

Pops the Coxswain

by [Timothy Ree](#) in the [October 2026](#) issue
Published on September 11, 2026

is watching, any veering off the narrow, my back always turned
toward the future.

Or maybe he's rowing & I'm the coxswain.

Up the river, see where the water looks a little grim. I holler the fam
to hold starboard

but they're mouthing back. No one hears anyone
in a sudden squall. Something about balance, or a rudder,
word, that's

on me. Maybe we're in a quad, sculling calm water
at dawn, the four of us rowing, rowing with no coxswain. Pops,
seated at the bow, would be

the first to drop, should we ram into
a buoy, another boat, a dock, jagged rocks. Everywhere there
are threats. Pops

is drowning, downing dirty shots of the river,
should we collide into you, reader, in a future poem. I'm learning
proper terms, the more elegant ones regarding

the stroke, precision of blades,
the catch & the drive, the finish, the feather. See also: release,
recovery. Release,

recovery, at least twice a year from the ER. I'm in
a single, rowing away from the city at sundown. The banks
of the river

are the margins of a journal. I watch cathedrals & bridges
diminish. Stone wells, clock towers,
& bells, bells.

Is there anything more ruthless than bells?