

Step-

Jenny Molberg

The year before I became a stepmother,
I climbed the levee stairs, fed

the rest of my old self to the river.
That green leviathan shot my clarity like gin.

Impossible to imagine loving a man
with children I don't yet know,

impossible to mother them
through fathoms of the past, impossible

to hear them calling me,
by mistake, *Mom*.

*

We struggle together with words, sounding
them out, my stepson and I, perched

on the bed like tightrope walkers.
What words can help

but those that make us smile, words like *narnbal*
and *Jupiter*. He writes in a hand

that reminds me of my own; his bantam words
climb up the page. Words with hooves,

words with horns, words without vertigo.
I say an impossible prayer, to undo, to repair.

Tell me how the story ends, he says,
but I do not skip ahead.

I want to see, selfishly, the unfolding
of his face in age, in story.