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A Litter of Hamsters

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A LITTER OF HAMSTERS

Eight hairless hamsters
squirm in a nest of cedar chips
in an aquarium. Their mother
stretches in a shaft of afternoon
sun.

Bodies as long and round as the last knuckle
of my littlest finger, each
head vibrates on a bony neck.
Black eyes bulge beneath eyelids
sewn shut with wisps of lashes.

One head shivers up. His ears
lay folded and flat like black
wrinkled leaves just burst from their bud.
His nose probes, stubbly whiskers quiver
like twanged pieces of fine wire.

His jaws open, frozen in a yawn
revealing a faded tongue, soft as wet lint.
Tiny teeth click together.
He totters sideways and the others
tangle over him and sleep.

The mother moves from the sun
and spreads her warm darkness
over the nest.