South Dakota State University

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Living for the Long Weekend

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LIVING FOR THE LONG WEEKEND

for my grandfather

1
when you come to
wake me I am already
awake, wide-eyed
from the cows' mooing
and racket of birds,
bound tight as a hay
bale by the night's
drive, towns
played out on a tape
of asphalt—Alma,
Augusta, north on 27,
Cadott, Cornell, past
Ladysmith, the gut-like
twists of County A leading
west into the pitch
blackness of the Blue Hills;
clunk of stones tires
kick up, familiar
turns down old
roads, the engine turned
finally off, graveled
drive my foot sets
down on, bark of
dogs, the kitchen
lit
like a full moon…

and you shake me
not sure why
a man might sleep
with his eyes
unshut,
and you shake me again.

I sit up,
reel, in this
hour’s sweet
trace of tobacco
and mown hay.

2
I dress,
go out, gather
gear from the milkhouse and
walk to the pick-up
left last night in tall
grass, my pants
wet to the knee, tips
of fishing rods
rattling
in the near dawn.

3
as I row out
you slide the tackle box
from under your seat, flipping
its rusted latch. what I see
are hooks enough to
fish this lake empty — pink
dollies for walleye, bass
plugs of balsa, buck-
tailed spinners, jigs,
daredevils, and this last
thing you pull out, what
looks like an old
shaving brush, bristles
barely hiding a hook of
filed-down fencewire.
“this,” you say, spitting
a brown dart of tobacco
over the boat's side, "this is for muskie," and you spit again and drop it back in the box with spools of tangled line, the needle-nosed pliers, and the stink bait.

Bird-shit, cat-shit, dog-shit, and what with all the gun-shot windshields, banged-up hubcaps, tailpipes, and sliced tires, call it car-shit, or how else explain the spectacle of sidewalk below if not a kennel's cleanings and junkyard's scraps washed up just here... seen from three floors up, whole weeks spent restless, useless, knocked all but dead-drunk senseless by the stench, and in the street the stalls, starts, blared horns, fuck you's stammered at stoplights, carbon clouds and soured breath of traffic rising in the general gag-all of Newtown... drubbing of the disco beat not unlike a dull clatter of typewriter keys, or quick clicking of the reel's drag, as here, now

the first cast sails out, gnarl of worm chased by bobber or bird, splashing, blue filament slackening, drifting down as the morning fog swirls and burns off.

—Mike Keller