MELANIE MERLE

Warmouth

The fish have gone deep, further from shore
Where sunlight moves, shafts dividing green water
Warm surface to cool floor, striped and speckled as bass
I watch for cottonmouths Uncle Jack warns will jump
Into the boat, I go blind from the staring
The air is still, quiet, save the crepitations of grasshoppers
Occasional plop of fishing weight
Frogs wait to sing the sun down
A sky full of things to read
Braille work of clouds, knotted daisy chains
I smell the deep woods
Off a raised red rise
Exclamation point on my arm
In winter, we fish from the banks
Invoke the freshly made beds of bass and perch
Stir their benthic silken sheets
Nestled in silt, a sleepy warmouth,
Red goggle-eyes shut tight
Uncle Jack scoops a wriggling flash
From the bait bucket
One minnow friend fewer for the mayonnaise jar back home

HALEE KIRKWOOD

On Moccasin Mike Road

Here was the burial ground of the Fond du Lac Band of the Chippewa People. Dating from the 17th century, it was removed in 1919 to St. Francis Cemetery in Superior.

— Stone from Interstate Bridge

… when the slope of land on which they were reburied had been undercut by construction of a road, bones and decayed clothing could be seen spilling toward the river.

— “A Sad Chapter in Ojibwe History,” Superior Catholic Diocese Webpage

46° 42.166 N 92° 0.531 W

Alone again, still-life with restless beach grass
I lean against parking barriers used to mark you—us—the passing wind.

Wetland where we left you
Food on stones like braces woven
Across plundered mouths
Humming beneath ash
trees, where we left you,
Horsetail turbid in slurry water

from further down the dump
and that’s always been the joke, hasn’t it?
How the potholes could still twist god’s ankle
and how I think you’d like that.

Before the accident you’d stay all night
in the library, nicotine-stained fingertips
holding microfiche like swallowtail wing
plotting out the remains
of our graveyards
archive of iron and blood and tongue.

Long after you passed I learned to name

Jackpine,
whose spine blister-rust swells,
Dropping seeds who bloom after wildfire

But you
brave
burrs
And buckthorn now,

Strange gravel beneath your feet.

2022 JAMES WELCH PRIZE WINNERS

selected by Elise Paschen

Art by Fox Spears