



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  
Invade 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 17<sup>th</sup> 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  
tobacco, angel

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*



POETRYNW.ORG