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Last Sun

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The Last Sun
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The bales dot the fields
in narrow straight stitches
like a Mother’s Day string project
from some over-zealous, crafty
grade one
teacher.

—the making of men is haying—
    my father would say
Proud of the ten thousand bales
which ate up all but
our Saturday afternoons
    —after three o’clock—

They leave
one after another
to cities
towns
    —anywhere—
just not the farm
“gettin the hell outta here”
the next oldest muttered to the thirteen year old

while he sat
wide-eyed, bewildered
too young to know
just what marriage lay ahead.

Married to the cows
the old men in the church gloat
puffy-chested
in their polygamy

stubby fat fingers
more like teats
than fingers
clap nothing delicate.Today we’d say
“no fine motor skills”
then
crudely put
“Pullin tits and pitchin shit
    that’ll get them hands.”

I did not shrink away
—these were church men—
although my nose wrinkled
at the dip that so efficiently disinfected
their fingers like the
teats that it protected.
I missed the warning signals
–the going-over-the-wall that
my brothers saw early.

–Struggling farm–
  no boys but the youngest
If my father would have sworn,
he’d have said,
  “Not worth a damn.”
But instead
reset the baler
  –smaller, lighter bales–
A bag of sheer pins
  for a bucky baler
    that didn’t like the kid
      who rushed,
        dumped the clutch
          and fed too much.

He didn’t yell
when that International
spit out the pin,
the flywheel spinning freely,
the plunger frozen mid stroke
  as it gagged on the hay in its throat
    to prove the boy a rookie.

Thirteen and thirty nine—an old man and a boy
  in fields where bales knit the stubble to the ground
Never pushing, chiding
he carries bales
  two at a time
    and tosses them up.
He does all the heavy work
  —I think I carry the burden—
Slowly I stack
  and build the loads
bring in the cows
  and milk
but fail to notice
  he takes breaks where never before.
Five years later I leave,
  divorced the cows
    married the books.
Dad attempts to dissuade
  reason why
school should not happen
   He sees the barn door open
         and the herd
               heading for greener grass.

We became men
perhaps
   too much the men.
Business men, police men, fire men, mail men
   So much the men that we
         would
               not
               be
         the man that you were.

Education happens
   in a
   class
not in a barn/church
   -yard—
Deals
   are settled
       with a lawyer
           not
       a handshake.
We
   We trust in God
       over food
and
   one day
in seven
believing our insurance
and
   our loans
       will cover
           in case
               God doesn’t.
I wonder
   heart failure
or
   loss of heart?
In us
   who missed
       the development
               of man.