December 2003

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
clasp 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.