Heart of the Garfish

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.2465

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Heart of the Garfish · Kathy Callaway

One thing you don’t talk about in Minnesota is the meaning of water. You can say what a lake did to you, or what you got away with in spite of it, solving that equation where one whole side equals zero. It’s done over beers, at night, safe from the gravity that keeps us stupified and turning during the day. A lake’s the lowest thing around, filling up all the best hiding places.

Our houses keep their backs to it. We drift down anyway, push out in our thin ribbed boats, oars beating away at the surface. We know that underneath is freedom from the body. It’s why we’re here. We push bait on like penitents for the garfish, because they never die, because we’re full of love. The shoreline turns hourly—our local zodiac, shapes we live by when we’re out of this.

So when someone goes under we can guess what he’s got: the bottoms of our boats and things overboard, shouts and blear faces, innertubes, apologies, all we have. He’ll have the lifesaver of the sun wholly dissolving, and years of regrets, like two stones tapping under water. We’ll wrap him in white, for everyone. He’s everybody’s. That’s why we’re back the next day rocking over water, jamming worms on hooks kyrie eleison, pulling the living teeth out of the lake.