

Fall 1984

The End of the Line

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Recommended Citation

Phillis, Randy (1984) "The End of the Line," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 23 , Article 30.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss23/30>

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The End of the Line

Half the minnows are dead
before we find a spot that suits us both.
We light the lantern and check carefully
the places we will sit, wary by now
of unseen dangers: poison ivy, ant hills.
I fish on the bottom,
use the turkey livers that disgust every sense,
willing to take anything that comes along.
You hook minnows through the eyes,
plan on making the big catch.
There is nothing to do but wait.
I have beer and you have wine
so we drink, and for a while it seems
we can hear the ground cooling with the night.

I realize we've been here for days,
our camp well established,
but we've had too few catfish, too many crappie,
and no bass.
I talk about our good fortune in being here,
watch the insects pile up inside the lantern,
still crawling and struggling,
though their wings are burnt to dust.
You, too, consider it luck, and
we pull in our lines to make sure
we haven't lost the bait.

I am caught on another sunken branch,
a rock, or maybe a large turtle.
Finally it comes loose;
I reel in another empty hook.
I am convinced there is nothing here for us,
and besides, the beer is running out, but
you want to try once more before we really give up
and head back to the tent. Still nothing.
The cooler is light, the stringer unstrung
and I notice we are the only lantern on the lake.
You are quiet and I think for a minute
of us zipped in this tent,
our only catch some bugs inside glass
and us with our wings burning away.