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## Sunday Mornings

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SUNDAY MORNINGS

Doug Ramspeck

This is the sound of polished shoes and  
Sunday mornings. Of August corn  
fields, their arms raised in supplication.  
Of pond water congealing into muck—  
slow summers in languishing abeyance.  
My brother and I rise each day and  
hold ourselves suspended; we hide in empty  
spaces between heartbeats. We watch the  
gathering reds and golds ride like sorrow  
on cloud underbellies. Our father's  
tractor chugs and expels black smoke.  
We have gone this way before. We walk  
the fields and sense the air grow still.  
The day shimmers and reclaims us.  
Our flesh is weak. I lie on straw and feel  
the grief flee out of me. These are prayers  
of dirt, of rich loam we fear will bury us.  
We listen to the inland prairie sea, to waves  
of wind that scar the land, to our mother  
weeping down the hall. The heat hangs  
heavy as a noose. The cows low  
late at night. In our worst dreams  
our father's hands and feet turn black.  
They caw like crows then disappear  
beyond the field. This air is rich with  
tallgrass and manure. The walls can't  
absorb what I am feeling. This ancient  
house crumbles with its age. Bricks fall.  
Pipes burst. Plaster chips and scatters.  
My brother cries soundlessly for our  
father. Each Sunday the pews are  
hard as flint. Hymns rise to the rafters and

beyond. Every sermon is preverbal, as raw  
as grit. When church is over, the four of  
us walk out into the heat. Sunday's done.  
Only chores are left. We strip off shirts—  
our father's scar puckers in the sun and  
draws a map. In the pond a bloated dead  
raccoon floats—the blueflies are ravenous  
with greed. Old farms have soil like a  
graveyard. You feel it in your fingers, taste it.  
It is the weight of generations. The church  
cemetery is visible from our barn. We stand  
there in the midday sun—baked in dizziness.  
Heat empties out the soul. At the funeral  
home I reach into the open casket.  
Our father has retreated inside his skin.  
His eyes are closed. It is Sunday. Nothing  
swims in our back pond. The hours congeal  
as weight, as translation of memory, as  
instruments of what we do not know. The rain  
won't fall. The earth peels like rotting skin.  
The cistern is blank as a dead eye. This is  
the sound of polished shoes. Of August corn.  
Of arms reaching out in supplication.