

# Sedley

poems

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## The Divide

(Living Room)

Fresh moms bounce plump  
babies on young

laps. Someone's bride, still wedding-gown slim, passes  
out a house plan, points

at the optional bathroom.  
Someone asks about low  
flow toilets.

Their fingers boast mini  
diamonds that peek and shine

like fillings. I gulp down another whiskey  
coke, glance at my wristwatch.

A boy locked on his mother's knee  
coos, blows  
spit bubbles my way.

*Are you still in school  
or working now?* his mother asks.

(Kitchen)

The guys grab  
Pilsners.

Talk about rain, the price of canola  
senior hockey and tractors.

## Things We Ask

He was found hanging in the hay loft  
of his father's old barn. Not the Quonset  
where they stored New Holland combines  
for winter. The old barn. He'd put on a plaid work shirt  
and his favourite Levi's. Everyone found out  
the morning after Labour Day. *I can't explain  
anything today*, our law teacher said.

So we wandered the halls. Second class:  
Math. Fractions. White numbers  
written on the blackboard. Pictured him  
written in dust hovering above stale hay bales.  
Dusk pouring in. Hands he somehow  
tied together while he still existed  
in rising dust, until he swayed  
the slowest way, slower than lovers  
in rowboats, slower than pendulums,  
a subtle back and forth. At school,  
a classmate walked in, back from the washroom,  
her face stained with tears. They say he suffered  
from a long illness. I wanted to know:  
what compels you to climb that ladder,  
then look at the loft below and step off – longingly into darkness?

## Her Own Fading Light

Harvest went on despite vanishing light.  
Our dads traced dark fields in hundreds of lines.  
Back then I waited for you every night.

Snow geese swooped slowly in synchronized flight,  
each bird distinctive, common as shrines  
reflecting the sun in fast-fading light.

The sharp blade of day saw us fight,  
then you wept in the shade of the pines.  
Back then I waited for you every night

while you fought with wheat infected with blight,  
as our dads scraped the earth in their combines.  
(Harvest went on despite vanishing light.)

I once held your hand, admired the white  
flesh that spread over a spray of blue veins,  
back when I waited for you every night.

You did not speak as I walked out of sight  
and read our dads' fields for any last signs.  
Harvest went on despite vanishing light.  
Back then I waited for you every night.

## In the Morning

We live in lines now, on pages  
snow falls slow and steady

as sleep, softly as crane feathers.  
Softly as crane feathers, snow falls slow

from a midnight-ink sky I could dip  
the tip of my pen in, write whichever ending

I choose from the last two years. The one where  
I drag my pen over the coral-heart curve of your lips.

We used to kiss with open eyes. Yours  
were a cold shade of pasture in morning mist.

A cold shade in mist. I learn this  
is how you write a poem: run your tongue over it

10,000 times. Relentless. An open wound,  
chipped tooth. Something almost senseless.

## We Knew

not to fear the night that held us  
to itself, hummed us to sleep  
with the crickets.

We knew David's dad drank too much –  
not in a mean way, just in a soft, lost way.  
Every night alone in the cold concrete

of his detached garage, clinging to a bottle  
of draught in one hand, cigarette in the other  
to cast himself out of there.

We knew when we saw storm clouds,  
swirl of sky over canola,  
we were really seeing something.

We knew in the end we'd forgive ourselves  
for the torture, times we told the whole school  
Angie got her period in class, Jay put cover-up

on his acne, I looked like a rodent, all cheeks and teeth.  
We knew about winter, that if you tried  
to walk home full of rye and lay down – hush

of snow sending sleep, under a sparkling ceiling  
of two trillion stars – you wouldn't get frostbite,  
you'd die. We knew Brandon's brother went organic,

not because he cared about being green, eating clean  
or anything. He couldn't pay his chemical bill anymore,  
couldn't pull in big yields, couldn't keep up.

## Seventeen

You had a thing for catching baby  
animals. I think you wanted to prove

you were good, a capable farm boy.  
I was the useless town kid.

We saw that mama cow in the pasture  
plodding behind her brown

and white baby, his newborn hair  
wavy and damp. The grass

was rain-laced (or was it afterbirth?).  
Rain, I'm sure of it. The sky had spread

moments earlier. A deep, dark blue, punched  
out by pairs of clouds. I remember

that now. We plowed through  
pasture and you walked right up

to the calf, scooped him, squeezed his hooves  
together at the bottom, a brown bouquet.

The calf, fresh, one long bead  
of placenta still stretched off his belly.

And everything smelled  
of cattle and rain.

## One Way to Die in Saskatchewan

1.

Gravel road flooded.

Slip-skid toward  
a slough swelled  
with Spring's icy

child, steel and  
wintry water. You

should think about  
breaking glass, buckles

and every sucked  
breath, but don't. Twelve hours

later, a hand touches you

too late, diver discovers death  
already painted you

pale dress  
floats thin

as a fish fin and tightly  
curled snails hover

around you

like watery stars.

## Graduation

Build house, career, right here.  
New season of settlers – their wives and TVs overseas  
in Pakistan or Ireland – who haven't come to seed flat land  
by hand. We are too young  
to know change in this place.  
Promise pours into *new Saskatchewan*,  
but we no longer ponder potash. Only think of oil  
if the neighbours build a pool or buy brand-new.  
Thousands of jobs. More bodies than ever. More than a million.  
This is what we've done:

All we know is the price of land  
and lentils. Most of us squeezed  
our dreams then let go.  
They are lying beside the dugout.  
Some believe the best has left us, even though  
our faces are still smooth as spoons.  
First summer out, we'll move into shacks quivering  
like canola on the edge of town, clutch jobs on rigs,  
the pipeline, wherever money's strewn.  
We know what's coming, and too soon.

Know someday not far away, we'll all live tick-tock  
ho-hum day-to-day. Some still texting high school loves  
who remind us of times we lay on the hoods  
of second-hand trucks, our summer breath thick  
as whiskey, warm as grain bin dust. Nights  
our sticky hands and foreheads felt like flu.

Sedley

Thin slip of earth buried  
under a July sky so clear-blue  
you could bathe in it. But slim

surfaces deceive. Beneath  
is damp, black soil, the kind  
farmers fall to their knees for.

They cradle it in their palms,  
inhale the scent of its velvety flesh.  
It's the type of soil a man claws at

with his bare hands  
after three broke, hungry years  
to find one tiny seed – no larger

than a pearl – with one green, thin curl  
bursting from it.  
It's a place where everything reflects

the electric sun and some people  
hide from it.  
This is where I'm from.

This place: a few hundred somebodies  
who know what it means to bet everything  
on the sky.