

Sestina: The Worm Farm

It's Sunday, my father is driving us both to his cabin.
Tucked down in the seat I'm reading, and neither will speak.
When I'm riding with him, the silence sits like a stone,
And me, I just want to go to the water and swim
Pull down somewhere in my head that heavy screen
So the day will leave me nothing I can remember.

But the drive up the road by the convent I'll always remember
The low gray stone building we'd pass on our way to the cabin
I'd picture a silent nun behind every screen
Not even in sleep would their vows permit them to speak.
In a hidden pool at the convent on hot days they'd swim
Later back to the beds in their cells, each pillow a stone.

Then up past the convent, through the next curve, then a stone
Big three-foot rock and what was painted there I remember.
Worm Farm it said, and though I just wanted to swim
It was bait we were here for, live things to take to the cabin.
And I went to the door with my father but never would speak
Not when the man in his boots came up to the screen.

He'd squint in the last morning light that came through the screen
And call to his wife who sat nearby, deaf as a stone
She would rock in the dark and may not have known how to speak
But the worm man's hard-knuckled voice I'll always remember
Is it crawlers he'd ask or lizards you want for your cabin?
And all I could think was just that I wanted to swim.

When I'm perched on the bank and I lean, finally ready to swim
Some fabric pulls down in my head just like a screen
And I hope that in years I won't remember the cabin
Those hot Sunday mornings, my father deep under a stone
But what finds its way out at night is what you remember,
Comes out in the dark, leans close, and threatens to speak.

At the bait shed, the worm man, my father, and I never speak
We pass by the plastic pool where the minnows all swim
To the cinderblock squares and the lizards and worms, I remember
Counted with moss into big cans and covered with screen
And paid for and gone and out on the road past the stone
My legs folded under, my book out, we speed to the cabin.

The days I try not to remember are those that still speak.
The drive to the cabin, the worm man thrown onto a screen,
Or they rest in my hand like a stone wherever I swim.