

First Prize 2022

Almanac for Sunless Haunts

by Samuel Prince

You say it's a splinter, I tell you it's a spell
and the realization burrows in that I know
my country imperfectly well.
I wish I was more fluent in low lying landscapes,
in rotation, drainwater, singed fields
of soot and gold, rutted roads,
feed-bags strapped to telegraph poles.
The aluminium silos are warheads of grain,
there's corroded bracken, signal boxes,
the unforeseeable and sometimes I corpse
when others talk, but I've made peace with this place
and walk it. The worst kind of itch is on the hand
you no longer hold, as in, the residue of you,
your downy thereabouts, I mean,
ignore me, you won't know I'm here,
you can't invade an idea,
but sure can retreat from one.
That word again: colder. I feel it so much less
these days, just the cattle nodding
like pumpjacks, the killer kestrels
in eager flight, the lock-gates,
the solemnity, and if I'd kept a diary,
it'd say *on my own*, but really it was habit
that took me to the cemetery,
silent mouthing the sandblasted names:
Sable, Rising, Harrowing, Harrowing.