

Last Night on Earth

by George Vukelich

And what of this
our last night on earth?
Will we spend it on our knees?
Do we reason that this might please
Somebody
a God somewhere?
Or shall we drink and love
once more this last time?
A kiss for the children.
A kiss for each child.
* * *

Our dream is stones and soldier bones
Spring and smoke and newly borns.
In this country we have built
A home for ours and theirs: a place
Of hope in goodly ground: free
and fresh
and fine for growing.

The army suits we use for scarecrows.
* * *

My father would take us for the fish.
On the U.S. government pier, foreigners thick as the Green Bay flies.
They had their lines out for the perch.
We carried the bait and the galvanized pails.
Waiting, we watched the young men diving.
They went like rocks, like stones.
My father on the great stone wall. Looking
and looking and tending his lines.
* * *

There was a baker man called Vogl
who fished with my father
and drank like a fish, my father said.
They know the lakes around Milwaukee.
Pewaukee, Tichigan and the treacherous Wind.
In spring they drove North and followed the walleyes
into the Wolf.
In the night times, the taste of snow and heavy fish
bagging with spawn
and the big Winnebago breaking up in the dark.

The German baker shaping his dreams in his baking pans.
His life measured out in fifths and pints and the poppyseed.
My father told me once, no more;
Louis Vogl afraid of tomorrow.
He lost something, my father said.
What it was he would not say.
One day, the baker in his basement
hung from his soil pipe by his belt.
His widow cried and left the state.
That was the winter.
And the very next Spring
the old man and I
on the Wolf River
For walleyes.
* * *

Before your eyes, I aged.
You did not watch. You did not see.
It happened in the middle of a sentence, I think.
You asked who loved you and I was young.
You asked me why and I grew old.