

David Bottoms

Sleeping In The Johnboat

1

With the motion of the water becoming the motion of the boat
becoming the motion of the body,
a man could drift away

and find that his sleep has become an entrance into water,
a dream-channel of genes unraveling
like spirals of minnows poured from a bucket,
and the dream
becomes a dream of diving—

an arm hanging over the side of the tilted johnboat,
elbow and forearm dangling
under the warm, green water of Lake Talquin,
thumb and fingers shriveling,
a curling in the joints,
and the white, loose flesh melting together
between the bones.

How deep must the dream go?
The webbed claw?
The fin?

2

Bow-up, the johnboat hangs its shadow against the house,
a brick split-level on a corner lot of solid ground
in a suburb of split-levels occupied by men
who sleep and dream of deals and mortgages,
golf swings and point spreads.

Over the mouth of my drive
the streetlight flickers like a running light,
and all along the street
the neighborhood has consigned itself to the dark,
the shallow, clipped lawns flooded with shadows,
azaleas darkened like clotted blood, dogwoods glazed
and dulled like dry scales.

I have pushed my chest off the carpet fifty times,
brushed and flossed my teeth, showered,
deodorized my underarms. On the night table
a warm beer waits beside a few fishing magazines.
Little else to prolong the inevitable.

Why should I dread the first wave swelling behind my eyes
and wake up fearing my own hand?