

Trash in the Rain

Every night we make our rounds
yanking bloated bags from barrels,
install new bags, then haul the crap out to the dumpster.

Every evening we drive the same loop:
checking all the rest stops along Route 96 where fishermen cut bait,
toss their cellophane Slim Jim beef jerky wrappers onto the grass.

Each Tuesday somebody smokes a whole box of Dutch Masters cigars,
then lines the stinking butts in a row
and stuffs them like turds between the boards of a roadside table.

Down the road a few barrels someone dumps their used porn.
The guys at the shop say, “bring back all the good stuff.”
So when I slid the videos across the table they were thrilled:
Juicy Lucy, Into the Pink, The Flintbones.

That’s the stop where someone went to the trouble
of cutting out pictures of nude women: meticulous, painstaking work—
the scissors tracing the complex slalom of well-oiled buttocks—
a precise surgery to free bodies frozen within a paper prison
so they could be held in hand, fragile female homunculi.
After the act, they’re tossed in the trash
with the rest of the filth.

Next we hit the playgrounds,
finish our rounds in the village.
Rake litter from the gravel path
that zigzags along the canal:
Lay’s Ranch Style Extra Crispy Potato Chips with Garlic & Vinegar,
Care-Free sugarless gum with Nutra Sweet,
Merit Ultra Lite Menthol 100s,
a bleached-out lottery ticket,
a plastic Tampon applicator,
a half-melted family of green yellow red Gummy Bears,
a blue bottle of Clearly Canadian Sparkling Water with Raspberry,
a discarded condom, its milky yellow reservoir tip
stamped with the telltale tread of a hiking boot’s Vibram sole,
the scattered remains of more Lifestyle Ultra Sheer condom foils
broadcast like seeds across the parking lot
behind the Town Hall of Justice.

Saturdays I work alone, weekdays I team up with Drury.
Not a bad guy, Drury, but dull.

As earnest as a mongrel. A slave to routine.
Drury goes strictly by the book, no corner-cutting,
no rule-bending, no contingency plans.
Even in hateful weather, he grunts like a slave,
but checks every trash barrel just the same.
Sleet whipping over the soccer field,
Drury climbs the berm behind the goal post
to poke his snout in the barrel
and prove it's empty.

I prefer working alone, tending to neglected duties:
driving out to Isaac Gordon Park,
strolling through cornfields, checking for brush fires,
hiking to the bird sanctuary,
making sure that picnic tables go unharmed by vandals,
that the birding tower is clear of fornicators and devil worshippers. . .
7:30 p.m. and all is well among the cattails.

On the best nights I say, *This is okay. This is how it is now.*
And sometimes the evening sky
looks as dreamy as a Maxfield Parrish print:
low on the horizon, turquoise
turquoise trailing to indigo
indigo arching to cobalt, cobalt bleeding to velvet blue
and on and on and on into Milky winking Way.

Other times it feels like punishment,
a never-ending treadmill: grass-cutting, weed-whacking—
dedicating my life to the pointless and ineffectual.
Until I quit, this will never change: stooping to pluck used condoms,
rolling over in bed to smell deep in my pillow the essence
of lawnmower gasoline.

I sit in the truck with the radio and heater on,
the CBC out of Toronto playing Faure's *Requiem*
(a station I never listen to with Drury;
he says the French announcers make him feel stupid).
Relaxing, the sound of rain against the metal roof.

From the other side of the canal,
dim lights poke through the rain,
pinpointing the steak house,
a few cottages, the coal tower.
Off in the valley, the sound of distant thunder.