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Fishing the Brazos

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Fishing the Brazos

Behind the outhouse, we trapped crawdads
in the creek Grandpa used as his private
flowing latrine. Catfish in the Brazos a mile away
waited for us, old whiskers floating.

The heavy ones we wanted lay in shade
on the bottom like lazy bulls.

Big catfish our uncles took on trotlines
weighed more than us, their oily,

leather lips wider than our skulls.

And so, after we roped ourselves
for anchors to the nearest trees,
we rigged broom handles with bailing wire

twisted to hooks. Skewered, crawdads made
the perfect bait. They squished
as big hooks punctured them. Held out,
they writhed like fat pale spiders.

We held them squirming and watched them,
then heaved them into the brown, muddy Brazos,
feet set against the explosion of hunger,
the appearance of things not seen.

Walter McDonald