

Five Poems · *Edward Kleinschmidt*

COGITO, COGITO, COGITO

If my father had an education it was dredging up sludge:
Everyday, down to the Mississippi, turning slough into channel.
Big barges would shout, "Praise!" My father seemed to think he
Was doing "Good Deeds." After work he'd hose off the antediluvian
Mud stuck to his Red Wing bootsoles. He'd scrape out the crustaceous
Muck under his fingernails with a dull awl. And then chores: pull
Up the awning, change oil, scale fish, weed—his work was the disguise
He wore around me. My mother tells me that in her dreams, she still
Mops up the imaginary mud from the linoleum. Or she awakes next to
A man-sized lobster, its claws snapping as *it* sleeps. My father
Always said that what a man and a woman think together can't save
A cat from dying, can't help a calf from being born. He said:
You tie a thick rope around the calf's legs—the calf half stuck
In its mother—string up the pulley and pull, and pull at the same
Rate the cow is dying and the calf is living. You are something
To yourself then. You can walk to your own death as hopefully.
I think I am my father's son, the one who made me. He said he was
Kicked in the head by a horse once but the horse is long dead. He'd
Say, Whatever it cost, buy it. He'd give me bits of money, nothing
Very real. The only thing I remember now during the two-weeks
Of vacation he took each year was driving thirty miles to see monkeys
—fourteen days in a row. Once we were digging potatoes—it was
The first Wednesday of the month—noon—and the air-raid sirens blasted
Up from the west: the silence during it, our silence afterwards, like
The place the potatoes had left. He didn't think much while working, he
Said, not time for that; a thought's like a stone you skip in a black
Stormy lake; it's too late for thinking now. He said he had the habit
Of a blind man: listening. I never knew what he thought. And he'd
Always say back to me: I'll tell you what I think: Just keep looking.