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### Photographer in a Small Town

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## Photographer in a Small Town

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*I.*

At night sometimes, they shudder just shy  
of waking, his children, shaking off sleep  
like a setter, he thinks, come out of a pond,  
then paddling on instead through the deep task  
of rest, their moist mouths slack;  
or strain their warm chins for a drink,  
eyes still half-closed, fingers  
not quite touching around the glass.

*II.*

For days, the season about to turn,  
middle-school halls still calm in their waxed swirls,  
counters scraped of grime, displays  
of laminate praise still clear,  
down in the tall, draft-echoing gym,  
faces one grade further along the line—  
restless, cleaned, fiddling, pressed—wait  
to have their pictures made.

*III.*

Packing up, he sees, in the wave of trees  
beyond the field, a shade of almost-yellow  
ready to raise its gleaming head. He is tired.  
(Focus and light take nothing; work  
is the quick moment of coaxing,  
the grasp at a joke so frayed it distracts those eyes  
from worry or blink.) He stops to watch  
currents of dust rise from the fresh-raked track.

*IV.*

His busiest month. When he finally locks his room  
it's as dark outside as in. The street is blank,

his vision calm from the red-gray haze  
in which he cautiously drew the children's prints  
from shallow pans, their features  
wet and gathering color. At home,  
he kisses the girls goodnight; their noses twitch  
from the chemical smell on his smoothing hands.