

8. I Remember, First Place

Summer Chore

Get out here, I have a job for you.

I leave the sheltering house—my room, my books,
My reluctance to get too close to him.
I obey my father's orders
To swat mosquitoes from his bare back.

Crickets silence as I pass, but not for long.

Sweating out river bottom humidity
He squats over a half-dismantled lawnmower
Cursing when the screwdriver slips and gouges
The meaty part of his thumb.
I watch his shirtless torso
Radiating blood's heat to *Anopheles*:
She drills her pilot hole with faint anesthetic—
The skin's cilia, however, are not deceived
As microscopic feet tread a whispered itch into rabid shout
For fingernails.

Behind our house bullfrogs grunt lumpy romance across stagnant backwaters.

I told you to kill those mosquitoes, dammit.
They're eating me alive, he growls.

A whirling, tickling whine maddens my ear;
Sometimes, I slap myself silly trying to quiet it.

I wait until the silver huntress dips into his spinal groove
Or settles on lightly freckled pumping shoulder
Articulating into elbow, hand, socket wrench, twisting nut.

Early evening fireflies flash cold green augury, searching for a soft glowing reply.

Then—I slap my father's naked flesh,
My force precisely aligned with the dispensation
He never asks of me.
I brush aside the dead body, smearing its half-consumed
Droplet of blood across my palm, his skin.

Seventeen-year cicadas shriek collective urgency from our maple trees,
Leaving behind empty husks of childhood—wings hardened for flight.

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