

Exit 30

by Gary V. Powell

Saw him north of Exit 30,
On the shoulder, walking south.
No shirt, cut-off jeans, and a rucksack
Slung over his shoulder. Lake Norman waving blue beside.

North of Exit 30, this kid's lean as beef jerky.
In the furnace blast from eighteen wheelers steeling past,
I make this muscled kid for a stringer, a roofer or a painter,
A landscaper, maybe, for the big houses overlooking Lake
Norman.

On the shoulder, north of Exit 30,
Not thumbing for a ride, not asking for a break.
Maybe a woman and a child at home--not every house a mansion.
I love this kid like sunrise shining through the pines on Lake
Norman.

North of Exit 30, driving south
I root for this kid, like he's my own. I want dinner
Waiting on his table--ribs, grits and biscuits, a pitcher of sweet
tea.
I wish him a young wife with a smile pretty as moon rise over
Lake Norman.

But south of Exit 30, I fear the other, as likely as not.
I fear for this kid the sickly scent of meth cooked where dinner
Should be cooked. I fear slippage on his shore, a babe hungry in
its crib,
And a wife old and dry as Lake Norman's caked red clay in
summer drought.

Bill Lee and Duke Power dammed the river to create the lake,

They meant no harm when they flooded farms in its swirls and eddies,

Bill, generous of heart when he upturned lives and washed out the marsh

Where egrets used to fish, his crystal eyes blue as the waters of Lake Norman.

Electrify to satisfy, he told me once in his big office.

Write off the drowned cows, social divide, and watery detritus

To the progress of man. Create wealth and don't worry so goddamn much

About young men walking the Bill Lee Freeway, Lake Norman waving beside.

