

Snap

by Bill Lapham

The truck is coming in slow motion. There's time to *think*.

We were at Lake Michigan, me and the kids. It was summertime, and the wind had whipped the waves into froth. Whitecaps broke in the lake.

That guy must have run a red light. Mine is green.

The air temperature was hot; the water temperature, glacial.

That's a Ford Super Duty pickup truck. Nice chrome grille.

The brothers were three years apart. The older one was playing in the waves while his little brother was in up to his ankles yelling at him. Their skin was bronze; their hair was sun-bleached blonde. They were as light as the seagulls floating above them.

They don't use chrome in trucks very much anymore. He must have special ordered it.

The older brother pounded his chest with his fists, threw himself against towering walls of water, and challenged them to knock him down. They did. Still, he was fearless, maybe even brave.

Those headlights are bright, the new ones with the clear lenses.

The little one was screaming at his brother. The words were unintelligible in the din of breaking waves.

That truck doesn't have a front license plate; must be from one of those states.

The little boy yelled at his father, he didn't want to go farther out into the water. Whatever he said made the man turn away, as if he'd been scolded by his own father, and not his son.

A bug is smashed against the chrome. Do bugs think? What did that one think? Why am I thinking about the bug?

The little one took one step into deeper water, making a minor concession. Then he turned and ran back to help his sister build a sandcastle on the beach.

When did we stop putting chrome on cars and trucks? Seems like a while ago.

The older boy came out of the water. His lips were purple and his jaw was quivering. He wrapped his skinny arms around his chest, but they generated no warmth. The wind was blowing a blue fury and grains of sand blasted the boy's backside. His father wrapped him in a towel.

I don't think that guy is paying attention. He's not going to hit the brakes. If he had hit his brakes, the tires would be squealing. They're not.

The older brother became a strong warrior. We sent him into many battles. We are safe, and free, and the guys who bought big trucks can buy cheap gas.

The grille is shattering the glass in my window and my head is being catapulted through a cloud of shards and into the chrome.

The boy is in a flag-draped box. The papers said he was a brave young man, a hero. We are a grateful nation, they said. But, still, he is dead.

Amazing the amount of force exerted on the human body by a hurtling mass of steel. I can feel my bones cracking; my guts breaking free of their moorings; the inertia slamming them against the chrome. Why am I thinking about inertia? And chrome? Now I can't see anything, I can't hear anything, and I can feel anything, like before I was born.

Like the boy in the box.

The younger brother and his sister met the flag-draped box at Dover Air Force Base. The young man held his sister's hand. A photographer took their picture and asked if they, or their parents, could give him permission to photograph their brother's arrival home. The younger brother said their father was late. "But sure," he said, "snap my brother's picture."

Lake Michigan's waves persist, just as they have for thousands of years.

