

How We Handle Our Midnights

by Charles Hale

He fingered her lighter off the table during a party hoping she would come over and talk. She was just on the other side of the coffee table but the stereo was so loud, belly or dee lite or some other early 90's dance thing that was back in vogue, so she had to stand next to him to ask for her lighter back. Ten minutes later he asked can we be married? Skip the wedding and the dating he said just be married. She said my name is Abigail and in the summers when I was younger we rode our bikes behind the mosquito truck. Do what he asked.

The mosquitoes were so thick over by the river they would drive through the town and the neighborhoods spraying poison out the back she said. A year later when their first child was stillborn he whispered to some of his friends that maybe it was a good thing they never actually got married. She learned to knit and invented reasons to stay home, he went to the casinos and one time bought a hooker but just talked.

One night the following February the rare snow and ice coated Mississippi. Power out and egg fertilized. They were especially careful and held each other at night but alas it was not to be. They didn't talk about it, started sleeping on the edge of the bed, and both wondered when the other would leave. One day we should ride out to the river he said. We can try to skip flat rocks to the other side. Or toss in sticks and watch them float away she said.

He bought beer, she cheese and crackers and made a bluegrass mix. The small cooler in the middle of the truck seat seemed like

the only thing left between them. The asphalt around here has a reddish tint she said and watched the rows of corn growing out her window. It's from the deer blood dripping out from the pick up trucks after the hunt he said. Really she asked and then they didn't talk for several miles.

Eventually they began to make turns, one after another and another, roads they had been on before but not for some time. It was spring but not too hot and when they opened the car doors the mosquitoes shouldn't be too bad yet she said. Not like when you chased the truck he said. You remember that she said. It's about the first thing you ever said to me he said. And they walked along the river feeling what little breeze there was. He tried to stretch his hand toward hers so they would accidentally touch but then she placed her hands in the pockets of her shorts.

We could get a dog he said. She turned to look at him, maybe she said. That's a start he said. Maybe she said. Maybe's just a word he said. Like the rest of them. They stopped and opened the cooler, had snacks and talked about nothing. They smiled at each other, packed up the cooler and walked a while longer. The river took a bend and then another and when the river straightened out they stopped walking and watched the current carry the water away for as far as they could see. Thank you she said and they had said very little and the amount resolved wasn't certain but they watched the river and saw.

