

Blurred Waters

by Erika Byrne-Ludwig

He was a boy then, barely ten, when he sat on the edge of the pond, watched the ducks swim, made intermittent ricochets. He didn't exactly know what had come over him that day. Whether it had been premeditated and meant to hurt. Or just an impulse of the moment, thoughtless, more of a mechanical gesture. Like a gull suddenly falling off the blue.

For whatever reason, he had picked up a rock and aimed at one of the ducks, a mallard, green head, white collar, purple-tinged grey feathers. Strange how I remember so clearly the colours of my target, he said to me.

The rock had flown across the pond near the edge bordering the woods and plopped in. What he had seen next was the black tail with its distinctive curl sticking up.

The duck may well have been foraging. Tyrone didn't recollect the details. Whether it had dipped its head to catch what had fallen in or whether it actually had been stunned and perhaps died. Neither could he recall if he had kept a watch at the pond, or returned the following days. Logically though, living on the hamlet itself, I'd have done so, he surmised.

He had mulled over the incident many times and had always found it unsettling, wavering between what may or may not have happened after the throw, gilding it with a view to reaching a positive ending. The sense of relief never came as no precise details had ever surfaced. He had been alone on that day, *that* he remembered. No witnesses. A stage with only one actor.

He might have been a wild child, and remained so, yet a glance through his adulthood, looking for matching incidents, disputed that

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claim. Likely a one off, he preferred to believe, though never quite convinced. Minds are selective: they keep but also let go. Certain truths may escape, he said, turning to me as for an opinion.

He had returned to the pond some years earlier, he told me, and sat on its edge, possibly in the exact spot he had sat as a boy. Water and ducks had gone, replaced by overgrown grasses and a clump of buttercups. He had tried to recall the gesture then, but the context itself was all muddy: no new elements to complete the full event. No matter how long he had dwindled on that day, the memory had stuck to its bare state: the rock flew, the bird ducked.

On that day he had replenished himself with childhood visions. The duck incident had stood out with its blurred dot. Now, here in the recess, near the edge of the woods, his eyes still stared. Was it its grave, I wondered.

