

Sherando

by Kitty Boots

Five seconds after I opened my eyes I catapulted from my bed and looked out the window. Please don't rain today, I thought. The Blue Ridge Mountains were tangled in their usual mist, but the early morning sky looked good. A few mare's tails, the sun in it's usual place.

Mom made hamburger patties the night before. Sweet onion slices in waxed paper, juicy tomatoes from our garden. We had hotdogs, too, and homemade potato salad packed in a clean glass mayonnaise jar. Coca-cola in green bottles, nestled in ice at the bottom of the cooler.

I already had my bathing suit on under my shorts and t-shirt. Running out of the house barefoot, I helped Daddy load the car. Beach inflatables, towels, folding chairs. Charcoal briquettes and beer. I lingered by a mimosa tree next to the carport. Feathery, sweet flowers attracted hummingbirds. They dueled over territory as I watched. Mom called to me to put on shoes, or at least, sandals. She was always afraid we'd get hookworms.

Ignoring my brothers, the three of us scrunched in the back seat, I looked out the window. There were special things, familiar things I wanted to see. Sonny's Country Store was visible across the cornfield from our house. I liked to look at it up close. The attached garage door was open and I got a glimpse of his stock car. I went to school with his daughter, Karen. She was always talking about Hank Williams, her mother wore her hair long. Mom had a home-perm and listened to Frank Sinatra. Karen talked a lot about Jesus, too. When my dad started taking golf lessons, we stopped going to church.

The two-lane road took us past farms, hilly, patch-worked with pastures. Scrawny cows, pigs in a muddy pond, groups of straw-

hatted men outside the general store at Stuarts Draft. The carved wooden bear in front of the tourist cabins. I inhaled it, the anticipation becoming almost unbearable as we reached the entrance to the George Washington National Forest.

Unloading the car, arms full, we walk on wooden bridges, past picnic shelters with huge flagstone fireplaces, rough-hewn beams, a creosote smell. I can't hold it any longer and I run to the beach, throwing off my t-shirt and shorts, sneakers kicked off at the water's edge.

Mom and Daddy set up a spot on the beach, blow up inner tubes. Mine is in the shape of a swan and I imagine floating across the lake, regal, except my butt falls through the bottom, I get dunked, water up my nose. Jimmy and Bruce play in the shallows. I hear their cries, "Mommy, Daddy, watch this!".

A few hours later it starts to rain, not a downpour, just enough to raise some steam, wash dust off the leaves, adorn ferns with crystal droplets. Shivery, sandy, wrapped in towels we eat lunch. Mom makes us wait an hour after we eat to go back into the water.

Daddy and I explore a small stream by the picnic shelter. He shows me how to gently overturn rocks and find small crayfish, hellgrammites. "These would be great bait," he says. Out of the forest duff, magic appears, crawling from under damp leaves. Newts. Pink with red spots. Elfin amphibian jewels. Translucent, delicate, docile. I collect handfuls of them.

