

Silver Moon Glimmer

by W. Scott Bowlin

The river was our sanctuary. Time moved swift and sure along its banks- no present, no future, every current a part of the past. Every moment lost in water brown from the tannic acid that hundred year old oaks seep. Mud turtles basking in the silver moon glimmer that slips past on the water's surface. An alligator grumps in the hyacinth that hugs the shore beneath the cypress trees. And there is you.

You always were different, or maybe you always told me you were different but you were really the same and just wanted to be different. Maybe I wanted you to be different.

You knew that we were destined for failure. You knew, but you wouldn't tell me. You brushed my hair back with your hand, kissed me slowly on the forehead, and gave me reassurance that would not last. You always tried to protect me. But who was protecting you?

Do you remember that time, when we cut our hair? A last admission of defeat, before slipping into adulthood. Adulthood doesn't come at 18. It doesn't come at 21, or 25, or any other birthday. Adulthood comes slowly and painfully, each event in your life pushes you toward it.

Remember when ... that is adulthood. *Remember when* we ran all the way to the bridge and sat underneath by the river, late at night just you and I. *Remember* how you took your clothes off and slipped into the water, and asked me to come in as well. Communion in the river. Afterwards we lay naked on the bank sharing a cigarette, the moonlight, the crickets, the cars on the bridge, tires clacking away at the metal grating.

We laughed at your dad when the pool was being dug. It was deep, even in the shallow end, and fifteen feet of water covered the deep end. He was a shouter, your dad. "Johnny, we just don't want you to get hurt," he said in his strong Pennsylvania accent. Johnny, I just don't want you to get hurt. I just want you to help me understand.

Remember when we went to the beach. It was late at night; there was no one there except the other couples scavenging the beach for that perfect romantic moment. You found it, Johnny, found it in our names, which you wrote in the sand. You said we would wash out to sea together, and be in the Bahamas before the sun rose. The surf pounded around our ankles, and we ran up the beach away from it. I laughed, but not you. You were too mysterious to laugh.

I drove to Kentucky that year. It rained all the way there, thunderstorms that gave way to steady rain that filled my stay. I wore your leather jacket, and I walked around the mountains and the gravel roads that once were my home. The rain made tiny rivers in the clay that ran hard and fast, and I splashed in them until my feet were saturated and my hair was stuck to my face and in my mouth salty and I cried and I didn't care.

I imagine you at Uncle Wadley's barn, the rain coming down. We run hand in hand, laughing and cursing, until we reach the barn. The barn has weathered many storms, and shrugs this one off indifferently. I enter with my head ducked and turn to watch you because you have fallen behind. You are walking, smiling, mysterious. As you stop at the door lightning flashes, and thunder rolls through the mountains slowly and deeply and the rain drips from your dark hair and you smile at me. A horse knickers behind me. So picturesque.

Why won't you come in from the rain, Johnny? Why do you stand there, looking mysterious and dark and alone? If you could just come in, we could stay here forever, in the barn, out of the rain. But there is darkness beyond the storm-- the unspoken words, the hidden knowledge that we cannot forget. The rain will leave, and we will go back to the house, and you will leave me here forever. Come in out of the rain.

Remember when I stood in the doorway watching the sheets of rain slide across the fields, and we smoked and talked and said nothing. Then I was on the porch, listening to the rain and wondering what happened to the barn.

Never again could you say to me anything that I would hear. I always said you were the one, and I always knew you were not the one because the one was gone and there was only you. But you knew that, and you were content to pretend to be the one when in fact there was no one. No one for you, only one for me.

Were you born of this world, were you born in this land? Were you born under the realm of light and only cast upon this land to make whatever way you could because the time of your kind had passed? Were you ever the one? If not of this land, then where were you from? Could there be a place where others like you gathered and laughed and ran through quiet fields and slept staring up at stars? Are there others that stand in the rain and cast their unblinking eyes to heaven? Can you taste the teardrops in the rain? Can you feel the pain of those who trod upon this land in the days before we came searching for the one or can you hear the cries of those who fell on this land before there ever *was* a one? Can you look at me and see nothing but the one who loves you?

So different than everyone else- a drop of water in the desert, a blade of grass, a flower where none should grow. Have you ever traveled alone? Have you ever *been* alone? Not just by yourself, but alone- you can be alone even when someone is standing right next to you. Sometimes that is when you are the most alone.

What happened, Johnny? What have we done, Johnny? We are not the same people we were. But we know those people, the young girl and the mysterious young man. We have met them, long ago in those years (months) before adulthood. We know them all too well, we remember the dreams they chased, and the time they could say only you, Johnny, only you.

Johnny, if it weren't you can't you see that it had to be someone- someone else, if it weren't for you? I never tried. You were always the one, laughing and throwing rocks in the water at night. You would lead us down to the trestle where the trains went across the river and you would sit leaned against the wooden frame while the train roared overhead, the whistle shrieking and the wheels shrill against the metal track. The smell of diesel and creosote thick in the

damp fog, the ground shaking from the load that passed overhead.
And there was you, in the silver moon glimmer, hair blowing softly in
the wind. There was only you.

