

Riverside Diner
By Frederick William Schroeder IV

A sense of sliding
distracts me, though my seat
at the off-kilter picnic table
is rooted firmly in the muddy bank
of the Susquehanna. A small strip of land
splits the river down the middle, guarded
by a dozen geese, honking and flapping
without purpose.

Seagulls, with no sea in sight,
float towards the riverside diner
where she told me she worked.
Their fish sandwich was bomb,
she said during our first conversation.
Three years here, and I've never tried it.
For that, she called me gay.

It didn't take long to prove her wrong.
She was the first townie I was intimate with,
but not the last. I'm sliding
into the river now,
the picnic table losing its footing.
I dig my nails into the gunky green wood,
where a shallow heart was once etched,
initials inside.

She and I would waste
those autumn nights flirting,
watching movies she hated,
like *Saturday Night Fever*.
The tension built; the movie
became our soundtrack.

*You can't fuck the future,
the future fucks you.*

Though I try to remember,
something in my peripherals
keeps grabbing my attention
from under dead leaves.

A few Saturdays ago she called me
at 2 a.m.. I was in another girl's room,
and, thinking she was asleep, answered.
I was too drunk to remember what we said.
I doubt it matters.

Part of me believes it was all wasted time.
The next morning the other girl asked me,
Who were you on the phone with?
I told her she was dreaming.
Was I dreaming, too?

I wonder if she'd be at the diner now.
If I swam over to surprise her,
and ordered a fish sandwich,
she might be impressed,
she might be glad to see me.

A goose lets out its honking laughter
from its poor excuse for an island.