**Snipe Hunting**

Ann Chinnis

After the cookout was done, my uncle prepared us

for the hunt of the Snipe, which are smokey black

most nights, but under the full moon fluoresce like Quetzals

with indigo, their ruby feathers glinting off chestnuts.

Vain with their pastels, Snipes are all ego, scout

for white objects they live to eclipse, like full moons,

button mushrooms, and undershirts drying

on clotheslines. At dinner we practiced

the Snipe’s call, a rumbling born low

in the stomach that belches into the night.

My uncle, a Schlitz in one hand, knighted us

with white pillowcases to bag our prey, told

us soldiers to take out alone, cross

the train tracks to the cluster of white

hollyhocks where Snipes hide. The eldest

cousin, I took off fastest, intent on their capture,

my pillowcase billowing like a Homeric galley,

and me—Ulysses—sprinting through chiggers, disturbing

cicadas with my screeching and burping, searching the moon’s

penumbra for wings, for color. When I reached

the tracks, I put my ear to the ground, my hand to the rail,

looked towards St Louis like my uncle had taught me to do

before crossing. I hid in the hollyhock and listened. I must

have been sleeping when I heard the shrill whistle that my uncle

made when calling a dog or a horse. He said the night

was too muggy for Snipes; time to cross the tracks, go home,

me holding my bag.

My uncle was a doctor, and I became one too. When I work

the ER on a Saturday night, I think about Snipes. Every shift—

among earaches, sore throats, and headaches—lurks one disease,

so rare you have never seen it. You learned of it once

decades ago—perhaps from your uncle, or maybe

in med school. It could be a myth, but if it’s real,

and you miss it, your patient goes home to die.

On my third cup of coffee, I remember something

my uncle taught me about sickness; like Snipes, diseases

are conceited. They want you to see them, but just

for one wing beat, so you have to be ready. You lie

on the tracks, pretend you’re defeated. Place your cheek

on the rail, close your eyes and be quiet. Before

the locomotive’s headlight comes into view, before

you hear the engine’s three short whistles, you will feel

the vibrations. That is when

you open your pillowcase.