

## TWO BRASS MALLARDS

“Deed that water slickam,”

said the old man.

His breath smelled like diesel and salt water,

his hands like oysters and mild cigarettes.

Loose skin sagged around his jowls

and pulled down on his ears.

We stood on slippery rocks

and watched the bay like gods.

It was morning.

The sun rose over the horizon.

One inch waves ticked rhythmically against the shore like a clock from the silence of serenity.

I could surely know a whole minute by counting forty-five of them.

Two mallards walked across the water

while their wings flapped.

They skipped across and caught air,

a few drops of water dripped from their webbed feet

in a line as they tucked them under.

They must have been going to the other side, like us.

We turned our back to the sea, it felt sacrilegious,

but we had places to be.

We marched up to a heap of rusty blue and white steel

and hopped in.

I touched the fender and The scent of rust and oil stuck to me like mosquitoes.

I slammed the door, because I knew the tough old truck could take it.

“Watch yo fingers boy,

take ‘em clean off.”

A steel spring cut my leg as I slid into the passenger seat,

but it didn't matter 'cause ten year old superboys don't get infections,  
and we had somewhere to be.

"Ain't no spark plugs" he said proudly  
as he ground the old Ford into gear.

Off we roared down a sand dirt road  
heading straight into an adventure.

The truck bounced and squeaked around a turn  
and startled a squirrel,  
which startled some doves.

They snapped furiously into the sky.

It was blue, true blue.

As the old man wrestled with the steering wheel around the turn  
a breeze cut through the cab.

I could feel the salt air against my soft skin.

I thought someday I would have a leather face too,  
And I do, just like him, the salty old wizard.

The brakes squealed and finally stopped the truck.

We got out and a silence I've not heard since  
surrounded us.

This side of bay was glass, no ripples.

A flash of silver broke the surface about as far out as I could throw a rock,  
then the glass instantly healed smooth again.

In the distance a coot called out  
and an acrobatic dragonfly dropped a message in my ear.

Geese honked then faded in a cool breeze.

A gray sky began to churn overhead.

The old man pulled oysters like carrots from a garden.

He was deep enough for his gill boots to fill with water,  
but the prize was worth wet socks,

if he was wearing any.

All he ever wore was faded denim overalls,  
a dirty white shirt with chum and scales dried to it,  
an oily green hat with a curved brim,  
and white rubber gill boots.

He was a real old-timer, the kind that would die ancient at home in bed  
rather than a hospital,  
the kind that would live amphibious like a hundred-year-old bullfrog.

A bolt reached slowly down and touched the bay.

Rain began to pelt down against the brim of my hat  
and shattered the slick glass surface.

Then another bolt, closer.

The old man walked up to me with a handful of oysters. They clanked into a pale.

“Deed that water slickam,” he said.

We turned our back to the sea.