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Further Evidence You Are a Changeling

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FURTHER EVIDENCE YOU ARE A CHANGELING
George Tucker

1. Possums are surprisingly large rodents with greasy buzz-cuts and have sharp snouts full of glass-splinter teeth—really, they look evil up close at night, eyes glowing demonic green in the scattered yellow headlights, hissing, puffed up to the size of a small dog and showing every one of those evolutionarily implausible 168 razor-teeth—you're not at all tempted to strike at the beast with what suddenly seems a rather feeble and not sufficiently lengthy stick to get it to "sull up" so you can grab that ropy pink tail that from this distance looks scaly and remarkably unpleasant and swing the cataleptic beast around your head a few times to build sufficient momentum to fling it away into the dark, hopefully far enough away that it won't be able to find you when it wakes from its coma—no, faced with that spectacle you'll back away into the safe cone of Mom's flashlight and say to the woman who interrupted the late-night drive home when she saw the hairy little beast shamble across the road to introduce her child to authentic Ozark fun, "I hit him, sure enough. He just didn't sull."

2. This is the same woman who encouraged you to amuse yourself on summer evenings with a large wicked-sharp treble hook, twelve feet of fishing line, and a piece of small cloth: cloth affixed to hook affixed to line, swing around your head—odd recurring pattern, this—to attract bats, which, as we all know, are basically rodents with wings—and when bat becomes affixed to the hook's triple barbs, pull him in and—

"And what?"

"Well, you know, kill it. Those little bastards bite."

3. By the time you're home from school, half the nightly case of Busch (Head For The Mountains!) will be gone and her face, oddly swollen now, will be pressed into the phone receiver and

her slitted eyes won't notice you as you walk by. Dad's in the Persian Gulf, sister lives at Grandma's. Those long warm damp nights of interminable phone calls and her voice a slur like canola oil on plastic and odd disjointed syllables. Nights she falls asleep that way, beer can and phone, you'll take the receiver away and hang it up. You'll wonder if there was anyone on the other end. Pour the last of the beer into the sink, watch the shampoo froth and smell that ripe yeasty stink. You draw the line at putting her to bed, throw a blanket over her as a compromise. Her bloated face oddly shiny, slitted eyes so like the possum's—the word sull occurs to you, and the word bastard. Then you'll kiss her goodnight.