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Brimhall: To the Snapping Turtle We Killed in July

TO THE SNAPPING TURTLE WE KILLED IN JULY
Traci Brimhall

We couldn't risk the threat
of your mouth. When my cousin
pointed to your snout peeking
above the surface, Uncle got his rifle.
How could we trust your jaw
when last summer a boy
drowned with his mother watching?
Uncle aimed for your head.
Your body didn't jerk, but a slow
red stream uncurled in the water.
He got the rake, clawed you
to shore, flipped you on the sand,
the tender plastron of your belly exposed.
A damselfly landed on your eye, a sliver
of turquoise, and I thought yes,
carnivores are the most gorgeous killers.
Uncle posed for photos with his .22 in one hand,
and in the other, gripped you by the tail.
We knew July was your season,
so we spread out on the banks,
walked through bulrush
and Black-Eyed Susans, and found it:
the sandy mound you'd closed
with your back legs. We undug
your clutch. Three dozen eggs incubated
against each other like large, rough pearls.
Uncle crushed them with the rake,
slicing tines with broken yolks.
We dropped you on top and heaped dirt
on everything. I knew we wouldn't talk about
this part, only my cousin's keen eyes and how close,
perhaps, we'd come to loss, the same way

we talk about the boy who drowned
and not about his mother and how she rowed
out into the lake, and jumped in,
and pushed the boat away.