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ONCE MORE "THE SONG REMAINS THE SAME"
William Varner

After the flaming gong, the height of pyrotechnics then,
finally you see the whole crowd, see the seventies t-shirts, iron-on prints
and cuffed short sleeves, the girl in white-flared corduroy pants
looking just like my cousin that year, straight, parted red hair willowing over
the glittering silver blouse, standing behind the Cadillacs
and their diminished fantails the band drives away in

like the one my aunt drove when I'd sneak out their guest room window
summer nights and slide into the front seat, punch the big radio buttons
then walk the neighborhood slipping into other people's pools
underwater swimming in the blue womb, the drowned spiders'
legs curled up into tiny loose fists, I floated around
the bottom drain as if without gravity, breaking the surface without sound.

Christmas evening celebrations with the whole family,
shooting Eight-ball downstairs with all the much older cousins
who let me drink the last sips from their stolen beers,
Zeppelin IV blasting from scratched vinyl, Bonham
pounding his three floor toms, Page's twelve-string guitar,
"crying won't help you, praying won't do you no good ..."

Deemed too young for funerals, I listened to my uncle tell me
to let the dead bury the dead and I did not understand
looking back, looking back. I stayed home, walked
the front yard collecting cicada shells, delicately undoing
the frail claws hooked into the red maple trees,
backs split open where their wings sliced through.