

SCENIC VIEW EXCERPT (SHORT FICTION BY MICHAEL HAGERTY)

Ray Conyers was flat footed. As a child he first realized it, when stepping out of the pool at the city park on a summer afternoon, the sun blistering overhead. Other kids would race around the pool—running despite the numerous signs warning against it and constant shouts from whatever lazy teenage lifeguard was on duty. Their feet would slap against the grainy concrete, rough like a pumice stone, sanding smooth the pink pads of young toes and heels.

Climbing up the slippery ladder in the shallow end and pulling his stout body onto the cement bordering the water, he saw the darkened outlines of the other kid's wet feet. Their footprints all left thin, arced shapes like crescent moons. Their dotted toe prints orbiting closely as if the moon had its own satellites.

His footprints alongside, however, left a full triangle on the pavement, leaving a shape much more like a comet, narrow at the heel and splaying out with his toes like cosmic debris fluttering at the comet's tail. His instep slapped the pavement simultaneously with the outer edge of his foot, his heels and his toes. It was this flat shape that would prevent him from joining the army when he would attempt to enlist in his twenties. And it was this flat shape that was causing him so much pain this very moment, on the side of Highway 90 through Brandelville.

The stretch of Highway 90 through the business district of Brandelville, Louisiana, was just one small part of the agony-filled hours Ray Conyers spent on his flat feet each day. He walked an hour and half to work every day at the pharmacy and followed a ten-hour shift as a clerk behind the counter with another hour and half trudging home in the muggy coastal air.

The pharmacy, Connor's Drug Store, sat on the northern edge of town along 90 and so the business district was the end of his morning hike and the beginning of his evening trek on foot, walking the borders between Hawkins County's roads and ditches, himself a vehicle with no pathway defined for it. No road, no lane reserved for him.