

But, Virginia is for Lovers

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Storefronts are presents wrapped in Confederate flags.
As if giving a grudging apology, a store sign reads: Civil War Relics Sold Here.
But, we can't just go around digging up the past, and all those monuments—
They are heavy and expensive, and we have other shit to do.
Besides, whites can't just shed skin like Northern Cottonmouths.

The farms of Virginia roll endlessly into the horizon.
My rental car rises and falls like waves into seafoam.
That's when it grips me--first water then vomit rolling slowly down my tongue.
For Christ's sake! We can't just excavate a black neck-bone that once hung from a tree,
Like some Jurassic ornament, a spoil for the vanquished.

(In the third grade, I could never cool the heat rising from the back of my neck
Whenever Mrs. Sidell read about the suffocating stench under the slave ships.)
What is the point of dredging up sunken bodies—
Just so the mosquitos can swarm and gawk, eat and regurgitate?

American Pride is needlepoint stitched in fear for me.
I hesitate to ask the bearded man for directions to the Interstate.
His eyes are squinting, perhaps from rage or from the sun and sweat.
Virginia is lathered all over his daddy's, daddy's bones,
It's the sweat gluing his skin to an American flag tank top,
But I'm not sure if his flag means:
This Land is Your Land.
Or *All Lives Matter?*
Or it's just what was good enough at the Goodwill.

So, my eyes avoid the squint of his gaze,
I pretend like I know my way around these parts
Because paranoia is paralyzing.
(I mean...Maybe my daddy's daddy knew his daddy's daddy
and things did not end well one Virginia afternoon.)
Yes, that's probably exactly how it happened.

By Ama Anane, a writer, educator, and mother living with her wife and three children in Los Angeles.