

A Mallard in a Pond

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A mallard sits before me in a pond. His colors are duller than those of his peers. Yet, he feels special, holds some sense of purpose and meaning that, he naively feels others lack. A group of gnats, minuscule but persistent antagonists, surround the mallard. His feathers seem to shudder, and his beak and tail tense. His eyes narrow on his new adversaries. Suddenly, he snaps at them, aggressively at first, but by the fifth try, his attempts show only desperation. His first strategy having failed, he considers a new option. The mallard dashes away splashing the water and creating great waves around him. The gnats however are determined. The mallard has weakened further; it cannot even take flight. Perhaps he is tired, or perhaps the unknown sky is too unknown and imposing to take on. But, the most likely and disturbing possibility is that my friend has grown to accept the gnats. He has come to see their presence as an inevitability rather than a nuisance. All of this I can see clearly in the mallard's eyes, but what I do not know is far more frightening. The question I cannot seem to answer is whether he has made a wise choice. Does coming to accept his pain show strength of will or weakness in ignorance? My friend comes to a stop and turns his head to look at me. Where his reflection lies in the water I see my own face instead. His beak creaks open and a voice comes out "what should I do?" I shrug in response and the mallard simply lowers his gaze, disappointed. He blinks once in grim resignation and then slowly the mallard spreads his wings. He does not fly, instead, he lies down on the surface of the water, body splayed wide. He closes his eyes and throngs of gnats swarm around him. They land on his wings and back and head, and slowly, I sink.