

1992 Agnes Scott Writers' Festival Distinguished Participants

Greg Johnson, professor of creative writing and American Literature at Kennesaw State College. He was Georgia Author of the year for his first collection of short stories, *Distant Friends*. His forthcoming works include *Pagan Babies*, *A Friendly Deceit*, and *Aid and Comfort*.

John Stone, professor of medicine and dean of admissions at Emory University Medical School, cardiologist, and author. He was 1990 Nonfiction Georgia Author of the Year. Two of his most recent publications are *In the Country of the Hearts* and *On Doctoring: Stories, Poems, Essays*.

Rita Dove, winner of the 1987 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, author of *Grace Notes*, *Thomas and Beulah*, *Museum*, and *The Yellow House on the Corner*. She currently teaches English at the University of Virginia.

Robert Coover, professor of English Department at Brown University and author of numerous novels, plays, poems, and critical essays. Among his publications are *Gerald's Party*, *The Universal Baseball Association* and *Pinnocchio and Venice*. He has received awards from the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Rockefeller Foundation, among many others.

Memye Curtis Tucker, poet and teacher, author of *Holding Patterns*. She has received the *Chattahoochee Review*, Armitage, and Reece awards and was 1990 Poet on Tour for the Georgia Poetry Circuit. She currently leads poetry workshops at Callanwolde and Kennesaw State College.

**AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE WRITERS' FESTIVAL
APRIL 9-10, 1992**

Thursday, April 9

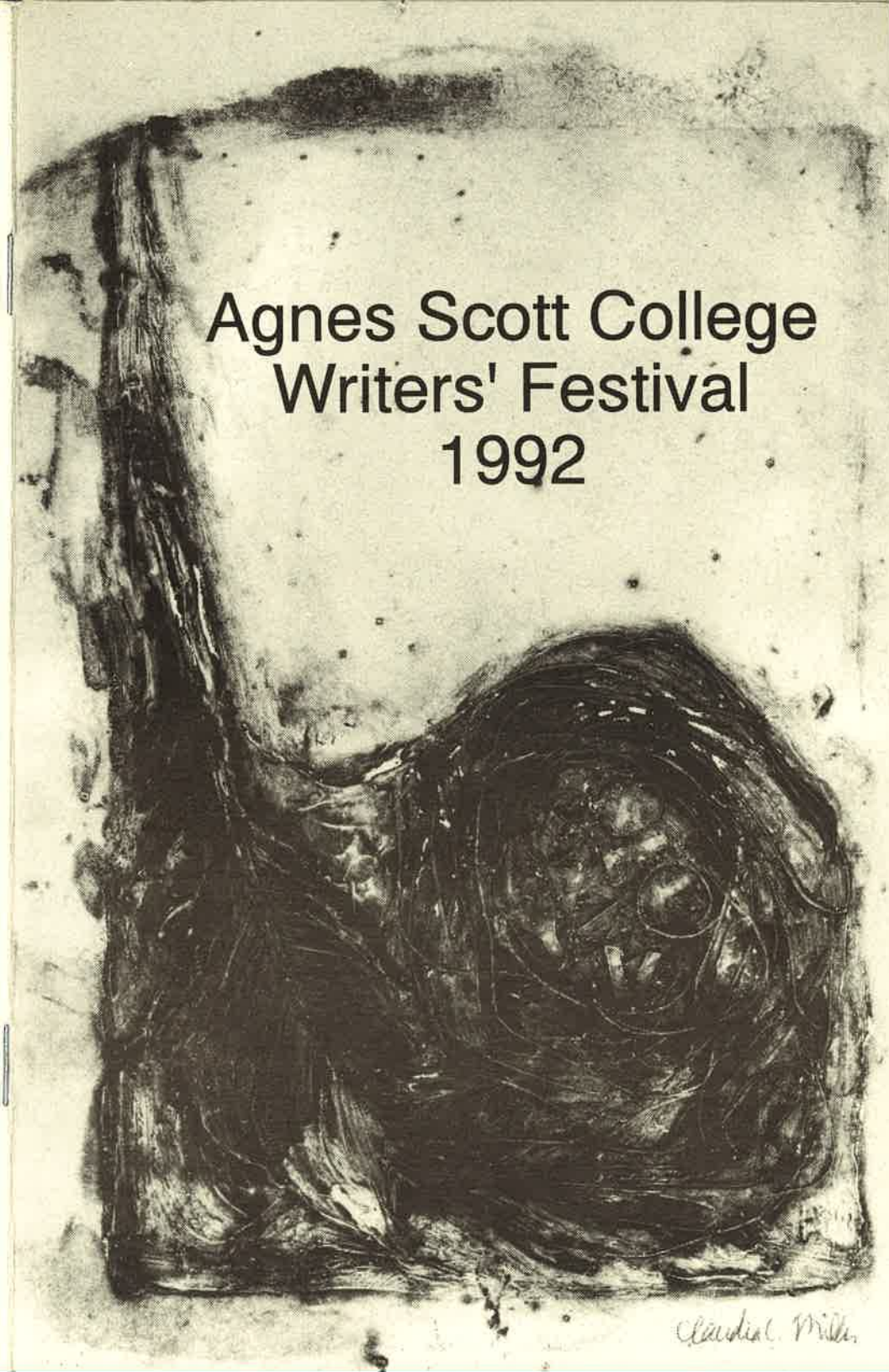
3:30-4:00 p.m.	Welcome/Refreshments	Dana Fine Arts Building, Dalton Gallery
4:00-4:45 p.m.	Reading by Greg Johnson	Dana Fine Arts Building, Winter Theatre
4:45-5:30 p.m.	Reading by John Stone	Dana Fine Arts Building, Winter Theatre
8:15 p.m.	Reading by Rita Dove, Reception Following	Dana Fine Arts Building, Winter Theatre

Friday, April 10

10:00 a.m.	Coffee and Pastry	Dana Fine Arts Building, Dalton Gallery
10:25 a.m.	Reading by Robert Coover	Dana Fine Arts Building, Winter Theatre
2:00-4:00 p.m.	Panel Discussion of Student Work, Moderated by Memye Tucker Awarding of Prizes	Rebekah Scott Hall, Conference Room

We wish to thank President Ruth Schmidt and Eleanor Hutchens for their support of the Festival.

**Agnes Scott College
Writers' Festival
1992**



**writers' festival
1992**

The Agnes Scott College Writers' Festival has taken place annually since 1972. Its purpose is to bring distinguished writers to campus in an atmosphere of community with student writers from the colleges and universities of Georgia. This year's participants are Rita Dove, Robert Coover, Greg Johnson, and John Stone. Other recent guests have been Sharon Olds and Gloria Naylor (1991), Josephine Jacobsen and Alfred Uhry (1990), James Dickey (1989), Michael Harper (1988), Tillie Olsen (1987), and Denise Levertov (1986).

Spring, 1992

Editors

Bo Ball, Fiction

Steve Guthrie, Poetry

Cover

Claudia C. Miller

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poem for thoma

for thoma davidson

fifteen years after your death
your tawny body burns
in my memory.
your chiseled face still sits
under a thatch of finger length hair.

muscled and ungainly, you resisted
the grace a dress should confer.
your brightly striated frame
lies shrunken and stiff,
swallowed by the casket.

last call for life.
it dangled from the barrel of your
hands. the stench of your mortality
winds closer.

in your ghost thin world
the tense bands of your body
move alongside my thinly
stenciled form.

we played in childhood laughter.
our deft tomboy bodies were
strung with tandem wire.
we sought the freedom bequeathed to boys.

i have often thought of ways i could
have saved your life. if not for you
then for myself, a gesture to stay my own
mortality. but the playground molders,
has swallowed our girlish youth. i walk
its borders even in sleep.

your tawny face flickers in this
fifteen year old light. i pick up
the razor to shave my stubbled arm pits
and remember the salt-sweet taste of your
blood along its gilded tongue.

i carry you in the yellowed light
of my own dead girl parts. at night our
slumped bodies curl like furred kittens
nesting in sleep.

Thoma, i think of how it must feel
now to be free of your short, tightly
wound body. being half girl,
an untoward woman, our unresolved sex
bent our lives
toward our own flame.

—Anjail Ahmad

Sestina for Summer 1970

The Rain hissed in the chimney and roared
down the gutters to the garden. Alone
late at night, except for a sleeping baby,
I read *In Watermelon Sugar* and *Please Plant
This Book*. Seeds grow; times pass.
I waited for my husband to come home.

That spring I made a tent, a warm home,
to shield the melons from the wind that roared
down from Three Sisters through the pass.
I'd never started a garden alone
before, but I wanted to plant
the book, and read, and feed the baby.

The garden kept me warm. The baby
wasn't cold. To her outside was home.
It was a cold summer, too cold to plant
corn of melons. The Northern Lights roared
and each star was separate and alone.
I waited for each night to pass,

and I waited for a man to make a pass,
and no one did. I read to the baby.
She liked it; she chewed the book, alone.
We hiked, (we didn't stay home),
to where the canyon waterfall roared.
At home we ate, we read, we planned to plant.

One night I had a dream to plant
something to make the cold days pass
beside the place where the wind roared
and the water fell a sheet: the baby,
in the fir needles a soft pillow home
where she could be what she liked, alone.

The next day I went there alone.
I wanted to stay there, to plant
myself there, to make it my home.
I'd got tired, waiting for time to pass.
I had some books and a baby
and a river, wind and sky that roared.

Alone I threw my ring in the river that roared
down the pass. I went home. The baby
and I planted the book it said to plant.

—Devan Cook

Alice Changing Size in the Hall of Doors

Even now, my father's voice travels far
In the silence and my mother is driving

Away from us, growing smaller, smaller.
My mother is about to disappear.

I could take you there, to where the story
Opens, to the house where each night

I waited for my father to begin, locked the door
Pushed my rocking chair under the knob, keeping us

Safe, lit two blue candles, spread my mother's good white cloth
Over the table like the sheet stretched flat

Across the bed she never slept in. My father sleeps
All day, in my bed, a bed he is too big for.

He curls his body, tries to make himself smaller
In his sleep. I listen for his breathing,

Touch his shoulder, his damp skin, to wake him,
Say it's time, lead him to the table where,

Between us, on the cloth, I fill the water glass
With whiskey. I know how much to pour, how to hide

The bottle and the book together beneath my mother's bed.
There is no place for you at the table.

Stand back. Stay here. I will let you listen.
I will show you how we leave this house, my father and I

Alone together, as he begins to read. The candles sputter,
Flicker, burn. We are so safe

Without my mother. My father drinks slowly,
His voice filling the room, rising along the walls.

There is this stillness, heat, a gaze that shimmers
In the grass. In the boat, Alice sits shaded

By the haycocks, by the faint wind that blows like breath
Over the lake. Dressed in white the Reverend Dodgson rows.

He takes off his straw hat, begins. He invents
The story as he goes along.

My father and I fall, fall slowly
In the dark. Together we turn, spin to the center

Of the earth. Cupboards line the tunnel walls.
There are books, glass bottles, watercolor maps.

My father points down a long, low hall, lit
By a row of lamps. He shows me the three-legged table

Made of solid glass, the tiny golden key.
On the lake the boat drifts as the story ends.

Alice turns towards the shore, towards home.
The oars cut the surface of the dark water.

I hold my father's hand. We stand so still.
This is the beginning of another story.

My father cannot enter the hall of doors.
He cannot fold his body up to fit inside.

Behind one of those doors, there are blue flowers, crystal
Fountains, there is a garden, open sky.

Tell me, did he want me to leave him,
To grow smaller, larger, to grow up, to disappear?

—Nicole Cooley

Anniversary

How two women lived together
 in a house in the city,
 one of many they had shared
 and how they sometimes lived apart,
 going back and forth nightly
 when one house was too much for them.
 One day one of the women said she wanted a baby
 and did the other one want to share the child
 But she worried about everything
 how they could have a balanced relationship
 how the child would know both women were hers.

As the first woman's belly expanded
 and the baby kicked ripples across her,
 the other woman's fascination grew.
 They started planning together for the birth
 And the worried one decided to stay
 and moved into the pregnant one's house.
 At the last moment the worried woman
 the worried one lost her job, a very demanding one
 making lots of money with no time to spend it
 and then the baby arrived.

Four days they stared in wonder
 at the baby and each other,
 Laughing not to have to make up stories
 for the woman's boss about missing work.

Life settled into routine
 and the women found a place for their baby
 in the day and went to work until night when
 they carried her home. They lived
 and worked and struggled with the world as they had before.
 Sometimes they got along great and
 sometimes one walked out in frustration, and when she returned
 they drank peppermint tea and talked.

When they grew tired of their home and the routine of their lives
 they packed everything in boxes and set out for another city.
 The first child so much joy, they decided to have another.
 The boxes loaded on a truck while the one with the big belly stood by.

They met up again on the other side of the country,
 in a sprawling city of green where
 the heat made the pregnant one's feet bulge
 and the child burst into tears when she tried to breathe the air.
 She had always lived close to the ocean.
 They lived in many houses on that side of the country too.

Each year as their anniversary passed they still laughed
 when they remembered that first night selling pieces of Valentine's cake
 in the rain where the people stood in the movie line waiting.

Never blessed by the rabbi or confirmed by the judge
 engraved in bark or sworn on the bible

They looked back at what they'd come through
 a list growing longer and longer until they reached
 a decade together; they could barely remember
 the time before they had each other, these women

How the women lived their lives.

They carry it on.

—Judy Gerber

The Secret Diary of Saint Bridget

1)

An old book of my father's
 listed the things needed
 to arouse mutual love:
 pills and nails and threads,
 roots and herbs and shoots,
 the two-tailed lizard,
 and charms from mares.
 I think I've decided
 to become a nun.
 I'm carving a bar of Ivory soap
 into a crucifix—
 the white shavings dot my floor.

2)

It's late, but I can't sleep.
 In the kitchen I peel a peach.
 The window panes fill
 with the moon-color of rancid jonquils.
 I burn a blue candle
 to bring you back to me,
 gouge your name into an onion
 and hide it beneath my bed.
 Last night I heard rain falling
 but there was only the wind.
 Tonight I listen for footsteps,
 keep quiet enough, still enough
 to hear mold growing
 on a half-eaten loaf of bread.

3)

The tepid water of my bath
 swims with old skin
 shed more slowly
 but just as cyclic as a snake.
 I clip my toenails
 and keep the trimmings in a jar.
 I no longer wash my hair,
 but wear it in a greasy braid.
 Writing note after note
 on squares of pink paper,
 I open the window
 to drop them all outside.

—Melissa Morphew

cross-legged on the futon

cross-legged on the futon,
 the whisper of my chart drawing
 locust wings against the canvas

both lost in the explanation
 of life under a double yod,
 apparent curse of a chance stellar alignment
 just after midnight once in July

the plump of your lower lip alone
 begs me to wonder, as in old times
 whether you conceal the richness of
 leaves resting under oak trees in the dark.

weeks later we linger abed in a room
 so damp mosquitoes bloom in the corners,
 your finger breathing rings around
 unabashed prey, still am I unlearned

yet on the night you fall to seduction
 even the weight of desire does not erase
 the gravity of love without armour so that
 even then we may not join lip to lip, wet to wet.

backsliding to days before we knew
 or feared to know,
 I sometimes think
 I would slither belly down
 across this continent
 for just one taste of you.

—Jeanne Peters

Butcher's Heaven

When you die it will be with those huge ankles,
swollen from years of walking in sawdust
dawn to dusk in a thousand
Cincinnati butcher shops. Snow

freckles the brown crease of the Ohio,
upturned like the belly of a dog.
Rounded, worn, you hobble to the door
to hug my daughters. It's a long drive

from the hot South to this windy,
frost-heaved frontier, where we speak
as always our pidgin of nods
and grins, saying nothing. I know,

it's not that we choose this halt
language, it's that love itself
is the gulf over which we cannot speak,
or if we could, could not

make ourselves heard. I dreamed
I saw you in, not Hell, Sheol,
Tartarus, someplace cavernous,
hollowed out of stone as dark as iron,

with the bad light sifting down
from high, unseen fixtures
and you in your stained apron,
behind the counter, shuffling

through sawdust. Your thumb is wrapped
in a huge bandage. The worn
tops of the butcher blocks shine
with grease and blood, but the meat

you traffic in here is men.
They are blue, frozen. Their faces
each bear one of our small handful
of responses: peace, anguish, wonder,

stunned surprise. One at a time
you heft them to your wide shoulder
and carry them into the great cooler.
Each time, you come out with another,

led by the hand, blinking. All night
you do this: you take them in blue,
you bring them out warm, whole, even
the blue frozen hulk of your own

father, though his face is obscured
to both of us. I woke up moaning.
What does this mean? In the dusk
I watch the bare Ohio hills

turn their wide backs to the wind
like horses. You nod in your chair,
beat, dozing. I know a lifetime
of silence cannot be wished away.

But now each time I see you—
you who loomed so large, then,
under the stars, on Cleany Avenue—
grow smaller and smaller. Soon

You'll disappear. Before that,
now, while there is still time,
we must invent a language we can both
understand, cry out, howl,

anything. Only speak, and your stiff son
will kneel in the dust by your right
hand. I turn from the window
to say this, open my mouth—

but your chin is tipped to your chest,
you're sleeping, and love as always
sticks like a bone in my throat.
Never mind, never mind.

It's a long night. Rest.
The silence of a thousand years
will not be broken for this.

—Rick Rohdenburg

So Black No Sky Could Squeak Through

Jamie stood beside Jody, away from her fellow sixth graders. Jody was just in kindergarten, but already his hair was starting to turn black like her own.

Davy had their father's sandy hair and strong build. Ever since their mother left, Davy stopped waiting for the bus with Jamie. Now with his third grade friends, he puffed up his chest that read Daytona 500, and occasionally glanced at Jamie to warn her not to acknowledge their relationship. She petted the sweaty sides of Jody's head. She still had him to worry about.

The bus pulled up to the marker. Davy and a red-headed bully both tried to get on at the same time.

"Cool it," the bus driver said.

The other boy elbowed Davy and forced his way onto the bus. They ran to the back, each claiming one of the two seats. Jamie and Jody sat down a few seats from the front. She tilted her head to watch Davy.

"Get out of my seat," a boy from Jamie's class said.

Davy squirmed, rose and moved one seat up.

"Davy is a baby," the red-head said.

"Oh shut up, pin dick," some boy yelled.

The red-head snapped his head defiantly toward his attacker. He shook for a moment, cowering under the bully, then quickly changed seats. Davy caught Jamie watching them and glared at her. She quickly faced forward and rubbed "Sarah loves Bryan" on the green vinyl seat in front of her. She tried to imagine loving one of the sweating burping blobs that filled the desks in her class. Other girls did. Theresa Armistead, in her starched white shorts, whispered about them with a mouth full of gum. She kept a scrapbook with all the notes boys gave her. Boys did not send notes to Jamie.

The bus finally rocked to a stop at the elementary school. Jamie took Jody's thin arm and led him to his classroom.

"Thank you, Jamie," said round old Ms. Bernwiz. She ushered Jody inside. "Please try to be good today," she told him.

Jamie wondered if her mother knew that Jody was in kindergarten now.

"Do you need something, Jamie?" Mrs. Bernwiz asked.

"No," she muttered and started down the hall to her class.

Jamie sat on the side row of chairs near the front. She pulled two sheets of notebook paper out of her faded pink sack and pushed her long hair over her shoulders. Ms. Swanson had a pretty china doll face, and she never raised her voice. Jamie looked at

her vocabulary sheet again. She wanted to do her best on the spelling quiz. "Good spellers are good people," Ms. Swanson said.

The shrill hiss of the last bell sounded. Most of the kids threw their books together and sprinted for the door. Jamie lingered at her desk. She slowly gathered up her books.

"Why so long to leave?" Ms. Swanson asked.

"I guess I'm just tired."

"Aren't you excited about going out to play?"

"I don't know. I have kind of a lot of work to do after school."

"Oh, yes," Ms. Swanson sighed. She bent down and picked up Jamie's sack. "Well," she chirped, handing the sack, "at least you have your father. He works very hard for you kids."

"Yeah," Jamie said, walking away.

"Don't forget to study your long division," Ms. Swanson called after her.

Jamie stopped to pick up Jody on the way to the bus. The boys in the back were even louder in the afternoon. As they approached Jamie's stop, and a mass of sweating young boys crowded towards the front of the bus, Jamie fell in behind the group to hurry off the bus.

"I'm going over to Craig's," Davy said.

"Be sure to come home by five," Jamie said.

"I can come home when I want to."

"Please."

"All right," he said, running to catch up with the other boys.

Jamie and Jody trudged towards the house. The sun reflected off the white aluminum siding. Jody broke away from Jamie and ran around to the back.

She found him digging in the dirt beside the sewage creek.

"Let's make mud pies like we used to," Jody said.

Jamie squatted beside him. She pressed her palms into the soil until they started to sting. She rolled the grit in circles.

Jody rubbed the ground in the same patterns. Jamie smiled at his tiny hands. She started to make squares, and Jody made squares. The sun dripped down on the stinking water. Jody smelled like a sweating puppy. Yet strange desperation seemed to flow out of his mouth, moist against his chapped brown lips. Jamie smelled like the creek, but he did not notice. Jody, the puppy, lapped her up, frantically rubbing his hands, constantly needing.

She dug her fingers into the dirt, packing it under her nails. Her brother tried to gouge the soil too, but his bald fingertips could only scratch the surface.

"Let's go inside," Jamie finally said.

Jody kept scraping the earth. He placed his soft hands on hers, as if they could help him.

"I have to cook dinner." She pulled her hands away, and stood up.

His scampering feet were behind her when she reached the screened door. Jamie waited inside for her eyes to adjust to the dark. Jody ran past her to the television. He turned on cartoons and plopped down two feet in front of the screen. Jamie walked over the shaggy brown carpet and into the kitchen.

"Come wash your hands," she called.

She picked up three empty beer cans off the table, and put away her father's breakfast dishes.

"Now," she called again.

Jody grunted at her feet. She lifted him to the sink while he washed his hands. Jamie gave him a glass of juice and a candy bar.

"Do you have any homework?"

"No," he said, walking back to the den.

Jamie opened the refrigerator and tried to decide what to make for dinner. A loaf of bread, an empty jug of milk, a case of beer, two jars of hot chili peppers, rotting lettuce, leftover meatloaf, a jar of spaghetti sauce. She ran to the den and looked at the black velvet clock on the wall. If she made spaghetti, she would have enough time to straighten up and study before dad got home.

Jamie made up everyone's bed and put away the dirty clothes. She vacuumed the den, swept the kitchen, and cleaned the ashtrays. Then she sat down at the cool kitchen table to do her homework.

The back door banged, and Davy called out, "What's for dinner?"

"Spaghetti," Jamie said without lifting her face from her math. She felt Davy's hot breath on her cheek.

"Craig says that Michael says that Theresa says you like Josh."

Jamie threw down her pencil. "I do not."

"Yes, you do." Davy started to laugh.

Jamie wanted to scream at him, but she remembered the time. Quickly she cleared away her books and pulled out the pots for dinner.

"You like him. I know it."

"Go away."

"You do."

Jamie raised the spoon in her hand. "If you don't go away, there won't be any dinner ready when dad gets home."

Davy stammered a moment then ran to the den with Jody.

Jamie was draining the noodles when she heard his voice call out, "What's for dinner?"

"Spaghetti," she said eagerly.

She quickly buttered the white toast she made for him, and piled noodles and sauce on his plate.

"Get your ass in the kitchen, boys," she heard him say.

He came into the kitchen, and Jamie held up the plate like an offering. "Some of those chili peppers might be good with it," Jamie said.

"Smells good," he said, throwing his keys across the counter. He took the plate from her, got some silverware, and returned to the den. "Bring me a beer," he called out.

Jamie got the coldest one from the refrigerator and brought it to her father.

"I told you to get in the kitchen," he said to the boys.

Davy laid the remote control on the coffee table and rose to leave.

"What did you say to me?" Father grabbed Davy's arm.

"Nothing."

"Nothing what?"

"Nothing, sir."

Jody slipped off to the kitchen. Jamie's fingers numbed on the cold beer.

"Don't use that tone with me." He let go of Davy's arm for a second. Then his hand landed hard against the side of Davy's face. "Next time I tell you to do something, you better do it."

Davy's face was small, and a red mark gleamed on his cheek.

Father laughed lightly. Davy quickly walked away.

"Where's my beer?"

"Right here," Jamie said, stretching her arm out from behind him.

He grabbed the beer without a word and turned his attention to the television.

Jamie fixed plates for the boys. They all crammed together at the table. The only sound in the house was the low hum of a game show on t.v.

After dinner, the boys went off together. Jamie cleaned the dishes, then went to look for them. When she turned the corner to the back hall, a suffocating moisture hit her face.

Jamie coughed, "What is that?"

"Lysol," Jody said.

"Jamie's got a boy friend," Davy sang.

"Stop it," Jamie yelled.

"Stop spraying that Lysol at each other. It costs a lot of money," father yelled.

Davy squirted Jamie again. She threw her arms helplessly at him, and another fog of Lysol flew into her nose.

"Jamie's got a boyfriend," Davy said.

Jamie ran to the bathroom and whipped the door closed. Davy and Jody started pushing on it. Her feet slipped on the rug as they shoved on the door. Davy managed to get a foot inside.

"Jamie's got a boyfriend," he sang again. Jody joined him.

"Shut up, Jody. You don't even know what a boyfriend is," Jamie said.

"I do so," Jody whined.

She threw herself hard against the door. It slammed into Davy's foot.

"Ow," he screamed. "I'm telling dad." He ran off, and she shut the door behind him, locking it.

Jamie pulled the rug across the tile floor, as far away from the toilet as she could get. She knelt down on the rug to watch the shower. The tile was pasted with rigid rubber flowers. It seemed like a rain storm of pink, orange and green petals. They streamed down the shower wall, over the soap holder, into the bath tub, and down to the drain. Jamie's mother had put the flowers up years ago, before she left.

Jamie pulled her scraped knees together, wrapping her bruised arms around them. She swayed against the broken cabinet and watched her mother's flowers through the strings of her hair. Her dad used to hold Jamie in his lap and whisper, in musty breath, that Jamie's mother never knew how to hold a man. But she would have made Davy shut up. It was not true. Jamie hated boys.

Davy's feet danced outside the door. He and Jody started singing again.

"Jamie's got a boyfriend. Jamie's got a boyfriend."

"Shut up," her father yelled from the den.

Jody poked his fingers under the door. Davy bent down and whispered through the crack, "Jamie's got a boyfriend."

"Shut up, and go do your homework," her father yelled. His voice closer this time.

Jody's fingers disappeared, and the handle shook.

"Open the damned door," he said.

Jamie looked at the door knob, then at the flowers. Her stomach started turning. Her hand shook as she reached up to unlock the door.

Her father thrust the door back and stared down at her. He filled up the doorway. Light brown hair was strewn above his ruddy face.

"What the hell are you doing in here?" he asked.

"I was going to the bathroom," she said.

His blue eyes softened under the folds of skin. A row of faded teeth showed through his grin. Jamie looked at the floor. He closed the door, and she heard the lock click shut behind him.

Her stomach climbed up to her throat and jumped off, falling all the way to her legs. Out of the corner of her eyes she looked again at the flowers. Every thing inside of her shook. Her head felt tighter and tighter, as if a vice were crushing it, forcing all the quivering parts of her body into a tiny box. Suddenly, the vice clamped all of her together, and she felt nothing.

"So you have a boyfriend?" he asked.

"No," she said. Her voice dropped and flattened out. A thick glaze covered her blue eyes. He could have been on television. She felt nothing.

His hands covered her shoulders. He slid them, and pinched the small knots of her breasts.

"You better not have a boyfriend," he said. "Because there's only one man for you. And who's that?"

"You, daddy," she said.

"That's right," he whispered in her ear. He pulled down her pink shorts and stained white panties. He lifted her up and sat her down hard on the toilet lid.

"Daddy's the only one who loves you."

Thick fingers edged up her thighs to the white wound between her legs. He jerked on her hair, pulling her head down.

"Watch daddy," he whispered. "Watch daddy love you."

The fingers wiggled inside her. Jamie wanted to drop beneath the lid and hide in the bowl. She took a deep breath, fighting to keep the vice closed.

"Doesn't that feel good. Isn't daddy good to you?"

Her eyes were on his fingers, but she saw nothing.

Her body was lifted to the floor. She heard the familiar clanking of his loosened belt buckle as his pants slid to the floor.

"Remember, it's our secret," her father said as he left.

The vice popped. Jamie's parts broke free and scattered across the blue tiles.

Jody pushed open the door. He looked up at his big sister, half naked and crumpled.

"Jamie's got a boyfriend," he said. It sounded like a question.

"Shut up, you little brat," Davy said as he smacked Jody's head.

Jamie glanced at her brother, trying to thank him. She had no energy to speak or to cover her exposed body.

"Leave her alone." Davy knocked Jody away and closed the door.

Jamie tried to look up at the flowers, but they were blurred. Her hands groped for the roll of toilet paper and rubbed her trembling legs. She crawled to the commode and lifted the cracked baby blue lid. A brown stew floated in the bowl. She dropped the paper in and let the lid slip through her tiny fingers. It landed with a crash. She stretched over to flush the toilet.

—MaryClaire Myers King

Baseball

I saw my sister naked yesterday. She didn't know. I was pitchin' ball out on the carport when I saw her through the window. She was standin' in front of her mirror, just lookin' at herself and smilin'. I guess she's pretty, for a girl, but I don't care much about girls. Mama says I will someday, when I get hair on my chest and my voice gets deep. I'm not so big on havin' a fuzzy chest, and I sure don't want to start squeakin' like Jerry Crawford. He's fourteen and his voice is changin'—he'll be talkin' along and it's deep and then it kind of screeches up and scrapes like a little old woman's, and then it slides down again. But he don't have any hair on his chest. Sidney—my sister—she's got it between her legs. It's all black and curly, even though her real hair's just straight and dark brown. It's funny to see her naked like that. She looked kind of—pure. If there's one thing my sister ain't, it's pure. I know I'm not supposed to talk about my sister like that, but everybody else sure talks.

I guess it was supposed to be bad for me to see her naked. But I'm more ashamed when she gets herself all gussied up—she has this black dress that's real short and tight, and she wears red lipstick and makes her eyes look all smoky. Jerry Crawford called her a whore. I hit him, but sometimes I think he's right. I told Mama what he said, and she hit me. That's the only time she's ever laid a finger on me. I guess she didn't have anybody else to hit. It didn't hurt too much, anyway.

Mama'd be really mad if she knew why Jerry was talkin' about Sidney. His big brother Robert was the first one to call her a whore. Robert's tagged after Sidney all his life. Sidney never paid him much mind, but the last few years she's outright hated him. He still comes over here all the time bein' nice to Mama, sayin' he wants to help Mama straighten Sidney out. He even says he loves her. Mama thinks Robert's wonderful. I think he's crazy.

Tonight at dinner Sidney come in all painted up, wearin' her black dress. Mama looked at her hard and then turned around and stared at the tea boilin' on the stove. I was sittin', waitin' for everybody else. Sidney picked up a biscuit from the basket on the table and started eatin' it. She didn't sit down. Mama watched the tea and Sidney chewed on the biscuit with her eyes borin' into Mama's back. The air was so thick it was like breathin' underwater. I turned to Sidney and said, just to make some noise, "Where're you goin' tonight?"

Sidney stared at me real cold and reached for another biscuit. She looked at Mama. "Got any butter in this house? These things are already stone-cold." Mama didn't answer.

I grabbed a biscuit and took a bite. "They're good cold. Hey, with all that stuff on your face, maybe you could go to a Halloween party."

Sidney jerked the chair in front of her. Then she kind of smiled, with half her

mouth turned up and half turned down. "Ha-ha." I squirmed in my chair. It's hard to look Sidney back in the eye when she glares at you.

"It's none of your business, you little runt." She looked at Mama, edgy-like. "I'm just goin'."

Mama turned around when Sidney called me a runt. Her eyes were cold as gray metal, but ready to catch fire any second.

"Don't you talk to your brother like that, Sidney Darris. Treat your family with some respect!" Mama paused. "I don't recall my givin' you permission to go anywhere tonight."

Sidney laughed. "I don't need anybody's permission. I reckon I'll go anywhere I want. It ain't none of your business, either."

Mama knew where Sidney was goin'—I sure knew. but I guess she just wanted to hear Sidney say it. I sat real still.

"I believe it is my business to know what my own daughter's doin'."

"What I'm *doin'*?" I thought you wanted to know where I was goin'." There was a little light in Sidney's eyes that was like a spark when you knock two rocks together. Mama'd stopped movin' and she was just starin' at Sidney.

"I imagine the two are connected," Mama said real still and real cool and quiet. Her face was white as a sheet.

"Oh, I don't know." Sidney's face had sucked up all the color from Mama's. "I reckon I could do what I'm gonna do just about anywhere."

"Well, then, I guess you can just stay here and do it. Because you aren't goin' anywhere tonight."

There was a real long pause. I prayed my stomach wouldn't growl. Then Sidney said quiet, but nasty, "You gonna give me your bed?"

I thought Mama'd forgotten I was there, but all the sudden she told me to leave the room. I moved fast. I made a ruckus like I was goin' up the stairs, but I snuck back down to listen in the doorway. I hadn't ever heard mama sound like that.

"...sleepin' around? You trashy...how do you think I feel—do they pay you for it? Do they? Your brother comes home and tells me people are callin' you a whore—"

"That little...!" A chair banged like Sidney was comin' to get me. I started to scoot up the stairs, but Mama stopped her.

"Sidney!" Mama screamed. I could see Sidney's back through a crack in the door. "You let him alone. He was repeatin' what he heard at school! At school!"

Sidney's body swayed. "They—You—"

"They see you paradin' around like that, you stay out days at a time, what do you think folks is gonna say? Are you a prostitute, Sidney Darris? Are you?" Mama was half-yellin', half-beggin'. "Answer me! Are you a prostitute?" Sidney was just standing there shakin'. "Sidney Darris! Are you a whore?!" I ain't never heard a word sound more horrible than when Mama Said "whore."

Sidney straightened up hard. Then she said, real quiet, "If that's what you think, Mama. If that's what you think. And just how do you suppose I got that way?" She jerked up her purse and walked past Mama out the back door. I could have sworn she was almost cryin'. Mama crumpled back onto the kitchen counter. When she heard Sidney's car start, she looked up for a minute and said, "Oh, baby—." Then I left. I couldn't watch anymore.

It really scared me seein' Sidney near cryin'. She's usually all mean and hard-edged—but here she was soft. She seemed more like my sister that way, like when we was little.

She didn't use to smart off to Mama. When we were kids we were afraid Mama'd hit us for it. She never laid a hand on us, so I don't know why we thought that. Mama did hit Sidney once though, about two or three years ago. She'd come home one night from a party. I was supposed to be in bed, but I'd been lookin' at comics under the covers, and I heard the car pull up outside and Sidney makin' all kinds of racket in the yard. I snuck over to the top of the steps behind the stair-rail to see what was goin' on. She came stumblin' in, half laughin', half cryin'. Mama had been waitin' up for her, and when she saw she was drunk, she just hauled off and hit her. Slapped her and told her to get up to bed before she hit her again—she'd better not ever come home to this house drunk like that again. Sidney tried to say something back to Mama, but Mama just screamed at her to shut up and go to her room. I hadn't ever seen mama so furious. Sidney kind of blubbered and then she turned and run up the stairs two at a time, wailin' and cryin'. Mama stood tremblin' for a minute, then she started up the stairs real slow. She tried Sidney's door, but it was locked. She knocked, real quiet at first.

"Sidney? Sidney, honey, open the door. I wanna talk to you." Sidney didn't answer. I could hear her cryin' though. Mama knocked again. "Sidney? Sidney, you hear me? Open up, baby."

"Go away!"

"Sidney, I'm sorry, honey. I didn't mean to hurt you. Now open up this door."

"I said, go away!"

"Sidney!" Mama slumped against the door. "Sidney, honey, please let me in."

Finally it got real quiet. I got up and checked out in the hall, but the light was off. There was a sliver comin' from under Sidney's door, and Mama's too, and I could hear Sidney cryin' and Mama snifflin'. I laid awake for a long time.

When I got up the next mornin', the house was dead silent. I wandered around for a little while, then went out and pitched the ball some with Spark, my dog. I knew mama'd get mad, though, if she knew I was outside in my nightclothes, so I went back in to watch cartoons. I turned the TV on real low so I wouldn't wake nobody up. It was spooky, everything so quiet.

When Mama came downstairs she was pale and looked cold. She walked into the kitchen without sayin' anything to me and went straight to the percolator. She plugged it in and stood there for a minute just watchin' the water bubble. I got up and went and stood in the kitchen doorway.

"G'mornin', Mama." At first it seemed like she hadn't heard me. Then she turned around and looked at me for a long second.

"G'mornin', son." She kept lookin' at me, but she didn't say anything else, so I started to go back to the living room. All of the sudden she held her hand out. She looked so sad, so I went over to her, and she hugged me real tight and breathed, "Oh, Karlie—." She pulled back like she was gonna say something, but she stopped. She had this far away look in her eyes. She let go of my arms and kind of ruffed up my hair.

"You go on and get dressed now, and I'll get you some breakfast." I didn't move at first. Then she pushed me a little, and I didn't know what else to do except go, so I did.

I was watchin' Batman when I heard Sidney's door open. mama had the machine runnin' in the kitchen, so she didn't hear. When Sidney came downstairs, she looked scared—but she had that mean look already startin' on her face. Since that night she don't

listen much to Mama anymore.

It wasn't too long after that I started hearin' folks talk. Robert was the first one. He was the one brought her home drunk, but Mama wasn't mad at him, 'cause he made it sound like he was a hero, rescuing Sidney before she got hurt. I never told Mama it was Robert who said it. I think Sidney knew, though. She got cold on him right about the same time she got mean towards Mama.

After supper I decided to crack some baseballs on the wall. Robert come over about 8:30, bringin' Mama some strawberries out of his daddy's patch. I was still playin' ball on the carport when he walked up. He's an okay lookin' guy—tall, kind of skinny and real dark hair. But his eyes are mean.

"Hey, kiddo, what're you doin'?"

"Playin' ball." I kept pitchin'.

"Don't that make an awful lot of noise for your Mama?"

"She don't mind."

"Well, she and I are gonna visit. Can't you do somethin' else for a while?"

"Ain't nothin' else to do." I kept pitchin' the ball. Crack. Crack. All of the sudden he reached over and caught it. He tossed it up a couple of times, then threw it out in the yard. Spark ran after it.

Robert grinned. "Isn't it time you were in bed anyway, squirt? See if you can't find somethin' else to do, how about it?"

Spark ran up and dropped the ball at Robert's feet and wagged his tail. Robert laughed. "Dumb mutt." He kicked the ball across the porch into the bushes. "Fetch, puppy." Then he went inside. "Mrs. Darris? I brought you some fresh strawberries...."

I wanted to hit him. He had some nerve, tellin' me what to do like that, then sweet-talkin' Mama. I got my ball out of the bushes and threw it hard three times before I quit.

Spark and I were tusslin' in the grass when I realized Mama was cryin'. If Robert—I listened good as I could from where I was. I could only catch pieces.

"Robert, she practically told me she was...offered to do it in my bed...doesn't know...drinking..." Mama was cryin' so that I could hardly make anything out: "Her daddy...too drunk to be a father...ever since...I just lost my head...in the blood...oh, God help..."

Robert said somethin' about Mama faultin' herself. He was tryin' to comfort her, I could tell, but I couldn't ever hear exactly what he told her. I threw the baseball for Spark once or twice, but I didn't feel much like it anymore. I went out to the backyard and drew pictures in the dirt with a stick until Robert left and Mama called me to come in to bed.

Sidney's been gone for three days now. She's run away before, but it feels different this time. Mama's got black circles under her eyes, and even I can't hardly sleep. I guess we shouldn't be too worried—folks say she can always find a bed. But she didn't carry no extra clothes with her, and she was so mad when she left—Sidney could get in a awful lot of trouble the way she does.

I had a dream about her last night. I was walkin' through the house and whistlin'—but it wasn't 'cause I was happy, it was 'cause I was scared. I was walkin' up the stairs when all the sudden I felt like someone was followin' me. So I turned around real fast,

but nothin' was there—just that I had a shadow. And I thought that was awful funny, 'cause there wasn't a moon or any light so that I'd have a shadow. So I bent down and looked closer at it. It was that black dress that Sidney was wearin' when she went out. I was just about to pick it up when Mama came runnin' in sayin', "Don't touch that—it's dirty. I was just about to wash it. I dropped it on the way to the machine." She just stood there though, so I picked it up and handed it to her. I looked down at my hand, and it was all red, like bloody. I wanted to ask Mama why she was washin' clothes so late, in the middle of the night, but she'd walked off—and then I woke up, all sweaty and scared with my heart poundin'. I had to get up and check the steps afterwards. But Mama was sound asleep, and Sidney was still gone.

They found her two days later lyin' half-naked and near-dead in a ditch beside the highway about six miles outside of town. She told the police she'd met some man at the bar and left with him, and he took her out in the country and raped her. He didn't try to kill her 'cause he figured nobody'd believe her if she said she was raped. I've heard so much bad about Sidney, I know lots of folks think she's lyin'. But how else did she get beat up? She said one of the lawyers from the next town did it. That's what she told the police and doctors. She won't talk to Mama.

Sidney talks to me, but I don't know what to say back. She started cryin' yesterday when I was tellin' her about my baseball game, told me I couldn't understand. I asked her, understand what, but she just cried and told me to go on and leave her alone.

She's been home about a week, and she still stays in bed most of the time. Robert tried to come see her twice. She wouldn't let him in her room, but the third time he showed up, Mama was gone and he busted in on her.

"What the hell are you doing in here? I told you not to come over here. Get out. Get out!"

"Sidney, why are you doin' this? We just wanna—"

Sidney cut him off. "We? Who's we?"

"Sidney, baby, talk to your mother. She wants—"

"Don't call me baby. And get out."

"You're gonna listen if you like it or not. Your Mama loves you. But she's heard about all your escapades for so long, she don't know—"

"Escapades? I'm a *whore*, Robert. Whatsa matter, can't you say it—?"

"Sidney, I don't wanna hear—"

"I don't care what you wanna hear. You think I oughta tell my Mama about it? Why? She ain't gonna listen anyway. She didn't listen last time—"

"What the hell are you talking about?" Robert's voice sounded mean.

Sidney laughed, rough-like. Then she said, real slow, "You bastard. Just because you didn't throw me in a ditch—"

"Shut up!" I heard a pop like he hit her and I jumped and held my baseball glove to my mouth. Sidney yelped, and there sounded like a tussle.

"What're you tryin' to do? Spread more rumors?" Sidney moaned. Robert's voice was horrible. "Don't you think you're in enough trouble already? What the hell are you talkin' about?"

Sidney answered real soft and choked, so I could barely hear. "I'm talkin' about when you raped me, Robert."

I heard another pop. "Don't you ever say that again. I never hurt you. I loved

you. And you wanted it, you—"

"I was fourteen! By God, you—"

"Shut up!" It sounded like he hit her again. "Now you listen. Nobody's gonna believe you if you tell 'em I raped you. Just like they don't believe it about that lawyer. I bring your Mama strawberries, she cries on my shoulder, begs me to help her straighten you up. Everybody knows I love you. I tell your mother every day—are you hearin' me? They ain't gonna believe—"

Sidney cut him off with a laugh that sounded like it hurt her to laugh it. It cut right through me.

"You're sick, Robert." There was a long pause. Then she said, real quiet, "No. Ain't nobody ever gonna believe anything I say." Her voice got hard. "And you know what? It don't matter no more. I've been with so many I've lost count—I started after you. I figured, if they'd want it bad enough to hurt me, they'd want it bad enough to pay me. And it got rid of you. At least I thought it would. But it's gonna pay my way outta here, Robert. I'll get outta here, and then I will be rid of you." She laughed that horrible laugh again. "You love me? You can have me. Thirty bucks and I'll do whatever you want."

There was a long silence, and then Robert said, hoarse-like, "You *whore*." I heard him go down the stairs, and then the front door shut hard. Sidney was *laughin'*, not real *laughin'*, but somethin' else. Then it turned into cryin'. I tried to cover my ears, but it didn't do any good. Then all the sudden it stopped. For about five minutes there wasn't a sound from her room. I snuck out of my room and made some noise on the stairs to make her think I'd just come in.

She was lyin' in bed, starin' off into space when I walked in. She looked at me all blank.

"The door was open, so I just come in."

"That's okay, Karlie."

"You, uh, all right?"

She looked at me sharp-like. "Why shouldna be? What—why's your face all red?"

"I been playing ball, I—I guess I'm just hot."

"You been cryin', Karlie. Come here." I stepped a little closer. "What happened? What's the matter?" She got a real scared look on her face. "Where've you been? I didn't hear your ball hittin' the wall. Where've you been, Karlie? Did you—?"

"He hit you, Sidney! Why did he hit you? Did he—did he—Sidney—I didn't mean to listen, I didn't hear much, I promise—"

"That son of a bitch!" There was fire burnin' in her eyes, but in suddenly flickered out and died. "I'm sorry, Karlie. Honey, I ain't mad at you. It don't matter. It don't matter, Karlie."

"But, Sidney—"

"Shush, Karlie. It don't matter. But you got to promise not to tell Mama. You hear?" For a minute she looked like the old Sidney. She reached up and ruffled my hair. "You're a good kid, Karlie." She got a serious look on her face then. "Here, I've got something for you. A surprise—"

"What for?"

"Go over to my dresser and look in the top drawer under that white t-shirt on the left."

I opened the drawer and reached under the shirt—"A baseball! Is it new?"

"No, it's not new. It's better than new. Come here."

"There's somethin' written on it—"

"Here," she took it from me. "See? It's signed by one of the Boston Red Sox."

"Wow. Where did you get it, Sidney?"

Her face got a sort of blank look. "Oh, a man..." she shook her head. "I was gonna give it to you for your birthday, but, well. Take good care of it."

"My birthday's only in a couple of weeks, Sidney."

"I know. I just felt like giving it to you now." She looked at me real serious. "I love you, Karlie. I'm sorry about bein' so mean to you. It ain't you. Forgive me?"

"Yeah, Sid—"

She ruffled my hair again. "You're a sweet kid. Get on outta here, now. I gotta get dressed. I got some business to tend to." She got up slowly and went to her closet and pulled out her black dress. I thought about my dream.

"Sidney, don't—"

"Karlie, I said get on! Now—" She looked sad and turned back toward the closet. "Please, Karlie. Go on, now. I'm busy."

I went out. I set my new baseball on the shelf with my baseball cards. I kept thinking about my dream and Sidney's dress and Robert. I grabbed my glove off my bed and got my old baseball and went out to the carport. I heard Sidney walk out the front door and get in her car out front, but I just kept playin' ball. I pretended the ball was Robert: "That's for hurtin' Sidney!" Then I made it Sidney, "for bein' so stupid!" Then Mama. And then I just threw it and threw it and threw it and it was me 'cause I'd let Sidney leave and 'cause I hated everything and I threw that ball harder and harder and harder and then I turned and threw it as hard as I could at the storm door window. It shattered all over the carport and I yelled as loud as I could and sat down on the cold cement and cried. I knew Sidney wasn't ever comin' back. I knew she was gone, and I knew I couldn't have stopped her, but I wished I'd tried. Now nobody'd ever believe what really happened to her. Nobody'd ever believe it about Robert and that lawyer—because she wore a black dress and lipstick and they thought she deserved it.

When Mama came home she found the note on the kitchen table. She didn't say a word about it or the window—she just tucked the note into the Bible and swept up the glass. We had cold biscuits for dinner.

—Sandee McGlaun

Helping Yoshihiro

By the time I reached Takayama there was snow falling, and I was glad I'd finally listened to something that someone had said and worn a sweater and brought my neighbor's heavy coat, gloves, and scarf. It wasn't *that* far from the coast to Takayama, but the temperature had dropped as quickly as the spunky two-car train had climbed the mountains. I'd only been in Japan three weeks. I had *had* the impression that I was coming to a purely tropical kind of place.

I dug the scrap of paper that I'd written the directions on. I was headed for the Yamakage Elementary School. That's my job. I visit elementary schools. I make this guest appearance in one or two of the classrooms, and I get the kids to count from one to ten and to sing the alphabet song. And that's all. Then I just let them entertain me with some cultural display or another, usually this stuff they call *kendo*—which is really nothing more than beating each other over the head with these flimsy bamboo poles that all look to me to be broken before they even begin. Then I pose for pictures and autographs. The students have all taken some special test or something, and the one who was the big winner gets to teach me how to use chopsticks. Other than that, all I do is sit in the principal's office and drink coffee and green tea—and then more coffee and more green tea.

So anyway I said my morning prayer—"Oh shit, here we go again"—and walked down the hill from the station. I walked through the town, and then turned a couple of times—and then I came upon something that I couldn't believe I was seeing.

There was a boy waiting at an intersection. I'm telling you it was a bitch of a cold day, and this boy wasn't wearing anything but shorts, a t-shirt, and this little cap that they all wear. Instead of socks and shoes he only had on a pair of lime-green plastic slippers. His legs looked like two pencils, his upper body like a nub of an eraser. He had a black book case strapped to his back that was bigger than he was, and he was leaning forward, bent just at the waist, and hugging himself and shivering. Maybe he was eight or nine years old.

He saw me and snapped to attention. At first, I wasn't sure if it was out of respect for me, or if it was because he was getting himself together to bolt across the street as soon as the light changed. Looking back on it now, I'm sure of his intention. Stand perfectly straight and still and the big foreigner can't see you, right?

"*Samui desu ka?*" I asked. Are you cold?

Okay, so it was a stupid question. But I really had this urge to talk to this kid, and when you've only had one year of textbook Japanese, you can't exactly say the most suave or the most idiomatic thing, but you want to say *something*. I wanted to say *something*. The boy bobbed his head in affirmation.

I couldn't think of how to say *short pants* or *long pants*, so I just pointed to my

slacks and moved my hands up and down along the legs and tugged on them, and then I pointed to his bare legs and said "Why?"

"School rule," he said.

"What's your name?"

"Yamashita."

"I mean your first name."

"Yoshihiro."

The light changed, and he trotted across the street and soon disappeared around a corner to the right. I walked in his footsteps at my own pace. When I reached the right turn, I could see six or seven other boys and girls on their way to school. They too were wearing short pants—but jackets, gloves, shoes and socks as well. The snow was sticking.

The Yamakage Elementary was a tiny, wooden country school with about forty students. It was at the bottom of a big hill, with its back to a mountain. The school looked like the sun could work its way down to it for perhaps two or three hours a day.

A teacher greeted me in English at the main entrance. She wasn't wearing shorts. She had on snug-looking sweat pants and a lined athletic jacket every bit as heavy as my coat.

"Preen-see-paru look foh-waad meetchu," she said, working like hell to get every syllable out, but still managing to give me a good looking over. "He bery bery happy you hee-ah."

I followed her down the hall.

"Bee keh-furu," she said. "Don'toh bee ah coh-do too-day."

"What?" I said. I had said it before I could catch myself. I'd just about got used to these odd expressions and pronunciations. *Be careful. Don't be a cold—that is—Don't catch a cold.*

She pantomimed a few hearty sneezes and coughs, and waving a finger in my face said, "Koh-do. No. Bee keh-furu."

Then she opened the door to the principal's office and shoved me in. The door slammed shut and the principal sprung out of his chair at the same time.

I couldn't believe it. He was wearing a mask! A white surgical mask! Jesus Christ! I thought. No one can have foreigner-phobia that bad!

He'd sprung up like he had wanted to shake my hand, but he had actually taken a couple of steps backward rather than forward. He held an arm straight out in front of him, with his palm open and up like a shield, and waved it frantically. *No! No! No!* his palm seemed to say to me. *No, what?* I wondered. Then he came out with these really strange hissing kinds of grunts. It was as if I had caught him sucking on a sponge and now he found it too big to spit out. Then his arm motion changed. *Sit down!* it ordered me, and I did.

There was a big kerosene heater near the sofa I was sitting on and it was putting out some intense heat. After a few awkwardly silent minutes—the principal was just standing there staring at me behind that damn mask—I stripped off my scarf and coat. A woman came in with coffee, saying nothing but just directing quick little head-bob bows to the principal and to me too, and then she left. I took a sip from my cup, and the principal finally sat down behind his big desk. He seemed relieved. I supposed he was figuring things weren't going nearly as bad as they could have. Every once in a while

he lifted the mask every so slightly and sucked down some coffee. Me, well, between sips, I'd smile at him some, and I think he would smile back, though it was a little hard to tell with that god-blessed mask. Man, it was getting hot.

Finally, the principal, in what seemed to me a moment of great audacity, barked, "Koruzhjo!"

This time I had no clue. If he'd just take off that damn mask, I thought. That thing was making me crazy.

Then he repeated himself. "Korudo! Korudo!"

Ah, cold! Of course!

I replied in Japanese. I thought it would be easier on both of us. "Yes," I said. "It really is cold today."

Shocked, he pulled his head back on his shoulders. His eyes seemed to say that he thought I was trying to trick him. Then he said it again. "Korudo!"

So again, I replied in Japanese. "Yes. It's very cold here in Takayama. It's snowing."

This time, he didn't seem to hear me.

Then it hit me. No foreigner knows how to speak Japanese.

Let me tell you, this language business is weird. Sometimes language doesn't have as much to do with the way it sounds as the way you look when you speak it. I didn't look quite right to this guy, not at all right I guess, and after a brief moment of thinking I was possessed and trying to speak in tongues, he became deaf.

So I gave my head a half dozen giant nods and said, in English, "Yes. Bery korudo."

That sprung him out of his chair like my entrance to begin with had, and I realized that he probably thought that I was cold. What part of his face I could see displayed bewilderment. I mean, if I really had been cold, what could he have done? It couldn't have got any hotter in that room.

"No, no," I said. "Outside is cold. Me, not cold. Bery, bery comfortable."

"Eeeehhh?" he said, those last few unstressed English syllable sending him for a complete loop.

"Me," I said, pointing to my nose in good Japanese fashion, "com-fort-a-ble."

"Eeeehhh?"

Then I gave up. "Me, okay. Bery hotto. Bery, bery hotto. Happy. Bery happy."

He crossed his arms. "You, hotto?"

"Yes, me, hotto."

What a stupid thing for me to say! Now he rushed out and came back with the coffee woman and a blanket. They insisted that I lie down and sleep.

"No, no," I said. "I'm not that hot. I don't have a fever. I don't have a cold. I'm okay."

"Su-ree-pu, su-ree-pu," the woman said.

"I'm not sleepy!" I said.

"Yesu, su-ree-pu," the principal said.

"No!" I said.

They pushed and pulled on me and the woman got down on her knees and lifted my legs onto the sofa. They both seemed to delight in my proving to be a nuisance.

Just when it seemed hopeless, when it seemed I'd have to spend the whole day lying on that sofa and sweating and trying not to gawk at the principal gawking at me, the door opened, and a young man came in saying, "Excuse me, excuse me, excuse me." He was wearing blue jeans and a white sweater and had a kind of pseudo-Elvis hairdo and when

he saw me he said, "Mr. Hawkins? You're Mr. Hawkins? Are you okay, Mr. Hawkins?"

This guy could speak perfect English—that is, what comes to seem like perfect English when you're stuck in Japan.

"I'm fine," I said.

"Well then, what are Miss Goto and Mr. Kawaguchi doing?" he asked.

"They think I have a cold and a fever, but I don't. All I said was it was cold outside and nice and warm in here."

He was about my age, and when he heard this he laughed, and then in a gravelly kind of down-home Japanese that I couldn't catch a word of, set everything straight in a matter of seconds. I was released into his custody.

My new guardian, Mr. Nakamura, gave me a tour of the school. It didn't take long. There were only a few special classrooms and a teacher's room at one end of the hall and the six main classrooms at the other. The teacher's room was warm but the rest of the school was absolutely freezing. We peeped into the classes in progress. At the front of each classroom there was a teacher bundled up in sweat clothes. In the middle of each classroom there was a kerosene heater that wasn't burning and a lot of students looking at their own breath. When the students caught a glimpse of me, they ooooohhhed and aaaaahhhed and, as I had come to expect, cried *Foreigner! Foreigner!*

Every time I visit a school, I see things that baffle me, things that make me crazy, and usually I just go home and yell at myself and push things around until I feel better. But now I had this Mr. Nakamura with me, and as it turned out, he wasn't a teacher and didn't even work at the school. He ran a camera shop in town, and being the only one around with functional English skills had been recruited to help for the day. He'd gone to the U.S. after failing to get into a Japanese university, and he'd spent two years there, as best I could ascertain, searching out blues clubs.

"Mr. Nakamura," I said, "why was the principal wearing that mask?"

"Oh, don't you know that? He has cold. He wears that mask so that you will not take his cold from him. He is polite to you."

"Really!...And why is it a school rule that the kids have to wear short pants?"

That seemed to embarrass him. Or rather, it seemed to make him feel embarrassed for me. Like I was really uncouth. He gave a little chuckle, hoping to get me to drop it, but I repeated the question. He reddened up again, and then he answered.

"Well, to tell the truth, Mr. Hawkins," he said, "there is no such rule. It looks like a rule, maybe, yes. But it is not a rule."

"This morning," I pressed, "a boy told me it was a rule. If it's not a rule, why are they all wearing shorts? It's cold!"

"Yes," he said. "Very cold. I have on the warm clothes, and still I am cold. Well, how do I say. People think it is a good idea. Not every people. But many people. They want the children grow tough. So every child do that way. you know, wear the short pants."

There was a rule, however, a very official rule, about the classroom heater not being used. Even though the Takayama climate was the most biting in the district, it was still subject to district policy, and it didn't get cold anywhere else in the district until much later. The rule stipulated that district gas could be used for heating beginning December 1, but that day was still weeks away. The gas in the heaters in the principal's room and the teacher's room was bought with PTA money. Apparently, PTA members believed in the *toughen the little boogers up* philosophy.

"The boy I met this morning," I said, after hearing all this, "was wearing shorts like

the rest of them, but he didn't have on a jacket, only a t-shirt, and he didn't even have on shoes. He was just wearing those plastic slippers."

"Ah," Mr. Nakamura said. "Perhaps that was Yoshihiro."

"Yeah," I said. "That was his name. Yoshihiro."

"I know Yoshihiro very well," Mr. Nakamura said. "He looks young. Like eight or nine or something like that. But to speak the truth, he is eleven. Many of the other boys bully him."

"Because he's so small."

Mr. Nakamura cocked his head to the side, that Japanese gesture I had already seen a million times that means *Hmmmh, I have to think about that*, and he said, "I don't know, maybe. But I think the main reason is his parents. His parents have the bar. Many people think it is bad influence. So other boys' parents say 'Don't play with Yoshihiro.'"

"So they don't play with him—and they make him go without shoes."

Mr. Nakamura came at me again with that tilt-the-head thing and said, "Hmmmh.... That's not right exactly. First they tease him. Then he wants them like him. Then he tries show them he is tough. He himself decides not to wear the shoes and the jacket and like that."

"Do you know his parents? What are they like?"

"Of course, I know them. They have the bar. Everyone knows them. Everyone goes to their bar. They are very wonderful husband and wife. I think so."

"What do you mean, *everyone*?"

"You know, all the people."

"Teachers?"

"Yes, yes. The teachers, the other students' parents, Principal Kawaguchi, and all the other people."

At that point, we both seemed to have talked enough. We let the subject drop. And I realized that I couldn't feel my toes.

Mr. Nakamura's main responsibility was to help me talk to the teachers about what we were going to do in our classes. I was to teach two times, and in each class a teacher would assist me in explaining the activities to the students. I would teach once to the fourth, fifth, and sixth-graders, and then to the first, second, and third-graders. After Mr. Nakamura translated what I said about my self-introduction, the alphabet song, and the counting game, he went back to his camera shop.

The teacher who was going to assist me in the first class was Mr. Hosokawa. He was very friendly in a nervous sort of way, but he didn't speak a word of English and he had I wanna be a principal! written all over his face.

"You good teacher, okay! You teach my students, okay! Let's go!" he said in a baby-like Japanese, and off we went.

There were about twenty students in the class, and though the *ooooohhed* and *aaaaahhed* a little when I entered, it wasn't the crazed reception that I was accustomed to. It didn't even approach all the *ooooohhing* and *aaaaahhing* I'd heard earlier in the morning. This wasn't a joke. Everything in the school was freezing and freezing fast.

Part of my grand entrance involved walking around the room and shaking each student's hand. Usually, this sends the kids into a frenzy, but this day was different. A couple of the kids were coughing and sneezing, and all of them were sniffing. Little Yoshihiro was sitting in the last seat of the row by the window. I don't know why, but

he wasn't shivering now. He was sitting stoically and staring straight ahead, seemingly not even noticing when I took his frozen hand in mine. His lips were blue.

"Okay, Mr. Ho-keen-zu, my students so happy now. Meet you. So happy. Yeah. Let's go. Please introduce."

I drew my family tree on the blackboard. I always draw my sister just like this famous cartoon character, Chibi Maruko, and my brother like the standard Elvis-look-alike Japanese high school doo-bopper, kind of like Mr. Nakamura, but even that didn't get a laugh. I blew on my hands and pointed to the various members of my family.

"Mo-ther," I said. "Fa-ther. Sis-ter. Bro-ther. Okay, please say. Mo-ther. Fa—"

I stopped and looked at Mr. Hosokawa. Only two or three of the students were participating, and those not exactly whole-heartedly.

He was giving me the big smile. He couldn't fool me. His little buns were freezing, too. "Okay, great!" he said. "Mr. Ho-keen-zu, students enjoy much! Great! More! More! Boys and girls, Mr. Ho-keen-zu great teacher, isn't he! Let's go!"

So I had no choice. I gave myself an absurd lesson in pronunciation. After that, Mr. Hosokawa held an American trivial pursuit game with himself.

"American capital? Okay, who knows? Don't be shy. Okay, speak out. American capital? You know, I think. Okay, yes, Was-sheen-tone. Okay, good students. All right, next question."

After that came the blessed alphabet song. I wasn't hanging in there by very much. I wrote the letters on the blackboard and had another pronunciation drill with myself. Then I sang. By myself. Then I looked to Mr. Hosokawa again. This time I didn't give him a chance to come on with that *Oh it's great!* crap.

"I'm cold!" I said, in Japanese. It was the first Japanese I'd spoken inside the classroom, and it brought forth the biggest reaction from the students.

"Eeeeehhh!" they blurted out in chorus.

"I'm really cold," I said. "Aren't you cold?"

"No, not cold," he said.

"Lie!" I said, sounding even more confrontational than I had intended.

"OOOOHHH!!!" the students exclaimed.

"No, not lie. Really, not lie. I'm genki! Let's go! Let's sing!"

I'm not sure how to translate *genki*. It's something like *healthy* or *cheerful* or *energetic* or *ready for anything* or as in this case *recklessly at whatever task is at hand*.

"The students are cold," I said. "They don't want to learn anything now."

"No, students not cold. Maybe little cold. But okay. Don't worry. Okay, let's sing! Let's be genki!"

I sang again. Then I had all the students stand and try to sing together. It didn't go well. Mr. Hosokawa was encouraging them to be more *genki*, when all of a sudden, little Yoshihiro let loose a ghastly sneeze. It sounded more like a snort from Hell than anything else, and as everyone turned around to snicker at him, Yoshihiro put his head on his desk.

Mr. Hosokawa began to reprimand him. I couldn't understand much of what he said, but I felt his drift.

Yoshihiro didn't move. It looked to me like the little guy had waited until this very day to finally give up.

"You're not a baby!" Mr. Hosokawa continued. "Try harder. Endure it."

That was it. I lost it completely. "Jesus Christ!" I shouted, "The boy's freezing to death!" I pulled my sweater over my head and rushed to Yoshihiro's desk and jerked

him to his feet and pulled the sweater down over him. "Nobody can learn anything! Everybody's too goddam cold! Don't you understand that?!"

Mr. Hosokawa had no idea what I was saying. He just stood there staring at me and looking totally helpless. Nothing in his experience had prepared him for me. I was the first foreigner he had ever met.

"That's just great!" I said. "Just great!" I went back to the front of the class. "You think I'm such a great teacher?! That's what you keep saying, isn't it?!"

Mr. Hosokawa produced a stoic smile.

"Well, I got something I want to teach you! It ain't right making these kids suffer like this! And if you got the nerve to make them come to school in shorts when it's snowing, then you all ought to come to school in shorts!"

By now, the other teachers had gathered in the hall. The principal, too.

And then I just didn't know what to do. Something inside me said that if I were going to cause a scene, I should really cause a good one, and the thought of yanking down my pants and mooning them all crossed my mind. Something else inside me said that I should just say *sumimasen*—I'm sorry—give a little bow, and go on with the class. Nobody else seemed to know what to do either. The students, Mr. Hosokawa, the principal, the other teachers, they were all looking at me.

"Fine," I said, walking down between two rows of students. "Just fine. Go ahead and stare at me all you like. I don't care. I just don't care."

I sat down in a chair near the back of the classroom and buried my head in my hands on top of one of the tiny desks. I refused to move.

I don't know how long the silence lasted, but it seemed a long time. Then there was a grunt of an order from one of the teachers in the hallway, and I could hear all the students standing and filing out of the room. Soon I was all alone. There was nothing I could do for an encore.

The next thing I knew, I was on that sofa again, with the blanket tucked in around me, and the gas heater blasting away. They had pushed a table up to the sofa—a table overflowing with food—sushi- sashimi, fried chicken, boiled shrimp, beer, grilled trout, soup, pasta, sliced cantaloupe, oranges, and grapes.

Would it be rude if I didn't eat? Was it a trick? Did they want to see how big an ingrate I was?

First, the principal came in and apologized. He was still wearing that damn considerate-to-others mask. He bowed deeply and muttered at the floor in a humble, formal whisper. He was followed by Mr. Hosokawa, and then every other teacher one by one, and then the coffee woman, and finally Mr. Nakamura himself, who'd rushed over to take full responsibility for everything.

"I think I should just leave very quietly," I suggested.

"No, no, you can't do that," Mr. Nakamura said. "It wouldn't look good. You can't go early."

"They told you what I did?"

He lowered his eyes and nodded his head yes.

"I guess they think I'm crazy."

"Not really, just that you're a foreigner. They're really ashamed of themselves."

"Them? Why?"

He just shook his head. "It's hard to explain. They're just Japanese, that's all. Mr.

Hawkins, please eat. Eat a lot. It's what you can do."

Mr. Nakamura said he'd come back at five-thirty and walk me to the station. I didn't know why they wanted me to wait so long. It seemed they'd want me out of there as soon as possible.

But I waited, and there was nothing to do but ponder this whole internationalization racket. I felt bad—*Feeling a little xenophobic? Call Mr. Hawkins! He'll set you straight!*—but at the same time, I wasn't quite ready to shoulder the blame for the day's fiasco. I tried to remember the details of my contract. I wanted out.

Mr. Nakamura finally came back. The principal and the staff were all at the door to say good-bye.

"Way to go! Nice work! Thank you very much!" they all said as I headed off.

The wind had really kicked up, and the snow was swirling. About six inches was on the ground. We'd gotten about halfway to the station when we heard a scuffle to our right. Two boys were holding another down in the snow. Two others were drilling him with snowballs.

"Why are you friends with that American?"

"I hate that American!" the boy being held said.

"Yeah, sure you do! And he hates you! That's why he gave you his sweater!"

"Leave me alone!"

"You want to be an American, don't you!"

"Just leave me alone!"

"You're a strange boy!"

"Stop it!"

All together, the four boys rolled Yoshihiro onto his stomach and pushed his face into the snow.

—Steve Redford

Seeing from Memory

I need to do a sketch of the homeplace before they tear it down. Or maybe a watercolor. Soon everything will be leveled, including the trees. That'll make it easier for them to build a fried chicken joint there.

It's hard to believe that once there was a huge stretch of woods between South River, the fairgrounds, and the Federal Pen, and that three room house was smack in the middle of it. There was me, two brothers, four sisters, and Mama and Daddy—that is, most of the time. Daddy was gone a lot. He would travel here and there picking up odd jobs and sending money home since times were so hard.

When I look back on those years, fourth grade sticks out most in my mind. So many strange things happened then, it's no wonder. First of all, it was the year I thought I saw Soap Sally. Also it was the year I nearly got mauled by a dancing bear. But most of all, it was when my daddy wandered off to Panama to help build a bridge near the canal. He had heard that Panama was a boom town for sure, and any clever man could make a fortune there. On top of that, I remember fourth grade because I was the only boy in the class without any front teeth. Everybody else's had come in by first or second grade, but not mine. Every morning I'd crawl over my brothers, jump out of bed, and run to the mirror. I was afraid they'd never grow in. On one of those mornings my mama told me to forget about going to school.

"Willy, go pick me a bushel of apples," she said. "We need to sell some apple butter next week at the fairgrounds. Now don't go starin' into space or drawin' pictures in that tablet of yours, or Soap Sally'll getcha."

I knew about Soap Sally. She lived somewhere out there in the darkest part of the woods, and if you were bad, she'd snatch you up, stuff you in a gunny sack, and make you into soap. I lugged a basket behind me and set off for the giant apple tree that grew near the bend in South River. A couple of times I forgot what I was doing and stopped to lay down in the leaves and stare at the clouds. And I remember doing a real fine sketch of one of my shoes. My daddy had taught me to draw when I was old enough to hold a pencil, and no matter how poor we were, he managed to buy me drawing tablets. Many times he would tell Mama that he and I were going hunting, but what we'd really do is sit in a field of broomsedge and take turns drawing what we saw: tree stumps, our dog Grover, stalks of goldenrod. I would sketch his face and he'd sketch mine. He taught me about perspective and shadow and the importance of seeing.

"Willy, you have to learn to see!" he would tell me. "You have to look at something and see it for what it really is, instead of what you want it to be."

He told me I should draw one thing every day. That's why I was sketching my shoe that morning on the way to pick apples for Mama. After I finished, I climbed out of the leaves, shook myself off, and headed toward the river. When I finally got to the tree,

I climbed up as high as I could and settled down in the crook of the biggest limb. soon I was plucking fat red apples and dropping them into the basket below. Once in a while I missed and bounced the apples so hard they got all bruised and cracked, but there were plenty more where they came from. My mind wandered and I thought about what my sister Doris had done to me in that tree. Mama had caught me smoking and was chasing me through the woods with a peach stick. I ran for the apple tree because it was easy to climb, but when I got there, Doris was leaning against the trunk eating an apple.

"Climb up fast," Doris said. "She'll never see you!"

I shimmied up to a branch near the top. Mama came tearing through the thicket and that traitor Doris screamed out, "Here he is, mama. Up in the tree. Come on, let's throw rocks at him."

You never could trust Doris. I guess I had to love her because she was my sister, but I'd sure never choose her as a friend. I lobbed an apple toward the basket and pretended I was aiming at her big behind. It was broad daylight with the sun shining through the leaves, but I could have sworn I heard an owl screeching, which is odd since they only fly around at night. Beside that, there was a special smell in the woods that day—a smoky smell, but not of wood burning, more like hair, like when Grover would wag his tail too close to the fire.

"Quit throwin' them apples, boy. You knocked me in the head two times!" That croak of a voice drifted up to where I was sitting, and my heart jumped so hard I almost fell off my perch. Underneath me, by the roots of the apple tree, stood an old lady in a grey dress. She had snow white hair that must have been two or three feet long. Even though there wasn't the tiniest trace of a breeze, that white hair of hers seemed to fly away from here head and ripple like it was caught in a gust of wind. Her hands were raised up toward me, and I could feel the flesh on my backbone standing up. That burning smell got stronger as she motioned for me to come down, and when I climbed from the safety of the crook and slid along the trunk, I felt like a hooked fish being reeled in. My knees shook and my eyes were glued to the ground.

"I'm sorry ma'am. I didn't mean to," I managed to whisper.

"You look at me when you speak. What's wrong with you?"

I looked up into her face and found eyes the color of unripe apples—a green you couldn't see into. those eyes held me for what seemed like forever and her white hair brushed my cheek. Opening her mouth, she let out a laugh, and that's when I got a good look at her teeth. They were as twisted and dark and gnarled as the tree roots she stood on. She rolled her eyes toward the sky and spoke in a deep man's voice:

"This is the Lord, talkin' through his servant. Slap this boy into Hell, woman. Slap him to Hell!" She laughed again and her voice got higher. "What are you starin' at boy? You lookin' at my teeth? Just you Wait! Yours will be uglier than mine—if you ever get any!"

Soap Sally reached out to touch me, but I grabbed my bushel basket, threw my tablet in it, and slipped past her as fast as a rabbit. As I tore out of there, I could hear her going on about riding a white cloud to heaven when it was her turn to die. By the time I got home, almost all the apples were lost, and I was so out of breath I couldn't talk. Everybody said I was a fool, even Mama, and wasn't I a little old to be believin' in Soap Sally?

As close as they could figure, that old lady had to be Azzie Lee Murk who lived with the rest of the Murks in a shack near the fairgrounds. Azzie Lee wasn't completely sane. She thought that the Lord had chosen her as his personal speechmaker, and she spoke in tongues so much that they usually kept her at home. But she must have gotten

out that particular morning. She sure looked like Soap Sally, though, and I'm convinced that she had some kind of power because that very night when I was staring in the mirror, I noticed that my front teeth were coming in.

Mama didn't have faith in my apple-gathering anymore and sent Doris and little Jimmy to finish the job. She managed to put up plenty of apple butter to sell at the fair and Daddy had a stash of rabbit pelts. Together they pitched a little concession right off the midway near the livestock how. Their plan was to bring in a pile of money so that Daddy would have spending cash to take with him to Panama so he could start making that fortune. Of course, the whole family wanted to go to the fairgrounds but we couldn't afford it, so I was stuck at home thinking about what I was missing—the merry go round, and the roller coaster they called the Greyhound, and the Gypsy man with the dancing bear.

My friend Petey stopped by and said, "Let's go!"

He claimed to know a way in that wouldn't cost us a nickel. And he sure did, by God. It was through a long drain pipe that ran under the street where the trolley cars stopped, under the eight-foot cyclone fence by the ticket booth, under the open field they used for the fireworks display, and finally ending up in a ditch all the way over by the Greyhound. We had to crawl on our stomachs the whole time, and Petey made me go first cause he was half blind and had gotten new glasses, and if anything happened to them, his mother would kill him. I wiggled along through spider webs and dark smelly places until I saw a light at the end.

"We're home free, Petey," I bragged, feeling pretty proud of myself.

But then I noticed a dark shadow passing back and forth in front of the opening. Petey was poking me and telling me to hurry, and before I knew it, I was at the very end, and that shadow I'd been seeing stuck a furry head inside the sewer hole and let out a roar. Those sons of bitches had chained the gypsy's dancing bear to an iron stake right in front of the tunnel. We probably scared him as bad as he scared us, and he was pacing and growling and straining to get loose. He squeezed half his body in the hole and, acting as ferocious as he could, took a big swat at me.

"Move it, Petey!" I shouted. "It's the bear!"

Petey didn't know what in the world was going on. He was holding on to his new glasses with one hand and onto my foot with the other. But he got the message when I backed into him going about as fast as that Greyhound roller coaster. We had to crawl on our bellies backward, under the field, under the fence, and under the street cars before we could turn around and run for our lives.

The fair lasted nearly a week although I didn't think about going back after that night with the bear. Mama and Daddy did pretty well for themselves, and when they counted up the money, there was nearly \$15.00, which was quite a haul in those days. Early one evening I came home from school and was leaping up the back steps when I heard them talking in the kitchen. I peeked in through the screen. Daddy had divided the money in two piles, ten for Mama and five for himself.

"When I get to Panama and start workin' on the dam, there'll be plenty more for everybody."

Daddy was excited and flushed. He always got like that when he was about to take off on one of his trips. Mama was beating biscuit dough, and her face looked tired as she spoke: "You mean if you even get to Panama, don't you? This latest plan of yours is the worst yet. Do you know what Doris heard in the grocery store today? She heard Melba Johnson say that you were a bum."

"The people in town think small. They see what they want to see."

I pushed open the door and walked inside. They both stared at me. Then Mama looked away and Daddy started talking.

"Yes sir, Willy. I was tellin' your mother, there's gonna be lots of money soon. Even for you. And we'll buy some fine sketch pads and India ink."

"Your father's what they call an idealist, Willy. An idealist and a dreamer." Mama stirred the biscuits so hard that the wooden spoon made loud scraping noises in the bowl, and I thought I saw a tear roll down her cheek and into the dough.

Daddy said, "Come on, Will. Let's go for a walk. Maybe we'll find a rabbit to go with those biscuits."

He grabbed his gun and stomped down the steps, leaving my mother behind and me running to catch up. Together we walked along the path to the dried-up well that we had filled with rocks the spring before. Just over the next hill, you could see the grey stone wall that ran around the penitentiary, and you could feel the misery it held inside.

"It'll be good to get away, boy. Yes sir." He rolled a cigarette and rested the gun against his leg. It was obvious that Daddy didn't care about any rabbits.

"Now don't get me wrong. I'm not sayin' I won't be missin' each and every one of you, especially your mother. But it'll be good to be in a brand new place—a new country full of new people!"

"I want to go, too," I said.

"You can't go. Who'll take care of the homeplace? You have to stay here and go to school and practice drawing every day. By the time I get back, you'll be better than me. Plus you'll have two front teeth."

He blew smoke above his head, and I knew it was just a matter of time before he'd start singing. My daddy had an Irish tenor voice, and he always sang the same song. That night was no exception as the pure, sweet notes rolled out and filled up the dark:

I'm always chasing rainbows
Watching clouds drifting by.
My schemes are just like all my dreams,
Ending in the sky.
Some fellows look and find the sunshine.
I always look and find the rain.
Some fellows make a winning sometime.
I never even make a gain.
Believe me.
I'm always chasing rainbows,
Waiting to find a little bluebird in vain.

After singing all the words, he went back to the beginning and whistled the whole tune over again. It made my heart beat fast, and even though I didn't understand what the song was about, I knew it was something important and sad, and I knew I would miss him when he was gone. He left the next week and it took him almost a whole month to get there. We got one postcard from him, and on the front was a hand tinted photo of a jungle bird called a Quetzal. The bird had a bright red breast and green, iridescent plumes that streamed out from its head. Daddy had written a note on the back of the

card:

The Indians think this crazy looking thing is a God.
Maybe it's my little bluebird in disguise.

Love,
Daddy

I thought nobody had any idea what he was talking about except for me.

Time passed and I practiced my drawing every day, and sure enough, my teeth grew in. But there was a big space between them, and if you looked real close, you could see that they were both slightly pointed. The kids in school loved to tease me and call me Saber-Tooth. Mama said it was all in my imagination, and that my teeth were fine, but that's why I got in the habit of covering my mouth with my hand whenever I had to laugh. We didn't get any more postcards from Panama, and three months later a telegram came that told us Daddy had died of a heart attack. When my friends asked, I said it was from yellow fever.

After I grew up, I had to go in the army like everybody else. A buck private and lousy with a gun, I was shipped overseas to the Philippines and ended up in the replacement depot outside Manila. There was nothing to do except be scared and wait to be sent to the front and an empty foxhole, so I doodled a lot in my sketchbook to take up the time. One day in the mess hall, I'd drawn a cartoon of my two-hundred-pound sergeant sitting naked in his helmet taking a bath. In the background little Filipinos peeked through the bamboo trees and giggled at him. All my buddies were howling and passing the picture all over the tent. I should have known better because it ended up in Sarge's hands and I thought I was headed for the stockade and a court martial. But a miracle happened. He liked it, and he thought I was good.

"Why didn't you tell me you were an artist, Private?" he asked.

That's how I got a transfer to work on the army newspaper in Manila. From that time until the end of the war, I drew cartoon for the *Stars and Stripes*, and it's what kept me out of foxholes and alive. It also kept me moving, and although I never really planned or wanted it, I got to see countries my daddy must have dreamed of. When the war was over, I could have stayed in Australia. There was work to be had, but I must not have been a wanderer at heart. Every new thing I ever saw reminded me of something at home. A famous writer once said you can't go home again, but maybe he wasn't all that smart. Could be we carry our home with us wherever we go, and since we can't escape it, we might as well go back to where home really is and lay down the burden.

—Susan Schell Tasse