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# Quarterly West

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QUARTERLY WEST

TIM KEANE

## HIS FEELINGS IN PINK AFTER THE BEACH

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Ma said, "Go without the bandage now can you?"

He said he could.

She said, "Then go on and dress yourself and wait in your room, your father will be in, I'm after talking him to his senses a bit. But you know better than all that. Talking to him about fairies and making up stories in front of the McAshes now, you go and leave your suit to rinse in the sink go on."

His hand ached up to his thumb in a tight shivering throb and squeeze but it was gone from blue to dull brown. He could move his thumb now.

He sat in the chair in the full sunlight of the window and listened to the girl voice running wild in the street and the boy voice chasing and laughing and stopping. Then the girl voice again, louder, like she was almost caught but not nearly as her singsong-shouting came faster and then stopped.

The towel came loose and the sun was hot on his legs and heavy on him. His legs still dripped wet and his bottom slid on the wet seat. He unbunched the towel and tugged it over the seat to cover the back of his legs. Then he sat again with the sunlight on him and the seat was towel-snug now. The sunlight was warm and hot on him, tickling, like a lady, and at his lap he saw the white line on his skin and the whiteness above the white line. The sunlight tickled and was heavy. Like his sister's friend Deirdre on his lap. Would she sit on his lap? Maybe. If adults do that. No. He was too young for her to sit on his lap. But maybe. If adults do that. If he asked Deirdre she would. She gave him nice eyes and she said tickling things at the beach like, "can't I come with you?" even though he knew she was an older girl, in high school, and older girls don't really want to go play with you on the beach. And she taught him it was an obelisk over the boardwalk and not a pyramid. Her voice made him feel nice and floating-free and her questions made him feel easy and free like flying.

Dad came in and he jerked up in the seat and pulled the towel over his legs and he said, "I'm getting dressed now I am." Dad wore his olive pants and his undershirt showed his arms red from the beach. His face too was red.

"That's it cover yourself after giving the building across the way a peepshow." Dad sat on the bed and patted the mattress. "Come here sit."

He went and sat on the bed.

Dad said, "Show me the hand now."

Dad held his elbow tightly and looked at his hand carefully on all sides as if

looking for something that might slip away.

"Feels better does it? Enough at least you needn't a bandage on that there."

He said his hand was OK and he did not need a bandage.

"But now you know why I put the rod to you, a boy your age's no business sitting in his room toying away like you were, make yourself into a sick person, you know that now I hope?"

He said he knew it and his throat tightened and his face grew hot.

"Cian, come on, boy, don't lose yourself, be easy here on me, all you do need is to go out, out of this room. You hear them out there running round, call on Jimmy McDougal or that Sean-boy, you've not much time now with back to school in ten days, I don't want you wasting away the last of your summer sitting in here sulking drawing pictures and drawing your head full of fancies."

Dad put his hand on his head and his hand felt like a hat.

"You need to get more of a head for lightstuff, get a feel for the hard knocks out there with the rest of the kids. Now will you do that for me tonight? None of these guinea-wop opera records tonight. OK? For me? No sitting-sulking around making a mess with your paints."

He said yes.

"Good. Now get yourself into some fresh clothes and go out there and run about, go out chase Sean Murphy into next week."

Dad stuck his bigfingers under his chin and pulled up at his chin and when he did this he was supposed to look up at Dad but the pull at his chin after the questions made him want to pull away and slap his father's face, slap him smacklike on his cheek.

He said, "I'll go out and play."

"That's the long and short of it then." Dad said you never get too old for fun with good friends. He said even he was going out with his boys tonight.

"Run off your silly fancies there with Jimmy and Sean and the rest of your motley lot."

Dad stepped around the board and the loose drawings and bent and picked up a bird picture he'd drawn from a book on Egyptians hidden under his mattress. Ma told him to keep the book there and that if he ever brought it to religion class Brother Moorhead would smack up his hide till it was beet-red.

Dad held the bird drawing with his finger and thumb like it was wet.

"This bird's as real as a bird I've ever seen, looks like he could just off and fly. A jaybird is it?"

"It's a sparrow. You can keep it."

Dad put it back on the loose pile and told him to hurry now and pick up the mess here. He said he would.

"You do a lot of saying boy but not a lot of doing."

He hurried down to the pile and folded the drawings.

"Cian, you dress first. Stop scuttling about in the buff, put on some clothes and then clean up, now, let's not have no more games, get yourself straightened out." Dad slammed the door and the pile of papers blew back and loose

across the rug.

He sat back at the window. Dad stepped off the stoop and put his hat on and walked off to the left. He stopped and took off his hat to a skinny man and a lady in a yellow dress. The lady's hat was yellow with webby green hanging over her eyes. The man's small face showed big wet lightblue eyes. His tie was chocolate brown with pink diamonds. The man played with his tie while the lady smiled and talked to Dad. The lady pointed at Dad's face and her lips puckered. She shook her hand like she was putting out a match. Then Dad put his hat back on and shook the man's hand. He walked on and turned off by the Laundromat.

He opened the towel again to let the sun on himself.

He saw on the opposite sidewalk that the girl voice was a girl in a pink dress. Her hair was yellow-red, yellow-red like Deirdre's hair at the beach, but the girl had more small curls than Deirdre and she was just a girl. Her legs were in white stockings and much fatter than Deirdre's legs. A boy in a blue jacket and a big green tie spun himself around the johnny-pump and the girl hurried away and hid between the bumpers of cars in front of the candy store. Old Piccolo swept in front of his store and he pretended not to see the girl hiding. He could see in old Piccolo's tight arms and the way he dragged the broom on the sidewalk that old Piccolo saw the girl. The girl's white legs peeked out by the bumper but the boy did not see her. Piccolo's hands were thick and his fingers were flat. His hands always shook like he was afraid when he handed lollipops over the counter. Ma said he was not afraid, that he has *R-thrituss*. Ma said Mr. Piccolo was born in the city where the Pope lives. He had asked Ma if the Pope sucked lollipops like old Piccolo does with a drool and sucking sound and Ma smacked him with the backside of her hand, and he fell on the sawdust floor with a sharp fall on his rump and his ear stung. The butcher with the teeth like a horse had stopped talking to the fat lady after Ma slapped him. Ma had pulled him up hard and looked at the butcher and the fat lady like she was mad at them too and they left the store in a hurry.

The boy on the sidewalk pointed in the window of Piccolo's store. Piccolo shrugged and pointed in the window with his broom and then shrugged again. The boy's jacket fit tight like on a policeman. The boy was angry at Piccolo. Piccolo kept shrugging. The boy's dark blue jacket had a little yellow patch on the pocket in the shape of a shell.

Dark-blue is Brother Giacomo's favorite color. He calls it *The Virgin Mother color*.

Brother always pours the paint holding the huge jar with one hand in sloshing gurgles and slow blobs onto the plate of glass. Then he works the knife onto the blob. He had asked the boys what they were laughing at and slopped the darkblue into the white. "This makes *babyblue*."

Migin Ryan had a bigger easel and he got mad. Brother Giacomo had said, "There's nothing small on the Lord's earth." He said that is how a real artist is

supposed to think. So he had pretended to like the smaller easel and then Migin wanted to trade.

The sun tickled his lap and made him hot and confused.

The pink girl jumped from behind the car like a cat. Her ribbons flapped and Piccolo dropped his broom and the boy ran after her, and she was running-laughing downstreet with the boy behind now all mad, her shoes wobbled hitting the sidewalk one after the other faster than the boy. The green tie was in the boy's face. The girl's hair looked like the red-yellow color of Deirdre at the beach but the sun did not go through the girl's hair like it did to Deirdre's. The boy caught her and they laughed so hard they fell into a hug and hugged and rolled on to the hood of the big black car.

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There was no more sun on the street and the woman across the way shook an orange sheet out her window. Small flakes of white blew out from the sheet. He could hear the pink girl and the boy in the jacket in front of his building but he could not see them. They talked fast in heavy breathing.

He took the towel off the seat and rolled and stuffed it in the space between the chair back and the window sill. He put his head on the softness and closed his eyes and listened to the giggling voices down below, talking so near like they were in his room or on his bed. Or in Deirdre's room. Voices and giggles and Deirdre standing in a big white room all sunlight and loose rags on the floor. A big easel in the middle of the room. The window past the easel looked to the beach. He saw again the Ferris wheel. The bells. Two big bowls in front of Deirdre. She had on no clothes. Then he saw she had on small clothes. Small pink and white clothes. Brother Giacomo sat in the corner of the room in a big chair and seeing the brother dressed in a thick red robe there behind Deirdre tickled him. The voices giggled and the Brother told him to come in, he said it was OK to come in. Brother Giacomo told Deirdre that Cian here teaches all the boys how to apply paint. But Deirdre did not look up.

"Cian Corey, let me tell you here and now and once and for all that the Good Lord made Deirdre and the Lord made you and the Creator made me." Brother Giacomo said it like he said in class, "We are put here to love His created."

In the room with the Brother he knew now he could maybe ask Deirdre to kiss him and sit on his lap. Brother Giacomo might tell Deirdre to do this. He walked past Deirdre and she was not talking but Brother Giacomo was. A small woodtable with a vase of yellow flowers and a plate with a big pink-red fish was there and Deirdre looked at the plate as she painted. He tried to see her eyes when she turned to look at the table but her hair fell over her forehead so long that he could not see her eyes. But she was Deirdre, long red hair, tall.

Brother Giacomo said, "Do you hear them outside?" He listened and heard Dad's voice outside.

He asked Deirdre what she was making. He asked her again, "what are you painting Dee-dee?"

He couldn't see the easel and Brother Giacomo told him "pipe down."

The Brother said, "don't be fooled, Cian, it's not a Hobson's choice you have a choice, you must be all three, somebody who watches what happens, wonders what happened, and makes things happen."

He stood by Brother Giacomo's chair.

Brother said, "Do you hear the voices? Do we have company in the hall?"

He asked Deirdre did she hear voices. Her back was naked and her hair was almost yellow in the sunny white of the room.

Brother Giacomo said, "Never mind her, I'm asking you did you hear the voices, leave her to paint there, do you hear the voices?"

Dad's voice and Ma's voice and Ma's voice cracked like it does outside his door.

"The boy's gone out Kathleen get your father's cig-, Daniel I tell you he's out playing, now go on, Kathleen, your father left his cigarettes get them there on the icebox would you?"

"I'll be a monkey's ass that he's gone out, house full of liars, now when I open that door, I'll see the boy's in there, hasn't this been the day for double talk."

He undid the towel. He wrapped the towel around his waist and crept over to his bed and took up his underpants and he twisted on the bed to pull up his underpants. The doorknob jiggled and he heard Dad in mumbles and then he heard him clear.

"Now do I open his blasted door here or would you, woman, like to open it for me?"