

A Call to Arms

The dog barks on the other side of the fence. We can't see it, but my brother and I think it's big, the kind with drool tethered to its lips. It growls deep and idle like the exhaust from our father's car. My older brother kicks the algae coated fence, rattles it, and laughs when the dog goes berzerk. I laugh with him. I laugh with him because he is my brother, and the fence our father built is sturdy.

"look, hurry," he says.

A rabbit has found its way into the yard, and as soon as I see it, I try and hit it with a muddy rubber ball I found lying in the grass. It must have had one way in and forgotten where. The rabbit dashes from corner to corner, to the center of the yard, then under the deck. We try to hit it with pebbles. We can't see it, but we can hear it.

"I have an idea," my brother says, and grabs the garden hose, turns it on, and sprays everywhere under the deck to flush the animal out.

The rabbit scampers out between us. We jump and shriek, pretend to be knocked over, and roll on the grass. I grab the nozzle and chase it around the yard, never empathizing. The rabbit finds a spot to squeeze under the back fence and flattens itself, hind legs kicking in a fever, small brown plumes of dirt. Then it's gone.

The dog on the other side of the fence erupts. We can hear the beast chasing the rabbit. The barking fades and returns and fades and returns until there is nothing but silence.

My brother presses his ear up against the fence and says, "I don't hear anything." I press my ear, as well. "He probably went inside."

For a while, we walk the circumference of the yard armed with one branch each; a walking stick, a sword, a rifle, a scepter. Whatever it may be, mine is mine, and his is his.

When we navigate near the rear fence again, the dog bark returns. Its white paws dig at the ground where the rabbit had escaped. My brother grabs the garden hose and sprays the dog's paws, trying to shoo it, but he only makes the animal filthy. He sprays again, and this time, the water washes the ground, and the hole deepens. The dog thrusts its head through the space. It's our first time seeing the animal, his long white snout streamlined with muddy snot. It growls and shows teeth and gums matted with rabbit fur. My brother isn't laughing, so I am not laughing. I don't laugh because he is my brother, and the fence my father built might not have been as sound as we had thought.

"What do we do?" I ask him, and he doesn't answer me. He always answers me. He always answers questions, my older brother does. But he stands still and numb, eyes fixated on the snarling animal working the hole in the ground. Its paws burrow for a while, and then it thrusts its maw farther in each time in revolutions. It shows us its teeth again, yellow crescent moons slick with saliva.

When the dog digs far enough to show us its eyes, we're both surprised that its eyes are blue just like mine, not like my brother's. The dog's irises are black and focused. There's a three-way pause when eye contact is made. It seems forever. Then the dog thrashes in a frenzy, and my brother jumps backward, stumbles, and drops his stick on the ground.

"Pick it up," I say.

He glances at me as if he hadn't heard me.

I repeat it the way dad would, "Pick it up."

He picks it up. He waits for me as I have always waited for him. I have never seen him make the face he makes when he sees my grin. It must have seemed a menacing expression soundtracked to the growl of the beast, a beast with both eyes now past the bottom of the fence. I grip my branch with both hands, baseball grip the way dad showed us, and I strike the animal between the eyes that are just like mine. The dog yelps and whimpers off. An old man yells at it from a distance. A door closes. I turn to my brother and raise the stick high above my head, a triumphant warrior, a field general, a guardian of our yard. And I laugh and then he laughs. He laughs with me because he is my brother and because these branches are strong.