

Concrete

by Dianne McKnight-Warren

The man who makes the noose is toothless and thin, doesn't sit with the others at lunch, doesn't eat. Every morning by 7:00, five of them, including the foreman, arrive at the pour site in a black truck. By then the man who makes the noose has already walked a couple of miles to get to the blacktop next to an old gravel parking lot where weeds are reclaiming their places. The man who makes the noose stands next to a ghost sign promising free clock radios in every room of a motel dead and gone. He lights a cigarette and looks down at the gravel, the rocks that all look alike. He looks at rocks or dirt or a mix of the two all day long.

He listens for the truck the foreman drives. The foreman's face is apple-cheeked and pleasant-looking but his barks are fierce, It's the second ride of the day for the other three who are brought to the shop in a van, all of them on work furlough and new to concrete.

In the afternoon when the mixer comes the three guys who pack the concrete stand on long planks attached to the sides of the forms. They each hold on for dear life with one hand and hold a shovel or a trowel in the other. They shift their weight from foot to foot, trying not to look at the deadly rebar below.

The man who makes the noose balances like a circus star twenty feet in the air on edges a few inches wide. A hose larger around than his waist swings in the air like the appendage of a prehistoric creature coming back to life. It seems to lower itself from the tip of a hundred foot crane.

The man who makes the noose grabs the hose when it comes within reach, wraps his arms around it and holds it steady. The foreman gives the signal and the giant mixer turns on a hidden axis. The hose twists like it's in pain, like the chemically hot concrete wounds it as

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it flows through. It writhes with enough force to knock the man who makes the noose off his feet, but he doesn't fall. He holds on and wrestles it still, then guides it and fills the forms, taking small steps backward, the hose now steadying him.

Together they look like two dancers waltzing, moving as smoothly as the Hangman's Knot the man made at lunch out of a piece of clothesline. How easily the end slipped through the final loop and tightened around his finger, how easily it slid and loosened and tightened again.

