

SEPTEMBER GOLD or DAISY'S SONG

by barry graham

We left Louisville two weeks after Daddy died and stayed for a month in a one room shack Momma rented from a one-armed walleye fisherman less than a mile from an abandoned mine near the mouth of the Manistee River on Lake Michigan. We spent the better half of September sifting for gold with plastic pans and screens and shovels and sluice boxes we borrowed from the fisherman's only friend, Linford, a homeless man who smelled like Smartweed and looked like Daddy, with dark hair and dark eyes that watched me while I worked; always in expectation of something he couldn't have unless he took it and he never did.

Momma and I slept together under a black and blue blanket on a blood stained queen sized mattress in the corner of our room. The wind blowing in from Lake Michigan made the nights unbearable, so Linford lent us his kerosene heater and we let him sleep on the floor beside it. He owned lots of things for a homeless man: old carnival bumper cars and bird cages and Korean binoculars and empty egg cartons and two more kerosene heaters, both black, both ending up in our shack as September ended and the nights grew colder and my space in the bed grew smaller. I slept with the front of my body pressed hard against the weather-beaten wood wall while Momma pressed hers against my back and breathed and bucked and braced and bit into my shoulder blades while Linford dug his dirty fingernails into her bare hips and fucked her.

She made scrambled eggs and sausage and blueberry muffins for breakfast and we ate them while Linford put his jeans on overtop his long johns and filled the kerosene heater before he left. Momma wrapped her arms around my neck when she heard the door close

and whispered, "he did it Daisy, he found gold." She repeated the word gold and we both cried.

We sifted through sand and rocks and gravel for most of the morning, watching the mud spill over the sides of the plastic pans, but the bottoms were always empty after the water washed everything away. Momma found a fishing pole with a spin cast reel and a brown tackle box full of flies and fishing line and lures and fake worms when she went to take a piss. They were underneath an upside down paddle boat left alone along the edge of the lake, so we put it in the water and pushed it a little ways from shore and got in while the salmon fishermen heading out to the docks watched and whistled when Momma's shirt got wet. We sat quiet and floated for hours and listened to the sounds the sky made and counted the clouds as they passed by us or we passed by them and I wondered if Daddy knew I was looking up hoping to find him. I wonder if he knew about Linford and the gold.

