

Kicker

by Gary Moshimer

My grandma kicks field goals between her bedposts, again and again. My finger is sore from holding. She says that's all I'm good for.

My finger is smudged with ink from writing my poems on her paper: half-moon rowboats, clouds like whales. She twisted my finger for messing up the paper with football scores. My finger is sore and red and black.

She kicks barefoot, with just the old lady half-socking. It's brown and twisted and ruined from her kicking. My mom tried to get her to stop kicking, but since my grandpa died she has become him. He was a kicker and also a tackler. She doesn't miss, but then it's only from like ten feet. When her foot whizzes by my face, there's a weird old smell. It makes a thwack sound. I know there are hard things growing on that foot, corns and *bunions*, which makes me think of Paul Bunyan. The hard sound is like his axe. Thwok! And every time she throws up her skinny blotchy arms and yells, "It's good!"

After about the hundredth time my dad yells from the living room, "Mom! Jesus!"

There's a big trunk in the corner of her room and all her silver hair is in there. She cut it off after she became my grandpa. Now her hair is shaped like a helmet. When she was young she was famous for her long red hair, and all the ribbons she wore.

I'm tired of her kicking, but it's either that or she slams the ball into my gut and tells me, "Go!" and I have to try and get around her, down the hall. My grandma would have let me win a few times, because she knew I wasn't good at sports like all my brothers, but now that she's my grandpa she butts me into the wall, tackles me

and pushes my face into the rug because I just want to write things all the time.

I make little noises and struggle under her and my dad sometimes will call out, "What's going on?" He's reading the paper today and has the black phone like the bat phone next to him on the doily. My grandma used to make doilies. He's waiting for the call from the hospital, to find out about the baby.

My mother's having another one, which she says is the last, dammit, and she also told my dad not to bother coming this time, he's such a freak-out. She says this one will probably fly out in two seconds, anyway, and probably be another boy, six in all.

That just means another one to eventually pound on me, along with grandma.

Grandma's fighting me for the ball, with my face half smashed against the wall. If she still had that hair, I could yank it. When the phone rings, my dad stands up slowly. "It's a girl," he says.

Something in Grandma cracks, just as her back does as she gets off me. I rub my arms and legs. She hands me the football, like my own baby, and walks like a zombie to the trunk. She pulls out the hair and spreads it on the bed. She opens another box and a hundred ribbons fall from her hands.

