

At Night in the Field

by Jim Breslin

I'm walking slowly through the outfield. Headlights from my step dad's rusted Ford F-150 shine on me, casting my shadow out into the night. He has me trapped in the spotlight, staring at me, as I search for the softball glove that he thinks I lost.

I lied. Told them I forgot it. After my softball game this afternoon, we went to Shauna's house for a party. I sold the glove. Fifteen bucks. Two percocets. I figured my mom would sigh, throw up her hands, and then on Monday, she'd buy me a new glove.

When I got home tonight, the two of them were sitting in the den watching Extreme Home Makeover. My step dad thinks he should be on that show since he's an electrician. On the screen, a crane ripped through an old house, the roof and the sides crashing down, breaking into dusty rubble. They were watching with glazed eyes. Both stoned. Through the magic of television, a totally new house was constructed in like twenty seconds.

I should have waited until morning to tell her. I blew it. My mom flipped out.

She said, "Missy, you'd lose your own head if it wasn't screwed on."

My step dad chuckled and said, "It may be screwed on, but it ain't screwed on tight."

When my mom works herself into a rage, her ears turn eggplant purple. She has these meds but she forgets to take them. Weed helps keep her calm but the booze doesn't. She started griping about money, about buying me a new glove.

Then my step dad gets this brilliant idea. "We're going over to the field and find it."

I stare at him like he's insane. He's this thin little guy, all wound up like a spool of electrical wire. His eyes are bloodshot, and he's got this smile that makes me want to stick a fork in a socket.

"It's dark out," I say.

"Ol' Betty has a nice set of headlights," he says with a wink as he springs out of the recliner. Betty is the name of his junker. "And I got my deer finder spot light."

He steps right up to me. Stares at me with a wicked grin, as if to say this is gonna be fun. He reeks of Rolling Rock and reefer. The stubble on his face reminds me of the hair on a hog I once saw at the 4-H fair.

So now, I'm out in the field. The grass is dewey in the night air. My step dad's shining the hunting lamp on my ass. I'm wearing tight denim shorts, and I know what he's looking at. He shouldn't be driving on the ball fields. If I'm lucky, a cop will drive by. I envision my stoned step dad being questioned and handcuffed.

I think about my options. Maybe I'll get myself a job. Maybe I'll start dealing. But I think back to that TV screen, the house being demolished, a new one arising out of the rubble. I think, with a single spark, I could make that happen.

