

# Ceali

*by* John Riley

Ceali picks up things and says, "This is an orange."

"This is a pear."

"This is the basket that holds them."

Objects become little girl things in her hand.

When she sits on the wife's lap Ceali wiggles too much and the wife swallows a grimace.

Ceali's mother works part-time in a building that lets the heat out through a smokestack. The wrinkles on her knuckles become deep creases when they reach her palm. Her fingernails are the color of corn meal.

While her mother cleans our house Ceali plays with our dog, Fritz, and his brother Ted, who lives with us, too. The dogs share a privacy pen built by the man who lived here before. It's made of dark-stained boards and has a door that locks.

The man's dog slipped away one night. He left soon after.

Our dogs bark and jump and snarl when a stranger approaches. They go quiet when Ceali whispers their names.

Only one of my children now has a room and the wife uses the free one to start projects. She thinks and plans and worries, lies on the bed, stares at the ceiling, tries to remember what the room looked like before it became the room.

When she leaves Ceali gives the wife one kiss. She says the rest are

for her mother.

Tonight after Ceali left the wife went into the room and climbed in the bed and covered her head with the covers.

