

The Tree That Took Brooke's Faith Away

by kate hill cantrill

It stood thick up from the bottom of the hill; from on top it looked no smaller, just lost within its grandeur. Brooke wrapped her fists around the rope some long-gone kid once tied around a branch. The twins, below—two boys well-known for mooning cheeks against their bedroom window, tossing underwear in the street for laughs—looked up at her and said: “Jump off the hill!”

She would, she said. The thing was, though, she couldn't shake the image of that dead dog she had found inside the black trash bag she thought could be first base, right before the twins said, Screw the game, let's swing. The thing was, though, she didn't know just when the dog had died, before—or god forbid—while within the twist-tied bag.

The twin boys laughed and waved their arms. Brooke saw they had a grown-up thing like interest spark inside their eyes. She knew her hair hung pale and wave-less. She knew she had a certain sort of swooping in her spine. She knew these boys, they saw these things. The dog, she thought, and when he died—they didn't understand.

But it was dead. This she knew. And here she stood, so head to head with this grand tree. I should swing, she thought. I should run down the hill, clutch the rope, and swing like tether ball around the trunk. The dog lay buried, now, where short-stops stood, and on its mound—the dirt now ruddy, upside-downed by her digging hands—she knew she placed one fist of stones she'd gathered by the old train tracks.

The boys cried: “Jump!”

The bag had been half-veiled in leaves. She thought it could be a fine first base. She thought at first it was filled with soil—it had that

heavy feel of something from which trees and flowers sprung.

“Jump already! Jump!”

Brooke gripped the rope. *Who killed the dog?* The tree stood thick, went and up and up and up. The twins, they stared, way up, and up and up; and then Brooke feared—where were the other baseball players? Where was the catcher? Where's the ump?—she ran and parted ways with land. *Who killed the dog? Who tied the bag?* She soared and swung right down the hill, around the tree, toward the tree, toward the boys. She thought: *He should have used his teeth.* She thought: *He should have fought and fought and fought.* She thought: *I think I know where next things go. I see it clearly from up here.* And by the *here* she meant just where the pause occurred. Before descent, before the jealous world would grab at her right from the very pits of its so very needy core.

