

Preliminary

by Kelly Spitzer

After court, the three of us skipped third period, walked down to the river and huddled under the 6th Street Bridge. From there, we could see the Red Lion Inn, the hillside it backed up to, the rocks that created slides during unusual rainstorms. John pulled a pipe and bag from under a rock. Laramie huddled close to him, smoking a cigarette. I watched a man talking on his phone on a balcony. He was staring our way, but he didn't see us.

Under the bridge was dirty and loud. The homeless had tucked blankets into corners. Traffic rattled overhead. I smelled diesel and excrement and the pungency of the weed John and Laramie were already smoking. They spoke in normal voices. I couldn't think of anything to say. The only question I wanted answered, and the only question I didn't hear, was: Is he guilty?

It was February. The river rocks were dotted with snowcaps. I couldn't stop shivering. I smoked some of John's pot and wondered if I should quit, wondered if things would ever be the same, if this was the reason they weren't.

In court, we sat opposite the victims' families, next to the defendant's parents, behind the defendant himself. His hair was greasy. Pimples flared on the back of his neck. He looked like shit, but I wouldn't tell him this later. He was, after all, our friend. The judge read the list of charges, the supporting evidence. Felony murder. Two counts.

The pot was gone now. John said he had to go. He unearthed a bigger stash from under a bigger rock and stuck it inside his coat. Laramie guessed we should head back to school, but I wasn't so sure, so we wrapped our hands around our arms, bare under our thin sweatshirts, and stood around, quietly, thinking, waiting for the man on the balcony to finish talking on the phone.

