

# Camden Place

*by Paul de Denus*

My grandfather says he's real French. He wears a straw hat like Maurice Chevalier as if that will transform Winnipeg into Paris. He tells us he was born in Brest. We giggle because he said breast. We look it up. On a map of France, Brest is the nipple.

My grandmother's room is at the end of the hall. It is the old sewing room, furnished with a bed and a small bureau. It's the size of a cell. We think that's funny because she rules the house. She is watching when I steal coins from a money jar. Being the stern warden, she sends me swiftly to solitary tears.

I see old Mr. Perry, newborn naked. My grandfather told me to go check on him. He is laid out on his bed like a dead man. He is snoring easily in an elderly afternoon recline. A brown snake coils and nests around purple plums on his lap. I am thrilled he isn't dead.

Between the houses, we light up trouble. How can someone suck smoke, we wonder? It tastes like autumn. We think Gramps won't miss one old cigar. Seems the old man's got a nose for it. We're stupid to light up beneath a kitchen window.

The summer friend down the street has established Fort Apache in the lonesome outpost he calls his room. We have a war. He tells his mom he's missing several cavalry, his favorite blue ones with the pointing rifles. His accusing weapon points to me, firing at will and it hurts. I counter with a crying attack and that's the end of our summer engagement. I spend the following days with the blues.

The summer is an oven. We can't cook up anything fun to do. We mope around and stare at each other like bored zoo animals. The next carbon copy day, we trudge to the zoo and stare at the animals. They mope in their rooms and yawn. They have nothing to do either.

