

# Fifteen

*by* Paul de Denus

## English Class

Everyone wanted to hear the new kid speak. When he loped off to the pencil sharpener secured against the far windowed wall, I loped behind. A 'hey' fell from my mouth. "My desk's over there, behind that girl, Brenda." Glancing her way, he sounded an 'MMMMMM' in a foreign sort of way and my ears perked jackrabbit style. "Quite the scrag, inn't she?" he snuffled.

## Bird of Prey

The girl sitting in the desk in front of him turned and gawked through her horn-rimmed glasses. Her head rotated like a bird of prey. Bryan insisted she stop, which came out all English as 'STOWP ET' but she continued to stare and perch her flopping hand innocently on his desk. Finally, he stabbed it with a pencil. Behind the horn rims, she smiled big owl eyes at the connection. I think she really liked him.

## Astral Travelers

We camped out in his parent's back yard and listened to the same song over and over. It was an instrumental by the Shadows, a British group Bryan liked and while I don't remember the song exactly, I do remember being lost in the prairie night sky shot so full of tiny silver pinholes. The song reverberated from a hand-held record player Bryan had brought from England, a battery operated portable contraption about the size of a slice of bread, able to play a 45 record sandwiched in between like stiff baloney. I'd never seen anything like it. Beneath the stars, I imagined two astral travelers hunkered down on a vast dark planet, my alien sidekick jawing at me in his odd garbled accent, manipulating the space-age musical device that sent otherworldly signals out into the forever night sky.

## The Hook-up

Pen sat on the swing and giggled while Janet hung on the chain and whispered in her ear. Bryan grasped the swing pole by one hand and performed a straight-arm pirouette, digging his feet in the base, twirling around and around while humming the Monster Mash. I stood to one side, toeing the dirt, digging my clenched hands into my pockets. Pen's light giggle turned to surprise, then panic as she stood and turned away. Off they went, laughing and shuffling across the field, Janet looking back, mouthing something to Bryan. "Her bra broke," he smirked and I scuttled off home and worried about what it all meant.

### The Great Divide

As we crossed the field to his house, Bryan told me he'd asked Janet to the movies and I should ask her friend Pen to go. "We could dooble date," he said. The field telescoped in reverse binoculars; the world flew into space. "That would mean I'd have to ask her," I said, tripping over my stomach as it dropped to my feet.

### I Want To Hold Your Hand

I saw no movie, heard no sounds, just loud thumping in my ears as I sat on the precipice. I had to jump. Bryan told me to do it early, preferably before the movie started. Pen's hand hovered over the armrest like a small dove lost, inches from mine and I imagined rescuing it. But what if *she* jumped or worse, screamed? Like a dead man reaching for God, my fingers fluttered up from my side and our fingers touched. The lights went on.

