

Heads or Tails

by Paul de Denus

We found a gopher's tail out in the prairie. No gopher, just tail. It was in a gopher hole. The prairie was lousy with them, gopher holes everywhere. You could break an ankle. The way we terrorized the landscape you'd think one of us would have. Someone had cut it off, the gopher tail. I kept it, like a rabbit's foot. For luck or something. A week or so later, we found another tail in another hole. I threw mine away.

A King snake nested on our front lawn. The neighbor's beagle was pouncing around like a jumping bean. The man next door came over with a pitchfork. He said it wasn't dangerous, the snake. He cut its head off with the pitchfork, two or three whacks it took. I kept the head, put it in a jar, wedged under my bed. My mother freaked out vacuuming one morning. Keeping it was a tossup. She threw it away.

