

# Paper White

*by* Paul de Denus

It's impossible to stop the prairie wind from strong-arming its way inside my parka. It muscled its way around, absorbs through my crisp white shirt like invisible water, and proceeds to burnish my skin with the tender stroke of a rough carpenter wielding gritted sandpaper. The shirts low thread count spiffs across the raised plateaus of my nipples, flicking rapidly like a thumb on a cheap lighter. My nips are on fire. The starched fabric, fresh from Woolworths's bargain basement Two-for-One sale's bin scrubs at my skin, polishes through the stratum of epidermis, addresses the bone. My pant legs hang too short. They rise, stiff as cadavers, inches above my ankles exposing black dress socks - the useless kind my father wears. They are as thin as my hopes of ever feeling warm again. With each step, that cold hand steals ever upward. My nut sack, strung tighter than my bag of summer marbles, retreats even higher, ready to scream from any caress of icy fingers. A faux leather briefcase, lighter than the wind, flaps about like a spastic. My skull is a frozen vanilla lollipop, my cheeks pinking into strawberry cream puffs. The wind licks around my crew cut; God, I hate crew cuts. I should have worn my tuque. I forgot it in the morning rush out the door.

My duplicate brother lurches next to me, each footstep reissuing the echo crunch of breakfast cornflakes. He doesn't look any happier. He is the frozen mirror I gaze into as we trudge across the schoolyard, paper white.

