

Eden, Suburbs

by Stephen Stark

Many years ago, perhaps even as many as 50, there was a young boy and a young girl and they were in the woods that separated their houses. They were playing a game they called doctor but which had very little to do with actual medicine. It was spring and the trees were sprouting leaves and flowers. Neither the boy nor the girl had yet unlearned how to talk to trees and other agreeable plants and animals.

And so it was that the boy was kneeling on the ground, which was alternately prickly and soft because of old rotted leaves and bits of fallen twig. The girl stood before him with her pants and underpants pushed to her knees. The boy peered at the rather unusual place between the girl's legs, which was entirely more complicated than a person might be given to believe should he see it, for example, bundled in underpants or a bathing suit. It was not the first time he had seen it, although it was still as mystifying as the first. He was also thinking about the dead leaves under his knees and shins, and so he asked the nearest tree if the leaves belonged to it.

The tree said that in fact many of them had once belonged to her but now were no longer. And then she admonished the boy that they were not dead at all. The boy opined that they did indeed seem dead. The tree said that he might one day understand just how silly his opinion was.

Soon enough it was the girl's turn to pull up her trousers and her favorite panties with the pink hearts, and kneel on the ground, and the boy's turn to pull his own trousers down and allow her to examine him. The boy's panties were plain white, but lacked the simplicity of her own. The boy told the girl that boys did not wear panties.

The girl's curiosity was piqued not only by the thing of the boy's, which he called his peenie, but also by his question to the tree. And so she asked the tree why it did that. Grow leaves just to toss them

away, again and again? The tree replied that that was what she did. What else would the girl have her do? The girl said she didn't know. The boy, also, was at a loss. There was a breeze and the leaves rustled and when she touched it the boy's peenie unslumped.

Soon the boy and the girl had finished the game and pulled up their trousers. The tree, which had been present during many such games, and had had many conversations with the boy and the girl, asked them why they did what they did. They both knew that these parts of themselves were called privates, and were private, and that special negotiation was required in order to gain their exposure. But even so, there was a mysterious pleasure that wasn't quite like any other pleasure in making them not private in certain situations and in certain places. But neither of them could have said that.

Together, they said, I don't know. But their combined utterance wasn't simultaneous, the boy's coming slightly after the girl's. And in the offset between the voices the tree could hear a kind of harmony. The girl scratched her head and watched as a squirrel leapt across a branch. We just want to, the girl said. Yes, the boy agreed. And then he added, in imitation of what the tree had said, It's what we do. What else would you have us do?

