

American Kids

by Tim Jones-Yelvington

Bristol likes Levi to fuck her with his hockey mask on, behind a tree in the church courtyard. She likes to pretend he's a rapist. Levi takes advantage, and Bristol takes Levi, takes the Lord's name in vain, takes hold of a tree branch cracked by the force of her grip, screaming, "Oh my fucking Christ. Stopitstopit stop."

Levi likes when Bristol stands outside the Yukon Creamery, sucking hot dogs with relish. He likes to pretend he's a hockey star and Bristol is his groupie. In the parking lot outside the stadium, she begs him for it. He likes the way her name sounds thrust through his mouth. "Bristo-oh-oh-oh-ohhhhh---"

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There's a game all the kids play at the church on Sundays, to pass the time in the pews. Take the name of a hymn, any hymn, and add the words "between the sheets."

Christ the Lord has Risen Today ...between the sheets.

How Great Thou Art ...between the sheets.

O Thou Sacred Head Now Wounded ...between the sheets.

Whenever Bristol hears the word "bible," she pictures belts. She knows the bible belt is somewhere in the lower 48, but she imagines it stretches across the North Slope, a belt of sacred oil. She pictures a belt with an enormous gold buckle. This is the belt she pictures her mother holding when she realizes she's late. 20 lashes from the bible belt and she'll be saved.

"Fucking Christ!" Levi says when she tells him. "Fucking babies?"

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Are you fucking with me?"

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"God bless America," the Mother stumps. "God bless our children."

She perches, imperious. Watchers wonder whether the distinction between the podium and the pulpit is structural or semantic. She clasps her hands and thrusts her index fingers forward like she's aiming her rifle.

"Mistakes were made," she says. "But changes come."

The Mother finds Bristol in the bathroom, hunched over the toilet.

The Mother extends her hand. Bristol clasps it and finds it warm and pulsing. The Mother separates the fingers of her other hand and gently strokes Bristol's hair.

"Hold on," the Mother says. "Hold on as long as you can."

