

NANCY JO RINEHART

Bittersweet

When the days grow longer and warmer, and the young grass peeks from under the last patches of snow, a melancholy seizes me and holds me in its clutch. I cannot explain this feeling. It is a confusion, a pang, perhaps of regret; and it visits me every spring. My mind returns to grade-school days, which now seem to have been so carefree. The playground bustled with activity in pleasant weather. Sometimes we girls skipped rope, chanting familiar jingles and taking an end if we missed a skip. At other times there were exciting softball games at the grassy, north diamond. Those of us who did not like to play ball lounged on the small knoll behind home plate and reveled in the sunlight.

Back in the classroom, we worked on long division problems and studied about the Civil War, but the high walls hemmed us in as the mild world outside the windows beckoned to us. Our teacher read from the library book *Old Yeller* in the afternoons, and we half-listened, half-dreamed, slumped in our wooden chairs.

In April, everyone anticipated the annual field trip to the Center of Science and Industry in Columbus, where we swarmed around exhibits of rocks, machines, and pendulums and ate peanut butter sandwiches and apples that our mothers had packed. Puppy love abounded, as evidenced by the sheepish boys and girls who held hands, exchanged dime-store rings, and stole an occasional kiss when a teacher was not watching.

Yet, my most poignant remembrances are of wistful glances from the classmate I disdained, of tender valentines I tossed aside, of a devotion I did not return. These bittersweet memories haunt me, because I can finally reciprocate his affection, but he does not know that. And I cannot tell him.

JACQUELINE LUCAS HOOVER

Reconciliation by the River

You and I and the single smoke line
fire sit in a row along the bank. The
mist rises from the water to close in
our primeval symmetry.

My mind slips into the river among ancient
shells and formless bits of bone.

The smooth stones at the bottom overwhelm
me with their coolness and sense of place.

I am too jagged to belong even here, shivering,
denying the warm curvature of your shell dwelling.

Seining the river bottom with your body,
you salvage what is left of me.

Your fingers make a fossil on my arm.