

An excerpt from

Three Drop Pennies

by Julie Ann Shapiro

CHAPTER ONE

THE MARKS OF SENTIENT CREATURES

The sound of the toads some say is the call of Cameria. “Not when they’re dead...” Tommy Clarence stirred from his sleep by his own whisper.

The future spoke; the dream was soon forgotten as he dressed and met Lori Lenox at Grotters Creek.

They trampled through the yellow flowers. Flashes of copper glinted in the morning sun. Lori picked up a penny and threw it in the air. She said, “If it comes up heads we kiss. Tails we tickle.”

They played heads and tails, even though Tommy tried not to think of Lori that way. Often when he saw her he wanted nothing more than to kiss her, but she was his best friend. *It would make everything different*, he told himself, as she threw the coin.

The penny landed tails down.

They tickled and rolled around in the flowers. Yellow petals clung to Lori’s golden hair. The green stems slipped down his shirt and found their home in her sandals and his. Clumps of dirt smudged their faces. The pink glow of the sun on their skin turned a brown cast.

Tommy wiped specks of dirt off Lori’s cheeks.

She tilted her head back. He tried to kiss her and collided with her arm as she tossed the penny again. It skipped in the dirt a couple of times and came to rest heads up.

Lori groaned. “Eww, what’s that smell?” At first Tommy thought maybe he farted, as he pulled his shirt out from his jeans so the bulge wouldn’t be so obvious.

The smell grew stronger. Curious, they inched closer to the creek bed and stopped at the sight of a dead squirrel with safety pins stuck in its ears and tail.

Dried patches of blood coated the dirt near the animal’s ears and tail. Ants circled around the exposed flesh.

Tommy dug in the dirt, made a hole and stood back a moment to make sure it indicated the right depth, as he spoke to Lori, “The squirrel needs a name.”

With her head down Lori answered. “Not if he’s dead. It doesn’t matter now.”

“Lori, that’s cruel. Someone hurt him on purpose. Don’t you get it? There’s too much blood on the ground. Let’s name him. Why should he think we’re bad like the others?”

“What others, Tommy?”

He shuddered and rammed his hands hard in the dirt.

Lori asked, “Are you ok?”

A hawk soared through silver threaded clouds. Tommy pointed at it and said, “I guess so. There are always the birds. At least no one’s hurt them, yet.”

“What do you mean, yet?”

“I can’t explain, Lori. It’s just a fuzzy thought I got that’s all. And I don’t like it. I hate it. Watch the hawk. It knows too. It appeared ‘cause of the blood.”

“Tommy, it’s a vulture. It’s what they do.”

He glanced at the ground. A centipede crawled in the upturned dirt. Lori extended her hand and curled her fingers around it. The legs of the centipede spun like a motor, then not at all.

“Stop it. Lori, you hurt it.”

“It’s just a defense mechanism. Now watch.”

She deposited the centipede back on the ground. It leaned sideways. The legs like dominoes crashed one over the other and gradually, as if in a slow march, the centipede’s legs sprung together in forward motion.

Tommy squatted over the squirrel and placed large leaves on his hands like potholders. He tried to grab hold of the squirrel from the middle, but the leaves fell. He jumped as the limbs of the squirrel flopped in the dirt.

“Gravity,” Lori said with such confidence.

“Oh, stop it. You don’t know everything.”

With science girl logic, Lori could explain all day long how the weight of a dropped object caused it to move on impact. Tommy didn’t want to hear it.

He felt something beyond Lori’s textbook explanation as he gazed at the safety pins that pierced the squirrel’s flesh. The metal lines on red, metal on fur didn’t belong; neither did the notion of birds hurt and driven by blood. He sensed them too and didn’t care to think what that meant.

In time Tommy wouldn’t have a choice.

Lori tapped him on the shoulder, “Tommy, can you hurry up? The squirrel smells.”

His fingers shook as he wrapped his hands with leaves and gently picked up the squirrel and placed it in the hole. Lori plugged her nose and commented how chemical decomposition caused the rotten smell.

Tommy shouted, “Stop it, Lori. No analysis. This is a burial, not science. Show some compassion, please.”

He dropped dirt over the squirrel and said, “Bye Rocky,” the name of his plush raccoon that he played with as a kid, until the black and white face with the bandit eyes gave him nightmares.

Tommy placed a slate-colored stone over the grave and trembled as he talked about his nightmare with Rocky the raccoon. “In it, Rocky wandered around in a forest with leafless trees. The closer he looked, the more the trees appeared to be limbless sticks.

No birds chirped. He glanced upward and saw a blue jay. Its eyes moved: open close, open close. But then he looked again and it was gone and so was Rocky.”

Lori explained the dream. “Tommy, birds don’t blink like people. And the forest bit, it’s so obvious what’s going on there. You’re stuck in a place where the familiar is unfamiliar.”

“And why is that, Miss Google?”

”It’s because childhood left and you don’t feel ready to say goodbye to it.”

He said, “You sound like an adult. It must be from all those books. Well, I have the birds. They teach me things too.”

She laughed and said, ”Name one.”

“The before thoughts.”

CHAPTER TWO
THE COPPER HOUSE

A thousand pennies covered the wall in Bo Marack's house. Each penny Bo had placed on a small wooden plaque attached by Elmer's Glue. All the pennies pointed to the right, heads up. Tails down, he thought, would offend poor Abraham Lincoln, and Bo didn't want to take any chances.

The copper wall blazed with intensity in the sunlight. Bo thought it looked like the Abes gathered for a meeting, all high and mighty. Bo strained to hear what they said. He knew they talked about him. The copper faced men always did. But when he tried to hear them, they grew silent; so silent.

He didn't like being alone. In The Home, the place others called Pine View Mental Hospital, there were people all around. Now only the Abes remained in his life; and they didn't seem happy stuck to the wall.

Bo traced the edges of the copper faces with his thumbnail and said, "Abe, I did it for you. Do you like your wall?"

Abe didn't answer.

In The Home they made him take the little pink pills. Dr. Nese told him it would stop the conversations with Abe. Only thing is, without Abe it was so lonesome.

The little pink pills came with faces too, not like the Abes. They didn't seem proud and stern, more like Bugs Bunny who laughed at the Road Runner. Bo worried that if he swallowed the pills that they would laugh inside his stomach.

He threw them down the drain and told the doctor the pink pills didn't work.

The doctor gave him different medicine and said, “The gray-blue pills are to quell the delusional thoughts.”

Bo said, “Oh, *quail*. I see this bird, nice bird. Not in my head.”

Dr. Nese laughed, “Bo, I mean the pills are to quiet the voices in your head. They don’t exist. Abe’s a product of your mind only. The white pills are for your bones. Do you understand, or do I need to speak to your brother? You told me the last time we spoke what a great roommate he is. It’s good to hear you are doing well on the outside.”

Bo lied when he talked to Dr. Nese before. There was no brother, not anymore. Sy passed away of old age a couple of months back and left the house to him.

Dr. Nese repeated the question, “Bo, do you understand, or do I need to talk to your brother?”

Bo glanced at the copper-faced wall and said to the doctor, “Sy’s out for ah...walk. Yes. A walk, a long, long walk.”

The doctor said, “Oh, I see. I’ll explain it again. The voice of Abe is in your head, he always has been. It’s why you need to take these blue-gray pills.”

Bo said, “No, Abe is my friend.”

Dr. Nese said, “Bo you need to find real friends. This is not make-believe time; you’re not a little boy any more. You do understand this, don’t you?”

“Yes, I have snowy hair now.”

“I mean about making friends, Bo.”

“Yes, need more than Abe.”

Bo put handfuls of pennies in his pockets and stepped outside.

The first time Abe visited, Bo’s Dad was drunk. The smell of scotch tinged the air. It got so strong, his Momma used to say, “You could light the whole room on fire with one match.” Bo didn’t know about that.

Sy had left for the market, while Bo stayed home to do schoolwork. Momma, when she was alive always told him to try and be smart like Sy.

The door screeched. The scotch fumes came into the room with Dad as he scooted up to his desk.

Bo scrunched his upper lip to his nose, to stop some of the smell, and said to Dad, “See homework.”

Dad yelled, “You don’t order me around, ever! Understand?”

Bo glanced at the garden where Momma’s tomato plant still grew. The leaves appeared withered. The tomatoes, they seemed bright red, ready for sauce.

“Answer me, boy.” His father stared at Bo’s long hair and said, “You look like a damned girl.”

Bo pointed at the tomato plant, “Momma’s...”

Dad yanked him by the hair, “Don’t whine for your Momma, boy. She can’t hear you now.”

“Momma went blue ‘cause of...”

Dad jerked him by the hair ‘til his ears rang.

Sy explained once that Momma’s insides bled because of Dad. They bled so much, the blood went blue.

Bo bit his lips. Blood dripped on his chin, as Dad shoved him hard onto the bed and shouted, “I’ll show you what girls are good for.”

The copper faces fell out of his pocket and onto the floor. The belt buckle clanked against the wooden bunk bed. Bo smelled Dad’s skin mixed with scotch, sweat, and the sawdust from the logging company.

Dad cooed, “Oh, you’re going to like this, my pretty boy.” He rammed his stomach against Bo’s back and squished him.

Bo screamed, “No,” and stared at the copper faces on the floor.

Dad fumbled for his belt, stood up and started to whip Bo like he always did. The legs, Bo’s legs, they moved fast, faster than the drunk old man. Bo back-kicked him in the stomach. Dad fell, grabbed at his pants legs and said, “So, my pretty boy likes it rough?”

Bo hopped off the bed and kicked Dad in the face. The old man’s head conked hard onto the wooden floor.

“Boy, what have you done to your own flesh and...”

He kicked Dad again and again in the head and watched the bright red blood squirt. It poured like a ketchup bottle without its top, except the squishy parts scared him. They looked like worms the way they crawled out of Dad's head.

Bo picked up the pennies and ran from the house.

Abe said, "*It is ok. Dad is a bad man.*"

He made it to the gas station on the edge of town. Mister Fitz stared at the blood on his clothes and said he was up to no good, and called the police. They took him to The Home in Cameria on the hill by the coast for the first time and said he'd done a bad thing. Except, Bo knew, Dad wanted to make him a girl and shoved his smelly flesh all over him.

Bo Marack's no girl, never had been and never would be.

Abe said, "*It is ok. Dad was a bad man.*"

CHAPTER THREE
REFLECTIONS OF WATER

Lori found the 1958 penny in the pool. Like so many old pennies, it lacked the luster of the past. She felt the same way, and missed the playful times spent in the water as a girl.

She thought back to the day when she, Tommy and his friend Kevin all posed for a picture at the beach before they went body surfing. In the sand, their legs crossed each other and bent at the knees. Their voluminous chuckles filled the shore as the camera clicked.

Rainbows formed in the salt spray. Going into the water they held each other's hands and jumped over shallow surf. When a large set came in they shouted, "On the count of three dive down! One, two, three."

Hands unclasped. They all dove into the belly of a wave. Walls of water rushed over them. Tommy bumped into Lori. The proximity of his body comforted her.

Another wave loomed overhead, a good ten feet tall; much larger than the last one. Lori took a deep breath and dove into it, the surf pounded and pounded above her. The bubble of the wave she couldn't stay in much longer. Her body wanted to breathe, but she waited until the wave began its descent, to minimize the whitewash tumble effect.

At the crest of the wave she propelled herself forward, took a deep breath, kicked hard and swam to shore. Her legs brushed against the sand. The water retreated back out to sea.

But Tommy and Kevin didn't come ashore.

Lori gazed a moment at the flap of cloth on a pole above the lifeguard stand. The water condition it warned about got lost somewhere in past summers.

Undeterred, she dove in and out of the waves again. A lifeguard announced on a megaphone about a strong undercurrent.

“Where are the guys?” She wondered to herself aloud.

Someone called her name in a strained voice. Lori scanned up and down the coast before she noticed Tommy. He kicked hard against the water, positioned further out to sea than he should have been.

A lifeguards’ whistle blew. They urged her back to the beach because of a riptide. She described to them where she last saw Kevin, and caught a wave back to the shoreline. So did Tommy.

Seated on a beach towel, Tommy said, as if he heard a news report broadcast only to him, “Kevin’s hurt. He will be fine. The blue one’s with him.”

“Huh?”

“You know, the legend of the blue bird.”

“Tommy, you don’t actually believe it?”

“Well...” He gazed at a flock of seagulls.

Moments later, they learned from the lifeguards that miles down the beach someone spotted Kevin. He clung to a piece of driftwood with a large chunk of his leg gone.

The leg got eaten by a shark.

Tommy said in response to the news. “See, Kevin’s safe because of the blue one.”

Lori shook her head in dismay. It figures, Tommy would believe some magical bird saved a friend and maybe that’s all it took for him. The belief came easily, while she remained the skeptic.

Something transpired in Tommy that day. When Kevin moved out of town, it cemented things, things Lori didn’t quite understand, even though she asked Tommy why the friendship ended.

He said, “I let him down.”

She assured him, “Tommy, he got bit by a shark. It wasn’t your fault.”

“No, it’s not why, Lori. I sensed it. At least, I sort of did.”

“So, what’s it feel like when the future stuff comes in?”

“Most of the time it’s fuzzy and I just shrug it off. I couldn’t do that, not this time.

When Kevin got hurt the vision came in so strong. I smelled iron and I saw red in the water before we went bodysurfing.”

“Tommy, it was probably caused by sunstroke.”

“Explain the irony smell, Miss Google that is what blood smells like.”

Lori didn’t take much credence in the vision and changed the subject. “Just call Kevin.”

“No, he’s mad.”

“Tommy, he can’t possibly be mad about your vision. Like you said, it was fuzzy.”

“I know. The thing is, he’s stuck with physical therapy, and they’re not sure he’ll walk straight again. It’s my damned fault. Next time I know the psychic stuff, everyone is going to know about it. Understand?”

“So you two have talked?”

“Lori, pay attention, this is more than just Kevin. I told you I saw bits of what happened before it did. I can’t let stuff like this go unheeded. Promise me you’ll listen the next time I have a vision, please.”

“Tommy, it’s not your fault...”

He interrupted, “Lori, make the promise.”

She couldn’t.

Lori hoped someday to become a scientist. She knew people of science made decisions based on logic, not intuition and the fuzzy thoughts of a best friend.

The sound of her mom’s voice pulled Lori from her thoughts.

Mom asked, “Are you almost done with the vinegar?”

“Yes.”

The vinegar and water she used to clean the old penny. It glistened again. When Lori found it at the pool, Tommy told her it was cold in that nonsensical way of his.

She said, "Weirdo, you don't have to hold the penny. Just get in the pool."

He said, "Will you just listen to the crows a second? They squawked when I first got here and are still at it. They sense something."

Lori wondered at the time, despite her predisposition to logic, if Tommy was an auger in some past life. Augers, they dissected the bird's insides back in ancient times. But Tommy seemed pretty content just to watch the birds.

She splashed him and said, "Give the birds a rest. Let's do laps."

"I'll race you to the shallow end."

"If I win I get a kiss, Tommy."

She accelerated from the deep end. The water sprayed in bursts from her arms and legs. The splashes intensified with each kick. She felt the end of the pool, the rough hewn concrete in her hands and made the athlete's victory pose. While Tommy performed a leisurely backstroke all the way to her side of the pool and seemed to know the precise moment to reach for the pool's edge and her hands.

He held them in his and said, "The kiss should not be won. And no more coin tosses either. They're too cold. And our..."

"What?"

He stared at a flock of seagulls and said, "It's special. And the before thought, I can share this one."

"Like that's what this is about, Tommy."

"But the feather's going to float when it lands on the water. And you know why, Lori? It's saying hello."

"Oh, Tommy that's nonsense. Gravity will make it sink."

"No, Lori. Not everything is explainable. Watch the bird, Lori. Watch the bird. This one is bright."

CHAPTER FOUR
COPPER FACE TALKS

No feather landed in the pool. Lori didn't care to know why Tommy talked so dreamily about it. Concerned only with the way his kissable lips quivered when he spoke. She wanted Tommy more and more. Even though they'd been best friends forever, Lori hoped to be his girlfriend.

She thought once again about the time at the pool when Tommy complained about a penny being cold and the hint of an embrace he missed. Boy, could he be dense. Or maybe he didn't like her, not the way she liked him.

Disheartened, Lori went on the Internet and logged onto a local coin lovers' message board under the handle Science Girl.

Sciencegirl: What happens to old pennies?

Copperface: Simple. Too many Abes, so Abe needs to get out.

Sciencegirl: What I meant to say is do you think old pennies are being phased out?

Copperface: Hmmm. I'm slow to learn things. Not like Abe. He's a smart man.

Sciencegirl: Yes, Copper Face. You're right Abraham Lincoln was smart. He studied law all by himself at night. He was the sixteenth president and united the nation.

Copperface: Oh, you like Abe?

Sciencegirl: Yes. There you go again with this personification of Abe. Why do you do that?

Copperface: Hmm big word, not sure about that. I just like Abe. Do you?

Sciencegirl: Everyone likes him, except maybe the Confederate die-hards. Do you know how to make pennies shiny?

Copperface: Not sure.

Sciencegirl: I made the 1958 penny I found shiny with vinegar and water. The vinegar got so brown. I learned in school the vinegar turned brown because of the copper atoms.

Copperface: Oh. Smartness is very good. The others say I'm dumb. I tell them no. I'm just slow. It's my first time on the smart box. The library instructions are ok for someone slow like me. Have you known this smart box long?

Sciencegirl: A little. Mom says she has friends all over the country with the Internet or as you say, smart box. They talk about fashion and what colors are in the rage, that stuff bores me. It makes Mom happy.

Copperface: Oh, no. I might have to go. My friend wants...to type...but it's my turn.

Sciencegirl: Just tell your friend to get a handle of his own, even my little brother has one.

Copperface: What's a handle? Oh...he says it's like what you hold onto on the side of a teapot. No teapot here, just lots of books and the smart box.

Sciencegirl: What's your name? You're kind of funny.

Copperface: My name sounds like snow. Oh, no. My friend says that's a no-no.

Sciencegirl: I understand if you don't want to tell me your real name. Mom says that's pretty normal on the smart box. Besides, I didn't tell you my name.

Copperface: Oh. My friend says it's time to go show the pretty pennies. My friend's lonely.

Scienceface: What do you mean show pennies?

Copperface: Some Abes are worth money.

Scienceface: Of course, silly, they're pennies.

Copperface: I have long braids. Want to see?

Sciencegirl: So now it's show and tell? I have braids too. No big deal. I tie the ends with ribbons. So are you a coin collector?

Copperface: Hmmm big word. I know ribbons and flowers. So pretty. You know why? I tell you a secret. See pink carnations are for girls because they're all fluffy and full of promise.

Sciencegirl: I think you mean carnations. Mom warned me about cyber flirts. You better be good or I won't type.

Copperface: Oh. My friend says it's time to get out. He's lonely. I must go make wishes.

Sciencegirl: What do you wish for? I want to be a scientist when I get older. My best friend says if you tell someone your wish when you blow out the candles on the birthday cake that it won't happen. He can be so superstitious. Do you believe in stuff like that? He believes the legends about the blue bird. Do you?

Copperface: This blue bird is not real. Wishes, they need to stay a secret. I must go. It's my friend's turn.

Sciencegirl: This is our turn. Do you understand the reason you need a handle on the smart box?

Copperface: Not sure.

Sciencegirl: See your friend needs to get one, that way you both can type on the smart box.

Copperface: Yes. You're a smart girl. My brother was smart too, before he went blue.

Sciencegirl: You're so silly. People don't go blue. What do you mean?

Copperface: My brother got sick. My friend says I talk too much. He's lonely. He says to show pretty girl pennies.

Sciencegirl: Don't cyber flirt. I told you not to. We're friends, just friends.

Copperface: Friends. You like Abe, this is ok?

Sciencegirl: Yes.

CHAPTER FIVE
HAIR WHITE AS SNOW

Whir, whir, whir went the phone. Bo covered his ears and observed how the clock hands formed a butterfly's "V", which meant 2:00 p.m., the time for Dr. Nese's call.

He picked up the phone. The doctor asked if he tried to make lists and emphasized how people on the outside stick to a schedule.

"Yes, Bo's a busy man."

The doctor wanted to know if he joined the senior center. Bo mentioned how the people he saw through the window sat so still like the stones in the forever sleep place.

Dr. Nese said, "Next week we'll go there together."

"No, I don't like the senior center."

"I meant the cemetery. It's important we visit there. Do you know why, Bo?"

"I buy the pink flowers."

"And?"

Bo remained silent.

The doctor continued, "Perhaps it's still too soon. Do try and get out and make some friends."

He thought about the smart box girl.

Abe said, "*Keep her a secret. She's Momma's angel.*"

The doctor reminded him to take his pills and said goodbye.

Bo rattled the sheet of paper with his list. He put a check mark by "smart box" and a circle around the word *park* and locked up the house.

In the park a metal chain clanked as a little boy swung his legs on a swing. Bo waved and said, "I'm Bo. My hair is white as snow."

The boy stopped the swing. Slowly, his feet hit the dirt, the color of cocoa mix. He stared right at Bo and hesitated a second before he spoke, "I'm Derek. Do you like to swing?"

Bo opened his mouth, but wasn't sure what to answer. Derek stuck out his tongue, "See mine's all purple from the candy."

"Can I have some?"

Derek started to reach into his pocket and got stopped by a tall woman with frizzy hair, who ran up to him. She yanked at his shirtsleeve and screamed, "Oh, no you don't."

The boy stuck out his tongue.

The woman turned to Bo and said, "Stay away from my boy. I know your type. You dirty, old man."

Bo said, "No. No. I'm not the old man." He grabbed hold of his braids and said, "I'm Bo. See my hair is white as snow."

"Don't try your sweet talk on me. I read about sickos like you in the newspaper."

Bo wiggled his little finger in the direction of the swing set and said, "Can't I go swing too?"

"No. Derek, get up this instant. We have to go home."

"Mom, he just wants to swing like Grandpa. Mister, here, have a piece of candy."

She dragged Derek off the swing set and said, "How many times do I have to tell you, don't talk to strangers?"

Bo sat down on the swing and said, "I just want to play."

"No. You go home old man, or I'll call the cops."

"Mom, his name's Bo-the-snow."

He smiled at the boy, "We're friends?"

The boy nodded.

Bo thought of his list. *Remember to take pills*, the words he'd underlined without a circle or a check mark. The doctor's office would call soon to see if he swallowed the pills.

A piece of gum fell to the ground by the boy's feet. Bo bent down. The mother said, "Not for you. You keep away. Understand?" Derek hollered, "No. Mom, you said when I don't have the shakes I can play." "Derek, it's called an epileptic seizure. Don't take it so lightly, the same with what I'm telling you about this old man. You can play with friends your own age. Understand?"

The woman used so many words, words Bo didn't recognize. But the sound the boy made, he knew all too well; the loud whine of an ambulance.

Bo covered his ears.

The mother didn't like it either and said, "No, I won't call the ambulance, Derek. The doctor's got you on a nice medicine program."

"You mean I can play more, Mom?"

"Yes."

The boy made the ambulance sound again, "Mom you play patient and I'll be paramedic."

She sighed.

Bo said, "No, no. I don't like sirens."

He propped his arms against his knees and recalled how the siren took his brother Sy away when he went blue. During that last week Sy tapped on the picture frame of Caroline, his wife, and said, "Bo, will you try and find someone? I should have again, but there was only one Caroline."

Sy met Caroline while they were both in college to become accountants. Bo liked her and looked forward to when she visited The Home. She resembled Momma with sunshine hair, and talked real slow. Sy told her not to speak that way and explained that he wasn't stupid. Caroline did it anyways.

She often talked about her and Sy's number business and how she wanted a baby. Sy didn't. He was too scared they'd end up like their old man.

Bo reached for Caroline's picture and asked Sy, "Did she go blue?"

"No. Well I guess by now she probably *has* died. When she left me years ago it was because she found someone else."

Sy held his hand and told him he wouldn't be around much more and not to worry. He made arrangements for the bills to get paid, and there would always be money in the bank in case he needed anything.

Bo tapped on a jar filled with the copper faces.

Sy said, "You can always get more Abes if you want to."

A tear fell from his face.

The boy in the park said, "Mom, you made Bo-the-Snow mad."

The mother yelled, "No backtalk, Derek. People like him are sickos. We're going home where it's safe to play."

Bo waved to Derek as they trotted out of the park.

He pushed his legs on the swing set and thought of Momma. She sang the sweetest melody beside a green, green lake; back home in Tahoe, near the house they lived in for a short time when Dad worked at a ski lodge.

"My Child On A Swing

Dangling his legs to and fro

Ever so gently

Waiting for the wind to take him flying

With a slight push

He goes soaring into the air...

He feels the wind in his hair

My boy is flying.

My boy is...

The song got interrupted when Dad found Momma and him in the park. Momma told him it'd be safe there because Dad went to work. *Not that day, no, no, Dad's face got red with purple lines on his nose and cheeks.* He smelled like scotch and onions as he pulled at Momma's swing and yelled, "Get him down. Men don't play."

Momma continued her song,

The wind slows down

My boy looks down

Feet touch the ground

And he is dazed...

The swing no longer sways

My sweet boy is grounded...

Dumbfounded by the hot wind...

She winked at Bo and he kept it their little secret. He knew Momma called Dad dumb.

Bo shoved the beige beret off his forehead and watched it drift to the ground. He thought about how Momma went swinging in the air and so did the others.

Abe said, *"It is ok, they touched heaven."*