

## Wilderness House Literary Review 10/4

*J. Galvin*

### **The Right Kind**

MY DAD TAPPED THE TOP OF HIS BEER CAN resting in the cup holder of his old Jeep getting the foam to go down and turned Tom Petty up louder on the radio.

"Make sure you get the right kind."

He eyed me in the passenger seat. I clutched my doll to my chest and nodded my head. I knew the right kind was a carton of cigarettes in the red box and a book of free matches.

He swung the Jeep into the parking lot of the corner store. As he smoothed his mustache in the rearview mirror, he nodded to me to get out. I held onto my doll, trying to gauge his reaction; a skill I was good at.

"Leave that damn doll here." I shouldn't have held onto her so tightly.

I maneuvered out of the Jeep, my gangly legs getting in the way of the long drop to the pavement. I tripped and heard his booming laughter behind me. I knew better than to turn around so I straightened myself up. My long bangs hid the tears I fought back from my stinging knees.

I entered the musty store that smelled of cigars and stale pizza. Old men sat along the counter and stared at me. They took in my skinny legs, worn denim jumper and mismatched shoes.

"Can I help you little lady?" The clerk behind the counter rested his hand on the apron covering his huge stomach.

"Just this please." I fingered the money in my hand and took the red carton off the shelf.

"Aren't you a little young for those?" I curled the five dollar bill over and over between my fingers.

"They're for my dad. He's in the car." The man started to rub his stomach. He stepped to the side of the counter and glanced out to the parking lot.

"Is that there your Dad in the Jeep?"

"Yes, sir." I placed the money on the counter and put my hand over the carton, leaving no room for negotiation. I felt the relief spill out of me. I was happy, elated even. I knew the ride home would be fine.

"Well little lady, I can't give them to you, but holler to your dad and I can give them to him real quick."

My stomach dropped like a stone.

"Please." My voice jammed and I started to pick at the old, dried up scab on my hand.

"Sorry. Just give him a wave." The old men seated at the counter started to lose interest and talked amongst themselves. I felt like the fireflies I caught at dusk in glass jars.

"Please." I gave it one final try.

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The man behind the counter didn't hear or choose not to answer. Instead, he turned his back to me, dismissing me.

I glanced out the window and saw my dad tapping his fingers on the steering wheel. He kept looking out the back of the Jeep and I knew my time was up. I waited and gauged. I fingered the red carton and looked around. The old men and the clerk were fighting about the Red Sox's losing streak. My heart raged. I looked around one final time. I grasped the carton to my chest. I turned and ran. I felt light headed, guilty, giddy with relief.

I hopped up into the Jeep; this time not tripping. I was sweating with the exertion. I wanted to throw the cigarettes at my father, but knew better. I handed them gently, nonchalantly over to him.

"They were out of matches."

He eyed me again as he lifted the beer can to his lips and took a long, thoughtful sip. He opened the carton and popped a cigarette into his mouth. He engaged the clutch, putting the Jeep into gear. I was sick with release to be moving away from the store.

He blew smoke into my face.

"Next time buy a lighter."

I held my doll, not too tightly, and nodded my head in agreement.