

I Remember Now the Ecstasy of Being Saved

Somewhere out there Patty Hearst is robbing banks in her crocheted beret but I'm not thinking about her, I'm in the apple tree at the far end of our yard, the one where my father has made a treehouse out of two-by-fours and a plywood sheet. I'm barefoot on the plywood, high off the ground, but I want to climb higher, up into the branches. I take a step forward and before I can take it back I see the nail, crusty with rust, poking up out of a loose scrap of wood. I watch as my small bony foot covers it, as the rusty nail tip pops through the pale skin of my long second toe. I stare at the toe, at the nail that has punctured it. I feel my scalp tighten. And I hear, rising from my chest, an endless, stretched, insistent scream, then another, then a stream of identical screams, lavish in their rise and fall, screams so urgent and keen they propel themselves up the long backyard and through the screen door and into the kitchen and my mother's ear. And suddenly she is a small shape running toward me with abandon, my mother who does nothing with abandon, running so fast her Peter Pan collar lifts in the wind, pushing at the air with her elbows as she runs, holding me in her eyes as she runs, quickly becoming life-size until there she is at the foot of the tree, reaching overhead with both forearms, slapping at the platform until her right hand blindly grasps the two-by-four that she can't see is connected to the nail that's connected to my toe, and she tries to hoist herself up with it but my toe is not strong enough to moor her and she falls back, her backward fall the pendulum reply to her earlier upward rush, and she drags the piece of wood as she falls, thudding onto her back, and from the grass she looks up at me wildly, wheezing *I'm sorry I'm sorry* but I'm sobbing *Thank you thank you thank you thank you* because I know, even in the violent chaotic heave of the moment, that she has found the only painless way to free the nail from my toe and because, for those long screaming moments, I had filled her eyes, I had been all that mattered.