

hilted throwing knife deeply embedded in his chest wall broke the spell. With a fleeting rush of feet the vultures fled, and the huge figure of Jonathan's faithful *baas-boy* Zambie appeared from the far doorway. Shakingly Jonathan knelt by the side of the writhing man. The shadow of death had dispelled all the clouds of madness from the stricken man's eyes. The writhing stopped as his eyes focused on the kneeling white man's face.

In his native tongue he said quietly, "I was a fool to forget the shadow always behind you."

His next breath ended with blood welling out of his mouth in a crimson gush, staining his dirty shirt and coarsely matted chest hairs.

Jonathan straightened up. "Go find a policeman, Zambie," he ordered quietly.

"Yes, Bwana," Zambie said, plucking loose his murderous knife and carefully wiping off the blood on the dead man's trousers.

## Childhood

Diane S. Masters

**A**UNT JEAN lived in the country, and Connie was visiting her and Uncle Joe for a whole week. Better than that, Durbin was coming, and Aunt Jean had said he would arrive just any minute.

Connie sat down on the long narrow front porch and looked around the yard. She loved everything about the farm: the big maple trees in the front yard, the smell of the clover fields and the fresh hay, the bright blue sky with its puffy clouds, the warm foamy milk Uncle Joe squirted into her mouth when he milked Ol' Jersey.

Something cold and hard poked her hand, and she felt a gentle thumping on her leg.

"Hi, Poochie."

Girl and dog exchanged solemn brown-eyed glances. Poochie turned around and nudged Connie with his rump. Obediently, the girl scratched and rubbed the dog's back. Pooch thanked her with a wet lick and ran off after an imaginary rabbit. Connie sighed.

"Guess I'll count birds 'til Aunt Margaret brings Durb," she murmured.

Presently a cloud of dust warned her of their arrival. She jumped up and ran to the sidedoor. "Aunt Jean! Aunt Jean! He's here!" she yelled, and without waiting for a reply, she ran to the gate.

Durbin hopped out of the car, lugging his suitcase and waving goodbye to his mother. He dropped the bag beside the pump and greeted his cousin.

"Hi, cuz."

"Hi, Durb."

He took her hand and led her to the barn. They climbed into the hayloft and sat on the haystacks, saying nothing. Durbin took a straw and, stretching out on his stomach, began to chew it. Connie did the same. They lay motionless: the two dark-eyed, dark-haired cousins in jeans and plaid shirts, drawn together in unspoken friendship.

"I counted birds 'til you got here," Connie ventured. "There were twenty-seven sparrows, eleven robins, two crows, and four buzzards."

"Buzzards?"

"Buzzards," she repeated. "Down by the quarry."

"Let's go."

They climbed down from the loft and walked single file across the barnyard, Durbin leading. At the horse trough they stopped. The trough was lined with green slime. Durb reached in and loosening a piece from the side, he examined it closely.

"What's that?" Connie asked.

"I dunno. Feels slick-like. Feel it."

"Nope."

"Scairdy-cat," he taunted.

Connie picked up a stick and pried a bit more of the slime loose. "It's bubbly. Is it good to eat?"

"Naw, silly. . . . You girls sure are dumb."

"Well, pepper grass tastes good and so does clover and hay," she said.

"They're plants."

"What's that?"

"I dunno."

No longer interested, he turned and walked slowly down the path; Connie followed. They crawled through the barbed-wire fence into the cornfield.

"I'll go first," he said. "You trail me."

He entered cautiously, trying not to brush against the tall stalks. Connie waited until she heard him give a wolf howl, then dropped on hand and knees and peered beneath the drooping leaves. Durbin was no where in sight. She crawled along expertly, turning to the right or the left to follow his intermittant calls. She emerged at the opposite side of the cornfield two fence posts to his right.

"You're getting gooder," he commented.

"Better," she corrected.

"You didn't miss me far anyhow."

The quarry was straight ahead over a steep hill covered densely with milkweed and thistles. As they reached the top, a buzzard flapped heavily into the air in front of them.

"Let's go back, Durb."

"Aw, you scairdy-cat. *I'm* not scaired."

She did not move or reply.

"Aw, come on. I won't let 'em getcha." And going back for her, he again took her hand, leading her down the steep slope to the water's edge. "There it is. It's a calf." He pointed to a lump of hide and bones and crimson flesh. "Stinks don't it?"

"It's terrible," she gasped. She hid her eyes and turned away.

"Shoulda brought my slingshot. I'd pop that old buzzard one."

"He'd pop you one, too," declared Connie, still hiding her eyes.

"They don't eat nothing but dead stuff, stupid. . . . Hey!" His voice rose with excitement. "Hey, Connie! Look here!"

"What?" she asked, peeping between her fingers.

"A tumblebug."

"Where?"

"Right there! Look!"

The two bent down to watch the bug struggling along the bare earth.

"What's he pushing?" Connie asked.

"Manure."

"Why's he push backwards?"

"'Cause he pushes with his backlegs."

"Oh. . . . Why's he called a tumblebug?"

"'Cause he rolls up in a ball when you touch him."

"Oh. . . . What's he do with that stuff?"

"Eats it."

"Eats it!"

"Yeh. . . . Say, you hungry?"

## NOTION

Carla Harris

Isn't it ironic

That friendships cultivated so to blossom

As romance, tender love, or *la grande passion*

Remain platonic;

While casual gestures toward the lads or lasses

You'd just as soon be pals with, often pass as

*L'amour embryonic?*