

deep well

rick stout

The spitball caught him just below the ear. It was a particularly juicy specimen, and retaliation seemed in order. So he built a monstrous, wet masterpiece and launched it at his adversary.

He was so intent on his target that he didn't notice that the teacher was watching him.

The missile connected, but only with the other boy's sleeve.

"I think you'd best stand in the corner for a while," the teacher said.

He rose, hurt, and started toward the corner. Halfway there, he stopped and faced the teacher. "But. . ."

"No but's. Stand in the corner."

He went to the corner and stood there, hoping to fabricate some diabolical revenge to inflict on his tormentor and, if possible, the teacher.

The walls were of concrete block. He searched for patterns in the pores, and found a few, most of them letters which he completed with an imaginary crayon. He followed the seams, imagining them to be roads leading away from the corner.

The class was struggling with difficulties experienced by Dick and Jane, who were trying to extract Puff from a tree.

"Why doesn't Sally help?" someone asked.

"Because she's just a baby," the teacher said.

"My Mommy's going to the hospital to get a baby soon." He recognized Janie Pruitt's voice. "Daddy says she won't be so fat then."

"That's 'cause the baby's inside her," one of the boys said.

"That's enough. Raise your hands if you want to speak."

"Miss Harris?"

"Yes, Janie."

"How'd the baby get inside Mommy?"

"Maybe you'd better ask your Mommy. I never had any babies. I don't know."

He knew how the baby had gotten inside Janie's Mommy, but he didn't think he should display the knowledge. Especially while he was standing in the corner. Anyway, his cousin had told him not to tell anybody. It would have been fun to tell, though.

"See Puff. Puff is . . . high in the tree," one of the boys read.

He wished he could ask why Dick didn't just climb the tree and get

Puff down, but he didn't think he should, while he was standing in the corner. You weren't supposed to say anything while standing in the corner. It was like not being there at all. It had never occurred to him that the class went on no differently when he wasn't there. He began to feel small and to wish he hadn't thrown the spitball. Especially since he'd missed.

"Dick climbs the tree," one of the girls was reading now.

That was more like it. That was what he should have done in the first place. He wished he could say so.

He tried to focus his attention on the seams again. But they didn't look much like roads now, and the one which ran from the floor to the ceiling seemed to go up forever when he was standing this close to it. He wondered if the class knew how high it went up when you stood this close.

"Now, can you tell me one good reason why I should let you break the rules in class?" The teacher was directly behind him.

"No, ma'am."

She nodded. "Take your seat."

He resumed his seat and looked through his reader for the page from which the class had been reading. And he put up his hand to ask why Dick hadn't climbed the tree in the first place.

Street—endless, frozen, empty  
 trees—spearlike, rigid, numb  
 night—cutting, knifing, blackened  
 stop light—hanging, blinking, warning—  
 Crucified.  
 for whom?

Elessa High<sup>h</sup>

The preacher  
 Attempted to turn on the light,  
 But the bulb had burned out.

Jerry Frederick