

## THAT'S ALL I REMEMBER

by James R. Warren

"Joe! Joe! Are you all right?" It was Kenny, lifting the trailer tongue up and away from me, grabbing my arm, pulling me up. "Gosh, Joey! You've got to get home fast! Run! Come on! Run!"

Run! . . . Run!—it echoed through my head. Blood. I'm bleeding? Maybe just a nose bleed.

"Joe!" It was Kenny again. "You've got to get home. Hurry!"

"Okay, Kenny." We ran fast, one block down the alley.

As we reached the fence behind my house, Kenny jerked open the gate and started yelling. "Mrs. Roberts! Mrs. Roberts! Come quick!"

Half way across the yard I tripped and one of my tennis shoes slipped off. Mom came running out. "I've got to put my shoe back on, Mom."

"Oh my God, Joey! Leave it! Joan! Joan! Call the doctor! Quick!" Mom's face was pale and blank.

"Why a doctor, Mom? What's the matter? Can't you fix everything?"

Mom calmed down. "There's nothing to worry about, Joey, but we've got to get to a doctor. You've got a cut that will need a few stitches. Everything will be all right, Son."

We were already in the house. Mom had grabbed a towel and was pressing it tightly against my cheek and forehead. Joan, my sister, was starting the car outside. Our good old '49 Nash. I felt a little dazed by my mother's hurrying.

Joan was driving; Mom had me held tightly in the back seat. I didn't feel any pain and I didn't see any more blood. What was the matter? Then I noticed that the towel was beginning to feel damp against my skin, down around my chin and neck. It felt warm; it felt good. Blood?

We stopped in front of Dr. Green's clinic. Mom led me quickly through the door and into the waiting room, where there was a whole line of patients sitting patiently. Darn! I'd have to look through all those old *Looks* and *Saturday Evening Posts* while I waited to see Dr. Green. Why are doctors' magazines always months old? I had probably seen every single one the last time I was there. That's how

old they usually were.

The receptionist took one look at me, blanched, got up, and led me straight into a smaller room. I began to worry. Why did she take me before all those other people? I began to sweat. I could smell the antiseptic odor of the air as she had me lie down.

Dr. Green walked in. He stopped right where he was, staring. "Mrs. Roberts, I think we'd better work on him right here. Nurse, give him a tetanus and prepare the table."

The nurse had put a white cloth over my eyes, but I could still get glimpses of the fluorescent lights on the ceiling, or the doctor's hand, or the nurse's white dress, from under the edges.

What? . . . How? . . . I was pulling. On the trailer tongue. Pulling it down to the ground. Kenny did it all the time. It was easy—for Kenny. My back. I was on my back when Kenny came? Charlie . . . John . . . Ron . . . They had been running up the trailer, making a teetertotter out of it. Back and forth. The two wheels and the axle were the balancing point. They ran up; I came down—on my back. Blood. Where did the blood come from? The hitch. Must have hit me. In the nose? Cheek. Forehead. That's why Mom was holding the towel over my face. Kenny? He was up on the basketball rim. Climbing. That's where he came from.

They took the towel away from my eyes and started wrapping my face in gauze, tape, and white bandages. Time? I didn't know how long I'd been there. Long enough.

"Mom . . . Where's Dad?"

"He'll be here soon, Joey. Don't worry. It's after six, and the store will be closed by now. He knows you've been hurt."

I loved Mom of course. It was just that I'd always been closer to Dad. Even though he was usually at work during the day, at some school board or zoning board meeting at night. Time together didn't matter. Respect?—Love?—Certainly a need.

"I wish he was here now, Mom."

"I know, Joey, He will be—*soon!*"

They were through wrapping my face.

"Mom, what happened to me?"

"That's what I was going to ask you, Joey."

I told her what I knew. I kind of lied about one thing though. I told her I was just standing under the trailer; I didn't say that I'd been pulling—in fact, hanging with all my weight—from the trailer

tongue. I don't know if Mom believed everything or not. I figured she would, and even if she didn't, she wouldn't get mad now—not the way it was. And she never did question the facts of my story. I had to tell her the truth myself, years later. I don't know why I ever told her, even then.

"Well, Joey," Mom began. "I heard Kenny yelling. I ran out, and there you were, your face covered with blood. Your right cheek was hanging open as if someone had cut it with a knife. You scared me terribly, Joey. And there was blood all over your forehead, over your right eye. At first I thought the eye was gone, and I almost got sick. But I caught sight of the eye gleaming out through the blood, and I knew then that you'd be all right."

"You were a brave boy, Joey." It was Dr. Green. Doctors always said stupid things like that, but they always made you feel better anyway. Maybe it was the tone of their voices. "I'll have you know that I put fourteen stitches into your cheek and twelve into your forehead, and you never made a sound." No wonder. I hadn't felt any stitches at all. In fact, I couldn't feel anything yet! Everything was numb. "I stitched carefully. I don't think the scars will show badly at all."

Scars? On my face?

"Don't worry, Joey." This was Mom again. "If the scars are too bad, we'll take you to a plastic suregon. He'll make them disappear."

Worry? Scars would be fine? Nobdoy else had scars on their faces except gangsters and monsters on television shows. And if anyone thought I would go to another doctor, they could just forget it! But I didn't say anything. I was beginning to feel tired and empty.

I heard Dad's voice outside in the receptionist's room. Mom went out and talked to him. They both came in.

"Well, Joe, how do you feel?"

It was good to see Dad. "All right, I guess."

"I think we'd better get you home."

It was dark by nine o'clock. I was lying on the couch at home. Despite the dullness in my head, I was beginning to piece out a number of sharp pains. In fact, my whole cheek and forehead were beginning to prickle under the bandages. But it didn't hurt. I never did say it hurt. It just tickled; that's all. And I continued to cringe underneath my smile every time my pulse sent a throb of pain rebounding across my face.



Dad had to go to another meeting that night, but this time he asked me if it would be all right. I told him I felt fine. So he went. Mom wanted me to go to bed at ten, but I pretended that I wasn't sleepy, and that I wanted to stay up another hour. She said okay, for this one time. Dad got home at eleven and came over to see me. He sat down beside me, and Mom came over, and she sat down, too. I was happy even though it had been a hard day. I guess I must have fallen asleep, there on the couch. That's all I remember.

### Of Carol

by Robert Basile

I remember when I  
used to make her smile

Remember?

Do you remember that?

When I would pick her up and  
spin her around?

. . . and she would scold (*Oh, Bob!*)

but never quite hold back the smile

She was like a little kid, then.

I think I loved her.

"I like us," I used to say.

"I like us, too."