

## **Atop the plastic white bench**

Atop the plastic white bench lay her hand. It lay there, next to mine. I could sense it's presence, it's warmth, calling my own to join it, calling out my name in a voice more angelic than a chorus of God's winged children. It called to me gently and longingly, a whisper within my ear. But whispers are often spoken when one is frightened, and fears deafen and drown all sounds except the blaring beat of one's heart.

And so it was. Dread descended upon me; like sand sifting through my fingers, the call, moments before strong, slowly silence until only a grain remained. But even this grain could not slow the coming consternation that encroached upon me. In a flash: my thoughts, clouded and confused; my stomach, in a tourniquet; my heart—the blaring beat of my heart—wild and furious.

How I wanted to take it in my own, to enfold her fingers with mine, to caress her lovely skin. Like a blanket in my childhood, I wanted its warmth to ward off the fright, to protect me from the indecision and inhibition that deafened its call. I wanted her touch, not the dismay of the silence.

And it happened! The silence being shattered, something reverberated in the air; it was the call of her hand. Perhaps it was by chance, perhaps she sensed my inhibition, but somehow our hands were in contact. Our outermost fingers, our pinkies as we called them in our youth, now lay together—not entwined, but nevertheless together, in heavenly touch. I could feel her warmth surge through my body, melting my indecision. It is not, I thought to myself, now or never.

But before I could venture to take her hand, she had already placed mine in her own. Enfolding our fingers, fear no longer encroached me, only the thought of her. Our faces, which had before been expressionless, eyes not daring to look at each other, now held each other as she held my hand, warm and tender. I could not venture a single word or smile before her arms were around my neck, her lips meeting mine for the first time, hesitant at first at what to say, but quickly coming to peace. And her warmth—the warmth of her hand, her touch, her lips, her breath—surged forth into my body.

**SCRATCH!**

Lighting a match to my fear, it burst into flame. A roaring fire, my apprehension burned away with each breath, as I inhaled more of her tender passion. And we were like that for what seemed to me the enduring eternity of love in each other's arms, until every last flame had died and only exhausted white embers remained.

Later that night, as we walked with my arm around her shoulder and hers about my waist, I searched beneath the ashes of my fears and, pulling her close, found happiness.

-E.M.