Then she put her cheek beside her grandmother's.

"I'll pray for it," she said; then kissing her grandmother, she again left the room.

The Broken Blade
Clarice Noland

I.

The boys scampered across the lawn, tearing their faded jeans as they scrambled down the embankment to the sidewalk. Once on the pavement, they picked themselves up and gathered around Stevie, their leader. He was staring toward a boy who was his opposite. As he raised his head proudly, Stevie's eyes flashed blue sparks. He tossed his blond head and clench his fists for the attack he felt was inevitable. A few yards from him stood the boy at whom he gazed. Jimmy was dark with brown hair and eyes. He was a head shorter than Stevie, but his stocky frame supported as much weight as did the blond boy's lithe body.

While Stevie eyed him with puzzlement and contempt, Jimmy's dark eyes glittered with hatred and resentment. He leaned backwards for a moment as though gathering his forces, then crouched slightly forward. Springing swiftly, he caught the boys off balance. Jimmy grabbed Stevie around the waist with both arms, and his momentum sent them both crashing into the fleet of bicycles parked in front of Stevie's house. The two boys, disentangling themselves from each other and the broken spokes, did not drop their eyes from each other's faces.

"You bum," muttered Stevie, wiping blood from a gash on his temple. Jimmy said nothing. He stood for a moment staring at his enemy, then, swinging quickly to face the other boys, he froze them with a threatening glance, turned on his heel, and stalked away. In a second Stevie was on his feet. Seeing their leader in charge again, the other boys surged forward; but in that instant, Jimmy whirled around, crouching panther-like, and transfixing them all, as a contemptuous smile twisted his lips. While Jimmy stood there, Stevie shrugged his shoulders and started up the embankment to his porch, motioning the others to follow with a wave.

Alone on the field, the little dark rebel stood looking up at the boys, who were reassembling at the brick parapet, looking himself much like a knight challenging the castle to send its champions out to do battle. As he walked on down the street, Jimmy could feel their eyes on him.

"You . . . you . . . fink!" Stevie screamed, his rage finding voice at last. His older brother and his friends always used that word when they talked about someone they didn't like.

Jimmy lost stride, walking stiff-legged a few steps. Two demons were fighting for control in his body—one wanting to rush up onto the porch and pound Stevie; the other wanting very much to run home into his mother's arms. The second demon won, and his
short legs once again resumed their belligerent, militarily-measured pace.

II.

The demon's victory was not complete. Jimmy did not race to his mother. He walked around to the kitchen door and crawled under the spiria bush to be alone. He pushed aside two rocks which neatly covered a shallow hole. Jimmy lifted out an old, beaten-up cigar box, and from it took an oily rag. Unrolling it, the dusky lad held his treasure. He pressed the paring knife close to his breast, muttering to himself in wide-eyed frenzy. Squatting like a priest of old performing an ancient rite, he swayed gently back and forth, crooning softly to himself. Having completed this weird incantation, Jimmy folded up the rag, put it in the "Roi-tan" box, and returned the box to its hiding place. Slowly he turned the knife over in his hands, catching the rays of the sun as they sifted down through the leaves on the silvery blade. Jimmy laughed softly and ran his finger up and down the edge. He had sharpened it himself every day on a whetstone he'd taken from his father's workbench. The knife had been very dull when he first took it from his mother's silver drawer, but he had worked on it every day, until the blade could slice a hair with no trouble. That test—with the hair—his brother had taught him before he went away.

Jimmy's parents no longer talked about Kenny. Once when he asked when his brother was to return, Jimmy had been surprised and shocked to see his mother burst into tears. Several weeks later they'd called Jimmy in and tried to tell him about his brother. His father started first, but left the room abruptly, leaving his mother to sob out that Kenny was dead. But Jimmy did not believe that. He knew Kenny was going to come back. Kenny had promised to on the night before he left. He was going to bring Jimmy a sword; he had to come back. Kenny would, though. He always kept his promises. And he had promised Jimmy that he could come home soon. Jimmy remembered. Kenny looked so clean and neat in his uniform. He was scared, though, and he did not let their mother see his face. He leaned over and told Jimmy to turn away if he felt as though he were going to cry. It would upset Mother, he had said. So Jimmy turned his face from her, too. Kenny knew all about those things. He knew everything. He told Jimmy all about the war, the soldiers, and the killing. Jimmy liked to hear about the battles. He used to laugh and clap his hands with excited glee until Kenny told him he should not. A long time ago when they used to play soldiers, Kenny was always quieting Jimmy down. Jimmy got so excited, and this disturbed his mother. She would stare at Jimmy and wring her hands. She let Kenny take care of Jimmy. She didn't play bridge like the other boys' mothers, but shut herself up in her room and cried. Kenny was liked by the other boys, and was always being asked to play, but he stayed and played with Jimmy. There were boys Jimmy's age, but Jimmy didn't like them and they
didn’t like him. They had always avoided him. But Kenny was not ashamed of Jimmy. They used to do everything together. Because they were so close, Jimmy told Kenny everything. He had tried to tell his mother how he felt one time, but she became frightened and told him to hush. Kenny understood Jimmy. Kenny would bring him a sword soon. Until then the knife would have to do, but Kenny would be coming home soon.

III.

Jimmy took the shiny silver blade and put it inside his shirt. He crawled out of the bush and walked resolutely over to his bike. He walked the bike to the sidewalk, then rode down the street to Stevie’s. The boys were still there, now playing blindman’s bluff on the lawn. They were laughing and screaming while Joey, who was “it,” kept walking right past little Danny. They did not see Jimmy, who was hidden by the line of shrubbery which divided Stevie’s yard from Miss Thompson’s. Jimmy waited. When Stevie had been caught and blindfolded and was starting to count to one hundred, Jimmy dropped his bike with a scream and ran up the hill. He jumped on Stevie from behind, locking his heels around Stevie’s thighs. His hands, shaking with excitement, fumbled with the buttons on his shirt. He ripped his shirt in getting the shiny knife out. Jimmy plunged the shiny blade into Stevie’s stomach. As Stevie stumbled, screaming, Jimmy raised himself higher on the bleeding boy’s body so that he could watch the silvery blade go in and out. It was no longer silvery. Stevie tried to run, but fell. Jimmy was thrown over Stevie’s head. He landed on the walk, but he was not hurt, just shaken and winded. Stevie screamed. Jimmy got up and went to Stevie, who was still writhing spastically, his arms and legs jerking grotesquely. Jimmy rolled him over and drew out the knife. It was broken in half. Half the blade was somewhere in the red pulp that had been Stevie.

“He broke my knife,” Jimmy said to the horrified boys. He turned and walked away. Kenny would understand. He’d tell Kenny about it and he’d understand. Jimmy tucked the bloody blade into the top of his trousers and walked over to his bike. He rode home silently, but thinking not of Stevie. He crawled under the spiria and carefully wrapped the broken blade up in the rag and hid it again. Jimmy wished Kenny would hurry home with that sword. He needed it now that his knife was broken. He was all alone without his shiny steel knife. He was all alone.

Did You Say Hooch?

Rita Bradley

PROBABLY teen-agers have always devised their own languages. Forty years ago there was a popular expression, “twenty-three skiddoo,” which later was changed to “skedaddle,” “scram,”