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### A Game of Marbles

Ushering in the rural southern movement of feminism - long before we knew we needed to move - a ten year old feminist swaggered onto the playground, pockets bulging with marbles.

"Here comes that old gal again!" said a boy with tow hair, out-grown shirt hiked on his bony back.

"Yall don't pay her no 'tention, and she'll go on over yonder and play with the girls," said the next boy, thumping his shooter to the trench of marbles within the circle they'd drawn.

A clatter rose above intakes of breath as a cat-eye rolled to the toe of her scuffed brogan and stopped. She stooped, her lank brown hair grazing her cool green eyes. Picking it up, she blew it, and tossed it to the boy whose red face peered up from the huddle of boys, dread and restraint registering in his blue-spoked eyes.

The summer sun bore down on the crowns of their heads as they bent over the game.

She squatted, perched on one frayed knee of her blue denim overalls; her elbow rested on the other knee, cocked. Sighing, she blew at her bangs. They could smell her savage sweat in the thick heat, gnats swarming around their **HEAT-RED** faces.

"I got me four at one shot!" a boy shouted, intent on ignoring her, scrambling over the dun dirt and scooping up the marbles rolling around their knees. His right thumb nail was as worn as the right knee of his pants, a bluish spreading patch, like the diffusion of sunlight above the oak. He could hear her dry hand rubbing her steel ball-bearing shooter, the soft whisper of her breath, her waiting. He dreaded her.

Again, he boldly thumped his shooter to the line of marbles, resembling a string of monochromatic beads. Two rolled together to a tuft of grass near an ant mound, and he scampered after them, glancing back at her.

She licked her bubble-gum pink lips and chortled.

They all glared at her from their circle, their eyes the greens, blues and yellows of the marbles, <sup>lit</sup>glazed by the sun.

A lone cricket squeaked from the snaking roots of the oak near the slumped wire fence.

He shot again, and his chipped shooter rolled outside the boundary.

Someone called a break and three of them ambled off behind the thick trunk of the oak "to b'excused." She watched the trunk of the oak, without blinking, reared back on her heels, caressing the steel shooter between her palms.

"Who's up next?" one of the boys returning asked, looking off as he buttoned his fly. His blue cotton shirt stopped at the waist of his khaki trousers.

"It's my turn," one said, flapping his elbows, scooting to the double crescent they'd drawn with a stick.

"No, you don't," she announced, her voice a rent on the murmur of morning in the pushed-back racket of the playground. "Y'all get back and look out!"

"It ain't your turn!" the boy on the Big Haul remarked, sullenly rearing back on his heels, shooter poised over the patch on his knee. "We ain't asked you to play with us, no how. Now, go on!"

She ignored him and squeezed between two boys across from him, elbowing them as she positioned her silver shooter in the crook of her left pointer finger. Her calloused thumb nail cocked and fired, and a dozen cracked marbles scattered outside the boundary. She crawled across the circle, erasing the line, as she greedily gathered the marbles, stuffing them into her pockets. They They watched her swagger off, pockets bulging on her thighs, as with weals of their own hearts.