

Blades

by C.K. Williams

When I was about eight, I once stabbed somebody, another kid, a little girl.

I'd been hanging around in front of the supermarket near our house and when she walked by, I let her have it, right in the gap between her shirt and her shorts

with a piece of broken-off car antenna I used to carry around in my pocket.

It happened so fast I still don't know how I did it: I was as shocked as she was

except she squealed and started yelling as though I'd plunged a knife in her

and everybody in the neighborhood gathered around us, then they called the cops,

then the girl's mother came running out of the store saying "What happened? What happened?"

and the girl screamed, "He stabbed me!" and I screamed back, "I did not!" and she said did too

and me I didn't and we were both crying hysterically by that time.

Somebody pulled her shirt up and it was just a scratch but we went on and on

and the mother, standing between us, seemed to be absolutely terrified.

I still remember how she watched first one of us and then the other with a look of complete horror—

You did too! I did not!—as though we were both strangers, as though it was some natural disaster

she was beholding that was beyond any mode of comprehension so all she could do

was stare speechlessly at us, and then another expression came over her face,

one that I'd never seen before, that made me think she was going to cry herself

and sweep both of us, the girl and me, into her arms and hold us against her.

The police came just then, though, quieted everyone down, put the girl and the mother

into a squad-car to take to the hospital and me in another to take to jail

except they really only took me around the corner and let me go because the mother and daughter were black

and in those days you had to do something pretty terrible to get into trouble that way.

I don't understand how we twist these things or how we get them straight again

but I relived that day I don't know how many times before I realized I had it all wrong.

The boy wasn't me at all, he was another kid: I was just there.

And it wasn't the girl who was black, but him. The mother was real,

though.

I really had thought she was going to embrace them both
and I had dreams about her for years afterwards: that I'd be being born
again
and she'd be lifting me with that same wounded sorrow or she would
suddenly appear out of nowhere,
blotting out everything but a single, blazing wing of holiness.
Who knows the rest? I can still remember how it felt the old way.
How I make my little thrust, how she crushes us against her, how I turn
and snarl
at the cold circle of faces around us because something's torn in me,
some ancient cloak of terror we keep on ourselves because we'll do
anything,
anything, not to know how silently we knell in the mouth of death
and not to obliterate the forgiveness and the lies we offer one another
and call innocence.

This is innocence. I touch her, we kiss.
And this. I'm here or not here. I can't tell. I stab her. I stab her again.
I still can't.