

Mine

by Gary Moshimer

My father was dating already. Her name was Shelly. She had a man-like body, buck teeth and red hair, a big forehead. I don't know what bog she climbed out of. She wanted to fill in for my mother, but I locked her out of my room. I just wanted to be sad and hold my crystals. They grew warm. They showed me my mother's form near the window, a ghost of light.

“Open up,” Shelly said. She had a broken reedy voice. “Too nice a day to mope.”

I wouldn't answer. I was almost there, could detect Mom's outline. The other problem was Lena. I had her letter. I could smell her hair; she'd cut some and put it inside. I just wanted to be left alone.

“We'll go to the silver mine. Been up there? There's real silver to add to your collection.”

“I don't want your silver.”

She opened my door with a nail. She pawed my crystals with her big red hands. She squeezed my arm and pulled me outside to her big red convertible. She drove too fast and smoked. Her ashes blew into my eyes. I thought of how we'd buried Mom's ashes not long ago. Shelly reached into the glove box and gave me a tiny brown bottle. “Drink,” she said. She gulped one of her own. Mine burned like poison. It put a spell on me: in a minute I didn't care where we were going.

We parked and walked a mile to the mine. She ran ahead but stopped to cough. She coughed a lot, just like my mother and father, the chronic bronchitis of smoking and how fools fooled themselves. I didn't want to touch her but I patted her back. Her ribs moved like

the keys of my electric organ. She wheezed like it. I played a little tune. She caught her breath and ran some more. I passed her. She tried to laugh. Maybe she was alright.

The mine had a big mouth that had spewed. Shelly showed me the dynamite marks. I picked up a rock and saw the silver in it, flakes and traces. Every rock had some. The mine went straight down for a ways and then twisted off like a worm, narrowing into the earth. I thought there might be skeletons. Shelly filled a bag with rocks. She slid down the hole.

She scared me. I thought she was gone. Then she cackled and climbed back with a skull. I about shit. She laughed like hell. "Here lies my ex," she said.

She saw the look on my face and confessed. "It's plastic. I planted it here. I did try to push him down the mine. I wanted this to be his head." She tossed it to me and I caught it. I shivered. The jaw opened. It was grimy.

"Why?"

"He hit me. Said I looked like a man. He was full of hurtful words."

I felt bad for certain thoughts. Like the bog thing. She was cool. She lay on the rock pile and I stretched next to her. We looked at the tremendous sky. "Your father's a good man. How about your girl?"

"Lena?" I shrugged. "She's in Springfield. She's not mine."

"She could be."

"Maybe in a few years."

“We can dream.”

I picked up a rock and looked at the silver. I squinted against the shine to spread it. “Can we get rich on this?”

“Naw. You get rich on other stuff, like me driving you to Springfield, or your father loving me. That's rich.”

Then she cried. It was a flood. I patted her cheeks with my red hankie. It left some grime on her face and suddenly she looked pretty, like someone I had to take care of. “Throw that skull down there,” she said, and I did. It clattered for a good while. She coughed and I helped her up. She seemed fragile. I helped her over the mine's lip and back to our car. We would go places.

