

FLASH FICTION PRIZE WINNER

KEITH S. WILSON
BLOOD

YOU COULDN'T GET AWAY from him—not a single minute your entire life—and maybe that's what irritated you. That he didn't seem to have a stone tied around his neck, but was laughing, loud, the way he always did, and that's exactly when you happened to slip. It isn't a stab—is it?—if it's accidental?—but you were leaning a stick against the old brick wall between your home and the neighbor's, and he was joking and the stick had seemed to slip and must have whisked—barely—in then out of your brother's temple. It happened so fast. It was a head wound, and you didn't know it yet, but heads bleed and bleed and bleed and fill two cotton shirts and your hands, and no amount of crying or promises will make it stop. Not until it's ready. It all turned out okay, and he wasn't upset, even though his face was slick with all the liquid stuff a body was

white and still on the sheets. In everything that happened after, it would take years for you to remember that right now you were thinking, in that sliver that happens before skin breaks and the blood comes, that you had just read in school the story of a boxer who had hit another boxer in his eye socket, and something had broken apart or pushed into his brain and killed him before he hit the floor. You thought in that moment as your little brother who was a head and a half bigger than you held his mouth, his eyes wide, that you had been lucky, since at some point you had become strong enough to have done that without trying. He didn't say anything and you didn't say anything as he ran water in the bathroom sink. You stood in the doorway, but you couldn't stop thinking about how you might have a bag of stones. You put the tooth in a glass of ice, and you thought you might have killed him and if you had, you'd have both somehow deserved it. ♦

capable of, spit and tears and snot and blood—he was only scared and hurt and confused, and those are alright emotions for someone else to have when you’re afraid of your father.

And once, you were both running at full speed down the uneven asphalt like the rabbits did, your bikes tangled behind you like sheets, and you were laughing but you were mad. Because though he was two years younger than you—and that used to be forever—he was still pulling ahead, first by a nose then almost (but not quite, and this is important) an arm. You thought to pretend he had started the race early, which was absurd since you had started the race—on a whim to the corner store where they sold cheap plastic bags of dollar soldiers and also purple drink and vinegar chips—but he was starting to get far enough ahead of you that soon it became your last chance, and if you were going to do anything but lose you were forced to act. You pushed him, and running like that, as fast as your muscles can throw, leaves no room for your legs to go but out like wings, and he flew for a second—like the space between your stomach and your lungs—and landed hard on his knees and hands. You were both older now, so he didn’t cry exactly, but his eyes wavered and he sat for a long time picking gravel from his skin, and the blood glistened but didn’t run. You knew by now he wouldn’t tell, so you didn’t make him promise. You only said you were sorry. You said it twice.

And when nobody else was home, you remember being alone with him in his room. He was facing away from you, trying to play a game, and you told him he was acting like a bitch. You don’t remember what for, but probably he was hogging the Xbox or had won a game winning kick that both your parents had attended—you would not have said this was the reason, but it would have been the reason—or for not being upset enough at something else you had called him earlier. And then you pushed him hard because nothing ever seemed to hurt him, even though he was younger than you. He pushed back now, and when you came at him again, he dropped you to the ground and kept you down, his whole body seeming to crush you. You couldn’t breathe. Except that wasn’t true—the kind of breathing you couldn’t do was nothing like your body—and so you pushed all of yourself into one arm and got it free and hit him just once in his face, a fist, your first time being the one to throw it, and blood poured from his lips. His front tooth was lying perfectly