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I Am A Rib

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I said yes to the snake wound in the tree like a question mark, not my nodding partner, but he will get all the credit. The bastard—if I hadn't let him have a bite he would have remained a naked, brainless monkey tromping through the bush and dropping names, not the first romantic hero, not the spirited individual who wanted to be God, the man with guts. Yet, since my thin hands passed the fruit to his thick hands, young lovers will forever bless his name in damp sheets as they try to keep quiet. And when a man under oath grins at the genius of his lie, the credit will go to my husband, wrapped in a goat's skin outside and flirting with our wifely daughters on the grass, as I touch my tight belly that holds a murderous seed, forming the mold for my particular role.

Unlike most of the other boys he knew, Dillon had never wanted a gun before. He had never liked Westerns or war movies or cop shows—he tolerated G.I. Joe cartoons simply because there was nothing else on at four o'clock in the afternoon. To him there was nothing fantastic or heroic about shooting someone. A solid punch to the jaw, a kick to the midsection, a judo throw, these things were heroic, requiring a special kind of skill and bravery that Dillon didn't possess. He knew that anyone, including himself, could point a gun and pinch the trigger, and there was a serious, ugly finality to this, far removed from the clean angles of a striking fist or foot, that had always frightened and repelled him.

But that December morning, shivering in the thirty-degree sunshine, Dillon ignored the old cop standing before him and stared hungrily at the policeman's neatly holstered revolver. He wondered what it would feel like to hold the weapon. He knew it would be heavy.

Still, the gun's rubbery black grips and easy silver curves told him that it was meant to be handled, that it possessed the reassuring weight of a baseball bat or an axe.

Dillon watched the revolver gradually sink out of sight as the old cop squatted down in front of him, his knees popping and cracking like muffled firecrackers. The gun disappeared, burrowing into the thick folds of the policeman's coat. The old cop grimaced as he settled his weight onto the balls of his feet and exhaled sharply through his nostrils, covering Dillon's face in warm mist. He was a big man; resting on his haunches he still towered over Dillon.

"What's your name son?" he asked, searching for Dillon's eyes.

"Dillon Foster," he said, mumbling into the zipper of his jacket. He tried to concentrate on the zipper's nail gray teeth but the old cop put a gloved knuckle under his chin and gently tilted his eyes up.

The first thing Dillon noticed about the big man's face was his nose, jutting out like a clenched fist. It was a villain's nose, hard and straight, with a tip that abruptly curled in towards the upper lip, framed by wide nostrils streaked with purple gin blossoms. But a weak chin, a Christmas white moustache, and moist brown eyes softened the menace of that beak. There was something bittersweet about the old cop's face that he immediately recognized and wanted to trust.

The old cop favored him with a tight smile. "He looks like a bull, like a tired old bull," Dillon thought, as he watched the big man blow another jet of steam out of his broad nostrils.

"And who's that over there?" the old cop asked. He pointed over Dillon's shoulder to a small figure wearing an orange and blue stocking cap and a bulky dark blue coat that extended down past the knees and resembled an old sleeping bag.