

Sarah
by Cody Weathers

1992: Bridget is drunk as usual when she comes into the kitchen. You are reading the letter again --mouthing the important words.

"Sarah," she says, "what will you say?"

"I don't know."

She bawls suddenly, "It should've been me! He would've loved me! Why doesn't he notice me?"

You set the letter down and stroke her cold hand.

"Hush, Bridget," you soothe, "it's not your fault."

1991: You are separated by most of the wheat in the world, but the postman finds you nonetheless. You receive another letter from Tadd.

1990: You say it won't change the friendship. You say so much time has more inertia than simple friction, sticky and unusual, can alter from its course. Tadd concurs. He is afraid of mockery and snickering. You say time is heavy. He thinks it weighs him down, too. He feels the pressure of a column of time on his head, popping his ears. Popping your cherry.

Sam Magic, perpetually dozing, lies curled beyond the foot of the bed, listening --occasionally opening his doggy eyes. Tadd is shy and clumsy, a gentle oaf, the worst kisser. "Stop me any time," he says again and again. Perhaps this is a sweet nothing he thought up. You don't know.

Now you've gone and changed the friendship.

1989: How did Matt Hogue get to third base? Wasn't the shortstop supposed to stop him short of it? Damn shortstop! Who is that anyway?

He is coarse, and his thumbs hurt your ribs. His penis is like a salt shaker. His tongue and voice are in your ear, equally slippery --"Let's do it."

You fish your larynx out from a cold brook of fear. "I can't. I'm scared."

He pushes you smartly away and spikes your panties. "Cockteaser." His gaze contemplates you with his pants frozen halfway up his thigh.

Sam Magic growls from his spot just beyond the foot of the bed.

1988: Bridget is plastered on the couch. "I think Tadd is sexy," she moans. "Do you think he's sexy?"

She can't see your pallor. "I think he's sweet."

"You're a good person," she proclaims emphatically. She twists over and whispers out, "Did you taste him?"
1987: Tadd takes you to see The Monopoly Ninjas. It is a terrible, terrible movie. The ninjas are pitted against the Soviet military in a battle not only for Park Place and Broadway, but the Water Works as well. Everyone passes GO entirely too often. It is a terrible, terrible movie.

"Wow," says Tadd when it is over, "that was really good!"

He has been holding your hand. "Yeah," you say, "I liked it."

1986: Your mother wakes you at six o'clock one Saturday morning. Her breasts are loose inside the pink terrycloth bathrobe that she wears when Ray is over. She bends over and they directly embarrass you with their sway and dangle. Your own breasts never do this.

"Honey," she looks intently at your forehead, "Bridget was killed last night."

There is a lawn tractor away from the service, mowing graves. You are angry that the grass is cut because it could be people, trying to get into Heaven, kept on Earth solely by the frie-engine-red John Deere and its coonskin-capped rider. Does he think he's blazing the damn Cumberland Trail? Ghosts could be everywhere, pining for prairies to become fashionable.

You and Tadd watch them bury her.

1985: Mom lets you take Tadd and some of Grammy Woogie's money to the taxidermist. Lately, Tadd has muscles. He carries the bag with Sam Magic in it.

The taxidermist is a mercury individual. Outside the shop, he shoos away a lethargic owl when he thinks nobody is looking. Inside, he looks at Sam Magic and says, "I can give him a tail if you want."

"How much?" says Mom.

"He didn't have a tail," you interject. "It got run over."

Outside again, beginning the long wait 'til Thursday to pick Sam Magic up, a strange dog sniffs your hand. You ask Tadd, "Do you have a crush on Bridget?"

He blushes and tries to pretend it's all just part of looking important. His new voice, still stretching to fit, answers, "No."

1984: Bridget pours you another. The brandy looks more and more like piss the more water she adds to it. You try to think about the math, but your head is spinning. Fractions suck is just about the long and short of it.

Bridget is wild and adult. She chuckles, "I've seen Tadd's penis. It's like a mushroom." You are seized by vomit and throw up on the billiard table. Bridget laughs and tips her glass, "Well, I have."

Your crazy head between your knees thinks of Papa Smurf, living in Tadd's weiner. You've seen it too. It could be done.

1983:Your father watches you fall asleep from the corner by the window. Sam Magic whines from just beyond the foot of the bed, and Dad makes a clicking noise to say, "It's OK." In the other room, Mom is lonely and crying softly. Dad walks towards her, making another clicking noise.

1982:You and Tadd and Bridget are inseparable in second grade. Keller Knutson says you are all humping, and foolishly, Tadd hits him. Keller, unscathed as juggernauts typically are, truncheons Tadd into an eighty-pound bruise. Bridget hits Keller in the nose and makes it bleed. Only thus is Tadd saved --although he is ridiculed quietly for having a girl to protect him.

1981:Bridget is new on Yates Street. Her house is next to Tadd's --across the street from yours. She is pretty and healthy and fun. She and Tadd wave to each other from their bedroom windows. You can see Delores Wilson next door.

1980:You and Tadd are running through the sprinkler in your underwear. "What's that? Is there a carrot in your pants?"

Tadd hits you in the arm. "It's not!"

"Is it your penis?"

"Don't make fun of me!"

"Is it?"

He is so red. So red! "Yes," he hisses.

"Show me."

"Didn't you ever see your Dad's?"

"I don't remember." You are choking on the memory, and your eyes sting.

Tadd looks at his feet, "I'm sorry."

You wipe your nose with the back of your arm. "Show me."

1979:You are playing house with Tadd up in the attic.

"So should I call you 'honey?'" he asks.

Sam Magic has his ruff up and is growling quietly at a woman in the corner. You meet her grey bored eyes, and she sneers. Sam Magic barks once and she sits back down.

"What are you looking at?" asks Tadd.

1978:You walk around Sloan's Lake towards the playground with the "Kill 4 Peace" torpedo in the blooming spring with

your pink balloon and cotton candy flavored blue. Four years old, and all you want to be is a labrador retriever like Sam Magic, tail run over by Lawnmower Wilson. Sam Magic just wants that blue webby goo all up his nose with the whiskers and the upside-down "Y" where his jowls fountain up to meet. Tadd hollers to wait up and you stop.

He is eating banana chips, and he offers you exactly four. "Sarah, will you marry me?"

"Why?" you say, not taking the chips since they are gross.

"Because then we'll be best friends forever."

"OK. How do we do it?"

"Just say, 'I do.'"

"OK. I do."