

july 2001 by Brittany Cole

it was the season of lemonade  
that tasted like sun tans and garden hoses.  
we were charging 25¢ a cup  
so we could raise enough money to buy a puppy  
because our parents said we couldn't have one  
because puppies are expensive.  
dad's lawnmower sounded like a mosquito roaring  
as mom stood on the front porch  
arms folded in an X,  
and we sat impatient after 5 minutes  
without any sales,  
stationed at our picnic table  
on the side of route 322.  
one table leg was shorter than three others,  
and it sat on a slight incline,  
so the liquid in the plastic cups was slanted  
like our hopes.  
we thought we'd make a million, or at least  
hundreds selling lemonade.  
but the cars dashed by,  
and our only customers were  
loud-mouthed children passing on the sidewalk  
with mothers who needed something to tame them.  
sue and tom and i grew golden  
sitting in the day.  
tom was picking at a scab the shape of  
california on his elbow.  
"go recruit customers,"  
sue ordered as the eldest.  
i ran barefoot to the backyard,  
(gonna ask dad if he was getting thirsty)  
but i didn't see the bee  
that was nuzzling near the ground  
and it pricked me from the soft spot of my foot,  
a needle to my fabric.  
the tears washed my face  
as dad quieted the machine to check on me  
and sue came to my side, trying to play mother,  
"are you okay baby?"

tom punched me in the arm  
and mom receded to the shade of the oak tree,  
lighting up a cigarette.  
dad kneeled, grabbed my ankle,  
and used his fingernails like tweezers to rip out the stinger  
as i writhed from his firm clamp.  
sue cradled my head and rubbed her dirty hands  
on my face to wipe away the tears,  
creating mud from my pain.  
“just walk it off,”  
dad prescribed, after some scrutiny  
of the pink pinhole sting.  
i shoved sue off of me,  
gingerly tip-toeing all the way back to the picnic table,  
surveying the grass for bumbling thorns.  
i pouted for the rest of the day,  
frowning shamelessly the way  
5-year-olds do,  
until the sun reclined into the horizon,  
and mom called “dinner!”  
which was microwaved corn dogs  
and—of course—lemonade.  
later, we spent the \$3.25 we earned on  
chocolate/vanilla twist ice cream cones,  
and dad bought us a yellow lab anyway.  
we named her jessy and she ate from the garbage too often,  
feasting on banana peels and raw chicken fat,  
and swallowing the occasional bee.