I am in the fifth grade. I just moved here. The terrain is new, the school is new, and I feel very foreign. I miss the woods, fields, and beaches I am familiar with, miss the things I am accustomed to, and I feel so out of place, so alone. While I am walking home for lunch, I recall the morning recess, watching the girls play on the swings. I stood there leaning on the cold steel pole watching them play as if I were invisible, an observer watching them through a two-way mirror. I ran to the field behind the school where some boys were playing ball, and I stood there watching them through the home plate fence, unseen, unfelt, unheard by those boys. I walked the playground, as if I didn’t leave footprints, as if I had no impact, and I alone was aware of my presence there.

Along the path toward the gully there stands a tree with gnarled branches that reaches toward me—no longer holding the green leaves which had brought life to it years before—and I hear blackened waters flowing from the Campbell foundry through the craggy, murky creek called Ruddiman. In the distance a horn sounds as a warm breeze rustles the golden grasses spattering the area around me. Then someone canters over to me and snorts, like a horse that has been joy-running, stops in front of me, snorts again, tosses her head up and down, her dark hair follows. She paws the ground with her Red-Ball-Jet-clad foot, whinnies, and snorts again.

"Hello there," she says, "My name is Miki, what’s yours?"

We are friends, before we find we live half a block from each other, before we find that we both are in the fifth grade, before we learn that we both like to draw, before we find that we both hate skirts and that both of our fathers are dead.

In the weeks that follow, we canter the area of the gully. She acquaints me with the terrain, helps me to adapt to the school as we embark on a mystical voyage together where I become visible, and we become Thora and Storm, Miki and Jean, juxtaposed and changing identities as the situation deemed.

Thora is a white stallion, the faster of the two and with the intellect of two. Storm is the black stallion, emotional, with the sensitive na-
ture and the ability to adapt. Miki is Thora, I am Storm.

We spend most of our time together at her house. Her brother is at college. She has a double garage that is remodeled into a recreation room. In that room we make up stories and draw pictures, mostly about Thora and Storm. In that room we play on the floor with small plastic horses, Thora and Storm.

Thora and Storm canter the recreation room together, down the coffee table cliffs, across the caramel colored linoleum plains, up the sofa mountains, into the pillow caves. And it is in this world where the bird is born.

In this world it is the size of Miki's green parakeet, Boris. But it is white, bright white, with jet black eyes, a black hooked beak, and sharp black talons. The bird patrols the area eyeing its territory, searching its prey, Thora and Storm. It sails over the plains, lifts in the upward current of air at the edge of the cliff, and rises to the heights of the mountain where it soars in search of movement. Its glides, surveying the furniture below as Thora and Storm gallop to the safety of the pillow cave, cringe in its depths.

Later Miki and I canter the area near the creek where the bird shows itself to us. We are in the gully, and can hear the rushing water of the creek. We are trotting the path along the embankment when suddenly our course darkens and we are in the shadows. We look up. It is huge—taller than a totem pole. It is white—blinding, sharp white—with a black beak, and jet black eyes that seethe red hate, and black talons with dagger sharp claws. We gallop from the danger near the gully, canter down the sandy path and across the bridge that crosses the creek, and trot up the grassy hill to the backdoor of my house. We snort, paw the earth with our feet, catch our breaths. We try to figure out what that bird is, and why it stalks us. We surmise that the bird attacks children, horses, and dogs with its giant talons. We seek concrete proof that this bird has validity and reality.

Nobody else sees or feels the bird. It takes observational powers that only Miki and I possess, only Thora and Storm perceive its awfulness. It is secretive. Miki and I decide that the bird has chosen us to see and sense its affliction, and, when we try to explain it, people laugh at us in their ignorant oblivion. We cringe at its vile presence, pity their stupidity.

The bird terrorizes us nearly daily as we canter to my house after school to get to the milk chute where a quart of chocolate milk awaits us if we get there before my sisters. We are successful as I secrete the clear glass bottle under my ribs against my rib cage. We tell my mother how the bird tried to assault by the bird. They laugh for a moment, try to reassure us, then they continue to work on other and drink Scotch in squat cutting glasses.

We trot to Miki's house, go to the garage, fill them with milk. We sip the beverage and think. She says, "Look at the bird, we must tell my mother how the bird tried to assault my sisters and us." We go down to the gully where we go into the chamber. We sit down, turn off the lights, and turn on projector which shows images on the white screen on the wall, and there music much. And then they start to explain all that off and blood ooze out of wounds. After the movie, we are given brown bag lunches and have to go back to our classes. When we went feel the sharp prying stares as they go into the classroom. I can't look up, I feel I'm going to vanish and never come back to this world. I look down at my desk. Someone asks a needlelike question. I do not answer.

After school, Miki and I walk home down the path past the black house. I know of this future phenomenon, I know her name, and I am told to me that I might have to go through it. And when I get home I stuff the bottle into the zebra stuffed animal who has it the door.

It is Saturday. We, Thora and Storm, go to the passages along the creek, and p
is Thora, I am Storm. Her brother is that is remodeled into a recreation room together, down the blue colored linoleum plains, up the stairs. And it is in this world where j's green parakeet, Boris. But it is eyes, a black hooked beak, and is the area eyeing its territory, near the creek where the bird usually, and can hear the rushing water path along the embankment when we are in the shadows. We look up. It is white—blinding, sharp black eyes that see the red hate, andews. We gallop from the danger to the bridge that grassy hill to the backdoor of my hill to the backdoor of my with our feet, catch our breaths. We and why it stalks us. We surmise eyes, and dogs with its giant talons. The bird has validity and reality. It takes observational powers that Thora and Storm perceive its awful—side that the bird has chosen us to when we try to explain it, people cringe at its vile presence, sharply as we canter to my house after secrete the clear glass bottle under my shirt, feel the cool presence against my rib cage. We tell my mother and step-father about the assault by the bird. They laugh for a moment as if the bird did not exist, try to reassure us, then they continue to hurl knife-like words at each other and drink Scotch in squat crystal glasses.

We trot to Miki's house, go to the kitchen, get out tall tumblers, and fill them with milk. We sip the beverage. I laugh at Miki’s chocolate milk moustache. Then we go to the living room and tell Miki’s mother how the bird tried to assault us. She looks up from her chair, sips from a can of Budweiser beer, tells us not to worry. Later that evening she falls asleep, suspended in the blue recliner. She rarely goes to bed. When she does, she stays there for days. Miki gets herself up and ready for school.

It is the day we have THE MOVIE in school—just for girls. I do not mention it at home. At school the girls are asked to stay in for recess as the boys head out to play. We are led down a hallway to a classroom. I look in the door and see white venetian blinds that hang over the windows, and, in the hall, the women teachers stand guard as we file into the chamber. We sit in upright oak chairs as the lights are turned off and a projector whirls and then hums. Gray and black images dance on the white screen that is pulled down over the blackboard. And there is music much like I've heard in the dentist's office.

And then they start to explain all this stuff, of linings being sloughed off and blood oozing out of women. It is gruesome and scary. After the movie, we are given brown bags filled with white pads, and we go back to our classes. When we walk in, all the boys giggle. I can feel the sharp prying stares as they watch the girls file back into the classroom. I can't look up, I feel I'm being paraded. I wish I could vanish and never come back to this awful new school.

I sit in my seat, look down at my desk. Some boy behind me asks me some needle-like question. I do not answer, I just sit in the chair.

After school, Miki and I walk home together. While making our way down the path past the black frame of the tree, I ask her if she knows of this future phenomenon. She says she does. I explain to her I know that men and women are different but it never occurred to me that I might have to go through this. I clutch the brown bag and when I get home I stuff the bundle in a corner of the closet, next to the zebra stuffed animal who has stood there for months.

It is Saturday. We, Thora and Storm, canter the flaxen fields, trot the passages along the creek, and prance the sandy footpaths. It is
fall and the leaves are starting to transform their greens to yellows, reds, and browns. We canter to the area near the gully, and there we feel the presence of the bird. We sense the eyes, the anger. We gallop to the safety of the gully, and trot the paths under the canopy of color, shielded by the red-leaved trees and undergrowth. The black muck of the creek smells of rot. We hide in a patch of thick shrubs where the ground is soft, and we catch our breaths. Our feet sink into the blackness of the mud.

We sneak up the banks of the gully to see what has happened. We are hidden by the trees and tangle of bushes and grasses. We look over the field covered with grasses. A beagle stands there, then starts running. Miki cries out, "The bird!"

We don't really see what happens, we are busy secreting ourselves in the thicket. A briar reaches out and scratches my skin. We are hunched in the shadows, shaking with fear, our hearts pounding in our chests, and we are breathing quite heavily. Then we emerge and see the dog is not in the field, and we can no longer see or feel the presence of the bird. We walk in the open of the playground, the sun is just overhead. We feel the warm breeze as the gnarled tree reaches out in the background. We circle the area where the dog stood, we follow its footprints. Then we cannot find the tracks. They just stop in the middle of the big open field. Then we see bones scattered on the ground. Both of us know that the dog has been caught and shredded, and these bones lying before us are the bones of that dog. We gather the proof and tie them in a handkerchief.

We return to Miki's to inspect the bones. We unfold the knots of fabric on top of the coffee table and look upon the ivory remains that lie on the red, wrinkled cotton. Miki figures that one is a shin bone and one is part of a hip bone. I tell her they are signs, some kind of omen sent to us from that monstrous white bird. She agrees.

About a month later it is Halloween and we are out in the dark streets each with a grocery bag. The orange and brown leaves blow in circles before us. We are dressed in blue jeans because we don't need costumes. We canter to the brick house three blocks down where some people live who own a dairy. There we are given cardboard containers of chocolate milk. Then we gather candy at the doors of lighted houses or where there are toothy orange grins of jack-o-lanterns. We drink chocolate milk as we prance down the street and chew on some candy. We laugh about Sharon, a girl we know, who appeared this morning with some new kind of toy. She blew up the limp white rubber shank of a white bladder floated in front of her school. Then she grabbed it and waved it in front of the children as the ethereal white ban. By then, there was a crowd laughing as they were amused by her antics. I walked up and told her what she had found in the school. We laugh again as we think of our knowledge about gender differences.

It is nearly a month later when we are cantering the golden grasses behind a boy named Tom Woodruff. We were sissies. It is sunny but cold and so we wear woolen winter jackets. We run to the branches when we come upon the playground and stop and check the dog for some reason between us as the dog trots off toward it.

There are scattered gray clouds, the outlines, and the green of the summer come out on the playground and I think one and am ordered to return to check again. I ask the teacher what is the matter, we can hear the voice of that teacher. All the kids are at our desks. Then the speaker starts the announcement. It says that the dog has been shot and is in critical condition. It seems like an hour. One of the girls just sit there, stunned by that shot, unable to think. I walk home on the sandy path branches askew. I see the dog circling the hill, feel sand fill my shoes and the bridge to my house.
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blew up the limp white rubber shape and it expanded. A translucent white bladder floated in front of her mouth right out in front of the school. Then she grabbed it and waved in front of the circle of children as the ethereal white barrel leaped back and forth in the air. By then, there was a crowd laughing at Sharon, who thought that they were amused by her antics. Finally Miki and I took her aside and told her what she had found in the parking lot on her way to school. We laugh again as we think of the image, secure in our knowledge about gender differences.

It is nearly a month later when we are at recess. Miki and I are cantering the golden grasses behind the school. We are chasing this boy named Tom Woodruff. We want to kick him for calling us sissies. It is sunny but cold and so we are hindered by the weight of woolen winter jackets. We run towards the tree with the black snarly branches when we come upon the beagle scouting the field. We stop and check the dog for some type of scars. Not a word passes between us as the dog trots off toward the gully.

There are scattered gray clouds overhead, all the trees are black outlines, and the green of the summer is gone. Then some teachers come out on the playground and I hear them call. We gallop over to one and are ordered to return to our classrooms. Miki and I wonder what is the matter, we can hear something urgent in the strained voice of that teacher. All the kids file into the classrooms, we sit down at our desks. Then the speaker that is mounted just under the clock starts the announcement. It says that President Kennedy has just been shot and is in critical condition. The class is silent for what seems like an hour. One of the girls then starts to cry, but most of us just sit there, stunned by that shot, until we are dismissed from school.

I walk home on the sandy path past the black tree with the black branches askew. I see the dog circling the bushes. I wonder what it means to lose a leader. I get to the edge of the gully where I descend the hill, feel sand fill my shoes and pass over the rushing waters on the bridge to my house.