

June Bug

Flash Fiction

*soon to be extended

The two boys sat in the front of a semi as they rode down the desolate highway into an endless sea of blue.

“Where ya boys headed?” the trucker snorted.

Declan remained silent and put his hands underneath his jorts. After a while, he pointed to the only shop they had seen for miles.

“There.”

The trucker ran his fingers through his hair.

“The 7-Eleven?”

“Used to be Southland Ice,” Finch rubbed his nose. “Whatever.”

“Alright, you boys got it.”

As the truck steamed to a stop, Declan tucked his brown-stained tank into his jorts and climbed down the side. The dirt felt loose beneath his feet. He inspected his increasingly dirtied Converse and noticed a few more brown specs on the tips of his shoes.

“Oxidized iron.” Finch was staring at Declan’s shoes. He breathed in and whispered to himself, though loud enough for Declan to hear. “Crystalized calcium oxalate.”

“Knock it off,” Declan said.

“I’m not doing anything.”

“You’re doing *everything*.”

Declan strolled toward the convenience store while Finch followed. The trucker slid a toothpick into his mouth.

“You oughta be safe out there,” the trucker called.

“We will, sir. Thanks for the ride!” the boys shouted back.

Declan gestured his arm up and listened to the semi play a long, drawn-out horn. The boys smiled and imitated the honk as the truck rolled out and into the still-blue sky.

Inside the store, the boys weaved through the aisles. The back row of sodas was filled with Pepsi, Sprite, Fanta, and Canada Dry. The radio hummed *Hound Dog* and next to it was a middle-aged woman with frizzy hair smoking a pack of Marlboros.

They ripped open a bag of Cheetos and crunched down the aisle before stopping to watch a news report that played on the television.

After a moment, Declan pointed to the screen.

“Looks kinda like you, Finch.”

The image on the screen was a black and white sketch of a boy with rimmed glasses and a missing front tooth.

Finch wiped his nose and plucked a scab above his eyebrow before sticking it onto his tongue.

“Yeah ‘cept he has glasses and I don’t.”

“Yeah but—”

“You boys gettin’ anything?” the Marlboro woman said from behind the register. The woman flipped through an old edition of *Vogue*.

Declan turned from the TV. “Do you have any Coke, ma’am?”

Without looking up from her magazine, the woman shook her head.

“We’re out,” she said.

Declan paused and looked down at his shoes. The brown spots looked darker than before, though he couldn't remember what shade they were originally.

"It's bug season."

The woman looked up and stared at the boys for a moment. Then, she coughed and pointed to the end of the store with her cigarette.

"In the back. The June Bugs are out, so there ain't much left."

"Yes, ma'am."

Finch kept his eyes on the TV and watched as the newswoman talked about a man named Ciel who lived on Marcadero Street.

"Finch, come here."

"But I wanna see what's on the news," he said.

"We don't have time for that."

Declan walked past the sodas and through a black curtain that led to a room filled with metal drums held to the ceiling in roped hammocks. The potent smell of fuel filled his nostrils and created a film of filth on his pores. He heard footsteps come up from behind.

"This'll be enough for bossman?" Finch asked.

"It's gotta be. We don't have a choice."