

HENRY

Henry kept his collection in the basement near the furnace same place there was the explosion that time when his dad was making wine and it got too warm and blew up and there was glass everywhere. It happened in the middle of the night when Henry was asleep in his little bed in the same room as the furnace and he woke up covered with glass and red wine. He can still smell it on his skin where the tiny scars are from the cuts. His arms were outside the blanket when it happened and one side of his face was showing. That's where the thin lines are still – purple in the cold and red on hot days.

After the wine blew up Henry called out to his dad to tell what happened but his dad must have been asleep and didn't hear. The door to the kitchen was locked on the other side and Henry couldn't open it so he washed the blood off his arms and face at the laundry sink and went back to his bed. In the morning when his dad opened the door and called him up for school he said there was no way the wine exploded all by itself and Henry must have broken the bottles with a stick or something. Henry said he would never do that but his dad didn't believe him and sent him to school with no breakfast. When Henry came home for lunch he had to clean up where the wine was, and the glass, and there was no time to eat. He was very hungry by supper and he can remember to this day that his dad had cooked pork chops and mashed potatoes and green peas. Henry hated green peas but he wasn't allowed to leave the table until he'd eaten all of them. His dad cooked green peas every day. He said that the more Henry ate them the more he would

learn to like them but it never happened.

When Henry's mom left, she took Henry's little sisters who were five and four and three years old. Henry was seven at the time. Henry's dad told her she could take those youngsters as far as she wanted and she said not Henry. He looks more like you than you do and if I had to see that face every day I'd probably smash it. He can stay with you. Henry's dad argued with her for one full night but she still said no, she didn't want Henry. Henry listened to them fighting until his little sisters woke up and started crying and he had to go sit in their room and sing to them so they wouldn't be afraid. The next day his mom took his little sisters away in her car and they waved good-bye. After the wine blew up and Henry had all those lines on his face he thought she might be able to look at him again since he wasn't so much like his dad anymore on one side. He asked his dad if he could call and maybe go see her. His dad gave him the phone number and said knock yourself out, kid. Henry could hear his little sisters in the background before his mom told him to go to hell, and hung up.

Henry grew and worked hard in school. His teachers told him he was smart and not to let the other students bother him too much about his scars and his quiet ways. They gave him books to take home and he read them at night in his little bed. His dad taught him how to use his fists so that when the other kids picked on him he could hold his own. Once he had to punch a guy who tripped him and shoved him into a mud puddle, took his backpack and dumped everything out all over the ground. He had to beat up a girl who was hurting another girl, pulling her hair out, and her nose was bleeding. The girl he

saved followed him home even though he asked her not to, and told his dad what Henry did for her. Henry's dad gave him a sound whack upside his head for hitting a girl. Henry stopped defending after that – himself or anyone else.

The girl who had followed him home tried to be his friend for a long time. She was an ugly little thing named Alice and she was in Henry's class all through school. She was smart like Henry, but dirty and the other children were mean to her. She smelled like bacon fat and damp clothes. She had sores on her arms and face and someone made up a story about her having leprosy so no one would sit near her. Miss Jones said there was no such thing as leprosy anymore. Alice wouldn't let things heal, was all. She scratched and scratched and if she didn't stop it soon she'd be nothing but a giant scab and Miss Jones said at that rate she'd never find a husband and even the nuns wouldn't have her.

When Henry graduated from high school, his dad told him he had to learn a trade. No son of his was going to university to be a friggin' doctor or lawyer or anything else that wanted more money than he was willing to spend.

Henry's teachers tried to convince his dad that Henry had a wonderful future, could do anything he put his mind to, and Henry's dad said no again. They helped him apply for every scholarship available and he came up with enough to get him started but his dad still said no. Henry was sent to the community college to learn how to be a plumber. If it was good enough for Henry's dad it was good enough for Henry.

Henry's dad said a man was only worth what he could do with his own two hands. Henry wanted to point out that doctors use their hands all the time, especially if they are surgeons, but he didn't. He learned how to be a plumber like his dad and as soon as he finished college and found work, his dad decided it was time to retire while he was young enough to enjoy life and it was Henry's turn to earn a living for both of them.

Henry had started his collection just after the wine blew up. He took a box of matches from his dad's jacket pocket and placed it under the pillow on his little bed in the basement near the furnace. His dad was angry when he couldn't find anything to light his cigarette and made Henry go to the store even though it was winter stormy out and Henry could hardly make his way through the drifts because he was still little and his legs not very long.

After the matches, he took one of his dad's grey wool socks that his own mother had made for him, God rest her soul. And her fingers were arthritic, but still she knitted away for her darling son. I know you took that sock, Henry. Where the hell did you put it? And Henry said he didn't know where it was, but he did. That night Henry's dad didn't cook anything for Henry. Opened a can of peas and told him to eat them cold. The next week Henry took the other one.

For a long time Henry collected little bits and pieces of his dad. His good shirt. His new magazine. A toothbrush. Hair from his comb. When his dad threw away old shoes, Henry dug them out of the garbage. He never took more than a few things in the run of a year.

When he knew his collection was complete he laughed. I have enough to build another dad he said but there was no one listening.

Henry's dad decided he might as well go out and find a woman for himself. Not that he ever again wanted a wife but he could use some company now and then. For the first time in his life, Henry was alone in the house at night. His dad went out after supper and didn't come home until all hours. Henry still had to stay in the basement in the room with the furnace and the lock on the door to the upstairs but there was no one to yell down at him and ask what he was doing if he made a sound. He took wood, hammer, nails and a saw from his dad's workshop. Henry's dad no longer had use for them since the time he broke his arm and it didn't heal very well. Henry built a little coffin.

Henry's job was at a new housing development where fancy big homes were being built for people with money. He spent his time installing pipes and bathroom fixtures. His co-workers usually went away from the site for lunch but Henry brought sandwiches and coffee in a thermos. Once, he began working again before the others returned and they gave him a hard time about it. Called him a suck up and brown nose and who did he think he was trying to impress anyway.

A little way beyond the new development was leftover forest that hadn't been torn up yet and Henry decided to have his lunch there. He could listen to birds and there was a little river. Henry found it peaceful like nothing he had ever felt before. It made him sad but

happy all at the same time. One day he walked further than usual and came upon a small house. A fairy tale house, thought Henry. Gingerbread? And Henry laughed to himself for being silly. He looked around for three bears and laughed again. It's a wonderland he said, and thought of Alice with the scabs and the dirty smell and how he had saved her that day when she was being hurt. Henry stopped laughing.

Henry couldn't remember the last time he had cried and the sound that came out of him along with the tears was shocking, though the ache was familiar, was always with him, but not wet and salty and didn't make his nose run like this crying did. What is wrong with me, he said, sitting on a rock and bawling like a baby at the sight of a shabby little house in the scrappy woods.

After Henry had been crying for a long time, a dog came by. Smallish with floppy ears – wagging its whole body to make up for no tail. It put its front paws on Henry's knees and licked the tears from Henry's face and ran away. Henry thought of something he read once, about elephants, how they were captured sometimes when they were little and chained by their legs to posts for a long time. And how, when they grew up, and the chains were taken away, they stayed put, like they forgot they could go anywhere they wanted. And he remembers thinking they must be pretty stupid.

Henry didn't go back to work. He went home to his room in the basement. He put all of his dad's things that he had taken over the years into the little coffin and nailed it shut. He

found a screwdriver and removed the lock from the upstairs kitchen door. Then he removed the door itself and placed it on his father's bed.