

It was his first barbed wire, there on the edge of that playground, that Tennessee backyard. He could not tell the hurt inside from his bleeding thumb; the two hurts mingled in his mind as he sucked the blood and watched the other children play, mumbling to himself—something about "Little Jack innacorner." In a backwards spyglass of mind, the freckled foreheads of the other kids receded in mist, and he, himself, became the focus of his own sight—a photon in a vastly striving spectral ray. Perhaps Baby Jesus spoke to him (or was it a phrase from a Goofy cartoon?); maybe he only repeated to himself a line from a Golden Book, but suddenly his pain became a badge of honor and an ecstasy of self-recognition swept over him. His suffering was eased in shady wells of reflected face. The glass grew dark, the children gone . . . Of course, they came again with coarse hurrah to mock his tears and check out his thumb, but he held fast and stared them all down—something hard stuck inside his chest, something white and hard. Looking back, the mystery became clear to him, ("Boys and girls, can you say, "Sublimate?") but, to the end, his dreams were invaded by dizzily-spinning pictures of that day with its primal scene, its ontological engram, its white lump—dreams about that corner, Little Jack inside with his plums and outside with his barbed wire.