

apron and I just couldn't help watching. Believe me, I didn't want to watch. It was very unappetizing. Her hands were dirty, even though she worked in the kitchen. But I couldn't look her in the face.

I guess I haven't looked at Anita Margolis face to face for over seven years; not since second grade. In second grade I was a friend to everybody, even Anita. And that was really an accomplishment.

Anita had always been the dirtiest kid in the class. She even smelled dirty. Her dirt was the ground-in, grey kind of dirt, so it almost looked as though it was the natural color of her skin. Her face was greasy. Her nose was crusty. But most of all, she had sweaty hands. Or maybe I noticed it most of all because I was the only one in the class who would hold hands with her. I was her partner in the countless lines that were always being formed by our over-organized teacher.

I don't think that Anita was dumb. At least she was not illiterate. In fact, I'll bet she was the fastest reader in the class. Whenever the teacher called on her, she walked to the front of the room, sorta stiff-legged and fast. She rattled off the words in a flat nasal tone. The whole thing just embarrassed me—her reading, the giggles from the other kids, and the way she picked her nose while she read.

But anyway, I was her friend . . . I guess. At least, I always stuck up for her, although not too loudly or bravely. I wasn't very loud or brave in second grade. But it just seemed to me that someone should stick up for Anita. Still, I got so I really hated holding her hand in all those stupid lines.

One day we stood in line during gym class. We were waiting our turn to bounce a rubber ball up and down the basketball court. Great fun. It took forever. You know how second graders bounce a ball. I was sure tired of standing in line. I was sure tired of holding Anita's sticky hand. My turn finally came.

"She called you Frecklepuss," announced Burton importantly, when I returned from my excursion down the basketball court. I didn't like Burton. He thought he was all it. But neither did I care to be called "Frecklepuss." I glared at Anita.

"Did you?"

"No. Honest I didn't, Janice."

"Boy, what a liar," said Burton loudly. "What a dirty-nosed liar."

Anita gave me her puppy-look, and I knew what I was supposed to do, all right. I was supposed to defend her, to protect her against all the Burtons in the world. I looked away.

"Did you?" I persisted.

"No. Honest, Janice."

"You just better not," I said.

"What a liar," said Burton. I ignored him. I ignored Anita too. She fumbled nervously at my hand.

"We don't have to hold hands now," I said impatiently. "Just stay in line, huh?" Anita meekly obeyed. She tried to get me to talk but I just kept watching that darn ball bounce crazily up and down the basketball court. You know how second-graders bounce a ball. I was glad when it was my turn again.

"She said she could beat you up," said Burton, when I returned.

"Did you?" I asked indignantly.

"No. I didn't. Honest."

"Did she say that?" I asked the other kids in the group. But of course, no one said anything. They just sorta snickered. There was no one to speak for Anita. No one but Anita, that is.

"I didn't say I could beat you up. But I bet I could."

Well, I'm telling you, I was really surprised. But I couldn't just stand there and be surprised.

"Just go ahead and try!" I declared fiercely. I was only eight years old, and not exactly a lady yet. But I still kinda hoped that Anita wouldn't try. I wasn't terribly brave, you know.

She walked right up to me and we stood chin to chin, which wasn't too pleasant because I don't think Anita washed her chin any more than she did her nose. But I guess I wasn't thinking much about germs or anything. I was just noticing that mad look in her eyes. She was really mad. I mean, she was always sad or hurt, but now for the first time she was really mad. I was sure she would hit me. But she didn't.

“I hate you.” That was all she said, but it was enough to damn her forever.

“All right,” I said with grave dignity. “But we’re not friends anymore.” Her anger disappeared instantly. She was once again whimpering and begging, just like a puppy. I hate people who act like puppies.

“I’m sorry, Janice. Honest. I’m sorry.”

“I can’t be friends with someone who hates me.”

“But I don’t. I didn’t mean it, Janice. Honest.”

I ignored her. For seven years I ignored her. I guess I just forgot about her. It was pretty easy. I had lots of friends, and it was easy to find new partners to hold my hand. Don’t ask me who held Anita’s hand. I never really thought about it, not until seven years later. Now every day I see those hands in the lunchroom because I can’t look into her eyes.

The Prisoners of the Sandclock

by Christos Saccopoulos

On the grandfather’s knees seated
The myth I first heard
Of the men who are born
In the Sandclock’s lower half.
In there trapped
From their birth they struggle
The sand’s silent—
The sand’s monotonous flow
to stop.

In there trapped
From their birth they struggle
The time’s glass—
The time’s infrangible walls
to break.