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Two Straws

by Gale Acuff

I can't reach the comic book I want so
I ask the woman looking through the screen
magazines if she'll reach up and get it
for me. Sure, Sweetie, she says, and pops her
cherry gum. I can smell it. She's got breasts,
too. Big ones, I mean--like fuselages
on the cover of Our Army at War,
which I can reach but I don't like fighting
unless it's against aliens or thugs.
She pulls down Green Lantern. His Power Ring
still isn't as big as hers, and not much
greener. Thank you, ma'am, I say, though she's all
of seventeen, I guess--still seven years

older than I. Don't mention it, Sweetie,
she says. Does your mamma know you read these?
Yes, ma'am, I lie. She don't mind it a bit.
Well, she says. Well. She pops her gum again
and winks at me, then bends to look me in
the eyes. I can see the tops of her boobs.
If she sees me seeing, she doesn't say.
Have you got a sweetheart, she asks. She grins
and I can see a couple of fillings.
Not right now, I say. They just come and go.
I'll bet you're a Lothario, she says.
Oh, no, I say. We're Methodist. She laughs
and her gum falls out but she doesn't bend
down to get it. Darn. She straightens and smooths
her hair and says, Say hello to your girl
for me. She's misunderstood. Ain't got one
now, I say. But I like older women.
She laughs like my Aunt Belle when she's drunk, says,
Maybe we'll meet again, in a few years.
Maybe, I say. By then I'll be a man
and I'll know what to do with you. Laughter
again as she turns for the checkout. Bye,
Sugar, she says. Don't break too many hearts.
No, ma'am, I say. Just yours. I'm left holding

Green Lantern, wishing I had a Power
Ring. I'd will it to make me old enough
for her, and then some, but not Father-old.
Then I'd ask her if she'd like a soda
and we'd sit sipping at the fountain. Two
straws and one soda. A bit of sucking
and the nipples of our straws touching each
other at the foamy Coke-glass bottom
and maybe they'd actually melt and
slurp up into each other and we'd make
a baby, but not all at once--we'd go

slow. That's not going to happen because
I'd vow never to use my Power Ring
for personal gain--I'd use it only
for good. It's good that she's checking out now
because I've got lumps in my throat and jeans
and I guess that's not exactly evil

but it feels like mischief in the making.
So maybe I've got powers after all.
What I don't have is money for the mag



but I'm just looking anyway and can
enjoy the thing here, at least until they
chase me away for looking for free. That's
probably evil, for them and for me.
It don't cost nothing to look is a lie.

The Fence

by Morris Kennedy

His hands
held one more lesson
for me.

My father set to work dying
the way he built a fence –
digging, sweating, always moving.

"Don't let your
shirttail
touch your back."

We measured the night
in saline drops, and staked its
corners
with needles.

Moving, sweating, always digging,
he is finished
a little before noon.

I pulled both hands across his chest
trying to make the fingers knit
together as though he were
resting.

But the arms slid back to the
sheets,
as useless at that point
as oxygen or love.

My Father's Final Year

by Morris Kennedy

Behind the eyes, birds unable to fly, birds
with wings splayed, black aningas
that fished too long, caught too little,

and now must wait
while their saturated feathers dry.
The birds perch on watersoaked logs

and lift dripping wings to a setting sun
in damp surrender to Florida heat at dusk,
hungry in a river that flows too swiftly.

