

GARY YOUNG

FAMILY MATTERS

My brother's in Wyoming, and I've had that dream again. We're fishing. The trout rise, take our bait, and keep rising. In love once with a woman, and with my own capacity for pain, I fell in with some cowboys, and broke my neck riding bulls in a little rodeo. That night, drunk in the bunkhouse, not knowing how badly I'd been hurt, I thought it can't get worse than this, but I was wrong. That was twenty years ago. Thunder rolls down South Fork Canyon. The Milky Way is a great river overhead. My brother is in Wyoming. I miss him more than ever when he's there.



The burning house turned our nightclothes yellow. Standing at the curb, my brother batted ashes with his hand. We had a puppy, and my mother shouted, where's the dog, and then, my God, where's Cathy? I remember the sound of breaking glass, and walls too hot to touch. I remember pulling my sister from her bed, and leading her out into the world again. I did not wonder, then, how I'd found her, or how my mother could have turned so easily to send me back into the smoke and flames. It was my house; I knew where I was. I could find my way even in the dark.

My father would say, you need a memory lesson, and he'd beat us, first me, then my brother. And I do remember, the little scratches on the banister in the upstairs room, the copper lamps and the flame-shaped bulbs, dark knots on the varnished wall; bamboo curtains creaking as the wind pushed through, the taste of salt, and my brother, shaking as he waited his turn. I took my comfort there; I knew where I was, and what was coming. My father once broke his belt against the back of my legs, and when he saw the welts and the drizzle of blood, he began to cry. I was so frightened to see him change like that, not shouting anymore, but on his knees, sobbing.



My brother was playing in the car when he slipped, pulled the handle, and cut his thumb off in the door. My father heard the scream, and ran naked from the house. My bike was on the porch, and without breaking stride my father picked it up and tossed it aside. I remember it hovered in the air. I remember my father flying, too. He took off from the porch and sailed above the shrubs, the grass, the newly staked trees, and at last came to rest by the car, where he knelt, and pressed my brother's bloody hand into his chest.