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Monsters

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window. They watched her turn and followed the progress of her long, slender legs returning up the drive to her home. Rudy plowed down the aisle, then felt an iron clamp on his bicep and he was being pulled forcibly into a seat with Jimmy Thibeau, a monstrous bovine creature, and Joe Michaud, a short, wiry seventh grader with thick glasses and a hoarse horn of a voice.

"Howya doin', Hymie?," Joe bellowed into Rudy's startled face. Rudy gagged at the older boy's foul breath, which bore no trace of tooth polish, or even food for that matter, but which radiated a hot blast of staleness like when Rudy's electric transformer overheated. Joe smashed Rudy up against the massive thighs of Jimmy Thibeau, who grinned foolishly next to the window. Jimmy wrapped his massive left arm around Rudy and bearhugged the little boy into his lap, rasping his knuckles across the blond scalp. Rudy could smell the manure of Thibeau's cows and Thibeau's own urine wafting from the denim encased between the older boys legs. Rudy played dead, suppressing tears, and Jimmy released him. He tried to ignore Joe, who asked him about the 'Nazzy's' and tweaked him painfully on the earlobes until his whole head burned. Across the aisle, Dawson McCafferty, who felt destined to be a sheriff, saw Rudy's stifled heaving and wet eyes, and told Joe to leave the little Kraut alone. Dawson was big for his twelve years, bigger than Joe, but he bled and cried easily. Joe fixed his confused lens-blurred scowl on the beady-eyed red face of propriety, and faked a jab at the fragile bulbous nose, which caused Dawson to flinch severely, and subsequently took the fight out of Joe. Joe looked around for support but found no following, even Jimmy Thibeau had gone back to staring out the window as the bus entered Carthage, so he amused himself by cleaning the dirt from his fingernails and flicking it on Rudy's new corduroy trousers. Dawson bumbled off towards a misty burning sunset, Marshall McHero, confident he had saved from harm the little Kraut, the rich Kraut's son, the irrefutable link to the beautiful blonde, the very sight of whom made Walter Moyse clap his knees together, flap his thumb-in-armpit wings and crow heavenward with painful desperation.

Dot pulled the old bus, Macwahoc County #17, to a stop in front of Carthage Elementary, a shambling brick and board edifice that entombed six hundred students on any given school day it didn't snow. Dot paid no attention as her charges were absorbed into the milling children waiting for the first bell, most vanishing quickly in the drab whirl of overcoats and wool hats pulled over eyebrows; others, like Walter Moyse, advanced with a cautious swagger into the throng, one weary eye peeled for any strutting roosters with bigger bags swinging from their hips.

Mike Augusta

Monsters

He learned the fear
from fascination — spinning,
spinning past the inner threshold
warm then cold going
around
once more.

The mother with her three bags
from other stores and
seven more gifts to buy and
only fourteen shopping days left

pivoted.
"If you do that again I'll!"

A threat is enough
to avoid the blades of glass and steel.

Keeping fingers in tight fists,
gingerly pressing the handle,
he learned to jump out quickly — looking back
as the monster flapped metallic arms
around
once more.

Sharon S. McCartney