



Do Butterflies Bleed?

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(IN A BEDROOM, OLD MAN SITTING UP IN A HOSPITAL BED. HIS SIX-YEAR-OLD GRANDSON HAS CLIMBED ON THE FOOT OF THE BED AND IS KICKING THE EDGE OF THE METAL FRAME.)

TOBY: Do butterflies bleed?

REX: Hand me that glass of water, over by the window.

TOBY: From their wings, like when I scratch a scab and the blood comes out?

REX: Can't see you under in that shadow. Turn on the other light.

TOBY: Or from their...their...

REX: Where's your mother?

TOBY: An...ant...

REX: Said she'd be here by four, can't have you hanging around all day.

TOBY: ...tennas, right.

REX: Said she'd bring me a cherry pie from Safeway, all wrapped up in foil so there's no—

TOBY: Maybe if you pricked the very tippy-top with a needle, like one time when I had a blister on my hand from climbing the rope in gym and Mom cleaned it with that drippy yellow stuff and said I had to watch out for germs, maybe then they'd bleed.

REX: Germs.

TOBY: Think they cry?

REX: Mother said, can't be too careful, watch out for the smallest speck, the rotten, soft peaches, worms, that's it.

TOBY: I bet they cry really soft, not like Mikey when he got hit in the head with that Whiffleball bat in gym class, with the nurse there and everything, saying, "Lordy-lord, Michael Allan Foster, quit your belly-aching, barely be a bruise."

REX: Straight from the pit of the fruit to the pit of your stomach. Then there's—

TOBY: Not a bear cry. A butterfly cry.

REX: Trouble.

TOBY: Like I bet if I listened real quiet, I could hear it.

REX: People say trouble is, didn't see it coming. Bullet, bus through a red light, heart trouble.

TOBY: Church quiet. Library quiet.

REX: Not it. Trouble is as trouble does when you know, can feel it, slowly, one step of death at a time, pulling you into the water,

TOBY: Graveyard quiet, except if there's ghosts.

REX: Drink it, swim in it, drown in it, makes no matter.

TOBY: Grandpa, do ghosts bleed?

REX: Think it's... (coughing)

TOBY: If they walk through you, is it wet like rain?

(REX'S COUGHING TURNS TO SILENT CHOKING, HIS HAND OUTSTRETCHED TO THE WINDOW, HIS EYES CLOSED.)

TOBY: Grandpa?

(NO RESPONSE. TOBY SITS FOR A FEW MINUTES, STILL KICKING THE EDGE OF THE BED.)

TOBY: Is it like this?

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