



### *Mary Connolly*

The old women sitting behind me on this bus are whispering. About me. I'm used to it. I blink slowly, lift my chin and pretend to stare out the window. I've been holding my head high, too high, all summer. Today I went shopping downtown just to forget about things for a while. No luck.

It's my stop and I stand slowly, waiting until the bus is motionless before walking down the aisle. The whispering gets louder, a hissing sound that follows me with each step. I don't even know these women. They live somewhere in the neighborhood. But they know me, or at least they've heard my story. Through the grapevine. Everyone in the neighborhood knows all about what happened to Mary Connolly. Some think I got what I deserved, some pity me. A few, just a few, feel genuinely sorry for me.

I wish I had the nerve to turn around and glare, ask them, "Don't you have anything better to do than criticize an eighteen-year-old girl? Who are you to judge me?" But I don't utter a word; I just clench the metal pole as the bus lurches to a stop. The doors swing wide open and I step down onto Abbott Road, one of the main avenues that runs north and south throughout South Buffalo. I know every inch of it, from Park Edge Groceries to the LB Smith Plaza. South Buffalo has been my home my whole life. There are no secrets here. There are endless secrets here.



### *Joe Gleason*

When we were little, I thought Mary was a blue jay, beautiful and mean. She sat across from me in kindergarten and barely said a word. Then one day, she asked me, "What's on your chin?" She traced an invisible line on her own face. I was sensitive about the scar. I'd had it since I was two and our neighbor's dog jumped on me and sliced my skin. That day in kindergarten, when I told Mary what happened, she screwed her face up like I was too

awful too look at. I don't remember her saying another word to me the whole time we were at St. Martin's School.

In junior high, she was in front of the building every morning, the other girls clustered around her, nodding as they agreed with everything she said. They knew they'd never be as beautiful as Mary, but they all vied to be one of her handmaidens, even Eileen, her best friend, who would easily have been queen bee at any other school.

I have to admit, Mary was irresistible that autumn we were in eighth grade. On the first day of school she wore a purple dress and stockings. Her long hair was the color of butter and her eyes were as turquoise as some of the marbles in my old collection. She looked like the models on the covers of magazines. I didn't gawk at her the way a lot of the boys did, but I stole a few looks. That short dress, those incredible legs. The sight of her made me ache.

Actually, a lot of the girls were knockouts that autumn. They'd come back from summer vacation with longer legs, longer hair, their make-up propelling them years forward. We boys were cowed by their make-up, by their short skirts barely covering bottoms that moved with a teasing rhythm down the halls. The best thing about Saint Martin's was that we didn't have to wear uniforms like the other Catholic schools. Sure, we were supposed to look clean and well-dressed, but the girls weren't hidden in those long ugly plaid skirts. Thank God.

These were the same girls we chased through the playground only a couple of years ago, but suddenly they were young women, leaving the boys in the dust. Their newfound beauty, so startling, was more wondrous to us than the moon landing. We could never admit this, of course, so we acted like a pack of idiots. Well, I was quiet, but most of the guys behaved like jerks. Timmy Corcoran and Mike Nelligan hooted, "36 D, DO IT TO ME!" whenever Molly Boyle walked by, her cheeks flushed, her eyes down.

Some of the girls were genuinely nice to us, like Sheila Adams. A couple others would say hello to you if you passed them on the street. But not Mary Connolly. You could be an inch from her nose and she wouldn't see you. She'd glide past me on the street and I felt like garbage.

I remember that first morning in eighth grade when I was up before my mother, stuffing my sheets into the washer, thrilled and horrified about what I'd dreamt the night before. For a few months after that, I wouldn't let myself glance in Mary's direction. I worried that if we locked eyes, she'd