

Patti Scheibel

Accident Prone

Today Mother cut her finger with a knife. She was carving lettuce. I am tired of blood.

She comes out of the kitchen with a soaked potholder wrapped around her hand. She holds it limply like a small dead animal. Her mouth is pursed up into a tight line, but her eyes are big and white, like in a cartoon. Papa stands up fast, and his newspaper flutters to the floor.

He says, "Cory, are you all right?"

She nods yes, but the potholder slips, and her blood spurts on and off, on and off. She just stands there bleeding onto our new cream-colored carpeting. Papa and I watch her trying to stop it with the soggy potholder.

He has to take her to the doctor. I want to come too, but they say no. They leave me here alone. I study the new stain. It is a picture, but it is not very clear. In school they would tell me what it is.

Now Mama's finger is wrapped in white.

"Four stitches," Papa says, almost proudly.

Mama holds her hand away from her like it isn't really hers. She keeps scrubbing at the brown stain in the carpet. Every day I come home from school, she is scrubbing. I sit and eat animal crackers while she scrubs. At night I come downstairs, frightened from some nightmares, and she is still scrubbing. I tell her I dream of someone's face on the body of a long, skinny insect. She keeps

scrubbing.

Papa once cut his foot with an axe. He hurts himself with power tools but usually not badly. That time they had to sew on his big toe, but it was dead and it didn't take. He walks funny now.

He buys Mama a throw rug to cover the stain. It is dark brown. I push it aside and look at the stain sometimes. It is lighter from all the scrubbing, but there is still a picture hidden there.

At school Miss Lisa shows me how to make a clay dog. The clay looks like a big wet rock, but you squeeze it in your hand until it is warm and it wants to be something. The boy who sits next to me makes a horse, but it looks like a camel. It has a big lump on its back. My clay looks like something strange to me, but Miss Lisa says it looks like a dog. So I make it a dog. We can paint it any color, and I pick blue. Miss Lisa laughs and hugs me. I name my dog, but I can't remember what. I drop it walking home, so it doesn't matter what its name is. I pick up the pieces off the sidewalk.

At home I show Mama the pieces. She rocks me in her lap like I am a little baby. She throws the pieces away and tells me to draw her a blue dog instead.

I don't. I draw Mama scrubbing at the stain. I don't show it to her though. She does not like it when I draw her.

I put the knife down the garbage disposal. It makes huge grinding noises. Mama runs in, screaming at me. She doesn't turn it off, she just reaches in. I shut my eyes.