

THE HOURGLASS

Dad

Sunny stood in front of her tiny father at the school gate. Not every kid had a squirt of a hunchback for a dad. Her hand rested upon his horrible curved spine as she kissed him good-bye. The bones of his back penetrated her hand as she hugged him and peered beyond his ear to two girls watching and whispering. Why couldn't he just stay in the car? Couldn't he just sit there and wave or something? No, he had to get out, with all that trouble, and hobble around to her side, and have that look of expectancy Sunny so hated. Sunny saw Daniel's mother hugging her. How tall she stood, even as she bent down to hug and kiss Daniel. And her father was even taller and athletic, always bouncing out of the car to greet her. Sunny ran into school and pretended all day long that she came from a "normal" family.

At home after school, Dad and Sunny moved like they were in a dance around the kitchen, her dad following her as she prepared their dinner, his withered hand brushing her back and her side. She frowned and moved away.

"What shall we have for dinner tonight?" he asked her.

"I think you can make it yourself, Dad. I am not your servant. Or Randy can make it. He's old enough. I'm going out on the porch," said Sunny, tucking in her blouse, and striding to the front door, exiting, and slamming it.

"Hot dogs?" said their dad, and Randy, Sunny's brother, one year younger, nodded silently, and got up and went to the refrigerator to haul them out.

Sunny found the fresh air gave her back the shallow air she breathed around her father. She pondered her father and his polio story; his stunted growth at age ten and his immobile hands except two fingers, and his weak legs that held him up best when he wore braces, and sometimes wouldn't hold him up well enough, when he wheeled himself around in a wheelchair.

He was a jerk. The idea of forgiveness was just plain hysterical to her. He did what he did and his polio stories and sad rejections all his life could

not justify one moment of his intrusive behavior. She was a kid and he was old - old and ugly, she thought, as he jabbered on, swimming in his stupid egocentric sadness. He expected her to just smile and forgive him for a lifetime, her lifetime, of touching her in rude ways. She slid her hand round her knee and leaned into the corner of the porch swing.

Later that evening in the living room his eyes glared right through her and she squirmed and looked away. His appeal was a lost cause.