

Peter Markus

Good, Brothers

WE COME HOME one day after being gone all day long fishing for fish in the river only to find standing inside our house people other than us. There is a mother other than our mother, there is a father other than our father, there are two boys in our house who are brothers other than us. Our mother, our father, they turn their faces to face the sounds us brothers are making when we come boots bursting into our house, in through the back door, and what they say, our mother and our father, not to us but to this other family other than us is, these are our two boys. Who are they? is what us brothers say to what we see standing inside our house. This other family, this other mother and this other father and these two brothers other than us, they look almost too much like us to be us; it could be us looking into some sort of a mirror. But they are not us, and we are not them, and what our father says to us, to our question, who are they? is, he says to us, his sons, that this is the family that might be moving into this house. This is our house, Brother points this out. There's not room enough for all of us inside of this house. That's true, our mother says to this, and for the first time in a long time, she is actually smiling. Which is why, our mother tells us, if Mr. and Mrs. Haskins decide that they want to buy our house from us, then we'll have to find some other house for us to live in. We like this house, us brothers say to this. Let them find some other house to live in. Maybe this is a bad time, the other mother says to our mother. The other father says to our father that maybe it would be better if they came back another time. Our mother shakes her head. Our father nods his and says yes, that he'll call them later. When our father says this, our mother shoots our father this look across the space that is between them. It's a look that could, with just one look, turn a muddy river into dirt and ice. Boys, our mother says to us, looking

this look down to us, what do you say you take the Haskins' boys outside to look at your fish. Us brothers stand across from and we stare into the eyes of those boys who are brothers not to us. All four of us brothers, us staring across our house at each other, to our mother saying that word fish, we each of us boys nod with our heads yes. That sounds good to us, us brothers say. Outside, we go with these two other boys out to the back of our back yard, to show them what our mother meant to say when she said that word fish. Fish? What kind of fish? is what these brothers asks us. Our fish, is what we tell them, and we lift our hands up to get these boys to see our back yard telephone pole that is studded with the hammered in heads of fish. We had a river once, one of these boys says to this, his head still tilted up. Our river, it was a real good river for catching fish. Our river is the muddiest river ever made, is what us brothers tell these boys. So, what are you gonna do? is the thing that these brothers want to know. How, we hear these brothers saying to us, are you gonna get them to stay? We look at these brothers. We look at them the way that we look at our fish. After a while, when we are done looking at these two brothers, us brothers, we give each other this same sort of a look. Brother's the brother of us who walks away from this look. He is going, only I know, to get what we need to get us to stay. I am the one of us brothers who stays where I am standing. I am facing into the faces of the other two brothers. I tell them to stand right here, with your backs backed against the pole, your faces facing the river. We'll show you the river, I tell them, just as soon as I get back. I go to where Brother is standing, with a hammer dangling from each one of his hands. When we get back, these other brothers, they are right where we left them, right where we told them to stay, with their backs and boot heels backed up against our fish headed pole. Good, brothers, is what us brothers say to these boys. Now give us your hands, we tell them. These brothers do what we say. We are brothers, after all; these boys are more than just boys. Now this might sting, we tell them, and we take each of these brothers each by his hand and we hold them up to the pole's wood. Both of these brothers take the nail to their hand. Like a brother. They

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don't wince, or flinch with their bodies, or make with their mouths the sounds of a brother crying out. Good, brothers, we say this to them again. We are both of us brothers both of us getting ready to hammer a second nail into these other brothers' other hands when our mothers and our fathers, all four of them, step out into the back of our back yard. Sons, our fathers call us out. All four of us boys, all of us brothers, we turn back our heads toward the sound of our fathers. It's time to come home, we hear our mothers say. Us boys, brothers, turn back to face each other. Up above us, in this sky above the river, in this sky over the mill, the moon, it is just now beginning to rise and shine. In the light of this light, us brothers, we raise back our hammers. We line up those rusted nails.

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