

# I KNEW A BOY

## By Alan Haehnel

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**Cast: one female**

***Though not old in years, the story keeper feels very old because of her hard life, especially because of what has happened to her today. SHE struggles throughout the monologue to do her duty and perform her obligation to her tribe, but her personal need to mourn keeps pushing through.***

You have come seeking a story, have you not? And of course, of course... I am she to whom you come, am I not? Tell us a story, story keeper. Help us forget. Take us from this place where... where dirt is hard beneath our feet, where smoke burns our eyes, where skin is an imperfect barrier between our hearts and the world, where... wrong things happen.

***(speaks angrily, as if punishing her listeners for being there)***  
Come! Come... what do you want to hear? Yes, let me spin you a fine web of words. I am the story-telling spider, all of you my flies. Come into my web; let me sink my story teeth into your necks until you feel nothing. Yes! I will whisper peace into your ears and wind about you my strands of silky words and you will feel nothing! Nothing but the bliss of forgetfulness, the ice of illusion that numbs your hurt! Yes, I will... I see I frighten you. You have not come to be frightened. You have come to escape fear. Gather close, then. ***(taking a deep breath, trying to be civil, even cheerful)*** Whither shall I whisk you with my once upon a time? To the top of a mountain, cool and clean, where the air tastes like cold apple to your tongue and you feel... you feel both small and large at the same time? Do you wish to go there? Where you are both a stranger and a sister to all you see? And all you see stretches for hundreds of miles, for miles beyond counting? Do you want to stand at the edge of the world with your toes clinging to the cliff? Do you want to believe you are an eagle?

***(SHE grows distant)*** I once knew a boy. He came to me in my tent, in the middle of the night, his skin so white it glowed. He was sick, his body as dry and hot as a stone heated by the fire. He said to me, "Where is the eagle? Where is the eagle?" I asked him what eagle he meant and he said nothing for a long time, just stared straight ahead, as if, in the dark, a whole day and a whole land danced before his eyes but I could see none of it. I asked him again, "What eagle?" He said, at last,

“You do not know anything.” He turned and walked out of my tent and back to his own. **(remembering her audience)** He slept, you see? Slept while he walked, slept while he talked to me. I must have been nothing more than a moment of his dream.

“She’s crazy.” I see you whispering to each other; I know what you’re saying. “The old story keeper has lost her mind. We have come to her for relief from the fire that is our lives and all she does is prattle and buzz like a dying fly in autumn. Won’t she tell us a story?”

**(speaks angrily, as if ready to leave)** To that I say... to that I say... **(pausing long, deciding that SHE cannot leave)** yes. Yes, I will do my duty, earn my keep in this tribe. I will weave you a blanket of words to keep you warm, for that is my calling. Yes!

Could I ask you, first, if something is possible? Do you think it possible that, just as the sun came too hot last spring and the rain kept back her gifts too long, too long, and the seeds we planted could only peek out their weak green shoots for no more than a day before they grew dull, and then brown, and then blew away to dust... is it possible that the stories can scorch and die inside a storyteller’s breast - every, every one?

I knew a boy. This very morning, he... **(suddenly puts on a mask of happiness and grows animated, almost manic, in her delivery)** But that is not a tale for you! No! No! Let us caper and jig! Let us get carried away in the joyful whirlwind! We will defy the winter and sing away the wars! Yes! Make springtime sprout early and call home the frogs to croak in the swamps, the birds to chitter and scold in the treetops! Jump up! Jump up and join me! We can... we can sing and dance until we have convinced the sun to push back the shadows! We will coax the very buds from the branches and make life burst through the snow! Won’t we? We will make life! We will make life!

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