

**THERESE**

The summer Daddy fell in the mine, I played in the backyard with my dog, Pepsi, and made doll clothes out of scraps of material until I lost my needle and thread in the grass. Then I caught grasshoppers and put them in a jar. The kids next door, wearing their bathing suits and carrying towels, left to go swimming in the river. I wished I could go too, so I went into the house to ask. Mother slept on the sofa with the venetian blinds pulled down and a face cloth over her eyes. Not wanting to wake her up, I waited in the doorway until she lifted her hand to move the face cloth, then I tiptoed to the sofa and knelt beside her. She didn't open her eyes. "I'm sick," she said.

"What's wrong?" I never understood my mother's illnesses. She didn't run a fever or vomit. And once when I was four she went into the hospital for a long time. I had to go live with Bupka, my grandma.

Mother pulled the cloth off her face and sat up. "I have to go," she said. "I have to go."

"I want to go swimming in the river with the other kids," I said.

"Not now," she said. "The river is too cold. You'll get polio." She stood up. In the dim room, her bright yellow dress reflected the light. Then she took my hand and said, "Promise me you won't go into the river. You can't swim. Promise."

"I promise." She was sick, so I couldn't argue with her. I had just turned eight. Most of the kids around here couldn't swim at eight. So that wasn't fair. But a promise was a promise.

"Good. I don't want to have to worry about that, too. Now, go get the brown suitcase."

"Where are you going?" I asked, but she walked across the hardwood floor toward her bedroom, concentrating the way she did when she had no energy. I pulled the scarred suitcase off the shelf in the basement and lugged it into Mother's bedroom. She'd pulled the shades there, too,