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Posturing

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RYAN
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posturing

1.

It happened in the parking lot after the game. The guy in red must have really taken umbrage at my wisecrack about better luck next year because the next thing I knew he was right up in my face. I could feel his breath coming hot and fast. I could feel myself tense against the chance of a blow.

The scene was hardly new: a Utah fan staring down a BYU faithful, the two colors vying for post-game supremacy, the rivalry flaring up like a helium burst only to settle down into yet another sunspot.

“What was that, BYU?” he said. “You wanna say it to my face?”

So I said it to his face, trying hard not to seem scared. We said it to each other, really, with a volley of expletives in which I took part (may God and the BYU Honor Code forgive me), and then a token shoving match, which ended as quickly as it began.

We stood there, maybe two feet apart, just seething and seething with anger. And while nonviolence is one of the soapboxes I carry around—in the long, spiritualist tradition of Martin Luther King and others—I confess that, right then, all I wanted was to take the shortcut between the spirit and the flesh and punch my accuser square in the jaw.

I didn't, of course. I don't think I've ever thrown a real punch in my life.

But I wanted to. That's the point. And that's what got me thinking: from whence comes such animosity between brothers? After all, if you prick us both, do we not both bleed—he in red and me, not in blue, but in red as well?

2.

Before she got her first period, my wife, then a little girl, thought women bled blue instead of red. She had seen the tampon commercials in which an eyedropper drops blue splotches of moisture onto the pad to demonstrate its powers of absorbance.

How could she have known that the bluish blood was not blood after all, but merely water mixed with food coloring?

Children are not given to understand fakery and sleight. No, such carnal understanding is the exclusive province of adults.

3.

In the fictive, slow-mo frames of memory, this is how the scene resolves: I'm staring down my Ute counterpart, both of us posturing violently but neither of us doing any actual violence, when a line from Mark Twain comes into my head, complete with accompanying adverbial phrase. Humans are the only animals that blush, Twain wrote in the jaded eloquence that would define his last years.

I think about Twain, about innocence and innocence lost, about my first paperback copy of *Catcher in the Rye*, which is still in one piece all these years later, its bright red cover shining out from the bookshelf.

I think about how Holden railed against phonies like me—posturing, frightened posers like me—and I blush at the thought.

I blush red, of course, the way I'm sure my momentary enemy would too, if only a child were here to remind us that even in our shame we are united.