

# chicken

**W**e've got paint on our jeans and in our hair — me and the new guy from B.C. All the other kids who were painting the church basement have gone home. He's tall and dark, the new guy, but not handsome. His mouth is too small and his hairline is already receding. But there's something about him. Marianne says he has a kid in Vancouver and got a letter last week from Regina that said, 'Dear Bram, You're going to be a daddy.' My mom would say being alone with a boy like Bram is asking for it.

"Ever played chicken?" Bram asks.

"I don't drive."

"I don't mean in a car."

"Oh. Like on railroad tracks? Where you have to stay on when the train is coming and whoever jumps off first is chicken?"

He shakes his head.

"What then?"

We face each other cross-legged. His lips aren't that small. "Put your finger here," he says. On his forehead. I do, and pull away. "No, you leave it there."

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"What if I'm too chicken?"

"Then the game's over."

"What game?"

He puts my finger back on his forehead and explains. "Now, as slow or as fast as you want, move your finger down until one of us says stop. Whoever says it first is the chicken."

What am I doing here? Me! No one would ever suspect me of even having thoughts of Bram's hands, those lips, how his jeans ride. And where they fold when he sits down.

My finger slips down the bridge of his nose. To the tip. Under it. On my finger his breath is hot. I can't breathe. Will he kiss my finger as it passes his lips, or lick it? Or will he just lean back, passive, while my finger trails past his lips, and neck, and down his chest? At his belt will I chicken out?

"Stop," he says.

I'm still at his top lip. I knew his lip for only a second. I don't want the game to be over.

It's not.

His finger slowly moves down my forehead and between my brows. So very slowly. My nose. Top lip. I expect him to stop, but he doesn't.

Slowly he pulls dampness from my bottom lip. I should say stop because who knows what danger lies in the well at the base of my throat? In the firmness of chest bone beneath his finger. Between my breasts that are aching — for what they don't yet know.

Bram's finger does not say stop moving down.

And I do not say stop.

My mother is right. I am asking for it.

