

ALONE IN THE BRIAR THICKET

J. BRUCE FULLER

1.

I screamed for hours.
When my voice went numb
I hung there sobbing
and small birds came back
to their nests.

I had woven myself in so carefully,
and with the lost ball deftly retrieved
turned to find myself caught.
The deer thicket swallowed me
beneath the thorn shadows.

2.

Papa showed me why
they're called king snakes,
under a pin oak
on the banks of Woolen Lake,
showed me how the rattlesnake
half-hidden in the king's mouth,
still shivered his rattles,
still rustled the leaves.

3.

The baby rattlesnake would not eat.
The jar where it was kept
was full of dead shiners,
a spot of blood near
the end of its yellow tail
where the rattle would have formed.
Why he showed me this
I am only beginning to understand.

4.

Somehow Papa heard me crying.

I glimpsed him through the trees
running across the field.
When he found me
his touch was softer than usual,
pulling my shirt free,
twisting my ankles
from the wiry brambles.

I could not walk
I had hung there so long.
He carried me to the house,
my head against his chest.