

I FOLLOWED HIM INTO THE WOODS

Debra Kaufman

He had a long stride and what Grandma, frowning, would have called *exuberance*. Something about him made black bees fly up from underground and sting me three times. *Run!* he said, and did, as venom flowed through my veins.

He stopped some fifty yards ahead and knelt beside a log. A violet butterfly fanned itself there. He told me its species name, said it like he was reading it off a flashcard, like I should thank him for it.

Have you ever been poisoned? he asked, breaking off a white mushroom. When air touched it inside, it turned blue, the same shade as his eyes.

We walked back to his shack. He said he was going to build a pyramid to live in, like Wilhelm Reich, who learned it from the ancient pharaohs. It slows down time, so you don't get old so fast.

I looked out the window. *Did you know porcupines could climb trees?* I asked. He shrugged and started sautéing the mushrooms he'd picked. He sang "Dear Doctor" by the Stones, off-key. His hair in a braid was longer than mine.

He served the mushrooms with wild chives and nasturtiums on tin plates. You'd think I'd have known better, but I ate a whole plateful. Then he pulled up a chair and stared into my face. I thought he was going to kiss me. But no, he was using my eyes as mirrors. I could tell by the way he was smiling.

We should have chamomile tea, he said, but didn't make any.