**The Basketball**

Phil Gallos

I was on my way to a meeting at St. Bernard's School, the old parochial school on River Street. It was one of those summery, hazy evenings when even the nearest hills seem to recede, bluish and indistinct. I was walking across the parking lot with Duke Derby—his real name; I’m not that clever.

We were talking and not looking at anything in particular when I noticed something going on beneath the basketball hoop in the paved-over play area. A boy and a girl were standing under the hoop. They were blond and well-muscled and maybe eleven or twelve years old. She was the taller of the two, and she was kissing him—not lots of little kisses but one long, solid kiss on the mouth that I suspect he will remember for the rest of his life.

She held his head in both her hands, held him tilted up to her. *She* was kissing *him*. I don't know what he was doing. Maybe he was simply trying to keep himself from being overwhelmed. He didn't put his arms around her. He didn't touch her at all, except with his lips; and that was her doing, not his. He still held the basketball under one arm.

Then he gave it up. He appeared almost to become limp. The basketball slipped away. It thudded a few times and rolled to the edge of the pavement. His arms seemed useless, as though he didn't know what to do with them. They just hung at his sides awaiting instructions that would never come. She kissed him harder, bending him back a bit more, turning him slightly, her hands moving his whole body merely by moving his head.

She released him abruptly; and they backed away from each other. He picked up the basketball and tucked it under his arm and began to talk about something, assuming an air of nonchalance as though he'd played this scene a million times. She stood quietly watching him. It was absolutely clear who was in command.

At the beginning of it all, I had said, "Hey Duke. Look at this;" but Duke just kept talking about something I wasn't hearing anymore because what I was watching would not allow me to listen.

When it was over, he said: "Did you say something?"

"Yeah. But it doesn't matter now. It's too late."

"What happened?"

"I can't really tell you. It was something you had to see."

So he picked up the thread of what he'd been saying, and we went to our meeting in the old school building.

When we came out, it was nearly dark. The boy and the girl were gone. The moon hung low in the thick summer sky. It was fat, dull orange, faintly lined.