

# UC Merced

## The Vernal Pool

### Title

Dove Blood

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5bk9n436>

### Journal

The Vernal Pool, 5(1)

### Author

Dimaandal, Patricia

### Publication Date

2018

### DOI

10.5070/V351038916

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Dove Blood  
By Pat Dimaandal

Last night, Mama told me she'll bring me to a nice place. She said lots of Christian parents bring their kids to this nature park. There would be hymns, campfires, and cool animals. We would also get to pray to God with the other families.

"Oh, I can't wait to bring you there! We'll have so much fun!"

Her hands were twitching and gripping hard at the car's steering wheel. I didn't like her face. The streetlights made her face different. Her eyes looked bigger, and the blue circles had red lines connecting them. The shadows underneath her eyes were bigger and darker; they looked more purple. Her lips were tightly fitted into a smile – a big smile. I don't remember any other time she smiled like that. Her ginger hair was tangled, and her red makeup was all over. The red was usually on the lips, but it was on her clothes too. She smelled a bit like metal.

"We'll eat at the buffet and meet other families!"

As she stared at the road like a doll, she continued to describe something we never had before. There would be plentiful food instead of dirty, empty plates; silence instead of hits and screams; and warm clothes instead of cold bruises. But, we should not have been out that late. The last thing I saw before I slept was a golden full moon shining on the highway to the nature park. God was probably on the moon watching us.

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Yet, I don't feel Him when I wake up in the morning mist. My eyes are blurry when they open. With the first few blinks, I see towering trees

covered in dark bark and green needles pointing to the sky; but, I can't see the sky – it is all gray. I stretch my hands upward to the trees. My pale arms are covered in black mud, red cuts, and the trees' needles. There is mud digging deep under my fingernails and the red places. It itches, but I don't feel like getting up. I pull at one of my long sleeves and stretch it out. There are tears, mud, and some bits of glass in my sleeves. I pick the glass out. Then, I push myself up, stretch, and throw the glass at the trees. While patting the dirt off me, I take in a couple breaths. The air is cold, but fresh. Though, the air seems odd. It smells more metallic. I sniff my armpits. It's from me. Mama doesn't like it when I stink like that, but I shouldn't focus on that right now. I need to find her.

The area around me is foggy and slightly bright. It should be morning. In front of me, there seems to be two pathways. On the left side, there is a leaf-covered path to more of the trees. I squint my eyes and stand on my tip-toes to see higher. There are some bushes, rocks, and shiny metal over there; the metal is in bits and pieces. It seems smoky. I could hear something wandering around there. It crunches the dead leaves in slow, heavy movements like a bear. Its roar sounds like one too. Then, the sounds somewhat settled into multiple, slow crunching sounds. On the right side, it looks like a bumpier path, but it's clearer; there is a patch of snow over there and the sounds of water. I don't think there is anything big there. I look at both pathways back and forth while plucking leaves and twigs out of my hair.

I lift my legs out of the mud and head over to the snow patch since Mama likes snow. If Mama was here with me, she would tell me that it would be too scary to go to the left side. She always wants to be on the safe side. As I walk over, more of the leaves and twigs stick to my brown

and black-mudded boots. It's heavy and I hear more sounds around me. Below me, I hear the scurry of a rabbit and rustles in the bushes and dead leaves. Above me, I hear the hoots and the flaps of a bird and its shadow flies above me to the snow patch. I want to meet the bird, so I quickly run over and stop myself before the snow patch.

Unlike the rest of the foggy forest, the snow patch is clear and seemingly untouched. It is pure white and glitters. I place one hand on the snow and watch it suck in my hand. Shivering, I continue to push my hand in until I touch the dirt. The snow goes up to my elbow. I don't like how this forest makes me feel so small, but at least I won't sink in the snow. I pull out my hand and wave the snow off me. Then, I take one big step into it and almost all my boot sinks in. I push on to the center of the snow patch with the big, crumpling sounds of my boots.

At the center of the snow patch, there is a small running trail of water. I cup my hands into the water and scratch the dirt off my fingers. I finish and rub my hands against my overalls. It is bad manners to still be dirty when you drink. I cup my hands in again and drink some of the water. It runs through my throat and cools it. As I slurp up more, the water splashes onto me. Panting, I crouch down to look in the river. My face is wet and there is mud speckled along with my freckles. I also have mud in my ginger hair and all over my blue clothes and brown boots. I stick my hand in the water again and wet my face and hair more. I try to rub the mud off me, but it's hard to get everything.

Mama doesn't like it when I'm dirty. She says we always must look clean. I have to look like her cute little boy, Aidan – who smiles a lot just like her pretty Mama. Mama says God wants us to always be pretty. I

practice my smiling with the river, but it hurts. I want to practice smiling with Mama, but it hurts. It hurts a lot and I don't like this.

As I practice smiling, I hear bird coos coming from the snow across the little river. There is a bird head popping out of the snow. Well, I think it is a bird head. It's small, white, has a beak, and beady black eyes.

"Birdie?"

I make clicking noises at it. The bird scooches out of the snow and shakes its body once it's out. It's a dove. Mama showed them to me before, but this dove is a fat baby dove. It slowly hops across the river and looks up at me. Its black beady eyes do not shine. It is like the men's eyes that Mama meets or her morning coffee – dark and bitter-looking.

I hold my hand close to the snow and hope it perches onto me. It tilts its little head and waddles to my palm. The little claws hurt, but it's ok. It shifts its weight onto my palm, closes its eyes, and rests there. I gently pet its head with a finger and it coos more. It's so pretty and white; I wish I was more like it. It would make Mama happier. She wouldn't hit me anymore. I pet more of its body. It's soft and squishy. While I pet the bird, I notice that it has some mud on its feathers and under its beak.

"Oh? Are you dirty too?"

I hold the bird with both hands and smile. Its eyes widen and it makes deep coos. The head keeps moving around all over the place.

"I'll clean you too."

I slowly move my hands down to the river and soak the bird. It coos loudly like a hymn at church. I scratch the dirty parts while it's in the water. The thick mud flows down. I rub its eyes since there seems to be dirt there too. As I look over its body, I see more dirt, scrub it, and put it deeper in the water: under the wings, between the claws, its belly, and tail feathers. It

doesn't coo as much as I clean it more. Though, my hands aren't clean anymore. They're sticky and red. They smell like Mama last night.

"God wants us to be clean."

I place the bird on the snow. It's whiter, but I don't know where the red on my hands came from. I rub my hands at the darker parts. The dove was pecking my hands a lot – it was a naughty bird. At least it is sleeping now. The bird is like me, I always get sleepy after cleaning. I place my hands in the water, but the water isn't as clear now. It's dark and I can't see my hands; but, I try to wash them as best as I can. I want Mama to be happy when she sees me.

I turn to look at the dove and touch it. It's very wet and cold. It also seems skinnier than before.

"Hey Birdie, are you awake?"

I grab it and move it around. Its head moves back and forth, and its eyes aren't black anymore. Its eyes are the same color as my hands. It doesn't wake up. I raise it to the sky and hope that God wakes it up.

"You're clean now. Why won't you wake up?"

I hear a crack from the dove. Looking down, I see the bird's head poking out of the snow. I sit down next to it and pet its head. Clean things don't last long.

"Birdie, don't ignore me."

I don't want to be alone again. It hurts. It hurts. I don't want to be the only one hurting. Please don't leave me.