

Gary Soto

**A SIMPLE PLAN**

*for V. M.*

To get rid of  
A dog, you put on  
Your brother's shoes,  
Slip into a shirt  
Hanging on a nail  
In the garage,  
Smack Dad's hair oil  
Into your dirty locks,  
The scent of confusion.  
You call, Let's go, boy,  
And with the  
Dog's neck in  
A clothesline noose,  
You follow your skinny shadow  
Down the street  
And cut through  
A vacant lot,  
Same place  
Where you stepped  
On a board with a nail  
And whimpered home,  
The board stuck  
Like a ski to your shoe.  
You walk past  
The onion field,  
Little shrunken heads  
Hiding hot, unshed tears,  
And stop at the canal.  
The dog laps water,  
Nibbles a thorn from his paw,  
And barks at a toad  
In the oiled weeds.  
The sun's razor  
Is shining at your throat,  
And wind ruffles  
Your splayed hair,  
Where a hatchet  
Would fit nicely—  
You feel the sharpened

Edge of guilt.  
Come on, boy  
You say, and leap  
On slippery rocks  
Set in the canal.  
You stop to  
Look inside an abandoned  
Car with a pleated grill—  
Three bullet holes in the door  
On the driver's side.  
You think, Someone  
Drove this car  
Here and killed it.

You brave another mile.  
When you arrive,  
The dog prances with  
Joy. What is it?  
A jackrabbit in  
The brush? Feral cat  
Or stink birds? You pick up  
A board, one just a little  
Smarter than the one  
That nailed you with pain.  
With all your strength,  
You hurl it end over  
End. The dog knows  
What to do. He runs  
After it. Time for you to spin on  
On your heels and, arms  
Kicked up at your side,  
Lungs two bushes  
Of burning fire,  
Get back home.  
That night it's steaks  
On a grill, a celebration  
Because someone  
In the family won  
A two-hundred dollar lottery.  
You eat to the bone  
And then nearly  
Choke on the gristle.  
You drag your full  
Belly to the front  
Yard, and stake  
Yourself on the lawn.

The neighbor's porch light  
Bursts on, and a shooting  
Star cuts across the sky—  
You touch your throat  
And think, Something just died.  
You lay with hands  
Laced behind your head.  
Somewhere up  
The block a dog barks.  
My dog is out there,  
You think, and behind  
Your closed eyes  
You see him, a nail  
In his bloody paw,  
A board in his mouth,  
And shooting stars  
Passing over the curves  
Of his wet pupils.  
If you were a better person,  
You would stab  
Your own foot  
And let him pick up a scent  
Back home.