

Free!

Volume 1
Number 1 *Free!*

Article 25

2-1973

A True Childhood Romance

Bo Michaels
University of Northern Iowa

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/free>

 Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#), [Fiction Commons](#), [Literature in English, North America Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Copyright ©1973 Student Board of Publications, University of Northern Iowa

Recommended Citation

Michaels, Bo (1973) "A True Childhood Romance," *Free!*: Vol. 1: No. 1, Article 25.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/free/vol1/iss1/25>

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Publications at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Free! by an authorized editor of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.

Offensive Materials Statement: Materials located in UNI ScholarWorks come from a broad range of sources and time periods. Some of these materials may contain offensive stereotypes, ideas, visuals, or language.

A True Childhood Romance

by
Bo Michaels

The bright light of the grass made John blink, blink, eclipsing two planets in his eyes. It was a good day for fishing. From his wagon he could see all around him the green skin of the yard where the big ones lie waiting to be teased, hooked and caught from holes that only he knew. A dump truck wind scooped a fine spray of grass and leaves through his hair. He rocked back and forth with the current, lightly sifting the fishing pole through his fingers like flour. He sucked on the summer air as a cherry malt peering through the straw telescope far away to the other end at his life. He realized that he would soon be approaching the middle age of his childhood. He thought about his three brothers. His brother David was a doctor but since he was only twelve years old and still going to school and playing baseball, he was only a part-time doctor. His second brother, Shelia, was really a girl and he didn't see her very often because she wasn't born yet. And his third brother was the one he thought the most about since his name was John too and he usually went fishing with John but today he was alone, floating and listening to the ground slap, slap the sides of his wagon. The birch trees whistled a cradle song. He liked to doze while he waited for the nibbles.

John woke with a twitch to see his pole spinning like a top and then vanish over the side into the green below. It was the first pole he had ever lost. It was almost as if the ground had opened a mouth and swallowed his pole, licked its lips and smiled contentedly. The smile faded into John's reflection frowning at himself. What to do, what to do, he asked himself. Even though he couldn't see the bottom he didn't think the ground was too deep where his pole had gone down. He would swim in after it. He pulled off his tennis shoes and socks and lowering himself slowly like a flag, he slid noiselessly into the warm ground. A wave rolled over his head tickling his spine, making his body jiggle like jelly. Overhead the sky was as blue as tea cups. A bird curlyqued in a leafwind. The ground settled and gently smacked its lips to the sides of the wagon. He filled his lungs and dove deep.

The ground was murky and hard to see through but John swam down and down, sunlight occasionally sinking beneath the surface like totem poles. He swam down and down and when his lungs were like glass about to shatter, he touched bottom. John squished melted chocolate between his toes. High overhead his wagon looked like a door to the air.

Swiveling his head, he looked for the missing pole. He tried to walk on the bottom bouncing like a cotton fluff. No pole. He saw a light ahead shimmering in the underground currents like a dancing candle flame. He swam toward it and as he got closer the light changed from silver to a rainbow ice cream cone to a goldsparkle girl. She was naked and her skin glowed like new moons her hair raining over her breasts like wheat around new mown haystacks. Her body curved in swaying fields and an alfalfa bed was blooming between her hips. Her eyes reached for John like fingers softly touching his body and drawing him closer. John saw that she was holding his fishing pole in one hand and in the other a colored ball with his fish-hook caught in one side.

"John" she said, "I have your fishing pole and a gift." John was startled to hear her speak so clearly underground.

"John" she said, "Take your fishing pole and this gift." She held the ball close to his eyes so that he could see the many colors dance like raindrops. "This is a planet, John. Some day it will be a world, alive in your hand. Take care of it. It is yours." John took it in his hand turning over and over its lightness.

"Are you God?" John opened his mouth to say, choking on bits of loamy claydirt as air bubbles floated past his head rising like apple pies. She threw her head back laughing and in the opening between the hedgerows of teeth, John saw a playground in her mouth. Then she pulled him to her and kissed him on the lips tasting of icicles and fruit trees and feathers.

John woke in a meadow. The sun was rolling down like an orange. It was time to bring the sheep in. He stood and rose high toeing the ground, staff in hand.

He awoke in his father's garden. The tips of olive trees threw pieces of shade on his face. It was late afternoon, the rose bushes were beginning to curl in on themselves. John turned over on grassdew. It would be time to bathe soon. He adjusted his sandals, pulled his tunic tight and arose.

He awoke on the mountain. He must have slept all afternoon, he thought, it was almost dark. It had been an exhausting climb but from this height, the forest rumped like a blanket of pines, spread from sky to sky. He would like to live here, he thought. He closed his eyes, imagining the house he would build.

When he finally woke, he pulled up his coffee can anchor and rowed his wagon back to the sidewalk, hitching it to an elm tree. He stretched, shuffling his bones and muscles like a deck of cards. It had been a nice day. He smiled to himself, a half moon rising on his face. The sidewalk was still warm from the after-

noon sun and his feet sunk in it like marshmallows. He started walking toward home, fishing pole in one hand, colored rubber ball in the other. He decided to put the ball in one of his pockets, but which one? They all carried valuables. His right front pocket was stuffed full with his fishing bait which consisted of, considering what was biting; jelly beans, comic books, cherries, green apples, baseball cards, bubble gum—used and unused, pennies, a knife that wasn't really a knife but an a) screw driver b) belt-hole puncher c) cork screw d) fingernail file e) pairing blade f) bottle opener, bottle caps and a traveling zoo.

His back right pocket was empty but it was his emergency pocket which would hold anything in an emergency, usually reserved for whatever he caught when he went fishing but a colored rubber ball was not that much of an emergency so he would leave it empty for now.

His back left pocket was ripped and had a hole in it the size of an ocean so that didn't really count as a pocket.

His front left pocket, he remembered, was also full at the time, but not really too full, so he guessed he could put that ball in there. Sighing as he turned up the walk to his house, he shrugged his shoulders and dropped the ball into his pocket. The pocket with the universe in it.

