

## KISS THE GIMP

*I*t was the night of the last dance at Easterbrook High, dusk, late June, and Franny Hall was looking out her bedroom window to check if choir practice had let out at St. James Episcopal Church next door.

No one was on the street except Mr. Goodly, walking his elderly basset hound in the front garden of the church.

Franny hurried down the stairs, checking herself in the mirror in the front hall, something she had been doing recently as if expecting a stranger reflected in the glass. That's how she sometimes felt, a stranger to her own self, and was almost surprised to see the same straight black hair in a ponytail, the same freckles and wide-set eyes she recognized as Francine Hall of Easterbrook, Ohio, U.S.A.

She opened the front door, calling to tell her mother that she was leaving.

"I'll be back by ten-thirty," she said.

An upstairs window flew open and Margaret Hall leaned out.

“Phone us to pick you up,” her mother said. “I don’t want you to walk home alone in the dark.”

As if anything ever happened in Easterbrook, even in the dark.

“Things happen,” her mother had said at dinner that night. “Especially at the high school dances.”

By the time Franny reached the sidewalk, choir practice had let out and so she walked quickly, as quickly as she could under the circumstances, hoping to escape the choir boys in her class who had a habit of making fun of her.

Turning right at the end of her driveway, she headed in the direction of her cousin Eleanor’s house, but too late. Already the boys had spilled onto the sidewalk — Andy Freeze and Tommy Wade loping by her, brushing against her shoulder as they passed, their hands in the pockets of their jeans.

“Franny Banany,” Tommy said. “Heading to the dance?”

“I am. With Eleanor and Boots,” Franny said, her stomach tightening, thinking she should have said nothing at all.

*Don’t give those silly boys the time of day,* her mother would have told her.