

DAVID WAGONER

*By the Empty Stone*

He walks away with the sword. He's smiling innocently, and the rest of us are left to watch him already growing larger than life, already being fawned over by an entourage, whose elbows bump and gouge to claim their places in a royal procession.

Some who lost are running to catch up, to be dogs under his table, scrapping for bones and droppings, and I'm left all to myself by the empty stone. There's nothing magical about the hole where the sword was. I can feel the ordinary roughness of the basalt. No lizard or wizard bites me, and nothing at all explains what kept that sword he's waving now stuck where it was for years against our wills, against our twisting and yanking. The obvious answer is *we* loosened it for him. He was made king by the luck of the draw, no matter how willingly he put it back when they cried *Foul!* and no matter how many times he took it out again when none of us could. It was good timing or blind luck. And though some others who lost are straggling back to their cows and their milkmaids, to their hearth sides and kitchen stuff, to swilling their sows like the hogs they are, I'm staying here all night, if I must, to prove it was a trick.