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JMF -

TRIAL PROOF

ALLEN

FEVER OF CREATION

Art to an artist is fever,
Burning and rising
Freezing and falling --
Always extreme, but never the norm:
The Fever of Creation
Out of which is born
The finished canvas,
The artist's child.
Child prodigy? Perhaps.
Time, not connoisseurs will tell.
Whether fame or death will sever
The artist from his child,
The labor lasts forever
And birth is never mild.

--Maisie Elaine Buerk

BELOVED STRANGERS

Beloved strangers:

I grieve that I cannot tell you--
what?

The throat-catching music of my life.

The look in old houses' dead eyes,
the speech of doors.

The ache and pull of a word
meaning what it is willed to mean,
perfect, costing
everything.

The way a brown bird rising
lifts all things.

That is why I search faces,
hands, eyes,
the whole city of earth
for one whose canticles have been mine,
whose summers have smelled of the same grasses;
who has lain, even for a moment,
by the loud flowering of the same hypnotic sea
and sensed me there, waves or worlds away.

--Marty L. Adkins

MARY LOU --SPELLED WITH AN "I"

For eighteen years I had been Mary Lou Fouts, daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Ernest Fouts of West Ninth Street, sister of Tubby Fouts (better known as Andrew to academic circles both in high school and college), my brain child brother I was the younger sister who could work marvels with a pencil or even a paintbrush.

Just because I live in a small town with a population of somewhere near 4,000 doesn't mean that everybody needs to know when I cut my first tooth or when I started to walk or that I was one of the odd kids in the world who walked before she crawled. Those were the kind of things that the older ladies liked to dig up when they caught me in my dad's office or saw me out in the town. Like I get real tired of hearing how sweet I looked toddling around Daddy's office with nothing on but my dignity.

Of course, they could tell I had once had beautiful blonde hair before it had turned the unsightly and most uncomplimentary brown that it was. They could also know, but keep beneath their fashionable new hats, that I wouldn't dare put a lightener on it like some of my, quote, friend unquote, had done. The reason was my lovely doctor-father who hated the thoughts of seeing his only daughter bald.

So, I had been Mary Lou Fouts, spelled with a "y," M-a-r-y, and I had always intended to be Mary Lou Fouts. That doesn't mean that I was planning on staying single, no, because someday I want to get married, but it means that I wanted to keep my identity. That meant being Mary Lou who smiled sweetly at old ladies and spoke softly to them. It meant working for hours on a paper to turn in for class and then seeing your best friend get the A because she had copied half of yours the hour before in study hall. It also meant letting Teddy Rogers walk Karen Rush home from school and then call you up to see a movie because Karen was going to be at her grandmother's. It meant being a buddy to all of your friends -- male-type friends, that is. It meant furnishing them cookies and cokes and your backyard for a game of softball with old Fouts running out with the drinks. Always a buddy -- a friendly pat on the head because you're such a swell kid.

That was what it meant to be Mary Lou Fouts for
teen years. Of course, after my senior year in high
school we didn't get together for softball games, but I
was the wettest shoulder in Rockport. More boys cried
on my shoulder than I care to remember. Sometimes I
wondered if I just wouldn't float away.

Like Teddy Rogers, for instance. I liked him.
My father did. He was good looking, somewhat taller than
me, black hair and blue eyes, and just the greatest
personality. Did he like me? Are you kidding?

We dated, off and on, when Karen didn't or wouldn't
date with him. I always jumped at the chance, and it
didn't seem to bother Karen. I didn't care if it was just
me washing his '48 Ford -- a beautiful old thing,
painted of maroon and battered, but beautiful. I just wanted
a chance to be close to him so Mary Lou would dress with
the greatest of care in a pair of faded old cut-off denims,
a white shirt, a squirt of perfume, a little bitty one, and
then out to wipe big white soapy suds all over the beloved
car -- Hulda. Somewhere along the way the perfume got
mixed up with the soap and Teddy never noticed. I didn't
care because, well, heck, Teddy had asked me to help wash
the car. That was special. Karen hadn't helped.

"You're a good kid, Mary Lou," Teddy would say.
"I'll buy you an ice-cream cone." And a friendly pat on
the head was the reward.

Maybe it is because I am so short that my friends
developed this mad habit of patting me on the head. That could
have been the reason, but no matter, it always infuriated
me to the end. It still does. But the pat -- oh well, I
loved it. Teddy patted me on the head. That was
love.

That was also high school. You know -- the days of
softball games, excitement over the prom - to which I
didn't go - and graduation, signing your year book and
that. It was fun -- for everybody else but me. I
stayed at home with a book, reading and writing, and sometimes
worked out with a new oil painting. That was all the
excitement I ever got messed up in.

Since this seems like a true story -- a story of life,
I'll go on by saying that I graduated from high school with
a straight A average, valedictorian of my class, like my
mother before me. Then I entered college, just like Tubby,
not like Tubby.

"Hi!" I remember saying to my new friend, alias roommate. "I'm Mary Lou Fouts."

She smiled, or at least I pretended it was a smile. "I'm Candace - Candy - Kromer. You can have the bed over here. I want near the window. Since we're down here in this dungeon," she referred to the basement, "I may want to slip in and out of that thing."

Maybe my mouth fell open ever so slightly, or maybe a lot, because she laughed.

"Wake up, little Mary Lou Fouts. It is done. You may try it before too long." She shook back her long chestnut brown hair. "Have a cigarette."

"No. Thank you."

"You don't smoke?"

"No. Not really." Daddy would have killed me. All my friends smoked, but not Mary Lou.

"Drink?"

"No."

"So, do you do anything interesting?"

"Paint."

She laughed loudly then, and I wondered what was so very funny. "Very good. Art major?"

"Yes."

"Strange." She seemed to be surveying me. I knew that she was taking my conservative cotton dress in stride. "Only child?"

"No. I have a brother. Andrew. He's a chemistry major -- has his degree, working on his master's."

"Oh, lovely." Candy ground out her cigarette in an empty coke cup.

"What's your major?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?" I looked at her strangely, I know, because she smiled. She had an impish smile.

"You'll be all right after a while, Mary Lou Fouts. Candy turned back to her unpacking. I opened a suitcase. It didn't strike me at all what she meant by that. That was a year ago -- I was eighteen, and then nineteen.

Yes, Marilou Fouts, you'll be all right after a while. That's Marilou spelled M-a-r-i-l-o-u now. Somehow, that old spelling just didn't seem right for the new girl.

I had planned on always being Mary with the "y." Remember what I told you about her? She had brown hair, remember, not platinum streaked, and . . .



3/5

MCDANIEL 69

Well, since I'm telling this story, I just might as well get back to it. It will sound hypocritical because well, to be perfectly honest, I guess it is sort of that way.

For the first two months I held on pretty well to the old Mary Lou. Like every girl at the U, I met a boy who turned out to be just another one of those, and my shoulder was just as soaked as it was in Rockport. He liked some girl back home, and old, good old Mary Lou showed him how to re-do it. Beautiful!

"You've got to learn, Mary Lou." Candy sat me down one day on the hard bunk bed with her zany poster of another world staring me in the face. "You've got to learn before it's much too late."

"You don't know, Candy."

"I don't know. Hell!" Her use of language was beautiful. I always had to hesitate before one little damn could leave my lips.

"Really." I sobbed a little. "It is no use. Nobody will ever like me. I'm no good. I'm just a stupid little shrimp. Boys just use me for a crying towel." Somewhere I had heard that. "I'm not like everybody else." My hands reached out and picked up a pack of cigarettes.

"Go ahead. Take one."

"I don't smoke."

"You've never tried it."

"No." I shook my head. That stupid-looking brown hair swung in front of my face, and its brownness blurred my whole vision for a moment. I hadn't tried a lot of things.

"Well, go ahead, dumb head, have you ever tried anything?"

* * * *

I'm a phoney. Doug doesn't know that. He thinks, he thinks that I like what I'm doing. A can of beer sits in front of me; a cigarette burns out in the ash tray, and I laugh at his jokes. Later we will leave and go to his apartment, and I'll pretend some more. Damn you, Candy Kromer. No, damn yourself, Marilou Fouts. Marilou spelled with an "i".

"Laugh, Marilou. You're not having fun. That's the reason I always like to see you, Marilou -- you're full of fun."

"Doug."

"Don't get serious. I couldn't stand you serious." His eyes narrowed as he gazed at me through a cloud of cigarette smoke.

"You couldn't stand me anyway."

"That's true, too." He halfway smiled, but I knew what he meant it.

I like Doug. That's really bad. Doug loves someone else. Doug's practically engaged.

"Damn you, Doug Jordan." I cried. "All you get out of me is a good laugh." I wanted to walk out of there, but my head was much too wobbly, and I couldn't. "You don't care. Nobody cares."

"Marilou." He laughed. "Don't get serious. I told you not to like me, didn't I?"

I nodded. He had. One night he had told me not to like him. I didn't -- not then.

"Okay." He nodded. "I know what you are, Marilou. You're a seasoned girl. You've been around. This crap about being innocent -- ha. Let's just have fun. No more seriousness."

I wanted to scream. It was too late now. Rockport, Teddy, Candy, somebody help me.

That was a few months ago. If I had known that I could fall flat in my role as number one actress, I'd have just quit a long time ago. I fell -- but I fell for Doug and no in turn had fallen for somebody else.

It's Christmas. I'm home. I'm nineteen now. For eighteen years, I was May Lou with the "y." Today . . .

Mother, Daddy, and the big brother are putting up the tree. I'm in my room staring out of the window. This holiday will be so perfect for real people. Doug's getting engaged. I'll be left come the new year. There's nothing to do about it now.

I'll go back to school, still being Marilou with the "i," and I'll drink gin and rum, and I'll smoke, and I'll read Lenny Bruce and Norman Mailer, and for hours I'll sit and philosophize with my friends about death and life and sex and love. Doug won't know because I'll never see him again. He'll go on believing that I'm someone else, but only Mary Lou and Rockport will really know.

It is dusky dark outside. Across the street I can see Mrs. Roberts turning on her Christmas tree lights. I don't feel too much -- just an emptiness as I sit here waiting. Waiting for Teddy. For some reason he's comin over tonight. Maybe we'll wash his car so he can take Karen out tomorrow night. That's probably what he wants to do since he said he wanted it to be like old times.

Shaking my hair back out of my eyes, I stand up. My jeans are filthy now. I've worn them for four days, and the western jacket is grimy. Maybe I should change. After all this is what art majors wear at school. Maybe a conservative blue skirt and sweater would be better since, after all it is Rockport. Teddy won't notice, and my perfume will be sucked away with the grime from the car, but still, maybe I'll change. Yes, that would be more Rockport, and Mary Lou spelled with the "y."

--Patricia Smith

THE HARP

My child's strong fingers stretch to pull the strings
bars of her prison, soul spinning free.
Her tender arms enclose the cage of gold,
moving wall of sound.

To fly from;
Return to.

--Georgia Hill

throw away synthetic arrows,
Amoretto

oyster-plastered walls enclose us with
paradoxical
protection
bombarding nerve-pricked reflections of
oyster
abdomens.
one, two, three, see -- like four
toy
soldiers
they shield us from ravaged fields of
pickled
pepsi-cups.
locked in fiery embraces our
mingling
minds
march out grappling, imploring like
hungry
men
and splash the blood-stenched air with
splatters of
antiseptics.
we dare not tear the finger-tipped silence
trickling along
each vertebraed-hill
with useless utterances... for
words
constrict.
perhaps our germ-infested bodies of
mummied
brains
an engender one arsenal of an
everlasting
yea
in a GI-joe-go, tv-tube world where
peanut butter
sandwiches
at jelly men.

--Edwina A. Doyle

BLOODMEADOW

I

Under the quilting mat of the meadow, the soil
Lies shackled in its bed unresting, bound up, unable to
Heave off the cover and the yoke of its grassy strangle.
Through the taut bend and plodding roll of the hollow,
The flexed brawn of the turf tugs its breath from the
Arrested clodding of the earth, uneasing the drain from
The mangled husk.

Poured and spread about the grazing gnaw
Of the creased bog, sheathing, the tanned folds drape
The flutes in a scudding flow of molten pelt, the wound
In the riven loam trussed and mending.

Worn raw

In a trouncing stamp of hooves and flying maw, the trapped
Mold whines, the stuffed wad and shred of marl strewn
And unspooled.

Ridden of the crust of the tallowy shawl
And the winding clutch of its tangled stain, rent into and
Throttled by the curdling trudge and battered flog
Of the udder swelling muzzle, the fertile rind of the ground
Pains for the bedding flue of culm to root and pit again
Its spermed pod, pains, bare, for the dewlapped wattle
Of the meadow.

Under the cudding wrap and peel of the clewed lea,
The pocked frame and girder of rock lies pinned and
Unshifting in its graveled marrow.

Malm boned, the webbed

Maze of the jacking plies of shale plait and back
The quitched berth of the papping weald, keystoneing the
Staved mead.

Twined round the trestling spine of the packed
Bed, thatch locked, the shrubbed mane and tuft of the wood
Bristle in the browsed and brambled stubble of the thicket,
The tressed nap of sedge and furze splayed along the brake.
Settled in the cormed pile of the bosked heath, peat laced,
The reaving kine lie tethered and sated, drowse eying
The nimble kernel rustling in the grove.

Knoll mounted

And vine cleft, the caned and rushy climbers on the barrow
Peer from the knobbed perch down the straddling brae
Of hillock and node, scanning the swallowed clabber
Of the pasture.

Stumbling down the shank of the clambered
Mound, lapsed into the thrall of the crock curbed basin,
The threading sog seeps through the marbling ground, the
Sloping woodbine unsodden along the chase.

Scuttling past
The rued and bending banks, the fluxing rivulets gather
The tithes of the meadow.

Bulbing above the chafe and raking churn
Of the frothy spate, clotting, the seamed buds unreel in
Powdered shoots and dust the swale, the upsprung seed
Drooping stale and unsown.

Primed and strung along the tie
Of the pulped stem, the spun germ lies fast and furled
In the sprout, staved by the spin, clad and unyielding,
The mewed pith and strain of the knotting gisting unbreached.
Hued in cream and dogwood flush, the lilting garland tinged
And delled cups the glenned and gullied miresup held in
The tinted mesh and troughed sway of the daled folds.

Rill
Wrung, the brindled grounds of silt unfondled from the sieved
And festered plumules on the felled sidehill in the fallowed
Halter of the field steep hamstrung in the pothole of the
Fescue, drowned barren on the leavened sill.

Unladled above
The coppiced stand and tendriled syphon of the galed bin,
Pent and looming quick laden on the purling tendoned paste
Of the lichen, the unplied casing bloat plugged in the briered
Holt and mantled broth of the meadow.

Pitched aloft wreathing the swathe of the laved wold,
Overcasting the locust hived and goldenrodded sward,
The cowling drift of the sky wafts in its throes the feather
Lauded writhe of a thrush borne alone and unsung on the
Warbling breath of the draft, peeling tousle winged for the
Wildwooded brood.

Wending aloud on the plumed seine and hoist
Of the weather, skimming in the wambling the quilled and
Catkined whorl of the hawthorn and the rathed and windfelled
Wildberried bush, a she bird hymns mateless in the wind of her
Sail, buoyed and tossed broken fluttering in the flung
Chirruped wind.

Fanned above the hedged till on the slip
Of the breasted down, raised tailspun on the fluffed weave
And beak lifting flurry of the spumed billowed ferry,
Dovetailed looping, two sung flits dip tumbling through the
Thrummed sway and thrushbeat give of the din, pinioned falling
Through the billed steering whir in a married whirl.

In
A poised taloned spiral fast over the wilt of the birds, slung
Hushed in a craving dangle, the lone hung stalk of a kite
Flares hovering in a biding stilted glide over the nestled
Meadow.

II

The foxgloved aviary, coveyed in the bloodrooted,
Mapled, and mayappled covert, snug cushioned and tulip
Abreast, the ferndaled nide in the driftwood contorted
Twist and ford of the headway dawn crib the wrenned
And finching suckled hatching in the nursed piping
Of the rayed and cockcrowed morning brought fathered out
Of slumber to roar the fledged light.

The fleeced blaring
Grope and filmy run of the blind membraned eyes
In the always brittle flail of winglets, futile in the grubbed
Infant flapping, tried in a sag of nettles under the havoc
Hunger of an unseen pincered vigil, fold and enfold all
The callow wayward innocence and the one and all storked
And broken fevered bluster of daythroated promise.

The
Offered up umbra drawn goodly out of a silken dormant pend
And bob laced makeshift of gossamer in an idle spiraled
Crawl, the betrothed sleuth tread of a moth full tilt
On the sheen of sunraised vows veils down from the roused
Eloping amble to the come what will and always does lined
Strain of the pennyriled bed where what is engulfingly bred
Is bred in and out of the spell of flowering wedlock and
The wizard burning of the bridal knell.

The now no longer
Held at ravenous bay pommeling tusked mosaic of the font
Winged coupling in the shorn pious glean and prod
Of the gospel rite, swept wide in the groomed hied stray
And boon of the nectared marauding flight made gorged above
The just out and offered gift now taken and led in a fled
Ranging dance out of the swilled light, repairs from
The table of the twobacked repast.

The spindrift theft

Of the tussocked spue in the beat by beat made off with
Gait of the vanned thief, lamming in a sole sprint through
The ravaged aura and tussle of the plundered spinneys,
And the fed shaking toddle and clawed shedding stumble
Of the plumose nestling, sprigged lifting out of the wan
Leafy damp to break the groundling trance flung casting
Down in a wile net by the sundering circling glede, tell on
Wands of keyless light of the sky lying windshake ajar in
The meadow.

Simmered in an ivy cling through

The tapering zenith and the cusped thorny brawl of the
Locusts, the bell tongued clusters of cameo hangfire
Give up in a shimmering taunt a dive of scent that
Windy crooks the whiffed limbs and whets the spines.

The

Spent dropped broil of the fragrance, eased branchy down
From the tortile lynch of the bushed treebark in a leave
Taken sloth cumbering onto the piebald swelter of the
Croft, unmindful makes the all handed grasses wild and
Wooly winded whiptwirl hare for a faith and calm run
Firefly amuck before the slugged sultry drift of the
Scent, the curry stroke of whidding upheaval a balmed
Swagger.

The rash, dogdayed wild sculled sowing of oats
In the cockproud skitting croon and pout of the loud
Nebbed, slapdash hoed and thrashed in a vandaling ruck
Through and amid the cockleburred prickling of the
Greenwood sash, wastes beneath the heydayed preen and
Shuffle of the hubbub beaked.

The blithe darting frisk

And buck of the fopped and feathered stunting rogue in
The heat of showy prime through the scamped and humid
Wood fumes tireless under the clenching loathe and stare
Abide above the parched wet and jerk of the billed
Raillery, deaf to the glazed slaying gaze astride above
The chirrs and trills.

Clycyed and unstinted through the

Lush lying keep down the valed well of the underwood sail,
In an uptaken saunter through the scented mist of the
Brush, the leafy riffle and drift of the full foundering
Riffraff dust winged keels slack loose the drubbed dined
Sift of the grains that hale heavy favored to the start
Of growth in a rife sigh.

In the full well and well enough
Ruffed grouse coat of the mud and moss thick woodland
Stand, in the greensward run and lily daubed slide of the
Moleskin breasted fields, in the mayfly and mantis praised,
Dell banded farm of leaves within the rayed are of the
Trees, a vein of light sullies before the sun disked pulse
Of the meadow.

The bay and buff spired dye O russet heading the mott
Wrinkle of the wald, and the frecked duff spawn brimmed sundry over
beneath

The crow foot flaking of the frond chime in florid gusts the dry
Buckling whimper of the marsh willows walking bleared.

In a runed
Languished sever breakneck blown in a wheezed feral prattle, the
Windburn of lamina crop crimpling pared to the duned warped molder
Of the gill.

The skelter slaked splay, bellows basked, settles in a
Stiffening smoulder and pounce in the mosswood kilned woe of the ru
The cramped pennoned gruel of the miller, tapped and tottering cank
Doused in the limp cancer pant of the mistral bolster, humbled lumb
In an ill wind head wind loiter, checked and falling foul asunder
Through the crippling murk of the gloam, the hazed ailing culprit
lepered

Aching in a punished downbreaking.

Shirred and shrinking in a wither
Crimp, the drab and dun doubledealt with leg spread drawn pucker of
Ramage nods crumbling as the stark, ash winged meandering elder pal
Adrift wavers in a worn rant.

In a bised shamled totter lean winged
Brandished in a wormed sluggard falter above the doted fell and bus
the

Hoar feathered bust of the laggard, hemorrhage burrowed on the chaf
Aching whimple of the darkling wind wresting, toils in a racked gra
Pat through the roiled and turbid dusk numbed and galled.

Thewed
And sinewed in a slow plunging fall, raining and falling on the tra
Clipped winged wind wheeled through the windmill dark, the mute arc
Kestrel plummets bared on the ill taken unspared slow crutched
the

Broken lull, the strangling, snapped still boned grappling a chill
Rain of down over the wizened urn of the meadow.

The goose flesh nipped dirge of the rime along the
stark

Darkened tree shells climbing, and the skeletal drifts of snow
In a barren sift through the husked wood's wake reel in
Sermoned rolls ice elegy whitened, the loured wind swooning
Through the brittle treed clatter.

The webbed limpid shudder and
Gelid held hang of the snowdrift lace of feathers, snowcloaked
Winter down on the snow craped biered verge in a slow flaked
Lament and fall, the white flocked wind wind of the cereclothed
Fields a harrier flurry.

Under the loping surplice of snow,
Bleak and flake tasseled, deep danced woods buried
Dance, stilled ice dust wings wing tatted through the slow tombed
Cold, all and all the frozen faiths kneel for faith down and
Chant, and whiten, and burn for the last rite's sake before the
Phoenix pyre of the meadow.

Wood Shrine
(Epilogue)

Always the ending, near knelt remembering wade
And wail abreath upon the agrieved strains of a prayer
Plumed lamenting heron's hail, sad aisling through the
Knell craped flush of the wickt altar reeds grief gailed
Before the ferned and sloe decked chancel crags, foretell
The plaint bowed crane's bereaved return.

Again the looned
Refrain, come descending round again in a lean railed
Requiem striding, ringing trains fin rung and craned
Among the devout loud spangle of the mourning rushes,
Sung stooped well out of a clergy of wings and a choir
Quilled beak of sackcloth and ashes.

Ever and at all the
Wooded water chapels shoals the bird wreathed anthem
Sobbing, ever and always through the stork etched water's
Brume mounts the offered psalming, the walking hymnal
Belling, the eucharist winged calling, reverent telling
And ascending in a heron mantled hallowed rising out of
The sanctum shallows, slow shed and priestly doving ever
And unending through the sermoned ongoing of the graven
Wood, the kneeling sanctity of the canticle winged
Tolling again a gracecrossed sailing trace across the
Always upgiven pulpit of the meadow.

--Robert Pollock

MR. MCGRUDER'S WOODS

When I was seven years old and enrolled in St. Mary's Elementary School, I used to swing at recess. The swing had no earthly limits. Often it sent me soaring among the big buffed clouds. And if I stretched out my arms I could catch a handful of velvet sky and bring it back to earth. Holding that bit of sky made me smile as if even my stomach were curving itself into a smile.

High in the air I could see the tree tops of Mr. McGruder's woods, which lined the far side of the playground. The very top of each tree painted the sky's edge with vibrant clusters of green and I thrilled at the luxury of climbing into the clouds and sailing over the forest. Never had I seen Mr. McGruder. But, instinctively he was a benevolent gentleman who grew trees just so children could play beneath the limbs that spired out in perfect geometric symmetry.

Inside the woods I could close the surrounding world and lapse into my own realm of transcendent loneliness. But I was really not alone. As I ran untamed and hysterically happy, the long fingers of the wind caught my auburn hair and braided it with breathing whispers. And then I would talk to Jesus and thank him for the beauty of His sky.

One autumn afternoon I looked down from the clouds and was surprised to see the lean figure of my father. His large hands which usually waved a husky cigar were sunk deep in the pockets of his dark suit. He squinted up at me and sunshine splashed off the lenses of his glasses, scattering reflections into the cotton clouds.

I eased my swing back to earth and without a word I walked away from St. Mary's. The squealing sounds of children playing tag and shooting cat-eye marbles made me want to turn around and wave goodbye. But it was as if someone else were controlling my body and forcing me to follow the deep sad steps of my father.

We drove away from the playground and I wondered if he were ever going to speak. He looked like he was talking inside his mind--struggling to bring the words to the surface. His forehead lined up tightly, then relaxed and lined up again. Widely opening his dark eyes he appeared to be combing the night for a lost object. Then he blinked and peered at the ouli stretch of highway through half-lowered lids. I thought he looked very tired.

After several minutes I wished he would say something. Yet the silence was strangely peaceful and I secretly feared its interruption. Finally he cleared his throat, glanced at me momentarily, and paused. I waited.

"Elizabeth, your brother died today in Harrisburg Hospital."

The words passed over my head as if they had been spoken in another language. I was a foreigner who could not comprehend.

"Oh," I murmured reverently.

My eight-year old brother, Paul, had been born a cerebral palsy invalid. He had lived with my Aunt Angie and Uncle Joe in Pennsylvania because my mother worked as a secretary during the day and could not take care of him. Though I had visited with him and offered him affectionate bear hugs, we were separated by the barrier of his scarred mind.

Yet Paul was my older brother. A year older than myself--and now he was dead. It seemed awkward to hear the word dead being applied to someone I actually knew. Death had always been a slumbering dream that carried away someone else's grandfather.

"We'll be traveling to Pennsylvania for the funeral," my father said simply.

I nodded slowly and tried to envision the process of dying. I squirmed around in my seat and faced my father with mild curiosity.

"What did Paulie die from?"

"He couldn't get his breath," my father answered as his forehead lined up in little pinches of taut skin.

"You mean he wanted air and couldn't get it?" My mouth dropped open in astonishment.

Up and down my father nodded his head, slowly but deliberately.

Vigorously I swallowed a great supply of air and then refused myself the privilege of another supply . . . thirteen, fourteen, fifteen . . . My chest caved in and my eyes bulged hungrily. At last I gulped in the waiting air.

"That hurts--when you can't breathe," I said, deciding it was a dull game.

"I guess it does," my father said. He looked like a stranger without his cigar. I wished he would light up the big black thing and make the smoke move in puffy, magic circles. But his hands remained empty.

That same day my father drove my mother and me across New York state in order to attend Paulie's funeral. I relaxed across the backseat of the car and a wide grin buttered my freckled face.

"Just think how happy Paulie must be in heaven!" I exclaimed.

"Happy in heaven . . ." the words stumbled heavily on my mother's lips. She bowed her head as if she might pray, but instead she rested her fine chiseled chin on her thin collarbone and fell into a heavy sleep. Without the usual mellow of his thick cigar, my father drove in silence.

I stretched out full length in the back seat and recited my Guardian Angel prayer. It had always been my favorite prayer. The nuns had taught it to me at school and I added my own musical tune to the words so that it was a prayer and a song, too. I closed my eyes and softly sang the words:

"Angel of God, my guardian dear,
To whom God's love, entrust me here,
Ever this day be at my side
To light and guard, to rule and guide,
Amen."

Suddenly a euphoric intensity stirred inside me and I sat up in one quick jerk. Paulie could be my guardian angel! I glowed with pleasure. At last I would be able to communicate with him and he could protect me and ask Jesus special favors.

"Paulie of God, my guardian dear . . ."

The words tasted like a creamy milkshake, smooth and delicious. They melted down my throat and disappeared inside me. I repeated the prayer over and over moving my lips as I silently breathed the syllables.

When we reached my aunt's house in Pennsylvania I jumped from the car in jubilation. Pulling out my arms to circulate the blood I clapped them over my head in spanking, brisk whacks. My mother closed the car door as if it were an effort and looked around. Her eyes were the color of salmon and the lids appeared to be collapsing beneath the weight of the eyelashes.

Then my parents, uncle, aunt, and I all sat in the kitchen on the straight-back chairs and sipped creamed coffee that steamed up the lenses of my blue-framed glasses. I felt important sitting with the others and drinking coffee--just like an adult. But it was rather depressing because they all just silently stared at their coffee as if waiting for a message to appear inside their cups. They were entranced right there at the kitchen table.

"Guess what," I said briskly in an attempt to shatter the gloom. They all lifted their dazed faces towards me and waited. Suddenly I felt guilty, as if I had desecrated a revered silence.

"I am almost the number-one spelling bee champion in my class," I said rather weakly. Losing my original enthusiasm, I just sat there, awkwardly rolling the cold silver spoon between my palms.

"That's very nice, Elizabeth," Aunt Angie smiled, but her mouth was tight and dry.

There was another silence and everyone returned to gazing into his coffee. Then all at once, they were talking. They said Paulie had turned blue in the hospital and how painful it was for him. And they discussed the casket they would buy and the funeral

Mass. Aunt Angie commented that Paulie had always been such a good boy and that she would miss him so.

Then they went on to speak of many people they had known who were now dead. Names were mentioned that I had never heard. They spoke of how sad it was when death took a loved one and how the only thing you could do was to continue living anyway. It seemed that they were speaking in a chorus--each of them together reciting the same words. Every time one of them spoke, they all nodded in complete, sad agreement.

Then my mother crumpled her chin in chapped palms and remembered all the doctors that had examined Paulie in hopes of repairing his injured brain. Aunt Angie acknowledged the memory and added almost bitterly, "We did everything to sustain his life." Her mouth was even tighter and more acrid than before. She looked as if she wanted to cry but instead she was collecting all the tears behind her strained eyes.

"But Paulie is in heaven!" I said it as a command and expected the depression to dissolve immediately. But the remark went unacknowledged. My mother murmured "Poor Paulie" and retreated to the world of her coffee cup.

That night I lay under a patchwork quilt and talked to Jesus as I often did. He was my best friend, but yet, He filled me with a splendid confusion of love and fear. I feared Him because He knew all my secret sins. He peered into my soul as if it were a picture window.

My soul. I envisioned it as a milk-white bowl capable of speckling itself with various splats of gray, according to the severity of my sins. A mortal sin turned my soul black and ugly as a bat's wing.

One time I pretended to be sick and remained in bed on Sunday morning. This was a mortal sin. I trembled on Jesus' doorstep, nervously brushing my saddle shoes on the door mat, which usually spelled out "Welcome" but was now caked with mud from a recent storm. Then Jesus loomed over me, and I twisted my mouth into my third-grade grin. But it was no good. My soul was heavy and black like tar on a boiling roof. Jesus saw through my red corduroy jacket, and my skin, and bones--and everything. He shook his head slowly and I shivered cold and afraid.

Then I hurried to confession and told my sins to the priest. My soul flashed clean as the day I had been baptized. And the next time I visited Jesus, He smiled at me and picked up my hand and we were friends again. Then we pretended we were horses and ran into the thick growth of Mr. McGruder's woods. The air might have been chocolate; every sweet breath stunned me with pleasure. A special honey filled my veins and mixed the blood into a smooth

smiling fluid. Even the trees embraced me and I stretched out my arms, cherishing every precious moment in Mr. McGruder's woods.

That night I prayed enough "Hail Marys" to send my soul gleaming through the black night. I shut my eyes tight and remembered Sister Margaret saying that whatever you ask in the name of Jesus, you will receive.

"Bring Paulie back to life," I begged, squeezing my fingers into tight little balls of pressure. "Bring him back and tell everyone it was only a mistake." Then I decided to do something horribly painful in order to stress the urgency of my request.

"I promise to eat one hard-boiled egg every day for a whole month," I pledged with all the sincerity that my seven-year-old soul could muster. This was indeed a sacrifice because I despised hard-boiled eggs; my stomach retched in violent convulsions every time I even looked at the hideous things. And as an after-curse, I could always in the depths of my imagination, feel that the egg was staring back at me with its queer bald faceless gaze.

Dressed in my pink flannel nightgown, I stole into the early morning light of the vacant kitchen. The soft material of my gown clung against my arms and protected me from the cold that drafted from the refrigerator as I opened its door. A fudge layer-cake swirled before me in rich dark ecstasy. My eyes bulged. But I waved the image away and with trembling fingers picked out a hard-boiled egg.

Slowly I loosened the shell from the white and held my breath against the pungent egg odor that shot up my nose. I was nauseous but I took courage and closed half of the thing into my mouth. Mashing it apart with my tongue, I choked it down. Quickly I repeated the process with the other half. It was over! But my stomach was rebelling. The horrid egg was creeping up my throat! In one frenzied motion I lunged to the porcelain sink and tasted the foulness all over again. Then I fell back against the lime-green wall.

Of course, my suffering and prayers were in vain. Paulie did not come back. Later that day I saw him lying in a shiny metal casket. He looked like he had merely fallen asleep in his brown suit. The many people who came to see him looked sad and hurt. They spoke in hushed whispers and I wondered why they did not talk out loud.

Aunt Angie brushed quietly beside me and I shyly touched her hand.

"I asked Jesus to bring Paulie back. There is still time," I smiled with confidence.

She rested her large body in a wooden chair and pressed my palm inside hers.

"No, Elizabeth. It is better this way," she said in a thick voice that did not sound like her own.

I stared at the tired lines that so easily crossed her face. She had been so sad before and now she almost looked content.

"Better? But, why is it better? Don't you want Paulie back?" I was amazed and perplexed at her complacency.

"Yes, but God wanted him too," she explained and smiled, but her lips were so dry that the smile looked painful.

"But you don't understand. I asked Jesus. I prayed and Paulie will come back. I know it!" I protested vehemently. I flashed my blue eyes into hers.

The smile fell from her lips and she placed her hand on my shoulder.

"Elizabeth," she paused. "Jesus does not always answer our prayers. He hears us, but sometimes He wants us to suffer." She said it as if she were very accustomed to the arrangement.

I could feel my cheeks flushing as my temperature rose. Aunt Angie was wrong! I nervously breathed the memory of the egg. Its poison lingered in my throat and I knew that I would taste that hideous morning forever. Painfully, I swallowed the thickness that rolled and gathered on my tongue.

My hair matted damply across my forehead. Little drops of sweat burst out all over my skin and my eyelids faltered over the eyes that felt as moist as my arms. My head spun around in heavy distorted circles. Blindly, I pushed my way from the crowded room.

Kneeling on the hardwood floor I clasped my hands so tightly that the right and left molded into one limb. I stared at the wooden crucifix over the bed. "Jesus! Jesus. . . ." It was all I could say. A tear tumbled over my cheek and then another. My knees succumbed to the dizzy pressure and I collapsed, mounded on the floor. Tears came freely now, raining over my face like arrows from a militant sky. I pressed the blue veins of my wrists against the ominous pounding of my head. It was as if the pounding were the simultaneous laughter of Aunt Angie, Uncle Joe, my parents--and Jesus. Their amusement became a hideous thunder that sliced into me. I wanted to run outside and spit into the debauched sky.

After Paulie's burial I returned to St. Mary's playground. I

sent my favorite swing into the buffed clouds and from my high position I could see Mr. McGruder's woods. The festive leaves seemed to dance on branches that leaned out in patternless chaos.

--Christine Knepper

YES. BUT

Yes.

But

none of that matters now at all.

What matters is this:

Is it enough for you that I love you,
or do you demand that other dimension,
the dry detachment
which is not one of my accomplishments
nor (look deeper)
one of your pleasures?

Why

in this of all cities
in this of all nights
do you ask for truth
when mad lies are sweeter,
folding about you
like some dark rose?

--Marty L. Adkins

POEM TO THE END OF THE DAY

When each day's end again
Has met the bray-hooved,
Switchback trails and with
Them wound to the blackberry
Yard and the stalls, the
Sailed aground skipjacks,
Or so the hawing, bootblack
Birds, thiefthick in the
Evening's milkpail rings
In a covenant of fields
Have said, canebrake deep,
Sleep. These days on end
Again gone by the haycocks
To the barns and the sheds
And the husked corncribs,
To the henpecked yard and the
Roosts, to the hogsback styes
And the strut of the coops,
To the orchards walking in
The cider washed fields, to
The horsehair strands on
The fenceplanks riding,
And the cornbread drift from
The hearth of the house, herd
To their end on the paths of
The cowbells' song. Oh, we
Pray to the siloing, almighty
God as homestead men afraid
Of the long night's thunder
Only at the end of the dear,
Good day for the barley bins
To spill and splay and bend
In the sunset wind, the hare
To return to the hutch, the
Weave of sheep to the fold,
And the reined plowfish to
The tributary stables. Oh,
We pray as the hare runs,
As the cow-deep ponds dry for
The day, as the holly strives
To light in the vines, as the
Blood runs from the rocks,

Until all our till-poor faiths
Die on the sleepshod trails.
Hail! All hail and hear
These days without end! And
Without end hail and hear
The ganders and the rooks
And the jays, galing their
Wings in the water and the
Wood, wish me well! The waif
Leaves beg down! The leaves!
The spiking trees on the cape!
Geese on the wing! The
Muskrat in the den and the
Wren in the nest! All the
Gabbing farm moves with my
Love! Crows caw! Sparrows
And swifts roof the hills!
Weathercocks fly with the
Fishes! Rock fences round the
Fields! Statuaries of cattle
Kneel in the holts and vales!
The rivers chant their
Hallelujah flood! Glowworms
Hatch from the dry rocks! And
All my love flows in the farm's
Dear blood! Listen! And again
The farm at dead to day day's
End harks to the chorus of pies
And cooing clouds, to hassles
Of mussels, slugs, and snails,
To the bird-dogged bird leaping
Of the fields, and to the
Squirrel heaped harvest in the
Oak-deep, hollow woods, loud
In our prayers! With the split
Black spade of my trade I hack
To die, and for the till-poor
Sake of the dying way to bury
And sing the bones and scales
Of the faith of the old day.
For my poor, pitchfork art in
Love in wagons and lofts, blest
And torn in the keep of the farm,
I burn and blow in the blueblack

Kentucky wind at the dog days'
Blood wrung end. And I lie to
This end at the end of the day
On the faithtrod, sole path
Of the last, great harm in the
Hearthstone arms of prayer with
All the poor pitch kettles
Of my craft. Oh, I lie to this
End with my baaing trade in the
Moonshine fold of the farm,
A black sheep at the end of praise.

--Robert Pollock

SMOKE

Prayers of the saints
the smoke of burning incense
is spun upward in silky skeins,
slender intertwining stems
topped with fragrantly uncurling flowers
which, bowing inward,
diffuse
to form
a cloud of blessing overhead

--Rosemary Gray





Liam Wilkinson Jan '64

The Woods 83

HOMEWOOD

Readers' Prologue

FIRST READER

To begin again,
And again begin to work the graveward tales
Of the finned towns into song as full as the fishnets,
Kettleblack, and make the trot-lines sing.

SECOND READER

The fishfull, taut canes on the quays, the tributary
Organ of birds, piping the tales through the wood,

THIRD READER

The barb-throated, dewdrowned birds,

SECOND READER

The farm-wild hounds in the springhoused hills
That bay at the barbed birds' shadows,
The fishermen's corks asleep on the moss,
The hooks and the hooking kith of birds, praise,
All praise the tales' retelling.

THIRD READER

Cocks and crows in the high hills cockcrow and caw.

SECOND READER

The river stalks its banks.

FIRST READER

The shantied coves lie shingle-deep in the day.

THIRD READER

A world of rowboats lies in the crow-black shoals,

SECOND READER

The bassblack, fishbacked shoals,

THIRD READER

Black as our pitchblack hearts.

FIRST READER

The hillmade men return to the farms,
Come back from the boats with a school of tales,
Come back from the boats to the driftwood supper hearths
And the good wives' arms.

THIRD READER

A world of rowboats turns its oars for heaven's sake.

FIRST READER

A world of fish-herds sails and walks to the music
Of the high hills' birds,

SECOND READER

To the fishfull folds,

FIRST READER

Home, to hearth and home again.

THIRD READER

Lonely men, alone in the hills and coves,
Lonely as lovers lying at night in their crying need
On the dead leaves, the courtiers' leaves,
Alone with the boats and the firewood household
Of fishermen's hearthstone dreams, pray for sleep.

FOURTH READER

Pray for sleep,
The river keeps the time.

SECOND READER

Now in this good time let the morning prayers begin.

FIRST READER

At starfall and flood let the tales begin again,

SECOND READER

The village of prayer return.

FOURTH READER

The river keeps the time.

SECOND READER

Listen, as the lampblack village of tales returns.

FIRST READER

All is quiet in the village of Homewood.

The morning has begun.

Sunrise wakes in the dust on the shutters of the houses,
And day is riding the hogsback, far hills.

FOURTH READER

Day rides.

THIRD READER

The dew has cried down in the pails.

The milkcans in the yard, empty before milking,

Stand washed in the night's rain.

The plowshares in the fields lie dew-deep in the sun

And hold with all love,

SECOND READER

The morning.

THIRD READER

Horseflies sun on the barnyard's back.

Horses whinney.

Horsetails dance to the song.

FOURTH READER

Day rides.

FIRST READER

The roosts have begun their morning tasks.
Boats creak and, propped against trees, oars wait
To be drowned.
The river skulks fishfull along the mussel roads.
The dew has drowned the sleeping village from the farms
To the banks.

SECOND READER

It is quietly morning and Homewood is

FOURTH READER

Sleeping.

SECOND READER

Night's misshapen ghost has let the day begin.

FOURTH READER

Day rides in the foxfull hills, in the wood, barnred,
In the man-kindled drifts from farmhouse to flood.

FIRST READER

Fishes trail in the finblown flood, the finswept,
Fishtrail flood.

FOURTH READER

Sinblack birds kneel in heaven's name,
Their sabbath-black babble blessed in clouds of angels.

SECOND READER

The morning has begun.
The village has opened its shutters and its doors,
And taken heart, and let the morning in.

THIRD READER

From kitchens blessed with broth and brier they come,
Who love the milkwhite stable folds,
Who love the nets and boats, to hill and wood,
The milkweed home
Of heartfelt tasks and prayer, with pail and hoe
And nets in hand, to gather from farm and shoal
The leaping country gold.

FIRST READER

From shingle and thatch they move to the country charms,
Backdoors chattering to the morning chores,
Milkmaids to the buttermilk stalls, sheep-thick
Along the fieldstone walks and fences on the farms,
From haystack to loft the yards galore with churns,
Their good clogs begun in the starfall flood.
Fencerows, like bells, clap blueblack with crows.
And under the milkmade dairy girls, the butterball
Dairies of girls,

THIRD READER

Wicked lying after milking with their hayhigh loves,
FIRST READER

The lofts flow.

FOURTH READER

With this the prayers begin again,
In praise of God and the homewood keep of men.

SECOND READER

The world lies in the swallow-swept hills,
In fields bonewhite with flock and herd, in prayer,
In love, starblessed at starfall and flood,
God-given in glory from shed to shoal in silence
And in song, homekept in praise by the hearthbred,
Holy trades of men.

FOURTH READER

Ride now in your hearts to that town on the lips
Of the hills, beynd the wingshade fields
And the forking flood, ride,

THIRD READER

Nearer now,

FOURTH READER

Along a hill of graves, headstones leaning against
The clouds,

THIRD READER

Heart to heart with heaven.

FOURTH READER

Where, plenty as wrens on the red-tin village roofs,
With brooks of dew astride and glistening in the bonewhite
Arms' embrace, the stones flow light and dark
In a brookblack morning flood.

FIRST READER

Ride in your hearts along the goat-trail backwoods roads
To that town in the farmspun hills, to Homewood,
Lying in peace, snug as squirrels in winter.
There, in the village's open heart, open as bibles
In every slate-shingled cottage and house, the world
Lies for the love of God, from the applejack orchards
To the cisterns' black brooking,
Until all the cows come home.

--Robert Pollock

They sat on the porch in the now cool shade
In the town where both had been boys,
And no one took note as the messenger spoke
How the light, too, waned with the noise.

The slaves stopped fanning the flies away;
The evening appeared but stood still.
There was only the dark and a distant dog's bark
And a wind grown achingly chill.

They left their lives in the cool of the trees
As silver shadows were turning to light;
Behind were the lands they had loved with their hands,
Far gone when the shadows meant night.

It happened sometimes, as the fires burned cold
And the air was weighted with death,
They'd remember soft summer nights and restful home lights
And a wind with rain on its breath.

But oh, they died on some unknown hill
In the glare of a springtime day.
No one asked why such men had to die;
They just buried them there where they lay.

And with every spring the flowers steal up
Unmindful, too, of such losses,
And the grass blows in waves unaware of the graves
Marked only by two wooden crosses.

--Audrey Morrison



Hans Holbein

L. K. Wilkinson

INFINITY

A childish trick

of holding

mirror before mirror

reveals

infinity

--Rosemary Gray

A MOUNTAIN INTERLUDE

The room had been made as attractive as possible. Colorful maps covered parts of the front side-walls and bright pictures mostly reproductions were placed here and there between the windows to bring an illusion of life from beyond this tiny, hidden and almost forgotten valley. Books from the traveling libraries of the State University stood on each side of the room as if to frame the large, black space painted on the wall and used for a chalkboard. The teacher's desk, freshly sanded and varnished, held a number of new books in attractive jackets. A vase of wild flowers complemented the arrangement of books. Directly behind the desk and high on the wall was a shining brass holder in which the new flag with its fifty stars proudly slanted outward toward the seats of the pupils. Near the desk on a two-tiered table stood a crank-type record player and underneath lay albums of music carefully selected for this special school. Newly made shelves lined the rear walls underneath the windows. Labels above certain spaces read: Nannie, Bernice, Deborah, Isaac, Jody

At any moment now the children from the surrounding hills would begin to trickle down the paths which led from their cabins. When a number of them were in sight, Margaret Evans would ring the hand bell to hurry the rest. As yet there was no sign of the children, and a glance at her watch showed Margaret that the bell should be rung immediately. She was puzzled, but the heat made her thankful for the brief respite. Meticulously, she surveyed her new assignment as bits of her conversation with the university professors floated back to her: "Geographically isolated school Make a study of the psychological needs Try for a model school: art work, music, nature study, all the cultural ideas you can muster You aren't too young, dear girl." They had also warned her about this community; three teachers had left because of the apathy among the parents. Now she had come and the responsibility was hers. She began to have some apprehension, but she dismissed it.

A foot sounded on the worn front steps where for decades the children had entered. Margaret recognized the freckled face of Jody, one of the older boys in the school.

"Miss Evans, Pa sent me t' tell ye that they won't be no school today." His voice was serious and showed anxiety.

"No school? There has been no notice sent to me!" Margaret felt annoyance. Everything was in readiness and she did not want a delay.

"That's why Pa sent me. They's goin' to be a funeral this morning. The whole valley will go. No younguns'll be hyer. Might as leave lock up and go too." The boy spoke so matter-of-factly that it registered almost as a command. Margaret knew that his father was one of the school-board members.

"Is a pupil dead?" The thought gave her a sudden pang.

"Nah, hit's a new baby. You wouldn't know 'em Ma'm. But ye better go. Pa says they'll all expect ye!" He turned and left quickly.

Margaret slumped in her chair. She rubbed the back of her neck to relieve the tension that was suddenly there. The university hadn't explained that school could be called off by one of its board members. And she had planned so carefully for this day.

The graveyard was in sight of the school so Margaret would be able to tell when the funeral time came. She began to work again on the room. She dusted the seats, washed the black-painted boards, made new choices of books and put them on the top of the shelves above the children's names. As she worked, she heard the sounds of digging up on the hillside and saw about six men up there preparing the grave. The dry, red clay was baked deeply by the July sun, and the work seemed hard. Soon the picks and shovels were laid aside and she began to hear voices. A parent stuck her head in the door to say that they were bringing the corpse down the trace. "Better hurry."

Many of those gathered around the grave nodded in recognition as Margaret approached. Others, strangers, shifted their positions in order to get a better look at the new teacher in their midst, and she was conscious of a steady inspection of her. She had on a navy blue cotton dress with a white stitching around the collar and down the bodice. Her shoes were dark blue with medium heels, and her hose were flesh-colored. Her nails, tinted a bright red, made her self-consciously ball her fists--a foolish, nervous gesture she realized. She noticed that most of the eyes were focused on her face, its makeup contrasting definitely with faces around her. Then she felt the glances that flashed toward her hair with its bouffant style. Finally, most of the women offered faint smiles of acceptance, and Margaret was able to stand with more ease. They appeared to be friendly and unpretentious. Their clothing was outdated and somewhat dowdy. She had only a moment before the murmur of voices dimmed, and she had to turn toward the procession that was coming into full view of the group.

The quiet was broken abruptly as a horse and rider came upon the procession just as it was getting ready to move. The attention of the entire group turned on this man. The men spoke low, respectful greetings to him, and the women and children nodded in recognition. There was an air about the rider of manly pride, and the young teacher wondered who he was. The group turned toward the approaching cortege.

Two strong men carried a chair in which sat a young woman, draped in black; her head was bowed in despair. She appeared to be about eighteen years old. They set her down near the open grave. Next into view came a young man shouldering an unpainted coffin, so small that it was hard to realize it held a human being. Following were the members of the families, and Margaret noted that she had not seen any of them before. No one offered to help the young man set down the coffin. He placed it on the side of the grave away from the pile of red clay near the mother's feet. He wasn't crying as she was, and he looked among the faces of the spectators until his eyes rested upon someone. He nodded toward him. The man and three others stepped forward; one song book held in the hands of the older women allowed them to follow the hymns. One man hummed a note, began to tap his foot, and the four of them began to sing in a strained, mountain rhythm "Shall We Gather at the River?" Those standing near began to pick up the strains, and before long the entire group was taking part in the dirge. Margaret could not seem to force a note from her throat. It was so primitive. The song seemed so inappropriate for the funeral of a child.

The song ended and a gaunt man stepped into view. He held a Bible in his wrinkled hands, but he didn't look down at it. It was plain that he had used these passages many times. The Bible was so old and frayed, its edges ragged with wear and the cover worn and in need of replacement. Soon he ended the reading, and repeated a long, well-worded prayer. Margaret noticed that his words seemed to comfort the listeners. She could tell by the way their faces reflected devoutness in the presence of death. Then came the familiar "Someday We'll Understand," and with this song, soft crying crept like a harmless wave over the group. The minister stepped back and nodded to the young man who knelt by the chair. The youth rose slowly and a silence came instantaneously over all as they bent down.

The lid of the coffin was tenderly removed by drawing half-driven nails from each end. A piece of cheesecloth was gently pulled aside, and as the little form was exposed, a smothered wail came from the young mother. A woman, a member of the family, came forward holding a branch cut from a tree and began to fan away the flies. Margaret felt nauseous.

The people began to pass by the coffin in silent sorrow. The young mother sat rocking to and fro as if in a trance, and the young man went over to her and knelt, holding her hand until the number of viewers began to taper off. A slight nudge in her side forced Margaret to join the last of the viewers. She had not meant to go, but she wanted to maintain her composure as the others had in respect for this grieving family. The infant had turned black, and the tiny white dress on it contrasted vividly. The little feet were bare, and the whole body was beginning to bloat and give off a foul odor. The procession by the little coffin ended. Margaret felt suffocated.

Then the father appeared again with the hammer. He reached into his pocket and produced a handful of new nails which he held a few at a time in his mouth. He replaced the cheesecloth, tucking it around the little piece of human flesh, and suddenly overcome with grief, bowed his head and rested it against the edge of the coffin. Quiet sounds of grief mounted to loud sobbing and weeping.

A young boy, a pupil of about twelve, came quickly and knelt by the father. His small mouth tried to form a faint expression of understanding. He lifted the lid and began to fit it into place. Then he and the father finished putting the lid on together, one nail at a time, spaced and gently hammered into place. One after another the nails beat a new dirge. They finished the task and rose.

Four men stood ready with ropes, and very quickly they lowered the little coffin into the red clay and most of the valley people turned toward home, leaving only a few to finish the work. As Margaret hurried toward the schoolhouse, Jody ran along-side.

"Was the baby a first-born?" Margaret asked.

"Yes Ma'm, hit was a little boy!"

Inside the schoolhouse Margaret sat and reflected: Innovations here would have to be gradual. The university had cautioned that. But in the experience at the funeral she had caught an idea. One way to fill a need in this community would be through music: singing. If she could teach the children folk songs first, then . . . Here was one wedge for her to drive. She recalled that the big man who had come riding the fine horse had been one of the best singers. She would probably need his support . . . But there was her planning too . . . she would have to plan for the next six months very carefully. Reports would have to be written in detail for the university, laborious trips would bring in equipment, conferences would have to be made very frequently with the professors. January would come and end the seven-month school before she would have time to do all that she saw possible.

On Monday morning of the third week of school, the entire enrollment was in attendance. Bright and shining faces smelling of "Sweetheart" soap looked up at the new flag and pledged allegiance to a country about which they knew so little--so little if they remained here. A hand raised near the back of the room.

"Ma'm, are we a'goin' to hear some of that thar music today?"

"Are we going to hear some more music today!"

"That's just what I ast ye." A ripple of snickering went around the room. Margaret knew she might as well let Bernice speak. He was a natural joker. He was one of the few who had not really tried to correct his grammar.

"Bernice, if you wish for us to have some music, will you speak to me correctly? We have gone over 'that thar' enough for you to know that it is incorrect."

"Will ye--you--play us some music today!" He said the words as if they were foreign.

"At recess time, we shall have our first folk dances."

"Music and dancin'! Oh Boy!" He had a Satanic grin on his face.

Margaret saw the pleasure that registered on the faces of the little children. Since the day of the funeral she had been on the right track; it was plain to see. The morning went well. Before she realized it, time came for recess which today could be prolonged for the singing-games. The record player was carried out into the school yard, and the first record chosen was "Looby Lou." Then came "Miss Henderson," during which it was hard to control the children. Everyone wanted to dance at once. It was gratifying to observe them so happy and interested. They caught on immediately to the words and the music. When it came time for the games to end, the children begged for more until Margaret let the time run close to the lunch hour.

When they were dismissed at four o'clock, they flocked around her desk saying that this was the best school ever. Their eyes paid in full all the heavy loads, the sanding and varnishing, the long hours of preparing the lessons that had been and would continue to be done to raise their level of education. Eventually the consolidated school would be built up on the ridge, and they would be assimilated, and God willing, they would be more at home. Margaret went with a light step to the cabin where she boarded. The day had been most rewarding; tonight she could sleep well.

When she arrived, Mrs. Kaylor, her landlady, was busy preparing fried chicken again, and Margaret lay down full-length on the large feather bed to rest until supper time. A slight smile kept playing on her mouth as she rested.

Suddenly a loud knock sounded on the door of the cabin.

Mrs. Kaylor went to the open door. Jackson, her husband, craned his neck around from where he sat in a big rocking chair. Margaret saw that he seemed to straighten. She heard his intake of breath as he rose quickly, jerked his head and whispered in a coarse voice, "God, it's Big Anse. What does he want here?" A voice seemed to blast from the cabin's small porch:

"Send the school marm out hyer! We've got somethin' t' say t' her."

"Now you listen hyer, Big Anse," Mrs. Kaylor shouted back. "You ain't a'causin' this teacher no trouble. Not so long as Jackson and me is around. Git on down th' road!"

"I'm a'talkin' to her, Marthy. Send her out."

Margaret moved toward the door. Jackson had taken his shotgun from its place over the mantle. He kept it loaded, but he checked it to be sure. Mrs. Kaylor stood slightly in front of Margaret. Jackson stopped just beside her. The three of them faced three men who now stood down on the ground looking up. Margaret felt fear take hold of her, but she stepped clear of the couple and tried to speak calmly:

"Did one of you wish to speak to me?" She looked from one to the other. She recognized the big man as the one who had ridden the horse at the funeral. The man stepped forward. "I'm Big Anse. We want to ask you a question or two." He looked powerful and threatening.

Margaret's green eyes never faltered. "You may, Mr....?"

"Big Anse. That's all ye need t' know." He seemed much taller now.

"Yes, Sir. What did you wish to ask?" She felt almost brave.

"The younguns come home frum school a'tellin' that you are a'teachin' dancin' up thar. Are ye?" He gestured toward the school.

Her first reaction was comical. "This is my first P.T.A." she thought. She looked into the face before her and without hesitation said, "Yes, I am teaching singing-games and folk songs. Don't you know what singing-games are?" She had almost quit trembling.

The big man stared at the ground for a moment, then looked back at her. "No, I reckon I don't--but I ain't havin' my Debbie a' learnin' no sin, hyer!"

"Sin?" That gave a new twist to things. Margaret had a sudden impulse: "Why don't you come by the school and observe? Come and see for yourself. You will be most welcome, Mr. McCaslin." She knew his name for she had only one Debbie at school.

The other men nodded approval. Big Anse gave one affirmative gesture, no word. Then they all mounted and rode away. Margaret

had a feeling of victory as they went out of sight.

"Will he cause me any real trouble, Jackson?" Her voice was earnest.

"Nah, I don't think so. You know, Miss Evans, he's a moon-shiner! Makes the whiskey for the whole valley. 'Debbie learning no sin!' Good God! Better be careful what happens if he does come by."

At nine o'clock the next morning, another loud banging on the front of the school told Margaret who had come. She was ready. She motioned an older boy near the back of the room to go to the door. He opened the door and turned to Margaret with a weak, "It's Big Anse."

She walked to the door and greeted him. He was still on his horse.

"Good morning, Mr. McCaslin."

"I'm ready for those dancin' games." He looked serious and demanding.

"Well, we aren't. There is more study before we take our recess. Won't you come in and observe the school?"

The big man slumped a little in his saddle, and Margaret felt her throat tighter. What now? He got down from the horse and hitched it nearby. He was a big man--six feet, four or five inches, and she estimated his weight at over two hundred and fifty pounds. But when he came in there was something about him, his eyes, that gave him away. He was just a big, bluffing man--he wasn't so impossible. Margaret's spirits soared as she watched his eyes circle the room in wonder like a child. He took a seat in back, folded his arms and sat back. Margaret walked with buoyant confidence toward her maps. They were near one of the tall windows and for a brief moment she glanced out toward the tall pines that to her seemed symbols of a wild untamed land, a land needing order.

She turned and continued her lesson that had been interrupted. It was about the dykes of Holland. The pupils were ill at ease at first and sat glancing back every now and then. Books with excellent illustrations were brought out from the traveling library, and the children became fascinated with the Dutch countryside. Then came the reading charts so neatly printed the night before, then the arithmetic in percentage, the general science, and finger-painting. The pupils responded with respect and visible interest, and Margaret felt pride. Never once did she look directly at her visitor. When recess time came she said:

"Children, we will repeat the same games that we learned so

ell yesterday." On impulse she made her choice of the children to lead the game. "Debbie, will you and Jody be the first to step into the circle?" Debbie turned green. She hesitated and looked with fear toward her father.

Big Anse's voice boomed: "Git in thar, Debbie." She moved like lightning. Margaret felt a pang for the autocratic control he held over his child.

At first the children were hesitant, but childhood joy soon overcame the fact that they had a visitor, a critical one. The enjoyment showed plainly in the laughter, the taking of turns, and none of the children seemed to notice when Big Anse left. Margaret was aware as the big roan trotted away, its hooves hitting the slate-rock as it crossed the creek. Her spirits soared. By saying nothing, Big Anse had admitted his defeat. She had won. A sense of triumph filled her as she stood for some time watching him ride up the hill into the pines. And suddenly she felt weak from the strain. He hadn't taken time to eat since yesterday and the diet at the cabin was inadequate anyway. She would go down to the store as soon as school ended and buy something. It would be a good chance to easily mix now with some of the valley folk.

On her way up to the store that afternoon, Margaret noticed that there were no women along the road. For years here a woman's place had been at home. Eventually all that would change, once women became educated and gained some confidence in themselves. As she entered the store, the men standing around fell silent.

"Hello Will," Margaret said. "Mind if I browse around? I want some little something to eat." She turned to the racks just as Ole Cain came staggering up to her. His breath, strong enough to make one who sniffed it tipsy, made her step backward. When he was drunk, he was vulgar. Mrs. Kaylor had made that clear. He was a man to shy away from. He came toward her.

"The little school marm wants a little somethin' to et," he sneered. He pulled a bottle from his hip pocket and extended it toward her. As he did so, it sloshed first on him and then, as he staggered, on the front of Margaret's blue linen dress. "Here's a little somethin', honey." Margaret found herself suddenly backed against the wooden counter. Will, the store owner, moved around and toward her quickly. He took Ole firmly by the arms and turned him toward the door. As he did, Ole's brother, Sid, blocked Will's path. The other men stirred.

"Leave him be, Will!" Sid's voice was threatening and his lip curled meanly.

"Now you stay out of this, Sid," Will said. "You aren't drunk. Or are you?"

"I ain't drunk, and you ain't goin' to put no kin o' mine out just because a little bitch of a school teacher got her dress wet."

It suddenly occurred to Margaret that the two Cains were quite drunk and meant trouble. Will let Ole go and faced Sid. Sid took a heavy swing at Will that sent him sprawling across the store, knocking down cans of lard and molasses as he went. The other men started to Will's aid. They got Will to his feet. Then they converged on the Cain brothers and herded them outside. Margaret stood frozen. The men re-entered the store, and no mention was made of the incident. Horse hooves sounded outside.

"Find anything you wanted, Ma'm?" Will's calming voice said. "Maybe you would like some of these little 'Viennies.'" He motioned to the little cans of sausage.

"That would be fine, and give me a box of crackers. Four or five cans of the sausage, please, will do." She stood flustered and weak as Will put the items in a bag for her. He smiled apologetically.

Like a bull out of a dark pen, Big Anse himself suddenly came storming in. His face was red and the veins stood out in his neck. Without stopping, he rushed behind the counter and dragged Will out into the little clear space in the middle of the store. Everyone stood amazed.

"You son of--callin' Miss Evans what ye did," Big Anse shouted. "I'll--I'll choke ye!" His enormous hands gripped Will's throat just as the other men swarmed over him.

"What's the matter with you, Big Anse? You gone mad!" one of them cried. "Will ain't done nothing. He was trying to help."

"It was Sid who cussed!"

"Ole spilled whiskey on her dress."

Big Anse quit straining against the men who held him. His face turned a deep purple and his shoulders gave a little "huh" gesture. As he looked around at the group, an embarrassed grin threatened. It slowly formed.

"You fellers know what I done? I jist let them brothers-in-law of mine lie to me. Them two skunks told me that Will hyer done what they done. I didn't want--her, Miss Evans, called no--." He took one step toward Margaret and she saw the embarrassed grin spread itself spontaneously into a helpless smile. He turned abruptly and hurriedly left the group.

It was late afternoon by the time Margaret got back to the school, and she stood before the little schoolhouse deep in thought. She did not remember having left the store or having walked the distance up the hill. She was only conscious that she stood before

a small, run-down schoolhouse to which she, Margaret Evens, had been sent. What was it that she had been sent here to teach? And with what methods? She stared at the worn steps leading into the schoolhouse, steps worn by generations of children. Here in this hidden valley shouts and wild laughter rose from the disordered scattering of houses. She raised her eyes to the big pines bordering the valley and unconsciously extended her hand to the unpainted clapboards of the school. Then she turned her steps toward the cabin where she could rest.

--Ruth Spurlock

FOR CHRISTOPHER

Young Christopher, asleep upon my bed,
I wonder at your untouched innocence.
But as soft rain upon the grass is fled
With morning sun--Life takes your brilliance.

Like laughter gently lilted on the air
And drifting far away is heard no more,
So is your pristine loveliness--for there
Is no ability to hold this store.

A melody without refrain--your song--
For no child ever sang it all his days.
And powerful, the broken beat of wrong
Shall syncopate with tigers--bright your ways.

But you will hear the melody one day
Come back to you, before you go away.

--Sr. Regina Marie Courey

THE GREEN VELVET DRESS

The words, like swarming bees darting in and out, first one then two, now and then hiding behind the arbors of sleep--never clearly seen, just faintly buzzing, came and went. Then stung into consciousness by the word "snow," I abruptly sat up in bed. Throwing back the covers, my feet hit the cold floor. I ran out into the dining room and leaned against the icy marble sill. Feathery flakes were floating down covering everything with a soft, downy pillow. The branches of the cedar trees were bending beneath the weight of the snow. Cedar trees--the words brought to my mind the trip planned for today to get our Christmas tree. Every year my dad and I went hunting for our Christmas tree. My mom's voice came from the kitchen.

"I hate to see that snow; there have already been three accidents reported on the radio. What anyone can see in it---" I looked out at the frosted trash cans, like giant cup cakes covered with a thick, white icing. I was never going to hate the snow. Sled rides, snowmen, snowballs hitting hard against my back and dishes of snow and syrup, that's how I'd always think of it.

From the kitchen came the mouth-watering aroma of freshly baked cookies. My mom had started her Christmas baking. Every year we'd make fruit cakes and candy and batches of cookies, lots of fat-bellied Santas wearing red sugar suits, forests of Christmas trees with colored beads that looked like miniature ornaments, bells, stars, and wreaths, all covered with colored sugar. Anxious to start looking for the tree, I walked into the oven-warmed kitchen to remind my dad of the plans for the day.

"Think maybe I should get the lights and ornaments out?" My mom and dad looked at each other and smiled.

"I put them under the basement steps so you'd better get some old clothes on," my mom said. I ran into the bedroom and changed and then ran down the steps taking them two at a time.

"Don't you want anything to eat?" my mom called down to me.

"She has to start watching her figure now--no more Christmas goodies. She's getting to be a young lady, you know," my dad teased. Defiantly, I went back upstairs and had some hot chocolate and cookies.

"Now don't eat too many cookies; that batch is for the caroling party," my mom said as she lifted the plate up from in front of me. I had forgotten; tonight our Job's Daughter Bethel was going caroling with the Demolay chapter. I grabbed a few

more cookies and ran back down the stairs. I opened the tucked-in flaps of the cardboard boxes. In them were smaller boxes filled with ornaments, lights, tinsel, cotton snow, the tiny manger scene and the gold, china tree that my mom had put angel hair around, making circles of colored spider webs in front of each miniature light. I began carrying up each box to the living room where the traditional decorating would take place. Each year we'd get some new decoration for the house, which gave every item a Christmas of its own. Everything from the tiny village on the mantel to the red felt Santa on the door had memories of a certain year.

My dad called to me to see if I was ready to go tree hunting. I put on my heavy coat, still faintly carrying the smell of summer moth crystals. The air outside was so cold that when we talked it chilled our teeth and made them feel like something foreign to the warm tongue when it hit against them. We walked from lot to lot, looking at the lopsided trees, those that had lost most of their needles, and all the others that would never leave until Christmas eve, if at all. The next day was Christmas eve; we had waited too long. All the full, round trees were gone. The more we looked, the colder we got. And as the warmth of excitement drained from me I could feel my body beginning to get numb.

"How's this one?" my dad asked encouragingly.

I looked at the scrawny tree and didn't say a word.

"Trees always look bad when they're just bare like this."

"Yeh, I guess so." I watched the smoke-like puffs following each word. My dad lifted the tree into the trunk, and we headed for home.

"We'd better get that tree decorated if you're going to go caroling tonight," my mom said glancing down at her watch. My dad looked down out of the corner of his eye and asked when I was going to get ready for my big night.

"Maybe never if I don't feel like it," I said jokingly. But really, I did have to go, and it might not be too bad. I went in and filled the tub with steaming hot water and lay there enjoying the warm blanket of water that covered me, breathing the mixed air of cinnamon and cedar. I wrapped the thick, fleecy towel around me and ran into my room. As I pushed open the sliding closet door, I saw the freshly pressed dress hanging inside the protective folds of the plastic bag. My mom had promised to make me a velvet dress for Christmas. I pushed the surrounding clothes away from the plastic bag just to make sure nothing would crease it. Just then my mom came in.

"Like your new dress?" She was pleased by my obvious delight. She handed me a paper bag and said, "Here's another early gift." She smiled warmly and left. I looked in and saw a box which had a picture of a girl on it that kind of looked like Alice in

Wonderland with this silly, Mona Lisa smile. It read "for the formative years--32 A."

"Oh no," I groaned and shoved the box back into the bag and put it in my drawer. I lay down on my bed and looked at the large baby doll lying beside me. Her dress had been freshly washed and the ruffles on her cap felt stiff from many starchings. I thought back to the year that I had first got her; just then, the car's loud horn broke into my thoughts. I jumped up and finished dressing. My dad was warming the car, and it was time to go. I went through the kitchen to say good-bye to my mom.

"Was it okay?" my mom asked hesitatingly.

"I really wouldn't know because I have no intention of wearing it." What an awful Christmas gift, I thought, as I walked out the door.

We all met at the old red brick Masonic temple. The kids were all gathered on the ice-covered steps, hovering together, trying to keep warm. The dirty yellow school bus, spotted with the black slush from the streets, pulled into the lot, and opened its accordion door, letting into its warmth the numbed bodies. Then we went to the old folks home to sing carols. The old people sat listening, their leathered faces cracking into smiles, some looking with down-cast eyes, some with eyes raised, but none really looking at us. I thought how much like cardboard boxes we were for them, each song opening up a storage of past Christmas memories. We all rode back to the temple in the bus. Some guy behind me leaned over the back of the seat and asked in his husky voice how old I was.

"Twelve," I said dryly, not bothering to look at him.

"Twelve and a half, actually," Nancy added quickly, then she nudged me with her elbow. Nancy had just turned thirteen that past November. Last week when we were dressing after gym, she asked me why I still wore undershirts--she didn't anymore. I wished I didn't when I was with her, but that was the only time.

The next day was Christmas eve; I got up early before dawn and lit the tree. The soft waves of light flowed around me. I walked over to the couch, feeling the sharp prick of a fallen pine needle under my bare foot. I pulled my legs up close to my body, enveloped in the soft flannel gown and the light from the tree. The next thing I knew, my mom was opening the front door to check for the last mail. The sharp cold air rushed through the cracked door, cutting my drowsiness. I sat up and saw all the newly-wrapped packages placed under the tree. I sat secretly stealing glances at each colored block bearing my name, wondering what was inside, yet glad I didn't know. My mom came in, her fingers slightly red from the cold air. I went into my bedroom and got out the bag from

the drawer. I sat looking at it, wishing I had never even got it. I put it back in the drawer and got dressed. That night all my relatives were coming to our house to exchange gifts. My mom and I spent the day in the kitchen preparing the turkey, making pies and spice tea, filling the house with an aroma of mixed spices and cedar.

It was getting dark outside and in the translucent columns below each street light the steady flow of falling snow could be seen. It was late so I hurried into my room to get dressed. I opened the drawer and got out the familiar bag and proceeded, awkwardly, to get dressed. I liked the way the dress felt, slightly curving out. I stood in front of the mirror, straightening out the soft, green velvet skirt and feeling quite grown up.

The whole house glowed, warming each new guest with its blaze. I went into the kitchen and arranged some cookies on a glass plate to take out to the living room. I heard the tearing of paper and the piercing cries that followed; they had started opening the gifts. I walked into the crowded room, wondering if anyone would notice my new gift. After all the gifts were opened, my mom went into her bedroom and came out with a big box. My little cousins started screaming with excitement, happy to see that another gift remained to be opened. I tore off the paper and through the cellophane window I saw a pink-clad baby doll. I opened the top and smelled the new plastic always accompanying the first few weeks of the doll's life. It felt awkward in my arms, its stiff limbs and paralyzed fingers not coming alive as before. I put the doll in her cardboard box, fixing her so she could look out the window. I got up smoothing out the wrinkles in my dress.

It was very late when everyone left, but my mom and I stayed up gathering paper, picking up crunched pretzels out of the rug, emptying ash trays and removing glasses from the tables before the water rings could permanently make their mark. I saw my doll, staring out at me behind her shiny pane. I went over and got her out, pressing her hard against my body, feeling the stiff little fingers poke into me. I loved her right then, as the tears welled in my eyes. I knew she would be my last doll.

--Donna Hopmann



FETUS... 207 1/2" x 14" x 1/2" ...

EGUINRECHT... 68

ULTRAMARINE

There was one day in Paris I remember
Better than the rest:
That day I cried.
And when you asked me why and I explained
It was the ultramarine in Paris skies
(I had not seen it anywhere before),
You understood.

--Maisie Elaine Buerk

TWO HAIKU

Hollow and silver
in the frosty autumn air
are notes of crickets

Chrysanthemums bow
dark heads like weary soldiers--
the first autumn frost

--Rosemary Gray

AUTUMNAL FRESCO

The palette parched with color,
Starts shedding its pigments,
Airy strokes whisking off
Each dried blister.

The palette scraped clean,
Remains, devoid.
While echoes beneath our feet
The crackling cry of autumn.

--Donna Hopmann

AFTER SUNSET

After sunset, when arms alone with the sunset wind
Back world and the birdbacked wood in black
To sleep deep made in blackthorn and elm, their kind
Embraces' spun sound gathering gentle to keep back
Dark and the dark's cold rain, these farms of leaves
Fall without praise for the conjured sake
Of hearts alone in the arms' still hold, and wake
In the eyes of the lying lost, not to let them grieve.

Come with the world, oh then dreaming leap to the high
Wind's turning, seeing the wood burn blind beneath
The midnight arms in fire and flood where they lie.
Through the leaves' tongues' singing (though song
wreathes
The breasts of birds, their hearts' notes
Ringing on the berry-black cobbles of the wood, loud
Where they fly), the world hears the silent arms flood
To falling leaves and birds and the sound their music
makes.

Or, nunneries of leaves with the breasts' fire drowned
Under stars and the half shaped starfall streams,
Their voices blessed, their bird-tracked scriptures'
sound
Crying as they fall through the listening arms' dear
dreams
For the world's turning ear, ghosts of a broken wood.
Into the gliding streams' windows where trees' souls
Sing, look, midnight steals
From the sleepers' arms, and they awake with the world
alone in the leaves' flood.

Look, moonlight rides through the world's arms,
Falling with the music the leaves in moonlight make.
Listen (the wood, deep in the flood's sound, hears
from their sleep the arms' dreams wind),
the currants sing where the hearts' notes walk,
flying in the farms'
Song. Listen, starfall strikes the wood awake.
Only the eyes in the flood's hold see, the eyes, alone
in the wind's sullen
Turning, see the leaves after sunset break against
the world's cold ear.

And the birds, only the listening birds awake, hear,
Hear the trees, the dreams, the sleepers' hearts, all
the world silent after the leaves have fallen.

--Robert Pollock

DEAR AND GOOD THE WINTER LIES DYING

Dear and good the winter lies dying in the moonshine keep of the hills,
Milkwhite to the dearest of all ends. Often under the snowflake
Stars, souls of snowmen dance from the ends of their dying floods
and dream beyond the shadows' snows of sills,
Adrift with the ghosts of birds, burning in the black tracks
of the snowshoe wind for the dying winter's sake.

Shipshape the snows set sail and burn on end across the tolling
skies

Into the starboned arms of the Great Bear, moonkept beyond
the midnight

Wake of the starbull's rage, his firework tusks raised with
the icefall to splinter and drown the white

Ark of the winter in the snowprints' flood and the frozen fires
of his eyes.

Silent through the dying winter's windows, the world awake, sees
through snowfall lashes of leaves, or, gliding deep in the
old snows' panes,

Listens alone with the melting trees to the bellnote bonfire
of the cold birds' voices. Listen,

And the world rides in the fall of the moonshine ark, still in
the starfall rains.

Oh the world lies dear through the burning winter's windows,
until men's eyes glisten

Open, and we awake in the voices' fire, in the arksfall flood and
moonshine,

And take to heart our dying tasks to the end of our good time.

--Robert Pollock

Stamens' Bay

John K. Wilbourn

Dec 64



BUNNY

I slipped softly out the door, away from the company for awhile, away from their laughter and talk and reminiscences. I shuffled across the porch, not noticing the peeling paint, only feeling the warmth of the sun on the tops of my bare feet, and underneath, the dryness of the planks and my feet together, like two pieces of paper. I sat down on the board porch with my bare feet on the top step.

I just sat there, taking in my surroundings. Then I heard a rustling sound in the trees, and trance-like, waited for a tiny breeze to lift my hair from my neck and cool the dampness there from perspiration. I wanted it to come, and knew it would.

It seemed that I wanted a lot of things at that time, and no sooner than I got whatever it was that I wanted, I began to want something else. I had cried for months for a new bike; then two weeks after I got it, I secretly decided that it just wasn't "right" for a seventh-grade girl. Everyone was really touched when I generously gave it to my younger sister. They probably thought I felt sorry about the many arguments we had had.

As I sat there soaking in the sun, a small brown bird flitted down on the lawn in front of me and started pecking at grass seeds and minute particles of earth. It was a graceful little creature and the sight of it enhanced my sense of peace. I hugged Bunny, my treasured stuffed rabbit, more closely to me. The bird sat there for some time and was joined by another bird, a bright red one that hopped around and pecked so vigorously that the supply of delectable particles for birds in that immediate area was soon gone. Then both birds flew off in opposite directions without so much as a chirp of good-by.

The lethargy and beauty of the day matched my mood entirely. I had not left the company because I did not like them or because they bored me. They were, as a matter of fact, my favorite aunt and uncle. They always brought me candy or some special treat, and they had two teen-age boys, almost grown-ups I thought, who would play with me and do practically anything I asked of them. It was just that that day I felt like being alone, well,

not really alone, because Bunny was with me. But I guess I was tired -- yes, that was it. Tired of being "seen, but not heard," of listening to grown-up talk and not being able to talk, too. Or tired of eating at second table because company got to eat first. Or possibly even tired of being teased, and picked at, and bothered, and because I knew that when night fell I would be put out of my own bed and forced to lay my head on a strange pillow. Maybe these were the reasons and maybe they weren't. I really couldn't say for sure. All I know is that I was, for a little girl, very, very weary of any number of things.

So I sat there and squeezed Bunny to me, absorbing the pleasantness of the weather and deriving from it a feeling of serenity that I didn't quite understand.

Then I stopped studying nature and focused my attention on the thing in my hand. I looked at Bunny carefully. This dirty little stuffed rabbit I carried with me everywhere. It had a pink felt nose, two black button eyes, and a round fluffy tail. But the one thing about Bunny that enraptured me most was the clear, golden tinkling sound that came from Bunny whenever I picked her up or moved her, even slightly. It was a single, bell-like sound of no more than two notes, but to me it was the most beautiful sound in the world. To me it spoke of carnivals and candy and a beautiful shade of orange. It stirred in me emotions that most children might feel when gazing wide-eyed at a Christmas tree, decked out in its brightest lights and ornaments and tinsel. But it was far better than tinsel on a Christmas tree, for it lasted all year around. Bunny was a constant comfort and companion to me, whenever I was sick or lonely or scolded, or just any time at all. Even when I was happy, the tinkling sound was not wasted, for then it seemed to be a laugh.

As I mentioned before, my two older cousins were at my house, and they were always ready to play with and talk to me. I heard a step behind me and turned to see Rhon, the older of the two cousins. He wasn't too tall, about 5'9" or 5'10" with dark wavy hair and dark eyes that looked teasingly at me as he came across the porch. His white even teeth were one of his most attractive features. I also liked the way he dressed and talked, even though I always felt my accent was very noticeable and unsophisticated when I talked to him.

n spite of my feeling a little like the country mouse
round my city cousin, Rhon could always extract the
ost personal confidences from me with no trouble at
ll. He came over and sat down beside me, and somehow
knew that my privacy of mood and mind was about to
e invaded.

"Hi," he said, with his most contagious grin.

"Hi," I replied as discouragingly as it was possible for me to treat him.

"What's your big problem, young lady?" He knew almost instantly that there was a problem, that I wasn't in a very talkative mood, and that such flattery would surely get a response. It wasn't every day that I was so sincerely called "young lady."

I really didn't know what the problem was, but I didn't want him to think that I didn't want to talk to him.

"Well," I said, feeling around for a subject that couldn't be too personal, "there were two birds here while ago. A small brown one came first, then a larger red one. The red one ate faster than the brown one and got most of the food. Then they both flew away. That's not fair," I said. "The brown one was there first."

"Sometimes things seem unfair at first, but they really aren't," he explained. "The brown bird probably benefited from that as much as the red one."

I didn't understand or really care what he meant, so I said nothing. The silence stretched out between us and I started to feel, oddly enough, embarrassed -- and somehow lonely. But then I remembered that I had unny with me and the loneliness went away.

It seemed like a long time, and then Rhon broke the silence. "What were you doing out here all by yourself?" he asked, cocking one eyebrow in a way that usually made me laugh. When I didn't laugh he gave me a keen, inquisitive look, so piercing that I felt obligated to look down at my feet to protect my modesty.

"Nothing," I almost whispered.

"Are you mad at me?" This was almost a challenge, but there was also something closely related to sympathy in his tone.

"No, o' course not." I felt a little guilty then or the way I was acting.

"Then why don't you answer my question?" he persisted.

"I wasn't by myself," I assured him.

"What do you mean?" He must have been genuinely

puzzled by my last remark because there were two little lines between his eyebrows now, and something like real concern showed in his expression. Maybe he thought I had really become mentally disturbed.

"I have Bunny with me," I said shyly, as if that explained everything. His eyes were laughing now, gently ridiculing me. "Bunny stays with me all the time," I explained quickly.

"Oh, I see," Rhon said slowly. But he didn't see -- he didn't see at all, I thought. His lips were slightly parted in an amused smile, revealing a small rectangle of those beautiful white teeth, and for the first time I noticed that one of them was filled. He hesitated, then added rather impatiently, "Why do you like that rabbit so much?"

"She stays with me always," I repeated, trying to explain. "She even sings me to sleep." Suddenly it became very important that he understand, really understand what I felt.

"Rabbits can't sing," he mocked.

"Bunny does, though. Listen." I turned Bunny over and heard the magical, fairy-like tinkling sound. "See?" I looked up expectantly, thinking that now he would feel as I did, but the condescending amusement was still there.

"Sure. But that's not singing. Do you know what makes that noise? There's a bell in the rabbit's tail. See? Feel this."

He placed my hand on it confidently, and sure enough inside the cotton-like tail was a small hard knob.

"That's a bell," Rhon repeated.

"O.K.," I said, helpless to do anything but agree. But in my thoughts there was still some privacy, and I refused to acknowledge it as just an ordinary bell. I could accept the fact that it was a bell, but it had to have something extra special about it.

My cousin always seemed to know when I wasn't convinced as I could and should be. He acted as if there were something wrong about this whole thing. And somehow, there was a certain appeal to me in the way he would not stop, once a thing was started, even if it was a thing I didn't like.

"Would you like to see it?" he asked enthusiastically giving me the chance to put our relationship back on the old basis.

"Oh, no. I know what it looks like."

"I can take it out if you want me to." He turned Bunny slowly in his hand, watching carefully the expression the tantalizing tinkling evoked from me.

We kept the conversation going for a few minutes, he thinking I should see the bell, me insisting that I knew what it looked like. Then all at once I had an irresistible urge to see it. I just had to see the bell. Maybe I wanted to prove my point, or maybe to disprove his. But in either case I just had to see the bell.

"O.K.," I said. Then another thought struck me. "But how are you going to do it?" I asked.

My cousin started taking out his knife. It was a beautiful knife. It had a black handle and gold engraved letters that spelled out his name. I noticed the impressive array of accessory gadgets in addition to the several shiny sharp blades.

At the sight of the knife, my resolution wavered. But then I wanted to see the bell. I simply had to see the bell. And besides, to watch that beautiful knife work would be thrilling.

"I can just make a small cut here," Rhon said, indicating the place with the longest blade of the knife, "and we can take the bell right out. O.K.?" he said, making me feel like a conspirator in an exciting game. But still I hesitated.

"O.K.?" he repeated, noticing my hesitance and becoming slightly annoyed with me. "Look, if you don't want me to . . ."

"O.K." I gulped, cutting him off.

"Are you sure you want me to do it?" The bait was there again.

I gathered all my courage. "I'm sure," I said.

The sun glinted on the sharp blade as it made a clean, neat, noiseless cut in the material. My eyes watched the knife, and only the knife. I could not turn away from it. I was drawn to it like a moth to a bright light. Then the cut was complete, and Rhon's long thin fingers dug into the cotton-like material and brought out the bell.

"See?" he said triumphantly, "It's just a bell."

And it was. Just a plain, ordinary bell, like the ones girls put on their shoe laces at Christmas time to jingle as they walked. Nothing the least bit magical about it. He placed it in my hand and it lay there -- and when I looked up into his face again, the bell seemed to be reflected in his eyes -- cold and round and shiny.

"Now you can have it to play with," Rhon told me.
"Yes," I said. "Thanks."

We talked a few more minutes, then Rhon went into the house again. And as he walked away, somehow he looked taller and a little darker. And somehow his teeth as he turned and smiled, weren't as attractive as before. The fillings were, after all, quite noticeable. I waited until he had disappeared into the house. Then I picked up Bunny and the bell, slipped off the porch, walked around the corner of the house, and stood there alone, picking at the peeling paint on our weather-beaten house, and cried as I had never cried before.

--Betty Jo Brown

INTAGLIOS

Designs in the shadows,
Black on gray:
Intaglios of heroes
Forgotten today.
Traces, traces, traces
On the shifting sands of Time
Of faces, faces, faces
Revered only in their prime.

--Maisie Elaine Buerk

SUICIDE-EYED

A sightless panda bear
 from summer's
 fairyland
 squats
 on
Heavy trunks -
 remnants of a
 promised future.
Tarnished trinkets -
 10K gold-
 filled
Neoteric stockings -
 torn
 now...
 and
 gulp!
Musty twilight pervades
 a room of
 ebonized bodies.
 then
 clunk!
Into the devouring arms
 of the final
 ravisher.
Damn a world that wouldn't listen!
Smiles and laughter
 that cover
 thought so well
That shroud hearts
 in iron
 table cloths
Flutter down and
 pat the plot
 with ironic joviality.
 Beware!
Death-desirous eyes
 walk
 everywhere.

--Edwina A. Doyle

IN TRUTH

In truth
if I were to stagger toward your light
(for truth)
in the fine mad vertigo of trust,
fierce as child's play,
would your eyes receive me,
opening like the margin of some hot
blue forest, suddenly,
to welcome the wanderer?

If this place
(where breathing is not the fevered tug at necessity
but the savoring of all horizons)
should teach me your mind,
what then of (my God!)
your heart?

--Marty L. Adkins

NOTHING

Nothing is
like
sleep or a black winding sheet
hung on a rusty nail.

--Rosemary Gray



