

Take Away

Pat Spears

I remember it as a childhood game, but not in so much detail that I can recite the rules. Only that it came to me, just now, as part of nothing else, my thoughts fragmented like torn pages from a favored book.

So it is, it would seem.

“Good morning, Momma. Did you rest? Let’s raise the blind. It’s such a beautiful spring day.”

Tattle-tale splashes of light spill across the black and white tiles, chasing dust bunnies fleeing in its wake. Now they hide beneath my bed.

The diagonally shaped tiles are those of the corner drug store where my daddy takes me, my hand in his rough one. He buys double dip cones of strawberry ice cream. My tongue searches. I taste its sweetness on my lips.

“What a nice smile. God willing I’ll hear my name spoken kindly today.”

A pouting woman holds a squirming child. They stay behind in the maroon-colored, four-door Dodge. I love the deep-throated sound it makes. Cool wind on my face. Fresh air fills my lungs. I sing loudly.

“You’re cold, aren’t you? Let’s pull up the blanket.”

A strange face, wearing a large red mouth, espouses nonsense.

“Hold still now. We can’t allow drooling.”

My arms are alive, flailing. My mouth opens. I take center stage. My jumbled lines fail.

“Please, Momma. Stop such awful profanities. No, no, you must stay put.”

I struggle.

“Hold her down ‘til I get this in her.”

“Poor sweet soul, she’d never speak such profanity if she were in her right mind.”

“Them pitiful little ole’ words ain’t nothing in this nut house.”

I struggle.

Precious memories recede.

Numbness silences my tongue.

Flesh melts from my bones.

Fluids drain.

Sharp edges grow round.

Beautifully winged shapes float above.

Blackened silence grows.

“Grandma, are you awake?”

I open my eyes, lost to the hushed voice, my heart pounds.

“Did she hear you?”

“Don’t know.”

“Try again.”

“Grandma, it’s me, Jason. I’ve come to see you. I’m sorry it’s taken so long.”

He’s a boy, stepping from the bank of a narrow creek. Cool water swirls around his ankles. He wears a red cap. His hand is big and warm like my daddy’s.

“Grandma, I’ve brought Laura to meet you.”

The boy’s voice is thick, the other small.

“Son, did she know you?”

“I’m not sure.”

“You were always her favorite.”

Shadows wearing rubber soles come and go. They strain, huff, and gag. Sigh and leave.

“Oh, Momma, it’s snowing. Please tell me you remember making snowmen.”

“Lord Miss, it wouldn’t matter if Jesus Christ himself stood out there wearing him a top hat. Your momma’s gone full-time inside that messed up head of hers.”

I slip the cruel tether and float. Stereophonic whole memories come as brilliant light. I study the boy’s sweet face.

“Oh, Momma, you’re smiling.”

“That sweet chariot’s done come and took away her misery.”

“Hello.”

“Son, your grandma’s gone.”

“I know, Momma. She came just now and said good-bye.”