

Even the Bees Have Disappeared

He once spent all of his spare time working the treadle that turned this stone until the sythe the hoe and every plow blade was whiskser-sharp. He even saw to it that on long winter evenings inside the barn all Martha's knives were as sharp as her tongue. With Martha gone and no one cooking, the fields all rented out to young whipper-snappers using John Deere tractors behind the shed next to the bee-hives. No use for either one.

Bitter Herb

My mother lived under a giant mushroom until my father carried her away to a fresh meadow, filled with tall sunflowers and cockleburs. She missed her sister violets and her bed of pine needles. Her Russian Prince turned into a thistle in his old age. By the time I was born things had chilled considerably. Mother's spirit was wilting as my father grew even more prickly. It is no wonder that as soon as my wings appeared I lit out for greener fields, forsaking the entanglement of weeds. I flitted from the tip of a blade of grass to the top of a fence post circling ever farther into great unknown territories.

My Father

My father always said *this earth is our constant.* But it keeps slipping away, rivers of it moving toward the sea, swirls of fine top-soil ride the winds from state to state and beyond. My father always said *a man's garden is his haven.* A place where none should bother him except the weeds that flourish, the pesky insects that find the tiniest patch of exposed skin or the dog at his heels. My father always said *strength is not in muscles, nor wisdom in one's head; but your heart should hold enough of both to last you a lifetime.*

Beginnings

My father came from a place that was always moving from one end of the country to the other and back again. From the end of the line where the railroad stopped, they doubled back to Tennessee and then to Denver, the Mile High City. When moves came before the end of the school year, home was whoever would take him in and feed him. He learned early to fend for himself. He learned that every ending was just another beginning.

What We Saved

Grandma saved string. Each piece wound tightly around the moon she began creating on the day she married Grandpa. Dad pulled every nail out of the old barn when it fell. And spent summer evenings on the porch pounding each nail back into something useable again. I collect stray words that wander around in my head until some warm summer evening when the moon's light lands on the porch in a manner that invokes the magic of days gone by. Then, I line them up on bits of paper. They may or may not make sense in the morning's light.

Lessons Learned

This is the lesson I learned when my dead father returned. Learning against the coffee shop wall he just waited for me to tune out the espresso machine, to acknowledge his presence, the teen-agers at the next table discussing a teacher they hated, the new-age music coming from poorly concealed speakers in the rafters, the fire truck racing by siren blaring headed for one emergency or other.

Lessons Learned

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Listen for the quiet that lies underneath the mayhem of everyday life.

get out my pen and look up to see him. Then he told me the secret is to listen.

He waited for me to settle my notebooks, put my cup where it couldn't spill,