

The Silversmith

JOE BERRY

(This selection is an excerpt from "The Silversmith," winner of the 1942 League of American Pen Women Prize)

The boy held fast the silver to the bench
and, hands white-knuckled, traced a simple figure,
working while the years filled out his youth,
steadied his hand, and sharpened his brown eyes.
He sang at work, while nearby stood his father,
watching the light brown curly head bent low,
watching a fine hand, finer than his own,
work carefully; he saw a little box
take silver form, and saw a little joking
pattern on the top take form—take startling
form, if once you viewed it carefully.

But when the singing stopped, the childish voice,
and irritated muttering replaced it,
'twas then alone the father interfered.
He walked at times like these across the shop,
to where the boy was working at his bench—
a new-made bench, already bearing scars
from fire and tool, and holding several bracelets,
and not a few good boxes. He would see
his son dejected, staring at a ruined piece.
"Ruined?" he would echo, "Why, my boy,
you've barely scratched it. Cut the groove
a bit more deeply now, and file it so."
"But that's not how I wanted it at all."
"No difference; who buys it will not know."
"But I know." cried the lad, and bit his lip.
"Still you must finish it," his father said,
and sometimes there would come into his voice
a silver ring of coldness, and an edge
of hardened steel to cut and chill the boy,
who slowly, silently returned to work.