

Aunt Kathleen

Howard Brady

My recollections of childhood lie in that happy time when the happiness of home and family was my whole life. The best of these times were wrapped around the family reunion. There were good things to eat and games for all the family, but these were only in passing. The part fondest in my memory is the picture my mind keeps of Aunt Kathleen. In the parks where these reunions were held there was always one bench, centrally located, set aside for her. While the rest of the clan laughed and played, I always kept watch over Aunt Kathleen. Unmoved and unmoving, she surveyed the activities with all the haughtiness of a queen. Not really an aunt, she was sister to the great-grandfather of all the family. In all affairs she was the grand dame, the arbiter of all problems for both child and adult. From her I took the happiness that goes hand in hand with the wisdom of youth.

Her clothes were in the most severe of early Victorian styles. About her was a mustiness steeped in the past. Her appearance was that of a generation twice removed from the life of today. Her high lace collars and long skirts reflected the sense of propriety that governed her life. Her carriage and short mincing steps were part of an era when respect for woman was natural rather than a courtesy. As Victoria assumed leadership of a nation, Aunt Kathleen chose in both dress and advice to cling to a stable and more serene past.

No one knew her age or cared to; her knowledge was proof enough of her years. Aunt Kathleen had never married. She believed that she had never found a suitable mate. I can see the possibility of this, because if as a young woman she had been as serene and wise as she was later, no man would have dared impose on the almost divine radiance that surrounded her. About her was an agelessness that is not easily frightened by death. When I reach for solace, I often find it in the memory of her advice to me. Her memory is everlasting because her wisdom lasted beyond the span of her life on earth.