

One Morning

Miriam Burrell

WHEN the child awoke, the room was filled with the white, bright morning. She lay and listened to the sound that had wakened her. A shrill, piercing sound, sharp and steady. She turned her head on the pillow to locate it. It was coming from downstairs.

Her eyes opened wide, and she climbed out of bed and ran to the door of her room, down the steep, dark stairwell, and through the rooms below. Her brothers were standing in the archway to her mother's room, horrified eyes in white faces.

Her mother was lying on the floor in her nightgown, her heavy body twisting and rolling. It was from her mother that the sound came. The scream had lowered to a moan—deep, pain-wracked, desperate. It did not change as the father began to nudge her sharply with his foot, his breathing heavy, his face harshly gray. The morning light glinted on the moist creases in his cheeks and shadowed darkly its stubble of beard.

His voice was rough and cold. "Get up. You're not hurt."

The woman on the floor, unconscious of the voice and the foot which had begun to kick instead of nudge, rolled her head from side to side, trickles of blood from her mouth etching a terrifying pattern on her jaws, and then suddenly became silent.

The small pajamed figures in the archway, immobile as statues, caught their father's eye. Dark red blood gorged and bloated his features. "Get out! Get up to your rooms!" His eyes threatened. Whimpering and shivering, the children ran from the room.

It was an hour before they heard their father's voice calling up the stairwell, ordering them to come down. They crept down slowly.

Their mother was in bed now, and there was a thick white square of cloth on her forehead. The doctor must have been there, because a bottle of pills and a small piece of paper with writing on it lay on the bedside table. The children edged into the room and up to their mother's bed. The littlest boy climbed up, began sobbing wildly, and pushed his face in his mother's neck. She held him close and talked low in his ear, and scratched his head gently with one hand.

The little girl standing stiffly at the foot of the bed was dazed with a feeling of unreality. She wanted to scream and run to her mother, and tell her she loved her so very much, but from deep down inside a fear stirred and surged up, and warned her of her father's hatred and contempt if she did.

From the next room her father called to her, and ordered her to go to the post-office for the morning mail. A habit of obedience controlled her and she turned slowly and went out.

The sun was brighter as she walked down the road to the post-office, and the birds sang as usual. It seemed so odd that they were singing normally. She was conscious of a stretching and burning feeling about her eyelids as her eyes searched in the trees. The impression of unreality grew in her. It was not right for her to go back to her mother. She was supposed to be as usual, too. Her father's hard face was superimposed over the things she saw on her walk.

She was on the steps of the post office when the police car rolled to a stop and one of the uniformed men leaned out of the window. He wanted to know the way to a house. It was her house. She kept her eyes on the splintery wood of the steps, and the yellow dust along the edge of the road, as she told him.

Forgetting to go into the post office, she walked down the steps toward her home. She kept her head bent, watching the pavement, and the dust, and her blue-jeaned legs.

Reaching her front yard, she saw the black police car, and was afraid to go in the house. Her gaze scurried toward the orchard, but suddenly she was so tired. She was so tired she could hardly stand and she began to drag her feet slowly toward the kitchen door.

Inside the house, she stood just out of sight by the dining room door and looked through the living room into her mother's room. The two policemen were standing there now, close to the bed, and were saying something too low for the little girl to hear. Her mother answered by shaking her head. There were tears running down her cheeks, as she hugged closer the little boy still in her arms.

The girl in the doorway wanted so desperately to go to her mother. It was a crying thing inside her and made her throat and eyes hurt. She wanted to lay her head on her mother's shoulder and feel her form, warm and solid and *there*. She did not move from the door.

In the living room, her father was on his knees, his face in a chair. He was sobbing hoarsely.

Suddenly nausea, deep and twisting, overtook the little girl, and she ran blindly back through the kitchen and out into the thin, impersonal air.

Davie's Corn Patch

Margaret Brunson Rees

“I WANTA garden this year,” Jane said. Jane was seven years old and her long chestnut hair was tied up in two red rubberbands.

“Me, too,” Davie added, pulling his straw hat on his head.

It was a warm May day and time to think about gardens and vegetables to eat in the summer. Daddy was planning where he would plant the radishes and lettuce. A merry twinkle lit up his eyes as the children spoke to him. He answered slowly, “You’re gonna have your own little patches of ground this year, and you can plant