

CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE

by Diane Steinfeld

IT WASN'T a very special day. It had rained the night before and everything was still kind of gray and foggy and lifeless. I guess that's the right kind of day to die on. I mean you wouldn't want to die when things were sunny and people were happy and stuff. Rainy days, though, were always sad and they made the people sad too. Yes sir, if I had to pick a day to die, it would have been then. There's never been another day since that has been quite that rainy.

The four of us were in the car. Grandma and Grandpa were in the front seat and me and Charlie were in the back. Grandma looked kind of really sick. She kept saying to Grandpa, "Oh, Harry, I just can't."

"Now, Edna," he said, "things will be all right." I thought maybe she was crying, but I didn't know what to say, so I didn't say anything at all and kept my mouth shut. Charlie just stayed on his side of the car and left me alone. I was glad. I didn't feel like playing. You weren't supposed to be happy on rainy days. I guess Charlie knew that rule, too. At least I didn't have to take the trouble to explain it to him.

After a long time, Grandpa pulled the car off the road and up a long cement driveway and stopped right in front of a pretty big brick building. I started to get out, but Grandpa told me to wait in the car. And then to top it off, they let Charlie get out and go with the two of them. Well, that just about does it, I thought. Always Charlie and never me. How does he rate anyway? Sure he's a member of the family and we play a lot and have some pretty good times, but sometimes, like now, I just hate him. There they are in that nice warm building while I sit in this cold car. They told me Charlie was a lot older than me, but you'd think I would count for a change. Just wait till they come back. I'll let 'em know how I feel and then to get even I'll be mean to Charlie all day. That really gets 'em mad. Just wait. . . .

I didn't wait very long until they came out. Grandma was walking awful fast back to the car. Grandpa was a good ways behind her. Charlie was probably lagging behind like he always did. We'd have to wait for him or else go look for him. They'd probably send me out in the rain to do that.

They both got in the car, but we didn't wait for Charlie. Grandpa drove off really fast. No doubt about it this time, Grandma was crying. Maybe they had both forgot about Charlie. Maybe I should say something.

I was thinking about that when I heard Grandpa say, "He's better off now any way. For God's sake, Edna, he was only a dog."

Yes sir, it was a good day to die on, what with the rain and all. Charlie must have known that too, and that's why he picked today.

The flags rise,
The sun sinks.
Humanity enters night.

Night for millions
Whose daybreak
Never will come again.

Names are only names
If the soul has
Escaped the body.

Nothing is left,
Of the flowers,
Of young lives.

But, flags will rise again
And slogans will be sung,
Always; always again.

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