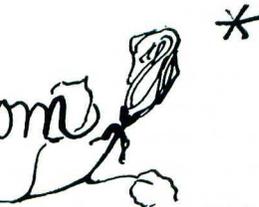


the first bloom 

Jean Ann McCain

It is spring and the earth begins her awakening rituals: trees give forth tender green leaves, grass fills the air with a clean, fresh fragrance, and breezes softly, almost tenderly, finger my hair. But I am not fully aware of the leaves, the fragrance, or the breeze. I am aware only of the flowers, the thousand golden, heavy-headed flowers that cover the sloping meadow. Spring's children, they call, laugh, and frolic as the wind sways their laden heads, causing them to dip, bend, and dance in the bright sunlight. But, in my hand, I hold a flower more beautiful than the rest. It is brown. It is wilted. It is silent. Not a member of the homogeneous mob outside my window, it seems no longer a plant, no longer a biological being. It is a memory. I hold the memory of another spring, another flower. Yet, in reality, it is the same spring and it is the same flower, but both have changed.

I am a young woman. Beside me sits a young man, a good man. He is not a member of the homogeneous mob of people that barges into my life and quickly departs leaving no trace of its brief presence. He is special. Beside me sits the first boy I loved. Yet, in reality, he is now a different young man, and I am now a different young woman; both have changed.

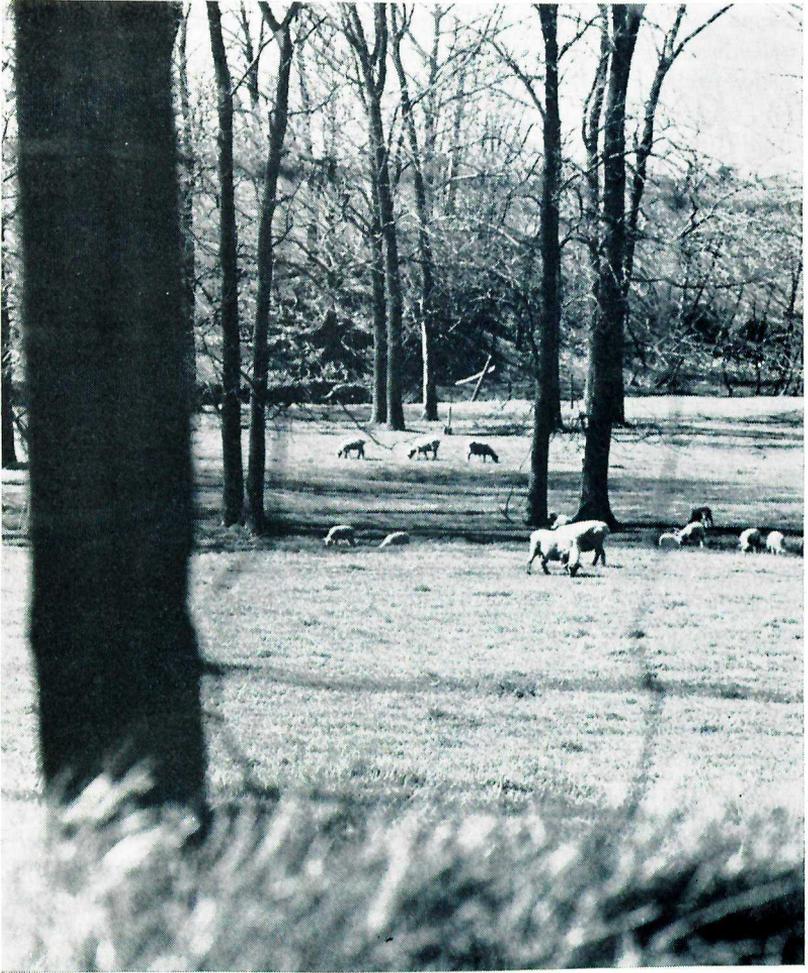
The other spring, the other flower, the other young man, and the other young woman lived only one month ago, for it was in early April that nature gave the land a sudden, premature explosion of spring. It seemed as if I were holding my breath; I knew the warm weather was a temporary pleasure, but I was a willing victim of spring's deception. Van also was knowingly a victim, and one afternoon we walked together through the meadow. The sun was warm on our arms, and the wind was playful in our hair as we clasped hands, and suddenly, as suddenly as the spring had come, we ran. We ran, disturbing the few flowers boldly daring to stand

in the young grass. We ran, and as we ran, we laughed; we laughed at nature, at life, at ourselves—we laughed at deceit.

Laughing and out of breath we plopped down on a large flat stump. We were breathless not because we had been running, but because the meadow held a pulsating, exciting beauty; and we, just as the flowers boldly dared to stand in the young grass, boldly dared to run in this young spring. Suddenly Van grasped one of the flowers and presented it to me as he laughingly said, "I pluck for thee, fair lady, the first bloom of spring." We laughed but abruptly our laughter ceased. Now realizing, knowing, understanding that the flower was a symbol of spring's first, timid life and our first, fragile love, Van softly and slowly repeated, "The first bloom of spring."

As I walked in the meadow the following day, I tried to understand why the pulsating beauty, the vibrating excitement were gone. Now, the wind was chilly, and the flowers had closed their petals to its hostility. Spring had left. I was saddened. Yet I knew another spring, a warmer spring would come; another breeze, a softer breeze would blow; another flower, a stronger flower would bloom; and another love, a more lasting love would come. But I also knew that it would not be the same. No seasonal phase would be like that first brief glimpse of spring, no emotion like that first fleeting taste of love.





MAN'S HORIZON

"Nature is the living, visible garment of God."

Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe