

Queen Anne's Lace

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By August it always seemed as though rain had forsaken Hackensack, New Jersey, forever. The flower beds were parched, and the leaves on the tiny maple trees had already begun to turn brown. The grass in front of our garden apartments was withered and yellow, anxiously awaiting the winter snow which would cover its bleached ugliness. The superintendent's "Keep Off the Grass" sign stuck forlornly in the center of the yard and prompted visitors to remark wearily, "What grass?" Here and there, however, life persisted in spite of the draught. Late summer flies hovered near windows, and at twilight there was always the sound of brown miller moths butting themselves gently against the screen door.

My favorite haunt as a small child was a spot adjacent to the apartment next to ours. Small tables with turquoise and white umbrellas stood precariously secured in the cement. There was also a small wooden swing, and if one swung high enough, he could just see the tops of the umbrellas. Young women sat at the tables drinking coffee and talking of their children. But as a rule, no one came before lunch. I would sit and swing with my mind empty and my eyes closed, conscious only of the warm sun as it penetrated my thin cotton dress. I swung lazily, holding on with one hand and brushing my foot against the Queen Anne's lace that grew from the cracked cement. On my left, the wild roses which had somehow managed to survive the heat clambered up the side of the building. I often wondered which flowers had the worse time of it: the roses which climbed the hot brick wall, or the weeds which pushed resolutely through the cracks in the pavement.

Recently I visited again the place where I had spent the first five years of my life. The apartments seemed to have shrunk in size, although they still appeared to be fairly new. The swings and umbrella-tables were gone; the cracked cement had been replaced with black-top. Ivy covered the wall which once had been decorated with wild roses. All was changed. Nothing of the elusive atmosphere remained. Nothing, that is, save the memory of it, as fragile and as persistent as the Queen Anne's lace which had grown there in a former time.