

Cindy Edwards

THE LEGEND OF OLD RUTHIE

Miss Bell was, I would say, close to sixty-five years old, a plump, rather tired-looking lady with wispy gray hair and sagging bosom. She invariably wore a faintly pleasant expression that seemed to bespeak tranquility and a vague benevolence. To her sophomore biology students she was a mixture of the ridiculous and the serious, and was perhaps better known by them as Old Ruthie.

Old Ruthie was perhaps the only teacher I have ever had that could look as if she were in two places at once. She could be lecturing rather carelessly about the reproductive cycle of the paramecium and at the same time be gazing fixedly at a spot on the back wall, looking for all the world as if she were pondering Einstein's theory instead. Often she would stop in the middle of a sentence, look thoughtfully up at the ceiling, bend her ear as if listening for something, then return to her lecture without skipping a word. At first we took this peculiar procedure as a sure sign that Old Ruthie was fast approaching her rocking chair and retirement pension; however, as she continued to alternately look, listen, and lecture, we would catch ourselves gazing searchingly at the ceiling or straining our ears for some distant sound that never came, only to be jolted back to reality by Old Ruthie herself, who had decided to finish her sentence. We never did find out what she was pondering—maybe it was that Great Biology Lab in the Sky. At any rate, it served to make her rather an individual in our eyes, to say the least.

I think I will never forget the day that Miss Bell got the hiccups. She was droning lazily on about crustaceans or something when I suddenly noticed that she was jerking at regular intervals, a peculiarity that I had never before noticed as being part of her lecture procedure. I immediately remarked upon this to the girl sitting next to me, and together we came to the conclusion that Old Ruthie had the hiccups. Delighted at this discovery, we settled down to watch. It was not long before she suddenly stopped in the middle of a sentence, as was her custom, and regarded the ceiling with intense interest. At precisely that moment a stray hiccup chose to present itself in a most unceremonious manner, and the room resounded with a sharp "Hic!" from her direction. Horrified, expectant silence hung over the room as every waking eye was fastened with quickened interest and high good humor

upon the hapless Old Ruthie. But she was true to form. Without blinking an eye, she inclined her head, listened for whatever it was she seemed to hear, and went on, completely undisturbed about the whole situation, if indeed she even knew it existed.

For all her peculiarities, Miss Bell did have two very important characteristics of a good teacher: an interest in her subject and an interest in her pupils. Biology was her first love, and she showed it in many ways. For several Saturdays each month she would trudge through bogs and over streams with her most interested students as part of a little club called the Swamp Stompers. Tirelessly, she explained each leaf and rock they discovered and tried to give each of them a glimpse of that rich and colorful world of natural science that she herself had found so exciting. In the classroom she always found time to help a bewildered student who was having trouble with his dissection project or who just could not seem to locate a particularly elusive amoeba under his microscope. Her patience was boundless, and she seldom became angry with a student unless he refused to follow directions or was consistently lazy.

Although her personality was not the kind to inspire students to toil ceaselessly at their biology, Miss Bell did manage somehow to drill quite a lot of it into most of her pupils, before each year was up. But, oddly enough, after a few years it is not so much the knowledge that remains as the memory of Old Ruthie—contemplating the ceiling, tromping through swamps, adjusting a microscope. When she leaves Norwalk High School, it can never be the same, for with her will go a forty-year tradition that will never return.

“People do not like night. . .”

Glory-June Greiff

People do not like night to come in—
They shudder and shrink inside their clothes
 and refuse to grasp its icy hand.
Its frosty black fingers beckon to me,
 carressing my raven soul.
Ebony and gold the night snickers at the Frigid-hearts.
I smile.
I know the joke.