i've seen gray

the moment before morning
and after night
the second before death
and after life
the fusion of black and white
  the balance of wrong and wrong
living with knowledge of death
  knowing ideals are never reached

TOM

John Gregory

Sliding into his seat, Tom Miller felt he would have to reach as high as he could just in order to touch the desk-top. "Well," he thought, "no matter—I'll grow into it by Christmas; I did last year, and the year before." He was somewhat short for a fourth grader, because he was a year younger than any of his classmates; Tom's parents had had him skip the second grade. He did not do as well in the third grade as he had in the first, although both he and his parents knew that he had the ability to compete favorably with children a year older than he (his kindly first grade teacher had let it slip out that his I.Q. was 127). He had gotten only "C's" on his report card last year, and while no one could figure out what happened (his parents suspected that there was a personality clash between their son and the third grade teacher), Tom had decided that "this year was going to be different."

"Good morning, children. My name is Mrs. Gnurd, spelled with a 'G,' and I will be your homeroom teacher for this next year. We have only two hours today, so we will get right down to work in the business at hand: filling out the first-day forms that you see on your desk. Please remember to print your last name first, and do put down your student number in the blank at the bottom. After you finish this, you will raise your right hand, and I will give you this medical form...."
Tom sat mutely in the little chair, pondering what had just happened to him. Now his parents would surely receive a letter from the principal, telling them that he has been sent to the office twice in the past two months. The first time was not so bad, because he had only gotten out of line while the class was walking to the art room. But this throwing of spitballs was just plain silly, and he wondered why he had done it. He didn’t particularly dislike Marcia, the little girl in the front row; he had simply finished his morning math problems and was trying to find something to do, so he had gotten out a piece of paper and made some spitballs. He was trying to hit Marcia with them—he didn’t mean to hit the teacher’s desk. Anyway, he had hit the teacher’s desk, and so now here he was in the principal’s office, staring at a piece of paper upon which he was to write 500 times, “I will not throw spitballs at teachers.”

The next night, after Mr. and Mrs. Miller had received the letter, Mr. Miller gave Tom the paddling that Tom had known he would get. After their son had been sent to his room, the two parents discussed what could be done about Tom. Mr. Miller had not wanted to spank Tom—he had understood from the boy’s explanation that eight-and-a-half year old Tom was bored with fourth grade. Still, he had had to punish Tom in order not to give him the idea that he condoned the spitball throwing. Mother and Father decided that the best course of action would be to have a talk with Mrs. Knurd (or was it Gnurd? they could never remember); for it was too late in the school year to have Tom skip grades now.

They came to school that Friday, over the objections of the principal, who said that it was not customary for parents to visit school. Mrs. Gnurd was very polite and listened carefully to the Millers’ complaints. Presently, she began to speak:

“Children,” (although she was only three years older than Mrs. Miller, she called them that because she had acquired the habit of calling everyone ‘Children’), she said, “I deeply sympathize with your wanting Thomas to have more challenging assignments given to him—in fact, I wish that I could do just that. But can you imagine what would happen to me if I were to give Thomas special attention? All thirty-seven mothers and all thirty-four fathers of the rest of the students in this class would be out to have my job. ‘Why should that Miller kid get special treatment and mine not?’, they would ask. And if, to give them a reason, I were to show them Thomas’s I.Q. (which
I doubt you would want me to do), they would say, 'Well, are our public schools designed for the brainy elite, or for the average student? They are for the child with a 100 I.Q., not a child with a 130 I.Q.!' So you see, I really cannot do anything like that to help Thomas. It is a shame that they closed down the gifted classes at Central. 'A lack of interest,' they called it at the downtown office; what they really meant was that they got 1,550 letters of complaint from parents of average children, who did not want their tax money to be used to 'help the brains.' So I am afraid that I cannot help you much in that respect. I might suggest that you apply to the principal’s office for a permit to put him in the sixth grade next year. I am sure Thomas can handle it.”

Tom slid into his seat and was amazed at how big the desk was. Would he never start out a school year with a desk that fit him? “I’ll probably never grow into it,” he thought. He looked around at all the new faces in the class; he had expected to see many old friends (the principal had rejected the Millers’ request for permission to put Tom in the sixth grade—“his grades don’t warrant it,” she said). Although he had had two disappointing school years in a row, he was still somewhat confident of his success in this grade. “Maybe this year will be different,” he said to himself.

“Good morning, children. My name is Mrs. Knurd, spelled with a ‘K,’ and I will be your homeroom teacher for this next year.”

February  
Martha Moldt  

Cornfields stretched out to horizon’s limit;  
Stubbled, brown, melted-snow soft,  
Furrowed, pooled, tree-framed,  
Successive mirror-image farmhouses  
Patiently sit out winter’s bleak progression,  
Waiting for summer’s green,  
How soft some of the trees look!  
Their tentative leaf-fuzz  
Against the hard bare lace of oak,  
The virgin coldnesses of birch,  
Is more alive than anything else around.  
More, even, then the black and white pigs  
Rooting in the mud.