

August Reunion

by EL Williams

GRANNY

It was Friday and I had been washing since seven. The kids were all coming home tomorrow and there would be no time for work then. The clothes were hanging on the line, flapping gently in the wind. I looked out the window and saw the bright white sheets swinging against the green background. So many things to be thankful for, I thought. So many times God's seen fit to bless. Then I thought for a second of Shirley, my little baby. I wondered what it would be like if Shirley came tomorrow. My baby Shirley.

I looked past the sheets flapping in the wind to the children playing on the hill. Always playing, I thought, but they helped me when I needed it. I saw them rolling in the grass, shoving and falling. That John, he was a mean one, though. He had too much energy. I saw him grab Kitty and wrestle her to the ground. Then Mike pointed down the tracks. They all ran from the weeds, Rafe leading. Then they stopped and I saw the bent, old, shadow of a man come walking up to them, one leg dragging behind in the cinders, the other leg flopping rhythmically ahead of it. Well, he's here, I thought. I better set the dishes.

JOHNNY

"You ain't ever gettin' up," I laughed. I had her so she couldn't either. Her arms were pinned down good. "Not til you say you're sorry." And I would have made her, too, except that Mike saw King Wes comin'. You don't see King Wes that often.

He came limping down the tracks, spittin' his tobacco to the side, draggin' that bum leg and gruntin'.

"Old man ain't never washed," I laughed, winking to Rafe. He told me I better never let him hear that but I just slapped my knee and laughed, "Ain't no old man ever gonna get me."

King came up and spit to one side, 'most right on my leg. He reached out a hand and took Kitty's hair in it. "Hello, perty gal," he grunted. She pulled back. I'd of pulled back too. I sure would've, seein's how an old man dirty like him had touched me.

"Hello, you little bastard," he snuffed to me.

"Cain't hear you through your gums," I shot back. King Wes didnt have a tooth in his mouth and he couldn't take no kidding about it. His hand shot out for me but I saw it comin' quick enough to just have it barely graze me. I ran down the hill to tell Granny King was comin'.



RAFE

We were at the table and King was slurping the bean soup. His beard was in the soup and his hands were wet. They held the bowl before his mouth and tipped it to the grey gums. Then he spoke. "Shor nice, Missa Willums, you takin' care o' old King Wes like dis. Folks help a littl', here and dere, but not like 'fore. Nobody care for me no more."

Granny got up and went to the kitchen for more biscuits. King's hands reached for them before she was seated. They were still black, the hands, black from the grit of the railroad tracks. I remembered, up there on the tracks, when he came 'round the bend and I asked if he was going to eat. He said he might cut our heads off and eat us if he had a mind to. "I reckon you won't," I had said. He reached for my shirt and pulled me off the tracks. Then he asked me if I liked tobacco and spat in my face. Mike pulled me up from the tracks and I heard him whisper "bastard" under his voice. "How you gonna eat without no teeth," laughed Johnny, winking.

My knee still hurt from the tracks when King dropped me. I met his eyes for a moment.

"How you comin', toothless?" Johnny snorted. His eyes sparkled while King's went wild.

"John Ely, you get out on the porch right this minute!" Granny yelled. Johnny winked and laughed as he slid out of the chair.

AUGUST, 1966

Night had come. They lay in bed, John and Rafe. On a mattress beside their bed, Mike was already asleep. John kept whispering to Rafe, kept nudging his shoulder. "What'd she say?"

"Nothing," Rafe answered. "just he'd been in prison some twenty years, that's all. Go to sleep."

The door cracked and Granny peeked in.

"You all hush in there. John, you go to sleep, hear?"

She shut the door and all was quiet, save for the chirp of the crickets. She walked down the hall and cracked the door to Kitty's room. Inside the young girl was asleep, her blond, almost white, tresses were spilled across the pillow. Granny passed on and stopped by the desk to pick up a small frame. She held a picture of a little girl in blue jeans. The little girl's head was cocked and she was smiling bashfully. On the back of the photograph, Granny read the inscription, "Shirley, 1945."

She laid the picture on the desk and walked on, out to the porch. She was tired. She leaned against the screen door and locked it. Her eyes turned to the dark, quiet road by the porch. She remembered, how King Wes had walked down the road in the late afternoon. He had left, dragging his bad leg behind the good one, kicking up a cloud of dust with each step. He had his hands deep within his pockets

and his elbows flapped as the wind ruffled his thin shirt, his worn black shirt.

Granny leaned against the door and sighed. Her thin hand moved slowly to her cheek and wiped away the wetness there. Her brows were somewhat pinched, somewhat arched. Her face was taut. She turned and walked slowly down the hall, her bent figure casting a dim but definite shadow. Then she reached out and turned the last light off.

A Tip

to members of the literary profession

by Piet Hein

Those
who can write
have a
lot to
learn from those
bright
enough
not to.