

## “Her Delinquency”

The pastor picks where he should strum;  
He's found a single note,  
But the tune slides by the dead  
And is lost on the living.

"I understand she was devout in her youth."  
She was.  
She walked four miles each Sunday  
Bonneted on a dusty road;  
Sometimes church picnics  
With long tables under the oaks.

Then a skin disease  
That despised the sun,  
Ointment, soaking, dressings  
That scratched so long  
Like a night mouse in the wall  
That its sting went out.  
Prayers were pails of water,  
And God a good husband.

Afterwards the hymns never made music.  
“Haven't heard that scratch have you parson?”  
Visited it periodically, offered prayers,  
But your greatest sting is the heat on your brow.

“I understand she was devout in her youth”  
“And feel that in spite of her delinquency,”  
“Heaven will accept her.”

You UNDERSTAND!

Arthritis, you understand?  
Thirty-six years  
She watched herself bend and swell,  
Fingers, hands, arms, legs until  
Each movement in the morning  
Is a yellow jacket,  
But the stinger is inside  
And you can't beat it away.

Twenty-seven years  
With a broom, a washboard, a wood stove.  
Always a neat house,  
Clean men and good food.

Somber but rarely dejected  
Even with bad years turning regular.  
No self-seen martyr in her suffering;  
Rather from courage without complaint  
Grew a family with strength, compassion, insight, love;  
A christian family,  
Not a church family,  
Not a family with a Bible,  
But a bible family;  
Not reading, singing and praying,  
Simply honest, respectful - Living.

Nine years in bed after her son married.  
Still in her room, silent until sought,  
Always sought by four grandsons  
And in evidence everywhere.

Then the hive inside died in the heat.

“Her DELINQUENCY!”

The man you address is short and aging;  
The suit is neat but not fitting;  
A light straw hat, scratched shoes,  
And a tanned moon face is this man.

He is fine of his own.  
He is better for his crippled wife;  
He sees your white hands;  
He hears your peal:

It is the shrill of the evening snipe,  
Not the toll  
Of the mourning dove.

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