

Tobacco Season

Going up the walk

Walking across the ^{wet} yard ^{thready} toward my grandmother's ~~the~~ ^{my} farm house, I can see ^{her} my grandmother & my mother ^{sitting} on the long screened porch. I wonder what they have seen, ^{what they have heard} what they know, and can't resist turning & starting ^{back} ^{at} the tobacco packhouse across the ^{highway} road. ^{to} ^{see} the picture from ^{that} ^{perspective} ^{is} ^{just} ^{as} Edward Loggins' pickup is still parked on the weedy ramp, facing the unpainted, empty ^{pack} house, and I can hear him inside stacks of tobacco sticks, ^{even walking} and I ~~know~~ ^{that} suspect I can hear that ^{from here} ^{from} ^{where} I am. ^{Man} ^{and} ^{Gracie} have heard our fast breathing and kissing and hot whispering.

Locusts
crickets
rain
driving
from
the
west

I ~~say~~ ^{to} ^{them} ^{to} ^{run} ^{fast} ^{to} ^{keep} ^{from} ^{hearing} ^{what} ^{they} ^{say} ^{back}. My red ^{shorts} & striped shirt ^{are} ^{soaked} with tobacco dust and sweat. I turn on the ^{spigot} ^{bracketed} to the side of the ^{house} and feed the green water hose from the ^{grape} ^{vine} arbor ^{through} my hands, then ^{the} ^{spout} of clear ^{water} over my ^{arms} first, then ^{my} ^{face} then my neck & great breasts and hips.

"I want to go home," I say low, but that's a lie. I don't want to go back to Decatur with ^{Man} ^{on} ^{Friday}. I tally ^{up} the days left -- Tuesday ^{the} ^{Friday} -- in which to keep from going all the way

2

with Edward Loggins. Four days! I'll never
make it. I wish Mama would make me just working
in tobacco for the Loggins. But that's a lie
too.

Another lie: Mama acts like we're rich and don't
need the money, that she's just letting me work to
teach me ~~country ways~~ ^{the country} ~~work~~ ^{good} old-fashioned
work ethic ^{to her home place in} ~~in~~ ~~Withers~~ ~~Warren~~ ~~County~~ ^{S. E. Pa.}. What
drives me crazy in the way she acts like me --
the offspring of the ^{landlord} ~~Sanderson's~~ -- are ~~above~~ ^{too} good
for the ^{farming} Loggins, but at the same time cozies
up to them & the other "quaint" farm people of
Withers.

I don't know how to put on airs like that,
and I don't want to. This very minute, coolly
down ^{my hot body} under the waterhose, I ~~would~~ ^{would} ~~like~~ ^{marry}
Edward Loggins ^(he wasn't already married) and tell Mama to kiss my foot.
I truly ~~would~~ ^{would}! But in the back of my mind, I
fear Mama, not her wrath (as she calls
it) but her disapproval. She has big plans
for me and ^{marry} Edward Loggins, who I ^{promised} ~~promised~~ to meet at the
tomorrow ^{old Masonic} ~~will~~ ^{lodge tonight} I'll tell ^{her} ~~her~~ ^{that} ~~that~~ ^{is} ~~is~~ ^{why} ~~why~~ ^I ~~I~~ ^{couldn't} ~~couldn't~~ ^{make} ~~make ^{it}.~~

~~I~~ ^{the dark;} listening ~~in~~ to the quiet ~~tick~~ ^{tick} of the house and
listening ~~out~~ to the drumbeats of the Negro church
just a few hours west of Grandma's.

Mosquito whine in the dark and I wait for
one to bite, then pull the crisp, sunny sheet over
my bare legs and close my eyes. Everybody in Decatur
has air conditioning, ^{evening,} and I wonder how Marna in the
front bedroom up the hallway is bearing up under the
heat. Probably wide awake or ready, though I can't
see light from her window when I look thru to
one by my bed. She never sleeps, she's not fooling
me. I sit up and swing my feet to the ~~cool~~ wood
floor, and just my toes, as if I'm ~~testing~~ ^{testing} her,
testing myself.

I know that I am going to meet Edward Roggens
when my feet ~~test~~ ^{spread flat out} the floor.

In the dark, I follow the starchy smell of
corn & vanilla plain cake from the hall to the
roomy clean kitchen, lifting up on the back door
to keep it from squeaking. Outside in the cut-off
cut-grass air, I stand & listen to the drums again
and think how 1965 in Wether is like 1950 might
have been in Decatur - the year I was born.

Passing along the wire fence of a house's front
the highway, I smell a snuffy smell of cooking tobacco
mingled with the green air. A few airplanes tumble
in the starry sky, a gentle drone giving life to the

the nothings in ring of katydid seesawing side to side
 in the oak & ~~myrtle~~ flowering shrubs ~~by the~~ ^{the} yard.
 In the fourth yard, I stop from the ~~ground~~
 grass to the tall dog fence & bahai seedling
 bahai and walk toward the two-story faded white
 old Masonic lodge: that I vaguely remember as
 The first floor is still used as a store, with ^{wooded} stairs
 leading up to back.

Suddenly, I'm afraid of more than just
 Mama & my hot tight bosomy body as I take the
 first dark stair up, ~~holding~~ ^{leaning} against the wall.
 When I get halfway, I ~~call~~ ^{hear} call out his
 name & he answers ^{from the top of the stair with} that resonant ~~rough~~ ^{rough} voice
 I love, and I picture him framed in the dark
 tall, lanky, blonde with ^{pequa} blue eyes ^{steadily} set in his
 even-featured face, and then I touch him and
 see his long waist and slim hips with my hands.
 He's too thin, but his lips are hot, his hands
 are sure. Unlike the only boy I've ever
 pressed my body onto and felt a thrill, Wade
 Sumner in Decatur. Last year. Rich boy,
 son of an architect.

"What if Mama followed me," I say
 following Edward thru the dark creaking room
 that smells of dust. ^{Downward} Windows ~~to~~ ^{to} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~sidel~~
 in starlight.

~~He stops~~, still holding my hand "I thought she was asleep."

"Oh don't let it," I say & let him lead me to a long church pew along the ~~side~~ ^{north} ~~set~~ ^{side} of ~~the~~ ^{west} window. "But she would stop to follow & rich having people know..."

~~He stops~~ up my words into his lips, holding my face as he probes my mouth with his hot tongue. I hold to his knobby shoulder bones and think how strangely narrow his bone structure broad shoulder feel. I do & know whether I love him. I do & care.

I do care when his right hand slides down to my right breast, and shrug his hand lower. He keeps it on my waist for just a second then allow it to travel to my back, to my buttocks. He squeezes. I sit higher, still kissing & breathing thru my nose, and then his right leg wraps mine & we sink, lower & lower, till he ~~is~~ ^{is} lying on the hard wood bench and he has one foot on the floor and the other leg jacked up by my right side -- kissing, kissing, drawing. He lowers his body to mine & I feel his ^{crystal} ~~hard~~ bone hard against my pelvis. Ohh okay, I have on blue jeans. It's hot. Smothering hot.

His right hand snakes down & fiddles with the button snap on my jeans & I arch ^{my back up} ~~up~~ ~~off~~ ~~off~~

The bench had pin his hand between us till my back aches. I let go of his still hand moved inside the band of my jeans. I reach down & stop at there.

"I don't want to, ...," I say into his mouth.

"I love you," he whispers?

"I love you too but ..."

"Trust me." He's breathing hard & fast & on hold. I pick up the slack between his breaths with my own. Panting sounds & ~~see~~ that single foot scrap on the board floor. The back of my head throbs from ~~the~~ pressure of his punched mouth.

I sit up, backing him off. He sits beside me. He holds his head in his hands, elbows on his knees. Then still I wait for him to speak and we end up in the same ~~position~~ again. And again.

"I have to go home," I say when we finally ~~meet~~. "Mama's probably already ^{been} checking on me."

"I don't want you to go," he says & we ~~do~~ again.

"I'm leaving on Friday."

"Tell your ~~Mama~~ you need to stay ~~with~~

flashback
swimming
in the river

7

you & Annie,

~~the fact~~ that I don't answer, can't answer,
the mean I'll stay, I think.

And then we start over, and I think how little
we've said for the past two weeks, ~~but how~~
so much with our bodies. And suddenly I know
I'm not so much afraid of my mama or my
body but that I might leave if we start ~~over~~
talking and I want to leave on Friday while ~~my~~
being in love is still intact. Something to come
back to Wicken ^{each summer} ~~for each summer~~ ~~the next summer~~
~~maybe~~