

A CUP OF TREMBLING

A Dramatic Reading

by
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From the story, "A Cup of Trembling," in the Southwest Review. Permission granted by the author to the WETMORE DECLAMATION BUREAU.

What happened that day is hewn in my memory in stone. Sometimes I walk back through these petrified tableaux, where each figure is like a statue in a graveyard, and I touch the marble images and name them, Mama, Daddy, Kathleen.

It was August and a hurricane was coming. Daddy had sent me down to Horsehead Landing to gather in the shrimp nets and secure the skiffs. The wind began to blow out of the east, bringing rain in diagonal sheets. The sky was filled with storm-swallows, swooping and spiraling in a final warning, but I was not afraid. Storms relieved, if only momentarily, the monotony of reality.

But between storms lay deserts of time when the sun was blinding and my nights were restless and dream-haunted. These dreams were nightmares in which I was stalked by a beast. He was large and hairy, with long ape-like arms. At first I'd hide from him but he'd find me and I'd run, stumbling and panting, out toward Old Woman Swamp. When my pursuer was so close behind I could feel his breath on my neck, I'd reach the swamp and on swinging vines swing away into the greenness, leaving the beast to stomp angrily in the selva ferns.

But it was only in my dreams that I went into Old Woman Swamp, for it was there that my loneliness began--

It was midsummer and I was lying on a bed of grass, fanning myself languidly. Kathleen darted about like a wood sprite, doing my bidding. Nothing is nicer than being twelve and having a six-year-old sister. Treat her halfway decent and she becomes your slave.

"Bring me three more snakeflowers," I said, and she rustled away through the brush. Already she had gathered for me a treasury of beautiful things (I did so love beautiful things!): three snakeflowers, two jack-in-the-pulpits, two butterflies, a water lily half open, a snake egg, and an old oriole nest. Kathleen was my procurer of beauty.

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