

Poems of Childhood

Elayne Sidley

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Scissors Man

Elayne Sidley

There was an old man on a bicycle cart,
A scissors man,
Who pedaled a little sharpener cart down the alley,
An entire shop the size of a large doll's house,
And when he stopped,
Bent over his scissors and knives,
Turning the stone round,
The wheel spun sparks and heat and a bright, hard sound.

When the job was done,
He gave over the implements shyly,
And took his coins carefully,
And was gone.

I never knew when he'd return,
But when he did, and there were scissors or knives to sharpen,
How I'd run to him and shyly hand them to him.
When there were none, I'd just wave and watch him go on down the alley,
Leaving the sound of his little bell behind,
And maybe a memory of a smile.

If I had a thousand thousand knives and scissors,
A million coins,
Would that have made him stay?

He must have died sometime,
In some place and time.
Was he in a hospital with tubes and steel basins?
Was he in a house, comfortable and warm?
Or was he pedaling down an alley, and, fallen,
Only a curiosity for some stray dog
Until the Proper Authorities hauled him off
Somewhere where they haul off fallen people,
To the rubbish heap of fallen people?

Oh, scissors man,
Could I have cradled your head?
Crooned loving ?
Turned round with you?

The Iceman

Elayne Sidley

A wooden icebox
Stood in the kitchen.
Mama would put up a sign in our front window
That said, "0, 10, 25," and "50" on the four sides.
The number up told the iceman
How much we wanted.
The numbers were big and red,
And he could see them way up on the third floor.

When he had climbed all the stairs,
A huge block of ice on his back,
He'd say, "Good morning, missus," to Mama
And, "Hi, Squirt," to me.

Mama would open the lower door of the icebox,
And the iceman, holding the ice with a big fork
Would lower and push the ice into the icebox.
He always gave me a chip of ice to suck on.

At night, Mama would pull out a tray
From under the icebox.
It would be full of water from melted ice.
She'd carry the tray to the sink and empty it.
Sometimes, she waited too long to take the tray,
And the water spilled on the floor.
Then she'd say, "Everything happens to me,"
And wipe up the water.

I wished I could pull the tray out,
But mostly I wished I could
Carry a block of ice on my back
All the way up the stairs.
And even more,
I wanted to drive the ice wagon
Filled with blocks of ice
And pulled by a nice horse
Who waited quietly for the ice man.

Now I have a beautiful refrigerator.
I have all the ice I can want,
And no water spills on the floor.
Sometimes, I take a chip,
Suck on it,
And think about a nice iceman
With a horse and wagon
Who would come up the stairs and say,
"Good morning, missus."

Flower Garden
Elayne Sidley

Way, way down,
These many floors,
A garden.
Flowers.
All the colors.
Like a picture book.

Children can't play there;
It belongs to the landlady.
It's only for her.
She doesn't share.

When I'm a grown-up lady,
I'll have a garden with flowers,
And I'll let every little girl
In the building
Come and play.