

Poems By Deborah Reed

FIELD HOOKY

When I was little, I already wandered
Always veering right at the foot of our driveway
Towards all those months of acres on the short end of the street
That whole field was mine
And it froze one February weekend
So I skated on rock-solid snow
Fell many times on frosted roots and secret weeds
But I was lighter then, and much more brave

In May I once unearthed a stormy nest of raw new mice
And by June I swam in clothes and captured stump-legged tadpoles
Crayfish, turtles, frogs, water striders
And strange bloated goldfish gone near-gray in the wild
Then I let them go

Atop I netted monarchs and swallowtails
Fireflies, newts, toads and airborne grasshoppers
Gathered up soft brown bunnies
Plucked leaves and milkweed parachutes
Wove dandelion crowns
And then I let them go

Eclipses and northern lights, comets and four-leaf clovers
Jupiter and Ursa Major, trilobites and arrowheads
Winking Venus in a Scarborough horizon
I never let those go

I could bend tall grasses into castles
Be Tarzan on the willows
Hunt rogue cherries which stained me
So I'd scrub myself before home with cold wet sand from the creek
And sometimes with found old rope there
I'd strap together stray branches
So I could raft like Huckleberry
On the silty pond only I called 'the ocean'

In July I found a hobo hunched with open can over a small stick fire
He'd slept plein air like I wanted
And knew the boxcars and he told me
If I placed a dime on the rail, the train would squash it into a dollar

Between the ties lay petrified shells

Shards of ancient seabed, and treasure twinkles of quartz
And when I was twelve I tried to stand my ground
When boy marauders from the mysteries beyond the tracks
Dared to invade my side and steal my fossils

Then August began to smell of school
Jackrabbits and tumbleweed outran me
In a wind redolent of straw
Which voiced its grassiness like whispering water
I deeply knew these vagabond afternoons would abandon me
That wildflowers would fade to broken feathers
That crickets slowed to silence
That pencil and ruler would covet my divine light

And when the weather finally pulled two blue knee-socks
Over my disappointed legs
I wouldn't let it go
But it went

RHYMES WITH DIMES

I rhyme on a dime and
Taught lessons in verse
Grade 5's only smiled and
Came out none the worse

My father, when walking
The Lake District hills
Took poetry with him
To garner top thrills

Deft syllable counting
Iambic or blank
Was lager to spirit
While beauty he drank

So Wordsworth or Shakespeare
Both Williams, both Brits
Kept rhythm inside him
As Dad hiked post-Blitz

For births and retirements
Chances to wax
He'd pull out his pencil

On paper he'd max

His own metric nature
In stanzas with form
Grand tributes in couplet
Dry humour, his norm

So such is now in me
Coy wryness plus word
Boy shyness behooved us
Twin need for absurd

Whenever my childhood
Was scary for me
He'd give me his ten cents
To kill misery

And if my school math test
Scored four out of ten
He'd wink and he'd jingle
"Allowance again!"

These days if in travels
Dropped dime I espy
I'll stoop and then pocket
Dad's gift from the sky

NIGHT FEVER

Mars and the meteors married tonight
Birthed stars on the leaves of the trees
My witching hour memory's suddenly right:
Deep magic descends on the breeze

'Girls and boys come out to play...'
Again that old wizard rhyme stirs
'The moon doth shine as bright as day'
My secret night fever recurs

Muscles less limber, raw heart is more sore
But inside young feathers awake
Curl fingernail moon with a Milky Way roar
Ensure tired parts double-take

So through woolly garden which midnight splits wide

I take two bare feet 'cross cold dew
Upturned, face to heaven all be-atified
I whisper my ancient thank you