Recommended

Skeletons of Yesterday and Today

by Barbara Sublett

The dog days of August were upon us. They filled the air with a dry humid heat, so hot that your lungs baked with every breath you took. Flat, sparsely-weeded land ran adjacent to the railroad tracks. Plumes of white smoke rose from the steam engine as it slowed to go into the yard half a mile east. A dusting of soot fell from the stack and filled the air, depositing fine black ash almost imperceptibly. The day was alive with the music of summer. Crickets rubbed their legs rapidly, keeping pace with the rapidly rising mercury as ninety-eight degrees registered on the thermometer. Grasshoppers spat their brown juice and performed magnificent standing broadjumps. Dragonflies and bees darted and hummed busily, filling the needs of survival.

The midday sun beat down on our heads as we trekked through the weeded fields behind the house toward the place where “they” had died.

“Come on! You walk too slow,” our twelve-year-old guide said impatiently as he tried to demand and command us into pace.

But it was too stifling to speed up our steps. Three of us moved along the dirt trail. As we walked, the dust rose beneath our shoes, swirling lightly and settling on bare ankles. The nearer we came to the water the slower our steps became. Even our self-appointed leader began to scuff his feet as we advanced.

It sat next the railroad tracks, bordered on the south by a small maple tree which shaded the swamp grass beneath its boughs. Scurrying and slithering could be heard, almost felt, within the grass as creatures fled the approach of small feet. Dried ashes of recent campfires, scattered empty tins and empty bottles of wine were all that remained of those who used the area, perhaps to sleep for the night, using the shelter and shade of the tree. The water surface was flat and it seemed, as we approached, to be clear and blue as far as the eye could see, as close as we dared to step.

We came here once last summer, drawn with morbid fascination to the spot. A hush came over us, pressing in and around our hearts.

“It’s down there, you know,” he said. “It’s a bottomless pond. Fed from the lake probably. They have never found the bottom. That’s why they can’t find them.”

“How do you know?” I asked. “If no one has seen the bottom or them, how do you know that they are really there?”

He cast me a narrow, sidelong glance. “Girls are such sissies, afraid of everything, and sisters are the biggest pain of all!” Disgust and impatience registered heavily in his voice and stance.

“Everybody knows they are there. They are held down there. It’s because of the quicksand. That’s what holds them down. The old man, the horse and the buggy.....they are all down there. If you get close enough to see down in there you can see them sitting on the bottom. But nobody can do that because they don’t know where the quicksand begins and it might pull them down, too.”

We all peered respectfully at the spot of the great tragedy, where careless man and animal had met their death, mired and then engulfed within a liquid tomb. We just couldn’t see far enough down into the water to determine anything. Didn’t it stand to reason that if the water held a grown-up who should have known better, who had ventured too close, that we should be respectful in distance as well as manner? For should we stand too close, a soft grip would encircle our feet....our shoes.... and then we would be sealed, along with the unknown soul, in the bottomless depths.

Necks strained and craned to discern a form, something or someone visible to validate this long-told tale. As always, we searched but never found anything but fear for our own mortality and a fascination for the macabre.

Time passed and years flew like days in retrospect. The secret of the pond and what it had held had long since left my mind, or so I thought. Founding fathers of the city proposed an industrial development in the area. They cleared land, paved a road and began to clean out the pond. I went to see; I had to see what it held. The pond did hold skeletons of
days gone by. These were skeletons, though, of discard. Old bodies of refrigerators and stoves, an occasional washer
and ever-present empty bottles of wine made a mounded heap beside the empty pond. I was left with feelings of sad
amusement, and a twinge of disappointment, the memory of hot summer days, of friends, of days gone by. The quiet
days of childhood, when death was but a possible glimpse of the form of an unknown stranger.

Recommended

Bend Over Backwards
A Song

by John Hicks

1. You tell me it's over, you say that we're through,
Nothing I could say could get through to you,
Your eyes look right through me, you don't give a damn,
I'd bend over backwards to win back your hand.

Chorus: I'd bend over backwards, I'd crawl on my knees,
To win back the love you promised to me,
To make you still love me like you used to do,
I'd bend over backwards to get back to you.

2. Love that you needed, I never could give,
So tired of dying, you now need to live,
You said "Listen to me," now you're all alone,
You could bend over backwards, and I'd still be gone.

Chorus: I'd bend over backwards, I'd crawl on my knees,
To win back the love you promised to me,
To make you still love me like you used to do,
I'd bend over backwards to get back to you.