

“On our dryness pour thy dew”

Recently an out-of-season rain fell on our valley. Gray velvet clouds, wet grass, cool air, making it legitimate to sag, collapse. And I thought of Eudora Welty’s story “A Curtain of Green”. In a small Mississippi town one summer it rained a lirtle. But on this particular day the daily ration of rain had not come. As late as five o’clock the sun was still ablaze. Women sat by their windows fanning themselves. Only Mrs. Larkin remained active, working her garden despite the warmth.

Ever since her husband accidentally died the year before, she’d enter her garden every morning and work away aimlessly at the soil, planting *every kind of flower she could order from a catalogue. She would plant quickly, carelessly, without regard to arrangement or even harmony of color. And if she thought of beauty at all, she certainly did not strive for it. It was impossible to enjoy looking at such a place. To the neighbors gazing down from their upstairs windows it had the appearance of a jungle.* Mrs. Larkin didn’t care. Neither gardening nor life really had any meaning for her now. True, at times she did feel something flutter within her breast like some bird struggling to fly free but she always lapsed into a deep depression. Then under the sun, her hair uncombed, all she could do was keep *chopping in blunt, rapid, tireless strokes. Her eyes were dull as if from long impatience or bewilderment. People said she never spoke.*

How well that describes so many of us in our modern world who, bewildered by disappointment or death, become skeptical of any deeper meaning to things. And what is there left for us to do but keep busy: hoe that garden, punch that clock, turn that channel, develop that property, widen that existing highway to take us nowhere new. It’s enough to drive anyone mad! And angry is what Mrs. Larkin became on that arid afternoon. It was the whistling and faraway smile of her helper Jamey, *the colored boy who worked in the neighborhood* that got to her. What right had he to smile? What right had he to dream, to contemplate some *flickering and beautiful vision* when she beheld only emptiness? She took tight hold of her hoe and approached Jamey as he bent over his work. She raised the hoe slowly in silent anger to strike out at this dark angel and his music, his ridiculous dream, and this ridiculous universe.

In that moment, the rain came. The first drop touched her upraised arm. Small, close sounds and coolness touched her. Sighing, Mrs. Larkin lowered the hoe. She stood still where she was, close to Jamey, and listened to the rain falling. It was so gentle. It was so full - the sound of the end of waiting. In the light from the rain everything appeared to gleam unreflecting from within itself. The pear tree gave a soft rushing noise, like the wings of a bird alighting. A wind of deep wet fragrance beat against her. Then as if it had swelled and broken over a levee, tenderness tore and spun through her sagging body. It has come, she thought senselessly. Against that which was inexhaustible, there was no defence. Mrs. Larkin fainted. Jamey ran and crouched beside her. In a beseeching voice he began to call her name, *Miss Lark!’ Miss Lark!’* until she stirred. And so the story ends. But who can doubt that beneath that gentle rain, symbolic of the Breath and Breadth of Inexhaustible Grace, whatever it was she had felt flutter within her breast was finally set free?

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