

Grains of Life: Fragments of a Sonnet Cycle

Helen Candland Stark

I

PLANTING

If I could give to you a dew-wrapped day,
You have no need to tell me — I should know
That you would use it all to make things grow.
The furling bud, the fruiting branch are pay
More than enough for loam from stubborn clay.
If noon wilted or harsh rains turned to snow,
If whirl of locusts darkened skies to mow
Earth naked — plant again. Thus you would say.

But love, our love, can have no second root.
We gardened well and won a tall white flower
From a bud that burgeoned from a bitter shoot
Rooted in sullen soil. Let come no hour
When we neglect to guard that tall bright tree
Whose harvesting must be our destiny.



HELEN CANDLAND STARK, now in her eighties, lives in Provo, Utah. She and her husband Henry lived in Delaware for thirty years where she was part of the pioneer effort to establish the Church in Wilmington. She has published in Exponent II, Sunstone, Ensign and remains active in conservation efforts and women's issues. This poem was awarded first prize in the Eliza R. Snow Poem Contest and was published in the Relief Society Magazine 28 (Jan. 1941): 10-11.

II

BLIGHT

August is the month of broken dreams:
The amber pear splits in the grass, worm-eaten;
The fish drift sideways in the shrunken streams;
And in the fields the fecund shocks lie beaten
With hail. What are those puny stalks of gray
Seen through a midday dusk of drifting soil?
Listen! The crickets work on stubbled hay,
And canker takes the perfect rose as spoil.

And I who kept my body for this fruiting,
Know now the wandering seed can find no rest —
Part of the waste of August's heavy looting,
Part of the waste of nature's heavy jest.
September, can your gentler hands redeem
The scattered fragments of the broken dream?

III

BIRTH

Let this then sober you about to wed:
Your loins and hers are living woof and warp
For special patterning. That tilt of head,
The tall bone, the laugh-closed eye, the sharp
Strength of hand — lovers made these belong
To us. Through them still other lovers sent
Our strand of silver words, our love of song —
Once more designing new experiment.

Let this then sober you about to wed:
That pattern, broken, now begins anew;
Here is the snapping of the ragged thread,
The family pattern rent of us and you.
Yet part of you goes with us past your place,
And Mother looks again from your son's face.