

Daddy Hung Me Out

A. R. Mitchell

He hung me next to the load of dripping clothes.
I was just a child! Couldn't walk! Couldn't talk!
Too frozen stiff to cry! But strong enough
to clench my monkey fists around the line.
I still can see the pomegranate bush.

Yes I dropped. Of course I dropped, I was
just a babe, not yet walking, not potty-trained.
Of course my daddy caught me, cuddled me, laughed
his husky damned-if-she-didn't-do-it laugh
and handed the ice to Mama. I thawed in tears.

I tell Mama, I knew the pomegranates,
the deep blue sky, the cruelty. "No—
You were too young to remember." But I do.
"Angel," she says, "You were such a strong-willed child
and Daddy was never so proud as when you hung."

A. R. MITCHELL recently finished a Ph.D. at the University of California Riverside, now resides at Madras, Oregon, and researches stress management for Oregon State University.

In fifty-five my man and I struck out
in a car loaded deep with budding dreams.
We gardened hope: a wage, a house, a farm —
In time four children came to squeeze my neck.
In time, the grandkids will say I'm growing old.

In hospital passageways I clenched my life
against the calluses of my father's hand.
I watched my first love struggle for a time.
I heard my second fall. I dropped a stillborn son
and heard a brother's comfort from beyond.

I suppose I've forgiven Daddy for the pain.
I watched his eyes turn inward toward the wall
and clenched his hand when he no longer mine.
I've seen the need for cleansing times.
I only hope he'll catch me home.