

Late on Father's Day

I always try to take him apples, red delicious if I can.
Or, if it's winter, d'Anjou pears, just losing
Their autumn hardness and gaining a hint of gold.
He still loves fruit.

Just so he always brought home fruit,
Watermelons long and green that cracked
Before the knife to draw it through. Or cantaloupe
Webbed with gray, so unpromising until the knife
Revealed the salmon meat within. Peaches, "cots," cherries,
Pears—wonderful return, we thought,
For the lustreless potatoes, onions, cabbages he took away.
Often a box of bananas, too ripe sometimes, but still
A treat for us. And in depression days a whole
Gunnysack of day-old doughnuts—took some picking
To get all the hairs of burlap off, but "warm 'em up
And they're as good as new."

The bringer of all things good!
We nine, we ate a lot.

But I remember too with what enforced reluctance came
Those dimes and quarters and nickels from pocket
To impatient hands, even when we'd earned them
Hoeing endless weeds in endless heat down endless rows.
And I remember worse the pain and hurt
In eyes that should have danced; we'd waited long,
And fussed too much, in front of banks.

Too early up, he roused the house with shaking grate
And sound of knife through kindling wood, started breakfast
cooking
On burning fire, and left for warehouse or for farm
To "get things going," forgot about the meal
Or any routine of wife and home. He ate, if he ate,
When nothing else was pressing. Played with us,
If he played, in snatches. But always went with us to church.

Those days are gone—and so is she.
Like the d'Anjou pears I take to him, he's mellowed much:
Long years, hard work, we nine, his debts, her pain.
We watched him watch, we watched him help,
We watched him hurt, we watched him pray.
We watched her pay the price of pain and pay the price
Of growth—both ours and his—but price they shared.
No mellowing from banker's pain; depression's pain
Hardened. But her pain mellowed.

Without her now, we're all he has.
And so I try to bring him fruit—

He brought us fruit
And still he brings us fruit.

—Marden J. Clark