

1997

Bread

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Bread

Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"The bed was hard, the room was hot, she lay there with her eyes closed. Nothing to do-or could do-except remember. Memory-God's gift to the old-what a crock! One of those laughable bromides, as if all memories were good ones. Ah but this one was. She drifted off to the beach; hot sand, the Jersey shore. Daddy's grandfather lived in New Jersey; that's why they had gone for a visit. She had a pail and a shovel. Tin, it was made of tin with fish painted on the side. No plastic in those days. How old was she then? Three? Maybe four. Must dig a deep hole, watch it fill with water. Watch the creatures scurry away when you dug. See the tiny crab skitter sideways, look at the black beetle; pick him up - she wasn't squeamish then-head back to the grownups where someone squealed and told her to throw it away. Who cares? Life is complete and beautiful; fulfilled by a hole in the sand. Adult voices carried by the summer haze, reach her ears."

Cover Page Footnote

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"Ree-ree" That was Daddy, "Watcha making?"

"Marie," That was Mommy, "Be careful" I paid no attention; adult talk, adult laughter, sitting in beach chairs, doing nothing, watching her - an only child, so adorable. I reveled in all the love.

Daddy's grandfather was back there with other relatives that she didn't know and couldn't remember their names. But the old man with the white mustache called Daddy "Buddy" which made her laugh. Daddy's name was John, same as his grandfather's, but Mommy called mustache "Mr. Curtis". Hard to understand grownups. Best to stay away from them and get close to the water.

The ocean was cold for all the hot sun beating on it. She had stuck one foot in but quickly withdrew. Freezing! She couldn't look at the water either. So shiny it made her eyes squint. It was filled with little crystal lights, sparkling and shimmering. Ignore it, like the grown-ups. The sand on her knees was wet and cool. Keep digging - the shovel was now an elbow length down.

The wave struck with a force that knocked her over. Ugly with foam, frigid in its intensity, unexpected and evil. It filled the hole, grabbed the pail and shovel, took her breath away. How dare the ocean do this to her? An only child-adorable! She stood up, livid, furious, shrill with anger; stamping her feet in the sand, tears flying off her cheeks. She shook her fist at this impersonal sea and screamed her rage. A roar of laughter blew into her ears. Daddy's laugh, Mr. Curtis' even Mommy? How could they laugh when she was so angry? Such fury should be respected.

The beach, the sand, the heat started to recede. The memory was gone. How strong it had been. She hadn't thought about that wave for what? Eighty years? And she could still feel the rage. Amazing. Peculiar that to this

day she cried when she was really angry. Not many tears when she was worried, sad, depressed or despairing. She could grit her teeth in those times and stick it out. Only fury seemed to bring the salt water streaming down her cheeks, accompanied by screams of defiance, hate-filled, loathing. Only child? Life's past scenes held too much anger. The family, her family, there was much to regret.

A breeze rustled the curtains. She kept her eyes closed and focused on anger. One of the deadly sins. She remembered them all. Pride, covetousness, lust, gluttony, envy, sloth, and anger. Six had gone with age but the last she hugged close. Perhaps it had something to do with affirmation of life. Her life had been filled with anger. At being born poor, at a passive husband, ungrateful children, shattered values, a litany of frustrations and now this. She gritted her teeth. A nurse and an aid entered the room. Oh if she soul only raise her arm and knock the glass on the floor that was on the bed table. Kick at them, scream at them. She kept her eyes closed. That visiting priest had lied. Christ was not the bread of life, anger was. She heard chatter, bustling about. She was being moved to the hospice today. They were whispering, not sure if she could hear. Idiots! She was paralyzed, not deaf. Did they think she didn't know what a hospice was? Why you went there? Another shore, another ocean. The aid's voice was soft, comforting. "now Dear." She felt the tissue blot her face.

--Joanne Clas