Solid

Joan Henson
St. John Fisher College

1977

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side in the front row. I'll be at the piano. When I give the signal to rise, I want all of you to get up and march quietly onto the stage. We open with The Star-Spangled Banner, and remember, they can't hear you in the back seats unless you sing out. I want every parent, every family member and all our friends to hear every word. You know how long they've been waiting for this great day. And I'll repeat for the last time, I want absolute silence!"

Hannah found her seat and Julia, next to her, squeezed her hand and whispered, "Good luck!" Hannah looked behind her and saw grownups and children take seats, heard laughter and friendly murmurs. "I won't look," she thought, turning her head. "But I know they'll be here."

The singing and the exercises went smoothly, and Miss Malloy beamed and bobbed her head with each note she played on the piano. When her turn came, Hannah, head held high, walked out onto the stage, "Breathe there a man with soul so dead," she began. She spoke with pride and feeling, felt her arms move naturally with the words. When she was finished, she heard applause and looked down at the blur of faces. Was that Blanchie's brother waving to her? Maybe that was Cussie behind him.

Once seated, she leaned back in her chair, relieved that it was over. "I did it," she thought. "And they saw me. I know they did."

The principal was giving his farewell address, but she hardly listened. She was still caught up in the elation that she had been picked, that she had done so well, that they had been there to see her. "In closing," she heard Mr. Ferguson say, "I want to remind our graduating class that no matter how far they go on life's pathways, they will always remain in the hearts of those they leave behind at Candace St. Grammar School."

As the class went to the stage for the presentation of the diplomas, the audience applauded wildly. Before the last diploma was handed out, a solid mass of people surged forward. "You looked so beautiful," she heard Mr. Goldstein saying to Blanchie, "Everyone was looking at you. My Blanchie."

"Come over a minute," Mrs. Goldstein called to her. "We want to see you."

"I can't," Hannah said, "I've got to find my family." Where were they? Where was Cussie? Ma? She pushed her way to the outer corridor and ran the length of the auditorium looking down the crowded aisles. Her classmates were with their families; kissing, hugging, laughing, Julia's mother waved to her, but she didn't stop. She circled the auditorium once, twice, heard her own heavy breathing and the happy sounds of families, friends and children.

"Hannah! Hannah!" Julia's voice called, but she turned and ran out the building.

She ran and cried, and the faster she ran the harder she cried. Up Candace St., past Chalkstone Ave., past Inkerman St., past Pekin St. she ran, crying. She stopped crying when she saw her house. "I'm home," she said, and sat on the front steps. For a long time she just sat there, looking straight ahead, then she got up and went slowly up the stairs. "Better go in," she thought, "or I'll get my dress dirty."

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**August**

*by Joan Henson*

go reckless to
forget you are in flowers
now when there bloom more
than can be crushed
or even gathered, more
than any earth ever needed, far more
than the spring dared wear
come squander some
wild buttercups and lace
along the brown, brimming curves of my road

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**Solid**

*by Joan Henson*

Buy a Shaker pegboard
straight bone of beech
and six strong pegs

No iron filigrees
or carved arms of wood
just a good sturdy board
to hang on for a while
when the closets trim coats
and you have nowhere else to go

Buy a Shaker pegboard
and hold on
until the world makes room