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A Cold Mourning

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awareness, a new encounter, and so much more — a new sense of concept of what life in Appalachia is like. we have not had to grow up in an atmosphere such as this — survive in this atmosphere.

I wish you were here to see the nine children who live in three rooms. They shy away as I sit on their porch. Only one tries to smile — an older girl wearing a checked dress at least three sizes too large, and held together with rusty safety pins. Sitting beside me, garbed only in a long T-shirt, a 4-year-old boy urinates on the steps. A blond 2-year-old plays with a hammer in the corner of the porch. Covering his leg is an open wound, obviously days old as the blood is dry and hardened, and the flies flock to the infected area.

I wish you were here to spend an afternoon trying to get an 11-year-old to a doctor. Bobby has cut his foot deeply. He is rapidly losing blood, and needs several stitches. The only doctor the flies flock to the infected area.

Once there, I noticed a huddled figure. A heap of ragged clothes, some of which were three sizes too large, and held together with rusty safety pins. Sitting beside me, garbed only in a long T-shirt, a 4-year-old boy urinates on the steps. A blond 2-year-old plays with a hammer in the corner of the porch. Covering his leg is an open wound, obviously days old as the blood is dry and hardened, and the flies flock to the infected area.

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and nodded hello. Walking over to the dairy section, I selected the milk I wanted, then made my way to the cash register. There, I noticed some packaged Danish rings. I decided they would go well with the coffee so I took one box, then another.

The owner smiled as I walked up. With a knowing look, he asked, "Have company this morning?"

I nodded absently.

I paid, left the store, and hurried home. Since the wind had increased in its intensity, I picked up my pace; I wanted to reach the woman quickly. Something inside told me to hurry, hurry before it was too late...

When I saw her, she had changed the position of her head again. Her forehead was pressed to her knees. I walked up and placed the packaged of food next to her hands. My next step was to run home; I wanted to give her my comforter. But I also wanted her to know she had food there. I tapped her, but she gave me no response, so I shook her gently, and her lifeless body fell towards me. Frozen. She had frozen to death. I looked about me, but no one was around who might have helped. No policeman was in sight. I was alone, as she had been until the moment she died.

I moved away slowly. For some reason, I found myself thinking about the food. It would spoil out here, yet I didn't want to take it home. I wanted nothing to do with that food.

Like a man in a trance, I retraced my steps home. I entered my apartment as if for the first time, noting all my "necessities." The fragrance of coffee, which had once aroused my senses, now repulsed me. I stood by the window, bathed in sunlight, yet I was colder than I had been outside. I felt another spasm shake my body, and I fell to my knees and wept.
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