

One-Room Country School

Like a mother hen,
it stands alone on the Iowa prairie.
Square white frame,
it peers over corn tassels
as I approach in the morning light.

Squeaky oak floor and maple desks
with pencil grooves and ink-well holes,
and eighty years of “ab loves ml” carved into the wood.
The smell of old books,
potatoes baking on the cast-iron stove,
kerosene lamps perched like owls between the windows
and 12 metal lunch pails at attention on the shelf.
Miss Dykstra’s spartan desk,
the dreaded recitation bench up front,
pull-down maps and “It is she”
erased but still visible
on the chalkboard of my mind
while cursive AaBbCc’s dance along its top border.
A stone path leads to the outhouse,
a quarter moon cut in its door.

Tracy became a doctor,
Clint a mechanic,
Betsy pregnant,
Jim a college professor,
Bobbie an alcoholic,
Marilyn a high school teacher,
Viet Nam took Billy
and Virgil farms with his dad.

No one left to hear the bell.

By Arlin Buyert