

Mama's Eyes

I. Mama's Tired Eyes

The only things my mama bought at Jim's Grocery
were flour, sugar, chocolate, salt and pepper.
She cooked three meals every day,
never ate in a restaurant, baked all our bread,
canned all our vegetables from her garden.
She washed our clothes by hand, hung outside to dry,
always on Monday, never Sunday, our holy day.
Farmhouse without electricity, without running water,
without bathroom but with room for love.
My memories of mama on our Iowa farm
resurrect often.

II. Mama's Mournful Eyes

Mama gave birth to twelve children,
all born on dad and mama's bed,
with dad as midwife, as best he could.
Six of my siblings lived just a day or two
and are buried in unmarked graves
in the town cemetery.
Mama never mentioned these children,
never talked about her loss,
never visited their graves,
never entered that dark room,
never.

III. Mama's Quiet Eyes

Later, after they sold the farm and moved to town,
after dad died from a heart attack at 63,
Mama continued to care for my handicapped-sister Berdie.
I called frequently to check in and surprisingly, this time,
Berdie answered the phone.
We chatted for a bit and then I asked to talk to mama.
Berdie said, "Mama's sleeping on the kitchen floor,
in front of the stove."

by Arlin Buyert