

Responsibility

Patty sauntered home from third grade again
Without her glasses.
When Dad dragged in from work,
We were fast asleep and he was weary
So he didn't bother about them.
But this morning they were his focus.

Dad despises factory work--Spraying enamel
on Westinghouse washers and dryers every day
In the most intense heat;
Moving air would mar the shiny enamel finish.
He toils at despised employment to pay the bills.
Unimportant his physical state
His emotional state.
Display strength only.

His responsible nature
(Beaten into him by a mirror image)
Allows no weak demonstrations.
Five growing, needy children;
This year it's my turn for glasses.
He counts his pennies, lives on a tight budget.
So if Patty's glasses get broken or are lost,
His irresponsibility looms;
memories haunt him for past transgressions,
Not keeping his brother out of the pool hall.
Passivity won't shoulder the blame
for his offspring's inability to see the chalkboard.
Weakness, past sins, will be revealed.
He must act.

From his bed, he roars, "Patricia!
Did you bring your glasses home yesterday?"
"No."
"How many times have I told you...?"
The house is shaking from his thunder.
But above the rattle, I clearly hear
his powerful tool snap the air as it breaks
free from the belt loops of the work pants
hanging on his closet doorknob.
"Lean over the bed!"

I can't see Patty's face
And she doesn't utter a futile sound;
Yet her terror is mine,
Moving me with uncontrollable trembling.
I must escape...I could be next
(He needs no reason other than his own
unspoken, unresolved terror). But
before I can, I feel the first bruising Craaack!
On Patty's little bottom.
Flying legs don't shelter me
from the second screaming blast.
And just as I close the attic door
and cover my ears,
The third cries out.
In burning pain, I cry to God to make
him stop,
To please, please make him stop...
But he won't.