

[Home](#)

[Current Issue](#)

[Spring/Summer
2008](#)

[Winter/Spring 2008](#)

[Autumn 2007](#)

[Summer 2007](#)

[Spring 2007](#)

[Winter 2007](#)

[Autumn 2006](#)

[Summer 2006](#)

[Spring 2006](#)

[Winter 2006](#)

[Fall 2005](#)

[Summer 2005](#)

[Editor's Note](#)

[Guidelines](#)

[SNR's Writers](#)

[Contact](#)

A KNOCKING AT THE DOOR BY ADELAIDE B. SHAW

COPYRIGHT 2008

What is that noise? Must be the boys. Why don't they come in? I left the door unlocked, didn't I? Oh, God! Stop the knocking. I can't... Too woozy to stand. Just play outside. Just leave me....

"She's not coming," Wayne, aged six, shouts. "I gotta pee."

"Use the bushes," Ritchie suggests. Too wise for his 12 years, he laughs and gives his brother a poke in the ribs. "That's what I do. It's kind of fun, actually. See how far you can spray." He laughs again and goes behind the bushes himself.

Josh, aged eight, sits on the porch swing, his head down, his hands twisting the tail of his shirt. Tears begin to fill his eyes.

Denise will take care of them. She's always home. I'll make it up to her later. Bake a cake or something. Need an hour to sleep. Then I'll get dinner. Chilli and a salad. They'll like that. The chilli. Even Jim.

"She's not answering the door," Wayne yells across the yard to Denise whose face appears at the window of the next house. A widow in her sixties, Denise waves and beckons the boys to come on over.

"You can do your homework here like before." She indicates the kitchen table. "But first, some milk and cookies. Your mom's having a bad day today. We'll give her a bit longer. She's just tired."

"You mean drunk." Ritchie spits it out, his voice and eyes as dry and bitter as chalk.

Denise puts a hand on his shoulder and gives it a squeeze. "Take it easy, Ritchie." She nods her head towards Josh who sits with his hands in his lap, his eyes blinking, the milk and cookies untouched. "And you, you little cookie muncher." She turns to Wayne. "Slow down or you'll choke."

“You make the best cookies, Denise. Even better than Mom’s.”

“Easy to do,” Ritchie mumbles, “since Mom never makes cookies.”

So dark already. I’ll put on all the lights. Brighten up the house. No. Too bright. They’ll see how wretched I look. Wash my face. That’s it. And some makeup. Brush my hair. There. Get out of this sweat suit. My gray skirt and pink sweater. Yes, that’s better. Cheerful. Just a little tired around the eyes. I’ll call Denise to send the boys home. No. Not until I make the chilli. Need the quiet now. The boys can’t help it. They’re boys. Girls are quieter. Molly was. Sweet, quiet Molly. Singing to herself. “Hey Dolly, Dolly. This is Molly, Molly, Molly.” God Damn that kid. Sixteen years old with his father’s car. Shouldn’t get a license until 30. No sense at all. Too young to drive. Too stupid. Turning the wheel so fast. Should have hit the dog. Who cares about a dog? Shouldn’t think about this. I need a sip. Just one sip so I can cook dinner. Funny, how that one doll looked like Molly. Curly red hair, green eyes. That three year-old plumpness with dimples on her knees and elbows and chin. Even her “Mama” was the same. “Mama. Mama.” I’m here Molly. Where are you?

The scraping of a key in a lock. The back door opens and closes.

“Mary Ann, I’m home. Ah, you’re here. You’re looking pretty tonight.”

“Oh, ...nothing special.” She turns her head, keeping her husband from looking at her fully. He gives her a kiss on the cheek. A whiff of Scotch. Faint, but there. “Where are the boys?”

“With Denise.”

Jim reaches in the frig for a beer, takes a swallow, gives Mary Ann a long, hard look and shakes his head.

“They were outside playing, and she...she called them over. You know how she is. She loves kids.” Mary Ann walks around Jim and gets a beer for herself. “I’m making chilli. I’m...I’m running a little late. Fell asleep.”

Swooshing through the back door the boys come clattering into the kitchen, speaking all at once. “Hi Dad. I’m hungry. Why didn’t you let us in? Denise gave us fudge cookies. We brought some back. Mom? Why did you lock the door?”

“Let’s go out,” Jim says to the boys as Mary Ann retreats upstairs with her beer. “Boys night. Pancho Villa or Tony’s?”

Oh, Jim. I can’t stand having you look at me like that. I’m trying. How can you go on every day? Work as usual. Laugh with the boys. They hate me. Ritchie does, I’m sure. Wayne doesn’t notice much, but he doesn’t want me to read him bedtime stories anymore. “You don’t read ‘em good, Mommy,” he says. And Josh. Sad, middle Josh. As lost as I am.

“Mary Ann, I’m taking the boys out to eat. Mary Ann! Get up!” Jim turns on the light and picks up the empty beer bottle. Shaking her now. Pulling her to a sitting position on the bed. “How much today? When did you start? Right after breakfast, I suppose.” He tilts her head up so that she’s forced to look at him. “We *both* lost a daughter. I’m hurting, too. So are the boys. Or have you forgotten about them? They lost a sister, and now they are losing a mother. Let me help. Let me *get* you help.”

More than a daughter I lost. A part of me. A girl. A girl to gentle. To teach all the girl things. To wear matching dresses. To have tea parties. To make cookies together. Jim has the boys.

I wanted her each pregnancy. Each baby I wanted her. I haven't forgotten the boys. I love them, but I can't help them now. I couldn't help Molly. Couldn't get her stroller out of the way.

"I should have died, too."

"And how would that have helped the boys? Or me? It's been over a year. Time to let go," Jim says. "You've got to accept it and go on."

"How? I see her on the sidewalk. Broken, bloody. And that boy. Unhurt. Nor that God Damn dog. Why isn't the boy behind bars?"

"It was an accident. Avoiding the dog he lost control. He'll have to live with the memory all his life."

"So will I. He should have hit the dog."

Jim puts a pamphlet on the night table. GRIEF COUNSELING. "Please, Mary Ann. Read this. I got it from that organization I told you about. These people may be able to help. Lord knows I've tried and can't."

She looks at the pamphlet, but doesn't move to pick it up.

"I'll bring you back something to eat. Mary Ann, please. Read it and call them. Tonight. Someone's always there."

One. Two. Three car doors slamming. Four? Ritchie must be in the front seat. So anxious to grow up and learn to drive. Oh, no. Not at 16. Not ever. Can't do that. Jim will let him at 16. He's forgiven that boy. I can't. He thinks these Grief Counselors can help. How? Listen to me pour my heart out? Probably in front of a lot of other suffering people. How does that help? Misery loves company? No, it doesn't. I don't want to hear other people's problems. I know all about them. In the news every day. Pain. Bombs. Death. I know I'm not alone. How do the families cope?

"Mommy, we're home." Wayne comes running into the bedroom bearing the odors of hot spices and the flavors of cold December. We brought you some chilli and rice." He carries a take-out box and places it in Mary Ann's hands. "It's good and still hot. I can feel the box."

The odor and his enthusiasm gives Mary Ann incentive to eat some. Jim comes in and, taking his robe and pajamas, goes into the adjoining bathroom. Josh and Ritchie do not come in. She hears them moving around in their rooms and a sudden blast from Ritchie's radio.

"Turn that down," Jim shouts. "O.K. Wayne. You get ready for bed, too. Say good night to Mommy."

Mary Ann eats slowly, surprisingly relishing the spicy warmth as the food slides down to her stomach. She pauses to survey the sounds coming from down the hall. Waiting.

They won't come without Jim's insistence. Only Wayne comes on his own. Ritchie, sullen and angry, will mutter "Good Night." His face near my cheek, but his lips not touching. An "air-kiss." And Josh. He'll hang back, needing to be pushed. His face screwed up, suppressing his tears, his voice low, his hug and kiss light as a breeze in May. What am I doing to my boys? My children. All my children. Even Molly. What am I doing to her memory? Letting her lie on the cold sidewalk, only seeing that last image. She was pure joy. A bouquet of apple blossoms. Champagne bubbles. Why can't I remember that? Must try. Can't let the best of her be forgotten. The boys will grow up and not remember. They'll forget her baby innocence

and sweetness.

Ritchie approaches the bed, slouching, his slippers scuffing across the polished floor, followed by an even slower Josh. They go through the required ritual.

“I’m sorry, Ritchie. Josh”

“Okay, boys,” Jim says, following them to their rooms. “Lights out. You, too Wayne.”

Mary Ann listens to Jim’s tread going down the stairs and the muffled sounds of the television.

Maybe they won’t give me a chance now. Probably too late. Should have... Should have... Oh, Molly, what am I doing? Help is just a phone call away, Jim says. I just want to be left alone. Who is this going to help? Me or him? He will have done the right thing. What he’s supposed to do. That’s not fair. He wants to help. It’s life that’s not fair. Big news there.

A few soft sounds from below. Jim locking up. Checking doors, windows. His slow step on the stairs. He enters the room, and, for several seconds, they look at each other.

Oh, Lord! What do I want? I want Molly back. Not a choice. Except in my heart. To remember her dead or alive. It’s my husband now and three children. Not four. Or nothing.

Without breaking eye contact, Mary Ann reaches across the bed for the pamphlet and the telephone.

Copyright 2008, Adelaide B. Shaw. © This work is protected under the U.S. copyright laws. It may not be reproduced, reprinted, reused, or altered without the expressed written permission of the author.

A graduate of a women’s college in Los Angeles, CA, **Adelaide B. Shaw** lives in a small rural community in New York State with her husband. She has three children and six grandchildren. Her stories have been published in several literary journals, including *The Toronto Star* and *The Writer’s Journal*, both contest winners, *American Literary Review*, *Green’s Magazine*, *Sunscripts*, *The Villager*, *Reader’s Break*, *Dogwood Tales*, *Housewife Writers’ Forum*, *New England Writers’ Network*, *Emrys Journal*, *The MacGuffin*, *Griffin*, *The Country and Abroad*, *Bartleby Snopes* and *Loch Raven Review*. In addition to writing fiction, Adelaide writes haiku and other Japanese poetic forms, such as tanka and haibun. Her collection of haiku, *An Unknown Road* is available at www.modernenglishtankapress.com.