

Mostly about People

By Wally Trabing



The Sounds A Kid Remembers

I can't seem to get off this grandmother kick; one memory leads to another.

She was a mountain woman when I knew her — tall and straight and bulgeless in her cotton dresses and suspicious of a sinning world several ranges of hills away from her isolated home.

What sticks in my memory were her morning sounds; especially her pancake mornings.

Heavy mountain silence made common sounds poignant and from my bed I could read her sounds in the kitchen through the thin rough board wall, and always knew when pancakes were in the making and when to expect her high-pitched warning:

"Better be gettin' up before the hogs get the fritters!"

Which I thought was peculiar because she had no hogs.

The ping of the glass chimney being unpronged from a kerosene lamp and a faint squeak from the unoiled wick-gear were the first sounds to reach into the warmth under the handsewn crazy quilts.

Then came the familiar hissing of her slippers shuffling across the kitchen linoleum.

Then the dead clank of circular iron lids being lifted from the Sincere Universal cook stove firebox; the soft collapsing of dampish paper, snapping twigs and then the dull thud of oak firewood fumbled from the woodbox beside the stove.

Silence.

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Next followed the scraping clatter of iron lids being returned to their holes, and out of a new silence came the buf-feted roar of suppressed flames escaping up the flue.

Life now had meaning and her slippers guided my imagination from the stove to the sink—to the pantry door.

When her slippers suddenly stopped, followed by a curt silence, the mystery broke the logical consequence. It was as if she had been suddenly frozen into some grotesque form by the cold.

But seconds later she would

hiss back into her pattern with a strong tinny clank of dipper against water bucket and the cascading of water into an enamel bowl.

My grandmother was a brave woman.

She washed cold.

The sounds of sloshing icy water against her face pulled unnatural animal sounds from somewhere deep within her body.

This was an overture to the wonder of wonders which always brought me up on one elbow, straining to catch the unmistakable clicking of her teeth being fished from their overnight aquarium and popped into her mouth with a perfunctory snap!

Although my ears were intimate with this scene, never once were my eyes so blessed.

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With her teeth firmly affixed, her shuffling seemed to quicken.

The sounds were no longer singular, but symphonic with subtle foresounds against the background of a captive thudding fire, the spit of water on the stove top and the rocking impatience of an aluminum kettle.

Against this background I could hear glasses gathered from the cupboard, the dull collapsing of eggs against crockery, the chain rattle of the milk can and then the heavy "clop, clop, clop" of a wooden spoon riling the batter.

There were other mysterious movements introduced by the whining complaints of the back screen door which were solved when she returned, by the rumble of firewood tumbling into the fuel box.

These were exciting sounds and I knew the finale well—bacon crackling like a forest fire, the dissonant ringing of silverware and dishes being dealt onto the table in a dry clacking rhythm, and then chairs scudding across the floor to the table.

This is when she would shout her first words of the morning.

"Better be gettin' up before the hogs get the fritters!"

Carpet Notes

Morris Plan