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Naught but Ghosts and Memories Remain

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Different Skies

Beverly Sellers

During the night years can pass, time moving only in her mind. The changing of seasons, a place well loved and people once children continue outside, while inside light-years propel her forward then back again through landscapes that revolve beneath different skies.

She recalls the white stone structure, dedicated in 1936, its Greco façade facing a manicured lawn and beyond an area for teacher parking. Evergreens—a mixture like children of tall and short—surround the two-story school, only occasional pruning required. Each morning a yellow bus stops at a brick walkway leading to the front entry as children—offspring of farmers, oil-field workers and merchants—gather lunch pails from under seats and scurry inside to waiting teachers.

The children, seldom overly boisterous as teachers march them through halls to the playground where they busy themselves on swings and seesaws laughing and talking to each other.

“Look what the tooth fairy brought me last night,” a child with a shiny quarter says to a classmate in line for a swing.

No decline in good manners. Through ropes of an empty swing, one child says, *“Go on. I’ll wait for another.”*

“No, you go first.” Who goes first she no longer recalls, but a bony, towheaded girl (maybe herself) waits for another swing, bent over picking scabs off one knee.

Further out on the playground, in an open field, boys play kickball while girls play house next to the building, squatting between spaces of evergreens. She remembers one girl whose mother would die before the girl completes Grade Six Reader. The girl plays the role of mother, sweeping dirt with a broken branch as if it were a broom and the dirt brown linoleum. Did she know her carefree days of playing house were rehearsals for what would come?

As one grows old, years dissolve during the night, often going where one should not look. Only the sun-warmed stones of that school, if any remain, can set things right—stones that radiated warmth but never spoke, though there still might be names upon them, like the girl who played mother. All gone now, except during the night when they rise to play once more—landscapes revolving beneath different skies.