

POEMS BY ALLISON OHLENGER

Redmond Meat Markets – 1898, 2012

The bear's heart steams in the ice house air
His hide, a trophy on the pillars stretched
The butcher's apron, innocent as snow
His nails rimmed black with blood

His hide a trophy on the pillars stretched
The wildcat, neatly packaged lurks
His claws rimmed black with blood
But placid beef and bacon wait for me

No wildcat neatly packaged lurks
At Bill's Meats in the downtown street
Just placid beef and bacon wait for me
Now tamer meat for tamer days

At Bill's Meats in the downtown street
No bear's heart steams in the ice house air
Now, tamer meat for tamer days
And the butcher's apron, innocent as snow.

Agnes Johnson – Logging Camp, 1905

We sang while we worked, my sister Annie and me.

*In the sweet by and by,
We shall meet on that beautiful shore*

Most gals hate wash day, and I admit when it was raining I wasn't fond of 'em either,
But spring Mondays when the sun shined were my favorite days of the week.
We'd always do the big washing together.

We did for our own and took in wash from the camp –
The extra money sure was welcome,

But land, those logger boys could dirty up a shirt!
The carbolic stung, and the water scalded and you ached in every bone.
And all those socks!
Thank the Lord for Naptha soap is all I can say.

Thank goodness for the porch being so high –
It saved our backs, putting the washtubs where you didn't have to bend so.
Thank goodness we had a wringer too, or we'd have had to do it all by hand.
Saved on ironing as well, though the thing seemed to eat buttons.
Laundry ruined your hands something awful—
No fine-fingered lady ever did her own wash.

*In the sweet by and by,
We shall meet on that beautiful shore*

We sang hymns and songs we'd known as children coming up.
Old favorites, new ones. It was good when the work was heavy,
Which it near always was.
Folks used to say, "You two should be on the stage!"
Of course we'd just color up and say "Go on with ya!"
But I admit, we were that good.

The suds went flat, but never Annie.
Her voice was sweet and true.
We sang. It made it less like work,
Me on one end of a sheet, Annie on the other,
Laughing like we were girls in the middle of the clothes lines.

We have it good now,
With automatic wash machines and spin driers and such.
But I tell you, sheets never smelled so sweet,
Nor a wash day ever go so fast
As singing with my sister over a scrubboard.

I don't much like Mondays any more.

*In the sweet by and by,
We shall meet on that beautiful shore.
In the sweet by and by,
We shall meet on that beautiful shore.*

Albert Magnuson – 1940

I remember that day—
We were hunting grouse.
He was a good dog—but stubborn!
Damn dog wouldn't get up the stump,
Wouldn't climb a step—but cried!
Cried to get up.
Oh, we coaxed—C'mon! C'mon Clancey!
Damn crying dog—nuthin doin'.

We had to hoist him, cringe-backed
Past that saw-toothed tree bark,
Got up like a baby in a bundle.
Then wagged, whip-tailed and licked my hands.
Run all over, almost off the edge.
Surprised he didn't go on and whizz—
prob'ly the cuss couldn't find a corner.

Yup—there he sits, like a damn duke.
Like the king of the woods—
King Clancey.
And me, standing guard
Gun and boots and swagger hat.
King of the Stumps.
If I knew then...

I don't remember what all game there was—
How many we bagged that day.
I just remember trying to get Ol' Clancey
Up that stump.
And then dammit working twice as hard
To get him back down.

Boy – Redmond School House --- 1887

They send you to school t'learn to read and write and cipher.
I guess that's alright.
But then they made us t' learn pomes.

*The boy stood on the burning deck
Whence all but him had fled;
The flame that lit the battle's wreck
Shone round him o'er the dead.*

I waited so hard to go to school, to be big enough.
Now I'm here, I can't hardly wait to get out again.
They make you stand in the front of the room,
With your toes on a crack and recite in front of *everybody*.

*The flames rolled on; he would not go
Without his Father's word;
That father, faint in death below,
His voice no longer heard.*

They ask me every day "What did you learn in school?"
Here's what I learned: One ham sandwich doesn't last a body 'til supper time.
Jesus doesn't listen if you pray about Spelling.
Playing hooky is worth the whuppin'.

*The boy stood on the burning deck
Whence all but he had fled;
...Puddinghead!*

Didn't he have any of his own sense?
Criminy! The ship was on fire!

I knew the answer, but my hands weren't clean.
I wanted that apple so. Teacher always shares with Maggie Tosh.
It wouldn't be so bad if they let you squirm a bit,
But you get strapped for not sitting still.

You're made to sit the dunce if you don't know your lesson,
And if you cut up the least bit, you're made to sit with the girls.

The boy stood on the burning deck,

*The flames 'round him did roar;
He found a bar of Ivory Soap
And washed hisself ashore.*

Haw, heh heh heh! ----- Uh, yes, Sir...

I will not pull Nellie Perrigo's hair.

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I will not pull Nellie Perrigo's hair...

They took our picture at school today, all of us lined up looking proper.
Mr. Turner stood me right by him, so I didn't wriggle so or pull a face.
That's me there, smiling, glad to be out of lessons.
I wanted to see all about the camera, but they wouldn't let me.

We study natch'ral history, but if you act natchur'ly you get whapped.
It doesn't figure.

I imagine you've guessed by now that I don't much like school,
And you're right.
But it's better than church—
At least God isn't watching you all the time.

*With shroud and mast and pennon fair,
That well had home their part,—
But the noblest thing that perished there
Was that young, faithful heart.**

The End.

*Lines from "Casabianca" by Felicia Dorothea Hemans, 1826.