

esther hirsh

daddy says this is the high holidays
and i do need to come with him
to the synagogue
so we can have thinkings about
what we did in the year that did just go by,
and make a plan to do better in the year that is to come.
he says mr. levin is locking up his shoes
for the holiday.
i did ask sara chickering if she will have locking up in the
barn and in the field
and have all the animals and the plants think about
what they did last times and plan for the next times.

sara chickering says,
the animals and the plants are too young for such things
and esther is, too.

daddy says sara chickering is right.
but he says
i still have to come to the synagogue and
have some deep thinkings and talkings to God.

i do have talkings to God and deep thinkings
every day.
but i will come with daddy,
even if i can't go fishing there.

ACT FOUR

leanora sutter

the more time i spend with mr. field
the more i learn.

he never went to school after sixth grade.
he had to work.
and then he went to fight in the civil war
on account of his strong feelings about slavery.
and when he returned, he built
carriages and sleighs.
but what he loved most was to paint them
with little flowers and scenes,
and didn't anyone need to show him how.
just like most things he does,
he sits and thinks about it a while,
till he figures it out.

i wash his dishes in the basin
and he sits at the table,
his bald head the brightest
spot in the room.
he's thin as a broomstick,
gangling tall,
his eyes cloudy.
he holds a palette up close to his face
and then he hawks his shoulders and touches his brush to the
waiting canvas.

i asked if i could look through his paintings
instead of just dusting them.
he said i could have one if i wanted. he said the pickings were

kind of slim these days,
that the best had long gone.
i remember when he offered me the typewriter.
i wondered if someone would say i stole a painting
if i carried one home.

mr. field, i said,
watching as he

sprinkled a meadow with bluets under a cloudy sun.
we could go out sometime so you could remember things to paint.

i never do like being seen with white folks,
but mr. field is different.
anyway, he said he didn't need to go out.
he couldn't see well enough anyway to make a difference.
besides, he said, he
could just sit down and think about a mountain he once saw
or the end of a forest road
and that was enough.
i guess that comes of being around since civil war days.
i have a lot more seeing to take in
before i can sit down and rest with it.

percelle johnson

got my work cut out for me.
more than 200 negroes
have moved into the state
to build the dam.

i'll have to protect them
from the ku klux.

i'll have to protect them
from themselves.

this job sure doesn't pay
enough.

harvey and viola pettibone

viola says:

harvey pettibone, how could you do such a thing?

harvey says:

they had booze in that hotel, vi. they were breaking the law,
serving liquor.

viola says:

so you go in, dressed in those ku klux nightclothes of yours and you
think you'll save the world from the
evils of drink

by raiding the place and smashing a few bottles?

harvey says:

it felt so good breaking that glass, vi.

viola says:

did it feel \$400 good, harv? did it?

harvey runs his hand over the bulge of his belly
beneath the straining vest,
sits down on the steps,
and sighs.

reynard alexander

i did not anticipate

when word of the klan first arrived from the south,
that they'd ever trace their way here to vermont,
but

this is no longer a problem
facing some other community.

the klan is in our homes,
our schools,
our factories, and stores.

it has worked its
fingers through the fabric of the state
and if we do not mend the rents soon,
we'll fall to pieces.

sara chickering

i rest my head against bossie's side
and the thrush,
the white rush of milk hitting the pail,
esther singing in the pear tree beside the barn,
how silent the world would be without cows and birdsong.
how silent my world would be
without esther.

esther hirsh

jerry
the dog that did make me feel happy here first
when i did get my fresh air with sara chickering,
jerry
went away to have the long sleep.

i could have standings upstairs and
call downstairs
things for jerry to do
and he did do what i say.

after i did leave the fresh air of sara chickering the first time
to have seeings of daddy in new york,
jerry had leavings too.
sara chickering says he did go to find me.
sara chickering did have such sad feels when jerry did
leave and i did leave too. she
did ask all people who
do love dogs to bring home her jerry.
but no one had knowings where jerry did go.
then a lady did send a letter from connecticut,
and sara chickering did go all that way to see
if the lady had jerry.

when sara chickering did come to the house in connecticut
she made callings from outside
and jerry did bark all the happy feels in his heart
and sara chickering knew she did find her own jerry.
and he did come home to wait with sara chickering for me.
and when i did come again to stay

and i did bring my daddy,
jerry did come with me every day to the post office
to fetch sara chickering her mail.

but today i did go to the post office without my friend jerry.
i did have to tell my feet every time to make one step
and one step more.
my feet did feel so lonely.

johnny reeves

if a dog dies between night and morning,
neighbor,
it is blamed on the
klan.

reynard alexander

a threat came from the klan, in the form of a letter,
advising me to be careful what i print
and what i say,
or the day would come
when i would not print or
say anything again.

it has come to pass that ordinary,
sensible,
hardheaded vermonters
are entertaining these
kluxers.

but surely the moment will pass,
and the same ordinary,
hardheaded,
folks who invited them in,
will sensibly suggest the klan
pack up their poison
and go.

sara chickering

the president and his wife
will be coming through town soon
on their way to plymouth
to visit the grave of their young son,
taken this year from them,
the same year that brought me esther.

esther hirsh

sara chickering helps me dress up
like i am a goblin
and i do dance through the doors of the schoolhouse
and i do sing a goblin song
in my clothes of green that sara chickering did sew for me.
leanora sutter did dress like a gypsy
and she had sittings by a cauldron
where she did stir the air inside with a big shovel
and she did tell the fortunes to the bob-haired
chatterbox girls
and now they do not have fearings
of being old maids
because leanora did tell them
it would not be so.

the room did have streamers of black and orange.
and owls and black cats and witches on their brooms had flyings
up the walls.
we did eat of carrot cake and cheese sandwiches and
we did drink pots and pots of cocoa
and i don't ever have rememberings of so much fun.

sara chickering

one of the things i like best about mr. hirsh is
that he didn't move himself up here
thinking how rich he would get
on the backs of some rustic vermonters.

he just came up to keep his daughter happy
and to sell shoes.

harvey pettibone

johnny reeves' mother
slipped me a letter
when she came in the store to do her shopping.

i think johnny's in trouble,
she wrote. i caught him with
a schoolgirl, she wrote. he said he was teaching her
about the good book,
but it looked like something different to me.

he's a good son, she wrote,
but he's been awful
quick to anger lately.

i know how important that klan is to my johnny,
she wrote.
maybe you men could see to helping him,
lost lamb that he is,
maybe
you
could lead him back to
god's pasture.

harvey pettibone

we threw johnny reeves
out of the klan.
imagine a grown man
a preacher
forcing himself on a child.

harvey and viola pettibone

viola says:
what you looking at, harv?

harvey turns from the mirror to look at viola.
would you say my head is small?

viola looks at the enormous
locust stump of a head on harvey's shoulders.

yes, harv, your head is small.

harvey grins.
it doesn't matter, he says. small heads can have
as many brains in them as big heads.
i happen to know i have a very well-filled head.

viola smiles and says:
harvey, that sounds like the reasoning of a man
with a small head.

merlin van tornhout

meeting of the klan
and every man standing
demanding those coloreds, the sutters,
get out of town,
and the hirshes,

worse for the hirshes,

who stained a pure
christian woman
by mixing their jew selves
up with her.

but the shoe man and his kid, they're just living there.

in private, harvey pettibone handed me rat poison
from his store.
pour it in sutter's well,
he said.

but it'll kill them!

no, he said, though
it will make them pretty
sick.
and he didn't look too happy about any of it,
but the exalted cyclops was looking on
so harvey pushed the poison at me.

that's when the roar started inside my head.

johnny reeves

there is only one way
to redeem myself
with my klan brothers.
only one way
to redeem myself
with god.

esther hirsh

someone did shoot my daddy
right through sara chickering's door.
and my daddy did have so much
blood rushing out of him
and sara chickering did leave me alone with my daddy
and i had so quiet talkings to my daddy and
sittings on the floor
next to his poor head
and he did listen to every thing i did whisper in his big white ear
but he had the bad kinds of breathings
and all the blood kept
rushing out of my daddy
and the bullet went clink in
the water pail.

fitzgerald flitt

i was called to see to ira hirsh,
who moved here from new york with his little girl.

i found a soft-nosed rifle ball had passed
through ira's left arm above the elbow,
scratched a two-inch gouge across his chest,
then passed through his right arm
to land in a
waterbucket beside the table.

sara chickering sounded rattled enough
when she phoned from iris weaver's.
sara chickering, who never gets rattled.

doc, i left him with esther. i'm sure he's bleeding to death.
hurry.

when i got to sara's kitchen,
she had ira on the floor and she and
esther were holding handkerchiefs tightly to the wounds.

sara said he was sitting at the table after dinner
and in his lap was esther, not leaning back in his arms as usual,
but leaning forward,
studying the crossword puzzle he'd just finished.
someone came onto the porch, so silent, and sara's dog
dead.

the curtain was shut. they must have aimed their rifle
through the keyhole.

why would someone do such a thing?
i asked sara.

klan,
sara answered.

harvey pettibone

viola sleeps,
she is so soft and warm when she sleeps,
and i am silent as i come in
from night riding.

sent a boy to do a man's job.
then i wasn't man enough
to finish it. i never thought it'd come to
this. thought i'd be helping the law,
not breaking it.

viola pats the bed for me to
join her.
she makes room for me in her sleep.

i cannot get in bed with viola.

merlin van tornhout

when i couldn't put the poison in sutter's well,
i went to harvey. he said they'd come after me, the klan would.
i don't have any choice but to run.

sara chickering

esther might have heard the gunman
with those ears of hers,
but she won't talk about it.

how grateful i am that she was leaning forward
over mr. hirsh's crossword puzzle.
if not she would have taken the bullet herself,
straight through,
and she wouldn't be alive now,
clinging to my nightgown,
even as she sleeps.

esther hirsh

sara chickering did feel afraid this morning
to go out and do the milkings
and deliverings of her creams and butters.
i did come out in my chore clothes to help her
and she had smilings for me
and chasings off of her afraid
like a big horse, rolling off the itchings.

it did take a long time
for all the people who wanted to have talkings with us
but we did finally have done all the chores
and i did stay home from school.

percelle johnson

been interviewing people all day,
trying to figure who stood on sara chickering's porch
and fired a shot through her kitchen door.

mr. hirsh is at the randolph sanatorium,
resting comfortably.

how's the child resting i keep asking myself?
how's the person resting who fired that shot?

and where the hell is merlin van tornhout?

reynard alexander

persecution is not american.
it is not american to give the power of life and death
to a secret organization.

it is not american to have our citizens judged by
an invisible jury.

it is not american to have bands of night riders
apply the punishments of medieval europe to
freeborn men.

the ku klux klan must go.

leanora sutter

daddy says:
the k.k.k.

went and burned down the great bethel african church in chicago.

i feel that old rope of dread
dragging up the ridge of my spine

daddy, i say,
the klan burns down a negro church in illinois,
they rob a catholic church in burlington,
they try killing a jew right here.
well, they're just giving white folks a bad
name.

giving white folks a bad name, daddy repeats
and he starts to laughing, and then,
i'm laughing, too.
until the laughter turns on us and we are wringing grief,
our faces touching,
our hands entwined.

first time we're right together like that
since mamma's gone.

percelle johnson

i hate calling for help.
but i just couldn't get to the bottom
of ira hirsh's shooting
and i couldn't let go,
especially with things in town the way they
are with the klan.

detective came over from boston, a mr. wood.
it didn't take him long to uncover all the dirty little
things that were going on here,
the letters sent to mr. hirsh
threatening to tar and feather him
if he didn't move out of sara's place.

it was merlin van tornhout wrote those letters.
i thought i knew merlin. he's got some roughness to him,
but i never thought he'd try killing anyone.
especially with that little girl on mr. hirsh's lap.
but merlin disappeared the night of the shooting.
what else can i think?
detective wood says it was merlin for sure.
says he come up on foot around dusk,
peered through the keyhole in the kitchen door,
saw mr. hirsh seated at the table
with esther on his lap.
thought he could get two with one shot.
says merlin fired through the door
as soon as sara left the kitchen to put the dishes away in the pantry.

just doesn't sound like merlin van tornhout.

harvey and viola pettibone

harvey says:

viola, what have you done with my phonograph and records?

viola is silent. she simply hands harvey a thank-you note.

*it is with sincere appreciation
that we accept these useful gifts.
the residents at the winslow home for the aged
will get such pleasure from your donation of
a phonograph
and fine record collection.*

harvey says:

what did you do, viola?

viola says:

i'm trying to buy back your good name, harvey pettibone.
you with your broom sales
and your liquor smashing
and your klan.
but you don't make it easy.

harvey turns like a slow mule
and lumbers back into the room
where his phonograph once sat.
he touches the table where the feet of the
phonograph left a divet in the lace cloth.

ACT FIVE