

That's Life

It was as good a day as any can be.

The young woman I was, studies him as she has not studied him before. He is in the garage, its wide door open to a late October afternoon sun. Two little boys, one four, the other two, paddle around him. The little one walks through a shaft of light beaming almost to the back of the space, noting his shadow, but too young to inquire about it. He is quiet. The older boy babbles. Question after question. "Daddy, why are you doing that? What's that thing? What will it do?"

I sit on the yellow brick back steps watching and listening. The baby, a fourteen-month-old girl, is due to wake from a too late afternoon nap. She will probably be impossible at bedtime. I watch the man, my husband, and think, "How did I know? I didn't. I couldn't. That he would be such a good father." I never knew Hu's father so didn't see what he learned at his own father's knee. I never knew the kind of patience he would show with our own young children. The clearness with which he explained, "Tommy, I'm oiling right in here – see – I squeeze a bit and tip and the drops go in this little hole so when Brucie pedals your old tricycle it will be easier for him. I think maybe we've left it out in the rain too often and that's not good for it, so we have to give it a drink of oil to make these parts here turn better. Brucie, climb up little guy, you're getting so big you can reach the pedals now. You couldn't do that a while ago – good

going – can you pedal down the driveway? I'll follow you so you don't land in the street.

O.K. partner, you follow us on your big trike.

The young woman I was, smiles, looks down at my stained apron, thinks with satisfaction, “For once all is calm, dinner's in the oven, a roasting chicken, small potatoes, carrots and onions cooking in the same casserole. They'll all like it, except the onions.”

The young woman I was, doesn't think about these two young boys growing up riding large two wheelers or god-forbid motorcycles or behind the wheel of the family car, or girlfriends or giving us grandchildren. I think no further ahead than for picky details of new snowsuit for Tommy and the serviceable brown hand-me-down for Brucie. Jody will of course wear the third time 'round rather boyish red suit, but can wear a hand-knit bonnet of blue and white with embroidered pink daisies which has stretched from her infancy until now.

The young woman I was, doesn't think about what trails we might travel and there is never a thought of losing a child, our own health, or when our parents will no longer be in our lives.

The young woman I was is not thinking of the big picture, only details, details, details.

Now, the old woman I am, smiles when I think about that autumn day in nineteen fifty-three. It would have been close to Halloween and I could not know what would

happen after trick or treating in the spooky dark, when Tommy and Brucie trundled down our street with their daddy. They were wearing clown costumes my mother made out of old sheets and calico scraps.

Next morning I found our two little boys in baby Jody's crib, where the trio were trading licks of suckers.

Later that day, Tommy was lethargic and when he bent his head forward, cried out in pain. All parents had been warned about this cruel symptom. Our pediatrician neighbor came to the house and pronounced "It's polio". The fierce epidemic had struck our house. Our thoughts, "Tommy – Oh - No - and what about Brucie and Jody?" We nursed Tommy at home for six days and five nights. On the sixth evening we took him to the Royal Alexandra hospital's quarantine entrance where we had to leave him. Poor little boy. He was whisked to an operating room.

In the middle of the night our exhausted pediatrician came to the door with, "We lost him".

A big picture detail.

I am not young enough to know everything. Oscar Wilde 1854-1900