

# Sarah Davis

## The Circle's End

**H**e was an October man.

"Season of mist and mellow fruitfulness!" is the first line of Keats's ode "To Autumn" and the first line I found in my father's poetry journal. The cover itself, torn and faded, is laden with a heavy harvest of rust-colored gourds, yellow-orange pumpkins, and ivory-speckled ears of corn. He had been moved to record these words on October 25, 1970, thirty-five years before his death.

He was born October 28, 1944, in Buffalo, NY. The date of his birth, a declaration of the beginning of the life of my father, didn't mean anything to me until October 5, 2005. That's the day I found the circle's end. His life had come full circle. There was not to be an ongoing wrapping around or infinite spinning for he had fallen down one last time. Michael Kachelmeyer was declared dead of cardiac arrest at 12:25 A.M. The circle had come to an end.

Until his death, I never truly contemplated the natural progression of life, of being human. I still envisioned my father at forty-eight: handsome, strong, only a powdering of grey in his thinning black hair. But, in reality, he was sixty: wan, weak, with only a dusting of shadowy grey amongst his white fluff of hair that reminded my daughter, Lilith, then six, of the soft feathers of a newborn chick. These contradictions of color and texture, of what was seen and what was real, baffled me like a recurring dream—while involved in it I thought I understood it, but when awake my heart pounded with anxiety, my brain thinking *I don't ever want to see that again*.

*Page six of my father's poetry journal dated October 20, 1971, thirty-four years before his death.*

*There was no other creature  
That saw what I could see –  
I stood and watched the evening star  
As long as it watched me. (5-8)  
-Sara Teasdale  
"February Twilight"*

I ignored the obvious contrasts day after day that even my daughter noticed in all her youthful naivety because, within that paradox, there was a truth. My father was aging. My father was dying. My father. Mine.

Like a possession I always prefaced his title with "my." Perhaps it is because a child knows nothing that is not her own. Perhaps it is because I aligned him with something larger than life, unconsciously giving him a holy context. "My father who art in heaven" has become, to me, the most reliable and comforting of phrases. I had never referred to him as Michael James Kachelmeyer. That was a mortal name.

Mike died on a Tuesday.

He died at home in his light blue recliner still reclined.

Shannon, my husband, our three children, and I, visited him earlier that night. My father, in his light blue recliner, was on the right side of the room, but he, as always, quickly became the center. Our two sons, Simon and Micah, both under two years of age, played at his feet—bare and swollen, cold and pulpous. I pulled a chair from the dining room next to him so I could be near enough to hold his hand. The wooden cracked seat made me sit very straight, very tall, able to conquer the world, his cancer. Lilith, our daughter, found refuge in my lap and my father dropped my hand for hers as if he needed to connect with his granddaughter more than anyone else. He held on to her and let his body rest; she held on to him as she took on my posture, very straight, very tall; my hand was left empty as I stared at this symbol of life passing on life.

A silence filled the room that I broke with my acknowledgment of it: "It's so peaceful here. I could just close my eyes and go to sleep." My father strained to turn his head to look at his hand and what he was holding. I

caught a glimpse of a half-opened eye and noticed that the icy blue pools had melted into a watery grey. I ignored the contrasts and sat in silence: the age—the innocence, the calm of the room—the ambiguity of the situation, the ice—the water, the sickness—the health, the crooked fingers wrapped around Lilith's small porcelain hand.

*Page two of my father's poetry journal dated October 9, 1990, fifteen years before his death.*

*Hold infinity in the palm of your hand  
And Eternity in an hour.  
To see a World in a Grain of Sand  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower. (1-4)*

*-William Blake  
"Auguries of Innocence"*

## **Beginnings**

The afternoon after Mike died, Wednesday October 5, 2005, his favorite brother, Thomas, and his wife, Laura, came to grieve with my family who sat like shadows in the backyard of my home in Fredonia, NY. The day was impeccably clear with all the colors of autumn masquerading in the landscape. The wind picked up that day as is the early season's tendency, as if autumn must move the summer along so it too may have its reign.

That's all I remember, the tossing about of leaves, the wind at play. It was the first time I yearned to have my long hair again, the hair of my childhood, for the wind to play with just like the leaves. I wanted to feel the movement and to become a dab on the palette of the colors of autumn. To be a color, a texture, for a while, what a nice thought. If I spent time in that state, a limpid speck, perhaps then I could have had the time to pick up on those obvious signs of my father's sickness that he had hidden from us for nearly three years. I intentionally missed them instead.

"As we got off the thruway and I read the Dunkirk/Fredonia exit sign as usual, I realized that I'm not going to see Mike," my uncle twittered like an injured bird. The wind had made him want something, too. On October 20, 1971 (thirty-four years before his death), my father had been enticed by the wind. It was then he recorded Christina Rossetti's "Who Has Seen the Wind?" underneath the maple tree in front of my parents' home on Johnson Avenue in Evans, NY.

*Who has seen the wind?  
Neither I nor you:  
But when the leaves hang trembling,  
The wind is passing through.*

*Who has seen the wind?  
Neither you nor I:  
But when the trees bow down their heads,  
The wind is passing by.*

Saying "I'm not going to see Mike" struck Thomas hard. He was deflated and flat, and I had never seen him cry like that before, not so close and in my ear, drops of tears on my own shoulder where Micah would later bite me and taste the salt. The wind and Mike had taken his breath away.

He had brought photographs of my father, and the contradictions that I had overlooked throughout the first twenty-nine years of my life were in front of me as crisp and conspicuous as the black and white in the snapshots of a time and life now gone. Those contradictions that made me think my father was an immortal being; those contradictions that made me disregard the fact that my father had once been a child himself; those contradictions that made me have to wait until that day to recognize what my father had gone through when he lost his father, Edward Anthony Kachelmeyer, on June 27, 1992, and his mother, Ruth Elizabeth (Benton) Kachelmeyer, on May 23, 1998. I felt as though time had caught up with me and I truly had grown up.

This, however, did not happen in the way I had always envisioned; there was no magical quality about it. No fairy godmother waving her wand like a sparkler on the fourth of July and muttering incantations that

turned me into a princess, finally making me one with my name (the Hebrew meaning of Sarah is princess). There also was no kiss by Prince Charming. In the matter of twelve hours, I had grown up: the phone rang with my mother gasping for air on the other side trying to scream, "Help, I need you," but merely whispering, and then I turned and whispered, "I'm going to need you more now than ever, Uncle Tom; I'm twenty-nine, twenty-nine and without a father." I realized that my father had a beginning and an end. I was there at the end; I want to know the beginning.

I have been left a child discovering her father's childhood. I have decided that this is where I begin. Begin to what? Well, simply begin again.

*Page five of my father's poetry journal dated October 1, 1985, twenty years before his death.*

*The year's at the spring,  
And day's at the morn;  
Morning's at seven;  
The hillside's dew-pearled;  
The lark's on the wing;  
The snail's on the thorn;  
God's in His Heaven –  
All's right with the world!*

*-Robert Browning  
"Pippa's Song"*

## **The Chipped Tooth**

If I had lived on South Crossman Street in Buffalo, New York, in 1954, would my father and his younger brother ever have played with me?

Michael, my father, is ten and his favorite little brother, Thomas, is five. They are hiding in the faultless grass in the vacant lot, the only remaining tenantless space on South Crossman Street. Mike craves the earth untouched by concrete foundations and black asphalt. Tom follows Mike, pretending to need all that he does. Shiny metal pistols are held by both; they dive, roll, and hide themselves in the mix of grass, dandelions, and weeds that cover them.

"Give up you coward!" Mike cries.

"Never! You'll never find me," comes the naïve rebuttal.

The next thing Tom knows, Mike is on him, holding the weapon to his back. Tom squirms and angles himself away from his brother, and, in the blunder the metallic barrel cracks his older brother in the mouth. Mike's natural overbite, inherited from his mother, causes his front teeth to jut out just far enough from underneath his thin lips so as to catch the iron tip on the enamel.

Mike loses his footing and falls backward into the grass that doesn't seem as long and protective as it did when it covered him from his brother's eye.

"What'd you do?" Mike challenges.

"I don't know." The tears come to Tom's eyes and the mild manner that follows him the rest of his life takes shape. "What's wrong?"

Mike brings his hand to his mouth, gently fingering the new shape. The thought of something new, any new experience, interests him, but he quickly brings his mind back to what his brother had done. "You chipped my tooth, silly, that's what's wrong! What were you aiming for, my skull? Were you trying to kill me?" The drama with which these lines are performed brings the guilt it aimed for, and now both boys are wounded.

The pain immediately shoots through the nerve every time Mike takes a breath. He begins to suck in the air in short spurts, pulling what he has for an upper lip down and back to shelter the chipped front tooth. Tom imitates and his breath whistles as the air passes through his pursed lips into his mouth. No more words are

exchanged, only slurps and slight high-pitched toots that make them smile at each other in spite of themselves.

“Come on, let’s go.” Mike pivots and walks the fifteen or so steps back to the concrete and away from the veil of grass that provided an imaginary countryside. Tom follows a short space behind, holding his head down, while the gun remains shoved into the denim back pocket of his hand-me-down dungarees. Mike still holds the handle of his pistol in his hand, index finger on the trigger, awaiting any imaginary danger.

“Are you going to tell Ma?” asks Tom.

“Should I?” chides Mike. And so the relationship morphs into what it will be for the rest of their lives—Mike teaches while Tom learns.

“It’s a lousy tooth, that’s all. Will ya get over it already?”

## The Body

My father’s lips were dried and cracked the day of his funeral.

*Page ten of my father’s poetry journal dated February 23, 1972, thirty-three years before his death.*

*These be  
Three silent things:  
The falling snow...the hour  
Before the dawn...the mouth of one  
Just dead.*

*-Adelaide Crapsey  
“Triad”*

The family had decided to have the viewing promptly before his funeral. As I walked around the Victorian chambers of the funeral home taking in the odor of mulberry and vanilla (what scent were they trying to cover up?), I envisioned who might show themselves there that day. Who would feel compelled to show they somehow connected with him or that he had somehow touched them? We had thirty minutes alone with his body before the others would arrive. I didn’t know what to do with myself so I became fixated on my father from as many points in the room as I could. I started by the white brick fireplace on the opposite end from the casket in the main room, the mantel of which we used to display framed photographs and his favorite books. I had taken the time to find those books he highlighted, those in which more left or right top corners of pages were folded over than not. I found those that were small with the covers tattered and worn from being shoved into his work uniform to feed his second appetite during lunch or when the line broke down and he was left to find something, anything to occupy his time at the Ford Stamping Plant in Blasdell, NY. Then I moved to the burgundy hallway, which adjoined the main room with the white fireplace. I leaned my right, black-suited shoulder against the white molding of the connecting entry way. I noticed then his dryness: the white flakes of skin that covered his lips, and consequently the chipped tooth.

I liked the realism in this detail. My father had always been someone that allowed nature to do what it would to the body. He didn’t hide his blemishes or imperfections, but rather saw these as scrapes of life, the marks the body bore in its existence.

## Reading

Mike crawls into bed first and pulls the sheet and blanket over his legs and torso, then stuffs them underneath his arms so he can position *The Red Knight of Germany* just right so both he and Tom can see. Tom crawls in after him and positions himself identically. The comfort of this bed, of this blue room found in the back of the house, the last room before the backyard, ends a day of play with a soaking in of moon-drenched tones that introduce the two of them to history. They are realizing that there’s more to the world than just themselves, more than 37 South Crossman Street, more than the blocks leading to Genesee Street, more than the bus that can take them to the end of the city; there is more than Buffalo. Mike is the reader, and he makes the discovery first. Tom once again follows, delayed in his extra five years of youth, and

because he is the listener he must wait for his older brother to make up *his* mind before he can make up his own. Michael shares the room and his education with his brother. They start with Baron von Richthofen.

These brothers lying in the same bed in the blue room in the back of the house are also German. John and Regina Kachelmeyer, the boy's grandparents had come to settle in the German neighborhood of Buffalo, close to Humboldt Park. This is where Edward, the boys' father, spent most of his days as a child, out in the sun until his skin was the deepest shade of chestnut. This son of German immigrants then wanted a park for his children to be near. So, when he and his wife, Ruth, along with their three children, Carol, Eddie, and Mike, were looking to move from their two-family home on Humason Avenue, they were thrilled to discover 37 South Crossman street available. It bordered Schiller Park, and the decision was an easy one. After all, "schiller" is the German word for luster, brightness, opalescence.

The boys learned of the German nationality that flowed through their veins, through this vision of a hero. Manfred von Richthofen (who, through the Americanization of the story, became the iconic Red Baron) offered the boys a literary and historical hero. This brought three German brothers to lie together in the small metal bed that creaks when either Tom or Mike move in anticipation to read or hear about the fiftieth or sixtieth plane that The Red Baron shoots from the sky. The gleam of each of the sixty trophies that this historic character had made in remembrance of the date and enemy craft destroyed inscribed can be seen in their eyes as well.

"Mike, is it true that The Red Baron wasn't as good a pilot as his brother?" Tom asks, thinking that a parallel might exist between the von Richtofen brothers and these Kachlemeyer brothers. The idea was one of hope.

"Lothar may have been a more impetuous pilot, but The Baron held to the task and got the job done."

"What do you think flying is like?"

"I think that flying is like any other job that a person may have. He needs to do it to the best of his ability. I bet that you'd forget that you were flying once you're up there. Especially at night and The Baron often flew at night. Look out our window and you'll see what I mean." Tom places his hand on the blinds and pushes down just enough for his large brown eyes to catch a glimpse of the darkened backyard. "Do you see how easily you could lose your sense of direction even out there in a place you've been a hundred times? Can you imagine what it would be like for The Red Baron flying in blackness knowing that it's kill or be killed?"

"I wouldn't want to kill." Tom lets the layers of the blinds swing back to their proper place with a metallic snap, and he covers his mouth as he yawns.

"Sometimes one doesn't have a choice in what he wants to do, Tom. That's why history is so important. It teaches us how to make choices based on what others have done in the past. I think that's why Ma likes history so much. She has lots of decisions and choices to make every day. I bet history helps her do that."

"Is that why she's always reading the newspaper?"

"I guess a newspaper is a kind of history. I think that's why she reads it the way she does, sitting on both knees on the kitchen linoleum with a kitchen chair turned toward her as a table. That's her place, like this is our place. Everyone needs a place, Tom, to think and read and learn I suppose."

"What's the Baron going to do next?" Tom asks.

"We'll see," Mike responds, ready to continue on the adventure with Manfred von Richthofen and his triplane.

## **The Book**

The funeral home director told us we could come to the funeral home at 9. I awoke that morning as I had the past three since his death, feeling like there was a buzzing in the center of my forehead, vision blurred, and a hatred for anyone who didn't know what I was going through. Going out in public designed a hollow ache that I felt inside my skin, that flesh pretending to be armor for my soul but doing nothing, devoured me from the inside out. I'd say to myself as I walked through the grocery or liquor store, the two most important pit

stops for someone racing into grief, "Don't make eye contact. They think you're okay, but if they only knew the truth...Please don't look at me! Please don't ask how I'm doing. Don't make me have to lie."

*Page fifteen of my father's poetry journal dated June 19, 1990, fifteen years before his death.*

*A simple child,  
That lightly draws its breath,  
And feels its life in every limb,  
What should it know of death? (1-4)  
-William Wordsworth  
"We Are Seven"*

I loaded up the car with my father's favorite things. Next to food and whiskey, they were the only other objects I'd touch. Not even my own children could suffice. On the contrary, I didn't want anything to do with them. I needed to go to a place where I could think and read and learn. I wanted to crawl into my father's dead brain and be left alone for awhile to interpret all that he had left behind. I wanted his memories.

I had been sifting through his notebooks of poems and thoughts dating back to November 6, 1966, since Wednesday, the day after his death. The pages curled under the weight of yellow; they appeared so delicate I was afraid to touch them. I knew I could ruin something I could never replace. I placed his notebooks in the car first. Then came an antique, miniature bottle of Crown Royal, a plastic doorknocker with the face of Ebenezer Scrooge that said "Bah-humbug" when one pressed its grey button, an engraved leather edition of the collected works of Charles Dickens, Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel*, a framed magazine article claiming the magnificence of the writing ability of Thomas Wolfe, Thoreau's *Walden*, corn stalks, and two giant mums—one burgundy and one orange. I wanted to make this room in the parlor of the funeral home, a pretense of a home, into a place of comfort for my father. Everyone needs a place that is his own. My Uncle Tom had had the same idea.

He entered the funeral home with a book in his left hand while his right was clasping onto my Aunt Laura. The book's pages were yellowed and worn, fragile like the patch of denim on a child's jeans. The book had the worn look that comes from hours of pleasure and use, not of poor quality. It was the Bantam edition of *The Red Knight of Germany*. This giant of their childhood was still pictured on the red cover soaring through the European skies as the flying hero of WWI. My Aunt helped my Uncle, just as my father would have, on his journey toward the casket. He looked at my father laid out in red. He saw the older brother that had lain next to him in their blue bedroom in the back of the house and he set the book by my father's crossed hands.

His first and most beloved memory of my father now connected with what had to be his last.

## **To The Rescue**

It's another Saturday morning for the boys to rise and deliver *The Buffalo News*. The paper route had belonged to Eddie, the oldest and wildest of the Kachelmeyer boys, but he no longer wanted it, as was often the case with his fickle nature, and so Mike stepped in to take it. Stamp collecting had a price tag and Nelson Keale, the owner of the hobby shop located at 1610 Genesee Street, would have stamps waiting for him behind the shop door as well as in his stock books. The boys' blue room reflects the autumn sun and fills with warmth like a wading pool with shallow waters. The boys float out of their dreams and into their blue jeans, suspenders, and favorite tee shirts: Mike in the one with a tall bandana-wearing pirate and Tom in the one with a cowboy and his lasso. Tom's hair stands on end, but he doesn't care. Mike quickly greases his back into the contemporary ducktail. They are out on the street and making their way together down South Crossman Street and across two blocks to the paper pick-up before anyone else in the house is awake.

The route extends to Genesee, Theodore, and Rogers Streets. This particular Saturday not many people are out and about. They walk quietly along, following the paths of trees and retracing the steps they have covered many, many times before.

"Next stop, the drug store at Theodore and Genesee," Mike hums.

The brick and concrete building is in view. They look at each other and on the count of three, "One, two, three," Tom buzzes as they run to the white painted door.

"I'll zip up to the apartment and you stay here, Tom." Mike turns the knob and a long wooden staircase rises in front of them. Tom steps in, letting the door slam behind.

"Shhh! Most of the time there is only one woman here. I don't want to scare her."

"Sorry, Mike. I'll wait here."

"Hold on. Did you just hear something?"

"Like what?"

"I don't know. It kind of sounds like a baby crying."

"But I thought you said that you think that only one woman is here."

"That's why it seems strange. Wait—there it is again."

"Do you think we should leave?" Tom begins to open the door again.

"Because of a silly little baby or something? Naw. I'll run up and drop off the paper inside the door and then we'll high tail it out of here." Mike runs up the stairs two at a time only to stop at the sound of a woman's voice, which he concludes is asking for help. He forms his hands around his mouth to send the words to Tom: "I've got to go in." And with that, the bandana-wearing pirate turns his back on his brother and vanishes behind the dark brown door that, to the boy standing below, seems to suck him in.

Tom waits like a watchman at his post.

Mike begins his search mission. The sound he follows seems to range from an animal's squeak to a woman's cry, but he can't find the source. He's in a game of hide and seek. "Hello? It's the paperboy. I have your paper. Can I help?" he calls as he moves through the barren and dark apartment. The hallway he follows has open doors on the right and on the left, the entrances to different rooms along the long hallway, and his head pivots back and forth as he reaches the openings. At the third set of doors he looks right, then suddenly to the left, and there is the source. A woman had fallen, face down, off of the solitary sofa in the room, and lies like a helpless child on the floor. "I shouldn't have thought this was a game," Mike whispers to himself as he approaches the woman. Then, "My name is Mike Kachelmeyer. I'm your paperboy. Can I please help you?"

The woman turns her head to the right side. "Ysss," slides out between her crooked lips; the left side of her face droops and drool slides out with the sounds. Mike speeds into action; "I'm going to slide my arm under your stomach to help you to your knees and then I'll slide you back onto the sofa." No response follows his words and so he continues. He pulls and tugs and props the woman back to her place of origin like a child picking up a toppled vase of flowers.

"There, you're safe now." Mike senses the gratitude in the woman's vacant stare. She never says a word nor moves a muscle. "Okay...bye!" He retraces his steps, closes the dark door on the dismal scene and once again tunnels his words to his brother below, "Have I got a story to tell you!"

## **Crippling**

I rushed home to make the appointment. I had started calling my mother from work three times a day to check on my father. It was October 4, 2005, and my father had been given the decree from his doctor that he had four to six months to live when he was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in May. My time was running out, not his. That's how it felt. Mary, the Hospice nurse we had been connected with, would be meeting us at my parents' house at 4 for my father's weekly appointment. "You have to get there! Your time is running out!" was the refrain of my day.

I pulled into the driveway and saw her car there. I walked briskly inside so I didn't keep them waiting. That's not right; I ran. I ran head on into a scene that stopped me like a brick wall causing me to slam my face so hard against the gritty surface that I cut my nose, the extension of me that hit first. That's not right; it was my father that had fallen; it was his nose; I just felt like I did when I saw him.

He was on the bathroom floor, face down like an infant that has been placed on his belly but can't yet crawl. He didn't know what to do. Or maybe he was just imagining it would all go away, face down, nose to the floor, pretending he was playing cowboys and Indians with his brother in the empty lot, the linoleum as grass. "Don't look at him," my mother mouthed to me. Mary was the only one who could speak. I continued into the living room so that I could pretend too. I was going to pretend that everything was fine and that my father was able to get off of the floor by himself.

"Michael, we're going to have to move you. Are you ready?" The response was so full of air I don't know if it was words.

"Michael, I'm going to lift you by your belt onto your knees and then I want you to wrap one arm around my neck." She was a brute of a woman, strong in every sense of the word. She was not messing around pretending like my father and I. "The other arm you're going to put around Mark's neck and the two of us will get you to your chair." The blue recliner.

"Sarah's here and once you're on your knees, Michael, she's going to bring a chair from the dining room so she and I can set you on it."

Okay, musical chairs can work. I don't even mind if he wins every time. I'll stand and lose, I thought to myself.

"Sarah, can you get that chair?" Mary's voice echoed from the bathroom into the living room. I didn't respond. I was hoping that if I waited long enough, her echo would respond for me. She had enough strength for both of us; she had to for I had none. I floated with the chair from the living room into the dining room and back into the bathroom.

*Page three of my father's poetry journal dated October 25, 1975, thirty years before he died.*

*I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills, (1-2)  
-William Wordsworth  
"Daffodils"*

"Here we go, Michael. One, two, three and on your knees."

He could not bring his knees underneath him. His glasses were on the floor.

"Second try, Michael. I'll work your legs for you. One, two, three and on your knees."

She and my brother, Mark, were holding all of his weight. I held nothing. My mother held nothing.

"Sarah, bring that chair right behind your father and catch him with it if he begins to fall. Mark, you need to hold on to your father's belt like I am and we'll carry his weight into the living room. Michael, try to step with your feet as we go."

His legs crumpled beneath him like the last leaves on their trip down from the branches that bore them. There was movement, but nothing ever caught them.

Between the ages of eight and twelve, I would fall asleep most nights with the sense of falling. I would dream that I was on top of a massive flight of stairs looking down into an empty stairwell. I went to take the first descending step and my foot felt nothing solid underneath it. I skipped over air and would feel myself falling, my heart in my throat. My entire body lurched awake.

I was again eight at that moment watching my father skipping over air.

## **The Last Leaf Falls**

On many October nights, my father would start a fire, pop some popcorn, wrap me in a blanket and read me O'Henry's *The Last Leaf*. In the story, an artist, Mr. Behrman, befriends a sick woman named Johnsy. Johnsy's only chance of survival is for her to truly want to fight to live. But, as Johnsy tells her friend:

*"Six," said Johnsy, in almost a whisper. "They're falling faster now. Three days ago there were almost a hundred. It made my head ache to count them. But now it's easy. There goes another one. There are only five left now."*  
*"Five what, dear? Tell your Sudie."*  
*"Leaves. On the ivy vine. When the last one falls I must go, too. I've known that for three days. Didn't the doctor tell you?" (O'Henry 2)*

The last leaf never falls:

*"... look out the window, dear, at the last ivy leaf on the wall. Didn't you wonder why it never fluttered or moved when the wind blew? Ah, darling, it's Behrman's masterpiece—he painted it there the night that the last leaf fell." (O'Henry 3)*

While my father would sit in his light blue recliner from May through October, I stared out of the leaded glass windows of the living room at the maple tree that started as the barer of green leaves and then red. I told my father that I wanted to paint as many leaves on that tree as I could. He knew what I meant.

"Naw," he breathed. "October's a good time to die."

He was an October man.

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"My grandmother's porch was the setting for hours of imaginative play for myself and my five brothers and sisters. We lived hours away, in the middle of nowhere, and she lived in the 'big city.' During our Sunday visits, our eyes took in all the different sights Buffalo, NY, had to offer and our brains set to work concocting scenarios, jokes, and imitations of the differences we were awakened to. Our stage was Grandma K's porch, and, if only for a moment, it took us to the top of the world."