

## STANDING IN LINE AT SUNDAY MATINEE

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*Charles Casey Martin*

*an elegy for Ethel Thompson Roberts*

Across the alley, Baptist children in Sunday clothes  
Play on the church lawn. Though closed and locked  
The shops along Central Avenue  
Are still in business. We stand in line. An usher  
Stands on a ladder and spells Held Over in marquee fonts.  
One of the E's is a backward 3. I point to you

And hold up two fingers. The cashier says "five"  
And shows the palm of her hand. We stand  
In line. We prefer  
The film to the book: if the heroine died  
The heroine doesn't have to die  
Though applause simply adds to the confusion  
As we crowd through the exit,

Holding hands, squinting in the sunlit lobby.  
Surprised:  
That darkness isn't always night,  
That death wasn't the final absence,  
Closed by the end as the body heals an open grave.  
We stand in line. Remembering

The circle of children, hand in hand in hand,  
Who all fell singing into the churchyard grass.  
And our memory is the beginning  
Of a past described by missing faces:

The four or five empty seats  
In a theatre filled for the occasion.