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American Triptych: 1. At the Store; 2. Down the Road; 3. Potluck at the Wilmot Flat Baptist Church

Jane Kenyon

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American Triptych · Jane Kenyon

1

At the Store

Clumps of daffodils along the storefront
bend low this morning, late snow
pushing their bright heads down.
The flag snaps and tugs at the pole
beside the door.

The old freezer full of Maine blueberries
and breaded scallops mumbles along.
A box of fresh bananas on the floor,
luminous and exotic. . .
I take what I need from the narrow aisles.

Cousins arrive like themes and variations.
Ansel leans on the counter,
remembering other late spring snows,
the blue snow of '32:
Yes, it *was*, it was *blue*.
Forrest comes and goes quickly
with a length of stovepipe, telling
about the neighbors' chimney fire.

The store is a bandstand. All our voices
sound from it, making the same motley
American music Ives heard;
this piece starting quietly,
with the repeated clink of a flagpole
pulley in the doorway of a country store.

2
Down the Road

Early summer. Sun low over the pond. Down the road the neighbors' children play baseball in the twilight. I see the ball leave the bat; a moment later the sound reaches me where I sit.

No deaths or separations, no disappointments in love. They are throwing and hitting the ball. Sometimes it arcs higher than the house, sometimes it tunnels into tall grass at the edge of the hayfield.

3
*Potluck at the Wilmot Flat
Baptist Church*

We drive to the Flat on a clear November night. Stars and planets appear in the eastern sky, not yet in the west.

Voices rise from the social hall downstairs, the clink of silverware and plates, the smell of coffee.

As we walk into the room faces turn to us, friendly and curious. We are seated at the speakers' table, next to the town historian, a retired school-teacher who is lively and precise.

The table is decorated with red, white and blue streamers, and framed *Time* and *Newsweek* covers of the President, just elected. Someone has tied peanuts to small branches with red, white and blue yarn, and set the branches upright in lumps of clay at the center of each table.

After the meal everyone clears food from the tables, and tables from the hall. Then we go up to the sanctuary, where my husband reads poems from the pulpit.

One woman looks out the window continually. I notice the altar cloth, tassled and embroidered in gold thread; *Till I Come*. There is applause after each poem.

On the way home we pass the white clapboard faces of the library and town hall, luminous in the moonlight, and I remember the first time I ever voted—in a township hall in Michigan.

That same wonderful smell of coffee was in the air, and I found myself among people trying to live ordered lives. . . And again I am struck with love for the Republic.