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At Aunt Meg's Funeral [and] Poetic License

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At Aunt Meg's Funeral

David Curtis

At Aunt Meg's funeral cousins meet
To talk about their jobs and kids
And share a joke about looking just the same
As always, though always was years ago
When we were made to play together,
Not out of liking but because our parents
Were brothers and sisters after all,
So very close; today cousins meet only
(And every year brings more meetings)
In chapels, over graves and memories,
And cousins' children know each other
Not at all, which somehow pleases me.

It is coming apart this union,
This artifice of tribal weave
As its center unravels
And is rewoven in new clusters
Around new nuclei, and what makes me smile
Is not my current centrality
But the beauty of relentless fission.

So it was in Aunt Meg's silent parlor
Where every arm of every chair and sofa
Held a lace doily of intricate design,
More holes than knots but knots nonetheless,
Threads arriving at bunches symbolizing flowers,
I suppose, or butterflies, but just bunches of string then

David Curtis is an associate professor of English at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Connecticut. He has been previously published.

To the boy who waited till he was alone
To take his jackknife out and cut
The single strings that held the bunches
In taut proximity, each to each,
And freed two bunches from one bond at least.
What relief those sundered bunches must have felt
Separated from an endless pattern,
Relaxed at last in unstraining isolation,
Like the way a child of lonely Sundays feels
Knife-wielding in an old maid's frozen parlor,
Like the way that death itself must be.

Poetic License

David Curtis

is the liberty that elevates ignorance

to art, to shout any bigotry

you want and call it irony.

How they lap it up, hate;

to seem sensitive,

how they'll lick a villain's boots

so he kicks hard enough

with compression,

spits in time

or drools rhyme.

They never see or can be seen seeing

the tiny mustache and arm band,

the cap and bells

beneath the printed page

called by appearance poetry.

Who then is freer than I?

Lovers or maybe gods,

perhaps a cowboy with his horse,

for building a superior relationship

on oats.