



Sisters Under the Skin

by Mary Lutes
English, Jr.

"CLARA, you may serve the breakfast."

I systematically arranged the dishes, placing the warm plate directly in front of my sister, Emma Mae. As I handed her the tarnished silverware, I noticed gray wisps that had come loose from her bun. *Emma would be furious if she knew that her hair wasn't perfect. When she takes her flannel nightgown off it will muss, anyway. I needn't worry.*

"That smells fair. French toast. Am I correct?" Forgetting for a moment that Emma had lost her sight, I nodded in agreement. Quickly I replied, "Yes." Emma Mae's bony hand groped for the syrup. I grabbed the bottle. "I'll pour it for you." Maple scented the air while it soaked into the golden bread. A sticky trickle beaded on the oilcloth when I set the bottle down.

Emma cut a piece. She chewed it slowly. "I do wish you wouldn't try to give me this store-bought syrup. Where is our home-made?"

Piqued, I said, "Emma, you know I can't make syrup anymore." *Mother had the maple tree cut down the year she became bed-ridden. She didn't want anyone to steal the sap.*

I sat down to eat my own breakfast. Emma remained mute. The fingers of the rising sun embroidered Emma's face in grotesque wrinkles. The faded curtains creaked behind me as I pulled them tighter. Light still streaked the gilded milkweed pods in the centerpiece. *I'd throw those fossils out if I dared.* Clicking silver signaled that Emma had finished her meal.

"I'll go see if the paper has come." I stepped to the frosted back door. Opening the door, I picked the paper up. As I returned to the table, I unfolded the paper and sniffed the fresh printer's ink.

When the rustling had ceased, she instructed, "Begin reading now." Her back stiffened as she sat up to listen. The occasional cracks in my high voice went unnoticed as I related the events of the day.

"New car purchased by a Miller, you say? Abbie's little boy, I reckon. Young people. A horse and buggy was good enough for us." Emma droned on, "One excursion. Remember when Silas McCormick courted me? I never told Mama but . . ." Emma leaned farther over the table, gripping the chair arms to support herself. ". . . one Sunday afternoon we drove in a powerful windstorm. I had my full paisley skirt on—with the French lace." My fingers twitched, tearing the newsprint, as she rambled on. *Doddering old maids. Mother made us.*

". . . strong gust caught my skirt and whipped it above my head. It stuck on a nail of the buggy roof. That scamp Silas looked at me, reined in the horse, and kissed me! I slapped him but . . ." she confided in a hoarse whisper, "I hated to." Emma sank back into her chair and was swallowed by the cushions. "Continue reading."

I scowled. *It isn't my fault that we have interruptions.* Her favorite page was next. Before she had a chance to tell me, I got the scrapbook and scissors. A foul smell of age clung to the embossed cover as I set it to the side. Emma tapped the table, waiting for me to resume reading. One of the milkweed pods broke from the decoration and rocked like a cradle on the oilcloth. Obituary notices stared at me in bold black print. *Four today.* I scanned the names—Abigail

Louise Miller, two unfamiliar, and then Silas Gordon McCormick. *I'll read his last.*

"Will you please continue?" Emma's voice sharpened and cut like a knife into my thoughts. My whole body tensed. I wanted to shout "shut up." *Leave me alone. Do this, do that, just like mother.*

My nails dug into the flesh of my palms. I read about Abigail. Emma prattled, "I remember the party where . . ." I tried to shut the discordant sound out of my ears. "I want that one put in the collection," she ordered. Then I knew what I could do. *I'll show her.*

"That is all this morning," I said, my voice dripping syrup. Taking the scissors, I cut two obituaries out. The brittle pages closed on Silas Gordon McCormick. I smiled to myself. Emma Mae would never know.

Adolescence

by Janet C. Brown
English, Fr.

Two wheeler driver with the
child eyes, naively perverted thoughts,
innocently sadistic mind,
where have your fleeing hop-skip-jumps
taken your perception-deception?
Are your shooed feet pud-muddling
or o n e - t w o - t h r e e i n g ?
And eyes, are you questioningly circling the sky or
contemplating a running nylon? Choosing can loose time
emancipate desires and perpetuate career-playing
Otherwise you are chained to maturity.