

The Promise

It was your hand I held when we walked through the woods, a short way from our door.
You showed me the den where the fox hid her kits...and jack-in-the-pulpit grew hidden, secure.

The small brown shed where tools and mowers lay, you said was the abode of bears,
and to this day my child-mind smiles to think them there.

Your's was the lap I sat on as you read 'til I slept, to dream of a golden Phoenix
who could rise from the flames unscathed.

From you I learned that mermaids were real, and carpets could fly, that a Psammead
(ill-tempered and surely when woken up early!) granted wishes malicious and sly.

And you promised me...you crossed your heart...that you would never leave me.

You taught me to swim and to sail, to tie a strong knot, to never complain of the wind's
icy bite. And if I misjudged the route to the shore, to stay with my over-turned sloop
thru the night. You taught me to dive and to fish...to bait my own hook...,to gut
my own catch...but never to cook!

Allowed me to read whatever I chose...of golden apples and Trojan kings, of
far-off lands and wondrous things. Of vengeful Medea who murdered her young.
Of Lavinia despoiled of her hands and her tongue.

You said never back down when I knew I was right. When to walk away...
not the same as take flight. That the arrogant, pedantic, repressive, unkind,
would always be thus....to leave them behind...and let my mind soar.

When the nuns called to complain I had strayed from the fold, you just
smiled and replied, "She's intrepid...not bold!"
And Mother Superior would retreat to the convent, convinced I was doomed,
with a father so indulgent.

And you promised me...you crossed your heart...that you would never leave me.

When I left for college you sent little treats found in some dusty shop on some obscure
street. Rings made of elephant hair, old books of sonnets, lockets with
photos of ladies in bonnets.

And when I set out for Egypt alone, to gaze at the Sphinx and sail on the Nile,
to travel by camel across desert sand...to wander the Souk...only you understand
that only **alone** can I traverse this land. Only you understood all that it took
to meet Ramses and Ptolemy, Cleo and Tut.

Every sorrow, every pain, every triumph, every gain, was shared first with you.
And when I married and had a girl-child, I felt joy, for I knew...
One day I'd walk thru the woods behind both of you...
And her hand would be in yours, as mind had been too.
You would show her the den of the fox and her kits...
And the house where the bears lived, high on a ridge.
Warn her, "Walk warily! Make not a sound!
For a family of trolls lives under this bridge!"

For her you would sing and teach her to whistle...tell her stories of
Psammeads who really existed and let her read Poe, no matter how twisted.

You would show her a world where animals spoke. Where by day Penelope
wove a fine cloak, and secretly, stealthily unwove it by night.
Where droll Rumpelstiltskin pranced, gleefully sure his name could never
be guessed, try though they might!
And a grateful lion would remember with awe, kind-hearted Androcoles,
who took a thorn from its paw.

And you promised me....you crossed your heart...that you would never leave me.

But one day in Autumn, you wandered away, quietly, softly, where I could
not follow.
And you left me bereft with a terrible sorrow, beyond tears.
For all that I cherished of magic and lore, of honor and goodness and sweetness
of soul had quietly, softly, perished with you.

And that's when I knew that "I will never leave you." was a promise untrue.

Dorothy Lorant