

Sketch

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Maybe

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Abstract

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Maybe

SUNLIGHT slanted into the corncrib through vents in the cupola and fell across the bins below me. I tossed the scoop shovel into the oat bin where it landed with a metallic clang, sending up dust and chaff. Then I let myself over the edge of the plank until I hung from it by my hands, and dropped onto the floor of the bin. I bent over and picked up the scoop, feeling the scratchy harness of the oats against my hand and smelling their stale dryness. Beginning in the corner nearest the opening in the floor, I slid my scoop under the oats, swung it over the hole, and dumped it. Scoop, swing, dump. Scoop, swing, dump. I shifted the oats around in the eight-foot square so they would slide down the chute to the opening below.

I enjoyed doing physical labor and wearing pants instead of a skirt, after six months at college, but my arms tired quickly. I stood the scoop up in the oats and leaned for a moment against the handle, thinking about the farm and college and things in general. In the dusky stillness I heard a faint squeaking noise followed by a fluttery sound of hurry from somewhere in the corncrib. What was it? A mouse? A rat? A squirrel on the roof? Probably just a bird up around the cupola. I decided to forget the sound and dug my scoop into the oats again.

Scoop, swing, dump. I filled the shaft and began piling oats above it. The sound hadn't necessarily been made by a bird, I thought. Maybe it was caused by an ear of corn sliding from the top of that piled in the crib. I had seen hundreds of bushels slide down other years as my father used up the corn near the door of the crib, leaving the rest in a steep pile. One ear would slide slowly from its place on top, tumbling and thumping twenty feet to the floor. Seconds later, another ear would follow it. Then two or three ears would tumble together, bouncing off the cement floor as they hit. Then more and more would rain to the

floor until a whole section of corn came pounding down in a yellow landslide.

I paused in my scooping and listened intently for the sound of a sliding ear. None came. Maybe it was a bird after all — a sparrow looking for scattered grain near the elevator. But there wouldn't be any grain left there by this time of year; it was more likely a mouse. There were always mice in the corncrib, and a lot more would come in from the fields during a bad winter like this one. Rats would probably come in too.

Maybe it was a rat.

Maybe there were rats in the corncrib with me.

I started scooping again to forget the thought, piling the oats higher over the opening, figuring how much higher they needed to be before I could quit.

Maybe there was a rat in the same bin with me.

I stopped scooping and looked hesitantly about the dusky bin. Was there? Was there a rat lurking under the gray-brown oats in the corner I hadn't disturbed? Was there a rat slinking along against the wall of the bin, just keeping out of my path? Rats were smart like that.

I shuddered involuntarily, then caught myself. This was ridiculous! I was getting all worked up over nothing at all, just a little noise. Maybe if I sang while I scooped it would cheer me up and scare any rats away.

"The sons of the prophets were brave men and bold, and quite unaccustomed to fear!"

I sang and scooped oats, throwing them wildly onto the pile, through two verses of "Abdul Abulbul Amur," then stopped. If there was a rat in the corncrib — if one were on the plank over my head — I wouldn't be able to hear him over all the noise I made.

One was probably up there. He was probably crouched on the edge of the plank, watching me with his small beady eyes. I glanced up at the plank, but couldn't see over the edge of it. I knew he was there though; one, and maybe others, slithering from their hiding places to watch me scooping oats. Wriggling out from between the ears of corn. Crawling up from the oat and bean bins around me. Scamp-

ering down from their nooks in the cupola to gather on the plank and watch me, an invader. Rows and rows of dirty-haired, snaky-tailed, beady-eyed rats. Horrid, repulsive rats! Above me and beneath me and around me, poisoning the stale air with their foul meanness.

Were they there? I had to see. Gripping my scoop tensely and shaking inside, I put one foot on the rung on the wall of the bin and pulled myself up to peer over the edge of the plank.

Nothing.

There was nothing on the plank. Nothing! It lay empty in the filtered sunlight, a brown path from my bin to the ladder rungs going down. With a sigh of relief, I threw my scoop onto it, pulled myself up, and sat down. Stillness all around me, sifting down from the cupola and settling over the worn boards and indifferent grain. The oats were piled high enough, I decided, and crawled across the plank to the ladder rungs going down.

—Carolyn Curtis, S. Jr.

*I Think I Need Another Rib,
But I'm Not Quite Sure*

Though passion
Is smashin'
And filled with delight,
It's painful,
Non-brainful,
Not pure lily-white.
It's blunder,
Wonder,
And delicious
Moral plunder!
Now, just
Why must
We lust?

—Larry Syndergaard, Ag. Sr.