What to Do, Little Man

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Abstract

What’s wrong, little man? You plop along in the hot dust. Each step stirs tiny clouds of gray mist. That tuneless hum and listless gait betray you...
What's wrong, little man?
You plop along in the hot dust.
Each step stirs tiny clouds of gray mist.
That tuneless hum and listless gait betray you.
Aren't you happy, little man?
No cares, no duties—
You should be happy.
Why are you so restless?

"Momma, Momma, what can I do?"
"Just go play, honey."
"Come play with me?"
"I'm busy now, David."

Plop, kick! Plop, kick! The warm dust swirls up. It feels good under your feet, between your toes, doesn’t it, Davey? Plod along, run your toes through the loose soil. But soon the mist grows too thick, too hot. The thick dryness
burns the inside of your nose. It settles on your skin and mixes with the sweat behind your knees. Sticky, dirty lane!

The yard, Davey. That’s it, go play in the cool yard. Now your bare feet swish over the stiff grass. The stems buckle, gently prick the tender arch of your sole. It’s fun to roll in the grass—over and over and over. But what’s this? A woolly bug? It humps over your finger. See it lift its head and search. Now it crippity-crawls away. And now Davey is a woolly bug. Hump, crawl, lift your head. What are you searching for, little man? Hump, crawl and sprawl face down. The fresh grass and earth smell nice, feel nice. Just lie in the cool, cool grass. But then the creepy red ants come. They scurry over your bare legs and arms, and slapping at them doesn’t help. Creepy, crawl yard!

Jump up! There’s your favorite tree. Pull yourself up; clasp the trunk with your knees; let the rough bark press into your skin. But it’s so still, and you must hold on so tight, and there’s nothing to do but sit on the branch and watch the ground below. Wasn’t there a wind once upon a time that rocked the branch and stirred the leaves . . . long ago, long ago at the dawn of remembering, and it’s so hard to remember long ago.

“Momma, I’m hot! Why does it always have to be so hot?”

“I don’t know, Davey. Guess we have had quite a spell of warm weather.”

“Momma, I don’t wanta play. There’s nuthin’ to play.”

“Please don’t bother me now, Davey boy. Can’t you see I’m busy. Play with your toys.”

Building blocks and tinker toys and tractors and cars. But you played with them yesterday and the day before that, and it isn’t fun anymore, is it, Davey? What to do. Go out and watch the fluffy figures in the blue sky? Watch them march across the arching sky and think about what big people do. Big people like Momma are always busy. They’re always doing something and they never have to wait or wonder what to do. Why aren’t you busy, little man?

“Hello, spider. You must be a Momma Spider cleaning house. You don’t even stop to talk to me.

“You’re a rotten old spider! You’re ugly and your legs are funny. There! Now you can’t clean house anymore!”
You grabbed away the house, and there's nothing in your hand but a sticky film. And the spider didn't mind. It just started building its house again.

It's hot and it's sticky and it's still and the big, white clouds march across the sky. Davey marches around the apple tree. March, march, faster, faster! Where are you going, little man? Round and round the apple tree, squashing the ripe fruit. Soon it's all squashed and you're dizzy. You can't keep marching and marching. What to do.

"Hi, punkin. Want to come in and sit down for awhile and read a book with Momma?"

"Can you read me the one about the choochoo train?"

"Sure 'nuf. Come sit by me."

"—and the little train puffed and puffed up the big hill. 'I think I can; I think I can'—"

"There. How's that? Want to look at one by yourself while I read my book now?"

The pictures are pretty. You look at your book, at the three kittens and their mittens. Then you look at another one about puppy dogs and another about mice and another about little boys and trains. Soon you've looked at them all. But Momma is still reading her book. There aren't any pictures in Momma's and it takes her ever so long to turn a page. You can't look at a page that long, even when you try and try to read the words that are just pretty letters. What to do. Going back outside? Inside, outside, all around. What to do. It's day and in a long, long time, it will be night, and then it will be day again. A different day, the same day?

But look, Davey! Look outside, little man! See what's happening? See the dust in the lane turn splotchy dark? See the grass begin to glisten and the leaves to sparkle? The wind is blowing and it isn't hot and it isn't like yesterday or the day before.

"Momma! Momma! Look, it's raining out, Mommal!"

"I see it is, Davey."

Press your nose against the window and watch the rivers run down the pane. Listen to the rattle on the porch roof, little man.
"Momma, it didn't rain yesterday. I remember when it rained and Jimmy came an' we got all muddy an' you an' Aunt Mary got all mad at us. Remember, Momma?"
"I sure do remember that, David. You were a mess—"

Epithanation

by Tessie Wolff

English, Sr.

I blame it on the vague and fleeting dusk.

Shrugging,
We watched the limp tissue of day compress,
Crushed like a soiled sheet on the feeble sky.
The hoarse silence that dipped and skimmed the walls
Was nothing more than sighing, we agreed.

We did not know, till night, abruptly falling,
Heavily pressed its weight on the jammed door:
Faint sounds, the block and reach of a scant breath,
Then silence, thick as incense.

Darkness hurled
Its diaphanous cloak around the humbled house.

We bowed to share the silence, chant a pause,
And kiss the barren woman's progeny.
Only after the dark did we slash our eyes,
Deny, accept, condemn, acquit the blindness,

And blame it

on the briefness of the dusk. . . .