Silas Speaks

George W. Woster*
like a chant, her body swaying to the measured beat of her voice. Suddenly she screamed in a piercing mad voice, "Don't you understand—I'm free!" Her laughter again throbbed like the beating of tom-toms and filled the room with a great, pulsing rhythm until it seemed a thing alive.

Silas Speaks
An Interpretation of Robert Frost's
"The Death of the Hired Man"

By George W. Woster

My thoughts are mixed, of course; these last few days
I've lived my life in memory so often,
I see the faces of people I'd forgotten.
There's Harold Wilson; I thought him a fool,
Yet he was wise enough to earn his living
By teaching other fools his brand of folly;
Yet if that crowd of college boys I saw
Bumming and hiking give him much competition,
He'll find it hard to keep his lucky job—
May yet be pitching hay to earn a living.

I'm glad the window's open; I can hear her
Trying to make him feel kindly toward me.
She's been my friend, God bless her! My own Mary
Would be like that today if she had lived.
If she had lived! I'd not be here like this;
On charity, no home to call my own,
Nor would I, dying, still have bitter feelings
Toward my own brother, who delayed the loan
Of money needed for her operation
Until it was too late, and Mary died.
I wonder if she, too, sees that small cloud
That Mary watches now. I am quite sure
His Hand, that guides that cloud, will guide my soul
Along the path He long ago has chosen,
And both of us now follow; all my life
Was guided by His Hand; I'm not afraid.
This pain that grips my heart, this roaring noise,
Louder as the lamplight dims, will pass—
The sound of Warren's footsteps in the hall
Grows fainter while he comes—It's quiet, now.

"H e's coming now; I hear him in the hall.
No, now they're going back; out on the porch
She's telling him the news that I am here.
What's that? He says he won't have me around?
He's right, he won't; I know why I am here,
And so does she, although I tried so hard
To hide from her how deathly sick I am.
The doctor told me just what to expect.
So Warren's right; I won't be here for long,
And he won't have to grudge me my tobacco.

"He's sore because I left him? Did he think
I'd work for bed and board like any schoolboy?
Wants me to hear him, does he? Well, that's easy;
They shouldn't sit beneath that open window
And not expect it; still, I'd like it better
If they'd go elsewhere and let me die in peace.
I tried to save my self-respect? So help me,
I'd do just what I said, if I was able.
I paid for Warren's kindness well in labor;
He could have been more generous with his money.