Oh...Hell

Phyllis Wendt*

*Iowa State College

Copyright ©1946 by the authors. Sketch is produced by The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress).
http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/sketch
Oh...Hell

Phyllis Wendt

Abstract

The fire of hell, I think, depends Not on the brimstone Moses names...
Outside was blurry, too. Howie didn't see the clean morning. He squashed the grass.

Out the gate. Across the field to the stream. Now he knew how the old nag, Bessie, felt when Pa loaded the wagon too full and beat her to make her drag it.

The rocks, furred with moss, and the water, that had been sparkling and silver like a new mirror, were dark. The little boy lay the box down and knelt by the stream to look in. A tear splashed on the dark smoothness; the rings widened, disappeared.

Howie lifted the pups into his lap—so little they couldn't fight back, scared 'n cold. He leaned over and sobbed, "It's all my fault. Oh, Pa had said you can't have a dog, boy. You can't have a good-for-nuthin' hound gobblin' and stuffin' his big mouth. I cried in the pillow so's they wouldn't hear me, but Ma come and found me. Then she said to Pa, God, let the kid have a mutt. We had enough scraps 'n stuff. 'N then I got Mike. But I didn't know she was a ma. 'N then you came. 'N it's all my fault!"

For what was a long time he crouched there on the wet stone.

Then from far off came the hard voice again, his pa, "Howard, you, Howard—." He couldn't hear; he didn't want to.

One of the babies squirmed loose and fell into the water. It squealed a little, then went under. Howie's hand reached out—he didn't know why—and held the body under until it moved no more. There were four more—warm things into the dark water. After, he put them, all cold, into the box and buried them in a hole he made in the sand by the stream.

Then back across the meadow. He didn't care what his pa said. He didn't care if he never, never got back to help his ma. He didn't care anything, except that the trust didn't go out of Mike's eyes, ever, ever. He was hurting. And he was hating—something.

---

Phyllis Wendt

The fire of hell, I think, depends
Not on the brimstone Moses names
But on perpetual little flames
From candles burning at both ends.