Poem from The Childstime

Andrea Carlisle*
male population has been steadily dying off within the last decade or so. Our own scientists have studied the situation, and their only answer is exhaustion of the male species. There may be more to it than that — I don't know — but the women have appealed to us for help. And you see, this is the amazing thing: they are physically so similar to us Terrans that we are able to impregnate them with healthy children. So we have made a bargain — milasium ore for new 'blood.'

Have you understood all this, Mr. Brookfield? Mr. Brookfield? Ah, but I see you are perhaps more interested in rubbing the piece of wood.

James? . . . James, he's ready.

Poem from

The Childstime

by Andrea Carlisle

English and Speech, Jr.

I have left a thousand times
the things I never knew well:
a leaf-choked stream with secrets not
all to be learned in only my first
six years.
And one Tuesday by a dusty gold
Seventh Day Adventist Tent
I met a cross-eyed cat, with scabs
and matted fur, wounded by the stones
of laughing children.
Her, I knew well but she went away,
padded down some graveled street
with tired paws. I saw her again.
cut in half by a tire that traveled
that same road.
And there was somebody who wept over
the same things as I and who said
I would make it as a swan someday
but he left too. The best ones always go
or I leave them.
Neighbors always came to say
goodbye when the Allied-Orange van showed.
and I was always waving through rainy car windows, through rain in child's eyes, at somebody who must have meant something once.

Everything lasts only a moment:
soft yellow fog of winter
dawn, fighting sun; sweet
marshmallow ashes tasted at some long ago fire; The Childstime.

Everything goes—
a whole world bought with boxtops, and all those Christmas trees, naked except for a strand or two of silver, dragged into some alley and forgotten; Saturday popcorn-throwing matinees, flashy cartoons,
a red coat with white buttons
double spaced down the front,
a black-eyed boy who held my hand and gave me the gift of a walk home one cold and witchy Hallowe'en and someone with quiet eyes who said hello a few times then crashed somewhere on a wilder night; a dog named Soot we had to give away and who came back after walking miles just to see me again—all the summer green rivers and swings that take you to the sky and back.

Everything lasts only a moment.
If you turn your back to cry, then look again,
a friend is gone. I wonder if anyone lights fires now inside the white wall of one great wine-carpeted home that seemed to me a mansion, and I wonder if anyone, tomorrow, will remember my name.