

Listen, can't you hear the miners digging; their pickaxes? . . .

My closet is not the entrance to a mine, this is my house, it cost me a pretty penny. The closet goes with the house, they threw it in to sweeten the deal, as it were . . . and I know this closet as well as I know my mother with all her lack of child rearing ability, and it doesn't go anyplace except to the back of itself and out again into this hall!

Shhh, I'm not supposed to be here, whispers the dwarf, I wish you wouldn't talk so loudly.

And so the man and the dwarf continue their exchanges, their voices become the whispery sounds of mice in a dark kitchen . . . only this and the distant pick, pick of pickaxes coming from deep in the closet . . .

Daughter / Kathryn Stripling

The whole world lay before me those Saturdays.
In good weather I could sit down beneath any tree
and for half a day gather a tow sack too full of pecans
to be carried. Then there was no reason
to hurry. My mother, a few yards away,
let me dream. At the next tree

old Autry sat slumped on an oil can
still mooning for Lester who'd left home for good
this time. Worked both her hands to the bone
for him she had, she said and considered her fingers
as if they still wanted to grab a strong oak limb
and stir one last washpot about to boil over.
No wonder sad Sugar Boots sang the blues
all afternoon, looking up through the branches
for nothing at all, five months gone
and no good man to find. Not one good man
in three hundred miles. No one spoke

while she sang. There was nothing to do
but to listen. The telephone wires festooned over the fields
hummed with messages. Soon all
the pigs in the county were rattling their feed troughs

for supper and all together too
slowly the trees in the distance were turning
to clouds. All that time I was waiting to turn

seventeen. Hand in
and hand out again. Hand
halfway between the full sack
and the ground. I remember

the message I almost forgot
I knew. I have my grandfather's word
on an acre of black dirt, my father's
on four thousand more. What
they lost is not lost. Here I am.
When I look up the future's a field for me.
I am the girl in the midst of the harvest.

Soreshin / Robert Morgan

Buying tools or implements when flush
my father asked for the highest priced.
He donated to the church then
in nothing less than hundreds, and for
weddings gave only silver.
Young beans he'd overfertilize and over-
plow, ripping out the tender roots with
a cultivator just when they should be
banked and left alone. To support his
extravagance every spring he
took out a hefty loan on the land
just like a big farmer, and ran through
it in a week or two of paying the
highest wages in the valley.
Jesus said seek first the kingdom
of God and all the rest would be added;
he meant to hold him to it.
I've seen him throw away good beans
to get a few bushels of fancies.