**Remembrance**

Christopher Hadin

I remember, from the time I have memories, knowing that a girl from the burnt-out house up the road had been murdered. In my family, it was forbidden to speak of this girl, but I have pieced the story together from inference and a few scraps of detail. She was one of a large family, and the summer I was born she was found dead in a cellar hole not far away. One day I was held by her grieving mother, who then came to our house to hold me for hours in the days and months following her daughter’s funeral. I was a colicky baby, but I slept quietly in her arms. The peace this brought to her I can only guess at because I have never held a baby.

In time the family moved, and their house sat empty for years before a leaking roof and broken windows allowed water to rot everything out. One day it fell in on itself slowly with a loud groan of creaking timbers. I remember hearing someone say, “Bennet’s house is falling down,” and being hurriedly packed into the back seat of a car. We arrived just in time to see and hear the collapse of the house. As it went over with a groan, my grandmother, sitting in the front seat of the car, also groaned, and the two sounds were so similar they blended together. My aunt and uncles looked at each other and shook their heads. Even though no one had lifted a finger to preserve it, everyone was sad to see it go. By then the town owned the land and, in a few days, firemen burned the hulk for practice, doused the embers, and left. People began to leave junked cars there, and garbage too.

The years have allowed me to see how her murder cast a long shadow over the houses and farms on our road. The subject of her death was utterly taboo and even when I was old enough to understand, it was never spoken of. If it was hinted at in conversation, the subject was changed. If directly addressed in a question, the question went unanswered. The nearness of such a violent act, and the refusal to ever discuss it made a hole in the lives of those who knew the girl. And because I grew up among them, we were at odds because of these fragments of my knowing and their desire to keep me from knowing, long after I knew.

It seemed to me that the murder made adults permanently angry with the younger kids because they were always telling us how little we knew about the world and how stupid we were for believing in its kindness. If I grasped at small bits of knowledge of the world, I felt their censor of that knowledge and was ashamed for trying to possess it. I learned not to know. It was worse with the older kids, the ones who knew the murdered girl. As soon as they could flee they did, not to college, but to cities and jobs that allowed them one luxury––to get away. They never helped us with anything. We didn’t exist to them. They were just gone, even before they left. No one said goodbye.

But there is a thing that helps me now. Should I tell you? This is it: *I can see the girl.* Sometimes she’s actually in our house. She stands near me, and smiles. Her smile is pure love. She knows how it is for me and knows that my heart has ached so much at times I prayed I would die, but I don’t pray for that now. I think I have always known her. She was the thing I couldn’t see, but now, somehow, I can.

Look at how I would be if she hadn’t been murdered: She was the perfect age for babysitting when she died. She would have certainly watched me from time to time. Together, we could have walked to the lake (something I can’t do now). I know that as I grew, I would have gone to visit her and maybe gone swimming. I wouldn’t be like I am now. She would have let me sit and listen to her and her friends talk. They would talk about anything! Nobody would shush anyone, or slam the conversation closed like a door. There would be no reason to do that! If she hadn’t been murdered, I would have loved her. I love her now that she has come to see me and make me smile. Mother and Father are too old to smile. I know it is hard for them to have me still.

Sometimes I say her name quietly and it is just like praying. I haven’t told mother or father. I’ve only told you and Dr. Sloan. He tells me thinking like this serves no good purpose, but he has no idea how much it does.