

# The Prairie Light Review

---

Volume 13  
Number 1 *The Dreaming Tree*

Article 61

---

Winter 3-1-1994

## The Sunflower

Victoria M. Jackson  
*College of DuPage*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.cod.edu/plr>

---

### Recommended Citation

Jackson, Victoria M. (1994) "The Sunflower," *The Prairie Light Review*: Vol. 13 : No. 1 , Article 61.  
Available at: <https://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol13/iss1/61>

This Selection is brought to you for free and open access by the College Publications at DigitalCommons@COD. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Prairie Light Review by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@COD. For more information, please contact [orenick@cod.edu](mailto:orenick@cod.edu).

## The Sunflower

by *Victoria M. Jackson*

She was nine and had lived in the same neighborhood all of her life. She had never seen the sunflower before. It grew in a field outside of her understanding, one block from her home. She looked at the immense stem holding the face of the flower, the face powerfully moving to keep pace with the sun. The center was brimming with black seeds.

As she gazed at the flower, she felt its strength and sensed the flower knew she was standing there in the sunshine.

“Come on, Jenny,” he called, as he climbed the fence. Her gaze, broken from the black center of the flower, moved to the young boy. The sun caught her eyes and she looked into a radiance of white light.

“I want to show you something. Come on,” he jumped off the top of the fence and landed smiling.

She smiled back and with clear eyes saw the blond, blue eyed boy. The excitement in his face caught her by surprise and she couldn't tell him she had never seen the sunflower or this field, nor climbed a fence before. She could hear the crackly heat of the day, the insects and her heart beat. By instinct alone she climbed the fence and landed so close to the sunflower as it swayed.

“Johnny, where are we going, what do you want me to see?” He smiled and grabbed her hand and began to run west through the field directly into the sunlight. She ran with him through the drying, yellow field, stumbling slightly and feeling that she was probably doing something wrong. She didn't climb fences, she didn't run through fields; her world existed on cement pavement, gray painted back-porch steps and school playground equipment. He let go of her hand and began to climb an immense pear tree. The fruit was very ripe and the air smelled tangy. There was a loud buzzing of fruit bees and she felt somewhat dizzy as she looked up to watch him climb high into the tree.

“Here, catch,” he called, as he gently tossed a yellowish pear to her. She moved her hands in a gesture of protection and the fruit fell to her feet. She reached down and picked up the pear. The pear's coolness amazed her. She held it to her cheek and closed her eyes. She was suddenly aware of the cool darkness under the pear tree. The crackly, insecty feeling of the field disappeared as a small breeze reached her and lifted her brown hair off her neck. She opened her eyes when she heard Johnny jump to the ground.

“Come sit over here,” he said, pointing to the base of the tree. He kicked a few pears out of the way and they sat down with their backs to the cool bark. She felt comfortable with his matter-of-fact approach. He knew what he wanted to do and he did not question his ability or her response. He was so different from the people in her life.

Now as she looks back, she realized that self-assured men were a rarity in

the Italian neighborhood; she knew bullies and belligerent oafs, and even softly seductive manipulators. The women were no better; docile, beaten, tired, helpless or on occasion loudly aggressive. There were no men or women that were simply self-assured.

Reflecting back on her younger days, she glanced sideways at Johnny, who was beaming a great smile at her as he took a huge bite out of the pear he was holding. It sounded juicy and Jenny could feel her mouth watering. She looked down at the pear in her hand and brought it back up to her cheek. It was still cool. She slowly took a bite. The skin had a momentary dry coarseness before her teeth broke through to the cooling white of the pear. The juices ran down her chin and she quickly wiped them away, gazing back at the boy. He had finished his pear and leaned his head back. She lifted her gaze to match his and looked up to the sky through the leaves and fruit of the pear tree.

She was forty-three now and more than years separated her from that day. She couldn't recall any other time she played with Johnny that late summer, but she did remember the last time she saw him. School had started again in the Fall, and with it, the routine of hot woolen uniforms and hard wooden chairs. The sweet freedom of summer and ripe pears passed into boring days of mediocre education and punishment from cross nuns.

One day, as the Christmas holidays approached, Sister Perpetua, the school principal, came into the fourth grade classroom and asked the teacher for a volunteer to help deliver presents to a poor family in the parish. Jenny was chosen.

Warm in her winter jacket, arms filled with flat boxes; Jenny walked with Sister Perpetua down a steep staircase into a cramped and dirty basement. This is where hilly-billies live, though Jenny. These were poor trashy people who didn't know much and wouldn't amount to anything. Sister Perpetua was talking to a young woman who must have been the mother and some skinny children watched as Jenny stood holding the brightly wrapped boxes. In a corner past the stove and a sink filled with dirty dishes, she saw him. Johnny leaned against the wall with one leg bent, his hands in his pockets. She looked down and felt her heart pounding. Something was wrong, very wrong. She wanted desperately to go out of the hot, crowded basement.

Sister Perpetua kept talking about the blessing of Christmas and the young mother was crying and thanking her for the gifts. Jenny stood with her head down until she hear the nun call her quite sharply. "Jenny, set the presents down here on the table." The boxes fell from her arms to the floor and she felt confused and humiliated.

Johnny had been the first wonderfully different person in her life and had shown her something she had never known: that life held possibilities. She was an intruder in his home and she had no business to be there with this nun for this reason. She looked up and caught his gaze. He had remained against the wall watching her. She didn't remember leaving the basement or ever seeing him again.