

The Best of Friends, vol. 1

ANTHOLOGY OF NEW QUAKER WRITING
PUBLISHED 1999 BY KIMO PRESS IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE
FELLOWSHIP OF QUAKERS IN THE ARTS

In an Amish Cornfield

Margie Gaffron

At the north corner of Abner's back cornfield,
Edge of sloping wood stretching wild
Over the mountains to Sugar Valley,
A mixture of vivid color,
A group of men not yet faces,
Silhouettes holding the cold metal of rifles,
And with the rhythm of their breathing,
Creating the illusion of mist or of halo
Clinging about their heads.

East, a small rise of pasture,
A fence line of old walnut,
And beyond that a dead deer,
Looking as though it had dropped from the sky
And broken.

The men shift nervously.
They stamp their feet,
Move their rifles from one hand to the other,
Breathing heavily into the empty hand.
They are mostly silent.
A gray-bearded Amishman lies on the frozen stubble.
He is dead.

See, they told us,
He was sitting over there at the corner of the woodlot,
Looking, I saw the sun invade
The winking forest and field -
Ice, frozen in the tracks of Abner's team,
Ice, frozen in the bark of trees, minuscule prisms.
And these three deer ran out this way,
Coming towards us,
We were on the rise up there above the deer,
And the old man shot one and it went down.
Well, it rolled some and then got back up

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And tried to run,
The other two headed back across the field,
Over towards Rossman's,
You know their camp took ten yesterday,
But we didn't shoot til they were past the old man
And the boy here, but they just kept going,
We didn't hit one. And well, the old man stood up
And ran over towards the wounded deer.

But this was as far as he made it.
Niel saw him fall and killed the deer,
Then came down here and tried artificial respiration
And that pounding on his chest,
But he was gone,
Probably dead when he hit.
It's a shame, isn't it?
The boy just stared and I stared,
Looking at the dead man on the ground.

Abner King's brother-in-law, they said,
Come up from Lancaster to hunt.
Come up from Lancaster to die.
Yet the blood on his head where he had fallen,
The pulse that wasn't there,
The blanket no breathing disturbed,
Covering but no longer warming him,
Could not diminish the character of his strong face,
Not stiffened yet, nor paled,
And only beginning to be dead.

Brother of Abner King's wife,
Whose tears when she saw you
Fell into your beard and stayed there,
Not quite ice or infant stars shining,
I tried to feel your spirit,
Lingering like breath over that small group of us,
But it had already gone.

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My eyes questioned where.
Not the mountains, I guessed,
For they looked and felt no different,
Not the barren December sunlight
Making the air something more than invisible,
And not back to Lancaster, country becoming city,
Where ties of family must bid you come.

Brother, it is a long way to Switzerland,
And the sudden stirring of some pious woman's womb.

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