

Hughes Family Reunion

Gloria Tester

Southern Illinois in sweltering and wet summer.
Thunder and the whippoorwill sing strange
duets at night.
From southwestern deserts to the closest
farmhouse, we gather.

We are many kinds of people around this common name:
the girls' team and the boys' team playing
tug-o-war over a mud puddle;
the sister come to say all is forgiven;
the grandfather bent with pain;
parents of just-married children;
parents newly single, grieving or, sometimes, walking taller in a
new-found freedom;
the loudly ill, the fanatically well, and
the serene.

And there is food,
brought from ordered kitchens, or fashioned on cluttered
counters with
pride and love;
fresh-snapped beans; sturdy ears of corn;
beef, carrots and potatoes in gravied, peppery stews;
bread, basic as life and love;
mounds of chicken, fried — what other way? — and
pies with airy crusts and juicy fillings;
and milk, fresh and foamy.

It's all mine, this reunion:
Grandma's advice, the cry of my days-old cousin.
I bring gifts of cactus jelly and take home
cake and an old hymn relearned.
I come here, weep and sing, small-talk and rhapsodize,
until in dreams I drink a cool, sweet blend of
country strength and city change that
is my truest heirloom.

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