

1935

The little friends

I played with every day  
each lived in a different house on  
the same big tree street. Each morning  
we would all do something different that was  
the same. Work was scarce for us in an elegant way  
that Depression Fall of 1935. We were all about 2 years old.  
We had almost learned to talk with perfect authority about what we  
thought was important: How the incredible Jimmy Burnside could get in  
and out of the most elegant escapades faster than anyone could make up stories  
of how he burned down his mother's mink coat stuffed cedar storage closet while smoking when  
he was one and a half years old, how the extraordinary Arthur Mintz might drive us out  
to his farm full of cows, how you broke your leg if you ran with your shoe laces untied  
Or perhaps the truly great Herman Groffsky was going to drive us down to his Glass  
Warehouse in Newark and let us climb over the giant trucks and wood crates full of  
glass with a green paper four leaf clover on each pane. Sometimes we ineptly tried to  
climb trees or just hugged around enjoying the newness of walking. Sometimes we  
would walk up the sidewalk the great distance of seven lawns to see if the mysterious  
old bird people who no one had ever seen had left their garage door open. It was my  
deepest earliest most profound dark secret ambition to be some sort of a secret bird  
garage person when I grew up and I am happy to report in my own humble way I am.  
*Sometimes the garage door was open and sometimes the garage door was closed.  
We would discuss why the door was open sometimes and sometimes closed or why  
if you could have birds or anything else in your garage, every one just had cars or  
last years garbage When the garage door was closed we walked away in an elegant  
sophisticated high hat depression realizing that soon the door would be open. When  
the door was open we eagerly peered in through the chicken wire covering the wide  
opening of the huge dark Burchfield garage and listen to the squawky radio left on  
for the birds and look in and stare as the charming silver throated feathered prisoners  
of the golden air waves danced, pranced, leaped, squeaked, beaked and screamed at us:*



extravagant  
little feather prisoners  
wished to fly away to freedom  
but we little slaves of small town  
growth believed in the rewards of enslave-  
ment. Every morning at about ten, no matter  
what we were doing, one of us children in the  
uncanny spontaneous compulsion of child ritual  
would yell, "Let's go see the Cookie Lady!" as if it  
were a new idea no one ever heard of before. Whoever  
yelled this was accorded a non-verbal Great Prize of  
respect and honor. It was considered a sign of genius.  
We would skip over to the side door of an old house  
and each yell over and over again like exotic giggle  
birds in as many funny tones of voice that we could  
hear, "Cookie Lady! Cookie Lady!" A thin white  
capped white haired lady would come to the  
door with a box of ginger snaps. She would  
unwrap an inner foil in a Franz Hals  
wink. She would give each of us a  
cookie with a smile. She  
was very jolly.

This was not an Eisenstein winter of discontent,  
 this was a summer of pale white millionaires in opera hats,  
 white ties and tails and evening gowns on the radio mill  
 ing around on the mirror polished Automat marble sing  
**ing somewhere just around the corner there's** a rainbow  
 in the sky so let's have another nickel cup o f coffee  
 and let's have another piece of ten cent pie. And one  
**afternoon that summer a man who looked** down in  
 old clothes came to our front door. Taking off his  
 gray hat and wiping his snuffle with it and looking  
 down, he asked my mother if he could do some  
 work for a piece of pie and coffee. He was try  
 ing very hard not to faint from hunger. With  
 a sad look my mother searched my little  
 being with her clever eyes, turned to  
 the man who looked down and said,  
 "My son does all the work here. We  
 don't have work. Come around  
 to the back steps and we'll  
 give you pie and coffee."

I was very proud of my mother. I followed the  
 poor man around to the back of the house and  
**watched** him look down, sit on the back steps,  
 look **down**, snuffle near tears, look down, eat  
 the **pie**, and drink the coffee. I was just about  
 to **tell the** crying man about the Cookie Lady  
 when **my** mother yelled at me out of the  
 back **pan**try window, "Let the man eat  
 in **peace**." It is over 60 years later. I  
 still **see** people who look down.  
 I still **wish** I could give to all  
 I see **who** cry dark misery:  
 In **all** ways quick foiling  
 any **shad**owy or dense,  
 depress**ing** desolate  
 shade: My mind:  
 The **Cookie** Lady  
 y: **Digesting**  
 gi**gg**les  
 her **lov**  
 ers **ma**  
 de.