

*From The Angel Valley Poems:  
Mama Knopf, Dearborn County Indiana, 1987*

## I Never Liked Men

I don't know about dying  
but I know we continue  
we go on; the spirit does,  
see? Its like the fire it goes  
out one place - comes back the next.

I don't know if that's  
in a body or not; well,  
he talked of it, he said  
he had walked this farm before  
came back here to finish, see?

Well, some might say it finished  
him, but I don't think he'd have  
had it any different.

We had the table, a long  
table in the other room  
but even then we had to  
sit down to dinner in two  
shifts, see? We were always  
trying to save so he could  
stop working in the city  
and farm full time:

All week I would be alone  
with the children - I was tired  
well, I was raised city  
I knew nothing of the country  
I never wanted this life  
see? And now I wouldn't leave....

I have it all - my solitude  
the creek and these birds  
everything, but him - and it  
was him that knew everything  
(he was the sky in my eyes  
then, see?)

He taught me how things  
grow to plant something you spread  
out the roots and work the ground  
first. I thought it just happened  
or you stuck a seed in and  
that was it - he saw something  
in me - do you know it?

And the babies they slept

between us until the next  
one came O his brothers were  
my thorn. It was always mama  
this and mama does it  
different. See they didn't know why  
he picked a city girl  
who only knew about  
markets and factories.

He was not like them, not like  
a man at all he was more  
like (should I say it?): a god;  
he was that good... Well, he was  
flesh (the children say, "hush  
Mama, it's a sin to talk  
like that") but you understand  
in his spirit he was god  
(I never had anything  
for men.) Maybe I sin, but  
it is true - do you feel it?

He never left here; he's still  
all around this land. Now on  
the weekends he'd come home tired  
from being a foreman in  
Cincinnati and he'd do  
whatever needed done: sweep  
and mop - he was not too good  
for it and by the time we  
had thirteen children he was  
ready to quit the city  
and come home.

O yes he had a room there  
but we were his life. It was  
his dream this farm  
he knew it the first time  
he saw it and that winter  
the house had only three walls  
here in the kitchen we made  
a fire and slept with Lia  
and Anna Margaret  
in her basket between us.

We had to scratch for everything --  
his brothers never gave us  
a thing but their troubles and  
he loved his Mama, alright?

He'd do whatever he could  
to help them (...my spirit  
is more mean) . He didn't want

it said back in Germany  
that he didn't listen to his  
mother and she told them all  
to help each other and he'd  
nod his head "ya, ya," when they  
came begging: "Fritz,  
take care of my cow; Fritz,  
we have to build a fence; Fritz,  
what's wrong with your wife -  
can't she sew your buttons?"

O, we had to do a lot of scratching  
for our own to make it work.

That year the farm was ready  
(his dream, see?) The boys  
were old enough to work  
in the fields and the barn was full;  
we had seventeen cows – some  
for milk, some for beef and four  
spring calves. He was so happy.

He had finally made it - we had  
enough for winter when they  
put the damp hay in the barn  
to keep it from the storm - O we  
didn't understand or we forgot  
it would heat up like that...  
He was milking when his  
dream exploded - the barn, see?

All of it in flames I cried  
out their names and the boys came  
running out: "Papa, papa's  
in there..." Well, he still had it  
in him to save those four calves  
and a mama, everything  
else was lost...He stumbled out  
and all I saw was ash --

That was the darkest, the deadest  
sky his blue eyes ever held.

It stopped my heart for a spell.  
Everything but the fire went  
quiet and it ate every thing as he  
stood there watching it...  
not moving, not cursing a thing.  
No, he had nothing to say  
and that was hardest for me:

I could not help him - it was

like he turned to stone under  
neath that pie apple and when  
it was done we ate supper  
and he went back to the city  
for his foreman job – but he was  
too old for the job now, see?  
They wouldn't have him again.

Three of the boys are firemen  
now in their jobs in the city.

Oh, but He gave me everything  
(You know it) this land  
and the whole feel of it  
the fields, yes and those  
clouds, he was good  
truly good, a god  
yes, a god –

I never liked men.

