

DEDDINGTON WRITING COMPETITION 2008.

The Open Competition - Poem

Special Prize: Edith Bright - Butler of Wantage

What If...Pregnant at Christmas 1930?

What if I'd been told, just as Mary of old,
I was chosen by God for His Baby's abode –
When unmarried?
Not only because of whose Baby He was
I'd have worried.
Now, here let me pause - show you photos, unhurried –

In old-fashioned days when young women wore stays
And hadn't a clue as to where babies grew –
Or how planted –
Such a one 'brought to bed' before she was wed wed
Would be daunted.
She could end up dead – and the baby unwanted.

From faces I knew – take a look at these – two
Of the girls at my school, whose parents were cruel –
Unforgiving.
They were given no room, but driven from home
For "their sinning".
All hope being gone – life did not seem worth living.

I saw this one's fellow down in the meadow
Where they'd been kissing; before she went missing
He'd – disowned her.
That made her decide; I know well how I cried
When they found her
In a pool deep and wide. – At night she had drowned there.

This other one, here – she would never show fear.
Until her last hour she believed she had power –
She was mistress.
Then, in late November or early December,
She'd – dismissed us –
Slashed wrists I remember – not long before Christmas.

DEDDINGTON POETRY COMPETITION 2008

“What if pregnant at Christmas, 1930?”

Edith Bright - Butler

In thirty thoughtful lines this poet quietly hauls society's hypocrisy over the coals in the matter of interpreting “sin”. It shows how society's values have changed from the last century to what is more acceptable now.

The presentation is as if to a friend, the reader sitting alongside, invited to look at a family album, “unhurried” – but you are soon involved. In its quiet revelations, the story packs a dramatic punch.

The writer remembers two schoolgirl acquaintance, “ faces I knew”, from 1930. As the guiding Christian calendar prepared to celebrate The Nativity and Mary's virgin birth, the young women, pregnant because of ignorance, and unwed, were in despair. Family bonds and charity disappeared in the season of goodwill. For Mary, “blessed among women”, new life was a rare and special gift from God. Not so in the suburbs of the Thirties. Cast out and condemned by cruel parents whose shame and apprehension of bastardy cancelled kindness, it meant that not only two but four lives were lost. Thrown into the same situation the two desperate girls were “given no room” at the Inn of life. They opted out.

Dire warning to other girls and the presenter, who starts with

“What if I'd been told, just as Mary of old,
I was chosen by God for His baby's abode-
When unmarried?” “I'd have worried”

One is moved by understatement ; how those girls suffered in their rejection. How they paid for “their sinning” when their lovers disowned them too. It was an intense experience for the writer, “How I cried when they found her”
”in a pool deep and wide. – At night she had drowned there”

And finally the other, tougher, girl
“Slashed wrists I remember – not long before Christmas”

Suicide was still a crime in that era, anonymous burial would follow. As if they had never been yet once so full of life and passion.

Skilfully constructed, the calm intimate tone is in wonderfully vivid contrast to the seething emotions involved. Rhyming words are the subtle knots in an economic, seamless presentation. There are 6x 6-line verses. The contrast of long and very short lines within each verse gives fine emphasis and allows for poignant silences when reading aloud. This poem rouses pity and makes us consider our own values. It is well conceived, perfectly delivered and highly commended. The judge awards it a special prize.

Maureen Dew
Competition Judge