

Old Glory

C.W. McCall

She was old, and beautiful, and wise, and She taught the young boy everything he needed to know. All about the land, and the woods and the rivers, and what had happened there even before he was born. She taught him what was good and what was bad. And most of all, the difference between right and wrong.

And so, every morning he stood beside his desk, with his hand over his heart, and promised to respect Her for the rest of his days.

When times were hard, and the grain elevators stood empty against the black Midwestern sky, She gave him praise for a hard day's work, and hope for his father. And She promised there would be better days to come.

And he sat by the radio and cried angry tears one gray December day, when he heard that She'd been betrayed. She was hurt; She needed help. He was only twelve, but he gave Her all he could: scraps of paper and tin cans and even the rubber tires from his wagon. He followed Her across the sea, on the maps and the newspaper, wishing he was older, old enough to fight back.

Then after four long, dark years, he heard the church bells ring and the noon whistle blow long and high. And he was part of one brief moment when all the world paid respect to Her.

And then he was grown up; and suddenly, the world had changed. And there were questions about Her. Some thought She was old-fashioned, useless. Some thought She was dead. But then after all, maybe they hadn't known Her as he had.

And now everyone has grown older. The boy, his children, and She too. He saw Her again just the other day: it was one of those bright, summer mornings and the church bells were ringing again. The bands were playing, and even the noon whistle was blowing, early.

He stood and watched proudly as She passed by. The sunlight catching the flash of crimson and white, stars blazing in the clear blue sky.

And then She was gone.

And he looked down through three generations into his grandson's eyes, and said, "There she goes, son. We used to call her Old Glory."