

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.