

One Crowded Hour of Glorious Strife

Phyllis McGinley, 1950

I love my daughters with a love unailing,
I love them healthy and I love them ailing.
I love them as Sheep are loved by the shepherd,
With a fiery love like a lion or a leopard.
I love them gentle or inclined to mayhem—
But I love them warmest after eight-thirty a.m.

Oh, the peace like heaven
That wraps me around,
Say, at eight-thirty-seven,
When they're schoolroom-bound
With the last glove mated
And the last scarf tied,
With the pigtail plaited,
With the pincurl dried,
And the egg disparaged,
And the porridge sneered at,
And last night's comics furtively peered at,
The coat apprehended
On its ultimate hook,
And the cover mended
On the history book!

How affection swells, how my heart leaps up
As I sip my coffee from a lonely cup!
For placid as the purling of woodland waters
Is a house divested of its morning daughters.
Sweeter than the song of the lark in the sky
Are my darlings' voices as they shriek good-by—

With the last shoe burnished
And the last pen filled,
And the bus fare furnished
And the radio stilled;
When I've signed the excuses
And written the notes,
And poured fresh juices
Down ritual throats,
And rummaged for umbrellas
Lest the day grow damper,
And rescued homework from an upstairs hamper,
And stripped my wallet
In the daily shakedown,
And tottered to my pallet
For a nervous breakdown.

Oh, I love my daughters with a love that's reckless
As Cornelia's for the jewels in her fabled necklace.
But Cornelia, even, must have raised three cheers
At the front door closing on her school-bent dears.