

# The Children of Caldwell Park

## I

The Children of Caldwell Park  
don't smile,  
and they don't talk,  
and they won't explain  
what they are doing.  
But I know.

The Children of Caldwell Park  
appear on cue  
and gather in the center  
to begin their ritual  
on tamped-down dirt.

And you, newsman:  
You'll never understand  
who they are  
or what they are doing.  
But I know.

You try to explain it  
in linear terms,  
but it's circular, interactive -  
they revolve around the center,  
and *each part* is necessary.  
It takes them all.

And you, newsman:  
You'll never understand -  
that the only way to know  
is from the inside out.

## II

I can see it all,  
the pattern, the spiral -  
From so many miles, and a year  
and more away,  
I can feel it rising,  
As I write in the north country  
of that one afternoon when I  
understood.

I sat on the steps  
about halfway down  
In my denim shorts  
and my straw hat,  
And taking the harmony ball  
from my pocket,

I rolled chimes between  
my palms  
As the juggler walked  
down the hill.  
(Once he's there,  
the walker starts the patterns  
that bisect the circle -  
it's always the same -  
and repetition makes it stronger.  
They've learned that much,  
and their focus is gathering  
And building in strength - )  
And I was suddenly *in*.  
I was part of the pattern.

I left shaken with the joy of it,  
the terror, and  
that night they came for me.  
The circle formed outside my  
door -  
for three nights, it worked there  
under a Southside streetlight.  
Sleepless, I peeked  
through the blinds,  
And I was afraid to go.

You see, newsman:  
I knew that if I went with them,  
I would never return.

"We'll take care of you,"  
said the children,  
although they didn't use words  
to speak to me.

But all I could think of  
was how hard it would be -  
things like medicine  
and winter  
and age.

"Come with us,"  
said the children.  
"We'll get you  
everything you need."

But I was afraid,  
And I didn't understand  
what they wanted.

It took me until now,  
when it's way too late -  
and I've made too many other  
choices.

## III

So I say to you, newsman:  
(and maybe to myself):  
"Don't be afraid of the children.  
The children will never hurt you.  
*They love you.*  
*They love you.*"

They invited me to  
be their teacher;  
They want the school to  
live again;  
They make art in Caldwell Park  
each day,  
And art is their prayer,  
their magic,  
their dream, the tears they can  
no longer cry.

One day when I  
come up again, I'll go.  
I'll remember the truth of it,  
and when the children  
reach out for me,  
I'll be ready.

*Won't you come out and play?*

Until then, sometimes  
I'll close my eyes and pretend:  
That on the third night,  
I opened the door  
and walked into the dark  
and away forever,  
leaving a note that reads:  
"Look for me with  
The Children of Caldwell Park."

*continued*

## IV

I've stopped believing in most promises,  
but I believe in that afternoon  
when I was *in*.  
I felt the patterns  
rising around me,  
and I *knew* the game  
they were playing,  
the only one they knew.  
For each did the one thing that  
each knew best,  
Pure focus, yes - no deviation,  
and that's always what works  
when you're working  
the patterns.  
The children were playing the  
game to win -  
they just wanted me to direct.  
Maestro of the  
Playground Circle?  
It would be dangerous to laugh  
now, newsman:  
For you do *not* know.  
That I did not go is *my* failing.

How many chances do you get?  
*As many as you need*,  
says the teacher,  
knowing that  
teaching is the most  
subversive profession  
of all.

And so...one of these fine days,  
I'll come up through  
the patterns again,  
and my heart will know  
that it's time to go  
freely through the night door  
to take my place in the dance,  
leaving a note that reads:  
"Look for me with  
The Children of Caldwell Park."

*It's all just  
Smoke and mirrors.  
The only thing that makes it  
Bearable is love.*

## V

In the basin that is  
Caldwell Park,  
nothing moves in the heat.  
I dream the midsummer  
park at dawn  
to warm my fingers  
enough to write.

In the north country,  
I sit at a plastic table  
on a café chair with a  
round plastic seat.  
A narrow mirror strip  
runs around the room  
above my line of sight.  
Beneath my feet is a vinyl  
floor painted to look  
like a brick mosaic.  
Faux wood molding strips  
straight-angle up  
To "silk" plants dangling in  
chained baskets.

This is the new world.  
Form without substance.  
Drinking hazelnut coffee  
flavored with chemicals,  
I eat eggs that taste real,  
with limp, wheat bran toast.  
Holst's *Planets* is the unlikely  
soundtrack for this effort.  
We are now on *Mars*. *Too  
strange.* {{{moue}}}

If spring ever comes to  
the north country,  
I will sit outside with my coffee,  
feed my toast to squirrels  
and pigeons,  
and hum my version of Caldwell  
Park. (*is melting...*)  
So that when I travel the patterns  
again, I won't be afraid of  
The Children of Caldwell Park.  
Every time the door opens,  
my legs are chilled;  
my fingers pause  
to remember when it was  
different, before I  
knew what it would mean  
to leave, and leave, and leave  
so many times.

## VI

Too many choices away  
to ever get back in this lifetime,  
I long for  
The Children of Caldwell Park,  
for in them lives  
the child I left too soon,  
the one choice I most regret.

I write in the north country now,  
and dream of my tall  
beautiful son  
with the red hair and blue eyes.  
I stand facing west  
to pray for him —  
does he think of me?  
does he know that I'm sorry?  
does he still love  
Holst's  
*Planets*?  
does he still have any  
need for me?

When I come up again,  
I'll stay with my son  
as long as he needs me.  
But now I fear that I've made  
too many choices,  
jumped too many levels,  
to ever get back in this lifetime.

When I come up again,  
I'll take my son by the hand —  
and I'll lead him to  
The Children of Caldwell Park.  
*The music changes to Gershwin,  
although I am not in Paris,  
and time is running out, so listen.*

My son, there are many  
ways to teach.  
The stories we remember  
*longest*  
are the ones we're told *first*.  
If you paint the pictures,  
I'll tell the stories.  
I'll show you how to  
change the world.