

THE DOCTOR'S TALE

Once there lived in times of slavery
A master who decided he would free
His slaves and settle them on fertile land
In a free state. He carefully had planned
This act, had taught his slaves to read and write,
To calculate, keep books, and know by sight
The native plants and animals where they
Would find themselves. Then they made their way
By cart and then by boat and then on foot
To their promised land. Their master put
Each family on a quarter section, and
Gave them tools and seed to plant by hand.
Then he left them with their legal deeds
To land and freedom, thinking that their needs
Had been well taken care of. Little he
Knew what happened once a slave was free.

One family had a daughter, Emma Lou,
So virtuous and beautiful that you
Would fall in love with her within a minute --
Sweet tempered, with a smile that had in it
The sun itself, shining in her heart,
So happy she seemed, so uninformed by art.

She moved with an unfathomable grace
And seemed to fill the boundaries of each space
With beauty and with goodness, coming from
A well whose deep delight was never done.

She helped her mother Callie in the house
And in the gardens they kept round about,
And took care of the younger children, who
Were happy to be watched by Emma Lou.

Her father, Nat, feared her beauty would
Attract men who intended little good.
And so it happened. One day, riding by
Their farm, an evil judge just chanced to spy
Emma Lou bent over pulling weeds,
Imagining her tending to his needs.

His lust was lathered by a glimpse of breast,
And from that moment he had little rest,
But fantasized fulfillment of desire
Again, again, again, an unquenched fire
That moved him to attain his wretched goal,
For he had little pity in his soul.

He hired a farmer from a neighboring state,
Where slavery was legal, to falsely state
That Emma Lou's whole family once was his,
Escaped two years before. The judge then quizzed
Him briefly on the relevant detail,
And soon the luckless family was in jail,
To appear, of course, before the corrupt judge,
Who ruled that they were slaves, and would not
budge
Before clear evidence that they were free,
And witnesses who testified rightly
That they knew well these former slaves, and
knew
They had been freed, swearing this was true.

One set out desperate on a futile ride
To find the master, who, alas, had died.
And since no black could testify in court,
According to the law, all was for naught.
The witnesses who knew the story best
Were silenced, and the judge refused the rest,
Ruling inadmissible their word
For reasons that were patently absurd.

In the end, the only evidence
Allowed was what would damage the defense,
And so the family soon was re-enslaved
And to the judge's hireling conveyed.

Emma Lou was to the judge then sold
As an indentured servant, and was told
Her family had been auctioned off, each one
Separately, and so the deed was done.

How bitter then her soul, with fire purged!
How pure the rage that through her heart then
 surged!
But she would bide her time. She had no lust
Except to do what now she knew she must.

At first she was but raped -- no tenderness
Or pretense of a kiss or a caress.
But slowly, as she played the lover's part,
Her acted passion touched the judge's heart.
Bit by bit he loosened up the reins
Till she at last could slip her supple chains.

One night he fell asleep right after love,
Heedlessly, an error that would prove
His last, for quietly she moved away
From him to where a letter opener lay,
Eased over to it, and, lifting it on high,
Stabbed the sleeping villain in the eye
And then the throat and then the heart. A cry
Of pain and then of horror shook the room,
And then a bloody silence. In the gloom,
Emma Lou sat weeping on the bed,
Not for him or her, but for, instead,
Her family, and the millions still enslaved,
Whose honor in that moment she had saved.

She didn't care when she was seized and bound,
Nor held in jail as the country round
Came pouring into the square. Soon a fire
Was lit, and as the lurid flames shot higher,
They battered down the door and dragged her
 out.
The crowd received her with a savage shout
Of hatred that went up into the sky.

Someone with a knife took out her eye
While others beat her bloody and then bound
Her to a stake sunk deep into the ground.
They scattered wood and straw around her feet,
Then lit the fire with torches. Along the street
A cry of victory went up; the flames
Followed as she called her family's names
One by one like bullets to destroy
Their evil world, and all she felt was joy!
Yes, joy! For death was life to her, and pain
Was what it cost to be free once again.