



PROJECT MUSE®

Autobiography in Yellow Flowers

Joanna Saylor

Appalachian Heritage, Volume 8, Number 3, Summer 1980, pp. 13-15 (Article)

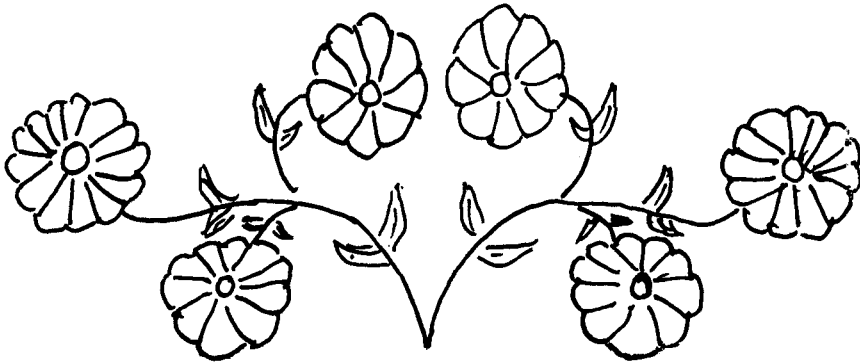
Published by The University of North Carolina Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/aph.1980.0030>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/441570/summary>



AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN YELLOW FLOWERS

by Joanna Saylor

The mountains of Kentucky. . .
In a yard
a child stands among the marigolds
Listening
Summer winds among the trees
carry the voice of a lonesome singer
A song of guilt and regret,
of loneliness and sorrow.
The child shivers,
shrinks down among the pungent flowers
And forever after
Guilt and regret,
loneliness and sorrow,
beauty and summer winds
are intermingled
with the odor of marigolds.

Harlan County. . .
A summer afternoon
On the porch of a house in a mining-camp
the child sits,
on her lap a baby brother, warm and small.
Listening
A neighbor talks with her mother
“Reckon I’m losin’ my mind
over Mommy. . . . Murph says
now we’re married we ought to forget and . . .

But I caint forget that I slipped out to Murph
and left her alone at night
Sick and alone
and came back and found her dead.”
Young, slim, tormented,
she paces about the porch,
then
down the steps
and buries her face among the marigolds.

Springtime. . .
Yellow spring flowers grow in moist green grass.
A girl and her sisters pick flowers to take to church.
Listening
Her father says to her mother
“Look at the girls! They’re growin’ up!
I wonder if they understood

what I read to them this mornin’?
“What does it profit a man
if he gain the whole world
and lose his own soul?”
We cut the green leaves from golden dandelions
and chop them with onions in bacon grease
A big raucous family celebrating springtime.

Another summer day. . .
My mother in an orange cotton dress
waters her flowers
with water from a well beneath a cedar tree.
I, a tall teenager among the sunflowers,
Listening
A blue-eyed neighbor boy says to my mother
“Is it all right with you, then,
if I run her down and kiss her?”
My mother smiles. “She’ll outrun ye, Johnny.”
I elude him, climb a tree, and hide among the leaves.

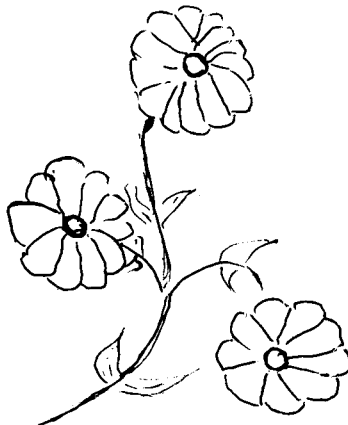
Hollywood, California. . .
Another time, another world
I look into the dark sophisticated eyes of a man.
“No?” he says. “No furs, no jewels?
How do I court you then?”
“Let me share your emotions, thoughts, experiences,

and send me yellow roses.”

“Ah, this fleeting world!” chanted the Anglo-Saxon poet
in the olden time.

On the graves of my parents
No blossoms, please.
If the measure of a human life
is love which it has given,
then their lives were rich, full-blown.
On their graves
put yellow flowers.

Sometimes
on quiet summer days
Listening
I hear the lonely voice of Time
calling through this fleeting world
I water the miniature marigolds on my window-sill
and wonder
On my grave which will it be
Yellow blossoms
or yellow flowers?



Joanna Saylor lives now and teaches in the Chicago area.