

Carol Hamilton

Ignorance Under the Law

"During our minority we were slaves
to the elemental spirits of the universe."

Galatians 4:3 (*The New English Bible*)

My 50-strong classes of first grade
art students were filled
with pure innocence, puppies
caught out with frosting
about their muzzles, a crumbled cake
smashed at their feet. My assembly line
production of Easter baskets
for children in the hospital
worked well along the rows,
entrusted with egg cartons, paper grass,
pipe cleaner handles, cellophane wrap.
The breakdown came at the jellybean
and chocolate egg station. Somehow
the finished product ended up
with very little candy, and I looked out
at a row of open-wide, guiltless eyes.
In Mexico, I was blessed to be swept
along in a river of indigenous folk.
I stood lost in something vast and cosmic,
completely filling, and not at all understood.

I like this translation, as if God himself
recognizes how wrapped tight we are
with the beginnings and the endings
of ourselves and everything. I had
to stand in the corner in first grade
for hiding my "boyfriend's" hat
in the *newspapers for victory* box
of WWII's frenetic war effort.
Bobby approved of my message,
so I only vaguely felt
my beloved teacher's disapproval.

I am swept up with the crumbs
of all my mistakes, and all, all,

the simple and the complex,
lie as opened gifts under my tree,
without shiny ribbon or foil paper,
each a promise like a newborn,
emerged at last from the dark safety
of all that was once unknown.

Carol Hamilton's work has been published widely.
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