

An Hour to Dance
from *Virginia Hamilton Adair's* Ants on the Melon (1996)

Key Ring

When my grandfather was very old
to one small room confined
he gave me his big bunch of keys to hold.

I asked, "Do they unlock every door there is?
And what would I find inside?"

He answered, "Mysteries and more mysteries.
You can't tell till you've tried."

Then as I swung the heavy ring around
the keys made a chuckling sound.

Summary by the Pawns

First the black square, then a white,
Moved by something out of sight,

We are started with a bound,
Knights and castles all around,
Kings and queens and bishops holy!

After that we go more slowly,
While around us with free gaits
Move the taller potentates.

Still we pawns look straight ahead.

To encourage us it's said
That pawns who reach the utmost square
Are as good as monarchs there.

Meanwhile pawns, if need be, can
By slanted ways remove a man;

But frequently, before we know
What has got us, off we go!

The April Lovers

Green is happening.
Through the sweet expectant chill
Of a northern spring
We have gone without will,

Without, fear, without reason,
Trusting to the power
Of a fickle season,
Of a passionate hour,

To mature, to sustain
Till the plan uncovers
In the sun and rain
Early lovers

Never question much
What is quietly beating
Through the music and the touch
And the mouths meeting.

An Hour to Dance

For a while we whirled
over the meadow of music
our sadness put away in purses
stuffed into old shoes or shawls

the children we never were
from cellars and closets
attics and faded snapshots
came out to leap for love
on the edge of an ocean of tears
like a royal flotilla
Alice's menagerie swam by
no tale is endless
the rabbit opened his watch
muttering late, late
time to grow
old

Slow Scythe

Slow scythe curving over the flowers
In yesterday's field where you mow,
My cool feet flicked
The dew from the daisies, hours,
Hours ago! Ages and ages ago
They flicked the dew
From the yellow and snow-colored flowers you leisurely mow.

White Darkness

Whether this is time or snow, passing
Through the night, earthward,
Who can tell—
Each particle only an illusion; yet massing,
Mounting over all,
Hushing the footfall,
Silencing the bell.

“I am confused,
Said the traveler, “hearing no sound
Though my feet touch the ground
As they are used.”

Soft as a shadow on fur
The filling places
Where his footsteps were;
Lost without shape or grime
His path through the level spaces.
How can we certainly know
If this is time
Falling, or snow?

Take My Hand, Anna K.

My mother wept in church, Episcopalian;
Over her far-off town the sun shone bright.
Her New York City child, I felt an alien.
Coming to a crossing the train cries in the night.

My only home is in the poems I write
Who now am exiled by my failing sight.
Words vanish like a flock of birds in flight.
Coming to a crossing the train cries in the night.

Here end my tracks of passion, reason, rhyme
Before the terminal rush and roar of light,
All go together under the wheels of Time.
Coming to a crossing the train cries in the night.