

The Air Was Heavy and the Days Were Long
By Catherine Strayhall

A child in summer understands the meaning of life:

Barefoot, playing hide and seek til the sun goes down,
Crickets sounding in the darkness,
Dust caking her feet; she smiles and
Eats marmalade on toast in the mornings,
Feeling the freedom in an empty day.

Gazing at the crumpled clouds from the top of a hill,
Her hands restlessly pick at the hem of her shirt where the thread's coming undone.
In the shade of trees she reads well-worn books
July days passing with the turning pages.

Kansas girl feels the air crackle as
Lightning splinters the black ceramic sky.
Miles away from home, as the day becomes
Night, she doesn't flinch at the thunder.
Over tangled roots she races, through
Pouring rain and seas of mud.

Quiet comes to her mind;
Revisiting the sunset in her memories,
Singing to herself as the shadows stretch out across the ground,
Then turning toward the sky, staring
Upwards at pinprick stars and planets.

Venus is on her mind, unreachable
When her eyes slip closed—
Except in her dreams, she can grab the flickering, fiery stardust,
Yesteryear's light sparking as she
Zips a handful in her jacket pocket.