

Treasure on Minta Lane

by Tonya McQuade

We were shoveling once again,
grumbling about the tiresome work
we were being forced to do
on a sunny afternoon.

Hot, sweaty, achy, thirsty,
eyes blurred from the dusty air,
we shoveled our loads
into the waiting wheel barrow,
our father swinging his pickaxe
to break up the hardened clumps
as we whined and complained –
at least in our heads.

Little by little, load by load,
we leveled the earth
where the new shed was to be built –
tethered to our shovels,
wrestling with the weight
of the dry clay soil.

With each pitch of dirt,
my mother and I scanned the ground,
guarding ourselves against the giant spiders
we called “Minta Monsters”
and seeking to avoid slicing earthworms
with our sharp-edged spades.

Suddenly, the sound of shattering glass
broke the silence of our arduous labor –
and our shoveling stopped
as we waited to see what broken relic
my father pulled from the overturned earth.

Attentive and curious,
we watched as he pulled an old popcorn bag –
red and white striped, with a smiling clown face –

from the now-broken canning jar,
its lid no longer serving any purpose
among the jagged shards.

Unrolling the bag,
we watched excitedly as my father
pulled out a roll of dollar bills –
a secret horde, stashed and hidden
in our own backyard.

Ranging in age from 1928 to 1942,
the bills totaled \$575 in all –
and my brothers and I got a lesson
in the wartime worries and fears
that had led some former occupant
to bury his worldly savings
rather than trusting it to a bank.

Brittle, faded, some torn at the edges,
one with “Hawaii” stamped across its face –
a reminder of measures taken during WWII
in the event of a possible Japanese invasion –
the long-forgotten bills told stories
at which we could only guess ...

The story I remember best
is how much more motivated we all were –
hoisting our pickaxes and shovels –
to dig at the dirt in our backyard
after discovering that buried treasure,
our very own “pirate” booty
pilfered from a popcorn bag.

After all, aren't we all inspired by work
that pays us a recognized dividend –
whether money, accolades, purpose,
or plain old, eager anticipation?