

ALSO BY KATHLEEN NORRIS

Nonfiction

Dakota: A Spiritual Geography, 1993

Poetry Chapbooks

The Astronomy of Love, 1994

All Souls, 1993

How I Came to Drink My Grandmother's Piano, 1989

The Year of Common Things, 1988

From South Dakota, 1978

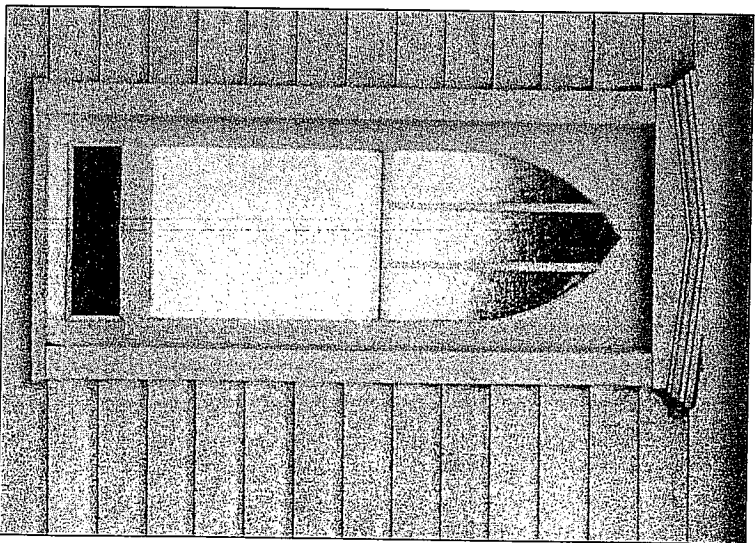
Poetry

The Middle of the World, 1981

Falling Off, 1971

LITTLE GIRLS IN CHURCH

Kathleen Norris



University of Pittsburgh Press

A PRAYER TO EVE

Mother of fictions
and of irony,
help us to laugh.

Mother of science
and the critical method,
keep us humble.

Muse of listeners,
hope of interpreters,
inspire us to act.

Bless our metaphors,
that we might eat them.

Help us to know, Eve,
the one thing we must do.

Come with us, muse of exile,
mother of the road.

HESTER PRYNN RECALLS A SUNDAY IN JUNE

Our affair had begun,
a sweet time.

I looked forward so to seeing him,
dark figure in sunlight.

When the moment struck—his sermon
drew fire—I saw quite clearly
that he had ritual,
law, the Word,
and I had nothing but myself.

All that
is in the past.

Now respectable women
seek my hand; I must find each broken thread
and make it sing.

They stay and talk now
as I sew. It's as if they expect me
to tell them something,
a secret I brought up
out of chaos.

But I've been too long outside
the comfort they found
in other kingdoms. Pray for me,
I tell them,
if you are my friends.

LITTLE GIRLS IN CHURCH

II

I worry for the girls,
I once had braids,
and wore lace that made me suffer.
I had not yet done the things
that would need forgiving.

Church was for singing, and so I sang.
I received a Bible, stars
for all the verses;
I turned and ran.

The music brought me back
from time to time,
singing hymns
in the great breathing body
of a congregation.
And once in Paris, as
I stepped into Notre Dame
to get out of the rain,
the organist began to play:
I stood rooted to the spot,
looked up, and believed.

It didn't last.
Dear girls, my friends,
may you find great love
within you, startlike
and wild, as wide as grass,
solemn as the moon.
I will pray for you, if I can.

I

I've made friends
with a five-year-old
Presbyterian. She tugs at her lace collar,
I sympathize. We're both bored.
I give her a pencil;
she draws the moon,
grass, stars, and
I name them for her,
printing in large letters.
The church bulletin
begins to fill.
Carefully, she prints her name
on it, KATHY, and hands it back.

Just last week,
in New York City, the Orthodox liturgy
was typically intimate,
casual. An old woman greeted the icons
one by one
and fell asleep
during the Great Litany.
People went in and out,
to smoke cigarettes and chat on the steps.
A girl with long brown braids
was led to the icons
by her mother. They kissed each one,
and the girl made a confession
to the youngest priest. I longed to hear it,
to know her name.

THE MONASTERY ORCHARD IN EARLY SPRING

God's cows are in the fields,
safely grazing. I can see them
through bare branches,
through the steady rain.
Fir trees seem ashamed
and tired, bending under winter coats.

I, too, want to be light enough
for this day: throw off impediments,
push like a tulip
through a muddy smear of snow,

I want to take the rain to heart
and feel it move
like possibility, the idea
of change, through things
seen and unseen,
forces, principalities, powers.

Newton named the force that pulls the apple
and the moon with it,
toward the center of the earth.
Augustine found a desire as strong: to steal,
to possess, then throw away.
Encounter with fruit is dangerous:
the pear's womanly shape forever mocked him.

A man and a woman are talking.
Rain moves down and
branches lift up
to learn again
how to hold their fill of green
and blossom, and bear each fruit to glory,
letting it fall.