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REQUIEM FOR JOHNSTOWN

*In the beginning,
before villages and towns,
my waters were pure
as the melted
mountain snow.*

*Protected by slopes
verdant
with spruce and hemlock,
surrounded by fields
dotted
with wild berries
and dew-kissed violets,
I blissfully
babbled
and danced.*

*Silvery pickerel,
bass and trout
sparkled
in the sunlight
and, when storms
raged,
found shelter
within and around
my sunken
logs and rocks.*

JOE DIXON

My brothers have been tromping
around the house for days
pretending to be Union soldiers.

I don't blame them
for being excited—
Decoration Day
isn't until next Thursday,
but already the town's dressed
in red, white and blue bunting.

Everyone's in a holiday mood—
nodding, smiling,
happy to drop three cents
to read the news of the day.
Good for business!

But with every nod,
smile and thank-you
my heart thumps
like a field drum—

Pa still doesn't know
I bought this newsstand.
He thinks I'm working
at the company store.

You've got to tell him,
Maggie says,

and I want to.
I'm just waiting
for the perfect moment—
a calm, quiet moment.

In our house
that won't happen
in a crow's age.



It's not just the newsstand
making my heart thump.

There's something else.

Something burning
a hole in my pocket.

*You made it weeks ago,
my friend Ed says.
Just give it to her.*

But I can't. Not yet.
That's got to be
a perfect moment too.

No little brothers pestering.
No well-meaning friends.

Just me, Maggie
and a ring made
of two willow twigs
twisted together—

a promise
of my undying love.



When Maggie's pa died,
my ma cared for her
while her ma cleaned houses.

We played together
morning till night.

Maggie's shimmery blue eyes
look like they're made
of sky-water—
sparkling and wide open,
endless as the sky
above Lake Conemaugh
and even more beautiful.

Someday
I want to give Maggie
a deep-red ruby
set in a circle of gold
like the glittering ring
I saw at Larkin's.

Someone like Maggie
deserves the best.

My newsstand is only
the first step.
I got my heart set

on being a millionaire businessman
like my hero, Andrew Carnegie.

Then I'll be able to afford
a proper engagement ring!

