

*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!

