

The story

by [Carol Gilbertson](#) in the [June 25, 2014](#) issue

We stood on a green hill  
on a brisk day,  
two small sisters in coats, singing  
two-part harmony into a tiny grave.  
Our preacher dad had asked us  
to sing the one about children  
and their heavenly father  
at the burial of a baby, stillborn  
to a couple named Story.

But this was a story  
I couldn't crack. How  
could a baby be born  
with no breath or life,  
how could a baby be dead,  
but still, born?

I looked at the mother's eyes  
as the two of us sparrowed on  
about how life and death  
would never sever—I knew  
it meant separate—children  
from God's strong arms.

It was nice to get paid for singing,  
but I didn't want to ever be dead  
and flourishing in some faraway  
holy courts. Each night I prayed  
uneasily that If I died before I woke  
the Lord would take my soul—  
God suddenly materializing  
in the dark room, like a frightful thief

in the night, to spirit some unseen  
part of me up and away.

I liked my real home on the prairie.  
And I wanted my story: all babies born  
unstill into their fathers' arms,  
everyone mounting green hills  
unwounded by grave dirt,  
all of us singing an old, old story  
and breathing, breathing,  
grace all around us like fresh air.