



7-15-1995

The Last Day

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Recommended Citation

Pelletier, Gus (1995) "The Last Day," *Westview*: Vol. 14 : Iss. 4 , Article 18.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol14/iss4/18>

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The Last Day

by Gus Pelletier

It began and ended with basic numbers:
to Freihofer's horse-drawn wagon
by 8:00 in the morning, home at 4:00,
all for one single silver dollar.
From autumn to spring, in heat, cold,
slush and mud, each and every Saturday.

The carry-all, once full of pies or
cakes, could crush a young boy's arm.
There was dumb old Dolly, too,
the dull-eyed mare who'd often jerk
across the cobblestone streets
without so much as a whispered command.

Two boys worked the box-like wagon,
leaping off left, jumping off right,
in and out of whatever traffic, hazards
of sleet, rain and snow, up and down
a conspiracy of stairs. Yet, at its
best, it was greater than any sport.

It ended forever one Holy Saturday
when a virus hit and one of the boys
had to double up, grumbling until
he imagined the joys of twice the pay.
At day's end, such fancies collapsed,
his stipend then no more than it was.
In years to follow, sufficient income
came from delivering papers or stocking
shelves, but for now, the miserly dollar
would have to do. On that Sunday morning
after Mass, one boy gave his mother his
only gift: one single potted Easter lily.