



12-15-1992

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Recommended Citation

Unknown, Author (1992) "Woman on a Bench," *Westview*: Vol. 12 : Iss. 2 , Article 17.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol12/iss2/17>

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Woman on a Bench

by (Author unknown)

I saw her sitting on a bench today
in front of Puckett's Food Store.
Her hair was wound in a scarf,
her clothes colorful, mismatched,
her eyes watery and pensive
I remembered the first time I saw her
back in the forties
riding by our tarpaper shack with her family
in the grey-weathered, creaky wagon
pulled by plodding horses.
We stared and they stared back
and this took place weekly when they went
grocery-buying over in Erick.

One day they stopped
and we learned who they were
and where they lived and not much else
In later years we heard she ran visitors
(and her husband) off with a double-barrel shotgun
and plenty of hollers. Didn't like people much.
But I decided she needed a friend
and I went fearfully
to find her not much more than skin and bones,
covered with sores
and writhing in pain on her rumped bed.
She asked that someone pray
and I did (fervently)
and the writhing stopped and a friendship—of sorts—
was formed. I did her laundry and cooked pancakes,
took her to church until she decided
that was enough of that church business
and gradually we lost touch
except to nod and speak on the streets

When I saw her today for the first time
in a long while
I began remembering her past.
Oh, she had a past alright—
as colorful as anybody's past
But as I looked into that somewhat
vacant stare and smiled and inquired of her health
I realized it was a future—and even a present—
that she was lacking.

(Editor's note: We could find no record of the author's name; he / she was identified only as "MASN" on the submitted manuscript)