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## The Lesson

James Beaty

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# The Lesson

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*by James Beaty*

A sweaty schoolroom —  
1967 in Western Oklahoma.  
One lonesome sparrow  
Drifted by the open window.  
I drifted through Keats and Browning.  
Then she said,  
“Today we’ll listen to a modern American poet,  
Woody Guthrie.”

One day the girls spoke of soulful things.  
“How do you know you have a soul?”  
She asked the blonde one.  
Rampant outrage  
At our teacher’s godless question.

I sat in the back row grinning  
And whispered to my friend  
What no one else knew:  
“She’s spent the last five years  
A missionary in Africa.”

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