

Please Provide a Brief Biographical Sketch

I grew up in a tough little town. One taxi. One church. Twelve taverns. Coal miners and farmers. They hated each other and fought constantly even after a terrible day on the earth or under it. First it was just lumps of coal and name-calling vs. rutabagas and name-calling. But the rutabagas invoked not alarm but laughter. Coal has that hard c sound while rutabagas . . . Well, say it out loud. You'll see what I mean. So the next time, farmers brought bricks. "Whoa," said the miners. "The rules are these: one fights with the spawn of his chosen profession. You are not bricklayers, but farmers." Frustrated, the farmers returned the bricks, getting most of their money back. They returned with clods of earth. Clod also has that hard c sound. The farmers and miners clutched their consonants as they looked at themselves and their enemies. It was hard to tell who was the darker, given the rich black earth of Southern Illinois. But there was still the hatred. For the miners, it burned like that massive seam of coal still smoldering in the Cumberland, and for the farmers it scalded like the lye they used to get the hair off a slaughtered hog. All they really needed was for the beautiful daughter of a miner to fall in love with the handsome son of a farmer. But life in my tough little town wasn't a Technicolor movie that would end with a song. On Saturday night, the music from the twelve taverns was mournful and bitter. The only taxi was busy, though, carrying men too drunk to walk from one drinkery to another and taking coal and potatoes as payment.

Fright Night

Nearly every Friday while her parents argue
I take my granddaughter to Fright Night.

This week it's *Empire of the Ants* with Joan Collins
as a crooked realtor selling swamp land in Florida.

Everything she says is a lie and Molly nods,
“She’s gonna get it.” And she does, crushed

by giant mandibles as the audience jeers.
Walking home, it’s windy and cold.

A block away a transformer sizzles, and it
gets very dark. Molly’s too old to say,

“Those big ants aren’t coming here, are they?”
But when we get closer to home she slows down.

Who knows what’s waiting there? She doesn’t want
them destroyed exactly like the Black Scorpion

or the Killer Shrews, but she knows radioactivity
isn’t the culprit. It’s them. They’re big and strong

and even when they seize her to apologize, they
hold her too tight as she struggles helplessly

like the pretty girls on the movie posters,
the girls who always, somehow, manage to survive.

Snowman

He's perfect, especially those black eyes
that look into hers constantly.

She makes a hole in his chest, shoves in
a valentine that says BE MINE.

His arms wide out in a constant welcome.
The things she whispers that make him melt.

That's the problem with love like hers.
How to tell him without killing him.