

Tony Triglio

He Needed a Learner's Permit

Ruth Hyde Paine

I hardly saw him in English
He didn't want me speaking
anything but Russian around her
We used English when I
taught him to drive

I didn't have the vocabulary
for that and wasn't about to try
"turn right" in Russian

At one point he wanted control
of the car I let him against
my better judgment

We practiced in a shopping center lot
Sundays because everything was closed

My father was an insurance man
we didn't go on the road without
documents I was mad
at myself for letting Lee do that

I visited them in New Orleans
the family fidgeting
in those shrunken rooms
as if making a household
was a frivolous thing

What she was facing just a month
from the birth of their second child
Lee going off to find work somewhere
so he said
& Marina with no prenatal care

Lee going off to find work somewhere
so he said
& Marina with no prenatal care

I said she should return to Texas
& I knew enough Russian to make
connections at Parkland Hospital
where the baby was born
where Lee and the President died
I said this really was for them
for the family
They'd get back on their feet
by Christmas we all figured

I took my kids to the dentist that morning

Marina watched the President on TV

She was another young mother with little kids
someone to hang diapers with
fold them too
Lee came the night before
played with June & Chris in the front yard
He helped me bring in the groceries
I said our President was coming
to town & I wished I could get into Dallas
tomorrow for the motorcade
He had nothing to say about it
Just a bland "yes" in Russian
a brown bag of produce squished in his arms

I heard on TV the shots might've come
from the Book Depository
Marina was hanging laundry & I didn't notice
this came out in her testimony later
she left for the garage to see if the gun was there
She immediately thought of the gun
& was it rolled up in the blanket

I worried about her a lot after the assassination
She left that Saturday morning & we both
expected she'd be coming back

I didn't see her again until
the next year when she testified in Washington
she invited me for afternoon tea

People can't believe an American
in his twenties couldn't drive

I've heard that crock about him taking
a test-run at one of those Dallas Mercury dealers
people saying he drove down
Stemmons Freeway like some crazy hog
I saw how he managed in the parking lot
and, no, he couldn't drive a car

Lee was withdrawn in almost any language
He bought *The Worker & The Militant*
to figure out what they wanted you to do
"You just read between the lines" he said