

The story

by [Carol Gilbertson](#) in the [June 25, 2014](#) issue

We stood on a green hill
on a brisk day,
two small sisters in coats, singing
two-part harmony into a tiny grave.
Our preacher dad had asked us
to sing the one about children
and their heavenly father
at the burial of a baby, stillborn
to a couple named Story.

But this was a story
I couldn't crack. How
could a baby be born
with no breath or life,
how could a baby be dead,
but still, born?

I looked at the mother's eyes
as the two of us sparrows on
about how life and death
would never sever—I knew
it meant separate—children
from God's strong arms.

It was nice to get paid for singing,
but I didn't want to ever be dead
and flourishing in some faraway
holy courts. Each night I prayed
uneasily that if I died before I woke
the Lord would take my soul—
God suddenly materializing
in the dark room, like a frightful thief

in the night, to spirit some unseen
part of me up and away.

I liked my real home on the prairie.
And I wanted my story: all babies born
unstill into their fathers' arms,
everyone mounting green hills
unwounded by grave dirt,
all of us singing an old, old story
and breathing, breathing,
grace all around us like fresh air.