

Wilderness House Literary Review 4/2

Gale Acuff

Plot

After we bury my dog my father
says, Well, I guess that's about it, and walks
away, toward the house. He turns around
and says, Come along, boy--let's go forward.
I can't help but stand and stare at the mound

of dirt on Caesar's grave, if it's a grave
--do animals rate graves? Father returns
and says, Oh, good eye, boy, let's level it
off. He steps
onto the hill of dirt and
walks and walks in place, until earth has
sunk
in on Caesar. I know Archimedes'

Principle. I'm ten years old and do good
in school. Do well, I mean. There's no bathtub
out here but I can see in my brain me
in a tub of water (Saturday night
is bath night and today's only
Tuesday)
and I--what's
the word--dis-place the
volume
of water
. . . e-quiv-a-lent to my
own

weight. Or something like
that. That's pretty close.
It's near enough. Anyway, my dog is
dead and I'm sad and there's no school again
'til tomorrow morning. I'm worth my weight
in water. That Archimedes,
I wonder if he had a dog. Father

Wilderness House Literary Review 4/2

steps off the grave. Or is it a plot? I
almost ask him but he has no patience
for small talk, unless it's his, or unless
he begins it, and then he cuts you short
if you get too en-thus-i-as-tic or
next to him. I never understand that.
My parents don't talk much, just look a lot.

Alright, boy, he says. Why did you do that,
I ask. Do what, he says. Walk all over
Caesar, I mean, and pack him down that way.
Hell's bells, boy, he says. He won't
suffocate
--he's already dead. You can't get any
deader than dead. I start to cry. Now, now,
he says. He sounds a little angry: Big
boys don't cry. But I'm sad, I wail. It's more

like a howl and my eyes are closed and I
see Caesar alive in
my brain and he's
like the full moon and I'm a lonely mutt.

Alright, says Father. Get it out of your
system and then come in and wash your hands.
He stalks away. His boot-steps seem louder
the farther he goes. I cough and spit and
blow my nose and wipe my eyes with the heels
of my hands. Goodbye, Caesar, I say. Real

good knowing you. I go inside and wash
up for supper and take my seat. Mother
says, I'm sorry about poor Caesar, son.
Yes, ma'am, I say. Thank you. I'm sorry, too,
says Father. Too quickly. What did you learn
in school today, Mother asks. Man and apes

Wilderness House Literary Review 4/2

is cousins, I say. Father drops his fork.