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## Ugly, smiling Agnes...

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## **Kathleen McGookey**

Ugly, smiling Agnes with eight pearl buttons on her blouse; sad and lonely Agnes in the boat, afraid to venture out. She has an unfortunate nose and her bulldog clearly loves to have his picture taken. Agnes and her brother holding bunnies. She tries to salute my grandfather but the sun gets in her eyes. She tries to look fetching from a distance, from across the sea. She loved him, so she tries. At first I thought it was a matter of simply buying something shiny and new, a shirt in a bright color. But the heart wants what it wants. Right now my heart is sick and I am sad in January's good weather, rain and green lawns. Agnes looks pretty in a field of cut wheat, white dress and hat, black boots; she succeeds because she doesn't try too hard, she just leans into the scratchy wheat, not smiling. The wide open space becomes her, finally a place where the heart can be let free. Somehow she hasn't pictured herself here, ever, or her silent image in my hands, or the moon and trees speaking in a summer wind at night. She could be here, in the wheat, and it would be all right to be alone, maybe better. A woman in a dark coat holds two mules; not Agnes, and no way of knowing who, exactly, she is. And here's Agnes with a group up to their necks in river, smiling. The focus so sharp that everything looks hard. Then my grandfather and Agnes on a bench in front of the river with their legs entwined. She bends her head, already deferring. She wanted him then, got him just once: this photo.