

CATE WHETZEL

*The Hanging of Frank C. Almy
for the Murder of Christie Warden*

Hanover, New Hampshire, 1891

Concord, New Hampshire, 1892

To each house came an invitation, silk-edged
and engraved, to the hanging in Concord in May.

Half of Hanover boarded the train. See the two
silhouettes dangling from a length of sable ribbon:
On the left, the man who did it, who tunneled
through the hay, who lived for months on stolen
food; whose face stared in her window nightly,
whose eye she caught as she awoke

but called it a bad dream. On the right:

a farmer's daughter, seventeen, lovely as a stand
of apple trees, who gave the hired hand a gold ring
in friendship, and asked what he was reading.

She dropped in a green cloud of grass and lay
at the bottom of the Vale of Tempe,

dead as Eurydice between Olympus and Thessaly.

He emptied a revolver into her and escaped

into his labyrinth of hay, where he had lain in wait
months after she refused him, and thought him gone
on the train. He watched her funeral from the family
barn, and at night laid bluebells on her grave,
George, thin as a candle, the sheriff noted on stake-out
in the corn. Mrs. Warden noticed the wilted flowers,
their boy found hollow rooms in the hay—then bottles,
salmon and oyster cans, stolen jars of peach preserve
licked clean, tossed behind the chicken run. In August
twenty men stabbed pitchforks through the hay.

In May he walked to the gallows,
a geranium sprig in his lapel, a red silk
pocket square, boots blacked. He asked
for the ring she'd given on his finger, and it was done.

Conspicuous, one reporter wrote, *to the crowd
here assembled. Romance Tragically*

Undone, recited another, to remember her
headline. *Our Handkerchiefs Limp
with Tears*. Upwards of 150 saw Frank C. Almy,

alias George Abbott, drop. His feet dragged

the floor, the rope too long for its job,
and fifteen minutes later some clapped.

The jail was overwhelmed with flowers.