

## The Book of Famous Iowans

I have kept three photographs of my mother, Leanne McQueen Vaughn, and anybody who sees one of them invariably asks me who the beautiful young woman in the picture is. No one recognizes a trace of her in me, since I grew, against her certain prediction, to resemble my father. I have his fair coloring; his stocky build; his wide, square face . . . Her expression in the photos is closely repeated and seems to me one of cool epiphany. It's conveyed by a watchful gleam in her eyes and in the way she holds her head, gracefully extending her neck so that she looks to be peering out over the heads of a crowd. I know well how it felt to be within its range (and it often felt powerfully confidential and secure). But thinking now of her actions, the choices she made, and how they permanently changed us all, I see her expression as suggesting that she has raised her eyes to look past the distractions of hope and innocence, in order to see what she needed to see.

...

One night early in the summer of this story, she returned home to start supper, having been away from the farm all afternoon, supposedly to town to shop and run some other errands. A flirtatious energy propelled her as she hurried about the kitchen, and all the while she chattered nonsensically, asking me what I'd been doing that day and then a minute later asking me again. She seemed a little out of breath. Her voice rose a few times, its timbre eager and careless.

Of course I didn't know that she'd just come from seeing her lover, Bobby Markum, but I did recognize that her mood was extreme, threatening to reach a pitch of pure emotion which might, I had learned, prove dangerous for us all.