4-15-2005

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.13023/disclosure.14.17

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Recommended Citation
DOI: https://doi.org/10.13023/disclosure.14.17
Available at: https://uknowledge.uky.edu/disclosure/vol14/iss1/17

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James Wren

When I Grow Up

12 November, 1952

at six years old
already lord, laid alongside a few of the finer arts
crying myself fast asleep
from an adjoining room
my mother held back tears enough for us all
as she blanketed two younger siblings tight
against the chills of a cold
hard
world
and the unrepentant words
of sinecure fathers
shadows of men
men
--pint-sized boys made for no exception,
according to the rule book--
had to be just that,
men
real men

against such ends and odds
I would venture forward, forewarned,
on occasion and into the darkness
and
share,
"When I grow up,"
whispered between sobs,
"I'm gonna be an angel,"

... and somehow amidst the blur of
tear-filled nights