

young vergil  
and the wizard

by Avram Davidson

part 2

This is the last unpublished short story by Avram Davidson, one of America's great literary fantasists. It tells of an event in the youth of the Mage Vergil, the main character in Avram's lifework, the Vergil Magus stories.

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Several generations back, someone's cousin had been married to someone's brother-in-law, and not even then a first cousin. But although, even then, Vergil's family had not been related to this other family, it had been thus connected. A very faint sense of this connection had shed upon a certain woman, Emma by name, the last of an earlier generation, a semblance of being some sort of twice-great-aunt. When he was small, he had thought *My Emma*, as he had also thought of another old woman as *My Grandma*; for all he knew, every small boy had an emma, too. Sometimes, not often, his own aunt, his own mother's sister, who had taken the place of his own mother in the household; sometimes, not often, she had said, his aunt, "Take this to your Emma" . . . a festal cake, it might have been, a stuffed tripe, a new-enough kerchief, itself replaced by one bought more newly yet (the elder Marius had been a great one for kerchiefs, buying them for his sister-in-law whenever he'd gotten a coin more than he'd reckoned as his bottom price for a beast sold at market. Once only had he bought her a small bauble of glass and brass, immediately she had asked, "What about marriage, then?" and Father had withdrawn to muck out the byre, not returning for several hours; and after that he had confined his purchases to kerchiefs), a honeycomb in a dish deep enough to contain the drippings, a small flask of oil. . . such-like things.

Emma lived within what was a half an hour's walk for a small boy; it was of course less than that now, yet he went there less often. Emma's daughters lived in another village now, Emma's son had married again, a termagant, and her husband was her match. And old Emma lived on, and lived with them, the gods save us from such a fate as that! Aunt had paid them a visit, had not felt she'd been made to feel welcomed; her next small gift, carried by the boy "Mariu," had been disparaged by the now-chief woman of old Emma's house, and been deprecated as precisely that: small. As "Mariu" had, in all child innocence, reported.

After that, the aunt sent things seldom, and Emma (her humble gifts: two eggs, say, still warm in some straw in a tiny basket she'd made herself) sent things no more at all. Nor, evidently, was allowed

