PRISM *international*

Contemporary writing from Canada and around the world

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Marilyn Cay

a shrivelling balloon

a man must show his wife how he feels
everyday
his face is a shrivelling balloon
he holds it before her
on a taut string, he brings
it into the living room
when she is watching t.v.
it bobs across the table from her
when they eat in silence
the wrinkles gather, his face
becomes smaller and smaller

she tries to keep a reasonable peace
between the two of them
so she can live
but sometimes she thinks of violent winds
the string snapping, the balloon
simply disappearing, sometimes
she remembers being young with this man
she says something cheerful then
and is sustained

Ospedale Santa Maria Nuova

Mirella Ducceschi

Translated from the Italian by Jessie Bright

[The author, a professional psychologist in her fifties, has been hit by a car while visiting a friend in Florence and now lies on her back in a hospital bed, unable to turn her head or shift her position because of the traction prescribed to relieve the pressure on broken vertebrae in her neck.]

After they wake us and go through the usual morning rituals—therapy, coffee, cleaning—at seven they come to take Granny for surgery. We follow with trepidation the movement of the stretcher and the attendants, we wish her luck. She has decided, fortunately, to hire a private nurse to stay with her at night.

The voice on the left is singing an aria from "La Traviata": *"Follie! Follie!"* Maria Pia attempts an approach to my bed with the wheelchair; finally I see her face, childlike, as I had imagined it. "How do I look?" I ask her. It's the same question I have asked the nurses, and all the curious people who have come up to my bedside, attracted by the mask which my face must be (now I realize it) but they never want to tell me what they see.

"Your eyes are very swollen and all different colours," she answers. "You have a cut on your right eyebrow, another one above your lip and bruises all over. But these are things that go away," she adds in an encouraging tone. "Tomorrow you'll already be better than today. An American came in last week; she had been hit while riding her bicycle. She was in worse shape than you are, and yet after a week they released her."

"If only!" But do I really want it to be so? More and more I am letting myself sink into this anonymous nirvana that allows me to be myself. It's good to savor anonymity, to be only a number in a bed. Anonymity coupled with infirmity, with the gravity of the situation, permits the maximum freedom of expression, even within the physical limitations imposed by pain. But luckily my physical limitations don't impinge upon thought, upon the psyche. Rather, they stimulate thought and the psyche. Like

my laborious nights struggling with dreams. Like my reflections on death.

In quiet moments, when the life of the room comes to a stop I am drawn to linger on my narrowly escaped death, trying to untangle its intricate skein. We live as if we would live forever. We don't think of death, there waiting for us just around the corner. If we lived instead in function of death (What religious order is it whose maxim is: *Brother, remember that you have to die* ? However my reflection isn't religious but rather existential), we might regulate our choices accordingly, and death should then help us to give value to our life, to taste it drop by drop like an exquisite liquid.

Maybe this is why my infirmity doesn't provoke anguish, because I am living this life as a gift, whatever form it take. It is difficult to understand, but fascinating to try.

They bring in a patient. So I detect by the rustling, by the voices of the nurses. They install her in a bed in front of me, presumably next to Maria Pia. They ask her a series of questions to which she gives answers that are prompt but confused. From my bed I follow the exchange with interest: "Signora, do you know what your name is?"

"Yes, my name is. . . " and she gives a foreign name. She has a distinctive, refined voice. She adds, "I was born in France."

"How old are you?"

"Past sixty."

"Past by a good bit!" laughs the nurse.

Uncertain, the aristocratic voice goes on: "Yes, quite a bit. I don't remember."

"Do you have children?"

"Yes, one nine year old, one six."

"Oh Signora, you're putting us on," answer the nurses. I feel as if I am at the theatre, or better, listening to the radio. I am so involved in the little scene that for the moment I don't even feel the traction.

The nurses start toward the door. The distinctive voice calls them back: "Excuse me, may I please have a cognac?"

"Oh, this is great, now we're supposed to be getting the patients drunk! Listen, Signora, this happens to be a hospital—anything but a bar," and they go away.

All day the *Signora* continues in her delirium: "I have to go home, they're waiting for me—the electrician, the carpenter." Every time one of us rings for a nurse she exclaims, "If you please, someone go to the door. They're ringing the doorbell!" I anxiously await the doctor to find out what's wrong with her. Beginning now she too is part of my life.

During visiting hours Tisse arrives from Rome. She comes in, much moved and eager to help me, bringing with her the *right things,* a night-

gown that opens in the back, a light bed jacket, an orange squeezer. Motherly, she arranges me on the bed, finally with the proper clothes for an invalid, helps me drink orange juice through a straw. Here I am back again in my earliest childhood, when she used to take care of me, right here in Florence. Are there cycles of life that go backwards instead of forwards? Evidently, yes. Essentially this hospital life has thus far been sending me back in time, moving me out of the dimension of the present.

The *Signora* begs Tisse, "Could you get me some coffee, please. They are waiting for me at home, I must go." Tisse investigates, goes out, comes back with a little paper cup full of coffee. The *Signora* can't stop thanking her.

Granny has been asleep after the operation. But when she finally wakes up her complaints are definite and continuous. Apparently she still has plenty of reserve energy to wail like that. All night she carries on at the top of her voice. "Oh, oh-h, oh-h—the pain! Oh it hurts. . . somebody have pity! There's no pity!" The minute I begin to doze off her wails wake me up. "Oh-h, the pain, the p-a-i-n!" The next morning I'm exhausted, worn out by my unsuccessful struggle not to be constantly awakened. Weeping, I turn to the nun who, called in by Tisse, materializes silently beside my bed.

"Sister, I beg you," I say dramatically, "I know I'm dying. So I'll die. It doesn't matter. But at least let me die in peace without these ravings that are breaking my eardrums." She places her hands on mine in a gesture full of pity. "I beg you," I plead, my eyes full of tears, "I implore you, let her stay with me (I indicate Tisse), give her permission. Without someone to help me what can I do? You see yourself how it is, what will I do?" How many operas did they make me take in as a child? Too many. We had orchestra seats and they forced me to go at least once a week during the season. Now they're showing up again, scenes from the last acts of the melodramas—the bedside, the tears, the last wishes of the dying heroine—along with my never satisfied desire to act. Now the accident has even given me this opportunity. And besides, maybe it's the proper tactic. The white wimple bends over me, a cool hand is placed on my forehead.

"Now don't worry. We'll take care of things. As for your cousin, I'll give her permission from eleven in the morning until seven in the evening. Are you happy now?" She has a sweet smile, the confident voice of someone who isn't easy to influence: I can't insist, the curtain falls. As the sister leaves, Granny continues with her loud lamentations, vaguely masculine in timbre. Even the voice ages.

Maria Pia comes to say goodbye to us. They're moving her. "You see, you're already better than yesterday," she reassures me.

"Come back to see me."

"Certainly, in my wheelchair, when I make my daily rounds." She moves the wheels and disappears from my field of vision.

This evening Signora Maria is to leave. I feel as if I am losing relationships important even in their brevity. I will be left alone with Granny, the aging singer, and the *Signora.*

My contact lenses are beginning to bother me: they have been in my eyes ever since the accident. It's true that they at least permit me to see clearly the little, very little, that constitutes my field of vision. Later, with my 20–400 vision, everything will be a total blur. I request an oculist. Tisse speaks for me to the sister. It won't be easy, it seems. Here is a new problem I will probably have to solve by myself. I'll think it over, I have plenty of time. For the present I'll keep my eyes closed as much as possible, protected by the blue cloth, as I have come to call it. Thus, in my pale blue obscurity voices reach me more distinctly, sound clearer, and every action stands out in particular relief. The hand which gives me the plastic straw, for instance: I touch it, it transmits warmth, comfort. The tinkling of the glass on the bedside tells me the nurse has left me my morning tea. The cotton ball soaked with cologne that Tisse passes over my fingers brings a caressing, precious freshness.

After all, I reflect, this is the life of the blind.

Tisse and Signora Maria have recognized each other and are talking about the past. I listen, sense the return of old ghosts, uselessly effaced: the relatives from Pistoia, the frustrating summers spent at the table of a milk bar in the piazza of the village. I was young and dreaming about life by the sea, about dancing in the evening, the beach during the day. The hours pass quietly. Granny has calmed down somewhat; they must have given her a sleeping pill. In Maria Pia's place they have brought in a Sicilian woman who has a ruptured disc. She has already had surgery some time ago, but once again has excruciating pain. Her complaint is faint, resigned, smothered by drugs. "Oh blessed *mamma mia,* help me!" she cries. "It hurts so much. Oh blessed little madonna, help me!" Marisa describes the husband: young, very dark, with a tight-fitting velvet jacket. He leans all the way over his wife's bed, tries to console her, to cheer her up.

"We have four kids at home in Catania," he says to Marisa. "I don't know how we'll manage if this takes a long time." He doesn't dare say that maybe there will be the danger of a second operation.

Marisa reports to me, describes what is happening in the room, helps me visualize people. "The foreign lady is very very thin."

"How old would she be?"

"Well, she must be very old, maybe eighty, maybe more." Now I understand why the nurses laughed so hard.

It is already dark when they come to get Signora Maria. Her sister and

her nephew. The nephew is a radiologist here at the hospital. I take advantage of the chance to ask him something about my x-rays. I feel as if I were stealing precious secret information.

"Doctor, did you see my x-rays?" I try to reach out with my right arm to catch his attention. "How long will it take?"

"Eh," he sighs, looking down at this species of monster in chains, which I have become. "A good while. You were smashed up just about everywhere!"

"But my neck? Isn't the neck the worst fracture?"

"Ah, for the neck you can light a candle to the Madonna. You were really lucky."

I don't succeed in getting any more out of him. The hospital secret service jealously keeps watch over its codes, its maps: you have to be able to read between the lines, interpret nuances.

Thus I should consider myself lucky. They keep repeating this to me. What is luck? The absence of evil? Death escaped? Everybody seems to consider it my great good fortune to be alive, even in this sorry shape, even in a world which oozes blood and violence, and which is coming apart in every direction. Is it really such a great good fortune to survive at a time like this? I don't know what the future in the long run holds but it is certain that old age awaits me; in the near or rather the immediate future I can look forward to a long period of infirmity. It's better to face this reality. It will be neither brief nor easy. I could have had a death without pain, without blood. A white death. It's even true that I have always said that having missed the experience of birth, I at least would not want to miss that of death. I would like to be aware of it, to live it all the way. Because of my deeply rooted need to live experiences, to make experiments. Death would be the ultimate, the most important experiment, the definitive one. The so-called rabbit's death which the accident would have provided for me would have taken me as by a trick, without allowing me the chance to think, to sum things up.

Signora Maria takes hold of my hand, says goodbye to me with affection: "Good luck, Signorina. You'll see, you'll soon be better."

"I'll come back soon to see you," says her sister. "I have someone else to visit here."

"I'll come too," says another family friend.

I remain alone to face the third night in the hospital, prepare myself, with the bandage over my eyes, to deal with it. It is perhaps nine o'clock, but it's hard to judge the time, when a hand grabs the cloth from my eyes, and an excited voice addresses me in a pronounced Florentine accent: "Oh Signora, I know this isn't a very good time to introduce myself, but I am the one who hit you." Wrenched thus abruptly from my drowsy state,

I open my eyes, try to understand what is happening around me. I see a feminine shadow on my left, a masculine one on the right (I glimpse the brim of a hat). Perhaps further over there is someone else. I can't tell.

"Ah, it's you," I say weakly, and meanwhile reflect, It's the woman who was screaming in the street, before they put me in the ambulance.

"I'm ruined!" She is also screaming now. "They're taking away my license!"

"But no, Signora," I reassure her. "They won't take it away. You'll see."

"If it wasn't for me you would sure enough be dead," she continues, unaffected. "I was the one who came to your aid, you know. I rang everybody's doorbell. There was nobody else around."

"But how did it happen?" I am trying in vain once more to understand.

"What can I say. I just found you on top of me. I didn't even see you. You were on my right."

"And how did the car hit me?" I insist.

"The right headlight hit you. There are still threads there from your coat."

Threads from my coat, I think. But if I was wearing my fur?

"The worst of it was," says the husband's voice, "that the Signora hit her head on the sidewalk."

"What a scare we had, my dear Signora!" she interrupts in an agitated voice.

"Yes, what a shock it must have been for you," I say sympathetically, forgetting the hours I spent in a state of clinical shock, wrapped in the wool blanket.

"I'll tell you it was a shock. I felt terrible all evening, isn't that right, Ernesto? I came right over with my husband and my son. We said let's go see how the Signora is. We came right away the first evening, you know that? But they wouldn't let us in." So it was, Marisa told me. "You know," she continues, having gotten started, "if we help each other out... I was in an accident in '68. I was with my Daddy. A head-on collision."

"And whose fault was it?"

"The other driver's, he didn't stop at the stop sign. My Daddy was killed instantly. But what can you do; the poor guy was just a laborer. So we said well, let's settle this between us. If we help each other... and besides my Daddy was dead anyway." Instinctively, under the covers, I make a sign to ward off the evil eye.

"It's a good thing for you that I am still alive," I reply. "If I had died then there would have been trouble for you." She doesn't answer. In the dark I sense her astonished look, her altered face. "Anyhow," I continue

in a tired voice, "it looks like it's going to take a long time."

She doesn't seem to notice my fatigue. In that voice of a roadside cabaret girl, she tells me that she is a nurse (who would have thought so?), that she was driving a Fiat 1100 when she hit me, on her way home from the hospital. The street that she has taken every night for years. Who knows what she was thinking about?

They all three take leave of me, the boy too, who has remained against the wall in silence. They exit with a rapid step, as if they are leaving a stage instead of the sleepy ward of a hospital. And the sensation remains that I have watched a scene from a play, recited by performers who appeared silently around my bed to improvise a nightly pantomime. The mother, the father, the son. Characters from Brecht or from Pirandello: absurd and dramatic, unaware and impelling. They assigned me a role and involved me in their impromptu performance in the wings of this corner: the bed was the center of the action, as in certain plays by Eduardo de Filippo. And I took the role which was most congenial to me, even in present circumstances: that of the psychologist, not that of the invalid or the victim.

A gratuitous psychodrama.

I rethink all this during the long and difficult night in which my only relief is the magical images which, without regularity, crowd behind my tired eyelids. Now there's a white telephone immersed in snow, how pleasant. It's soft, so white it's almost translucent. The snow creates an alcove for it—grainy, sparkling, beautiful. So many snow crystals for a white, smooth velvety telephone. It transmits sensations of extreme softness, whiteness. Now there is a flame coloured rose surrounded by fire. A stupendous image! The rose has opened, its petals vibrating as in the wind but instead it's inside a flame. A hot flame—I feel the heat—it moves sinuously and licks the rose without burning it. Might it be a reflection of the sun and not a flame? Yet the long backward curling tongues are those of a fire that superimposes itself on the rose, covers it, then uncovers it, playing with the flower, which possesses its own intense hue. It's a living rose in a fire that now is flaring up. But here in place of it comes an angel with great blue wings, moving across a cloudless sky as blue as he is. Is it really an angel or maybe a great enchanted flying creature? Muffled, remote, whispering voices reach me. They are coming from the right, from the wall. It's as if they belong to a group of phantoms huddled next to my bed. Who could they be? Perhaps the voices of my thoughts? Or the audible reflections of the hallucinogen that evidently they are continuing to prescribe for me.

My last thought before falling asleep is, I hope tomorrow they move Granny into another room.

Robbie Newton Drummond

Two Poems

Funeral Procession

June's broad day:
the headlights
on the coffin-black cars
add their dash of vodkawhite
to the bareback colourslap
of Montreal's bikewheeling streets.

Stalled in their train
by the red of corners,
the discomfited relatives
fidget solemnly;
the widow's face,
a study of placid poise.
Even the casket of blond wood
reclines in comic relief,
an item of refinished furniture
crated for a crosstown move.

The gaiety of breezy
noon is unblemished
vivid with the vanity
of strollers on parade,
sidewalks adrift with pastels
the putter of scooters
the chuckle of squirrels
the nuzzle of peach down sweethearts
the coo and caw of rock doves.

The green light
is no greener
than the green
of golf grass
or of apple love
and the dead
move on.

The Wild Horses of the Carmargue

The salt flats
of southern France
near Arles where
the man who painted
sunflowers cracked
at last

Flamingoes in a slough;
in flight at sunset
a pink so incarnate
the sky blushes

The Sea of the Middle
of the Earth unleashes
the circle of moon
into a landscape
of chalk drawings
on a sidewalk
after rain

My brother and I trespass
in the moon's windfield
we breathe her blue air
we are not alone

Thirteen graze, dappled
grey as the moon's face
the last wild things
tamed by the sea salt
on the grass beside
the highway that hems
in the edges of all
the wide world

Norman Nathan

Mistings of Colour

Mistings of colour,
slippery as orange mottled carp
in the pool circling the teahouse,
blend with grey washed earth
and paper hued air

the mountain tops disappear
into snow

criss-crossing red lines,
men and women
with matchstick legs,
hurry in all directions.

Letters From Sevilla

Sara McDonald

1. home is a series of rooms

Home is a series of rooms connected not by corridors, but by trains. Each room asks the question: will you be happy here? There are too many windows onto the world here, the view revolves by, and there's often no telling what lies beyond the courtyard wall. The room itself never changes: a bed and windows protected by drapes, blinds and shutters. The room never changes, only the view, and when it begins to look familiar I am home. I could be anywhere, I could be anyone.

I've stopped writing letters home because of the postal strike, news of which finally reached here when violence was involved. Nights I dream vivid pictures of home and wake missing people I haven't seen for years. It would be futile to send the letters I write in my head, not because of the strike but because they are to people I only used to know.

When I arrived it was with a plan to find someplace and stay put for awhile. Now I find myself unable to stop moving, to stop looking for the perfect place. At the train station there are always flocks of women waiting to try and rent you rooms in their houses. They come up to you offering in their soft English: home, home?

2. waiting on the midnight train

I am waiting on a midnight train—it's cheaper to travel by night. The station is full of soldiers all singing a song I can't understand. They will board the same train I do and sing straight through until dawn. I find what I hope is the right platform and free myself from my pack. With the lifting of the weight my body tips forward as though I suddenly discovered gravity. I prop myself up against a pillar and the marble is cool against my sweaty back. When I try to avoid the eyes of the passing soldiers they circle around me until I am forced to face them.

The attendant in the station washroom speaks enough English to ask me where I am from and where I am going. I'm on my way to Seville, I tell her and she smiles. Sevilla, she says. She gives me squares of toilet

paper and towels from the drawer of her desk. I watched the women ahead of me to see what they paid her, but couldn't tell it was done so smoothly. I hold out my hand with the coins on my palm for her to take what is right.

She is a smiling woman and eats her supper there at her desk despite the acrid smell of urine. Later, on the train I realize that the coins in my pocket are of a currency no longer of any use to me where I am going. I could have just turned my hand and spilt the coins into hers. A small enough gesture and if I were to write this as a story it is one that I would say I made, and no one would be the wiser.

3. in Sevilla, a woman

In Sevilla, a young woman walks down the street, wobbly in her mother's stilleto heels. She is perfecting a walk she has learned at the movies perhaps, and you would be a fool to think her oblivious to the effect she leaves in her wake, to think her ignorant of the heads turning as she passes. She and the gang of boys that surround her are all dressed up like their parents' memories of the fifties and youth.

She throws an extra wiggle into her walk, tangible as the sound of gears grinding, when she passes the street cafe where the old men haunt the sidewalks drinking tiny cups of coffee. Talk between the men stops, they set their coffee cups down in their saucers, and like marionettes they are pulled to their feet and fall into her wake. The procession gathers people as it goes, heads turn as she passes and we are irresistibly drawn, wanting only to look on her face for a moment. To see if it fulfills the promise of the curve of her calf pushed up by the newness of the heels, the tight and impossibly mobile body encased in red satin.

The men follow her, and so do the children and even the dogs. The women are part of the procession too, but it is impossible to say whether it is her they are pursuing or delinquent husbands and lovers. The traffic of the entire city changes direction and we let her lead us into the night.

4. the little sisters of Sevilla

The little sisters of Sevilla tread the cobblestone streets on miniature, perfectly shod feet. They fan themselves without coquettry and will not meet your eye. They are to be seen most often in pairs or flocks, black on white on black, and in crowds of tourists they disappear. They are of such a size that you could put one in each pocket and take them home with you.

The little sisters of Sevilla have no bodies beneath the stiff black shells

of their habits. At first their bodies merely fade to the colour of turista's bellies, then they begin to lose their definition (floating free and formless as amoebas beneath the seas of fabric) and finally they disappear entirely from disuse and lack of attention. This explains the eloquent silence of the nuns gliding to and fro across the stone floors of the cathedral.

The little sisters of Sevilla make me feel large and white and awkward, an overgrown Alice with my sun-yellowed hair and my naked legs. They are neither beautiful nor ugly for in memory they all share one face, placid and still.

5. in this city, irreverence

In this city irreverence is impossible. I am silenced by the cathedrals here, their size and numbers. I seek them out as I do movie theatres as cool, dark places. I am embarrassed to catch people in prayer, because I am constantly forgetting that cathedrals are more than monuments. In one I got caught up in a wedding procession, trying to be invisible in my faded shorts and rotting sneakers.

The cathedral at Sevilla is a collage of images; Catholicism yet another language I do not speak. The painted cherubs with one side of their body black and the other white and nobody to explain the why to me. The miniature wax limbs pinned to the hem of the virgin's robes to ask blessings look like a slaughter of child's dolls. The most interesting things are caged off and you have to press your face between the bars to pick out icons in the shadows. On the floor of one alcove was a man's wallet, stolen, emptied and discarded; pictures of his children were scattered on the stone floor beneath the benevolent gaze of Our Blessed Virgin.

I am unable to give my money to the beggars who wait on the stone steps of the cathedral; to do so would make them too real. I dream gold candlesticks in my pockets for them. But I never meet their eyes, squinting instead straight into the noonday sun until my vision blurs with tears.

6. the lost generation

The lost generation, now there was something to be. But I arrived more than a half-century too late, and none of us here seem to know what to do with ourselves. We seem to be not so much lost as misplaced. Is this exile? Afternoons wasted sitting in movie theatres for the cool, the dark, and the sound of my own language spoken. I have passed up the bullfights; they are now said to be more of a slaughter than a show. Time was the bull had a fifty-fifty chance, but matadors no longer lose and matadors no longer die.

I have met mostly Americans and other Canadians here, we talk of the best towns to visit and good places to stay. We write down addresses and pocket them to lose later. We pretend we know where we're going. I memorize the stories of others, later I will lie and tell them in the first person. I met three girls from Canada today, sporting flags and decals; they were in the bar, drinking sangria and comparing nose jobs. Also, a man from Omaha, who told me how like New York his city was becoming—Central Park Mall and a district much like Greenwich village. He also told me he didn't like New York. Omaha, though, was fine, and the anarchists he knew there didn't blow things up.

7. in this city there are lovers

In this city there are lovers everywhere. On park benches, shadowed by trees, they explore each others' bodies, their touch making them new. I write you now to tell you only this: I miss you. It is all I have to offer.

In this city there are lovers everywhere; backed into doorways young girls kiss shut-eyed boys with their own eyes open wide. They watch me as I pass and I cannot keep my eyes away from their hands on lovers' backs—holding them to them. Kissing them blind.

In this city there are lovers everywhere, and I was never so alone. Silenced by language, I find when I do try to speak my tongue has lost the habit. I have words for these things: room, beer, coffee, ticket, please. My world narrows to this and when language fails me I say what I know again and again. Please. Por favor.

Cornelia Hoogland

Spider Lake

I love swimming the deep
water of the inlet's embrace,
dark with shoregreen.

At her smooth centre
her heavy belly hangs
black. We splash upward,
noises fanning into air,
and beach our tired bodies on her
island eye
before swimming long limbs back.

I love her cold, moist
humour, the wash
of her fingers holding me
buoyant until
sculling,
I arrow the deep, reach
tip-toe for the familiar.
Feel only a pull
prickle my lower limbs.

I think this might be bottomless and that
I can't stand.

Pedro Salinas

Translated from the Spanish by Alison Burch

Do souls keep you company? Do you sense them?

Do souls keep you company? Do you sense them?
Or are they tiny thimbles
of glass,
prisons of the pink tips and flights
of fingers?

Are desires your company? Do those ever "more,
more, more's" tag along with you too?
Or is it only music beside you,
martyred and mangled
from colliding with all the world's
corners, the sort played
by desperate, unkissed spectres
on the radio?

Do wings keep you company, or
keep their distance?
And tell me, does that immense
longing to be by oneself
which is called love, or a telegram
accompany you too?

Or are you alone, with nothing for company
but looking leisurely over old
fashion plates, with brimming eyes—
feeling denuded
and all alone, with a nakedness that is
full of promise?

We Made Love Like...

Svetlana Boym

We made love like French intellectuals, although you were, of course, American. You insisted that we stop by a tacky motel, Arrows and Hearts, on Route 1, and watch colour TV like in Pynchon's novels. It was very slow. You were savoring every texture: the design on my stockings, the reddish trace of the rubber on my waist, the peach-like line of my cheekbones and clumsy adolescent shoulders. You were touching me calmly, as if getting more and more intoxicated with your own artfulness. And then, I don't remember... there was only a complete delusion—diffusion—déluge of all senses, never-ending... ... "Sara Lee," says a sophisticated woman on TV rolling her Rs... "she must be French."

We made love like Judith and Holofernes. I touched the bluish veins of your thighs, and stroked gently the unyielding hair on your body. I stretched my long white neck like Louise Brooks in the old movie, and pressed my little finger against your protruding Adam's apple. Then I become cruel, and stop caressing you for a moment. "What's up, darling. Why are you sighing?" I whisper. I love watching how you half-close your eyes, and bite your lower lip to blood.

We made love like heroes of the Russian novel. I cried afterwards, and you wiped off my little warm tears with badly disguised irritation. You smoked languorously to fill in the clumsy silences, not knowing in what tone to start the conversation. You wished the waiter would bring you a slice of a watermelon on a fine porcelain plate with gilded ring. And I was obscenely uncool, nagging, and overflowing with sentimental demands: "You probably don't even respect me, do you? You don't even like me, I just didn't want to be alone." I respond to the warmth of your anonymous body when we lie together with the light in the room and our eyes shut. I feel like a weak damsel in distress, stylishly passive, but coyly experienced in the orgasm of self-pity. There is a calm dryness in my body, and a sour aftertaste from our indifferent passionate kisses.

We made love like husband and wife—quickly—as a part of daily

routine. We just wanted to get it pleasantly over with, and then pleasantly lie side by side, pleasantly laugh like kids, pleasantly tease each other and be tender, just before a pleasant Sunday breakfast together, and a long talk over a good coffee. We would drink freshly brewed coffee from the old family porcelain cup with many tiny cracks and a brownish line in the middle—the residue of daily drinking ceremonies and a mark of bad housekeeping. "We ran out of the dishwashing detergent again, kiddy, perhaps you should stop by the Star Market and get some Palmolive."

We made love like Eastern-European refugees in circumstances of high risk of infectious diseases, on a narrow bed, with doors locked, and without contraception. It was gentle, sweet and a little clumsy. We were both embarrassed and protectively anticlimactic. We turned our backs to each other. "See, we wanted to escape *it,* to get distracted, to forget. But we can't really, it isn't the absence of a diaphragm that separates us." You pat my hair calmly and affectionately, and then press your whole full paternal body against my little-girlish figure. We both cry, share our secret escape stories, and finally I fall asleep curled comfortably on your broad chest. In the morning we take a walk on the beach at sunrise, look at the exotic palm trees, and speak with the Southern accent.

We made love like the characters of the soap opera. Your beautiful blue eyes were intense and serious. "I love you," you said. And then, "Please, tell me 'I love you' in your language." "But, why? You won't understand it... " I tease you affectionately. "Darling, you grew up watching soaps. We don't say it like that, you see... Once you say it it vanishes somewhere... " You don't smile back. "Please, don't hide; express your emotions, be direct... " you say. "I want you... I want more... I want to have a life together... I want you to cook for me... I want you to talk to me in your language... I want... you to come to me... " I touch your lips with my fingers, we hold each other, freeze in one long embrace... please, please, I love when you are saying it to me... in your language... please...

And then we parted. We parted like the characters in a Russian novel. We hoped to meet each other again in a bright and beautiful future, in a little town with warm sun shadows on the fresh asphalt, where everything would work out... Through the half open curtain I watch you walking away awkwardly, stumbling a few times, stooping, with your eyes tired and dry.

We parted like French intellectuals, exchanging playful Americana—postcards with neon signs and the silhouettes of the sensual southern cities—writing fictional return addresses and the polite "give my regards to your wife."

We parted like the characters of a cheap melodrama: "How could you do it to me? How? Well, do you want to... break up?" I sit in your new sparkling red car, knowing that I should be leaving, that I should be leaving right now, and not leaving... "Well, let's just break up,"—I say, arranging the strap of my bra.

We parted like friends, smiling on the threshold, and looking astray. We promised to be friends, to call each other if one of us needs something, to call each other to say hi, to call each other to say how are you, to call each other and wish a nice day, to just call each other for no reason.. For I would really miss talking to you.

We parted like strangers. I give you a nightmarish kiss, and walk home on a fresh rainy morning, passing by a yawning policeman, and a few women in their thirties wearing classic coats and white running shoes. I open the door of my apartment carefully like a thief, and noiselessly like a sleepwalker, so that my landlord will not suspect anything.

We parted like the characters from a war movie. The train took me away, and I saw your little figure vanishing on the platform. You rush after the train, trying to reach it, and then I stop noticing you because the guard starts to collect our passports for the visa control. A blond curly-haired woman in front of me presses her face against the window and cries.

We also parted like the Lady with the Dog, like Oneguin and Tatiana, like Madame and Mr. Bovary, like Madame Bovary and her lovers, like Woody Allen and Diane Keaton, like Swann and Odette, like Arlequino and Columbina, like Louise Brooks and Jack the Ripper, like Maria Schneider and Marlon Brando or like Maria Schneider and Jack Nicholson...

We were parting over and over again. We parted. We parted, but I still call you sometimes, pretending that it is not me, and leaving long silences on your answering machine.

Mark Bastien

Smoke and Light

Someone might think by the way
McDonald Drive yawns and stretches
along Yellowknife Bay that morning

in Old Town is a ghostly intruder,
a haze of smoke and light
shivering its reflection

across the silent water
like a crisp, cool sheet.
Trees awash with wind

scrape dusty windows where tiny, grubby
hands have rubbed holes for seeing.
Screen doors clatter open

and creak closed. Phantoms skitter
into shadows like mice and the gravel
puffs the paths of evening travellers

to the bay: couples in khaki
shorts and bleached cotton shirts
hoping to uncover the mystery

of the nightless sky,
the shudder morning sends
through the slats of crumbling fences.

the porch light goes out
at a house on the shore;
water laps at the stony beach

like a thirsty cat. A woman
with grey hair wearing
a flecked terrycloth bathrobe

and carrying a cup of coffee
opens the door. She breathes
the morning through a stained screen,

then shuffles to a white pine
picnic table. She is still
dreaming her calm sleep's dream:

brilliant paper lanterns
from the clothesline rustle and twirl colour
into the night's discreet whisper;

wind chimes spangled like the shadows
of stars glint in the pale moonlight.
The evening sounds are as hollow

and dry as bone. The woman sips
from the steaming cup. Wavelets
curl back from the grey-blue pebbles;

smoke and light waft across
the bay. The woman stretches her arms
to the sky and thinks:

those are clouds, that
is a tree, these are my
hands, this is my face.

Chris Mansell

Two Poems

The discovery

you've discovered an ancient atlas
wherein the supple and thrilling coasts
cast themselves out like nets
wherein the seas nudge the bays
warm and delighted like suckling animals
wherein the legends are all but invisible
but you know they will be there

there is silence as fierce as sunlight
and the book is quelled by dust
you try to remember the history
like you try to remember the pages
before they're consumed by air

you're the one they've chosen
to be their assassin
you are alone
there is no one to tell
and you hide your hands before
they become imprinted
with the fragments of words
or the borders of oceans

* *

you write letters home
but resist telling
of the strangeness of the words
of the ambivalent dryness of your skin
in the new climate
of the breathless air
you've encountered but cannot
say truthfully that you love

instead you draw them pictures
of landscape and animals
and strange fruits which hang
from alien trees you are determined
should not bear food

against your wishes the people here
are warm and bleed with intensity
a red that is exactly
similar to your own

something is different
perhaps it is the sky
not soft and slow like home
but straight and timeless like
nothing on earth

privately you wonder what the eyes
of your children will be like
what dreams they will have
in this linear air

The discovered

they've come for the song
they come from a place of songs
they must their boats heave
in the harbour and we hear
the boss man call out
and the sails change
we wait for the true voices
that brought the boats
over the long sea

the men swear and stink
and are soft in the stomach
they are fit for arrow shafts
their thighs are fit for transgression
their voices gone

whatever song there is to sing
would they recognize it
if they found it?
the traveller wants to know
they'll always ask
of routes and ways to the exotic
even the hills climb mosaically
for them
they are ready to make a scene
of anything
including us sitting dog nosed
thinking into the air

Imagining Autobiography: 1954 & 1974

Caroline Woodward

The wheat is taller than me and I am running to Marjorie's place. My toes are sinking into dust, stubbing on stalks. I have bloomers on and some light little shirt and the sun is hot. The clacking of grasshoppers is everywhere and I stir them up as I run. They fly up and bash into my legs and face. This is my first moving footage, my first movie starring me.

It must have been August for the wheat to have such heavy heads. I duck my head down and keep running, trying to pull the stalks aside, to keep their small and spiky beards from getting my face. Behind me some grown-ups are talking on the road about rain. Or bushels to the acre. These voices mix into the grasshoppers, droning and clacking.

The road they are standing on splits at the first gate and goes through bush on the left to Spence's and through four gates on the right until it gets to the road which goes up to the highway. I don't think I knew about the roads or the gates then, on the day I started running to Marjorie's. I am two and a half. No one else remembers any of it.

Straight across this field of wheat, through the barbwire fence, more field (oats?), some bush, then barnyard, is Marjorie's place. We can see the light of her kitchen from our living-room window. She sits on her high kitchen chair by the window and smokes and always has raisin cookies. Once I had canned bear meat she made. Someone mentions her name, one of the visitors, and I go running to see her. Marjorie allows me to sit on her lap and I sing songs for her which she claps for after I do.

* * *

Once I paid for a glider ride, towed up to 2500 feet by a small plane and then let go on our own. There is a pilot and me behind him like the Red

Baron and Snoopy. The pilot's nickname is Red, in fact, and he used to have a teen radio show on CKNL Wide Sky Radio called Rockin' Red Ruddell (590 on your dial). He's too old for that these days and he flies anything for anybody. Gyppo bush plane outfits forever going down in godforsaken places but that was later.

On this day we are floating and bouncing higher on thermal updrafts from the hot brown summerfallow below. We slip along completely without sound except for me going Wow Wow and Red saying We got a good run here and Wanna go there? pointing to the river. For an ex-dee-jay he didn't talk much.

We hover over the Beatton River, see the bridge, see where it runs into the Peace, brown on brown, the Peace swallowing the lean brown ribbon of the Beatton without so much as a burp. We do a complete 360 degree flip and I screech the f word which I hardly ever used when I was nineteen and which I did to impress Red with my sophistication. He just laughs and says not to worry when I apologized (again to cover all my bases in case he preferred more innocent types) because just about everyone swore at 360s. We did two more at my request and I kept my eyes open and watched our fixed wing shadow on the ground below. The sun was just right for shadows.

* * *

I heard someone hollering my name and yoohooing. I stopped running and looked up and all I could see was high blue sky. Then the world swirled and someone (my Dad) picked me up, laughing, saying She would have made it all the way to Miller's. (But I did, I did!)

This is where my memory began.

* * *

The last time we climbed up I stretched my arms out wide, pressed my hands up against the glass bubble, counted to eight for as long as I saw sky only and there it was, the airstrip below and me made wide and open above.

Jan Conn

Private Fears

Sitting on the long wooden dock
with a book beer small yellow dish of black olives
outside your house
which from a distance is luminous and grey,
I watch a pair of sting rays undulating
flying underwater
and a green stick-like fish
hanging motionless,
perpendicular to the water surface,
perfectly camouflaged.

I wish I could be that perpendicular, at times,
to the earth.
I am all angled-elbows scarred knees,
restless.

Here in southern Florida
I wake up in the night
because there is no difference
between the temperature of my body
and that of the air.

The boundaries tremble.

I take my book *Las Memorias de Mamá Blanca*
downstairs, have another beer,
lie on the big bed in the guest room
reading slowly the stories Teresa de la Parra wrote
about the *hacienda* where she grew up in Venezuela,
before she contracted tuberculosis
and withdrew from the world
imagining that her soul
in the euphoria of respiratory distress
was somehow closer to her body

so she stopped writing, and died.

I want to go back upstairs to you
and wake you,
needing comfort-

What is it you'll say, mostly awake,
asking if it's the tragic life
of yet another writer,
and how can I explain that lying down there
in that large bed looking out into the dark,
hearing the slow rise of the tidal river
and the splash of mullet leaping
ecstatically,
I began to think
this is the room your ex-wife moved to
when you were still sharing this house
but things had fallen apart so badly

How do you fall out of love?

All that intimacy lost buried
altered beyond recognition

What if I looked out the window
and saw a woman on the end of the long dock
sitting perpendicular to the surface of the water
eating black olives, the colour of the night air

Kathy Mac

Three poems

In dreams
dogs follow me
chasing

there are stars shining in the spaces
between their claws

I go to a play
and there he is
a man I once acted with
when this was my hometown

I'm embarrassed remembering
how I mooned over him
but that's history—he's someone I used to know

At the intermission
I buckle my sandals
on the wrong feet.

the seven of us considered ourselves
in a perfect Agatha Christie scenario—
near strangers isolated together for
a weekend-in-the-country—
and,
becoming fond of one another,
decided on seven ways
to off
the bank's assessor

whose high heels
kept her from seeing the river property

Borys Bunchuk
Two poems translated from the Ukrainian by Jeffrey D. Stephaniuk

Clip Clop

In the early, copper-coloured morning,
when countless stars are in the sky,
he knocks about in the upstairs room,
reviving the morning in my home.

I was a young boy then. At that time, I thought
a woodpecker lived upstairs and was waking the day.
I have long since grown up. Our home is now old,
but his knocking is still felt in my heart.

There, upstairs, my neighbour and veteran of front-line battles,
is measuring his room on artificial limbs. . .
while I listen. I am still not accustomed
to his sad, limbless protest.

I feel guilty without blame:
to me his steps are more painful than a sharp noise.
. . . Yes, we are walking farther and farther away from war.
Slowly. On wooden feet.

Hitch-hiking to my Village

These were already written about long ago-
these uncles in cotton jackets,
these talented, cursed, verbose peasants,
robust as the characters in an Indian movie.
    The taut truck canvas thunders. They sit
    on benches with small loafs of bread in their hands.
    A frozen amoniac smell in the stuffy air
    tickles the throat and nostrils.
    You are in thin shoes. A despondent from Chernivtsi.
    It is so cold, your eyes almost freeze.

Here, in the back of the truck, the cold reaches out and shakes you,
here, where you can talk loudly about anything.

Someone tells a joke. You become timid and silent.
Your momentary funny confusion.
You are more important to them than your learning,
because you emerged not from a book,
but from them.

Gas fumes are strong. Also the smell of bread. As always
one smell warms your spirit the most: their breath.
And what is it warming?
A frozen body? Frozen soul? You do not understand.
The truck hits a hole. It stops.
Everyone gets off here. Here, at the beginning
of the circle.
And it still seems hopeful to you;
like never before.
You are within them.
You are from them.
They are your nation.

Mrs. Downs Goes to the Dentist

Allison Brown

"Well, let me see. . . " Dr. Robinson said, straightening his white coat and hitching up his pants as he took a seat on his chair and focused the lamp over his patient's face. He handed her file to the nurse. It was a thick file—Mrs. Downs made frequent visits. In huge, now fading red letters across the front it said *SHOT-PHOBIC*.

The tiny woman opened her mouth obediently at his command.

"Tsk, tsk. . . my dear. . . you. . . . " He peered inside and inserted his mirrorscope, although it wasn't the back teeth he worried about. She couldn't reach them as well. "You've been at it again, haven't you? Any new brushes?"

"I've been doing my best."

"Come on, now. I know you've been using something harder again. Last time I gave you three Oral B's. That was plenty for six month's time. You've been getting your own, haven't you? Do you have them to give to me?" He took the mirrorscope out of her mouth and relaxed in his chair.

Mrs. Downs looked at Mrs. Reid, Dr. Robinson's assistant, and then to him.

Then she reluctantly reached into the pocket of the smock that, although extra small, fit her like a tent, and withdrew a pair of cheap toothbrushes whose hard, widely spaced bristles were flattened, skewed as if they had been used to scrub floors. She held them out to the nurse, who left the room to dispose of them.

As she came back in the room, Mrs. Reid smiled at Mrs. Downs, who was looking worriedly at the dentist. He said, "Mrs. Reid tells me you are here today because you split a tooth biting down on something hard. Is that right?"

Mrs. Downs looked at Mrs. Reid. "Can I have the gas?" Her hands gripped the arms of the bright, clean vinyl chair.

Mrs. Downs heard the nurse say, "Do you prefer the gas? We want to

do what's best for you, Mrs. Downs. We only want to do what's best for you. What's best for you. Best for you. For you."

"I need the gas."

"Hmmm," the doctor said as he inspected her chart. "We've never had to use anesthesia on you, have we, Mrs. Downs? You've kept your teeth so nice and clean that we've never had a cavity."

"Can I have the gas?"

"Mrs. Downs, do you remember what we talked about last time? About dentin and enamel on your teeth? Hmmm? You told me why you brush your teeth so much—so they'll look cleaner, whiter. But remember how I told you the core, the inside of everyone's teeth, is called dentin and its natural color is yellow or gold? Remember how I told you there are different colors of enamel and yours is what we call *translucent*? That means you can see through it, so your teeth are never going to look as white as people who have opaque enamel. Remember how we said we can do a very good job of cleaning our teeth brushing them twice a day at the most, flossing properly once a day? I've told you before—you can have too much of a good thing. You have a tendency to think if brushing twice a day is good, then six or seven times must be better. But it's not that way at all, Mrs. Downs... ahhhh... let me see... " Dr. Robinson peered over his glasses.

Mrs. Downs nodded her head. She knew all that. "I need the gas."

Dr. Robinson turned, motioning to the nurse. She handed him some cotton which he put on either side of their patient's lower left teeth. The nurse gave him enough cotton to cushion the remaining sides of her mouth.

"You have nice clean teeth, Mrs. Downs. In fact, your mouth is immaculate. I know your teeth look dark to you, but it's not because they are dirty. Translucent enamel allows light to pass through to the dentin, which is dark. I don't want you to keep brushing the way you do."

He looked at the damage. What had startled him when he had first seen her—the horizontal lines—turned to grooves, then to patches of enamel missing, now were trenches of erosion in her front teeth. She brushed her tongue, too. She probably hadn't tasted anything in years, from the looks of it. Her gums were also deteriorating—he wished Mrs. Downs would occasionally either eat or if she did eat let her food digest. Well, she was a nervous sort. He didn't know what would happen first to her teeth: either they would drop out from her malnutrition or she would brush them away. She had come in for a split tooth, but he had plans to reconstruct some of her front teeth before they caved in on her.

"I know you want your teeth to be white, but the more you abuse them with your brushing—which is what you are doing, Mrs. Downs, you are

abusing them—the less white they will actually look. You are exposing the dentin... "

When the nurse wheeled the nitrous oxide pump to her chairside, Mrs. Downs loosened her sweaty grip on the vinyl chair. She still held it tightly but her fingers no longer showed white. She let her eyes, opened wide since she had been there, blink slowly.

"Tell me again about the injections, the shots, Mrs. Downs... " he said, without changing the tone of his voice.

Her mouth was full of cotton.

"Tell me again how they lined up, thousands of them, and filed into the trailers for their vaccinations, and came out the other side with bloody arms. Thousands of them, a procession of bloody, dripping arms. Blood dripping down in little droplets, or was it sometimes gushing? All those people. Thousands of them! Tell me about it again. Tell me how you stood in line for your turn and watched all those people go before you... "

He put a suction device in her mouth.

"Ready, nurse," he said as he turned to Mrs. Downs with his shiny silver needle.

J.W. Caughlan

Crossed-Currents

Mykonos donkeys
(whose dung smelled of caramel sauce)
carried cases
of Pepsi-Cola
on their backs.

I was no tourist here!

W.P. Ormshaw

Through Autumn, Going Home

I

Marching cadence.

Walk hurried home
for fear of cold
catching me up.
Winter coming on.
I turtle my head
into coat collar.
Stare forward through
eyebrow wisps. Eyelashes
flutter silver
crystal crusted
breath.

II

Leaning into home.
Yearning like a sprinter
streamlined to touch
the tape.

Leaning into wind's
face slap gusts.

III

Wide prairie planted
with streetlight stalks.
They waving sway.

Ordered rows of roads
refuse earth's curves.
Skeltered stars up there
ponder subdivisions
of lights here gridlined
in strict runways.

IV

Up the white dotted line.

Too conspicuous tall
over pavement
cracked crust.

Broad prairie black
sky down presses.

Between pages
of a fat old bible.

V

Pissing beer back
of some alley.
Waiting for a dog to bark
his territory.
Watering down tin
empty garbage bin.

Torrent tumbling
gurgle of used water.
Acting like oil
it slides on powder dust
puddles under feet.

I leave
five wet sole prints.

VI

Then unearthly sound
of taunting kids'
playground rhyme songs.

Faint as memories sieved
through chain link fence.

But the children are calling
geese. Geese calling
caught there between
those leaves of land
and flat deep sky
brackish black.

I follow them home.
Past shoebox clapboard
green clippered square lawns.

Arrow headed.

Stephen Brockwell

Taunting the Boar

On the earth above the high lagoon bank,
children watch swimming sharks.
I swim toward them, brushed
by a shark's cold leather.
The water level is low.
Logs and grey rocks span the river bottom,
a ribcage covered by silt.
Alan stands among the silent children,
leads me to a plain of dry grass
and scattered, grey-leaved deciduous trees.
A herd of wild pigs, cattle-sized,
grazes in circular array, hairless, dark purple.
Alan taunts a boar on the perimeter
with unintelligible sounds.
The glistening boar charges.
We run to a tree where a dust-caked
blanket hangs, boar in pursuit.
Around and around, hidden by the blanket,
we run until the boar drops
exhausted, a pearl in dust.
We watch its lungs rise and fall while it sleeps.
Dust falls from the blanket in a light wind.
Circular patterns emerge from the exposed fibers.

Tom Eadie

raven

for Bill Reid

raven
compassionate one
trickster
what could amuse you
but yourself

like any god
you formed the earth
from your droppings
set your heart in the sky
to burn with clarifying pain

dreamed us
and woke with a wry smile

The Ukrainian Easter Egg

Kirk H. Wirsig

In those days, bears lurked in the woods behind the trailer where we lived. They got by all right on their berries and things, but there was no doubt whatever in my mind that the true dream cuisine of those ravenous bruins was a long, slow munch on blonde haired, seven year old boys with features exactly like mine. Oh, and it wasn't just the bears. There were alligators underneath my bed whose appetites were similarly disposed and a wolf in the closet who walked on his hind legs and prayed for that one careless moment when I'd have to go in further than usual, reach in behind my Mom's shoes, through my Dad's Sunday suits, into the vast darkness and then... Bang! Chomp!... He'd have me for good, or maybe he'd just take my arm and leave the rest for the alligators and bears. It was a dangerous time all right and there was one morning in particular when the boogie man himself doffed his cap from the shadows as I waited for the school bus, clutching my Lost In Space lunch bucket and wondering how long the earth would dangle me as bait before that final, inevitable, gruesome banquet took place. I knew it was the boogie man that morning because otherwise it had to be old Ted McFarlane who was dull as cold toast and wouldn't even let me pick mint from his garden to make my gum taste weird when the sugar ran out. Of course, it might have *looked* like Ted McFarlane. These ghouls have no end of tricks.

But the myriad monsters that I had to contend with on the home front paled in comparison to the greatest evil, apart from my father's temper, that up to that point in my life I had never known. Donald Jardine. Oh, the base infamy of Donald Jardine. He smoked cigarettes at recess, down by the creek. He took treats from lunch bags, him and his boys, and you'd better not say anything or we'll paste you, snot face. He routinely made girls cry and was the first person I'd ever heard use the word fuck and seem to know what it meant.

But worst of all, Donald Jardine didn't like me. I mean, he didn't seem to like anyone much except his two pals, Scottie and Sid, but he took a particular dislike to me, a hatred even, because he thought I was the one

who ratted on him about the notorious marble syndicate. You're as good as dead, puke face, got it?

Marbles were a big thing in our school in the early Fall and late Spring. Our school was the only one for the small population of loggers and farmers on the south side of Kootenay Lake and was for Grades one to six only, although there were only a couple of grade sixers. Just about everyone played marbles. Even the girls. We played chaseys, clothes line, knee caps and pots. I was particularly fortunate because my grandfather had given me a big heavy leather satchel filled with marbles he had collected as a boy in Germany. No two of those marbles were alike. If you don't know marble hierarchy, there are two basic broad categories—shooters and dubs. There were sub-categories, of course—boulders, steelies, crystals, pee wees, but it's the difference between shooters and dubs that I want you to understand. Shooters were marbles that were in some way unique—a peculiar colouring or pattern or design. Your favourite shooter was priceless, it was part of you, no less painfully separable than a hand or foot. Dubs on the other hand, though still valuable, were standard currency. Dubs were milks, onion rings, flags, clears and cat's eyes—the sort of marbles you could buy in drug stores and they were mostly what you won or lost. Shooters were sometimes traded, but if a game was for shooters, especially favourite shooters, then crowds would gather and a quiet atmosphere of awe would ripple through the audience as the contestants faced each other over such fearsomely high stakes. To give you an idea of my inherited marble wealth, my grandfather's satchel was filled with shooters. Not a dub in the bunch. I remember when I took the satchel home and spilled it onto my bed, I nearly peed with delight. I was rich. I rolled my hands over that smooth, clicking collection, that rainbow of glowing orbs and had my first tingling sensation of the carnal joy of material wealth. I knew I would cherish those marbles more than anything, more than my Major Matt Mason, Mattell's Man in Space, more than my G.I. Joe O.M.A. combination machine gun and grenade launcher, more than my shoebox garage lined with hotwheels, more even than my custom, super deluxe Tonka jeep with its own front pulley, spare tire and removable roll bar. Of course, I couldn't just sit and gloat in my room. Marbles, like money, have little intrinsic value and I wasn't by nature miserly, so I publicized my good fortune. My best pals, Ricky and Ralph and Louie, got to choose three marbles each, for free. I let Sonja Bumpky—her mother brought her with her sometimes when she came for tea on Saturday afternoon—pick five, but only after she promised, cross your heart, swear to God, let me see your fingers, they're not crossed, O.K., that she wouldn't breathe a word to anyone, not even, except maybe, her best friend Elaine. Sonja had long braided hair,

blonder than mine and sometimes when she laughed, especially if it was something I said, my stomach did a funny bounce and I got lumps in my throat. We shared a jawbreaker once at lunch and I knew it was love.

Of course, the *first* thing I did was choose the shooter of shooters and I knew at a glance which one it would be—a jet black marble with thin brilliant crimson streaks. It was a thing of almost painful beauty, that marble, and after I spent almost an hour rubbing it in gravel and throwing it against the concrete of the porch steps, its perfection was almost indescribable. Now it was a dark, exotic missile, a dangerous cannon ball from foreign lands. It had known battle on many fronts, spanning the centuries even. It was my favourite favourite shooter.

I was in Grade two then and quickly learned that the pampered bliss of Grade one was a thing of the past. No more morning playtime, no more TV cartoons at two o'clock on Wednesdays, no more getting out of Assembly first, no, now it was *regular* classes, real textbooks and that horrible, force-fed, mind-altering drug known as homework. But it wasn't all bad. In Grade two I began a way of life that made me, by Grade four, when we moved to another school where marbles were stupid,-eh?-Don't-you-know-how-to-shoot-pool, a virtual marble baron.

I began trading: shooters for dubs, or ten, twenty, thirty dubs for a prize shooter or five dubs and a milk boulder for a shooter and three black pee wees. I developed a sales pitch: look, try it out, doesn't that fit snug against your thumb, hey, wow, what a shot, your game will be better by half with that one. I got hardnosed: a deal's a deal, Jimmy Lochlin, we shook on it, but still I'll give you back the milk with the orange stripe—it don't look like no shooter to me Jimmy—if you give me six green onion rings and that jumbo steely. All right, three onion rings and the steely, come on, shake on it. I also began honing my game, practicing till my thumb was sore and more often than not, triumphing on the field.

The thing was, no one could play marbles seriously at Cole Creek Elementary without paying a sort of bully tax to Donald Jardine. Mind you, Donald wasn't much of a businessman. He flunked Grade three and he had little finesse; he'd been strapped more times than anyone I'd ever heard of, but he made a great bully. He was a huge, ogreish bulk of a kid, four foot nine if he was an inch and I bet both of my shoes would have fit easily into one of his. He always untucked his shirt as recess and used to swagger around and every once in a while he'd make this awful grating sound at the back of his throat and then squint his eyes, purse his lips and befoul the wall of the school with these hideous wads of spittle that would hang there like bad jelly and then run slowly down the wall so that you'd stare at it, wide-eyed, a little sickly, fearing for the general safety of the world and yourself in particular.

Anyway, at recess or lunch hour, just when kids were starting in with their games or their bartering, Donald Jardine would wander around with Scottie or Sid or both and he'd go up to someone and say, four dubs fart face or we'll murder you, or, let me borrow your green shooter dick head, and the kid who handed it over could only pray to whatever god watches over marbles, that he'd get it back. Sometimes, the braver ones would barter and offer gum or licorice or a Nanaimo bar or even a quarter. Donald had a good thing going and though he was dumber than most small animals, he knew something of limits and thresholds so he would never take anyone's favourite shooter—it was just too dicey. Kick a kid's lunch bucket, stick gum in his slinky, scribble on his textbook, take away every dub he's ever owned, but stay clear of his favourite shooter or even the certainty of violence wouldn't keep him from doing something stupid, like going to the principal, Mr. Brooks, who was about seven hundred feet tall with hands like scoop shovels and an angry voice that could make your head throb and your spine sort of squirm around as if it was trying to leave your body.

The thing is though, Donald Jardine was one lousy marble player. Even with something as simple as knee caps he was slow and oafish. His hand-eye co-ordination was just plain terrible and his finger-thumb co-ordination was even worse. Still, a lot of kids were scared of the consequences if he lost, so they'd let him win and he began to get this view of himself as something of a marble shark.

I had given my fair share of dubs to Donald Jardine, just like everyone else, and once I had to give up a mediocre shooter to protect a Nanaimo bar that I'd foolishly brought out to eat at recess, but Louis and I had gradually developed a healthy talent to avoid him during his collection strolls. His routines were pretty much predictable and if you kept up a kind of warning system—hey let's go use the swings Louie, here comes Jardine—then for the most part you were safe.

What happened with me was, I was playing a big game of pots at lunch hour with some Grade 3ers, things were going good, my thumb was hot—me and this other kid, I forget his name how, were cleaning up. Anyway, Donald Jardine comes by and wants to play. I should have gathered up my dubs and left right there and then, but you know how it is with high rollers: they get a streak going and not even toffee and cold orange Crush in the treehouse by the creek can tear 'em away. Besides, I thought, it's a whole group of us, so it shouldn't matter much. Anyway, Donald joins in and at his say so, more and more dubs get put in the pot. I'd never played such a perfect game. Again and again I took every dub in the circle. I was so thrilled with victory that I hardly noticed as the players dwindled to me, the Grade 3er I mentioned earlier and Donald Jar-

dine. My God, was Jardine awful. He couldn't have hit those target dubs with a bowling ball. His shooter, an ugly blue thing with a white dot on it, would just sort of plop in the dirt like a lost eyeball, miles from anywhere and Jardine would silently put more dubs in the pot and then watch me take them out. I don't know, maybe that's when he really started hating me.

After a while, we had a bit of a crowd; I guess some of the kids could sense an imminent tragedy—in retrospect I should have too, but anyway, we kept playing until the Grade 3er runs out of dubs and so I say, "Well, that's great, good game Donald, I have to go to the bathroom now," and Jardine says, "Keep playing." That was it. Keep playing. No pus mouth, no shit nose, nothing.

I knew I was in trouble, but there's no reasoning with someone whose brain is probably little more than a clenched fist, so what could I do? I even tried to lose, subtly, so that he wouldn't pound on me for that reason, but his aim was so bad that I would've had to start throwing my shooter over my shoulder to give him a chance.

I won two more pots, then he turned to me and said, his voice low and starting to get raspy as if he were about to spit, "I don't got no more dubs."

"Would you like some back?" I asked as politely as I could.

Someone, some awful blight on schoolyard etiquette, some ignorant tipper of immortal balances, giggled.

Donald Jardine's ears turned red.

"Watch it," he said.

"My Mom made a whole tray of fresh Nanaimo bars," I said quietly, doom thickening about me and the lump in my throat feeling very much like Jimmy Lochlin's jumbo steely.

"We play chaseys," he said.

I felt a sudden surge of relief. Chaseys was like tag with marbles, you just toss two marbles after each other and the first to make contact with the other player's marble wins. I simply wouldn't hit his marble and given the law of averages, of which I knew absolutely nothing, still I was confident that before I got out of elementary school, Donald Jardine should triumph at chaseys, Given the alternative, it seemed a small price to pay.

His next statement took me utterly by surprise.

"We play for shooters," he said.

Now a whole new wave of emotions came over me. Playing chaseys for shooters! My God, it had become a grudge match. Now more than mere pride was on the line, now we were talking touch-stones, life-blood and all that. Donald Jardine wanted my beloved shooter, my lucky thumb globe, my cool black immaculate prince of marbles that I kept in the

drawer beside my bed in a place of honour, chauffeured in the back seat of my Tonka jeep. Ah, my crimson pedigreed shooter that ruled my grandfather's satchel with a gentle, but austere command. It was peverse, diabolical...

"This... this is my *favourite* shooter," I said.

"Yeah?" retorted Donald Jardine. "Well, this is mine."

Lies came to Donald Jardine like flies to warm meat.

What could I do? To make matters worse, I saw that Elaine, Sonja's friend, had joined the crowd. Oh, how heart rending, I thought, if Elaine should tell Sonja Bumpky that I gave up my favourite shooter because I was a coward, a putz, a milk-soaked cocoa puff before the likes of Donald Jardine.

"Who goes first?" I said. I could hardly believe that those words had come from my mouth.

"You throw," he said. "No cheatsies."

I don't think Jardine would have known a cheatsie if it was thumped between his eyes by Mr. Brooks himself, but I nodded, paused, and tossed my beloved shooter a few feet into the hard-packed dirt of that part of the playground.

There is a definite strategy to chaseys. It involves an appreciation of distance, of the ability of both oneself and one's opponent, of terrain, gravity and in this game, when the noon bell would ring. I had never before, nor since that I can recall, wanted so desperately for that bell to ring and force a truce on a situation that expressed so clearly that old paradox, if I win I lose, if I lose I lose...

My plan was to string the game out until that blessed bell would haul even Donald Jardine away.

Unfortunately, gravity worked against me. Right off the bat, good old Babe Ruth Jardine tries to hit my shooter and shock of shocks, he comes so close I'd have had to do a real piece of slapstick to miss him. Still I tried. I made to aim like Mr. Exacto, hoping to hit a small rock beside his marble so that mine would ricochet off and roll down a small hill, far enough away that I was reasonably sure he couldn't hit me. Well, I hit the rock all right, but my shooter took an odd loop up the hill, rolled back down and clicked up, nudged really, nice and polite even, against Jardine's shooter as if they were long lost buddies.

The crowd was silent, like when Casey is strike two at bat, or Rocket Richard is flying down right wing in the final minute of the game, or maybe more like they'd have been at the St. Valentine's Day massacre, if they'd been there.

Jardine was staring at me and I got this deeply unpleasant picture of my head orbiting the schoolyard.

What he did was, he reached down and picked up both shooters and put them in his pocket.

It was a blasphemy so profound we were all speechless.

Some moments passed and then I said, "Give me my shooter back, Donald Jardine." And I said it in a voice that would have made even the wolf in my closet think twice. Unfortunately, Donald Jardine hadn't yet thought for the first time. He was still staring, his face hardening like mud in the sun and then he said, "Try it."

I didn't say anything, but I could feel my fists closing and that feeling in itself scared me more than Donald Jardine. I had never been in a fight.

Some more moments passed and then, abruptly, without warning, as if the crowd and the place and his own actions were too much for him, Donald Jardine pushed me hard in the chest, so that I fell back and bruised my tailbone on the hard ground. He broke through the kids standing around and ran toward the creek.

I was devastated at the loss of my shooter, but I swear to you that it wasn't me that went to Mr. Brooks and told him about Donald Jardine's extortion. No, I can tell you honestly and absolutely that it wasn't me. I was responsible for another, more sinister episode, but I'll tell you about that shortly.

Anyway, the next day, Mr. Brooks calls Donald Jardine to his office and Donald gets the strap, but bad this time, really bad, and he not only gets the strap which was said to be made out of dead snakes and which had been sold to Cole Creek Elementary hundred of years ago by evil gypsies, but he also gets hours and hours and days and years even of Mr. Brooks' voice thundering around his head and sending his spine to the far corners of the earth. For the first time in my marble-addled life, I felt sorry for Donald Jardine.

I never got my favourite shooter back and for a while it looked as if Mr. Brooks had successfully ended the recess dominion of Donald Jardine, when what happens, but Jardine sidles up to me in the cloakroom one morning and says:

"You fuckin' snitch. You're as good as dead, puke face, got it?"

I nodded in the hope that by agreeing with his prognosis, I could at least delay it.

"I'm dead," I said to Louie. "I'm done for. He'll eat me like cheese."

"But you didn't tell," implored Louie who, at that time at least, was a great believer in logic and natural justice.

"No, but I'm dead anyways, Louie. You can have my marbles. But be fair, though. Give some to Ricky and Ralph."

Louie got soppy and then so did I and I was about to tell him all about my bittersweet romance with Sonja Bumpky, I mean the jawbreaker and

everything, but I hadn't yet quite convinced myself that Jardine would carry through on his threat and so I didn't feel the need to confess, you know, *everything*. For his part, Louie offered me his pet toad Bugs, but I told him that Bugs wouldn't do me much good when I was dead—after all, he mostly just sat there and I only once got to see him eat flies. And so we thought about things, ate some of his sister's hoarded Halloween candy—possessions are meaningless to the condemned—then we walked arm in arm down to the pond below the bridge near his house where sometimes there were trout and we wondered in silence how life could have got so ugly so early.

A few days later, again in the cloakroom, Donald Jardine came up when I was taking off my gumboots, grabbed my shoulder, spun me around and proceeded to all but unscrew my nose from my face. It was all I could do not to cry out.

"Dead. Murdered. You're dead, asshole, right?"

I nodded with an enthusiasm born of despair and wondered if I had discovered the horrible truth to longevity. Nod when they hurt you, agree with them, acquiesce, let them see you sweat, let them know they've got you by the nose forever.

But now I had lead in my heart. I couldn't concentrate. Marbles held increasingly little significance. Things deteriorated between Sonja and me. We quit swapping fruit at lunch. Elaine's nose started getting ceiling-bound whenever I came by. She began hating me on Sonja's behalf. I'd messed up. I lived in terror; life was a spiderweb with me in the centre, trapped and shaking and to top it all off, arithmetic had entered my academic world and suddenly I found out that numbers are acrobats and I was supposed to follow them around like a ringmaster and predict what stunt they would pull next.

I was exhausted, flipped out, alienated, scared, and verging on cynicism. Finally, I came to my senses and I thought: go see Grandpa. I couldn't talk to my Dad because his human communication consisted mostly of telephone calls in the evening and strange grunts while eating. Plus he worked forever and smelt like machines. I couldn't talk to my mother, either; she was friendly enough, but she had a nasty habit of referring *boy* problems to Dad. God was generally unresponsive, so Grandpa kind of won by default.

My Grandpa and Grandma had a house on a hill in the forest above the lake, across from another forest and down from the mountains, the tops of which were always capped with snow. It was a big old house—in my eyes, a mansion, with so many rooms the whole family could stay there for Christmas.

My Grandpa was a good choice to talk to. He did this strange, unadult

thing and actually listened. You could tell he listened because he was a little hard of hearing and if he didn't quite catch what you said, he'd get you to repeat it, two or three times even, and he'd never ask those impossibly stupid questions like some adults would. You know, like what did you learn in school today, or, so what do you want to be when you grow up. You were always supposed to say something cute or adorable when you were asked questions like that, when really what you wanted to do right then and there was try out the latest swear word, loud and clear, and watch that old adult face get all puckered and stern and bug-eyed. But instead, you'd maybe pretend you hadn't heard and beat it on out of there, or if you were stuck, you'd say in your best boy voice, "We read *Dick and Jane at the Farm* today, Mrs. Lumbowski," or, "I think I want to be an astronaut, Aunt Sarah." Yuck. When my Grandpa asked a question, it was because he was interested in an honest, intelligent answer.

My Grandpa was retired and he spent a lot of his time working in the garden. Grandma would help him sometimes, but she had a disease that made her arms and legs stiffen up really bad, so she spent most of her time sitting in the house or on one of the garden benches reading, or knitting, or listening to music.

They also had a greenhouse and that's where he was when I went to visit him one day after Sunday school.

The greenhouse, on a sunny day, was hot and humid and smelt enticingly of ripe tomatoes, cucumbers, oranges, coriander, chives and thyme. There were lots of flowers, too, and on that particular day, as I recall, he was tending to the geraniums.

I rode my bike up from Mrs. Gallo's house where Sunday school was held. I hardly ever told him when I was dropping by. My surprise visits seemed to please him.

"Hi," I said.

"Have a cucumber," he said. "The oranges are too green."

"Can I wrap chives around it?"

"Sure."

I picked a small, pickle-size cucumber and trussed it with a handful of long green chives.

"Grandpa, you ever been in a fight?"

"You mean a fist fight?"

"Uh huh."

"A serious one?"

"Yup."

He was holding a trowel and he paused for a moment and stared up at the sky.

"Three," he said. "Serious ones."

"You win 'em?" I asked.

"Well, it's not always black and white like that. Fist fights are a pretty nasty way of settling things. You fight someone?"

"Donald Jardine's gonna kill me."

"That Bill Jardine's boy?"

"Uh huh."

"I see. He wants to beat you up, does he?"

"Yup. Bash my face in."

"Hmmm. And you don't want to tell the teacher about it."

"I can't, Grandpa. It wouldn't help anyway. He'll get me sooner or later."

He nodded. "I taught your Dad how to box. He teach you yet?"

"Nope."

"Well, if the teacher can't help you, you either learn how to box or you learn how to finangle."

"Finangle?"

"That's right. Finangling is where you use your brain to get out of a tight spot."

"Is it legal?" I asked.

He looked at me and laughed. "You're a straight shooter, you are," he said. "So what's it to be, boxing or finangling?"

"Can't I learn both?"

"Well, yes, but do you think that Jardine boy's gonna wait for you to learn to box?"

"I s'pose not. How 'bout I learn to finangle first and then box?"

"Good idea," he said. "So he's threatening to beat you up, eh?"

"Yup."

"Well, threats are a funny thing. He a smart boy?"

"Dumb as a bag of sap," I said.

"I see. Well, do you think he knows what'll happen to him if he beats you up?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, he'll get the strap, won't he."

"Uh huh."

"He might get suspended or even expelled."

"Maybe."

"Your Dad might have to go see his Dad and if I know young Bill Jardine, he'll lay a lickin' on that boy that'll make his bottom shine seven ways from heaven. They might even send him to reform school. Or worse," he added ominously.

"Wow," I said. "Is that finangling?"

"Yup."

We both ate some ripe cherry tomatoes with salt and then I rode home thinking, finangling sounds great but what if Jardine won't even talk to me? What if he just hauls off and hits me, right off the bat before I even get a chance to finangle?

I thought about it all night, it seemed. I thought about it so much that the alligators beneath my bed turned out to be stains in the tile and the wolf in the closet must have died of starvation because, when I started to get really angry, I went on in there, past my Mom's shoes and my Dad's suits, ready for a fight, but nothing was there but empty suitcases, some hat boxes and a couple of spare brooms. I was sure the bears and the boogie man were still around, but at least now I knew the house was safe.

It was towards the middle of the next week that inspiration came to me. Every Wednesday we had Show and Tell when three or four kids were supposed to bring something like a hand puppet or a picture or a Mexican jumping bean and tell about it in class.

Our art class had been working all week with clay and the table at the back of the classroom was filled with our attempts at ashtrays, cups and a number of ceramic distortions that bore little resemblance to any artifact of known human culture. Usually Show and Tell items were placed on that table, but this time, they were put on the table in the classroom next door, the Grade four classroom, Donald Jardine's classroom.

I went into that classroom at recess; I don't remember why, maybe I just wanted to poke around my enemy's territory, sniff out some clues. I was still convinced that finangling was the way to go, but I knew that there must be variations to these ancient arts and my Grandpa hadn't experienced first hand the particular beast that I had to deal with.

Anyway, there on the table were that day's objects of Show and Tell. There was an old baseball mitt, a Chatty Cathy doll, a black rock that looked like a lump of coal and an exquisitely painted egg, an incredible thing that caught my fancy to such an extent that for some moments the problems of my world disappeared and all my concentration was given to this delicate oval shell on which someone had painted in seemingly impossible detail an entire scene involving a boy and girl skating on a pond with a church in the background and a beautiful blue sky. The egg was sitting on a small silver pedestal and I remember feeling that here was something possibly even more precious than a favourite shooter.

I heard some kids talking in the hall outside the classroom and that's when it happened. I took the egg. Quick as a mink, I plucked it from the table, pedestal and all, and slipped it underneath my shirt. I spied a textbook at a nearby desk and snatched it up, held it in front of my stomach and walked out of the classroom. I suppose it was one of those minor miracles that the egg didn't break, but somehow I managed to

transport it to the cloakroom where I placed it, ever so carefully, in my lunch bucket.

The repercussions of my theft were immediate, dramatic and shocking.

"Did you hear?" Louie asked me, right after the recess bell.

"Hear what?" I asked, my face a portrait of innocence as befitted, I supposed, an apprentice practitioner of finangling.

"They had to take Sonja Bumpky to the infirmary. Someone stole her Hookerhanginghum Easter Egg. She was going to use it for Show and Tell. She was so upset she got sick."

My stomach began scampering about like a mad puppy. Somehow I kept my composure.

"Her Easter Egg?"

"Yup."

"Wow. They know who done it?"

"Nope, but it was in Donald Jardine's classroom."

I sat there as still as I could, my mind racing. I had unintentionally devastated the one and maybe the only girl I could ever love. Sure, lately things had been rough between us, but I was confident that after another jawbreaker or two, we'd be back together again, playing on the swings at recess, or colouring pictures when she came with her Mom to tea, or maybe even passing notes to each other in class. Now I had rent her world asunder.

"Do you think she might die?" I asked Louie with sudden horror.

" 'Course not. It was just a painted egg. Though it was an Easter Egg, so I s'pose Jesus Christ has somethin' to do with it."

So now Jesus Christ entered into my finangling. The complexity of it all left me feeling somewhat numb.

Anyway, Show and Tell was cancelled and we were all lectured about the sin of stealing and that Sonja's Ukrainian Easter Egg had been in her family for a long time and if anyone knew anything about it at all, they were to talk after class to Miss Joss or Mr. Brooks.

Later in the afternoon, Sonja actually returned to the classroom, her face still flushed from crying. I saw her later, by the bus, looking as if just about anyone she had ever known had just sort of got up and gone away. I thought my heart would burst, what was I to do, go up to Miss Joss and confess? Let her know my game plan? No, I'd end up getting strapped and it was certain that Sonja Bumpky wouldn't just never talk to me again, but for sure would hate me deeply for the rest of her life and maybe even put in a bad word about me to Jesus Christ, who I was starting to get pretty wary of anyway, what with his being alive and dead all at the same time. I decided to stick things through, come hell or high water.

I took the Easter Egg home and hid it in a shoebox filled with cotton underneath my bed. I was winding my courage up like a clock and at the beginning of the next week, after Donald Jardine came up and threatened me twice more in the cloakroom, I walked up to him.

"I gotta talk to you, Donald Jardine."

He turned and the surprise on his face was obvious.

"Beggin' ain't gonna help ya, puke face," he said.

I didn't flinch. It was now or never. "I could get you into big trouble, Donald Jardine," I said. "Expelled even. Or worse."

A cloud of uneasiness passed over his face.

"I'll bash you," he said.

"Then I'll have to tell Mr. Brooks that you stole Sonja Bumpky's Ukrainian Easter Egg," I said.

This was, for Donald Jardine, a new, unheard of dimension of evil and it took him a few moments to appreciate the full portent of what I was saying.

"I didn't steal nothin'," he said.

"You stole Sonja Bumpky's Easter Egg," I said. "I saw you. It was at recess. You stole it and I saw you. And then you told me not to say anything or you'd bash me. Lots of kids saw you threaten to bash me the last few days."

His face darkened. "I didn't steal nothin'," he said.

"Who're they gonna believe, Donald Jardine?" I asked. "I've never been strapped," I said. "I get A's on my Report Card. That Egg was in your classroom. Who're they gonna believe?"

"I was down at the creek havin' a smoke," he said.

"Sure," I said. "Right after you stole the Egg. You prob'ly hid it down there. If people were to look for it, it might even be found," I said ominously.

He looked at me, the bully draining from his face. "Don't," he said, finally. "Don't, O.K.? Please."

"Gimme my shooter back," I said.

"O.K.," he replied. "O.K."

"And don't lay a finger on me 'cuz otherwise you know what I'll do. You just leave me alone. I won't tell nobody about this, long as you leave me alone."

"O.K.," he said.

"Shake on it," I said.

We shook on it.

A couple of weeks later, when things had died down a bit, Sonja Bumpky was over with her Mom and we were drinking Kool-Aid and munching ginger snaps. We started talking about secrets.

"I've got a secret you'd like to know," I said.

"What?" she asked.

"Can't tell you," I said.

"Why?"

"Cuz I'd get killed," I said.

She was silent for a moment. "I'll tell you a secret too," she said.

"My secret's got to do with you," I said.

"My secret's got to do with you," she answered.

We were both getting pretty excited.

"You gotta promise, though, Sonja, you gotta promise to God and even to Jesus Christ that if I tell you my secret, you won't tell nobody. Nobody. Not even Elaine. Or I'll get murdered."

"O.K. Same here," she said.

"You go first," I said. "Girls first."

"You started it," she said and gave me a little kick under the table. "You go first."

"I know who stole your Easter Egg," I said.

Her jaw dropped. Her eyes sparkled. For a second I thought she'd go running to her Mom. Oh, what a gamble!

"But listen," I said quickly, "I can get it back for you. I can. But it's got to be real secret, right, or my life's on the line. O.K.?"

She thought about it for a moment, her face a little ashen, then said, "O.K. Who was it?"

"Donald Jardine," I said.

"I knew it," she said quietly.

"You can't tell," I said. "If you do he'll prob'ly knife me."

"How can you get it back?" she asked.

"Marbles," I said mysteriously and she nodded. "You can just say it turned up in your desk. That'll be that."

She reached across the corner of the table and squeezed my hand. "Thanks," she said.

I blushed and put another ginger snap on her plate. "What's your secret?" I asked.

This time she blushed. "It was me who told Mr. Brooks about Donald Jardine taking marbles and treats from kids' lunches," she said. "Elaine told me how he took your favourite shooter. I couldn't stand it. I was so mad."

Guilt and elation took a strange parallel course up the back of my spine, but elation won. We continued holding hands. Finangling, I thought, is a hard science, harder than marbles, but it definitely has its rewards.

John Donlan

And On

Enduring days as closed to love as banks
our inner gestures continue unfolding
invisible as a dissolving jawbreaker's
imagined colours. Unpeopled landscapes

reinvent themselves out of the
vacuum of flesh cloven
from flesh like lichen spattered on tree bark
too tough for wind to blow its blue spirit

lamp out. Years eat themselves like dragons
giving birth to a flow of events
that seem to flicker
like actors in an ageing, much-loved film

burning in the light that creates them.
Awake and living we turn out heads
into the photon spray as if it were time
we welcomed, breathing in the future's scent.

G. Ébinyō Ogbowei

My Courage Crumbles

Here the ancestors come in booby masks
Singing songs of climbing servants
Dying on the twenty-eighth marble step.

Here the ancestors walk on sun waves
Repeating the viper's silent words
In the Canon of the Mass.

But I, at the edge of a shriked dream,
Repeat in rainstorm palace
A litany of bones.

I spend my time on a pillar of penance.
Catching Braye's parrot
Far out on the tender branch of hope.

I am like Okoko
Drowning in a whirlpool,
Calm in the salt-green coolness of turbulent water.

No. My courage falters
On infant feet,
Stretching out the years

On an unmade bed of faeces.
The flies gather in my mind
Initiating the ritual cleansing dance.

My courage crumbles
Like a cracked waterpot
At the mere touch of the hand.

Contributors

Mark Bastien used to live in Paris, France, but has apparently moved. He should contact Prism international at his earliest convenience.

Svetlana Boym emigrated from the Soviet Union in 1981. She is assistant professor of Comparative Literature at Harvard. Her play, *The Woman Who Shot Lenin* won a special award from the Harvard Office for the Arts, and had a student production in the Loeb Theatre in March 1988.

Robert Blake is a Vancouver photographer.

Jessie Bright teaches English at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. She has translated short stories by Vitaliano Brancati, Carlo Sgorlon, and Mirella Ducceschi, which have appeared in literary reviews both in the U.S. and in Canada. Her translation of Sgorlon's novel *The Wooden Throne* was published by Italica Press of New York on 1988.

Stephen Brockwell recently published *The Wire in Fences,* (Balantino Book Publishing, Toronto). He works with geographic information systems at Statistics Canada in Ottawa.

Allison Brown lives and writes in Memphis Tennisee. *Mrs. Downs Goes to the Dentist* is her first submission of work to an editor.

Borys Bunchuk lives in Chernivtsi, Ukraine, and is a professor of Ukrainian Literature at the Chernivtse State University. In 1989 he was accepted into the professional State Writers Union, and may write full-time if he desires.

Alison Burch lives, writes, and does translation in Ville St. Laurent, Quebec.

Marilyn Cay lives in Tisdale, Saskatchewan. She has placed poems in numerous print and broadcast media, including, CBC, *Canadian Author and Bookman, Cross-Canada Writer's Magazine,* and *NeWest Review.*

J.W. Caughlin is 43 years old, and a husband of one, father of two, and teacher of many. He and his family have lived in Quesnel since 1978.

Jan Conn's most recent book is *The Fabulous Disguise of Ourselves,* (Vehicule Press, Montreal 1986). She is currently working on a volume titled *South of the Tudo Bem Cafe.* She is also currently working on the systematics of malaria vectors in Western Venezuela.

John Donlan is a poetry editor with Brick Books in London, Ontario. He has poems currently appearing in *New American Writing, Canadian Literature, The Capilano Review,* and *Dandelion.* "And On" is from a book of poems titled *Baysville*

Robbie Newton Drummond will be featured in a collection of Montreal poetry, *Sounds New.* Poems have recently appeared in *Zymergy, The Medical Post, Poetry Toronto, Freelance,* and the Quarry Press anthology *Poets 88.* He has a poem accepted for publication in *The Fiddlehead.*

Mirella Ducceschi took her degree in chemistry from the University of Rome in 1946, then specialized in post doctoral work in social psychology. She has published in this field and has also done some literary translation from English into Italian. Her latest book, entitled *Manager E No* (1987, Franco Angeli) is a study of the contemporary corporate world.

Tom Eadie lives, breathes, and writes in Sackville, New Brunswick. He is a big fan of Bill Reid.

Cornelia Hoogland has published many of the poems in her first manuscript of poetry, titled *The Wire-Thin Bride,* in Canadian journals. Most recently in *Event, Arc, Dandelion, CV2, The Antigonish Review,* the League of Canadian Poets' anthology *Garden Varieties,* and *Go Dutch Gone:* A Dutch-Canadian Anthology.

Kathy Mac lives in Halifax. Her work has appeared in many venues and formats. The three poems published here are from an as yet unpublished piece entitled *Excerpts from a Trip Diary—Ontario 1988.*

Chris Mansell has published in many literary magazines in Australia, and overseas, and has given many live and recorded readings of her work. A member of the Sydney Poets Union, she was Secretary 1978/79 and latterly Treasurer and was a member of the Australian Copyright Council. In 1978 she founded the literary magazine Compass which she edited until 1987. She is currently working on a collection of stories called *Walking to Antarctica.*

Sara McDonald's work has appeared in *NeWest Review, Grain,* and *Dinosaur Review,* as well as several recent anthologies. She used to live in Saskatoon, but now she lives in Montreal.

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W.P. (Peter) Ormshaw has returned to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, after living and working in Ontario, the Middle East and the United Kingdom. He divides his time between (in ascending order of financial reward) poetry, freelance journalism and cutting grass on a golf course.

Pedro Salinas is a poet who writes mainly in Spanish.

Jeffrey D. Stephaniuk lives in Saskatoon with his wife Daria. His interest in Ukrainian Literature dates back to 1987, when he spent 6 weeks in Ukraine. He has a background in Canadian Literature, especially poetry.

Kirk H. Wirsig works as a lawyer in Vancouver and is a UBC English Lit and Creative Writing Department alumnus. His poems and short stories have appeared in the *Antigonish Review, Event, The Fiddlehead, Grain, Rampike* and *Miscellaneous Z.*

Caroline Woodward was raised on a homestead in the farming community of Cecil Lake, 40 km northeast of Fort St. John, B.C. She writes poetry, fiction, scripts and arts journalism. *Disturbing the Peace,* her first collection of short fiction, will be published by Polestar Press in Spring 1990. *Imagining Autobiography* and fiction forthcoming in the *Malahat Review, This Magazine,* and others will be included.

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Poetry

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