PRISM *international*

MARCH 1985

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PRISM international FICTION CONTEST WINNERS

First Place - $1000.00:	Janice Kulyk Keefer, *The Paris-Napoli Express* (p. 25, this issue).
Second Place - $500.00:	Bill Gaston, *Gold* (to appear in 23:4).
Third Place - $250.00:	Audrey Thomas, *The Dance* (p. 7, this issue).

Janice Kulyk Keefer of Churchpoint, Nova Scotia, has a total of nine stories appearing in North American periodicals in the next few months. Last year she won first place (poetry) and second place (prose) in the annual competition of the Nova Scotia Writers' Federation.

Bill Gaston, of Vancouver, was short-listed for the Seal First Novel Competition in 1983 and has fiction set to appear in the *Malahat Review*, and poems in *Ariel* and the *Wascana Review*.

Audrey Thomas, well-known to readers of Canadian literature, lives in Vancouver, where she has just completed her tenth book. *The Dance* is taken from a new collection developed on the theme of Greek dancing.

Honourable Mentions:

Elin Elgaard	*On Dancing Ledge* (p.48, this issue)
Keath Fraser	*13 Ways of Listening to a Stranger* (to appear in 23:4)
W.P. Kinsella	*For Zoltan, Who Sings*
Irie Nakadate	*Bruja*
Mildred Tremblay	*Dark Forms Gliding*
Lorraine Vernon	*Folk Music*
Carol Anne Windley	*A Star Seen From Earth*

We wish to thank our sponsors, the Canada Council for its Promotions Grant and the Koerner Foundation for its assistance with the prize money. We owe a special thank-you to Jack Hodgins, our final judge.

Audrey Thomas

The Dance

This past summer, at the Disco Romantika, I realized that I am what used to be referred to as "on the shelf." Temporarily, let us hope, for what is "on the shelf" now can presumably be taken off at some later date, like a jar of preserves sealed up in August to be enjoyed in the chilly days of winter. It is then that we reach down one of these jars and what bursts upon the tongue, then, is it not all the more astonishing for being sampled out of season? Does it not recall the very essence of those bee-laden, scented days? Or so I tell myself, deriving a little comfort from this pretty metaphor. Unfortunately, the real facts of fruit shut up in a jar recall another expression, one of those kiss/slap remarks made by one person, usually a woman, about another: "She's very well-preserved for her age." I won't think about that or about "shelf life" or about items in supermarkets labelled "Best before _____" with a date stamped in.

Instead, let us get back to the Disco Romantika. I can hardly get away from it, lying here in the darkness with the sliding door to the balcony partly open and the sounds from the disco coming faint but insistent across the quarter mile (if that) which separates it from our bungalow.

She works hard for the money
(she works hard for the money)
She works hard for her honey
(she works hard for her honey)

The coloured lights revolve in their semicircles, blue/red/green/yellow, set in a bar like some strange traffic signal. (If red means stop and green means go what do you suppose that blue means?) The lights leave rich transparent circles, like licked-down lollipops, on the dancers, the marble dance floor, the jetting fountains whose spouts are the gilded mouths of baby angels or of Eros, their faces turned up towards the starry sky. For the Disco Romantika is open-air and that is one of the interesting things about it — all that changing and shifting light, all that motion and commotion down below while the stars carry on their fixed

dance up above.

"Pomantika," my daughter scoffs, the first time we pass it on our way into the town. It is daylight and the sign is not lit up. From the outside, in daylight, the place doesn't look very interesting at all. A couple of brown hens are pecking in the dirt just outside the entrance and we can hear somebody inside sweeping up bits of broken crockery.

"They just wrote a Greek 'R'," I say, "you can see how easily it could happen. It was probably too expensive to get fixed. Or maybe one of the legs dropped off."

"Hmmph," she says. She is not in the best of moods.

We are walking into town in order to have a look around, in order to explore, in order to find out about bus schedules to some of the villages we have read about, in order to escape from BUNGALOWS LIMENOS where we have the misfortune to be staying. My daughter is in a scoffing mood. We have left a perfectly wonderful island where we were having a perfectly wonderful time – she has already forgotten about the flies, the wasps who hovered greedily over her breakfast of yoghurt and honey, the heat so terrific that we banned all active verbs, such as "walk" after eleven a.m. – to come to this pretentious, ridiculous, *boring* place and all because her mother felt she should see more of Greece than one small island in the southern Aegean. And as she has so rightly pointed out, there is nothing very Greek about Limenos Bungalows except the manager, the waiters and the chambermaids. Really we could be anywhere that boasts blue water and a sandy beach.

"Let's try the disco some night soon," I say, trying to cheer her up.

She shrugs her shoulders. "Maybe."

We flew up here, after a thirty-seven hour ferry ride, after a night at a pension in Athens, and I think now this was a mistake, the flying up. We are going back from Kavalla to Athens by bus but we should have done it the other way around. The plane went up; an hour later it came down. A combination Pegasus and Trojan Horse it disgorged its army of tourists and swallowed up another. She has no sense of how the landscape changes as one moves north or why, as we sped along in a taxi from the airport to the place where we would board a ferry to this island, she felt that "it doesn't look like Greece." Her Greece has been either the noisy bustle of Athens or the landscape of that other island, its hills so sparsely tufted they remind one from a distance of worn-out upholstery, its pastel houses clinging to the hills like barnacles. Not this – not all this *green*, not field after field of corn and hibiscus blossoms and frangipani. I thought it looked like California.

"Well it sure doesn't look like *Greece*," she repeated, "I can't believe this."

The ferry, enormous, a car-ferry, was crowded with holiday-makers, none of them speaking English, but there was an old Barbara Stanwyck movie on the T.V. in the lounge. Barbara was managing oil rigs (not inappropriately, I thought, as they are drilling for oil up here in the northern Aegean) and talking back to men in that sexy voice she has. We bought iced coffees and took them up on deck, where we sat watching the island come towards us. I like going places by boat — I suppose it has something to do with "crossing the waters" which to me is always symbolic as well as real. At first the boat is very large and whatever you are heading for invisible or just a smudge on the horizon. Gradually the smudge becomes larger and larger until there is a moment when the boat and the island appear to be the same size. That is a wonderful moment, for me. It is like the moment before the tide turns, when the whole universe seems to be in balance. The island is there all right, it's real, you didn't get on the wrong boat by mistake (see everyone up here is breathing its name — Bulgarians, Yugoslavians, Germans, Greeks, Italians) but you don't, yet, have to do anything, gather up packs, check for wallet or purse, put away the *Blue Guide*. One of the delights of this summer has been the discovery that this daughter who looks for all the world like the epitome of "The Pepsi Generation" or "Gidget goes to Greece", loves to travel on boats. I thought she might get impatient but I was wrong. She has decided that she likes the whole sense of "getting there" and is willing to wait for "there" while she enjoys the voyage. It has created a great bond between us. As we approach the island and begin our descent to the car deck we notice posters advertising various discos in and around the port. One of these is for Disco Romantika although we don't realize that until later.

Bungalows Limenos is beautiful to look at. A broad asphalt road curves down from the Reception building towards a long beach of white sand. Branching off from this main road are small paths covered in pine needles. These lead to various "bungalows" which are really a series of beautifully designed rooms, with bath and balcony, usually attached to one another in groups of four. There are flowers everywhere and hedges and long-needled pines and low stone walls. The hedges glisten and the smell of the flowers is almost overpowering, like a florist shop.

"It looks as though it has been raining," my daughter says as we step around a few puddles, following the boy who has insisted on carrying our luggage. We had just come from an island where it had not rained for five months.

"I expect the gardeners have been watering the flowers," I say. It was certainly cooler here, pleasantly so. I could actually imagine doing some exploring, taking walks, climbing to the acropolis up above the town. And the room was beautiful, spacious, with a marble floor, soft gray and white, comfortable beds, a real bathroom with a real tub instead of

a communal shower and toilet with goats peering in the window. This was style, this was class. We looked up the times for meals (we were required to take half-board) and then, as the navigator who had managed to get us from way down in the south to way up in the north without incident or accident or lack of portable property, I took a nap while my daughter went to the beach for a swim.

After that first dreamless sleep things went rapidly downhill. The "attractive dining room" turned out to be more like a dining hall in some enormous summer camp. The place was full of families with young children, all of them under twelve. Because the walls of the dining room were concrete the din was terrible. Cacophony is a good Greek word. Have you ever been to a big indoor swimming pool on a Saturday afternoon? The effect was something like that. And all the grown-ups talking away as well, talking loudly. The headwaiter, who was dressed very curiously in an outfit that made him look Mexican, not Greek, showed us to a table and commandeered a waiter to attend us. He did this, not by snapping his fingers but by pursing up his lips and making a long kissing sound and then calling the man's name. Most of the waiters were young but ours was not. He spoke to us in German. I said that we did not speak German, we spoke English. It soon became obvious that his English was very limited and he would prefer it if we spoke Greek or German. During our stay he spoke to us in German whenever he saw us and his manner seemed to indicate that he believed we really could speak German and were only trying to make his life more difficult than it already was. I told him he could speak in Greek and if he spoke slowly ("sigha, sigha") I would probably understand. For reasons best known to himself he didn't want to do this and stumbled along in English. Never mind, his descriptions of the menu wouldn't have made much difference. In spite of the brochure which called our attention to the "international dishes" and "haute cuisine" which it was going to be our delight to sample, the food was terrible. *Terrible.* With all the abundance of fruit and vegetables, of lamb, of everything delicious, on the island, it was a perverse miracle that the food could be so bad. We ended up calling it *bas* cuisine and then, because the entree at dinner was so often a big chunk of stringy mutton in gravy, resembling nothing so much as a lump of soft rock plucked out of a mudslide, with mud-looking vegetables to accompany it, we began to refer to it as baa baa cuisine. The comical part was that the waiters, who, as we learned later, had all been to "tourist school," bent low over fake-silver platters or soup tureens, serving or ladling out this awful food in a manner that would do credit to a five-star restaurant anywhere in the world. That was the comical part. What was un-funny was that we had to pay for two meals a day whether we ate them or not.

"I can't eat this," my daughter said.

"You'll eat it," I said. "We'll both eat it."

"I can't." She pushed the food around her plate but really only ate an enormous slice of watermelon for dessert.

"Maybe it's an off day," I suggested. (But alas it wasn't.)

The next day plunged us even deeper into gloom. Clouds had been building up from about ten o'clock on and by two-thirty it was pouring. The rain never let up except briefly, around five p.m., and then it began again. Our umbrella was at our friends' in Athens, along with things marked "needed for London." And it was chilly. We lay on our beds reading trash books and thinking up silly ways to get kicked out of the place. Breakfast had been the Greeks' equivalent of Tang plus slices of cake or bread and coffee. It cost sixty-five drachmas extra to have an egg and although when our waiter said "drei minuti?" I shook my head and held up five fingers, he came back almost immediately with two very soft-boiled eggs, the kind neither of us can stand, the kind you give to babies, dipping in little pieces of bread when they are first beginning to eat solid food. It was sixty-five drachmas extra for yoghurt and on an island famous for its honey we were given imported packets of jam or marmalade to have with our bread and cake. For lunch we ate fruit and nuts we had brought with us and then it began to rain. We could not face dinner, in the rain, in the dining room. I had seen in the brochure — not that I trusted it anymore — that there was a "taverna" somewhere on the grounds. At eight o'clock I decided we should try and find it. My daughter was surprised.

"I thought you said we had to eat the meals here because we can't get out of paying for them."

"There are times," I said, "when morale is more important than money," and off we went into the rain.

We found it — we were the only customers — and ate a good meal of souvlaki, tzatziki, chips and wine. A family ran the place and the oldest boy said that the disco was very good, we should try it. He also told us the sun would shine the next day and it did. We spent most of the day on the beach and discovered, with the return of warm weather, that tables had been laid in the courtyard outside the dining hall. The food was still awful and we had to pay sixty-five drachmas extra to get feta cheese and olives on our "Greek" salad but the noise level was improved by eating out in the open.

It really was a "family" resort. There were one or two honeymoon couples and a trio of English girls in their twenties, two very pretty and one very plain. But mostly there were families. On the beach I watched families, father, mother and one or two kids, talking, playing, exchang-

ing information and commands the way families do and I felt very strange. There is no rule that says a family has to have a father, but there is a strange convention that with families on holidays, unless the holiday consists of going to the family cottage, a father should be in evidence. Even if it is actually the mother who makes all the plans and reservations, does the packing, cancels the milk and arranges for the mail, even if it is really the mother who is *in charge*, the father should be there. We were not a honeymoon couple nor young secretaries on a holiday — we did not somehow "fit in." I had not felt this before in Greece. Indeed, five years before I had been on a beach in Crete with not just one but three daughters and no one had thought it strange. Everyone was very friendly to us — *Kalli-méra*, good morning, they would call when they saw us coming. I wore a black bathing suit then; perhaps they thought I was a widow. And of course I am talking about Greeks, and particularly about Greek women. The older ones knew a great deal about young widows — they have watched their husbands and sons lined up against the walls and shot. Now I wear a turquoise bathing suit and of course there are no Greeks or none that I can see. On this beach I simply do not count. It is not just the language barrier — the family next to me that first morning were speaking French and my French isn't bad — it was another kind of barrier. These people did not *need* anyone else, unless it were another family with children who would play together happily with theirs. There was one teenager, a beautiful Italian girl, but she was with her family *and* a friend. I could almost hear my daughter thinking what she was too polite to say aloud. "At this time, on the other island, I would have been _____." For she had made friends quickly and easily there, with a group of Greek boys and girls, and had had a wonderful time.

And so we began to walk into the town, to explore, to climb the Acropolis, to take buses to small villages. One day, in the local museum, I pointed out to my daughter a Roman statue of Nemesis, or Fate. She had wings still but her head was missing and one arm.

"Look," I said, "even Fate is not impervious to Fate. There is a destiny which shapes our ends, etcetera."

"Ha ha."

Advertisements for discos were everywhere. Some offered air-conditioning, some beauty contests, one a Friday night watermelon-eating contest. Still we did not go, but walked along the beach after dinner or sipped ouzo outside at the small taverna we had discovered that first, rainy, evening. Two very talented local men sang songs in Greek. Sometimes one or the other of the young waiters from the Bungalows joined us.

"You go to disco?" they asked. "You no like?"

And so one night we get up our courage and do it.

"We don't have to stay," we assure one another as we remember to take the flashlight, the key, some money.

"We can just look around, have an ouzo; no need to actually *hang around* if we don't like it." As we walk up the hill I think how beautiful she is, my daughter, and how tonight her hair is exactly the same colour as the waxing moon.

The music draws us — Come Come Come Come ("Travel the world and the Seven Seas/Everybody's lookin' for something") and we go in under the arch and the comical neon sign — *Disco Pomantika* — up the stairs to the balcony above the dance floor. Where the bar is. Where we will be able to observe all the goings on. We sit down at a small wrought iron table with a glass top.

What is probably tacky and gimcrack by day — silly little tables, wrought iron painted white, with all their rococo decorations, the fountains and the fairy lights — is utterly magical on this summer night. It is early yet, by Greek standards, only about ten-thirty and not very many people are dancing. Two little girls in white dresses, the older teaching the younger to do some steps, are having a grand time moving in and out of the circles of light. We order ouzo and water. The song changes to "Last Night a D.J. Saved My Life" and my daughter says rather wistfully that she would like to dance but doesn't like going to a place like this without a partner. Immediately a partner appears, a very tall thin waiter who has sat with us several times at the little taverna and is a very serious young man. He is thinking of joining the Communist Party; he believes there would be a more equal distribution of wealth if the Communists were in power. Whenever we ask him what a song means he always replies "is a very sad song."

"Are all the songs sad in Greece?" I ask him.

"Oh yes, all."

I sit above the dance floor sipping my ouzo, watching the people — there are more and more dancers on the floor now — wanting to dance myself but not sure who would ask me. When my daughter comes back from dancing with the tall thin waiter she sits watching the dancers with a critical eye and suddenly says, "That couple are at the Bungalows. How old do you think they are?" She is talking about a very thin blonde couple who are dancing up a storm in the middle of the floor. We've seen them on the beach and coming in and out of the dining room with a little blonde boy of about seven. The man wears mirror-faced sunglasses all the time, even at meals, and he is wearing them tonight, as well as very tight red pants with black stripes and a black tee-shirt. She is wearing a Mickey Mouse tee-shirt and a mini-skirt.

"I think they are about thirty-two," I say.

She suggests that they are having a "last fling at youth." I tell her I will remind her of that remark when she is thirty-two.

The young Greek waiters from the resort hover around our table like bees. My daughter frowns, chooses one and descends once more to the marble dance floor. The man who has served us drinks and seems to be general bartender/waiter for the whole establishment stops to ask if I want anything.

"Where you from?" He leans on the rail and looks down at my daughter, dancing.

"Canada."

A big smile. "Where Canada?"

"You mean where *is* it or where in Canada?"

"Where in? What city?"

"Vancouver."

Another big smile.

"I been. Four times. On boats."

When my daughter comes back this time we introduce ourselves.

"Don't you ever get a chance to dance?" I say. It seemed to me that he had looked longingly at the dancers.

"Too busy. Later." Then he looks straight at my daughter. "You dance me? Later?"

"Sure," she says.

"We aren't staying long," I remind her.

"Oh yes."

I want to dance. It's horrible music, pushy, insistent urban music which has nothing to do with this island, its history and culture. And the words to many of the songs are nasty, don't bear thinking about. And yet. I could go down and dance by myself. I like to dance but I have the most horrible feeling that my daughter would not like it, that it would embarrass her to see her mother out there alone on the dance floor. There are a few people over thirty here but they are parts of families. A pretty French mother is dancing with her young son, the father with the baby sister who keeps trying to catch the circles of light. I begin to feel like a chaperone or better still one of those Spanish *duennas* who followed well-bred Spanish girls around. All I need is a large mantilla, some jewels on my arthritic fingers and an aristocratic nose.

The bartender comes by again and sets down two glasses of ouzo.

"I give," he says.

"Oh no, no thank you."

"You no like? What you want?"

"No no, I like. I like very much. But ouzo very strong. Too much ouzo and . . ." I open my hands, let them fall on the table.

He nods, serious.

"Yes, very strong. I like dance to your daughter. Later."

I look up at him.

"How old are you?"

"How old you think?"

He is older than the young waiters but not much older.

"Twenty-four."

He smiles and nods.

"My daughter," I say, very carefully, in my best *duenna* manner, "is fifteen." I sit up a bit straighter, raise my chin, pull my mantilla a little tighter around my head.

We look at one another. "I a good man," he says and I believe him.

She does not dance with him that night or the next — but on the third night he dances with her and she decides that even though he is as serious as the tall, thin waiter (who is "too serious" in her eyes, too self-righteous) and his English is not as good as the crewcut waiter who is studying business administration in Austin, Texas, that she likes him. (We are late coming to the disco that night because we have taken a bus trip to a place called Aliki Beach, where we swam and ate grilled fish and walked around the remains of a palace built by an ancient queen, a palace built to honour Eros. She also kept a harem of young boys and I can't help wondering at what age she took up this interesting hobby.)

After the third night my daughter doesn't really dance with anyone else. He introduces us to his friends when they come to the disco. We smile and exchange greetings. Sometimes they send us over drinks. I still want to dance but have accepted that this is not the right time or place to do so. And so I sip my ouzo and observe while the dancers fling out their limbs in all directions and the yellow moon moves slowly across the sky like a snail in a golden shell.

And tonight she has gone up there alone, with my permission. Mikhalis, that is his name, has promised to walk her home after he finishes his work. And anyway, if one is on the shelf one might as well *be* there, not half on, half off. I worry a bit. I brought her on this trip to learn about Greece. Is Donna Summers Greece? Michael Jackson? The Disco Romantika? No more Greece than Limenos Bungalows. ("Travel the world and the Seven Seas/Everybody's lookin' for something/Sweet dreams are made of this.") But let me tell you a story.

Five and a half years ago I spent a winter in Athens. In the pension where I was staying there was an Australian woman about fifty, a wonderful woman, very handsome, very intelligent, who had a knack, no, more that that, a *gift* for travelling around the world and meeting new and interesting people. It was her great desire that winter to learn some of the Greek dances, the old ones, and so she joined an organization called The Lyceum of Greek Women. As far as I could figure out this was a cross between the Junior League and an historical society and one of the things they did was to teach the old dances or hire teachers to do so and also sponsor performances every Thursday nights at the Aliki Theatre. I didn't join the dance class because I was already, two days a week, struggling in the labyrinth of the Greek language as well as trying to finish a novel. But my friend Beryl joined and she enjoyed it very much.

In April the Lyceum of Greek Women had their annual dinner dance and Beryl was urged to come and bring some guests. It was to be a gala affair, at the George V Hotel, and she invited me and an Australian couple who were also staying at our pension. It was a strange evening. Heavily-corseted ladies in dresses which seemed to come from another era (what my mother would have called "dinner dresses" in the forties) with elaborate hairdos, hair often bleached blonde or dyed with henna, the same women one sees at Zonars or Floca on a winter afternoon, spooning up hot chocolate and gossiping with one another, biting into pastries, licking the cream from the edges of their mouths, these women had dragged along reluctant husbands in elegant business suits, gold cuff links showing just at the edge of jacket sleeves, boredom showing too as they tapped cigarettes on the lids of gold cigarette cases.

There was an emcee, a young Greek comedian/singer in a sequined dinner jacket. He told jokes in Greek and kept tripping over his microphone cable. There was a band which played fox trots, tangos and two-steps and these well-to-do ladies and gentlemen pushed each other around the ballroom in a desultory fashion. And then, towards midnight, the band suddenly played the first few notes of what has become the Greek national dance, the "syrtaki" and the room fell silent.

Da dah/da dah/da da da da dah. You know it. Anthony Quinn made it famous in *Zorba the Greek*. The women got up first. A few joined hands and began to dance, then more, then more. They laughed and their eyes shone like the eyes of young girls. They called to the men Come! Come! and at first the men resisted, looked away, drummed on the table with their fingertips, lit another cigarette.

But their feet wouldn't stay still; their feet betrayed them. Under the tables their feet in those elegant leather shoes began to trace out the old steps and soon the men, too, were up and dancing, joining the

ever-increasing line. A group of women rushed over to our table. Come! Come! Beryl was all right, of course, but I protested I didn't know how. "Doesn't matter!" they cried, and it didn't. I joined the dance as the music whirled us faster and faster and the George V ballroom became an enormous village square.

I've never forgotten it. I've never forgotten the feet of those men, the feet that would deny gold and silk and the years that stood between Athens and the country festivals these people had enjoyed when they were young. And the same thing will happen tonight at the Disco Romantika. At about two o'clock (we've stayed late, we've seen it happen) Mikhalis will shut off the tape loop and put on a record of the old dances. He knows them, all the young people know them. That is the amazing thing. "Come," they will say to my daughter, "come come come come." And with her arms around the shoulders of strangers who have suddenly become friends, she too will join the dance.

A STRANGE CITY

When I left the room
I took a crooked corridor,
and knew I could never retrace my steps.
What a strange city this is,
despite its great, flapping flags,
its roar and its glare.
Near to where
the earth meets sky,
and a vast water cuts across,
part river, part unending rain.
Here I've lost myself
like a child put in my care,
the dense drops drumming from sodden flags
that I'm not me anymore,
as I wander the corridors
through all the city's
baffling customary ways.

AT SIXTY

Shadows stand
in the street
waiting for me.

But I've gone beyond
their high noon,
walking without myself
in an undetermined night.

As long as daylight's fate
still shines upon my hat,
my shoes throughout the night
are neither swift nor slow:
my feet are not in them.

translated from the Hungarian by Jascha Kessler
with Maria Körösy

ALL THE OLD GOLD

All the old gold of my hair
Passes into grayness, meekly.
Do not pity! All came fair,
All inside has merged in singing.

Singing, distances have merged
In the rural chimney's moans.
Lord God! The soul has emerged:
My main and most secret purpose.

THE WAR, THE WAR!

The war, the war! The incense at the altars,
The chirring spurs.
I care not an inch for the Czar's
Hard reckonings, the people's wars.

It seems that on a slightly cracked tightrope
I am a small dancer to tiny tunes.
A shadow of someone's shade, I am the lunatic
Of two dark moons.

translated from the Russian by Nina Kossman

ROOSTER

The rising sun beyond the top of the pines
Is like a picture scroll of popular music
Calls to mind a line
From the mythical accounts –
"Collect the birds of sudden darkness and make them sing,
bring the Goddess out"
Rooster that walks
Rooster that sleeps
Upon observing, the powerful figure undoubtedly holds
Slime, slender tubes and feathers collecting
Gold claws and dynamos
Imitations
On the earth of straw and annihilation of living things
The somersaulting cock
Tells the time
Rushes at the water's edge sway
And the jar of jam breaks
Spring that quivers in the diaphragm
Hairpins fall
From the jet black hair of mothers and daughters
Make ready the cooking knives and camphor
Inside a hut dreamed while napping
Ready the chamber pot for father on the moss
A meditative darkness
The blacksmith's bellows (womb) contracts
Chicken pecking at vegetables
Chicken that lays an egg
Is this a world of grace –
In the cornfields
On the icy peaks
"The men are fighting far away"
Brightness of the sparks
Without looking up at the empty sky

Like a hen
Strangled
"The women straddle an open grave and give a difficult birth"
Things abundantly dispersed
Types of seeds and dried leaves
And now some feathers
Like amulets
Dance lightly up in the watery sky of evening

from ELEGY

(for Junzaburo Nishiwaki)

1.

My world is a tea house on a small slope
I eat clear noodles
And lie down
An angelica tree
Pieces of teacups tossed in the street
Human genitals
I think
Of eternally sad existence
(The perineum is sad)
Going along the banks of a spring brook
"Correspondence"
"A wren makes a nest on a green branch"
Beneath the mud and froth
"The turtle's head is shut inside its shell"
This is karma
Crossing the flow of consciousness in the brain
Though the poet purifies himself
At the summit of a windblown rock
"I exist"

3.

Nature disperses
Things which are bound
And binds together
Things dispersed
"In the folds of a red silk cloth
A carp is captured alive"
At that moment people hear the voice of supremacy
Oh, "papai"
Returning to the fields
Of impermanence
Beyond the sedge

The farmer has a hand of golden impurity
He may be the father of "reality"
You arrive at the top of the cliff
Like the tips of pampas grass and the moon
Not "a relationship of perspective"
If "lined up and juxtaposed"
You will go far over rivers and fields
Is woman the mother of "association"
You — see with your own eyes
"World at once being and emptiness"
Clematis clinging to the underbrush
The rooster crows
From the gloomy dawn of this watermill
Little brothers and sisters are born
On rare occasions
A traveler is born

translated from the Japanese by Eric Selland

Janice Kulyk-Keefer

The Paris-Napoli Express

Jerry was still belching champagne and dreaming of Sheba when they entered the Gare de Lyon. He knew his legs were moving and that Teddy had the valise. And he also knew in some tight corner of his brain, that if he weren't to arrive in Marseilles on time Sheba would have left him forever, or rather, let him go, like a tennis ball that had lost its bounce. So he was visibly, palpably grateful to Teddy for carrying the valise and wrestling directions and information from the seedy porters; and furious that the sod had gotten him drunk over petit-fours when he'd known how crucial this arrival in Marseilles would be. All during his stay he had talked of nothing else: in cafés, galleries, and lecture halls: in the gardens of the Palais Royal, under the portico of the Madeleine, and in front of every one of the manifold crucifixions and martyrdoms in the museums: he'd talked of Sheba almost in defence against this pressure of culture and Catholicism that weighed on him as heavily as the pastry and the custard cream from that obsessive tea. And Teddy hadn't stopped him — much: Teddy was acquainted with Sheba; in fact they may even have been lovers once, when Paris had been new to Sheba and she'd needed the right sort of apartment in which to stay. Teddy was in Le Marais, in a seventeenth-century *hôtel particulier* which had not been tarted up by any inflated Iranian heiress. It would have been Sheba's type of place at the time: almost certainly they had been lovers.

There were two high steps up; to steady himself Jerry focussed on the little placard stapled to the side of the car: "Paris-Napoli Express." He was sober enough to know that he wanted one saying "Paris-Lyon-and whatever after"; he had to make the connection at Lyon. "Sure, sure," he seemed to hear Teddy saying, in a voice as dearly comforting as old Tokay: "Look, Jerry, I'll double-check for you." He left him in a compartment which seemed evacuated: it was late Sunday afternoon and there should have been a million provincials going home. Instead there was but one tall, long-haired, back-packed young girl who nodded at him as if in apology for something and then returned to stitching up her bedroll. Teddy was gone — no, he could see him out the

window, questioning someone who was leaning out of a neighbouring train that bore the placard: "Paris-Lyon-Basle." That was the train he wanted — good, kind Ted to have made sure. He tried to stand up to grab his bag from the luggage rack but slipped sideways so that he was reclining, one knee archly pointed, across the sofa-seat. "That girl will think I'm piss-drunk" he thought; to make a gesture of sobriety he asked her the time in what turned out a metallic falsetto — his voice always rose two octaves when he drank champagne. She flushed and shook her head: was he so incomprehensible, was his speech so slurred? What would she be thinking? And where was that traitor, that Jesus, that weaseling creep: oh, here, Teddy, grasping his elbow when he'd offered a hand: "So long, love to Sheba, don't forget the connection at Lyon — only a couple of minutes, so get your gear into the corridor a good ten minutes before the train pulls in. No, nothing to worry about — the other train leaves an hour later, same route; if you want to meet Sheba on time it will have to be this one. Good luck, old man: been a pleasure — see what I can do for you this side — love to Sheba — tell her Gunther Gonzales is the man to get in touch with if he's still in Caracas. Ciao!" And Teddy was gone.

He managed to swing his legs down and slump into the space of one seat, closing his eyes so that he wouldn't see the other train across the rails. If there was one thing he hated and feared, it was a contagion of possibility: there was only one train he wanted, only one: that other was a snare and a delusion: no delusion but real enough — he would wait it out, he would endure. In ten minutes the wheels would roll: he would close his eyes and sleep, wrestling with a dreamed anxiety rather than the everyday terror of railway compartments, whistling porters, indecipherable large print upon window ledges and over doors. His mouth was dry: he had to piss: he let his eyelids rattle down and dozed in steep discomfort. Jerry dreamt in cinematic genres: this might have been early Hitchcock — the shy hiker was hatted and veiled, a Madeleine Carroll: there were border police, an espionage ring among the ticket collectors, hints of war in the jolting headlines of another passenger's newspaper. Sheba did not figure, unless perhaps as director.

"Reservato, reservato, vedere!" The French Inspector did not want to see his papers, but a tall Italian woman was pushing something over his nose: the dream swelled and then broke entirely, leaving him only the hard fact that he had to get up and find a toilet. He nodded to the seven others who seemed to have filled the compartment while he'd lain sleeping, and he stumbled over some feet and sacks of groceries as he made his way into the corridor. By this time the train had started — too late, too late to jump out and make triply sure: here he was, stuck with his valise and the galley proofs he had been sent to collect by

Sheba. But Teddy had made sure. He found the toilet. Buttoning up he felt suddenly, masterfully sober: he knew exactly how to find his way back to the compartment and this time he could decipher the instructions and prohibitions posted through the train: "E pericoloso etc. . ." Italian, the train was Italian and going to Italy! Yes, but stopping at Lyon: three hours or so and then he'd get off and more Italians would get on: admirable simplicity, order, coherence — that woman leaning over him, the tongue-tied girl — wonderful sense it made to him, now: he would try out his seven pages of phrase-book banalities on them both — it would help to pass the time. The corridors were crowded: luggage, slouching conversationalists, those little fold-down seats that latecomers have to angle upon, shifting and turning every time someone comes by. Jerry apologized to a man on one of these seats as he opened the door to his compartment and ended by sitting next to him on an even narrower seat some three minutes later. Reservato, reservato: the lady, imperially slicing some provolone, had made that clear: yes, there was an extra place, but not for the signore: her cousin would be returning, returning: reservato. Jerry turned and looked for the tall, sallow girl with the bedroll: she was gone. His thoughts began to loll again — Teddy and that fucking champagne; why hadn't they come earlier and reserved a seat? There was a special formula for bribing porters, Teddy must have known, might have told him — he would be dead by the time he reached Marseilles, sitting like this. You didn't make excuses to Sheba. It would be midnight by the time he reached her — she would insist on talking shop, too.

He had the galleys in his valise and he sat there on the fold-out seat with the valise in his lap like some heavy sleepy child whom he daren't wake lest it begin to scream. He couldn't expect her to be on the platform or even at the gate; she would be correcting copy in the station restaurant — you could not miss her, even sitting down. No hat — her hair long, thick, that peculiarly fine dead-brown like oak leaves in the fall. In black, probably, or else smack in red: shoes, bag, coat. With her glasses, which she would take off deliberately the moment he reached the table — not out of any irrepressible vanity but because she was saving her eyes for her work — nobody knew how Sheba could read so much with only one pair of eyes and astigmatism, too. Her one physical weakness she wore like a defiance, making you feel that it was you, and not her eyeballs, that were askew and distorted. Jerry began to wonder just how much more of a mess he could appear to her without her glasses — his every hair an anarchist, his mouth uneven, clothes threatening a breach of promise with his body, even his voice a stutter he'd corrected into a slur. How had she ever? With him, Sheba — Teddy hadn't believed it, he was almost sure. But what should he care — after all, it would be him, and not Teddy, who would be in Marseilles before

the day was over.

He twisted on his seat to watch how rapidly the countryside was passing by. The factories and towns had long since disappeared, and there was only a quick monotony of darkening grass and a cold sky in which the moon was just beginning to take form. The moon, the same moon, he reminded himself, that would be shining in Montreal, in Marseilles and in Jerusalem, whether he met Sheba or not. In Jerusalem, he repeated to himself, half-expecting that ripening blank to turn red in the night sky, by the magic of old words and expectation. It stayed the same: it was like looking into an eye from which pupil and iris have vanished, leaving just a null white. Jerry veered his head from the window, swivelled round, and happened — that enormous valise on his knees — to knock from his neighbour's hands the book he was somehow reading in that jolting corridor. Jerry nearly gutted himself on his suitcase handle, bending down to retrieve the book: "Scuse, scuse," he kept repeating, even though the title of the book was *The Letters of Lord Byron*: even though the man was saying, "Not at all; thank you ever so much," in an accent as confident as it was fastidious. The man seemed to want to talk — at any rate, he took advantage of Jerry's embarrassment to begin his address:

"You are not English. Well, to be English is not everything — though I sometimes think it is everything that matters. My mother was English, though she lived all her married life in Florence. Oh, yes, even the war years: you can imagine how dreadful that was for her. My mother gave me my English: she read Byron to me when I was just a small boy: I owe her everything. You are not English — Canadian, then? There's no need for gratified surprise: I am not one of those stupid Europeans who conceive every foreigner to be an American. They — they are the danger, as everyone knows. . ."

He was a bore, but thankfully one of those bores to whom one needn't pay the compliment of appearing to listen. Jerry just looked at the man: conservatively dressed in old but excellent clothing: tie pin, vest, summer tweeds: gold-rimmed spectacles on a round but unjovial face; long and exquisitely curved hands that seemed to grow out of the ancient binding of the Byron. An impoverished, upper-class Italian — or why would he be sitting here, unless he had quarrelled with his travelling companions in one of the compartments? He was talking irrepressibly, despite the competition: someone a few feet down from them was reading the trilingual safety precautions posted over the emergency door — first in Italian, then in fast and florid French; finally in German, a deliberately hysterical Nazi-German. Jerry felt stiff and sore and uneasy and the man never stopped:

". . .regrettably those so vital currents in the soul of the English people were not tapped: the wrong men in power, fools: everyone knows

that Sir Winston's mother was an American, and the Americans have always been controlled by unwholesome elements within. . ."

Jerry stood up to let a fat woman in a track suit get by. "Prego, prego," she beamed at him, the words a loud, sweet kiss on his ears. He watched her disappear into the compartment: as she opened the curtained door a winy gust of laughter blew towards him. Everyone on this train seemed to know one another: everyone but he must be going to Naples. He checked his watch — another hour to Lyon; then a dash to the platform from which the southern train would depart. Sheba would still be with Proctor, at his villa outside Arles: incredible contacts, had Sheba. She'd persuaded the man to write a series of articles for one of the periodicals she was co-editing: it was a coup, it would make her name, except that she'd already made it. The one name it might make would be his: Jerry's — Sheba had liked an article he'd written in *Northern Soil*, and invited him to write for her own, much more important review. And now, to be collaborating with her and Proctor; his reputation would be secured, he would be safe and sound, a bona-fide wiseman; he would also have Sheba. She had been amazingly honest with him when they'd first begun seeing each other: she'd said, "At this point, I admire you, Jerry — and I only sleep with people I admire. And I can see that you're the kind who lives with someone, so you might as well come and stay with me, for as long as my admiration lasts. And that, Jerry, is entirely up to you."

Whether she was admiring Proctor now, he couldn't guess: Sheba didn't just go after names — witness him, Jerry. But then she'd confessed another, deliberate weakness to Jerry: she wanted a child, she would have a child, and so for the last month she had slept without pills, diaphragm or condoms, with him — it had been as rigorous as though they were using all three precautions at once, and Jerry couldn't help thinking of how Sheba's last lover had warned him as he'd cleared his socks and underwear out of the dresser that would become Jerry's, that where most women had a uterus, Sheba had an extra cranium. Sour grapes, that — he could understand, though: he was still in a position of strength; she would have to be waiting for him, especially since he didn't have the address of Proctor's villa, nor the temerity to track them down. She'd sent him an ultimatum via Teddy's Telex machine: "Meet Marseilles, last train Sunday. Proctoring. Busy! Sheba." But it was a sure thing, sure as rain, as railway timetables: Teddy had looked them up and told him he could take his time. They had gone for a stroll to the Ile de la Cité on Sunday morning and boozed it up over a lunch so late Teddy had called it tea. Teddy was English — the English were simply the finest people in the world. . .

". . .and not only the finest, but the purest, the strongest. An island race, uncontaminated by. . ."

"Scuse, scuse, signore." The compartment door directly in front of him was opening: not the fat lady, but a child. There was a howl of laughter at something the boy was saying — Jerry wondered what sort of joke an eight-year-old could be making to provoke that sensuous laughter, redolent of garlic sausage and Lacrimae Christi. Would he have time to grab a croque-monsieur at the Lyon station? God he was lonely — hungry, he meant. The boy seemed to have heard his thoughts, for he shoved a hunk of sausage under Jerry's nose and the whole compartment choked on its amusement. Jerry was about to push the kid away until he noticed that this was no child but a dwarf, and probably a good five years his senior. He froze, and the laughter burst again, even more raucous and filling. The man on the seat beside him gave a sharp kick to the dwarf's groin, but it had been anticipated: the dwarf leapt back into the compartment and somehow among all the legs and picnic refuse, found a place to perform a perfect little goose-step, his eyes straight on Jerry's neighbour who kept silent until the dance ended and then said six or seven words in an Italian not to be discovered in Friendship Phrasebooks. No one said a word until the fat lady poked her head into the corridor from the compartment in which she'd been sitting. She jumped out and billowed down the aisle, came to the dwarf and, plucking up imaginary skirts, curtseyed and kissed his forehead. He, in his turn, spread out his arms and making a bright cushion of the woman's pliant belly, cradled his head there, burlesquing the bliss of a stupid child. Then, joining hands, the two bowed to the compartment and the corridor. Jerry's neighbour had gone; someone poured a cup of wine for the performers and invited them to join the party. It was decided, however, to take their show from room to room — they had bundled out and were going down the corridor when the woman turned, grabbed Jerry's valise and his shoulders and half-pushed, half-gestured him to that same compartment in which Teddy had first abandoned him. The same dictatorial lady was there, but it seemed as though the cousin had never showed up. Before Jerry knew what was happening he'd a hunk of bread and a paper cup full of some very sweet, brownish-looking wine in his hands. "Veni, veni, mange signore!" was what they seemed to be saying. Was he hungry, did he have time? He could feel his belly rollicking along the rails in its sudden emptiness; he would just toss this down and his bags into the corridor, and be gone — surely Sheba couldn't begrudge him this?

"Non Inglese, non Americano — si, si, Candese: bene, grazie," were all he managed in reply to their questions. They kept refilling his paper cup — a jolly man with hairy hands and an abstract-patterned sportshirt was encouraging him to drink up. For the first time he looked round the compartment: the jolly sportshirt, the aristocratic lady with the provolone and the absent cousin, a nice old woman crocheting rapidly,

her hands knotting, twisting, pulling, with all the certainty and skill of a practiced hangman fashioning a noose — and all the time her eyes on his face, dark, no, black eyes, slightly raised at the corners, as though they were doing the friendly work for her lips, which stayed in their tight straight line. And last, two teenagers playing cards together, oblivious of his presence — were they brother and sister or just look-alikes, or was he seeing double? His cup was refilled again and again — everyone except the card-players was watching him, expecting something: the silence was so complete he could hear the breadcrumbs sticking sharply in his throat. Were they Mafiosi — had they Montreal connections, perhaps? Or was there some definite sympathy, now, with that gentleman in the corridor — was this a trap, was he still dreaming: espionage, war, trains, Europe. . . He rose, suddenly, to run: the train swerved and sent the wine he still clutched in his hands down over his trousers, in a sticky-sweet parody of his fears. How, oh how could he ever escape — and how could he meet Sheba looking like this?

The train jerked sideways and sent him flying into the grandmother's lap: he threw his arms round her to steady himself and managed to put his left hand through her piece of crocheting. Her skin smelled of lavender: her blouse of starch; her hands of the stiff dustiness of her lace. She smelled like his own mother — and with her strong, tilting eyes upon him he settled back into his proper place like an excitable, chastened schoolboy. What was happening to him? All he wanted was to secure his happiness, to make his little success in life — was that so immoderate a desire, were these such lies? Even as he shut his eyes, wishing himself out of this compartment, out of the window — pergolesi? pericoloso; non e permesso — even as he told himself it was only five more minutes to Lyon; he knew. The very speed of the train was shouting it to him: it would not be stopping anywhere, except for Napoli. He groaned and opened his eyes only in time to see the station at Lyon whirring past: on one of its tracks a sister train: Paris-Lyon-Basle, letting its passengers leisurely out — or was he imagining things? Teddy, that bastard, had screwed him — he must have known — he knew Sheba, at any rate, and that would be good enough. What had he opened along with that magnum of champagne: jealousy; pathos? A mistake — in the proofs? Or a mistake to be going like that to wherever Sheba was snapping her fingers? "What's in it for you, Jerry-old-man; she's not your type, and even if she were she wouldn't deserve you. You're decent, is what you are — a man of feeling — a man of fearing — a man of here's your train — don't forget the connection at Lyon — only a couple of minutes. . ."

Or was he, Jerry, fabricating all this, now? She'd never wait for him — he'd be in Naples this morning and she'd have left Arles, Proctor, and be flying back to Toronto, telling her cleaning woman to pack up his

gear and send it off to St. Vincent de Paul, so that he'd have nothing once he got back. Back, when, how — Sheba had the money, the tickets: surely she'd leave them for him at the Canadian consulate in Marseilles? Why had he left home in the first place? Because she'd told him to — that brainy bitch, that intellectual houri, that Sheba — and he thinking he could play a mock-up Solomon to her, coming here. Here, on this bitch of a continent, him! Born in Montreal, he'd never been further west than Toronto: those two cities were the two safe poles of his earthly existence. He found the grandmother looking at him, her mouth drooping into pity. "My son, my son, what did I tell you — stick to your own, stay where it's safe," — but she only wrapped her lace around her hand, wriggled it into an even loop, and started over again. More wine — the stains on his trousers had dried — they must be near the border, now. At least he had his passport: but mightn't they still arrest him, eject him, imprison him?

Out the window darkness had thickened into night; the world was blackness and a rasp of moon — it frightened him, this void pastoral through which he and his plans and all his desires had come to speed. He tried to secure himself by thoughts of home, the True North, true in proportion as it was safe, sound, plush, easy. There were the tall glass office towers, reflecting only each other in their concrete parade down the dear, familiar streets: Yonge, Bay, Bloor, Spadina: the very words were a charm. Oh sweet, sweet new world where all Europeans were just immigrants and ethnics, their hates and loves and politics reduced to the dimensions of a little Italy, an Oktoberfest, storybook Baba Yagas instead of Babi Yars: the week before he'd come to Paris there'd been a synagogue bombed there — stick to your own sweet home, my son, your own home ground. . . But all around him a tipple of Italian; gestures at him, to him, over him — the kids in the corner retrieving rolled pillows which they spread beneath their heads, falling asleep against each other's shoulders. Where was that fat woman and her dwarf, that ample mother and her constricted son? Sheba had been looking to her projected child: why not Proctor, why not Teddy, why him, grateful, scatty, pettily-ambitious Jerry? Only because — prego, prego, scuse, vino — she would want a child she could manage, dictate to, edit like an effluviate manuscript: his child, a part of him — would she even own him as the father if she did conceive? And she on her way, even now, to the station at Marseilles, with someone's book on Hegel and another's on Machery and a dozen reviews of the latest significant Canadian novels: and he, tumbling out without a lire into the nauseous dawn of a Neapolitan fish market. Up went his hands to his disordered head while he moaned aloud, "Sheba, Sheba, what have I let you do to me — to mine!"

His cry was like glass dropped upon ceramic tile: slivers of true and petulant grief shot out into the ears of everyone, except for the two

friends, heads together, fast asleep. He would be thought a madman — he had to speak to them, say something they would understand or he'd be thrown out, handed over to the border police, betrayed. Ransacking his brains for all the opera libretti he could remember he produced something, at last: "Amore, amore: si, sposa mia: perfida, tradita: mia tragedia, Dio mio, tragedia mia!" The little man with the wine bottle made a sign for concerted silence: he corked up the bottle with a ceremonial flourish, as though he were concluding an aria. And then he stood, and stepped over to Jerry, who looked up into the man's eyes: black, big, and profound lakes in which the whites flicked like fishes: and then blanks, perfectly null and distant: and then leather-hooded, with the look of circumambient hatred given by the fastidious fascist in the corridor. Silence or voices, Sheba, Teddy, the ticket inspector: first in a rolling and rich Italian, then in florid French, finally in a deliberate, hysterical, German — he reached out for the little man, to knock him over, to steady himself, but fell down instead and through the window, rolling, rolling, covered in glass and rich Italian. The jolly man in the violently-patterned sportshirt lifted him gently in his arms and pushed him back into his seat. He reached up for a pillow, lodged it under Jerry's lolling head, folded the arms across the chest, and left him to sleep.

Half an hour later there were visitors to the compartment: the little man gave a grunt, inclined his head to Jerry and murmured something about the drunken Canadian in their midst — "Amore: e pazzo." Then the fat lady in her scarlet tracksuit, so red it gave even her sweat a febrile glow, turned to her companion. The dwarf winked at her; they began a little pantomine, Romeo e Giulietta, she peering down from the balcony of her bosom, he arching up from his knees, at which the audience began to laugh, again, louder than ever, while Jerry began to snore in the relief of dreams. At last the big, red Juliet bent down in a grotesquely amorous pose; kissed the dwarf on his retreating forehead and then, with a shove of her hips, knocked him down flat to the jolting floor. The laughter was by now uproarious: the ticket collectors and border officials who were climbing into the train rushed to the compartment and caught the last of the tragedy. Wine was poured out and offered round: tickets were flashed and passports dangled; healths drunk, news exchanged and Jerry dozed through it all, hidden under baskets and blankets and the bulk of the entertainers. The officials moved on, scattering laughter behind them. One by one the compartments extinguished their lights, as their occupants settled down for the short night, sweaters draped over shoulders, provisions neatly basketed, heads lolling together, blinds drawn upon that night whose lights shone out serene as a straight line, with a purpose all their own, and only incidentally illumining the rails on which the Paris-Napoli Express sped its way home.

SNOWBOUND LETTER

it has snowed alot since you were last here
the synagogue and the abattoir are covered in snow
the ships docked at the pier are white
the rapid pulse of the sailors can be heard at night
even this far inland
(like the snapping of dry twigs
in their arms and legs)

I'm not practical enough to live much longer
only a dozen more lifetimes or so
and then the freedom of insects again
the peace of being a fly for a thousand years

the window is open and it's cold in my room
but it's almost daylight and I'm happy listening
for the coal-train through the snow

this world separates us
with a single ache
with a button with a grassblade
it takes so little effort
to keep us apart

the neighbour's lights have just come on
they're now removing the dry leaves and earwigs
from inside their mouths

it's the wind that shapes their lives
that fills the morning glass
with sugar and water

it's the wind that allows them to live
like birds on wires
pigeons that startle each other over breakfast

I can hear the train
although it's still miles away
soon I'll be able to sleep
soon I'll be able to put up my feet
to tie up my wrists and ankles
and pull the small black hood down over my heart.

THE WEATHERMAN

so you lie peacefully across the bed
and your heart is a snail
turning over the blue air
inside a blood-red shoe

you listen to bad weather
to that huge church of rain
crash blindly to the street

from downstairs there's the ticking of the clock
which sounds more like flat dinner plates
sailing one by one through the air

from outside there are cars
driven by leaves by the wind
by the world shifting its weight at 2 a.m.

you have predicted all of this
the sense of doom
the bruised colour of the streets
the thunder releasing its dangerous breath
along the ground

and now you are exhausted
tired of divination
tired of forecasting dragons and draconic shapes
coming inland from the vast grey sea
where no one lives

tired of lightning
always following
you home in the dark
like a dog a bad dog
radiant and full of rage.

DRIVING IN THE COUNTRY

the man is restless
the man finds himself driving
in the country again
it's night again
the sulphur-coloured starlight
comes up through the trees
the wind hums through a comb

the man is wearing his favourite coat
the one his wife despises
the pockets are full of dead dandelions and string

the road passes cows veiled in steam
fish and jewelry submerged in dank pools

the man loves his car
the small cries of excitement it makes
turning a corner
the way it has of always saying yes
the apparitions exiting easily
through the exhaust pipe

the man presses down on the pedal
"you are pure," the car sings
"and the moths hitting your windshield
are a proper rain, a fitting weather for
one as pure as you."

the man rolls down the window
the air enters
the air says, "I was once a man like you.
Drive on, drive on. And when you finally
come to your destination take me with you."

the man presses the pedal to the floor
the road is empty
except for the moon passing
in the other lane
and the moon slowing down for a moment
to whisper, "Oh my little
bowl of water, are you thirsty once again?"

THE PINES OF ROUTE 7

They're building a new bypass
from the cutoff a road
back of all roads back of
the river and riverside places
Martinon Ingleside Ononette Nerepis
It will link with a road already
houseless its places grown up in
scrub poplars spruces tamaracks or
nuded into firing ranges and mine
fields where if anyone steps
he should step lightly

This is back country I used to know
a little back of the river strips
the first settlers settled Somewhere here's
where New Jerusalem was that sent
their ball team out with a sidewinding
pitcher every Saturday night to baffle
the Flats boys hometeam to us
from the river cottages And out from the back
road fierce-eyed Charlie Beesley
rosy and round astride his ground
back of homeplate Charlie Great War veteran
with lungs still corroded calling
all the pitches immovable
as at Vimy

I know the road I go over and over
house to home and back again Riding
its rises and falls I'm finding
new names to fix onto where I am
in space where I am in time

For this bogan and what I saw one morning
stand out of it *Moosewater* and its valley
after it For this hill and the townlights
I can almost see from it *Lookout*
For the white pines that loom over scrub
and scour the old poetic ones *Noble*
Sentinel and *Lofty* And for this last
I love red and soft-shouldered
Lonesome

IT WON'T WORK FOR A SNOWMAN

When you make a straw man use
green straw Corn stalks are good still

sweet enough to twist and fill
full his denim legs and belly his

flannel arms and burlap head If there are
crickets singing when you make

your straw man hide one in
to give him a voice and song

Then stitch him up strong with
butcher's twine and mount him well

straightbacked with arms
broomsticked out Let the

seasons season him wind and sun
turn his torso left and right

shrink his stuffing and bleach
out his togs till he bobs and flaps

like any straw man should set
high among the earing corn the cricket

still bleeping from his dry throat
cows and grackles cracking back

When he's no more than tatters
streaming from a stake leave

him there among shuffling
cornstalks and bowed

sunflower heads to wait
his turn

Harry Thurston

BULBS

I.

Bulbs with their clods of wet earth
the shade of a wall and a worm
    working through them.
Disinterred they steal life
into their bulbous bodies.
It trickles there in a dry stream
(as leaves tear away, snow grades
    into a corner).

II.

Bulbs: a man senses their inhuman
dormancy in the basement dusk.
They sit in their boxes
drawing their wrinkled skin
hard against their meats
like a man's sex,
testicles tensing.

A man plants his seed and withers himself
Not a bulb. It resurrects perenially
a vegetable Lazarus
fruited from its own dessicated corpse.

III.

His father gave it to my father
a bulb that produced a purple flower, almost black.
For thirty years my father made a place
for this living heirloom
next to the peonies
against the hearth of the stonewall
    trailing honeysuckle.

It did not bring forth a flower. Not even once.
When the farm was worked out
he left behind much
but he carried the bulb with him to town.
Still, it lay dormant, coming to leaf
    never to bloom.

It was July
a black dahlia's drugged head
lolled on its thin stem.

Goddamn that flower, he said
humouring his nemesis
when it was brought to him
placed in a vase
beside his deathbed.

Looking into its dark face, he recognized
the death he had cultivated within the humus
    of himself
    the time of its dark flowering.

Leigh Faulkner

WEIGHTING THE BALANCE

I. Wounding

a crow hacked the dawn;
my walk undid the cords across the field,
stirred blackflies to celebrations of blood

wind gusted
and a spider struggled from pod to petal
on the wisteria;
an osprey,
tail to the sun,
balanced on a rung of air

*

the weight of the sun
bent the grass
and a moth
stiffened in a web between fence slats

a yellow jacket dipped
at the well
of a crushed crabapple

the bait slipped from the hook
and the genius of the deep pool
turned again
and moved away

II. Healing

the stain of vapours
gathers like wisdom
around each leaf and twig

birds toe moss
colonies of snails
and labyrinthine worms,
winnowing

*

night is opened
like a pouch
and the planets
let in

a moth,
light-stung,
shingles the glass with scales

clouds pull up tight against the hills;
the sky bellies down
like a frog

the day fulfills
like a raindrop

XV.

Through the constellation of the Serpent
Over the crescent of Prince Edward Island
The SAC plane moves on its mission of malice
With an exhaust like a glowing cigar
As visible as many of the stars,
To keep the end of the world always threatened.

These are men who've spent their entire lives
From late youth to early retirement
With their eyes set on their instruments
Moving though the constellation of the Serpent,
A luminous precinct of Heaven
To keep out the poor breaths rank with the leaven
Of the end of all we've done and meant.

XVI.

(after a painting by Alex Colville)

Along a narrow road along a dyke
In Holland I suppose in 1945
A line of soldiers marches single file
With snow and water deep on either side.
Not one of the men is paying attention
To the danger of his situation
Since there's no use in peering at the edge.
If they're caught they're doomed and dead and done.

Any gunner with a line on the road
Can make a score and finish every one.
The sergeant in the lead fingers a cord
Which serves some function on his uniform
With eyes downcast as if he only feared
To meet a girl too beautiful and young.

Elin Elgaard

On Dancing Ledge

"No man's an island," the Reverend Coleman was fond of saying, in such assured tones you couldn't doubt it; but Ruby often wondered if, perhaps, a *woman* might be.

It seemed for as long as she could remember her mother had been just that: craggy and jutting and — well — cut off like the island itself. Though here the analogy somehow blurred because — of course — Mom's was an Illness, and this little world of boulders and sand edging an almost impenetrable thicket of conifer and birch — well — it had a softness to it: like a hug, the way it hugged its own centre, the way Dad had hugged her, saying: "Mun-a-nook's the Indian name for it, 'the island place'."

"No man is. . ." she thought again, wondering if after all the Reverend was right, lips working over it as she walked. Then she blushed. Because 'man', so far always connected with Dad in her mind, had come to be disturbingly linked to Harold — Hank — from the Beacon's Rest, the big hotel she'd been working in during the tourist season. Now over: season, job and Hank. He'd been one of the waiters there, and she just a kitchen help. Though Hank had said she was the prettiest thing in it when he. . .

STOP THAT! Stop that right now! She did. Stopped walking, too.

That minute Beatrice, Bea, who was always so friendly, came up on her bicycle: "Anything wrong, Ruby? Lost something?"

"No-e, I-e. . ." She was confused, the pretty skirt whirling off the saddle so close to her face, like a field of fireweed seen flash by at train speed.

She'd once been on a train. Before they'd come to take the ferry from Blows Harbour; before they'd come to live on the Island. With Dad — of course — then.

"I was gonna say, if it was anything back at the hotel, Mrs. Weaver's sure to be there for at least another hour, clearing up and that. Though we were great girls and knuckled under like a coupla slaves, right?"

"What? Yes. . ."

Bea shook her head, perhaps just at a persistent yellow jacket con-

vinced she was a flowery field. Her voice came very gently:

"Ruby? Come with us tonight, just for once, huh? To the Smokey Den. We're having an all-out disco — dammit girl, we got something to celebrate, haven't we?"

"Yes but — no." The name reminded her of the fish: today the day for picking up herring direct from the shed, way she'd gone on doing what Dad used to — when — and she almost forgot now!

She whirred: "I must get the fish. For Mom, you know. I — it's today of course and — thank you very much Bea for — bye now!" She began to run.

Her friend pedalling after, laughing about her still having half an hour for sure, what's the great flurry? And wouldn't she come to Smokey's? Steve would take them both, there'd be a whole lot coming and. . .

Ruby stopped rigid again. For Hank might be there. Hank, who'd said. . . But then, Mom would say. . .

"Oh, now I get it, couldn't figure out why you looked so different, Ruby: you got your glasses off! Was it them you forgot? Want me to bike back?"

Nono. They were right here (patting her canvas bag, blushing). She just didn't wear them always because (blushing fiercer, for they had to do with Hank, in case he'd passed her on the way home, in his car: he shouldn't see her with glasses. The one time he had, he'd looked so — strange she'd pushed them off hurriedly and said she hardly ever wore them).

And really, she thought, panting to get away from Bea's chatter: people were so difficult. When they were friendly, they sort of kept you all the time, waiting for you to talk back. Like some teachers in school. And now you were out of school, all out, you should at least be free of that: having to explain, answer, cut off your dreams all the time. . .

Cut off.

But here was the turn to the cove, the smell from that complex of stilted sheds. In her relief she waved generously to Bea, who kept talking, her feet and skirt whirling about like a fairground wheel. Now, thank goodness, she could no longer hear, but she'd got to see. And fumbled her glasses out of their case.

They were for wear. Not just reading — or she'd have dumped them now school and books and blackboards were over. And was she ever glad of that! Though what was she going to do until the next tourist flow? Mrs. Weaver had talked about opening her dining room in the fall and winter, just for the Island people, at weekends. "Might like a helpin' hand, Ruby," she'd said. But would that be enough?

"Hi-ah there, Rube." Garey was keeping an eye on the dying fires: dozens of little flame clusters spaced out on the floor of the shed, their smoke reaching to rafters where fish hung similarly clustered, sequined

with salt. Like ballroom people in fine gowns when you looked in from the outside: each stilt house had storeys with sets of paneless windows; and there were ballgowned, secret-world little people in each of them as soon as you took off your glasses!

"Mom wants 'er fish, I reckon. Bit o' normal life, oh Lawdy, after all them tourist gawkers. Couldn't see where to turn in 'ere. I'm tellin' yer; only fun's when one of their rotten kids gets 'is pokey sausages burnt — hehe!"

Sausages? Little thick fingers. Her own were like that: What small hands you've got, Ruby. She blushed.

"An' sure enough, every blest day there's a woman says 'Mister, I think your stick's still burning' whenever I put one of them rods out to rest we start the fires with. Think the whole lot's gonna go up in flames — I ask yer: a metal rod! Thank the Lawdy I got ol' Linda, for all her jawing, at my woodstove back home, hehe!"

"Thank you, Garey. Very much." She paid him (though he never wanted her to, old friend of Dad's he was, but Mom *said*), carried the newspaper-wrapped bundle, warm and aromatic, close to her chest. Home. But not without another look toward the wooden, ramshackle piers forming the avenues of the equally ramshackle stilt-town of herring sheds. And beyond the gull-studded roofs (like white pearls for the sequined people if only they'd bother to reach for them!) was the blackberry grasslands leading up ever up to the lighthouse and Dancing Ledge.

There, her father had said, "I imagine those birds go dancing when they've had their fill. Puffins, shag and cormorant, all with gurgle-gargle bellies! Bringing it all up like owls, of course, and that's why you hear the Laughing Gull at night: going fit to bust at the sight of them, itself far too smart for silly romps like that. Gulls are allus the smartest of the lot."

She'd laughed, too. Laughing now so she dropped her parcel then, stooping, her glasses that never broke. Though she'd have loved them to, knowing there'd be no more, for Mom wouldn't pay for new ones — oh no: Mrs. Leggett had strict ideas about what constituted 'silly romps':

"Your clumsiness will fashion my coffin, Ruby Jean! Go losing your glasses at school as if we'd only to pick another out of some lootbag. This, here, is my stitchery sack full of patches to sew together — full of WORK, in case you haven't yet grasped it. Brings us the bare minimum at that! You think perhaps my widow's pension was anything grand? Wasn't as if your father lost his life at sea, in his proper sphere as you might say. Oh no, he must needs go climbing too, with his half-cocked ideas about starting an ornithological museum — without the birds, but naturally, just drawings and description and the good Lord knows what! The legacy of that is his Field List which, I'll have you know, just

about anyone could have put together. All because he couldn't bear the thought of wringing a creature's neck — so he fell to his death and broke his own. And someone else, of course, had the brains to put together a proper museum afterwards!"

All right, all right Mom. Ruby was still again, eyes closed tight. I don't know, Mom. I couldn't say, Mom.

"Always up and around that Dancing Ledge. Filling your head with silly stories. As if your head weren't already. . ."

What, Mom? That one thing I'd please like you to tell me: What IS it with my head? What is it makes me stop when my head's too full, so I can't move the rest of me?

"Mom of hers! That's all it is," Mrs. Weaver told her husband. Who wasn't intrigued, having heard this umpteen times before.

"Mmyarr," he said noncommittally.

"So okay she's clumsy. Wouldn't you be if you had your ears hooted full day in, day out, that's how you were? When I've got her on me own, she's fine. Took me weeks to get that 'please-don't-eat-me' look outta her face when she dropped something. So okay, coupla glasses got broke — no disaster, is it?"

She let the till she'd been counting the last change out of go with an almighty crash that forced him, quite literally, to take a stand: "Christ! No, of course not."

"Seen a bit o' life this summer. For once. With this job and the young ones around. Most of them really nice to her, Bea 'specially. . ."

"Bea, yes." Mr. Weaver looked appreciative.

"Nah, you old fool! But so's her mother, mind you, and there's fools as are dangerous, too. I mean, like with the drinking, you know. . ."

"Mrs. Leggett on the botttle? Well, I never. . ."

"Course she isn't! It's when people go over the edge here they really go, you get me? Not just your fun 'n games, but real *evil* in it. An' there's something evil about this whole setup: I mean, never see her out of doors, do you, 'cept when the girl pushes her to church. Won't hear of any help, any normal askin' the time of day — and there's lots wanted to help out in the beginning. Those years back, when It happened."

"Mmyarr. Leggett."

"That. And the sclerosis thing. Mind you, there wouldn't have been all that much difference if she hadn't got it, mainland woman through and through an' don't you forget it, fine city family and all. Still thought this place was full of shipbuilders and well-to-do captains — bet you *he* told 'er that, and that's how he got her over here in the first place."

"She could still go back," he offered, resisting the 'mmyarrs' in the face of her growing fierceness.

"And how! Cut herself off from the fam'ly, plain as plain. Oh, there

used to be letters enough, from a sister I think, Claire at the P.O. told me, an' Joyce Leggett had to take a long-distance call there once, so Claire just couldn't help hearing how they were fairly begging her to come and live with them; and later on it was about the girl. Less than a year ago, in fact. When they knew how she'd be out of school soon. I don't see why they don' just come and get her!" With which, in thorough disgust, she hurled assorted bundles of clothing at her husband, who hastily got up from a near-drained beer to help her get into them.

"Mmyarr. Chill in the air now."

"No use pretendin' you're one of them boozers, Joey, you heard me: they best come and get that kid outta here!"

"Sounds like a kidnap to me." He grinned: "Reverend would get you for that, way he goes at the boozers hammer and tongs!"

"Blast the Reverend! You think he'd prefer murder, p'raps? I'm tellin' you straight that for Ruby to stay round that dragon much longer reeks smoke and danger to high heaven!"

Which he didn't know whether to blame on the bookmobile's lurider covers or on the fact that she had no children of her own to wax dragonish over. Whichever, forceful women sure came off this Island! A habitual thought, guilt mixed with love. Mmyarr.

"She does those patchwork things, you've seen them," Beatrice told her boyfriend Steve, like herself an Islander bound for the mainland that takes its toll yearly at graduation time. The Reverend Coleman thus indirectly to blame: for the younger, livelier ones among his congregation using his favourite sermon opening as an exit to Life, not Death.

"Little islands," Bea went on, direct as always, "squares of colour all sewn together, she's selling quite well now. Tourists first, that's the way of it, and then the Islanders catch on too." With which words she effectively cut herself off, and not a scruple lingered. Only his arm loosely round her: the car had not yet started up outside her house, and they were conscious of many little brothers and sisters flattening nostrils to light-switches against the window panes.

"She's that -er-cripple?"

An impatient shake of tantalizingly scented blonde bob against his face. "That's not the point. It's her *mind*'s crippled, that's what. Came out when she got really paralyzed after he — you know — and everyone from the Cove tried to help. Mom was one of them, never mind how stuck-up old Joyce'd always been, and people laughing their heads off when she came over grand about this museum idea — though really, that was *his*, but you never laughed at him somehow. Funny, that. Anyway, he was so nice about it; he was just a thoroughly nice guy."

"I remember." Steve, the boy from the next cove up, was trying to make her concentrate on him and their night out dancing. But she

seemed bitten by that family; best humour her along a bit: "Him, I mean. He was nice like you said. Crowd round Dad at the sheds still talk about him, what a buddy he was, only you never could get him *out* to things."

"No, and that's her again. Though I don't think he really minded. I mean, he really loved her, can you imagine that?"

"I can imagine love," Steve said.

"Idiot! Well, he'd be out taking her every day with that stick of hers; and then it was two sticks, up and down the road and turn-about, like two sentries. And Mom and the others would come up and try to talk, and Mr. Leggett would, too, but she'd just stand there looking straight ahead, giving just one nod, you know, that'd be it."

"Sure, I seen them myself as a kid. Like two outsize crows there in the dark. Seemed always dark when they. . ."

"That's right. Only time she'd come out, I guess. And in the daytime, Sundays and so on, he'd take her — take Ruby I mean —"

Getting there at last!

"— out for a real run and a dance. It's true, Steve, they were like — dancing together, and it had to be right up on the cliffs every time. They went birdwatching. She didn't want to play around with us, it was always him, she'd look so happy."

"And now she don't."

"No." A quick glance at him made her decide to be brief, now he'd been good and attentive. Tit for tat her method. Which was how her parents could rest easy in her going to discos and, soon, off the Island to the nearest city: she was doing Scripture and Reverend Coleman proud in honouring parental advice every bit of the way: "Now, don' you go take shit from nobody, gal." Stood her in good stead so far, and she meant to go farther, leave no loose ends behind. Parents and Steve dithering about an engagement ring settled, Ruby was next:

"That's why I mean to take her with me. Yeah sure, to the dance, *and* right out. She can shack up with us for a while, we can find her a job, she's a real good worker. Even if she was dumb at school she can work practical — stopping her can be the problem sometimes! Whole mountains of dishes, loads of bedding, she gets it all done."

"But. . ."

"Augh, fuck the buts, Steve. I mean to tackle that woman, and then Ruby, never mind how. So, let's get started!"

They did, to frantic waves from his kid in-laws, waves of unease within himself. He didn't want to share Bea with a limp refugee from the Island, but he'd have to or go without. Bea the dancer, who made him jig like a drunken bee in the golden rays off her September-struck hair.

Fish hadn't been so good, after all. Nothing sequined and bright about

it. The package was crumpled, half-open for one thing, and no longer warm, for another.

"Where HAVE you been dawdling, girl? I suppose with that SET up at the hotel, should't have let you go at all, not company for you to mix with; but I was naive enough to think that Weaver woman RESPONSIBLE, whatever else she may be. Civil she certainly isn't. When I call to impress on her the trust involved in letting you go, all she can say is 'Be pleased to look after my own business and do it well, Mrs. Leggett'. Some Island commoner giving me the lip. Well. . ."

"Shall I warm it up, Mom?"

The wheelchair shot past her in high agitation: "No indeed! I can do it myself, you're sure to drop things and fumble about. As if I weren't competent in my own kitchen."

"Yes, Mom."

"You think I idle my days away, per chance?" A new, bright chair cushion indicated. "If these aren't the hands that bring food on the table. . ."

"No, Mom."

"Oh, don't stand there like a fish! What were you doing?" Shrewd glance. "Not losing your glasses again? I see you've got them dangling from your hand – no doubt you intended to go about the evening meal without the aid of them. Wonderful pigsty that'd be."

"Yes – no, Mom, I didn't."

"Meaning what, exactly? Difficult enough as it is keeping this miserable hut of a place clean. Couldn't expect anything else with what little your father left." A pause. Fingers deft on wheels, on pans; turning taps, setting scraped potatoes to boil:

"So, where HAVE you been? Fish stone cold when you got here. Well?"

And Ruby froze in anticipation of the capitals: always a sprinkle of them, at the best of times, in her mother's speech; but there would be other times, dreadful times, when they came at her in huge, numbing blocks. Like the THOU SHALT NOTs that used to scare her at Coleman's Sunday school.

"You were up at THAT PLACE again! Don't deny it, I can't abide your fibs. Up there where your father fell to his DEATH – haven't you got that into your head yet? Why MUST you do this to me–why can't I TRUST you to come home direct, why WHY?"

"Because – he's there," was all she could think of.

"What on EARTH do you mean, he's there? As if he hadn't got his Christian grave with the rest of them – don't you KNOW bodies come in with the tide – and do you think I could have survived the SHAME afterwards, with him like a SUICIDE, a sinner before God. . ."

Some say he did it deliberate, they say he didn't want to live, that he wanted to. . .

Her eyes filled with tears.

"Heavens! You think he was a COWARD, child? He may have been foolish and scatterbrain in a lot of things, but that. . . ."

No. Ruby nodded. A great many nods. It was not to be borne that Dad could have felt — cut off — and wanted to — to go away. Mom said so, yes, that he couldn't have, and she even sounded, yes, a little proud of him. But still Dad was out there somehow, because. . .

Mom went on talking, and she *wanted* to think to the end of that because.

Out there, she'd felt him. Her hand in his as they found the eider duck together, far far off a boulder outcrop, like a pier all its own. Bob-bob it went, sleepily, gorged on food. And she'd said, "Dad what do you think?" Because there was this about Hank and the dance still in her head; and it was no use asking Mom what she thought. It would be the same as all the other dances.

At that moment the eider had ducked its head right under, a sort of long serious nod; and a gull, one of the beautiful Roseate Terns it was, had started screeching in up-and-down swoops. Like more nodding. And so he had squeezed her hand tight round the hiprose she'd picked, and it was all Yesyes. As always.

Will you take me to the Ledge, Dad? Are the gulls gonna be there? Plenty birds — the Razorbill too, and that funny one, Guillemot? Will you tell me a story about them?

Yesyesyes.

Forever. So that she could go on now, adding to the forever (Dad could: he'd said "Forever and I," only it was "Aye," he'd told her) as she handed over her pay, cleared away, washed up, got her mother's hot-water bottles and the warm milk after she'd carried her upstairs to bed. So very light, no burden at all, she might carry her up and down forever. Yes.

"Half the time you're not even LISTENING. One might as well talk to the heater. What IS it with you, girl? Not a thought in your head."

My head.

"Just what are you trying to DO? Drop me — kill me like that? Your own mother — is THAT what it's come to? You think your precious father would smile down from his heaven and CONDONE a murder?"

Yes. Or no, I don't know — what does it mean?

"Mind you lock up and turn off those heaters, smoky old things, or you'll have a fire on your hands. Mind that. . ."

Yes Mom. Yesyesyes.

But no.

They were on the threshold, over it, ringing the house down, so she had to go answer, shush it, for Mom's sake. Moments wild inside her of

Hank having tracked her down. But it wasn't; it was Steve and Bea, smiling as wide as the doorway, as the whole Cove. Talking so fast and together, then slow very slow. Like Mom when you had to mind something, when she started about your HEAD. So that it bulged.

Oh no.

"Don't look so scared for godssake, Ruby. It's not the Lion's Den or something, only Smokey's! A great party, okay? and never mind. . ." quick look at her skirt and T-shirt, slightly stained with bled-through fish parcel "never mind your clothes. Ain't the gov'nor general, huh?"

She shook her head. It was full of flowers, Bea's perfume must be, made you dizzy like balancing on the outmost ledge when she was little — like for a seapink some reach away down the cliffside.

"C'm ON Ruby. Your Mom's off — can hear her snoring all the way down here. We'll bring you back and everything, she won't know what hit her!" Sharp nudges. "I mean, she won't KNOW. OKAY?"

Her head whirring faster and faster. At least on the inside. She didn't know about. . .if. . ."

"Hank?" Bea pouncing right on it. "Sure, he said he'd be there. So what's he to think, Ruby? I seen you two. He'll think you don't care at all!"

She stopped whirring, was altogether still while Bea sponged her T-shirt a bit and took her own comb and spray-cologne to her. "Close your eyes, Ruby, geez!"

"Like a corpse." Steve in an undertone. Sharp glances then. Like knives just polished for the dining room at Beacon's Rest. Mrs. Weaver's fine silver. Hank's hand coming to hold hers round the knives. "Such small hands you've got, Ruby."

And hers hadn't held any since Dad.

"I can't leave Mom because of — because. . ." Here was another because to work out. And they wouldn't let her:

"Sure you can. She'll dream her dreams to the end, while you'll be having a dream of a night!"

Would she? It sounded like Dad: absolutely no room for doubt. What power they had, people of such ease with words.

And the world took to dancing, easily. Land in a sea change, tucking what was over under, wave upon wave. Here was Hank, no, dancing with another, no, he was waving. At once, as if he was glad, really glad to. . .

Ruby too. A gladness in her now that took to the floor, feet and hands obeying straightaway to music, how could that be? Because — and here was a because she could finish — because she'd been practicing all those years on Dancing Ledge!

Hank was saying so: that she danced like a light, light bird on a wind.

Even a counter-wind: then she just flew backwards! "Like the wild geese do," she shouted above the din: "Dad told me." And soon, very soon, she'd tell him about Dad. He was close, so close now, with Hank. In a quieter tune, the wind abated, his voice dropped to a whisper: "You carry me away with you, bird!"

How strange. Like an order, only without capitals. Was he angry? Oh no, all tender, smiling so — and here was the music loud again. Faster, faster. Bea flying past, too; and now she, Ruby, could fly as marvellously, even with her tight, brown helmet of hair and her faded check skirt! And she'd never really liked Bea — something bossy about her, always, like all women. Men took you by the hand and kept things simple.

Women wanted to stop you, hold you, with all their questions. And there was no holding her now — perhaps this was how Dad felt when he went over — but Mom said he didn't — just go like that — he wasn't a coward — but perhaps that wasn't really it — it was simply what you had to do: go free, free and easy over the Ledge, dancing: No man is an. . .

"Something the matter, Ruby darling?"

"No — it was just my — I was thinking about my Dad."

"You think about me now." Holding her, letting her go, just as it should be. And she should. Think of him now. Yes.

"I mean to keep an eye on those two."

"Aw, come on Bea, climb down. She's having a ball. Can't you see?"

"I can see. But she's to take no shit from anybody. You know how she is — well maybe you don't, but I do. He's a mainland guy. . ."

"Says the one who's heading there herself!"

"Not the point, man. I mean, *he* doesn't mean it — just fun for him, and look at her, all starry-eyed!"

"Sure, I'm not blind. But don't go all heavy on it, it's not as if he was gonna carry her straight outta here though I must say, if he did. . ."

"You stop it right there! I'm the one's gonna carry her out, and not for any lark either."

Steve saw that; and he also saw that the faster they whirled the more chance there'd be of letting the other two carry on without Bea catching the Flo Nightingale bug or whatever it was made her tick so loud. He meant to have her to himself for a little while yet.

Ruby saw. The heater and the day's washing still damp from the line when she left.

Ruby heard. Like a bell clanging: the dangers of fire; the RESPONSIBILITY of being a cripple with a daughter who had a head. A head.

It ached. She stopped.

"Good idea," he said. He, Hank, who'd called her. . .called her. . .

"Need a break and a bit of air, darling. Don't all have wings like you."

Dad had called her darling. Just this way, their hands linked, just this way.

"I need to. . ." she began, heater flashing in her mind's eye like a fire exit, deep red; something that drew and repelled you at once.

"Want the 'Ladies'?" Hugging her. Then, as she shook her head, whispering, "Come. Let's go outside, huh?"

Yes Dad oh yes. It's been such a long day and Mom wasn't — easy. Fretting you called it: "Now don't you fret, Joyce." For that was Mom's name. Now she's forgotten it, because there's only me. Because Dad danced over the Ledge.

She should have danced with him. She should go join him the way Reverend Coleman said you did. Mrs. Weaver had said Mom was a Very Unhappy Soul. She'd also said that's why Ruby got this Head. But really — I don't — so much — with my glasses off. Because then I see things, lovely things, like Dad sprinting up the grasslands, never tired at all. Like Hank — only he said *he* was tired, but then she could teach him how to. . .

He was kissing her. So that's how it felt. Like all the heaviness gone from you: like dancing, only inwards. The way it used to when I knew Dad was on his way home.

"Hank — please — let me — I want to show you something."

Sure thing, babe! What? Dancing Ledge? Where in the hell could that be? But never mind, since she was so keen, they'd take his car, be there in a zoom. Poor kid, really. Things he'd heard: living with some crazed mother who'd cut her off from everything. Girl sure could dance, and once she took those antiquated glasses off she looked quite sweet. Something about her — well, nothing he'd get saddled with, Jesus! but really cute all the same, none of the old sexy come-on, for a change. Took to nice words like anything, so why not let her have them:

"Pity your mom wouldn't let you come right away with me, darling. We'd have such fun, wouldn't we?"

Just what Dad had said. After, up on the Ledge, many times: he'd wanted her there. But Mom had said: I WON'T have the girl climbing about in fog and drizzle. Are you out of your MIND?" Capitals beginning already then.

So he'd gone alone. And fallen. Or perhaps. . . And after, he'd said, "Why weren't you with me, Ruby darling?" Quietlike and no capitals. To which all she could ever answer was Mom.

Ever? Mom? But that wasn't — right. And now here was Hank saying — Hank, who'd called her. . .

"Steve, I'm telling you, they've gone!"

"For a little neck in the woods, lettem be, Bea. Don't come the nanny."

"But for Christ's sake man, what if. . ."

"Then you can rescue her and have a ball with the little bastard: Double Flo, how's that? Ouch, I'm only joking, lay off! All right, let's give them five more minutes and then call the fire brigade. Jesus, if we ever have kids they'll be locked up in a closet!"

"Don't talk shit. It's Ruby I'm on about. There's something about Ruby. . ."

"Oh, I thought it was dear ol' Harold from the mainland. . ."

"Don't give a damn about him. He may be a shit, but if there's trouble it won't come from him at all. It'll be her — and the kind of BIG trouble we aren't used to, take it from me."

Queer bird, really. Gone all silent now, stiff, lips moving. Well, maybe it wasn't worth going through with. Maybe he'd set her off at her home door. That's what she was telling him now. To stop there.

Muttering something about a jacket. So, allrighteo. Give her a few mos for her coverall, and then shoot back to Smokey's. There was that chick he'd been with earlier; quite a looker, but not a patch on this one for dancing and — no, not a patch.

Inside, Ruby went to the heater. And the bone-dry things slung on a line above, now ready to drop. She was in time. There'd be no fire. Mom said. . .

But Dad said, Why weren't you with me? And Hank said, Your Mom wouldn't like it. And Mom said NO, in capitals.

Mom said, Why do I have to go ON with such a daughter? Why do I have to suffer this RESPONSIBILITY?

And it all came together in one great because. In Ruby's head that was ever questioned and questioning. Now it answered. It even dictated things. For Ruby had danced in the blood-red centre, after years of being cut off. Ruby was going to dance now forever and aye. And she would teach Hank.

She turned the heater up. In the imperceptible wave of air turned will turned wild whoopee, the washing moved. In the breeze from the window she now opened (beware the SEA CHILLS of night, Ruby Jean. BAD for the bones), they ached to descend. And would.

It took less than the five minutes Hank had stopwatched. She went out forgetting the jacket — because she was Ruby and couldn't be trusted to remember everything — and directed him toward the gravel turn.

The five minutes Steve had pleaded bred lots more of their kind before they were finally in the car tracing Hank's. In an icy silence he had to break, bewildered by the whole exercise: So, the guy had taken her home, that's all — seen she was not for him. And if he'd crumpled her

a little first, so what? Was she some kind of precious jewel, for godssake, kept pure and sparkling for the Flo Bea Nightingales to grab and run with?

"You don't see," was all she would say.

And then he thought he was seeing things. At the Leggett house. From out an open window a curtain billowed, the room behind it a bulging crimson, now opalescent, now clear, like a precious stone turning itself to be viewed and gasped at.

He did. But she wouldn't let him stop, say, even point.

"This isn't it, Steve. I know there's a fire. There was a fire for fifteen years somewheres, that's what I've been trying to make you see, and now you do. I just didn't know how it was gonna come out, good or bad. I wanted to be in time to make it good, okay, and maybe I still am — oh, that fire! That's nothing, they've already seen it, there's the alarm, hear it? No, it's the other one, the real blaze out there — and I think that's his car, yes, they'll be quite a ways from there, and we're gonna run, get it?"

He felt something slip, torn as he was between bells that tolled yammer and alarm, and those that didn't, between orangey flames a-caper and the unseen blaze: the idea of 'limp refugee' letting in, of a sudden, all there was to know, all that Bea in vain had known, about Ruby.

As easy as foothold, up ever up, came the words: she no longer marvelled about them. Nor about Hank, whose hand in hers had become matter-of-course in what seemed no time at all. But then, time had ceased to matter; and so would *he* if he didn't stop dragging them both in the wrong direction, she had to chide him a little: he really must learn to take heights.

She had no mind for the fear in his eyes once he'd learnt of her superior strength as her superior dancing — how could she? Her glasses had been the first to go, in a wide arc that splintered the lighthouse beam into myriad sequins. Wonderful! And Ruby had laughed.

"Nicest they ever looked — like everything from up here — you were right, Dad, it's a tickly place. Like the funny one, Guillemot, name always tickled me. Now come on, Dad, you forgotten how to walk here? That's only the foghorn, you're used to that, bit close round here, the sound, I know. And *you* know. Stop pulling at me — see? I'm a big girl now, I go where I want, and you're not gonna jump anywhere without me ever again — come dance with me, Dad, that's right — that's how it should be now — you hear the gulls laughing?"

Yesyesyes.

FIRST MEETING

You perch beside me at dinner
saying "I am in despair I am in despair"
and "For God's sake, Elizabeth, say something."

You have been drinking too much.
You are — or have been — beautiful.
Your first name is the same as mine.

What am I to say?
"I don't like this kind of party either"?
"Yes of course from time to time
I also feel despair"?
Or perhaps just "There. There
You'll feel better after dessert and coffee"?

Are you telling the truth, I wonder?
Or is it some kind of act
designed to get my attention?
(But then, why my attention rather than that
of several impressionable others also present?)

By the Rideau Canal in Ottawa
I too have sat down and wept

but now my eyes are dry.

Should I be proud or ashamed of my self-control
as I swallow my beef stroganoff,
my one cautious glass of wine?

Is it pity or envy I feel
as I touch my glass to yours
and try to decide what to say?

Your lover your children your children
the blood and pus of your wounds:
do I want them all now?

You are my other self, I think,
the one I almost was,
the one I saw walking away from me
a long time ago
down a street in another country.

I do not share now
your despair, your ecstasy
(though once I did)

I only share your name

SEPTEMBER SNOW

Snow near the end of September
when I expected only falling leaves

Thick, heavy, and soft
like maritime snow
it fluffs itself over the caragana hedge
hides the brown leaves
I failed to sweep up
encases me in a drift
of memory.

I shovel my way off the back steps
uncover red geraniums
still alive near the wild rose-bush
silken flames in the snow.
I intended to take them inside
to warm me in the winter.

So odd and beautiful to see
that red on white
their death is almost worth while

NEAR DORCHESTER

the carved carcass of the tide's leavings
the chocolate rocks and wooden pilings

the whole heaped and tired assembly
of the bay's gut hangs heavy

the jam of rock, the key-block blown loose
and the entrails shift in red waters

it is a time of trying, the old bridge
was its own creaking coffin gone sour

the local terrors beat it down
with souped-up Chevs held fast by chrome

where have the boyos and the old bridge gone?
they have gone to sleep in the sea's throat.

A BRIEF WHIFF

what snow there was came as accident
a brief whiff of it from Fundy

but the dimensions harden and the cut field
holds the thin white of it, a consistent plaster

a finding dust over the forgotten criss-cross
and toilings of men and tractors hauling

themselves through centuries of seasons
with minds gone to their very edges

and hard the sea-socked flats glisten
with the hint of it, the time of winter

and wisps and belts of snow and ice
the pits and pores on the skin of it.

BAUCIS AND PHILEMON

The fog that settles through the trees
like a white flock weights the long grass down,
sagging the fence by the tilled plot.

Old age has put its tools to rust,
watching the tides as the seasons flow,
the upstairs rooms closed off, too cold
to climb now.

The grandchildren are grown.
The noises of their summers fade
like water from the pan left overnight
on the parlour stove.

Grown like two trees
together; he, a statesman in his youth, and she,
historian of these red shores.

"Now that I know
no place more lovely than this one,
it's time to go."

"ANY ROAD"

"Any road," she said, shrugging.
She would have said, "Any way,"
or perhaps, "Well,"
had she not been local.
Or, had she been younger, "Whatever!"

For it is the walking –
since all roads come to an end.
Whatever ways we come at, stay afloat,
or with the Builder of the world
walk even, we will be blessed.

The blessing hurts.
Hard labour makes hard blessings hard to take.
Any road, we all take what we must.
We will be blessed.

THE GIFT FROM THE BAD FAIRY

This is the curse, that we do not sleep
and let the rose briars hide us, but our hope
awakes each morning to be pricked.

I sew this page. The needle hurts, is bone,
is flesh, is permanent. If we could sleep,
the future like a fairy prince suck out
the dead bee's mortal sting and change the world
to roses. . . .

But it is, roses, every morning
when we wake. I take my housework up again,
and find again the secret thorn
the sick rose nourished every day.

What makes us think the heart breaks once? It breaks
all day. It breaks like rain. All that I did
not want to bear has to be borne, and what I mend
has to be mended all over again.

Do we learn to be glad there is still pain?

James Reaney

Happy Enough

It was when Colin came back from taking his three younger brothers to their first day at school that he heard his parents discussing where the parcel with the small books bought at a secondhand store in Victoria had got to. Then, that morning, other problems intervened, other missing things, long periods when his father tackled something important on his desk in the library, or his mother superintended the washing and cleaning of the triplets' recently doffed travel clothes, one suit of yellow, another of red, and one of blue. For Colin's three younger brothers were triplets, looked very much like each other, and could only be identified by most people if their garments were colour-coded: red for Jeremiah, blue for Habbakuk, and yellow for Ezekiel. There were at least half a dozen sets of these clothes since the triplets, being demonically energetic playmates, usually got dirty so rapidly that constant changing and cleansing were necessary for fear their suits might start to blend into one blurred, muddy, dusty, sweaty sameness. Thought Colin's mother then, if you ever called one of them by their wrong name they would never listen to a word you said thereafter.

Just at noon, Father really begun to get quite desperate about the lost little books. In the last few years, his livelihood had begun to depend on finding things that collectors needed and would, quite often, pay big sums of money for. The little books, all bound in leather, had once been part of an eighteenth century gentleman's travelling library, small enough to pack into a coach and not crowd out bulkier and perhaps more necessary items. In an hour's time a bookseller from New York would be answering his earlier call on the library telephone. No wonder he was desperate. Then Mother called up from the laundry room that, yes, she just now remembered where she had put all those expensive little books, one of the many things her husband and children had brought back with them from their trip over the mountains. She had unpacked them from the glove compartment of the car, and then decided that that was such a good hiding place they should stay there.

Because he knew that Father had bought the books for hundreds of dollars and was hoping to sell them for thousands, Colin really began

to worry. Even more perturbing was the opening of the parcel in the glove compartment, containing, yes, the right box, but inside the box . . .

"My goodness," said Father, "the miniature books have turned into three small falafels, some oatmeal cookies, and — three apples!"

"Then the Trips have taken the miniature books to school with them for lunch. Mother got things mixed up."

"Colin!"

"I'll take this to the school, Pappy, and just hope they haven't eaten the miniatures yet." He raced off on his bike.

"The trouble is, Lucy," murmured Father, leaning against the car, "I added books we owned to complete that set. It's worth a whole lot more than five hundred dollars now."

With unnerving calmness, Mother replied that it all depended on just how hungry the Trips were after their first morning ever at a public school. Anyhow, she had now got their extra Goosey Gander suits red, blue, and yellow again. Inside the house, Father could hear the library phone ringing.

When Colin reached the schoolyard, he had already heard the sound of uproar sifting out from the school building, both old and new wings. Miss Bunn, the kindergarten teacher with whom he had left the Triplets that morning, came running out to meet him with his brother Ezekiel pulled behind her.

"Ez," asked Colin first. "Why have you changed your yellow Goosey Gander suit for Jeremiah's red one?" It was the first time he had taken a chance and just guessed which triplet he was addressing.

"Never mind about a little thing like that now!" cried Miss Bunn. "Your little brothers have gone berserk, and *you* worry about the colours of their Goosey Gander suits, you fool?! Why on earth did you send them to school with twelve small books bound in leather for lunch?"

"Miss Bunn, I didn't. It's just that I have their real lunch here. The two parcels got mixed up just before we all set out this morning. Mother . . ."

"That's enough from you. Now keep hold of this one in case he explodes on us like the others, sit right there under that tree, and I'll go back and help the principal catch those two other hellions."

"Yes, ma'am," said Colin quietly.

So he and Ez sat down under the tree in the centre of the schoolyard. While screams, cries, shouts, as well as an ominous humming sound, kept coming out from inside the school, carefully, Ezekiel told his older brother what had happened.

"Colin — first of all, we didn't feel red, blue, yellow this morning, so we asked to go to the washroom. We changed our clothes with each other, so she keeps calling me Jeremiah. Mother sent her a note about the colours — sorry."

"But that alone wouldn't cause all that commotion, Ez."

"That started when we opened our lunches. Everyone laughed at twelve small books for lunch. Jer and Hab were so hungry they did bite them. Miss Bunn went tsk, tsk and came by her boss Mr. Rolpin, he has a big bottom. He asked what the trouble was. Then he asked us if we liked playing hockey so we could be on his midget hockey team this winter, so we said, yes. And, guess what — Mr. Rolpin ran out and brought us back some hot dogs."

"Which we haven't eaten for over a year now, have we, Colin? Because they and hamburgers and milkshakes and soft drinks make us jumpy — run around, climb trees to the top of them, play tricks — the way Jer and Hab are right now. Red Dye Number Two! I yelled that at Bunn and Rolpin, and he said I was silly, and I told him what an awful life we had made for Father and Mother because we couldn't stop eating the fast foods which made us faster and faster, and finally you persuaded Father to take us all away from poor Mother for a year to British Columbia in a house by the sea where there wasn't a hotdog stand for fifteen miles. And, after quite a while we became quite nice to live with didn't we?"

"You certainly did. Why wouldn't he. . ."

"Colin," interrupted Ez, "do you think?" He pressed one hand against an empty stomach, and bit the other with his teeth.

Hastily, Colin opened up the parcel and gave Ez a homemade falafel.

It was all too true. After getting the Triplets back on the rails of good behavior and good diet again, he had insisted that the Trips eat the hot dogs he had bought them, and none of this nonsense about food additives and other such faddy ideas.

"So Jer and Hab wolfed down their hot dogs, but I wouldn't. So Rolpin turned on me and tried to jam it down my throat. That's when Jer and Hab went wild. You could just see the Red Dye Number Two. . ." Here Ez paused and reached for an apple.

"Attack their nerve endings," finished Colin. "Well, well, Ez, suppose we show all those people in there chasing around after your two brothers just how easy it is to bring them to their senses."

With that, Colin took out of his jacket pocket a homemade flute and began to play on it a slow, hypnotic tune. Ez began to feel sleepy; it was the tune Colin always played at night to lull them to sleep. Colin continued playing.

A few minutes before this, Jer and Hab, inside the school, had just robbed the school janitor of both his flashlights. Then, after rattling around the partitions and tunnels of the old part of the school, looking like dust mice gone berserk, up through a register they emerged suddenly into a senior classroom and scared a Home Ec teacher out of her wits. Popping back, they climbed like monkeys up the partitions until

they found that her room had a false ceiling. Squirming into this invisible space, they loosened the cords of the light fixtures and swung them lower and lower over the heads of fifty girls sewing away at gym bloomers — and now screaming as well.

Then, for a while they lay low: making mysterious growling sounds.

The principal, Mr. Rolpin, tried to talk to them through the wall, but they made no reply, and, when he stuck a window stick through a register at them, they melted away into the tunnels leading into a modern part of the school.

Windowless, arranged in pods, carpeted into hills and dales, with no walls between classrooms, the new part of the school gave them new problems of concealment, but no end to their delight in thinking up new mischief. You see, Jeremiah knew all about fuses, and Habbakuk's specialty was main switches.

Ruled over by three not very bright teachers who never thought to have flashlights or candles ready for an emergency, the new windowless wing of the school was now suddenly plunged into darkness, was suddenly terrorized by two identical forms bearing flashlights which they swung back and forth to make huge shadows. Up, down, and across they cavorted over the broadloomed study pods. Bookcases crashed over, whole Creative Drama classes of kids pretending to be trees fled as if before a hurricane. And, when Jeremiah and Habbakuk had tired a bit of this, they turned the overhead lights back on again, then furtively crept into some ruined Creative Drama class of smashed oaks and shivering willows.

It was then that through an open fire door through which a teacher had run with some equally hysterical children, that they heard Colin's flute. Quickly, the Two Identical Terrors came out into the yard. Suddenly behind them appeared the principal, Mr. Rolpin, his glasses broken. Hab and Jer shot over to Colin and begged for protection. Other teachers appeared too, their clothes torn, stained with dust and cobwebs. Some of them bore the window sticks and shovels they had been using to winkle the Terrible Two out of their hiding places. The boys crawled over to Colin, slumped their heads into his lap, and with one voice said:

"Colin, we're tired and our stomachs feel funny and it's not our fault. He forced us to eat commercial hot dogs with Red Dye Number Two in them!"

Fifteen minutes later, they, the principal and the school nurse were all gathered in the Health Emergency Room with its two cots — one for boys, one for girls. On the boys' cot lay the Terrible Two having their brows wiped by Colin with a cool, damp cloth. He had just returned with them from the Boy's Washroom where, with a skillful and practiced finger down both their throats, he had encouraged them to regur-

gitate the cause of all the recent furore. Ezekiel was back in Miss Bunn's class weaving paper mats, and waiting for his turn to cook water at the Montessori stove.

On the other cot, the one for sick girls, lay Principal Rolpin in a much tattered three piece suit. Nurse hovered over him.

"I'm still going to expel them," he groaned.

"Oh, Mr. Rolpin, sir," oiled Colin, "so would I if I thought that the boys meant to do what they did. Two years ago, sir, they used to race all around our house in exactly the same way. Always after some fast food. Then — then we learned not to feed them anything they liked such as potato chips, hamburgers, onion rings, Chinese take-outs — commercial hot dogs."

"I thought I was doing your family a very great favour by buying them. . ."

"Yeah!" chorused the Two, "Red Dye Number Two!"

"What a faddy family you folks must be. I suppose you won't use insecticides in your garden, and you send leather bound old books in Latin with your kids' lunch boxes."

"Yes," said Colin, speaking ever so humbly and gently to see if he could turn away Rolpin's wrath. "We are a rather odd, faddy family. But. . ."

"I'm still going to expel them," muttered Mr. Rolpin, buttoning up his vest and reaching for his other pair of glasses, the spare scratched ones he had first bought when attending Teacher's College.

"My three brothers attended hockey camp you know when we were away last year. They headed the school in goals and attack, sir."

"Well," grumped Mr. Rolpin rising from the cot. He then walked away to his office without really settling things, but the rest of the day passed quietly enough. Colin fed the Two their proper lunches, then they returned to Miss Bunn's room.

At recess, the other scholars in the schoolyard gave them a very wide berth indeed, but soon, on succeeding days, the Triplets faded into the picture of what was really quite a pleasant and loveable school. Their being Three somehow impressed everybody — from those who would have punished them, but remembered in time how good their team defence was, to Mr. Rolpin who soon asked them to try out for the Scrappers whose trophies quite filled the glass case in the lobby of his school.

Now, when they arrived home that first day, their mother met them with after-school pieces; home baked brown bread spread with hand-churned butter and handmade peanut butter. Deftly, she pointed out that yet again they had destroyed her colour-coding.

"We forgot to change back," said Ez. "The washrooms have taps you turn on with your feet."

"That washroom," murmured Jer and Hab.

"So, tell me," asked Mother. "What happened on your first day of school?"

"Is something supposed to happen?" said Jeremiah and Habbakuk.

"Why the day I started to school there was a flood and my mother and father had to come for me in a boat."

"Nothing," said the Triplets as one. "Nothing. We learnt nothing. Nothing happened. We wove paper mats. We're learning how to cook water."

Colin, still eating his piece, and fresh from eavesdropping a telephone conversation between his father and the New York book dealer, came down the verandah to tell the Trips that despite the delay, and even the recently added toothmarks, the small books had still been sold for a hefty sum. But when he came upon them happily swinging on the verandah swing with Mother, their faces smeared with handmade peanut butter and handchurned butter, he decided to wait. They looked happy enough.

THE FISHING LINE

Far back on shore,
I watch you fishing among the reeds.
You flick the silver whip
of your line onto
the dull green back of the pond,
that body of water
turned face down, averted from you,
holding its treasures
where you can't see them.

You stand in the stiff
green ribbons of cat-tails
one boy alone before his time,
easing your line
out into silence,
your line as slack as a fallen
cable in which all lines
of communication have ceased,
your hook dangling
its silver bribe, a hard
question mark that no one answers.

PINK LADY'S SLIPPER

Just large enough
to hold one
human breath,
it hangs its swollen
colours in air.

It's a small paper scrotum,
a taut double sac,
crinkled and lined as its
human counterpart.

Inside, it stores
its sex, its seed;
quivers so slightly

as warm fingers
caress its cool and
proffered nudity.

SLEEP FULL OF SAWS

The sleep full of saws
severs the heads from the horses
and the horses run neighing with blood
like so many red tables escaped in the streets
from the Last Supper.

And the horses run in clouds of red vapour,
shaking shadows. In the saddles — phantoms.
Leaves stick to their necks
or tumble inside them
as the shadows of trees tumble down wells.

Bring buckets, bring jugs, large and of glass,
bring tumblers and jugs.
Bring old helmets left over from war,
bring all those missing an eye,
or in place of an arm, have a place free
for filling.

The blood of headless horses
runs freely everywhere,
and I, the first to see
this,
tell you I have tasted it, and it
is very good. . .

FINAL LANDSCAPE

Undefiling mud, sweet mud,
mud left by words in the air,
mud clothing the first step free
of earth, on bridges of air.

Mud up to the windows, the locks on the doors,
spilling into the room in slender keys,
keys to unlock the great gate of silence
found in the void of each hour.

Mud of unimportant seconds,
of the hostile silences conjured by the old ones,
dead — the dead who have blessedly died.

Mud stirred by sweet animals
yoked to a pale plow of bone,
plowing our flesh from within
and sowing it with the hungry skulls
of the dead before our birth,
in endless cultivation

translated from the Romanian by Tom Carlson
and Vasile Poenaru

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

MILTON ACORN, one of Canada's most celebrated poets, lives in Parkdale, Prince Edward Island. These sonnets are from a new collection about a Rustico fisherman, his travels and his war.

ALISTAIR BELL, of Vancouver, has exhibited throughout North America and in Europe, South America and Japan. He is represented in many major public, corporate and private collections, notably the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the National Gallery of Canada and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. He is also the recipient of two Canada Council Senior Arts awards.

ELIZABETH BREWSTER has published nine books of poetry, two novels, and two books of short stories. She is presently working on a volume of *Selected Poems*, to be published by Oberon in 1985.

THOMAS C. CARLSON is a specialist in American literature at Memphis State University. From 1982 to 1984, he was Senior Fulbright Fellow at the University of Bucharest. Carlson is currently completing a book-length translation of Stanescu's poetry.

DON DOMANSKI lives in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. His books of poetry include *The Cape Breton Book of the Dead* (1975), *Heaven* (1978), and *War in an Empty House* (1982). These poems are from *Hammerstroke*, to be published later this year.

ELIN ELGAARD lives in Sackville, New Brunswick. She has previously published in such journals as *Matrix*, *Antigonish Review* and the *Journal of Canadian Fiction*. She has also translated two Canadian novels into Danish: Marian Engel's *Bear* and Timothy Findley's *The Wars*.

LEIGH FAULKNER lives and teaches in Queen's County, Nova Scotia. He is Associate Editor of *Germination*, and is currently completing a novel, tentatively titled *In Place*.

ROBERT GIBBS teaches at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton, where he has long been associated with *The Fiddlehead*. *A Mouthorgan for Angels* appeared last year from Oberon. *The Tongue Still Dances*, a collection of new and selected poems, is due out shortly.

KEVIN IRIE lives in Toronto. His poetry has appeared in various periodicals such as *Waves*, *Poetry Canada Review*, and the anthology *New Voices; A Celebration of Canadian Poetry* (Mosaic Press, 1984). His first manuscript, *The Colour of Eden*, has just been completed.

JANICE KULYK KEEFER lives in Church Point, Nova Scotia, where she teaches at the University of Saint Anne. Her stories have appeared in various periodicals. Last year, she won first place (poetry) and second place (short story) in the annual competition of the Nova Scotia Writers' Federation.

JASCHA KESSLER is a professor of English and Modern Literature at UCLA. He has translated over forty contemporary eastern European poets, and has visited Budapest six times in the past decade.

NINA KOSSMAN was born in Moscow in 1959, and immigrated to the U.S. in 1973. She is currently a teaching assistant in Russian at Vassar College.

M. TRAVIS LANE lives in Fredericton. Her books include *An Inch or So of Garden, Poems 1968-1972, Homecomings, Divinations and Shorter Poems* (Lowther Prize). A new collection, *The Witch of the Inner Wood* is currently in preparation.

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JAMES REANEY is well-known to readers of Canadian literature as one of our very finest poets and dramatists. *Happy Enough* is a chapter from his current project, a novel for children entitled, *Take the Big Picture*.

ERIC SELLAND is a poet and translator living in Tokyo. His translations have been published in Paris and his own poems have appeared in Tokyo and San Francisco.

NICHITA STANESCU was Romania's leading contemporary poet until his death in 1983. Stanescu's poetry has appeared in three separate American editions: *The Still Unborn About the Dead* (1975), *Unfinished Poems* (1979), and *Ask the Circle to Forgive You* (1983).

AUDREY THOMAS of Vancouver has published ten books, the latest of which is a novel, *Intertidal Life*, published by Stoddart in Canada.

HARRY THURSTON shares a thirty-acre farm with his wife and daughter in Southhampton, Nova Scotia. His first book, *Barefaced Stone* was published by Fiddlehead in 1980; he is currently completing his second.

MARINA TSVETAEVA was born in Moscow in 1892. She is generally considered one of the greatest Russian poets of the 20th century.

SANDOR WEORES is considered one of the finest of 20th century Hungarian poets. He is now in his late sixties. These poems are from his latest collection, published last year.

MINORU YOSHIOKA has been widely published and honoured in Japan and has been translated into English in a collection titled *Lilac Garden*. These poems are from his most recent work, *Kusudama* (1983).

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