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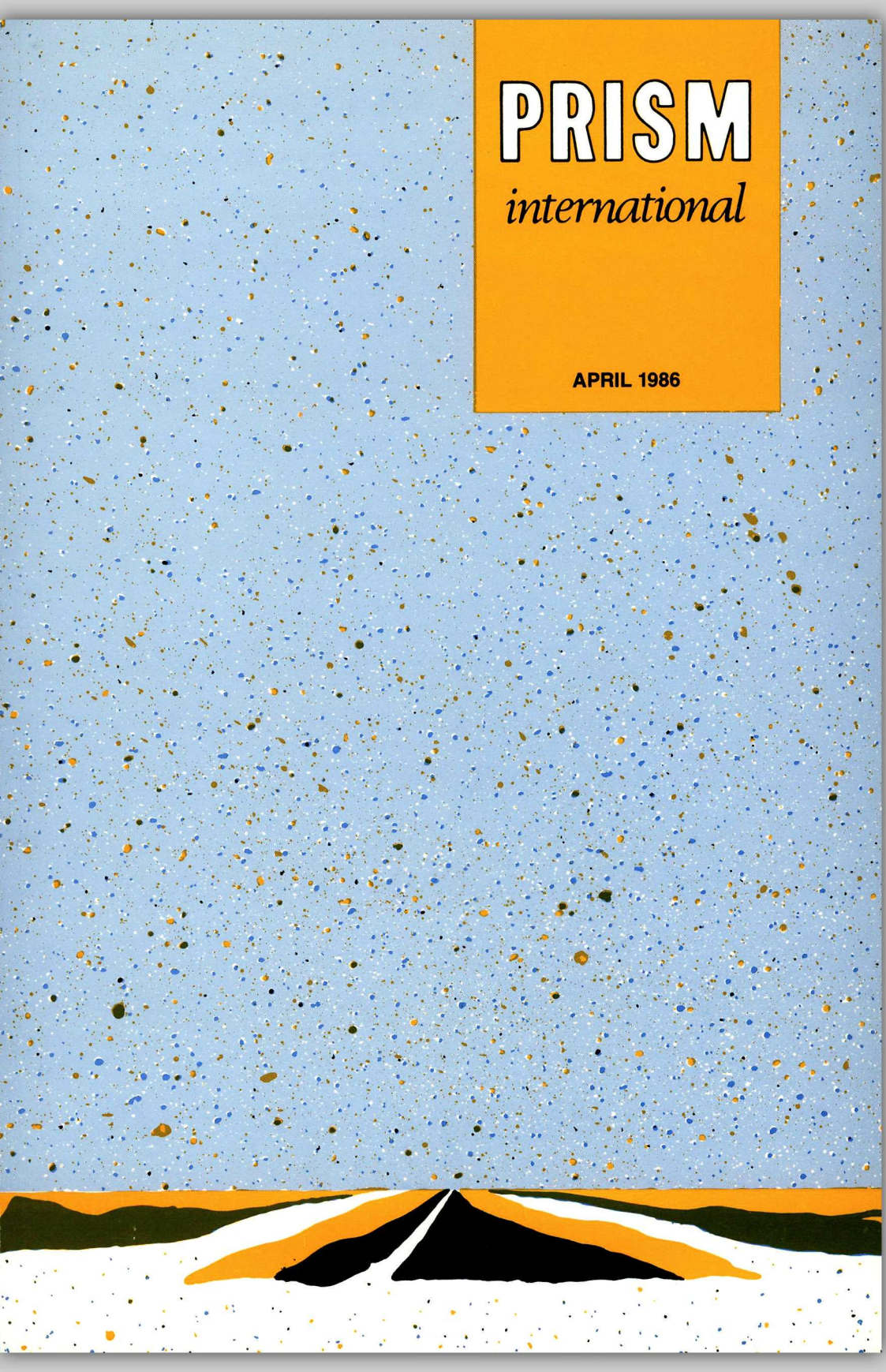

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Carol Shields

Family Secrets

Acres of corn, wheat fields and oats led right up to the town of DeKalb, Illinois where there was a State Normal School which prepared farm girls to go out and become schoolteachers, one of them being my young mother. This was not long after the First World War. She was sent first to teach in a four-room school in a place called Cortland where she stayed for two years. Why only two years?—I must have asked her this at one time or else my brother Barclay did. "I got sick," she said, "and had to go home for a while."

Where did she go? She went back to the forty-acre farm near Lemond where her mother and father lived, and after a year she got a job teaching on the west side of Chicago where she soon met our father and got married and began her real life.

I've thought lately about that time of sickness; what kind of sickness is it that makes a young woman leave a job and go home to her parents for a whole year? The last time I saw Barclay I said to him, "I think Mom must have got pregnant that year she had to quit her first job."

It took him a minute to figure out what I was talking about. For a man so intelligent he has a poor memory for the details of our childhood. Once I tested him on the colour of the garage doors we had at home in Maywood. "Blue," he said. "No," I shot back, "brown."

I had to remind him about Mom leaving the school in Cortland. I had to trot out the whole story, and then he leaned back and smiled his off-focus smile and said, oh yes, now he remembered.

"Well," I said, "what's your honest opinion? Do you think she got herself in trouble? As they used to say in those days?"

He shook his moony face. "I doubt it."

"A year's a long time to be sick." I made my voice curl up at the end, pointed it accusingly at the memory of our dead mother.

"Girls *didn't* then," Barclay said in a deceptively prim way he has.

"Oh no? What about Mary Organ?"

His face squeezed into a wide smile. He remembered Mary Organ all right, one of the old schoolteacher friends our mother used to talk about—Mary Organ who was unmarried and Catholic and who got

pregnant and jumped one night off the top of a player piano in an attempt to bring about a miscarriage. For us the story of Mary Organ's desperate leap has the sheen of legend about it, and shares space with my mother's other girlhood legends—brave little crippled Grace, for instance, who went to DeKalb Normal in a wheelchair, and another friend, someone called Lily who had the habit of signing her letters, "Lovingly, Lily," one word swimming coyly beneath the other (an example is preserved in my mother's "memory book," floating loose between pressed gardenias and locks of hair).

Barclay and I were having this conversation about Mom and Mary Organ and Grace and Lily in a downtown bar that serves good roast pork sandwiches. Barclay works as a systems engineer in Houston, and normally when he comes to Chicago I invite him out to the house for a family dinner. I wondered if he thought it was funny that I'd suggested we meet down in the Loop like this instead and that I hadn't even mentioned Ray and the children. Maybe he thought I was being evasive. Probably not; he has a calm, incurious nature. He'd put on weight, I saw. Even his fingers curving around the wine glass looked puffy. What do you do for love? is the question I would like to have asked him. I imagined the words leaving my mouth and entering his soft body. No, impossible. We talked instead about our mother's friend Mary Organ whom neither of us had ever met. "Do you suppose it worked?" Barclay said. He meant, did she have a miscarriage, and the question surprised me. "Why, I don't know," I said with amazement.

Why didn't I know? This was an old story, after all, and I'd heard it from our mother countless times. The picture was vivid: a carved oak piano draped with some sort of fringed scarf; a woman in a flapper dress with flushed Catholic cheeks is climbing first up onto the keyboard and then onto the top of the piano itself; she crouches, then springs, and there—frozen in mid-air—she has remained. Rings of surprise surround her spread-eagled body which is weightless in flight, but determined, righteous, and stiff with terror.

"Either it worked or it didn't work," said Barclay in his committee voice. Then he said, "Maybe she died."

I said no, I didn't think so, we would have remembered that.

Neither of us could believe that our mother had told us only half the story. We agreed that we must have blocked out the ending, the moment of actual impact. "Maybe it was a nervous breakdown," Barclay said, getting back to the subject of our mother's year of illness.

This was a good possibility and one that had also occurred to me. Our mother had been a nervous woman. Insomnia, hives, headaches, fits of harsh weeping, all the usual symptoms. "Mom's in the sadhouse again," our father would tell us from time to time. But that sad self was her later self, the self that came into being after the betrayal of her

veins and the stringy deterioration of her hands. As a young woman in her sunny Cortland schoolroom I see her as cool-skinned and calm, rather like Barclay in the matter of personality.

Barclay said, "Maybe it was one of those mysterious girlish fevers women used to get. Or—what do you call it?—wasting disease?"

"No one's had wasting disease since the eighteenth century," I told him.

"How about TB?"

"Impossible. She'd have gone to the San."

"Mono?" he flung out. We tried to think if people had mono in those days—it sounds so much a disease of our own generation. But no, it's an old illness; we remembered that it was once called glandular fever.

"That's a real possibility." I drummed my fingers on the dark wet table, pleased. Barclay—what a good man he was—sensed my pleasure and poured me more wine from the bubbly-sided carafe. Glandular fever. People who had glandular fever had to go to bed and stay there—perhaps as long as a year.

"Why don't you ask Auntie Ingrid?" Barclay suggested.

"I suppose I could."

"You still write to her, don't you?"

"Twice a year. Christmas and her birthday. I think she'd go through the floor if I just wrote to her out of the blue and asked her a thing like that."

"Well, if you really want to know..." He let his voice trail off mildly, but managed to suggest I'd been wasting his time with my speculation.

"Maybe I will," I decided. "But that's not to say I'm going to find anything out. You know how secretive our family is."

"Oh, I know that," Barclay said.

In my mother's family there were two amputations, Aunt Ingrid's finger and Uncle Harvey's leg. Even in a family with eight children this seems to me unusual.

Aunt Ingrid is my mother's twin sister—they were identical twins, the Lofgren girls from Lemond, Illinois, who looked so much alike that one of them once took a Latin test for the other without their teacher catching on. Later they liked to fool their boyfriends, my mother Anna going to the door when Ingrid's beau arrived and saying in her sly teasing voice, "I'm all ready if you are." They believed, as many twins do, that they were joined by a bond closer than mere sisterhood. In later years, Aunt Ingrid, married by then to Uncle Eugene and the mother of four children, would write from Napoleon, Indiana where she moved and tell my mother that she had a new perm, and it would turn out to have been on the very day my mother in Maywood

gave herself a Toni. Or they would find they had had colds at the same time or bought new spring coats in the same colour or tossed and turned throughout the same restless night. More often than not their letters crossed, and this more than anything provided proof of their joined natures.

As girls they were each other's best friends. When they were seventeen they enrolled in the teacher training course at DeKalb, travelling back and forth each day on the Interurban which ran for miles past the town limits, into the rolling countryside and stopping not far from the side road where they lived. One afternoon, arriving at their stop, my mother jumped gaily off the car, followed by her sister Ingrid. But Ingrid was wearing a ring on her finger, a cheap ring of imitation gold, and the ring caught in the mechanism of the door. My mother remembered a strip of brown skin unwinding like a peeling from an apple. There was surprisingly little blood but considerable confusion and shouting, and someone on the streetcar said loudly, "The poor girl, she's going to lose that finger."

The driver of the Interurban took Aunt Ingrid straight back to the DeKalb hospital where she did indeed lose her finger, the fourth finger on the left, that very night.

It fell to my mother to go home and tell her parents that there had been an accident. But she did *not* tell them. She could not, she later said; her mother could not have borne it. Instead, she told them that Ingrid had gone to a friend's house in DeKalb to spend the night, and then she lay awake all night with her teeth chattering, the longest night she was ever to endure. In the morning a doctor from DeKalb drove his Model T into the farmyard, knocked at the kitchen door and informed the astonished parents that their daughter's finger had been amputated.

"It was lucky it was on the left hand," Aunt Ingrid said. "It was lucky I lost it when I was young." She graduated and became a teacher; later she married Uncle Eugene and moved to Napoleon and became a prize-winning knitter. When she wore gloves she tucked the extra finger to the inside so that nothing showed but a neat little seam. Barclay and I as children used to ask to see her tiny knobbed stump which was pinker and harder than the rest of her hand. Did it hurt? we asked. Not a bit, she told us, not in the slightest. Now she's eighty years old and lives in a retirement centre in southern California, and last year she wrote that she has begun to experience a twinge of arthritis in her stump, just a twinge, nothing serious, she says—but a reminder that a finger had once been there.

Uncle Harvey, my mother's oldest brother, lost his leg in the war in 1916. There are no firm facts about how this loss occurred—whether it was a bullet or a bomb or what—the leg was just "lost in the war,"

mysteriously swallowed up in the smoking distances of Europe. He came home wounded, a man with a wooden leg and two canes to help him get around. After a few weeks of hobbling about on the farm, he took the train into Chicago and got a job as a machinery operator, and he worked at that for the rest of his life, a life that was long and alcoholic and which had a quality of deep distress about it. Whether it was the wooden leg that caused his distress I don't know, but I do know that his mother, our grandmother, was never told that her son had, in fact, lost his leg. He was lame, that was all she knew. She lived until the fall of 1942, this poor deluded woman, and then she succumbed to double pneumonia, still not knowing why.

My husband Ray, who comes from a more forthright family, could never understand how this could have happened. Was this grandmother, this short, fat-faced woman—we have only the photographs to inform us—kept in a state of innocence because of her status as Mother, the being most closely tied to the one-legged man? Or was she a woman with a singular sensitivity to life's darker offerings? Would she have screamed if she'd been told? Might she have fallen into a faint or slashed her wrists or sunk into years of melancholy? Or might she have shrugged—did anyone consider this?—and said, well, that's a shame but other boys have lost their legs and some are a lot worse off than Harvey. On one occasion the truth was almost discovered. Uncle Harvey, home for a Thanksgiving dinner, was sitting at the table lifting a turkey wing to his mouth. His mother, who was setting down a bowl of peas, put her hand on his shoulder and felt through his shirt the heavy leather strap that held the artificial leg in place. "What's this?" she said in a sharp voice.

There was a moment's awful silence. Then Uncle Harvey said, "It's for a hernia, Ma. Nothing serious."

My grandmother set down the peas and went back to the stove for the potatoes; nothing more was said. Perhaps she didn't know what a hernia was; perhaps she thought it was too delicate a subject to pursue; maybe she had her suspicions but resisted them—this, after all, was a woman who could not be told about her daughter's mutilated finger. How was she expected to bear the news of a son's lost leg? What if the secret had become a part of her, like a small benign tumor under the skin which had long since been accommodated. Turning to the stove, serving out potatoes, keeping her back turned, she may have been saying: I don't want to know, I don't want to know.

Whew, the aunts and uncles must have said afterwards; whew, that was a close call. I can imagine that they made adult faces at each other over the table, mock expressions of shock and guilty amusement as though they had brushed close to something unspeakable and also foolish, something they were deeply ashamed of, but could do nothing about.

In 1925 my mother recovered from her mysterious year of illness and came to Chicago to teach school. She and Aunt Ingrid and Mary Organ and another girl called Gladys Heinz found an apartment on the third floor of a house in Oak Park. The house was on Kenilworth Avenue, just north of Lake Street.

And the strange part of this is that the house belonged to the Hemingway family, the parents of Ernest Hemingway.

Of course my mother had never heard of Ernest Hemingway. No one, for that matter, had really heard of him. All she knew was that the family had a son who was living in Paris, France. He was married, and his family spoke about him with a certain coolness. My mother, in her simple way, assumed that the family disapproved of their son living abroad or else they didn't like the girl he had married. She had no idea that he was a writer.

Dr. and Mrs. Hemingway interviewed the four young women on a hot, late summer day. My mother and Aunt Ingrid and Mary and Gladys Heinz all wore hats and gloves and stockings, and they sat uneasily in the airless front room—the living room, as Mrs. Hemingway called it. The Hemingways explained that they didn't normally rent out their third floor, but that their daughter Sonny was in college and that college was expensive. This statement was allowed to float for a moment on the still air, and then Mrs. Hemingway explained a few household rules: the rent was payable at the beginning of each month. She herself was a light sleeper and could not tolerate noise after ten o'clock. The gas bill would be shared and so would the bill for water. Baths were to be limited to two inches in the tub, which was all she ever required herself. She said that she and her husband had considered carefully the kind of people they preferred as tenants and they both thought that young women in the teaching profession represented all that was ideal. They regretted that their son Ernest had not considered a career in education. They regretted it deeply.

The third floor apartment contained two bedrooms and a sitting room with a shuttered-off kitchen at one end. The ceiling sloped sharply in the kitchen part of the room, and standing at the sink they had to duck their heads, especially Mary Organ who was taller than the others.

They took turns cooking. My mother's specialty was cheese rarebit, a soggy dish that she occasionally made for us when we were children. Aunt Ingrid made chicken à la king in toast cups. Gladys Heinz made a good nutritious meat loaf, and Mary Organ—hopeless when it came to cooking—washed dishes night after night with her long neck bent against the ceiling.

On one occasion they were invited downstairs for Sunday dinner. There was a standing rib roast, mashed turnips, canned peas and tapioca pudding. The four of them were astonished to learn that Dr.

Hemingway had done all the cooking himself. Speechless, they turned their eyes to Mrs. Hemingway who pronounced in a deep voice, "I have never taken an interest in cooking." After dessert the Hemingways talked about their children. There had been a recent letter from Sonny, but it was some time since they had heard from their son in Paris.

"Is he an artist?" Aunt Ingrid asked.

"He's a time waster," Dr. Hemingway said in a stern, settled voice.

After a brief silence my mother, anxious to prove she was *not* a time waster, said, "Can we help with the dishes?"

"That would be useful," Mrs. Hemingway said.

Later they told each other it was all they could do to choke back their laughter. That stiff autocratic phrase of Mrs. Hemingway's—that would be useful—became their private invitation to hysteria. They inverted its icy finality—after all, they were very young—and made of it the signal for hilarity. If Aunt Ingrid offered to give Gladys a manicure, for instance—as she often did—Gladys would say, "That would be useful." If Mary Organ said she was thinking of strolling down to the public library, they would all call out after her, "That would be useful." When a man named Eugene Propper proposed to Aunt Ingrid, she swore she came close to giggling out, "Why, that would be very useful."

A year later Ernest Hemingway published *The Sun Also Rises* and became famous, but by that time my mother and Ingrid and Mary and Gladys had moved to an apartment on the west side.

This has always seemed to me to be a tragedy of timing. "Why did you move after only one year?" I used to badger my mother with that question, and her answer was always the same: "That house was so cold, we couldn't stand it another winter. We complained and complained about the heat, but they never did a single thing about it."

My mother never read Hemingway; his reputation intimidated her, I think. I started early, at fourteen, reading him with eager pleasure, but also out of a compulsion to fulfill a side of a family contract which I felt had been allowed to lapse. It seemed to me I had been willed the sharp perspective of privilege. For instance, I would look up from certain passages in *Green Hills of Africa* and suddenly think: this is the voice of a man who grew up in an insufficiently heated house. The drafty stairs, the icy bedrooms, the two inches of bath water—all these things tore brokenly into the smoothness of his sentence parts, or so I thought, and I wanted to reach through the pages and warn him that he was in mortal danger of exposing himself. Didn't he realize what those soft places in the prose revealed? Couldn't he see what was so clearly apparent to the most casual observer, what his pathetic evasions revealed?

Lately, since I've had lots of time, I've reread his earlier books. A

man I know—a man I thought I was in love with—teased me about being on a Hemingway trip, but it's really an inverse journey. I see these books differently now; what I thought were unconscious evasions, I now see as skillfully told lies, lies that have given me a new respect for Hemingway and the way he coped with a difficult life. I even started to think that perhaps I could cope with my own.

Then Aunt Ingrid's letter arrived, not a Christmas letter, not a birthday letter, but a letter that arrived in April in reply to my own unseasonable note. First she told me about the weather in San Diego which is always superlative, and then about the complete lack of cooked vegetables at the Centre. She expressed surprise at hearing from me and regretted that I hadn't sent news about Ray and the children—she assumed though that they were all fit and fine.

On the second page she explained she had very little recollection about my mother's year of illness. She vaguely remembered a sickness of some kind, but was sure it was of a shorter duration—six weeks at the most. She suggested influenza and then, as an afterthought, eyestrain. She went on to say, "I can't for the life of me see why you want to delve into all this ancient history."

The tone was rough, cross; she meant to put me in my place and she did. I couldn't really blame her. Lies, secrets, casual misrepresentations and small failures of memory—all these things are useful in their way. History gobbles everything up willy-nilly; it doesn't care a fig for distinctions; it was all the same—my mother's illness has the same weight as a missing finger or a wooden leg or a fizzled-out love affair. Eventually everything gets stuck between a pair of parentheses or buried in the bottom of a trunk.

I was thinking about this when the phone rang. It was my husband Ray suggesting we have dinner together. Why not? I said. We met at a place on Rush Street known for its good authentic Basque food, and afterwards we sat talking for an hour or two.

He told me that the saddest thing that had ever happened to him was going to the movie *Easy Rider* and then coming home and climbing into a pair of striped pyjamas and going to bed. I asked him why he'd never told me this before, and he said he didn't know. I accused him of being secretive, and he smiled and said he'd probably learned it from me.

I started to tell him that the saddest thing in my life was the bundle of worthless secrets I carry around in my head, but then I smiled back at him and said that I loved my secrets, that I would be lost without them, that they were the only things in the world I could call my own.

Al's House

Sometimes late at night, the rum bottle
empty, he pushes his chair from the table
and thinks he should go home,
but he's there. He can find his way
up the stairs in the dark, tell you
where Rufus's feet tapped the floor
as he played the fiddle,
where the dog slept, the dog now gone.

He won't speak of the fire
and what it destroyed:
his manuscripts, his marriage,
pictures of his daughters
before they knew
the meaning of absence, of loss.

Before his wife left, they built
the new house around the old.
Still standing, the original frame
prodded the boards into place,
hung the windows where they used to be.
His place, without a doubt, but a dream of it.
Nothing broken or shabby, no signs
of the wearing down of a life.

Fall in Cornerbrook. The maples on the hill
strike their own small flames. While he sits
alone, drinking in the night, moths drift
from the trees, gather on the siding
until the whole house has eyes and wings
ready to take flight,
the old one underneath, still burning.

Lines for the Earth

A long line of black ants
moves across the sand, so many
they carve a trail. So many
if you step on one, the line
will not break. It is time
tracking itself. It is one
vast mind moving forward.

Ant after ant, each bears
an egg, a round white syllable.
Somewhere they are stringing them
together. Somewhere under the earth
they are spelling it out.

Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadow—Sketch

seen close those dabs are slops of white
in the mid distance are sun on cloud's edge
brightness in a tree a flower a meadow
dew on the ground but at whatever distance
it's clear he broke the peace
splashed about in the lake of oil
to make nature dance
by palette and brush stroke
brought clouds and trees to the boil
an early action painter
the splash of the act of art
roars across Salisbury meadow
turns round and round the still point
of man's geometry
Claude's placidity and Gainsborough's
pastoral swirl set spinning;
or, Turner in the real world

Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadow—Painting

from front to back his full world
evanescent yes, all of it
from decayed posts to the grand arch
of the rainbow: post, man and horse
at work, boy at play,
Salisbury Cathedral, rainbow,
clouds, trees, the vanishing
world

there is to the left
a small separate painting
in the manner of Ruisdael
all in darkness
like a varnished bench
in a church
a curve of the channel takes us there
into black that might go on in any
of time's directions

a pastoral landscape yet some force is
writhing in the trees
at war in the clouds
seeping like smoke out of dark channels
some malevolence gathering
over man's cathedral
the trees by waterside
rising like a cry from the earth
skeletons of a dead world
god's in his heaven
is not clear

Ken Rivard

Winning Tree

for Bernie

some trees grow downward
through swamp water
straight to the earth's centre
and others race up to sky
while cattails wait in bleachers
ready to applaud the victor
now who will be first
to either brush the sun
or the earth's core

a woman took this picture
from where water meets
land meets cloud
and in this competition
the sky swamp is more crowded
than the sky in the air

at the base of one tree a ladder
from the last person who made it
who climbed into a photographer's world
a world where rivalry is still

the light green foam is a winner's circle
and cannot see its own reflection
as it is too busy readying itself
for when the photographer returns
from that other green world

George Amabile

Catch

In the throat
between
islands where the rip-tide
turns, they
let their boats
drift, slipping
the craft of millenia
into that now
alien
atmosphere, the sea.

Living
silver
tumbles into the dark
hold as neurons
threading the lungs
and the full rooms
of the heart
fire—a gap
in the breath, a skipped
pulse at slithery harvest.

So much
death
and life at once it makes
the head spin, lightly
like the double-talk
of oracles, or the sting
and flutter of Greek
songs, at night, in the *tavernas*
where something fresh
out of time comes back
to dance inside them.

E.D. Blodgett

Aubade for Rivers

Xanthos, why do you prophesy my death?
—Homer

1

Sitting in ditches.
Saline odour
of swamp water.

Horses not yet
dead.
Hands seeping.

Silent skin.

2

How do they come to name the great rivers?
To know there were gods who hid always within

the great rivers, sacred flowing away
to mingle with the sea: bright ecstasy

of salmon breathing within the wakes of gods
and blue divinities. Had I been born

fish, I could not run from holiness.
And what would death be but one return

from flesh to bliss, nothing left but gods
passing, the silence polyphonic praise?

3

I have never been fish. My dreams do not include
gods. The origin of rivers starts at dawn, the sun
all crimson in the east. Guernica I did not dream
was once an origin. All day beneath the sun the rivers
ran, rivers of fish flowing from the sun, through
narrow streets, the rest of houses. The horses
screamed, the children ran, the women wailed, the men
wept. It did not help: some died and were wrecked
against the shore. The sky ran crimson in every place,
the streams flowed down from Guernica, and in the streams
they saw the sky, and silence dying.

4

The ditches crowd.
I do not know
where they started from.

I do not know
who is alive
and who dies.

This is not
water at my feet.
Some horses

fled.

5

I dreamt where once Skamandros ran
I saw the flush of corpses there.
I could not see the shore nor sand
but saw the eyes and then fear

descend upon the bodies there.
Nor could I see a face I knew,
but mere sorrow everywhere
and nothing, nothing I could do.

Down across the plain it ran
until it emptied in the sea
and then the sea from blue began
to change to blood. This cannot be,

I thought to say, when all across
the plains the great rivers run,
rivers that flow from where Skamandros
flows, so slow to bear the scum

that heroes leave, autumnal red
of streams that start from hands and feet.
And what is left now they are dead
but blood when the rain falls and meat

6

for fish that turn within their crimson wakes?
How do they speak of gods, serenities

of blue, where fish within their timeless idylls
feed? And how can I, arriving here,

speaking of horses, of how we sat with only
silence for shirts and felt the rain fall

where ditches soaked, none far ever
from watery death, tell you of fish and tell

what mysteries the element of fish
has been, the joyful streams, the flowered banks?

7

Someone in the ditches danced.
Someone plays the flute.
Transcriptions in the pools

of horses their slow dressage.
How shall this song be called
but Guernica?

8

Guernica where the horses screamed.
Guernica where the streets leaked red.
Guernica where the children lost their heads.
Guernica where the arms are filed under A.
Guernica where the rivers gush from roses.
Guernica Guernica Guernica

9

I want to place your name
into mouths of lovers glossing—

languid dactyl of sighs, your name
the smell of savage isles,
a skin to feel against the air

Guernica I fear the rain
I see the sun drains
within your name the silence
of bone

breaking:

white Guernica where the fish are bombs

10

How wrong these litanies—Guernica is
the breaking of the heart.
                Guernica is
a name for flesh, and when I dream I do not dream
of old, oracular streams without the cry
of horses there, the sounds so long ago
but bare refrains, sounds going mad
of someone sleepless for years.
                I sense fish
somewhere going round beneath my skin,
design that rivers take, and eyes of fire
waiting within the dark, the silent blood:

11

behold silence, it
flowers, the sound at heart
of roses

petals waking

A Brief History of the Head of Thomas More

After the blade's neat bite
it spun once spraying blood
and bounced inside the basket.

Spiked on London Bridge
it was a hive for flies
till his daughter saved it,

bathed it, and placed it
in a spice-crammed pot
she kept beneath her bed.

But the brain which had
bemused Erasmus and
fired Henry's ire

shrivelled to a rattle
behind the dreadful grin.

Landscape with Figures

This is either a dream
or something I think when
I think I'm asleep:

a long white land—
sky bleached, ground
snow-sheeted, horizon

a line only when three
figures darken into shape—
men in parkas running.

Two carry guns, the third
their quarry, battles drifts
soon stumbles and is taken.

I am too far for their words
or to hear their rifle butts
burst his face and skull.

Yet the landscape remains
white, no red freezing stain
as the killers dissolve

leaving me in white sheets
in this white-walled cell
awake and oddly elated

not knowing if I have dreamed
but knowing one of them (not
always the same one) was me.

Gerald Hill

The Invisible Merging of Concrete and Air

I walk one way, will ride
the bus the other. Pigeons
rise or fall to or from
nests below the bridge
transporting on their wings
pieces of concrete (often
spilling them:
the river has to be dredged
every thirty billion years)

The going to, the coming back, the bridge . . .

I pour my eyes into the infinite
ringing sky (it must be one o'clock)
and gradually my skin falls away
until I'm, or the birds are, blue dust
above a river. I can see
the river steam
and the birds glide.

Dennis Cooley

Sunday Morning

sunday morning
walking out the back door
geese
(they're coming)
hhhllonnnggk
hhhlllooooonnnnggggk
& their fat liquid
pulses &
look i say
the geese they're coming
somewhere behind the pressured air
blind they are
coming lungliquid in their throats
lifting
sacs of air out
dangling into
Megan saying
where's Dana? Daaana
& they're there
in the southwest we see them
sway their bodies torpedo
north towing our hurt
our letting go

brains bunched
on wires of sun
in our heads too our eyes
& pulling
blur the sky the sky it is
wavering

it is
full & opening
silver &
black
it slivers our eyes
& our rushing
birds going their way
north in their noise
their stutters
left in the air

The Prestidigitators

How is it both my daughters
fall for jugglers and magicians
Young men who keep three objects going
with two hands or pull coins out of noses

Am I being punished for my steady job?

My blonde child hangs around malls
watching for Joe the Juggler and Jerry the magician
My dark child introduces me to a date who can't shake hands
because his are full and empty empty and full

When I was younger I too fell for sleight of hand
I gave 54 cents to an aluminum cookware huckster
who dissolved them with a flash and rumble
He sold pots all around but never paid me back
I would wander the shopping centres
bemused by moving staircases that folded into the floor
or stare at a beachball suspended miraculously
in the roar of a vacuum cleaner wand

Do I still miss that handful of change?

Now my daughters hanker after tricksters
no matter how often I warn them
repeating stories out of Ann Landers:
young girls abducted in shopping malls
(Drugged hair cut and dyed
they sleepwalk past their parents undetected)
I wander the malls on weekends wondering if my children
are in the washroom dyeing their own hair and giggling
The dark one blonde the blonde one dark
Perhaps they're being smuggled out right now
as two doves in the bottom of a silk hat

Will I know them as I go by?

I feel as futile as a ball bouncing
in the concourse fountain
I'm a coin lying in the pool
a face tossed away for luck

Water, Sand, A Palm Tree

She tells me how happy she is,
in her small northern town,
with her flowers and garden,
and the woods nearby.
                I look
at the album of house and yard,
the pictures of boat and motor home,
and then I see the pages of cartoons
she's clipped out over the years,
all on the desert island situation:
rescue and hopelessness,
the problems of sex and no sex.
She has always sent jars
and bottles into the world,
pickles and relish, the jams
under a plug of paraffin.
I've tasted the wild raspberry,
sweet with a little edge,
the tart flavour of seclusion.

Patrick Lane

Apple Peels and Knives

She picks up an apple and slides the knife under the red skin, turning the apple carefully with the knife so the peeling doesn't break. She tries to do this with every apple and today she has not succeeded. If she can do it she will hold the peel at one end in her left hand and swing the peel around her head three times with her eyes closed. Each time the peel makes a complete circle she will say, *Who is my true love?* If the peel doesn't break as she swings it and she succeeds in saying the words without anything intruding on her mind, she will drop the peeling on the floor. The shape it takes will be the initial of her true love.

The apple turns slowly in her hand and just as she gets to the hard part, the part near the end where the blossom used to be, the peeling breaks. It drops into the sink on top of the others and she slices off the last bit and cuts the apple into the third pie shell. The first two are full. There are only two apples left. She picks up the smallest one and begins again. There is one large red apple left in the sink. She noticed it when she began making pies and she has left it to the last. Maybe it will be the one, the one that will tell her.

She learned this when she was a little girl helping her mother. Her mother was full of superstitions, things you had to do and things you must never do. Like putting new shoes on the table. She never does that. She doesn't remember exactly what it means to put new shoes on the table. Does it mean a death? Strange but she can't remember. She only remembers she shouldn't do it, so she doesn't.

Or dropping a knife on the floor, or a fork or a spoon. She only remembers what the knife means. Wherever it points it means an unwelcome guest, a visitor, someone who will come and bring bad luck to the house. Most of the things she remembers are about bad luck. The knife and the shoes. Other things.

She picks up the last apple and holds it in her right hand. She will peel this one with the knife in her left hand like she always does, her woman's hand. If you are a woman her mother told her then it is the hand where your power is. It is the evil hand if you're a man. She is not naturally left-handed. She had to train herself to use her left hand for

things like peeling apples and now the hand is sure of itself. The knife feels safe, almost as if it knows this is the precise moment when everything will become clear. The apple will peel itself and then she will push the knife into the pale white apple flesh, lift the peel in her left hand and swing it around her head. As she does she will say, *Who is my true love?* three times. Then she will know.

As she is thinking this the apple is turning and the knife is slicing through the skin, the peel coming away from the flesh and settling on the broken peels in the sink below. The apple turns and the knife moves with it, both of them moving together, without guidance or volition, each knowing exactly what it must do in order for the peel to be perfect.

It is Carl's birthday today. He likes apple pie. She doesn't make it for him much anymore. She hasn't made apple pies for years. When she asked him in the morning what he wanted for his birthday, he said apple pie and kissed her good-bye.

That is why she is making apple pies now. Three because one isn't enough. It used to be but the twins can eat a whole pie between them at one sitting if she lets them. She usually lets them. Their names are Cam and Craig. It was cute seventeen years ago when she named them. Carl, Cam and Craig. Her three boys, her men. She doesn't think it is cute anymore. The names make her uneasy now. All the names did was confuse everyone or worse make them look at her that way people have and say, isn't that cute.

Her daughter's name is Carla which is even worse. She wonders if she ever taught Carla about apple peels? She doesn't think so. Carla was never interested in making apple pies. She wanted to make something out of herself and sometimes she wonders what it is that Carla has made. Whatever it is, it doesn't resemble her or her own mother. Carla is different. She guesses that is what Carla was making all those years when she was growing up, something different. Carla is away at University. She is studying to be a psychiatrist, like her father. Maybe that is what she wanted to make out of herself. She doesn't know.

She wants there to be enough pie so Carl will be able to have a second piece. The boys will finish one pie at supper and the second pie before they go to bed. The boys are still growing. Already they are taller than she is. They have been taller than her for what seems like years. She wonders how they could ever have been inside her own body, the two of them together, growing there. And now they are bigger than she is.

She is half-way around the apple and the peel still hasn't broken. She tries not to think of it breaking. If she does, it will. That is what her mother told her. Her mother used to say, don't think of it and it will happen. She never understood what that meant until she was older. Now she understands it but she can't explain it either, just like

her mother couldn't. Even if someone asked she couldn't and it doesn't matter. No one is going to ask.

She thought Carl was going to say chocolate cake when she asked him what he wanted but he didn't. He said apple pie. That's why she is peeling this last apple, why there are two full pie shells and another one almost full and a sink full of broken peelings. She turns the apple slowly and the knife moves.

In another year or two the boys will leave and then there will be only her and Carl for the rest of her life. The boys aren't really boys anymore, they're men, young men. In a few years they will be the same age Carl was when she married him. Carla is already past the age she was when she got married. Carla, her daughter. Carla isn't interested in getting married. Carla says she will probably never get married and for sure she will never have any children. She says she doesn't want to have a life like she did. What was wrong with her life that Carla doesn't want it?

And Cam and Craig don't want to be married either. When she asks them they look at each other and laugh. She wishes she knew what they laughed at when they laugh that way. They tell her things are different now, different from when she was young and married Carl. She asked Carl about it once and he told her he didn't blame them. What did blame have to do with it?

The knife is nearing the end where the blossom used to be and she ignores it. She knows this time the peel will be perfect. She also knows that the whole thing she is doing with the apple, the knife, and the peel is childish, something her mother told her in order to entertain a child when the child was learning to make pies. She knows that. But it doesn't change anything knowing it. She is watching the knife slide under the last bit of peel and then the peel drops into the sink. It doesn't break. She knew it wouldn't. She puts the apple down, feeling excited. She reaches for the peel and drops the knife on the floor. For a moment she is frightened, a kind of childish fear. She almost wishes her mother had not filled her head with all those superstitions but she did. She put them into her head and they stayed there.

She picks up the apple peel at the end with her left hand and lifts it out of the sink. It is long and red and it curls down from her outstretched arm like a snake. It looks very beautiful. You are very beautiful, she says out loud and is surprised at her voice. She closes her eyes and begins to swing it slowly around her head. Each time it passes in front of her she says, *Who do I truly love?* She says it three times and then she drops it on the floor. She hears it fall, hears the wet slap of the apple peel on the clean white linoleum.

She stands there with her eyes closed, her arm outstretched, her left arm with her left hand open in the air. The peel is on the floor in front of her. It has formed an initial there, she knows that, the initial of her

true love, the one who truly loves her. She is going to open her eyes in a moment and look at it and then she will know, but first she has to clear her eyes.

Your eyes must be clear, her mother had told her. She never knew what her mother meant. Now, at this moment, she does. She knows what it means. In a moment she will lower her arm, her hand, and she will open her eyes and look at the initial on the floor and when she does, she will know. Then she will pick up the peel and throw it in the garbage under the sink and she will put the pies in the oven and cook them until the crusts are a golden brown. If Carla were here she would tell her about apple peels and knives.

But the others will be here. They will all arrive together. They will be laughing and excited and Carl will put his arms around her and say he loves her and she will say Happy Birthday to him and the boys will say it too. But first she has to stop thinking. Her eyes have to be clear, perfectly clear, and right now they aren't and she wants them to be, knows they have to be so when she looks at the floor the apple peel will be able to tell her. Then she will know with her eyes wide open and clear and she will pick up the knife and go on with her life. She is standing there with her eyes closed. Everything will happen in a moment.

Warren Graves

The Last Real Summer

Act One

CHARACTERS

DR. ELIZABETH WHARTON, retired.
HERBERT TINGLEY, her father.
LIZZIE TINGLEY, herself at seventeen.
MOLLY TINGLEY, her mother.
DOUG CAMERON, her first boyfriend.
PEGGY CAMERON, his mother.
DUNCAN CAMERON, his father.

SETTING

The stage is divided into three fluid areas: the Tingley home, the Cameron home and, centrally, the barn where LIZZIE and DOUG used to meet.

(*Houselights down. Silence. Lights up on* ELIZABETH.)

ELIZABETH: I'm not sure why I wanted to come back here again. Looking for something, I suppose. Some sort of review of my life. What it was all about. Whether it made any sense. Or maybe I just wanted to wallow in old memories, and feel the warmth of them again. Not a good thing for a woman my age to do, of course. But after so many years of being practical and sensible, I find that being eccentric comes as a relief.

It means I can do whatever I like and not feel there has to be any particular reason for it. So I came back here. To see where it all began.

It's not the same, of course. How could it be? What did surprise me was how much it *hadn't* changed. Our old house is still on the corner. The garden is different. Somebody has put a garage where the swing tree used to be . . . but the house is still there . . . my bedroom looking down onto the street . . . and for a moment I thought I saw Dougie . . . throwing stones up at my window.

I wanted to walk up the path again, but if I did that, I would have to knock on the door, and somebody might answer it, and then what would I say? "I used to live here." They might pretend to be interested, and then I would have to talk about it—and I didn't want that. I wanted to imagine that it was still the same . . . still warm and comfortable . . . and the place where I could be a child again.

(*Tingley area lit.* HERBERT *sits in an armchair marking exercise books.* MOLLY *enters in her dressing gown.*)

MOLLY: Is she not in yet?

HERBERT: Er—no. Not yet.

MOLLY: Herbert. Have you seen the time?

HERBERT: Yes.

(*Pause.*)

MOLLY: Well I'm going to bed.

HERBERT: Good night dear.

MOLLY: Herbert. I really think you ought to speak to her. She's only seventeen, and she should be home before this. Are you listening?

HERBERT: Er—yes. Yes, I will.

MOLLY: Heaven knows what these young people get up to. (*Pause.*) And don't you stay up all night either!

HERBERT: All right, dear.

(MOLLY *leaves, exasperated. Once she's gone,* HERBERT *quietly gets out his pipe, tobacco, and the newspaper.*)

ELIZABETH: I really loved my father. He seemed such a calm and self-contained man. Somebody who was always there. I think it was the solid structure of the house and the reliability of my father that gave me such a happy

childhood. He and I always seemed to understand each other without having to say anything, especially when Mother was being a bit "Irish."

(LIZZIE *enters softly, wearing a party dress. She stares at her father, but he does not appear to notice.*)

LIZZIE: "And what time do you call this, Miss Tingley?"

HERBERT: Is that what I'm going to say?

LIZZIE: I expect so. And then something about "you know how your mother and I worry when you are out late."

HERBERT: Your mother has gone to bed, and I am reading the newspaper.

LIZZIE: And smoking a pipe.

HERBERT: The smell will be gone by the morning.

(*Pause.*)

LIZZIE: Did Mum really go to bed?

HERBERT: She usually does at this time of night.

LIZZIE: Didn't she say anything?

HERBERT: She said good night.

LIZZIE: I mean about me being out late. It's after one.

HERBERT: Hmm.

LIZZIE: What does "hmm" mean?

HERBERT: It means if you wanted to say anything about that, you would have my undivided attention.

LIZZIE: . . . It wasn't a very good dance.

HERBERT: How did you get home?

LIZZIE: Gerry Rasmussen brought me home in his truck.

HERBERT: What happened to Douglas Cameron?

LIZZIE: (*Miffed.*) *I* don't know.

HERBERT: Oh, I see. Not quite the evening anticipated.

LIZZIE: I wish you weren't the principal, Dad.

HERBERT: Why?

LIZZIE: They all think I tell you everything we do.

HERBERT: And don't you?

LIZZIE: Yes. Well. Maybe not absolutely everything.

HERBERT: I'm not sure I was to know "absolutely everything." You told me about Oggie's frog.

(LIZZIE *laughs.*)

Bit embarrassing really. I stormed and raged. Kept the class in after school. And all the time I knew whose fault it was. But I played my part. Don't worry, dear. I won't let you down.

ELIZABETH: But you did eventually, didn't you?

HERBERT: Did I? How?

ELIZABETH: You died. That was a terrible thing to do to me.

HERBERT: Yes. Sorry about that.

ELIZABETH: I have never felt so alone in my life.

HERBERT: That's what growing up means, Lizzie. Learning to be alone.

LIZZIE: What shall I be when I grow up?

HERBERT: Very tired if you don't start getting to bed earlier.

LIZZIE: No, seriously.

HERBERT: What would you like to be?

LIZZIE: The captain of a ship.

HERBERT: All right.

LIZZIE: Would you let me?

HERBERT: If that's what you want to be. I'll write to all the shipping lines to see if they have any vacancies for a seventeen-year-old girl with no qualifications.

LIZZIE: Write tomorrow.

HERBERT: Sunday tomorrow. The post office won't be open.

LIZZIE: You could write tomorrow and post them on Monday.

HERBERT: Yes, that's true. If I've got the addresses.

LIZZIE: You don't have the addresses.

HERBERT: I don't think so.

LIZZIE: So you won't write.

HERBERT: Well, not much point if I don't have the addresses.

LIZZIE: You wriggle out of everything, don't you?

HERBERT: I'm not wriggling out. It's called taking the line of least resistance. When you've been dealing with children as long as I have, it becomes a sort of art form. (*Pause.*) What do you want to be a ship's captain for anyway?

LIZZIE: See the world.

HERBERT: And be the boss.

LIZZIE: Yeah, that too. But I'd like to see the world.

HERBERT: Ship's captains see the sea mostly. I suppose bits of the world turn up from time to time.

LIZZIE: You saw the world didn't you—in the war.

HERBERT: I saw broken bits of it.

LIZZIE: What's it like?

HERBERT: Quite exciting to start off with, but the novelty tends to wear off.

LIZZIE: Why?

HERBERT: It can be quite a shabby place.

(*Lights fade in Tingleys as* LIZZIE *kisses her father and goes off to bed: he folds his newspaper and follows.*)

ELIZABETH: I thought that was a very strange thing for him to say.

It never occurred to me to ask my father about himself while he was alive. It was only after he died that I asked my mother. She talked about passion and despair, adventure and disappointment. I couldn't believe she was talking about the same man. All I could remember him as was a smiling man who sat in an armchair marking exercise books, and smoking a pipe after mother had gone to bed.

(*Lights up in Tingleys:* MOLLY *enters.*)

MOLLY: Lizzie? Lizzie! Have you seen the time?

LIZZIE: (*Off.*) Coming.

MOLLY: That girl.

(LIZZIE *rushes in and grabs schoolbooks.*)

Have you had your breakfast?

LIZZIE: I had some toast.

MOLLY: Elizabeth. I am not going to tell you again. You must have a good breakfast before you go to school. It's such a long day.

LIZZIE: I don't have time.

MOLLY: If you got up when I called you, you have plenty of time.

LIZZIE: Yes, Mum.

MOLLY: Is that the dress you were wearing yesterday?

LIZZIE: Yes.

MOLLY: Go and change.

LIZZIE: I don't have time to change.

MOLLY: You can change your dress and go to school with your father.

LIZZIE: Mo-ther! I can't arrive at school with the principal.

MOLLY: What nonsense. Everybody knows he's your father.

LIZZIE: He's not my father, he's the principal.

(MOLLY *grabs* LIZZIE *and tidies her.*)

MOLLY: You just listen to me, young lady. Tomorrow you will get up when I call you and you will eat a good breakfast. This really ought to be in the wash. Did you do that homework?

LIZZIE: I'm going to do it tonight.

MOLLY: Well you come straight home and get it done. Then you can go to bed early for once.

LIZZIE: I have to go to Cameron's on the way home.

MOLLY: What for?

LIZZIE: Dad says I should take Doug some homework so that he doesn't fall behind. He's sick.

MOLLY: Sick my foot. His father's starting seeding and keeping him home. Why do you have to go? Is there no

one who lives nearer the Cameron's than us?

LIZZIE: I have to go because I said I would.

MOLLY: Don't forget your lunch.

LIZZIE: I have my lunch.

MOLLY: Don't forget to eat it.

LIZZIE: I won't.

MOLLY: Did you give the recipe back to Mrs. Olsen?

LIZZIE: Yes, yes. Mum I have to go. *(Kisses her, leaves.)*

MOLLY: *(Calling.)* Did you say thank you? Oh what's the use. No time for anything. I don't know what's wrong with the girl.

ELIZABETH: When did you first know about Doug?

MOLLY: Oh Lizzie, I always knew. The look on your face. But Lizzie, for goodness sake, you were only seventeen.

ELIZABETH: You were married and had me at nineteen.

MOLLY: No reason for you to make the same mistakes I did.

ELIZABETH: Was I a mistake?

MOLLY: ... You're a bright girl, Lizzie, and you're pretty enough. You can go a long way in the world. You don't want to get mixed up with young Douglas Cameron. You're too young.

ELIZABETH: But Mother, I *was* mixed up with young Douglas Cameron.

MOLLY: Nonsense. It's nothing serious. I'm not going to make anything of it. I start saying something to you and you'll do the opposite to spite me. I'm going to leave well enough alone, and mark my words, it'll all go away.

ELIZABETH: It won't go away, Mother.

MOLLY: *(Sadly.)* But it *did*, Lizzie. Don't you see? It did.

ELIZABETH: Did it?

MOLLY: Oh stop fussing me girl. You get me so fussed, I don't know what I'm saying half of the time. *(Exit.)*

(Lights fade in Tingleys.)

ELIZABETH: Poor Mother. When my daughter was seventeen, I wanted to run away. My child was turning into a woman and there were so many things that *I* hadn't done yet. I couldn't bear the thought that time was slipping away, and I might never get the chance. Now Kathy is married and has a family of her own—so she won't get the chance either. Maybe we should talk about that.

(Lights in barn. DOUG *lying on some straw.* LIZZIE *enters with schoolbooks.)*

LIZZIE: Doug?

DOUG: Yo?

LIZZIE: What are you doing in here?

DOUG: Hiding from my old man. He's trying to kill me.

LIZZIE: Why weren't you at the dance last night?

DOUG: I'm sick.

LIZZIE: You are not sick.

DOUG: I am so sick. My old man even sent a note to the principal. Didn't your dad get it?

LIZZIE: Yeah, he got it. He said the ground must have dried out early this year. (*Throws books at him.*) He says if you don't finish your assignments he can't pass you to Grade Eleven.

DOUG: Thanks. Too bad I'm too sick to finish my assignments.

LIZZIE: Everybody knows you are not sick.

DOUG: Guess I'll just have to die and smarten everybody up.

LIZZIE: (*Concerned.*) You're not really sick are you?

DOUG: Holy Cow, are you deaf or something? I'm sick. My old man is dragging me out of bed in the middle of the night to start working. He says I'd wake up quicker if I washed under the pump like he does. I'm sick of that for a start. Then he takes the horses out to the field, and I'm stuck in the barn with the seed and getting all that green powder stuff in my throat. Then he comes in and says, "Is that all you've done?" I'm sick of that. I'm going blind, I'm choking to death, and then the principal's daughter turns up with my assignments. How sick can you get?

LIZZIE: I'm sorry.

DOUG: Oh sure.

LIZZIE: I am.

DOUG: Show me.

LIZZIE: No.

DOUG: Aw come on, Lizzie.

LIZZIE: No.

DOUG: How can you say no to a dying man?

LIZZIE: You are not dying.

DOUG: I am so dying. Parts of me are going stiff already.

LIZZIE: (*Furious.*) You stop talking like that Douglas Cameron or I'm walking right out of here.

DOUG: Okay, okay. Jeez.

LIZZIE: You hear me?

DOUG: So take the assignments with you, okay?

LIZZIE: I'm just trying to help, that's all.

DOUG: Well if I needed that kind of help . . .

(He collapses to the floor, coughing and clutching his chest. LIZZIE, *concerned and conned, hurries to him.)*

LIZZIE: Doug? What is it?

DOUG: I told you. I'm sick.

LIZZIE: Oh Dougie!

DOUG: I am. Swear to God. I got sleeping sickness, working sickness, blisters, frostbite. Just one?

LIZZIE: No.

DOUG: Please?

LIZZIE: I know you.

DOUG: I'm so weak, Lizzie.

LIZZIE: Oh sure. That's what you said last time.

DOUG: I'll keep my hands behind my back.

LIZZIE: Solemn oath?

DOUG: Swear to God.

LIZZIE: Well . . . okay.

(She kisses him swiftly and chastely. DOUG *is "born again.")*

DOUG: I'm going to live. I'm going to live. My eyes. I can see! I can see Old Sam picking cotton off the tree and a cricket singing in the sky. It's going to be different from now on. You'll never see me in here again, Warden. I'll get a *job*! And I owe it all to you, Missy Tingley.

(DOUG *lunges at* LIZZIE, *she screams, escapes, grabs a hayrake and socks* DOUG *heftily. He collapses to the floor and lies still.)*

LIZZIE: Oh for gosh sakes. Doug?

(As LIZZIE *reaches him, he grabs her suddenly and fights her into submission as he would another boy.)*

DOUG: I can hear that steamboat coming down the river, bringing our boys home from the war . . . *(Sings.)* "Oh say can you see . . . "

LIZZIE: I can't breathe.

DOUG: Great. You talk too much when you can breathe.

LIZZIE: Doug, please!

DOUG: Do it right then.

LIZZIE: No!

DOUG: YES!

(He pulls LIZZIE up into the sitting position. She glowers at him. He moves in slowly and kisses her.)

I wouldn't hurt you. You're my Lizzie.

(She stares at him. They break and she stands up. Pause.)

LIZZIE: I wish you wouldn't keep doing that.

DOUG: Why not?

LIZZIE: I don't know.

DOUG: You like it don't you? (*Sing-song.*) You like it, you like it, you like it . . .

LIZZIE: Shut up. (*Pause.*) Why didn't you come to the dance last night?

DOUG: Are you kidding? By the time we finished, I could hardly stand up.

LIZZIE: Gerry Rasmussen took me home in his truck.

DOUG: So?

LIZZIE: It was one o'clock in the morning.

DOUG: I'd had four hours sleep by then.

LIZZIE: Don't you care?

DOUG: About what?

LIZZIE: Me going home with Gerry Rasmussen in his truck.

DOUG: Did he hit something?

LIZZIE: No.

DOUG: I thought maybe there'd been an accident or something.

LIZZIE: No, there wasn't an accident. He drove me home safely and carefully and it was one o'clock in the morning.

DOUG: (*Realization.*) He got his headlights fixed.

(LIZZIE, *furious, starts to leave.*)

DOUG: Where you going?

LIZZIE: I just dropped by because my dad wanted you to have the books, okay? (*Exits.*)

DOUG: Hey, Lizzie . . . Jeez.

(*Lights fade in barn.*)

ELIZABETH: I am still not completely sure who treats who the worst—men or women. I try to take an unbiased view whenever I can. I really had a thing about Doug that summer, and I was furious with myself. He was such an oaf.

One night, quite late, he came to see my father. I could hear voices downstairs but I couldn't make out who it was—so I went out into the garden and looked in through the window. And there they were the two of them, Douglas Cameron and my father, frowning and nodding at each other, so I could tell it was serious men talk. The next morning, my father told us that Doug and his father had been arguing about something, and Doug had come to our house to look it up in the Encyclopedia Brittanica. It seems Doug was right and his father was wrong. Maybe there was more to this hooligan than I thought.

(*Lights up in Cameron kitchen.* PEGGY *returning from*

answering the door carrying a vegetable scraper. LIZZIE *follows her in.*)

PEGGY: Come in dear. I was just doing the carrots for supper. Will you stay for supper?

LIZZIE: No, that's fine Mrs. Cameron. I have to be home for supper.

PEGGY: Sit down dear. Tell your father I think it's real nice of him sending the schoolwork for Doug. I wish he didn't have to miss school but his Dad says the seeding is more important. That's right enough I suppose if we are going to have food on the table. How's your mother?

LIZZIE: She's fine.

PEGGY: That's good. How are you doing at school?

LIZZIE: Okay . . . I guess.

PEGGY: Doug says you are one of the clever ones. He says you have to be with your dad being the principal and all. That's a good thing for a girl to be smart, but you mustn't be too clever to enjoy yourself, you know. Did you go to the dance?

LIZZIE: Yes.

PEGGY: Dougie wanted to go but his dad said there were more important things to do. It's different for a boy isn't it?

(DUNCAN *enters.*)

Oh there you are. I was wondering where you had got to.

DUNCAN: How long till supper?

PEGGY: About an hour.

DUNCAN: I'm needing some more barbed wire.

PEGGY: Doug can go for you.

DUNCAN: I don't know where the hell he is. I'll go myself.

PEGGY: Duncan, this is Lizzie Tingley from the school. She brought Douglas's books so that he won't get too far behind. Wasn't that kind of her?

(DOUG *enters,*)

DUNCAN: Where the hell have you been? I'm needing some barbed wire from the store.

DOUG: I'll go.

DUNCAN: I'll go myself. You fill the troughs and feed the chickens. And you can have another look for those wire cutters while you're out there. We're going to be needing them and I'm damned if I'll buy another pair. (*Exits.*)

PEGGY: Are you sure you can't remember where you left them, Doug?

DOUG: If I could remember where I left them, I could find

them, couldn't I?

PEGGY: They must be along that fence somewhere.

DOUG: I'll try again.

PEGGY: They were very expensive.

DOUG: I know.

LIZZIE: I think I should be going, Mrs. Cameron. I have to get back for supper.

PEGGY: Are you sure you won't stay dear? You're very welcome.

LIZZIE: I'd better not. My folks will be wondering.

PEGGY: Maybe some other time. Let me just get a pot of jam for your mother. The strawberries were very good last year. (*Exits.*)

(*Pause.*)

DOUG: Thought you'd gone.

LIZZIE: Just going.

DOUG: Hey listen. Don't eat the strawberry jam. I put some of Oggie's love potion in it. Make you go round kissing guys and all that kind of stuff.

LIZZIE: So?

DOUG: So?

(PEGGY *returns with jam.*)

PEGGY: Here you are dear. Tell your mother I'm glad she's well, and thank your father for being so thoughtful.

LIZZIE: I will. Good bye Mrs. Cameron.

DOUG: I'd better walk you off the property. I didn't feed the chickens yet. They could attack you and eat you.

PEGGY: Oh don't listen to him. He gets it off those radio shows. Amos and Andy.

DOUG: No, this was on the news. It really happened. These starving chickens went crazy and attacked a whole city—with knives and forks.

PEGGY: I don't believe that.

DOUG: Best not take any chances. I'll walk you to the road.

PEGGY: Come back and see us again dear, any time.

(DOUG *and* LIZZIE *leave.*)

PEGGY: My son and the principal's daughter. Well. How about that.

(*Lights fade on Camerons.*)

ELIZABETH: By this time everybody knew about me and Doug—except Doug. Walking back to the road, I was being aloof, and he was trying to make me laugh. He could always make me laugh. By the time we got to the road again, I was chattering away, and wondering

if he was going to try and kiss me again. He was right. I did like it. But I couldn't tell him that or he'd never want to do anything else. Then he said he had to get back to the chickens—and he just left. Not even a joke. That made me mad at him all over again. There's nothing worse than getting ready to say no to a man and then finding you don't have to. That was the night he came to throw stones at the window. He said while he was feeding the chickens he reckoned I owed him one. I told him to stop yelling in the middle of the night, and he said he couldn't because he was surrounded by chickens with knives and forks singing, "Come and join us." I told him to go away. So I got my own back, and I didn't think my parents had heard us.

(*Lights up in Tingleys.* HERBERT *putting on his shoes.* MOLLY *enters with his lunchbox.*)

MOLLY: I've made some cheese sandwiches and put some slices of onion in separate.

HERBERT: Onion?!

MOLLY: It's good for you. You don't have to eat it. See how you feel.

HERBERT: I don't think I want to go to school today.

MOLLY: Shall I give you a note for the principal.

HERBERT: Yes. Tell him I'm starting my life over again, and this time I *am* going into the family business. That's what I should have done you know, Molly.

MOLLY: Sure you should. And if I'd had any sense I'd have stayed in Ireland.

HERBERT: Might have been easier, mightn't it.

MOLLY: Much easier. And if you'd got killed in the war, you wouldn't have any troubles at all by now.

(LIZZIE *enters with schoolbooks, yawning.*)

MOLLY: Well look at that now. She's up early for once.

HERBERT: Meant to ask you about that, Molly. Did you hear any strange noises in the night?

MOLLY: No, I heard nothing.

HERBERT: How about you, Lizzie? Did you hear anything?

LIZZIE: What sort of noises?

HERBERT: Strange noises. Sort of clicking and people whispering.

LIZZIE: What sort of clicking?

MOLLY: Do you think it was burglars trying to break in? trying one of the windows maybe?

HERBERT: No, I don't think it was that. Sounded more like a

bunch of chickens with knives and forks.

(MOLLY *hoots with laughter and* LIZZIE *hits him.*)

LIZZIE: I won't come to school with you if you are going to tease me.

MOLLY: Saints be praised.

HERBERT: Are you coming to school with me this morning?

LIZZIE: Yes.

HERBERT: Does that mean I have to go as well?

LIZZIE: What?

MOLLY: Take no notice of him. He was thinking of making a start on his second childhood this morning.

HERBERT: I've changed my mind. We'll do it, Lizzie. We will embark on a new day with firm and purposeful steps.

MOLLY: You'd better speed up those firm and purposeful steps or you are both going to be late.

HERBERT: I shall give us both a detention.

(*Taking* LIZZIE'S *arm into his, they stride out together.*)

MOLLY: Tell the principal I'll be holding a good supper.

(*She watches them leave, smiling and shaking her head. Lights fade in Tingleys.*)

ELIZABETH: I'm glad I remember that. It was a beautiful day. One of those days where you don't have to worry about anything because everything is working out just fine by itself.

I came home from school, did my homework, and went to bed early. My normally perceptive parents didn't seem to find this at all suspicious. They should have.

I lay in my bed waiting, forever it seemed. Finally I heard them go to bed, and the house fell quiet. I could hear my heart pumping like a two stroke. Was I really going to do this? All I had to do was get out of bed, put on my clothes, walk down the stairs and out of the house. I had done that hundreds of times before, of course . . . but never in the middle of the night with my parents in bed and the house so quiet.

My legs wouldn't move. I tried saying, "NOW" and "THIS IS IT"—but nothing happened. I can remember my mother saying, "An act of will is the easiest thing in the world. You make up your mind, and you do it." She said it about taking medicine, cracking eggs, jumping off the boat dock. I don't think she meant to include meeting a boy in the middle of the

night, but I felt the principle was the same. It was all the time Doug had. His father was keeping him busy while it was light.

I thought of Dougie waiting for me—and my legs moved at last. I stood in the white moonlight of the bedroom and my heart was so high in my chest I could hardly breathe. Now. This is it. This is what I was going to do.

(*Lights up in barn.* DOUG *asleep.* LIZZIE *tiptoes in.*)

LIZZIE: Doug?

ELIZABETH: I had never seen Doug asleep before. He was so quiet and still, I thought he was dead.

LIZZIE: Doug? Doug! (*Shakes him: he rolls over.*) Well here's a fine thing. I walk all this way and you are fast asleep. Doug? I nearly didn't come you know. Sneaking out of the house and creeping down the stairs. Do you know how noisy our staircase *is* in the middle of the night? Suppose my dad wakes up and finds out I've gone? Doug? Are you awake or not?

DOUG: Yeah. Yeah, I'm awake.

(*He reaches out to pull* LIZZIE *into his arm. She resists. He quits. Pause.* LIZZIE *arranges his arm around her. Pause. She settles comfortably, smiling. Pause. Finally . . .*)

LIZZIE: Doug?

DOUG: Hmm?

LIZZIE: Are you sure you're awake?

DOUG: I'm sorry, Lizzie. I'm so tired.

LIZZIE: That's okay.

DOUG: My old man is trying to kill me.

LIZZIE: Poor Dougie. How much more do you have to do?

DOUG: You know the pump in the yard?

LIZZIE: Yeah.

DOUG: From there to Saskatchewan.

LIZZIE: I guess really you ought to be in bed.

DOUG: Wanna come?

(LIZZIE *hauls off to hit him: he covers up.*)

I'm not doing anything.

(*They resume previous position warily. Pause.*)

LIZZIE: Doug?

DOUG: Mmm?

LIZZIE: Are we in love?

DOUG: I dunno. Why don't you look it up in your old man's encyclopedia?

LIZZIE: I'm serious. I never had a boyfriend before.

DOUG: Gee, Lizzie, I'm sorry. I didn't know you had a boyfriend.

LIZZIE: I'm talking about you, dummy.

DOUG: Dummy! Thanks a heap.

(*Pause.*)

LIZZIE: I think I'm in love.

DOUG: What's it like?

LIZZIE: What?

DOUG: Being in love.

LIZZIE: It's okay.

DOUG: Does it hurt?

LIZZIE: Yeah. Sort of. Kind of scary too.

DOUG: Why?

LIZZIE: Oh you know. Getting married. Having babies.

DOUG: (*Awake.*) Whuh?

LIZZIE: I mean I know that's what other people do, but I thought it meant *other* people. I never thought it about me. Did you think it about you?

DOUG: Hell no, I'm too young. (*Pause.*) You're not really thinking about that kind of stuff are you Liz?

LIZZIE: Well no. Not yet. (DOUG *slumbers gratefully off: pause.*) My mother says I'm too young. She was married and had a baby at nineteen. She says that's too young. Are you asleep again? (*Hits him.*)

DOUG: Quit that.

(*Pause.*)

LIZZIE: You can kiss me if you want to.

DOUG: I'm too tired.

LIZZIE: Well . . . I could kiss you.

DOUG: Okay. That would be nice.

(LIZZIE *ventures this, then is delighted at her audacity. She arranges* DOUG *around her.*)

ELIZABETH: I was surprised at myself. All those times I had stood conveniently near Mr. Douglas Cameron so that he could put his arm around me, or kiss me if he was quick enough—and then I would scold him when he did . . . now it was different. By the end of the evening, if I wanted to be kissed, I just helped myself. It was a new and wonderful freedom. I was a hussy at last.

I got home that night on Doug's old bicycle. Flying through the night like a demented wood sprite. That was the image I had of myself. "I am a demented wood sprite." I must have read it somewhere. I re-

membered the phrase about ten years ago. We were in Houston for an oil meeting and the banquet the night before should have been very enjoyable. Unfortunately I had a filthy cold, and I spent the evening surrounded by some of the youngest looking middle-aged women it has ever been my misfortune to stand comparison with. I was looking into the bathroom mirror the next morning and that phrase came back. "You are a demented wood sprite." I laughed so hard that Harvey said, "Guess you're feeling a whole heap better today, eh Liz?" He was such a lovely man. I only wish I could have loved him as much as he wanted me to.

(*Lights up in Tingleys.* LIZZIE *is looking for schoolbooks.* HERBERT *enters, tying his tie.*)

HERBERT: There appears to be a bicycle in the front yard.

LIZZIE: What?

HERBERT: A bicycle.

LIZZIE: Oh. Yes. It's Doug's. He said I could borrow it.

HERBERT: What for?

LIZZIE: To ride to school.

HERBERT: I thought you'd got used to the idea of coming with me?

LIZZIE: It's good exercise. You're always saying I should get more exercise.

HERBERT: When did he lend it to you?

LIZZIE: Oh . . . weeks ago. But I had to get the flat tire fixed first. (*Exit.*) Bye Dad.

(MOLLY *enters, bringing* HERBERT'S *coat.*)

HERBERT: Did you know about this?

MOLLY: What?

HERBERT: Young Cameron lending Lizzie his bike for school?

MOLLY: And maybe to cycle out to the farm in the evenings?

HERBERT: Is that what she's doing?

MOLLY: I don't think so. But I daresay the idea will occur to her eventually.

HERBERT: I'm not sure I like the sound of that.

MOLLY: Well you've nobody but yourself to blame. You're the one that's encouraging them.

HERBERT: Me?

MOLLY: Oh go on with you, don't take any notice. If she wants to pedal her way out to Cameron's and back, she's got her evenings cut out for her. She'll not do it too often. (*Brushes* HERBERT'S *coat.*)

ELIZABETH: She was wrong of course. Within three weeks I could

have qualified for the Olympics.

MOLLY: There, now. Get off with you.

(Lights fade in Tingley's.)

ELIZABETH: It was a cranky old bike with a heavy iron frame and "sit up and beg" handlebars . . . but when love oils the wheels. Maybe I did do it too often. Once too often. I'm still not sure about that. It all began when Doug told me about his conversation with Oggie and "the points system." It was just boy talk of course, but it made me furious . . .

(Light barn area. DOUG *picking at straw angrily,* LIZZIE *fuming in the corner.)*

DOUG: Dammit! I wish I hadn't told you about it.

LIZZIE: Well you did.

DOUG: Well I wish I hadn't.

LIZZIE: Did you tell Oggie how many points you score with me?

DOUG: Course not.

LIZZIE: I'll bet you just did.

DOUG: Honest, Lizzie.

LIZZIE: I'll bet you all get together over at Hanson's, with some of that stuff from the bootlegger, and you all boast about how many points you got this week.

DOUG: We do not.

LIZZIE: You mean the others don't talk about it?

DOUG: Well sure they do.

LIZZIE: But you don't.

DOUG: No, I don't.

LIZZIE: Don't they ask you?

DOUG: Why should they ask me?

LIZZIE: Oh come on, Doug. They all know I come over here. Oggie was round school the other day squeezing the tires on the bike and pretending they were so hot he burned his hand.

(DOUG *laughs.*)

LIZZIE: I don't think it's funny.

DOUG: Did I ever tell you about the time he spooked old man Ramsdale?

LIZZIE: What do you tell them when they ask you—cross your heart and hope to die.

DOUG: I swear to God, Lizzie, I don't tell them anything. It's none of their damned business.

LIZZIE: But you have to tell them something.

DOUG: No I don't. I just sort of—grin.

LIZZIE: Grin?

DOUG: Right.

LIZZIE: And they don't ask you how many points and where?

DOUG: No. (*Pause.*) Hey, look. It's getting pretty late . . .

LIZZIE: Show me how you grin.

DOUG: What?

LIZZIE: Show me how you grin.

DOUG: What are you talking about?

LIZZIE: I'm Oggie and I'm saying to you—"Hey Dougie, how many points did you score with Lizzie Tingley last night?" Now grin.

DOUG: Aw come on Liz.

LIZZIE: You just grin, Douglas Cameron, or I'll never speak to you again.

DOUG: Well I dunno . . . it's sort of . . .

(DOUG *finally grins and all is explained. It is the grin of a man who has scored all the points* LIZZIE TINGLEY *has to offer.*)

LIZZIE: They think that?

DOUG: What?

LIZZIE: They think you are doing it to me?

DOUG: How am I supposed to know what people are thinking? I'm a mind reader or something?

LIZZIE: You know what they are thinking, and you are not telling them any different are you!

DOUG: I'm not telling them anything! I'm just grinning, fer Chrissake!

LIZZIE: Well you start telling the truth.

DOUG: What?

LIZZIE: About tonight. You tell them the truth about tonight.

DOUG: Look Lizzie, it has nothing to do with us. It's just something they talk about, and I have to go along with it. I don't tell them anything.

(LIZZIE *grabs his hand and moves it over her body.*)

LIZZIE: Well tomorrow you will. (*Claps his hand on her calf.*) A leg. That's two points, right? RIGHT!

DOUG: Right.

LIZZIE: A knee. That's four points. Leg under the skirt. That's five.

DOUG: Six.

LIZZIE: Oh. The big six. Is this a big score? Are you having fun, Dougie? Will the boys be impressed? (*Unbuttoning her blouse.*) What do you get for a tit under the blouse? Let's really give them something to talk about. Doug! I said what do you get for a tit under the blouse?

DOUG: (*Miserable.*) Ten.

LIZZIE: HOW MANY!

DOUG: TEN!

LIZZIE: Well, what are you waiting for? Twenty points right there. All you have to do is grab with both hands.

(*She sits in front of him with her blouse pulled open, staring into his face. He stares into hers, reaches out one hand, index finger crooked, and touches her breast.*)

DOUG: (*Softly.*) That's real soft, Lizzie. Warm and soft. (*Withdraws his hand.*) That's real nice. Thank you.

(*Pause.*)

DOUG: I'm not even going to talk about it any more. It's none of their damned business.

(*Pause.*)

LIZZIE: Doug?

DOUG: Yeah?

LIZZIE: I love you.

DOUG: Yeah. I know.

LIZZIE: I like you touching me.

DOUG: Yeah. I know.

(*He looks at her sadly, rises and leaves, and the lights go down in the barn.*)

ELIZABETH: September came and the summer ended. September the first. I remember that day very clearly. Doug had got the truck and we went into the city to see a movie. In those days, *The Journal* used to bring out a special edition if there was a particularly big news story. My father asked me to look out for one while we were there. Just before we went into the Rialto I heard the newsboys calling out, "Extra. Extra," so I bought one. I didn't look at it. We were late, and anyway, I wasn't really interested in newspapers. We saw Irene Dunne and Charles Boyer in *When Tomorrow Comes*. Doug put his arm around me and kept it there even after the back of the seat had cut off his blood supply. So she had Charles Boyer, and I had Doug. That seemed fair.

(*Lights up in Tingleys.* HERBERT *reading the special edition.* LIZZIE *comes in.*)

LIZZIE: Good night, Dad . . . Dad?

HERBERT: What?

LIZZIE: You okay?

HERBERT: There's going to be another war, Lizzie.

LIZZIE: When?

HERBERT: Soon. Maybe it has already started.

LIZZIE: Who's fighting it this time?

HERBERT: Same people as last time.

LIZZIE: Oh good. No reason why we should get mixed up in it. Good night, Dad. (*She kisses him and goes off to bed.*)

HERBERT: Hear that, gentlemen? No reason why we should get mixed up in it.

(*Crossfade lights from Tingleys to Camerons.* DUNCAN *is also reading the paper.* PEGGY *is knitting.*)

DUNCAN: Bloody fools.

PEGGY: Who's that, dear?

DUNCAN: All these kids rushing into Edmonton to volunteer.

PEGGY: Yes, I know. Isn't it wonderful?

DUNCAN: What the hell are you talking about?

PEGGY: I'm very proud of them. It's nice to think the Old Country means so much to them.

DUNCAN: What Old Country?

PEGGY: Our Old Country.

DUNCAN: You think Werner Grimmelt's boys will join the 49th to fight the Germans?

PEGGY: Well no, I don't suppose they'll do that. They'll probably stay on the farm and help their dad.

DUNCAN: How the hell can they do that if we start a war with Germany?

PEGGY: Well I don't know, dear. Maybe there won't be a war. Wasn't Mr. Chamberlain going to speak to Hitler about it?

DUNCAN: Huh.

PEGGY: I must say the King didn't look very well when he was here. All the crowds and cheering and the flags. And then his poor drawn face. He did look quite drawn, didn't he? But I'm glad we went. Can't have the King and Queen visit and not wave to them, can you? *She* was smiling. Waving.

DUNCAN: Aye. There's a lot of smiling and waving goes on.

PEGGY: You've never talked much about the war. It must be quite exciting really.

DUNCAN: Aye.

PEGGY: Doug was asking me about it the other day.

DUNCAN: Doug was?

PEGGY: Yes. He was reading something in the paper and I said I didn't really know. I said he should talk to you. Did he say anything?

DUNCAN: No.

PEGGY: Maybe you should tell him about it.

DUNCAN: What am I supposed to tell him?

PEGGY: About your experiences.

DUNCAN: About the time I was standing in mud and water up to my knees and pissing on a sock?

PEGGY: Duncan!

DUNCAN: It was called mustard gas. When you saw it drifting towards you there were only two things you could do. If you ran away from it, you had to run downwind and it followed you. If you tried to run into it and through it, the machine guns would cut you down as you came out the other side. Then somebody said if you pissed on a sock and held it over your face, you could stand there and wait for it to go by.

PEGGY: You don't have to talk about it if you don't want to.

DUNCAN: That's how they opened up a bloody great gap on our left. Mustard gas. Supposed to be some crack regiment there, but they couldn't handle it. They took off. And we were stuck there. Us! The bloody replacements. Cooks, orderlies, drivers—and we were supposed to be the bloody replacements. No rifles of course. Didn't have enough rifles for everybody. So we killed people with shovels and pick handles—hoping to God someone would die so we could get our hands on a rifle.

PEGGY: Duncan?

DUNCAN: That's what it's like. Piece of farmland, good soil, drained, irrigated, old buildings, churches . . . and a valley, and a ridge. You put one army in the valley and another on the ridge. Then you leave them there for three years trying to kill each other. They pump shells into the valley until all the canal banks break, and it rains, and you've got nothing but shellholes and water and mud and there's not a tree or a building left standing. Looks like nothing you've ever seen before. Then the guns start up again, middle of the night. The whole place is lit up with fairy lights, and they tell you not to move. Don't move. They can't see you if you don't move. Do you know how hard it is not to move with all that damned metal creeping closer to you all the time? Don't move. So you stand there, soaking wet, covered in mud. Then the lights burn out and you dive into a shellhole you've picked out for yourself. Full of water of course, but you

don't sink right down. You can feel something down there that you can brace your feet against. You know what it is, but it doesn't matter anymore. He's dead, and you're not. Dawn comes up and you see a head on the skyline. You pull the trigger and it disappears. He's dead, and you're not. And that goes on for day after day, night after night, month after month, year after year. It's the biggest damned game anybody ever invented. In the end, there's nobody left. Hundreds of thousands of bodies covered in water and mud, and they're dead, and you're not.

The strange thing of it is... and I've never understood this. Come through something like that and, when you look back, it seems like the best damned thing that ever happened to you.

Do you want me to tell Doug that?

(*Lights fade in Camerons.*)

ELIZABETH: Nineteen thirty-nine. It was a beautiful summer... good harvest... plenty of work to be done... but there was no money. And, historically, when the banks run out of paper, you beat your ploughshares back into swords. I don't know whether that is conscious political philosophy, or tragic lack of imagination.

But it was not, then, the greatest concern of a seventeen-year-old girl. She was still at that state of innocence where you know that, if you do it, it makes you pregnant. There were, however, contraceptives. Furtively spoken of rubber things that boys stole from their father's dresser drawers... and kept in their wallets until they disintegrated. Doug said he would try to get one. I said nothing. I had heard how "it" was done, of course. I experienced the initial disgust, but then this was replaced by the feeling that it all sounded very "unlikely." I have obviously always had an academic mind. But I said nothing. Why was that? I don't think it was love or passion. I think it's just that there comes a time in your young life when your misgivings are replaced by an overwhelming curiosity. I was finding so many new things with Doug... and with him, they seemed right. Maybe

that's what love is.

(*Lights up in barn.* DOUG *enters with newspaper.* LIZZIE *follows.*)

DOUG: It says you have to be between eighteen and forty-one, physically fit, not more than three dependants—and that's all. Have to pass a medical . . .

LIZZIE: You're not serious, are you Doug?

DOUG: For a dollar thirty a day? Are you kidding? That's ten bucks a week—forty a month.

LIZZIE: Doug?

DOUG: Get all your clothes and food paid for.

LIZZIE: But Doug, you don't *have* to go.

DOUG: Everybody else is. Lizzie, you don't understand. This is a great chance. Maybe I could join the Air Force and learn to fly. Jeez. I can hide up in the clouds until the war is over. They'd never find me up there.

(*A thunderstorm begins.*)

LIZZIE: Don't joke about it Doug.

DOUG: Hey, listen to that. You'd better be going back. I'll see if I can get the truck.

LIZZIE: Doug, don't volunteer. Please?

DOUG: Why not?

LIZZIE: You'd have to go away. I wouldn't see you.

DOUG: Sure you would. Weekends. You get leave.

(*Thunder.*)

DOUG: That storm is really coming up. I'll ask my old man if I can have the truck. (*Leaving.*)

LIZZIE: No, don't Doug. Stay here and talk. I want to get this settled.

DOUG: It's getting late, you know. Your folks are going to start wondering.

LIZZIE: I don't care, Doug. This is important.

DOUG: We can talk in the truck, Lizzie. (*Exits.*)

(LIZZIE *sits on straw, lights in barn remain up. Through the following, lights up on the Tingleys and the Camerons in their areas.*)

ELIZABETH: It was the duty of all able-bodied young men to step forward. I suppose I believed that—but if Doug had to go away? School would start next Tuesday. Surely he wouldn't go to war and miss school? What would my father say? And where would I take his homework?

I thought about getting engaged, married even, but I

knew what my mother would have to say about that. All the same, I had to do *something*.

MOLLY: Has Lizzie come in yet?

HERBERT: Haven't seen her.

DUNCAN: What makes you think they'd take you? You're not eighteen.

DOUG: I am soon. They took Oggie.

LIZZIE: Doug?

PEGGY: There's not going to be a war, you'll see.

DOUG: So can I go?

DUNCAN: Of course you can't go. Who's going to help me with the damned farm!

LIZZIE: Doug?

HERBERT: The stock market is recovering.

MOLLY: Nothing like a nice war for business to pick up.

DOUG: Dad. I'm going to go.

PEGGY: Don't argue with your father, dear. You know how it upsets me.

LIZZIE: Doug, they've got *Goodbye Mr. Chips* at the Capitol. Will you take me?

DUNCAN: Look. I was in the war. The war to end all wars. You don't know what the hell you are talking about, so just stay the hell out of it.

DOUG: How can I stay out of it? Everybody else is going.

DUNCAN: Well I'm not and that's for damned sure.

LIZZIE: Doug, did you get it?

DOUG: What?

LIZZIE: You know. The thing.

DOUG: No. I didn't.

MOLLY: If you ask me, there's nothing to pick between them. Hitler or the bloody English.

HERBERT: Now, now, Molly.

LIZZIE: Doug please don't go.

DUNCAN: So I lived through it and came back, eh? To what? answer me that. Came back to what?

LIZZIE: I love you Doug.

DOUG: I'm going, Dad.

DUNCAN: (*Roars.*) You're not going any damned where and let's get that straight right here and now.

PEGGY: I do wish you wouldn't argue with your father, dear.

LIZZIE: You mustn't go, Doug.

MOLLY: Where *is* that girl?

LIZZIE: Please?

ELIZABETH: Help her somebody—help her!

LIZZIE: I love you, Doug.

DOUG: I know you do, Lizzie.

LIZZIE: I don't want you to go. You can do it to me if you want to.

DOUG: I don't care what anybody says. I have to go. (*Exits.*)

LIZZIE: (*Screams.*) I'm going to have a baby.

(*All the parents turn to stare down at her.*)

LIZZIE: I think I am going to have a baby.

(*The parents remain motionless.* LIZZIE *backs from their gaze, and turns to run from the barn, but* ELIZABETH *has moved in to take her in her arms. She strokes her hair as* LIZZIE *sobs. Parents to silhouette, special on* LIZZIE *and* ELIZABETH.)

ELIZABETH: (*Softly.*) You silly girl. What did you do that for? Mmm? Why did you do that?

(*The special fades on ELIZABETH and LIZZIE, and we hear the cry of a distant loon. Black.*)

Charles Foran

Winter Colours

For years Pierre Brosseau sat at the back door of his house listening to his wife work her garden. Turning over the thawing earth in May, planting in June, Ginette Brosseau would water and watch through the summer months until flowers would begin to bloom—roses, orchids, tulips—with a vegetable patch along the fence. Pierre would hear the sound of digging, soil being smoothed and patted, spades hitting rocks and roots. He could never understand how Ginette managed it. With all the chemicals in the air around Sudbury, chemicals choked from the smokestacks of Copper Cliff, it was astonishing that anything grew at all. Sulphur alone from the mines should had been enough to render the city barren. Or else it made sense that plants would turn out deformed—grotesquely shaped flowers and bloated vegetables. If Ginette hadn't forced him to smell the orchids each year as she brought them into the house, or help wash the green peppers and tomatoes, he would simply not have believed. Her gardens were a miracle; Pierre was certain of it. They were not, however, miraculous enough to make him want to be wheeled through the yard. Ginette always maintained that he should let himself be placed in the middle of the flower bed, just once, placed amidst wooden stakes and vines, and allow the smells to overwhelm him—feel the life surging up from underneath. Pierre thought that was a ridiculous idea. He was content, he insisted, to just sit and chat with her, a breeze in his face and scents in the air. In his mind his wife, her features half-forgotten, was an outline over the dark earth. The garden itself was all black; Pierre couldn't even begin to imagine what it looked like.

Within a month of the operation his eyes have improved enough to permit an hour of television per day. One Friday evening he sits with Ginette watching a program. Pierre's attention to the screen is erratic; often he stares down at the floor for minutes at a time, rocks back and forth, even closes his eyes and simply listens. She is knitting. Their living room is long and narrow, its size having been reduced by half

years before to create a main-floor bedroom. A curtained window takes up the entire front wall. On the other walls are prints of landscape paintings and two pencil sketches of cats. A well-worn couch lines one side of the room, with a coffee table before it and armchairs in the corners. The television is by the door.

"Aren't you enjoying the movie?" Ginette asks him.

"It's okay, I guess."

"I could change channels?"

"It doesn't really matter."

She puts down her knitting needles.

"It must be wonderful to be seeing all these things again after so long," she offers. "So fresh and exciting."

Pierre shrugs.

"They are as I remember them."

"Remember them?"

"From before, Ginette—before the accident."

"Really Pierre? I can no longer remember very much of our life before that."

"Trust me: it is just as it was."

"But all the beautiful colours?"

"What colours?"

"On the screen," she says. "Having a colour TV makes such a difference."

Pierre wheels himself to the television.

"The colours," he begins, "hurt my eyes."

Lise Brosseau wore black pants, red blouses and purple scarves, tall leather boots with silver nailheads tacked around the ankles. The tightness of her clothing exaggerated the extra weight on her body, weight added since the last divorce two years ago. Before that divorce her name had been Lise Dionne, and before that Lise Cloutier. Now she was back to being Brosseau again. Not having any children made the decision to readopt the family name a lot easier. Not having any children had also made the marriages more difficult—if not impossible—to manage. Failing to stay married to miners had been, she thought, understandable. Failing to become a mother, however, remained a mystery; inexplicable, vaguely unforgivable. Now Lise had stopped thinking about it and was spending her days as a clerk in a clothing store and her nights in bars in parts of Sudbury her mother had never even visited, and her father would not have admitted visiting. The bars were dark rooms with plain tables and chairs, open spaces for dancing and fighting, country music blaring from speakers. On weekends the rooms were noisy, acrid-smelling, stifling hot from cigarette smoke and body heat. On weeknights, though, they were often quiet and lonely.

The operation came as a shock. The thought of her father actually seeing her for the first time, the first time *ever*, left Lise weak with fright. Unplugging the phone, staying out each evening, she managed for three days to avoid going to the hospital. Finally her mother tracked her down at the shop. In a voice quavering with anger and exhaustion Ginette demanded that Lise accompany her that very instant. She was not even allowed to change her clothes.

"But he'll see me looking like *this*?" she said.

"Why shouldn't he?" Ginette asked. "It's how you look, isn't it?"

"You and I know that, mère, but he does not. He thinks I look . . . different."

"Then he'll learn otherwise."

"Père will not like it."

"What is there for him not to like, Lise? You are his daughter . . . "

"My *voice* is his daughter," Lise said, "My voice and nothing more. My face and body—how I look and act—belong to someone else."

"Who?"

Her daughter laughed nervously.

"Not the Lise he imagines, anyway."

"Don't worry," Ginette advised.

At the hospital Lise slipped into a small room all soft blue and white. Sunlight pouring through the window covered the foot of the bed, the chairs, the silver and grey machines which surrounded her father. He sat upright with bandages under his eyes. The eyes were swollen and red and looking as if he'd been crying for days. After staring at his daughter for thirty seconds—Lise matched each one with a beat of her heart—Pierre decided that he couldn't see her clearly. All he could make out, he claimed, was someone with pale skin, black hair, and perhaps long gold earrings. Could he see nothing more? Ginette asked. Nothing of the Brosseau nose and cheekbones? No, nothing more. Besides, his eyes were tired and needed to rest. Lise was suspicious; she'd felt his furious stare upon her not two minutes before. Still, even with having forgotten to eat a peppermint for her breath, she appeared to have escaped unharmed. As soon as she'd left the room, promising to return again the next day, Pierre exploded.

"Our daughter is a middle-aged whore," he said.

"Pierre!"

"I bet she sleeps with men from the mine."

"Please don't say that about Lise."

"Will you just look at her for a minute, Ginette? *Really* look at her? You know the type as well as I do. Twice divorced, promenading around in tight clothes and drinking beer in the Coronet Hotel or the Star Inn. She is the kind that ends up in a different bed each night."

"You shouldn't talk like that."

"Isn't it the truth?"

"Of course not."

"How do you know?"

"How do I know? She is *Lise*, Pierre. She is my daughter. She is *our* daughter."

"She cannot even keep a husband."

"She married mean and drunken miners—men who cared more for their hockey and their alcohol than they did for her. Who else is there for her to meet in this town? Who else? And still you blame her?"

"*You* married a miner?"

"I know. But—"

"Are we all rotten drunkards?"

"Pierre, that's not—"

"Or is the problem women like Lise Dionne or Cloutier or whatever name we should call her?"

He was trembling.

"You shouldn't get worked up," Ginette said, quickly wiping her eyes. "The doctor says you need to stay calm."

"How can I stay calm when my daughter has turned out like that?"

"Your daughter is a thirty-five-year-old woman."

"And she stank of liquor, Ginette. It's not only the men around here who do all the drinking."

"All right, Pierre."

"What a sight to see," he muttered. "What a sight to be greeted with after so many years of wondering."

Pierre begins adjusting the controls on the television.

"I can't look at this box for more than ten minutes without needing to switch the colour off," he says. "They pound, pound away, making me dizzy and giving me a headache."

"I didn't know," Ginette says.

"All the brightness . . . " Pierre continues. "All the brightness is nothing but a lie."

"A lie, Pierre?"

"Yes, a lie. Look at this screen for a minute. When I first saw it four weeks ago I discovered it was a grey or greyish-white colour. Fine, I said; that is the truth of things. For thirty-six years I learnt that truth. Suddenly you come in and push this button here. Click—the screen is all yellow and red and blue? Click—everything is purple and orange? You think you can just *do* that?"

"I don't understand . . . "

"You can imagine the world to be any colour you want, Ginette, like a child imagining he is a hockey star or a blind man imagining he has sight. But it doesn't make it true. It doesn't make things turn out any more how you'd like them to. Shouldn't I of all people know that by now?"

"Yes you should," she says weakly.
"Exactly. And I do—I *do* know it."

On the morning of the operation Ginette spent an hour deciding which clothes to pack into her husband's suitcase. In the closet beside the kitchen were the shirts and pants he'd been wearing for thirty-six years, the clothes chosen, washed and mended by his wife. Ginette had probably knit Pierre two dozen sweaters over that time. From the age of nine she'd been knitting, first for herself and her sisters, then for her infirmed mother, and finally for her husband and daughter. Pierre's sweaters were all combinations of green, blue and yellow. In fact most of his clothes were those colours. Since the accident he'd worn white shirts or grey pants far less often than he imagined. The decision had been Ginette's; to lie to his face, to fold up and store in boxes his old outfits. Now, ready to drive him to the hospital, she was faced with an even more difficult decision. Upstairs from the kitchen was the bedroom where Pierre and Ginette had spent their honeymoon year. In a closet beside the double bed were the remnants of his old life. Hockey skates, sticks, baseball gloves and mitts, hard hats and miner's boots; all his gear was in storage there. Pierre had never wanted any of it thrown away. He had also never once asked to be carried up to the room. There were as well two boxes of clothing in the closet. Every year Ginette washed and ironed the dull pants, faded shirts, then carefully folded them back into boxes. Why she did this was never very clear to her; it was an act of superstition, she supposed, a compulsion she gave into once each winter. Until that morning it hadn't really mattered. After the operation, though, things would be different. Not too different, of course; but enough to be worrisome. And, remarkably, he could still fit into those clothes. In all that time her husband had not gained a single pound—had not changed one bit. If Ginette wanted, she could slip the old collection of clothes into the suitcase and dress Pierre up exactly as he'd dressed in 1949. It seemed ridiculous. It *was* ridiculous. Yet she could actually do it.

Pierre was calling from the hallway. Her hands trembling, Ginette snapped the suitcase shut. Before a mirror she touched up her grey hair and tried smoothing the skin around her eyes. The lines were permanent; make-up no longer helped. In the mirror was a face worn with fatigue and neglect. It was, Ginette decided, old and unattractive. Certainly it was not a face to be introduced to again after so many years. He would be disappointed. He would feel, well, let down. More than anything else, Ginette did not want Pierre to feel that. Maybe they weren't ready? Maybe it really wasn't worth it? Maybe?... His angry voice awoke her. They were going to be late, he called; he was going to miss his own operation! Blessing herself before the crucifix, switching off the light, Ginette hurried out to meet him.

First the images on the screen are rendered black and white. Then they are distorted little by little into shapeless streaks of colour. Pierre, his hand on the controls, stares into the television.

"Don't do that, Pierre!" Ginette says. "Didn't you just tell me that the brightness was hurting your eyes?"

"Look at this mess," he answers. "You can't make out a thing. It's all a blur—a total blur. Isn't that what I've been saying the whole time?"

"Please turn to me."

"Why?"

"You'll damage your eyes."

He wheels around.

"Should I switch it off?" she asks.

"You like watching TV, don't you?"

"In the evenings, yes. I find it relaxing."

"What good is there?"

"There are all kinds of good programs, Pierre. You know that—you've been listening to them for years."

"And I should have kept on listening to them."

"Why?"

"Because they aren't what I was expecting to see."

"What were you hoping for?"

"Not this, at any rate."

"I don't think it's so bad. The show on now can be quite funny sometimes."

"It may be funny, Ginette. It may even be hilarious. But it just isn't what I wanted to see."

The Toronto Maple Leafs had no greater supporter than Pierre Brosseau. Since 1949 he'd listened to all their games, home and away, following the team through a half-dozen coaches and three generations of players. Among his friends he'd long been considered a turncoat for his allegiance. To be a French Canadian and live in Sudbury, to have grown up playing ice hockey all winter, and *still* not cheer for the Montreal Canadiens—*les Habitants*—was for the men almost a crime. Pierre's rationale was, however, convincing. The Maple Leafs had something going for them which the Canadiens never would have—Foster Hewitt. With Foster Hewitt announcing their games who could help but become a fan? With his voice, so full of authority and style, so capable of making each play sound exciting; with that behind the Leafs the Canadiens didn't stand a chance, did they? His friends agreed with him completely. Then they raised glasses of draft beer, nodded to each other, shook their heads sadly. Moments of silence would follow. Well, he would repeat, *did* they stand a chance? The men all understood how Pierre had to rely on the words—*English* words, no less—of some announcer to bring the Toronto games to life.

Had the poor soul been able to actually *see* Rocket Richard or Jean Beliveau or Guy Lafleur on the television for just a few minutes he would have renounced forever his support of the Leafs. His mistake was understandable. No one held it against him.

Now on Wednesday and Saturday nights Pierre sat before the television watching his team in action.

"This is torture," he would tell Ginette.

"What is, Pierre?"

"Watching these morons play hockey. Look at how they make bad passes and miss open nets. It's miserable."

"The Leafs haven't had a good team in many years now, have they?"

"I know that. But I never imagined they could be that bad, Ginette. I *couldn't* ever have imagined it. This isn't professional hockey; it's sloppy amateurish play."

"At least you can see them skate," she would offer. "I can remember watching you play for the mine. It didn't matter to me one bit if you never touched the puck. Just to watch you glide up and down the ice in your red uniform . . . You were a very fine skater, Pierre."

"And I could score goals. First in the league, you know, the year before the accident. Twenty-six goals in twenty-five games—one per match, like the Rocket."

"The things you remember!"

"Watching these idiots makes you want to remember the old days."

A goal by the opposing team or a poor play by Toronto would enrage him.

"I can't believe this," he would say. "Can you believe a player like that even being allowed in Maple Leaf Gardens? The same goes for the rest of them too."

"Isn't Borje Salming a good defenceman?"

"He is always hurt. Too fragile for the big leagues."

"And doesn't Darryl Sittler score lots of goals?"

"Sittler is old and complacent."

"What about Lanny Macdonald?"

"He is long gone, Ginette. They have some boy in his position now."

Ginette would fall silent.

"Foster Hewitt was the biggest liar in the world," Pierre would eventually say.

"Should I turn to something else?"

"For all those years I really imagined they could play hockey as well as the Montreal Canadiens."

"Pierre, don't . . . "

"And it was just in my head. He put it in my head—all those lies. I should have known better."

"They *were* good back then," Ginette would try.

"I can't believe I let myself be fooled like that."

"You weren't being fooled, Pierre. Toronto had some excellent teams in the 1960s. I can remember how good they were. Only not in recent years, that's all."

But Pierre would not listen. Nor would he allow the channel to be changed. Until the final buzzer, the announcement of the game's three stars, he sat comparing the figures in the screen—a Toronto Maple Leaf team of shadows—with the one he had lived with in his mind.

"What exactly were you expecting to see, Pierre?"

"I was thinking I would find . . . well, things different."

"Things different?

"I mean *different things*."

"You were hoping you'd find different things?"

"Yes . . . You know what I mean, don't you?"

"I suppose."

"It really isn't worth explaining."

There is a silence.

"On channel nine there's a movie?" Ginette says.

"I don't want to see a movie."

"It's a brand new film. According to the guide it was only made this year."

"Ginette—that's not what I'm talking about!"

She throws up her arms.

"*What* then?"

Her husband sits with his back to the television. The absence of light in the room has left his face in shadow. Yet his wheelchair appears surrounded by flashes of red and purple from the screen. They seem to reach out to consume him, like flames in search of additional fuel. Ginette's voice softens.

"What then, Pierre? . . . What?"

He does not answer.

Unlike other men, Pierre Brosseau had been planning his life from the start. Each morning as he climbed aboard the hoist with the rest of the crew, hard hat on head and gloves covering his hands, preparing for eight more hours of darkness and damp, he was mentally looking forward to the changes which would take place. Even if professional hockey were ruled out, and a career in the mines settled on, he was confident of his chances. They could start him out at the bottom, five thousand feet below the surface in caves of sweating black walls and clotted air, start him out behind a mucking machine or even a jackhammer, but there was no way they could keep him there. By twenty-five he'd be a driller, working the cooler, better-lit levels nearer the top, the air breathable if not exactly fresh. Then by the age of thirty—thirty-five at the latest—he'd be on the surface supervising the oper-

ation. Under the tall northern skies Pierre would issue orders by telephone, riding down into the earth only to inspect, to deal with problems other men couldn't solve. He often explained his thinking to Ginette; you could get what you wanted only if you knew exactly what that was. You simply had to imagine it. You had to conceive of how the future would turn out, how people might act—even how they might think. You had to be striving all the time to see what hadn't yet happened, but could happen, and could happen to *you* if you were open to it. You had to be ready for anything. At the age of twenty-two Pierre had felt ready for anything. That was why, and not the extra money, he'd accepted the job of powder monkey before being really comfortable around explosives. That was why he'd gone ahead by himself and planted a charge one January morning. His supervisor was returning from a coffee break. He was no more than ten yards away—fifteen at most—when an explosion shook the ground beneath him.

"I'd better just switch it off," he says quietly, turning to the television.

"Please don't let yourself get this way, Pierre. It does you no good."

"I'm not any 'way', Ginette. It's just that my eyes are full of water."

"Are they painful?"

"Just tired."

She nods.

"*I'm* tired," he adds.

"I'm sorry."

"Sorry? Sorry for what?"

"I don't know . . . I just am."

"Don't be."

"Sometimes I can't help it."

"Don't be," he repeats. "*Please* don't be . . . "

In November Lise made a rare visit to her parent's house. Wearing a dark blue dress, black coat and shoes, she sat perfectly still at the kitchen table while Pierre complained about the new Maple Leaf team. Ginette set out plates and cups for three.

"I think our daughter has something to tell us," she finally said.

"She isn't getting married and then divorced again, is she?" he asked. "You're not engaged to another miner, are you Lise?"

"No, père. I've given up on them."

"More likely it's the other way around."

"Pierre, Lise has important news. Won't you let her speak?"

"I'm listening."

"It's okay, mère," Lise said, her eyes fixed on the table. "I'm ready."

No one spoke for a minute,

"Well? . . . "Pierre said.

"Are you sure, Lise?"

"I—"

"Let me then."

Ginette turned to her husband.

"Our daughter is going—"

"I'm pregnant," Lise said quickly.

"She's going to have a baby, Pierre."

"A baby?"

"We're going to be grandparents!"

First Pierre glared at his wife. Then he tried staring at his daughter. Lise, however, refused to look at him.

"But you have no husband?" he said.

"I don't think I want one either."

"Two goddamn husbands and nothing. But now that you're unmarried again you go and get pregnant?"

"It wasn't intentional."

"What, were you forced?"

"She tried so hard for years there," Ginette said. "Don't you remember all the trouble we had?"

Pierre blushed a deep red.

"Who's the father?" he asked.

"I don't think that's any of our business."

"Of course it's our business. She's our daughter: the baby will be our grandchild. Of course we have a right to know—"

"I'm not sure, père."

"Not sure of what?"

"Pierre, *please* . . . "

"Not sure who the father is."

Pierre spoke slowly.

"Have you been fucking around Sudbury like a whore?"

Ginette stood and positioned herself behind Lise's chair.

"It's best that we leave him right now. He had *no* right to say that."

"I wasn't speaking to you, Ginette. I was speaking to my thirty-five-year-old daughter—"

"That doesn't matter."

"Please don't fight over me," Lise said.

"He had *no* right . . . "

"Didn't I? Didn't I, Ginette? Thirty-six years of—"

"I'm tired of hearing that, Pierre."

Shock registered on his face.

"I haven't been 'fucking' around Sudbury, père," Lise began. "I've been sitting in bars every night waiting, hoping maybe to meet someone new. I've—"

"*Don't* explain yourself to him," Ginette interrupted.

"It doesn't matter now."

"Yes it does."

"Let her speak, Ginette."

"I *won't*. I *won't* when I know you aren't even listening. You can't treat her like that, Pierre. She's a living person."

"That's true," Pierre agreed. "It's me that's the dead one."

Neither of the women responded.

"Or at least for thirty-six years I was dead. Maybe I breathed, talked, ate: but really I was long departed. There was just a short delay in arranging the funeral, you see, and so I had to wait around in this chair."

Ginette sighed.

"Sorry to bore you, Ginette. I won't much longer."

"Enough, Pierre. *Enough*."

"Then when I heard about the operation I thought, 'At last, Pierre, you will be alive again, as alive as when you were courting Ginette or playing hockey for the mine.' Maybe it was foolish; maybe I was dreaming. But it was what I believed. And so now to find my daughter, who I knew only as a bulge in her mother's belly, to find her all a mess—"

"Stop!"

The tone of Ginette's voice silenced him.

"I *am* a mess," Lise agreed.

"No you are not."

"A middle-aged one too. They are the worst."

"There you are wrong," Pierre said. "An old fuck-up like myself is far worse. For us there is no hope."

He waited before continuing.

"Far worse. Less likeable, less worth saving . . . "

In the long silence which followed Pierre closed his eyes. He sat listening to the sounds in the room; the hum of the refrigerator, the drip of water from the sink tap. He also heard Ginette playing with Lise's hair, Lise running her fingernails over her skin—even the smooth sound of their breathing.

"You've been to a doctor?" he finally asked.

Lise nodded. Then, noticing her father, she answered.

"And the child will be healthy?"

"Dr. Gautier said that Lise was in ideal condition for late motherhood."

"She'd better quit the cigarettes."

"I know," Lise said.

"And the beer."

I *know*, père. Mother and I were talking about me staying . . . about where I should stay until the baby is born."

"In the bedroom beside the kitchen here, of course."

"But that is where you sleep?"

"Your mother and I are going back to our old room upstairs, aren't we, Ginette?"

"Pierre?"

"I think it's the only fair thing to do."

Ginette was unable to hide the confusion on her face. But her husband's eyes had remained closed.

"If you say so," she managed.

The women exchanged glances.

"It is too much trouble," Lise said. "*I* am too much trouble."

"A pregnant woman can't be walking up and down stairs all the time to the washroom. An old man can walk them—needs the exercise, in fact."

"It's kind of you to offer."

"What kindness?" Pierre said. "It just makes sense, Lise. Anyway, it's time we started using more of this house."

"I don't know . . . "

"It's decided. There's nothing more to say. Tonight I'll begin moving my clothes back upstairs."

Ginette went over to him.

"We'll talk more about this later on," she whispered.

He shrugged.

"Thank you, père."

"You are my daughter . . . it is the least I could do."

Both women coughed suddenly, allowing them to cover their faces with tissue. Pierre looked up at Lise.

"So you'll be a mother in a few months," he said.

"And you a grandfather."

"And Ginette will finally have her grandchild."

"I've been praying for years," Ginette admitted.

"I hope it's a girl," Pierre said.

"A girl? I was sure you'd want only a boy."

"Either will do fine," he decided. "So long as the child is healthy and can be active."

Over dinner that evening they settled on Lise giving birth to a six pound girl with blue eyes and curly blonde hair. They even chose a name: Maria, after her grandmother.

Pierre flicks off the television. Immediately the colours recede and the tube darkens. A faint glow remains, slivers of electricity crackling along the surface. Without thinking, in a gesture learnt from Ginette twenty years before, he places both hands on the screen. The sensation of fading warmth is familiar, comforting; his eyes are shut tight until the tube is cold. Withdrawing the hands he discovers an outline in the glass. Staring into the grey mirror is a dim figure hunched over yet stiff. The face is bony, narrow, lined with creases and fatigue marks. For a moment Pierre is transfixed by this image. His first instinct it to switch on the television again to drown the reflection. Instead he closes his eyes and wheels himself into the kitchen.

New Year's Day was bitter cold. A yellow sun stood frozen in a corner of the sky, smokestacks west of the city rising in columns to meet it. Brick chimneys from houses along the streets sent tufts of smoke up into the air, higher, higher, until they dissipated into the whiteness. The city was quiet. As she moved along the sidewalk Ginette Brosseau could hear the snow squeaking under her feet. Her father's coat, just large enough to cover her seven-month pregnancy, was six inches too long in the arms. This made it impossible for her to hold hands with her husband. Instead the couple linked arms, as they did walking to church on Sundays. Pierre Brosseau was keeping firm hold of his wife with one arm while carrying his hockey equipment in the other. The leading scorer of INCO Mine's 'A' team was a tall man of twenty-two, long faced, handsome, with curly brown hair beneath a black toque. No one in Sudbury skated as quickly as he did; no one had as strong a wrist shot as the young Brosseau. At least two hundred people, besides wives and family, would venture out to the rink on New Year's Day to watch an exhibition match between two mining teams. It would not be the NHL, the Maple Leafs or the Canadiens, but it would be local men—Sudbury or Capreol men—who could be seen on the streets afterwards, in the bars, and not just listened to on the radio or stared at in newspaper photos. And none of the men would be more admired than Pierre Brosseau.

"I'll score a goal for you today, Ginette," Pierre was saying. "Plus one for the boy, plus a third one for myself."

"You mean our *child*, don't you Pierre? It could easily turn out to be a girl."

"Our first born will be a boy. You can be certain of that."

"Can I?"

"Yes. Just as you can be certain we'll win today's game. I will make sure of both."

Ginette smiled at his boasting. Her husband also laughed at his own arrogance, showing white teeth in a warm smile.

"You shouldn't take the game so seriously," she teased. "It's only an exhibition match against your own mine, isn't it?"

"Against the *'B'* team, Ginette. Half those men would kill for a position on the top squad. With their wives and kids there today they'll be playing for their lives. We will need to be equally as fierce."

"You make it all sound so important!"

"If you were on that ice, skating with those players, you would understand."

"I understand one thing, Pierre—men with their heads full of themselves."

He laughed again.

"You're green with envy."

That reminded Ginette.

"I've knit you a pair of mittens," she said, digging into a jacket

pocket. "I finished them last night."

"But I bought these gloves two weeks ago. What do I need with mittens?"

"Store bought gloves can't keep you as warm as real ones. Your hands will go numb if you wear those for too long."

"Everyone's buying them now, Ginette. No one knits anymore."

She held out the mittens.

"And they're *red*," he complained. "You know I can't stand red gloves."

"Why?"

"Because . . . well because gloves are coloured brown or black, like the snow is white and the sky is blue. That's just how it is."

Ginette was unconvinced.

"You don't understand, that's all," he decided.

"I guess not."

Pierre thanked his wife for the gift. Then, without slowing his pace, he leaned over and kissed her on the cheek. The mittens were quickly stuffed into his pockets, where they would remain, unworn, if he had his way.

"Make sure you stand behind their net today," he offered at the entrance to the rink. "That way you'll have a good view of the action."

"I think I like it better in the middle."

"The middle? Why the middle?"

"From there it's much easier to see the players. Sometimes, when both teams are skating well, it's as if you're all following a pattern planned out ahead of time. The game is even more beautiful to watch then."

"Well just remember to keep an eye on your husband," Pierre said. "For you and our boy I'll outplay everyone else on the ice."

Ginette did keep her eyes on him as he strolled off to the change rooms. Her Pierre walked with long easy strides and greeted the other men, many his superiors, with handshakes and pats on the back. Her Pierre had confidence, charm, a head full of half-formed hopes and dreams. Despite his failings, Ginette Brosseau couldn't imagine wanting to share her life with anyone else.

Tony Cosier

A Country That I Have Not Known

This is a country that I have not known.
Mountains retreat and give the valley air,
Become hills only, shreds of blue. Fishbone
Bleached on blue rock takes me to my own bare

Rigging, swims me in my spirit upward
Past the smokehouse, past the sagging weir.
A trapper seems to know the place. The beard,
The tooth, the grease of him say this, the sneer.

He snaps a trap to show me how it works.
But I am well upstream by now, beyond
Whatever he can do. A grizzly jerks
A head to take the sun, takes air beyond
The river, off hind legs reared the hills.

Karen Romell

Incubus

There's a moon in me
some old
governance
of chaos and
suspicion

locking me into
lamplight and the comfort
of two sets of keys

while my teeth chatter
at 5 p.m. in November, or knives
come up through the mattress
and dimple my skin

and the man
walking 10 steps behind me
and slightly to the left

thinks he's Zeus
he has pocketed his shower
of gold and bright eyes

and something rides
my spine
my hair is a-snake
with betrayals

the treachery of all those
swans, hiding carelessly behind
trees
with their bead-eyes
their guns and their
divinity.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

BERT ALMON teaches English at the University of Alberta. His fifth collection of poems, *Deep North*, was published in 1984 by Thistledown Press.

GEORGE AMABILE has published several collections of poetry, among them *Presence of Fire* (M&S). The former editor and founder of *Northern Light*, he teaches in the English Department at the University of Manitoba.

E.D. BLODGETT'S poem, "Aubade for Rivers" is part of a series of meditations on music and war entitled *Musical Offering* to be published by Coach House Press in 1986. His last book was *Arché/Elegies* (Longspoon, 1985).

DENNIS COOLEY teaches at St. John's College in Winnipeg. A co-founder of Turnstone Press, Cooley has written *Fielding* (Thistledown, 1983) and *Bloody Jack* (Turnstone, 1985).

TONY COSIER teaches at Confederation High School in Ottawa. His poetry has appeared in numerous North American literary magazines and he has two books forthcoming: *The Massacre of the Innocents* (Portage Press) and *Ensemble* (Moonstone Press), a collection of short stories.

LORNA CROZIER'S poetry has been included in many magazines and anthologies, including *The New Canadian Poets* (M&S, 1985). Her sixth anthology of poetry, *The Garden Going on Without Us*, was brought out by M&S last fall. This year she is living in Montreal and working on her writing as a result of a Canada Council Arts Grant.

CHARLES FORAN is a Canadian writer currently working on a novel in Amenia, New York. This year, *Rubicon* is publishing a special feature on Foran's fiction.

WARREN GRAVES is an Edmonton-based playwright currently working at the Bastion Theatre in Victoria.

GERALD HILL published his first book of poems, *Heartwood* (Thistledown) last year. He lives in Edmonton.

GARY HYLAND lives in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. He was one of the poets included in Dennis Lee's *The New Canadian Poets* anthology (M&S, 1985). He also founded the publishing company Coteau Books.

BRIGITTE KEMPER is a commercial artist currently living in Vancouver.

DON KERR has written two books of poetry, *A New Improved Sky*, and *Going Places*, and has recently had his first play, *The Great War*, produced at the 25th Street Theatre in Saskatoon.

PATRICK LANE is currently Writer-in-Residence at Concordia University in Montreal. His most recent book is *A Linen Crow, A Caftan Magpie* (Thistledown).

KEN RIVARD is the author of *Kiss Me Down to Size* (Thistledown, 1983) and *Losing His Thirst* (Pierian Press, 1985). He is a member of the League of Canadian poets, and lives in Calgary.

KAREN ROMELL'S poems have appeared in *event, CVII, Malahat Review* and *Women and Words Anthology*. She lives in Vancouver.

CAROL SHIELDS is the author of four novels, the most recent of which is *A Fairly Conventional Woman* (Macmillan, 1982). In 1985, General Publishing brought out *Various Miracles*, a collection of her short stories. She lives in Winnipeg.

IN THIS ISSUE

A Selection of Writing from the Prairies: Carol Shields, Lorna Crozier, Warren Graves, E.D. Blodgett, Patrick Lane, Bert Almon . . .

Plus Fiction by Charles Foran, Poetry by Karen Romell and Tony Cosier.

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Winners of our Poetry Contest, Fiction by Dayv James-French, Imre Oravecz in Translation.

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