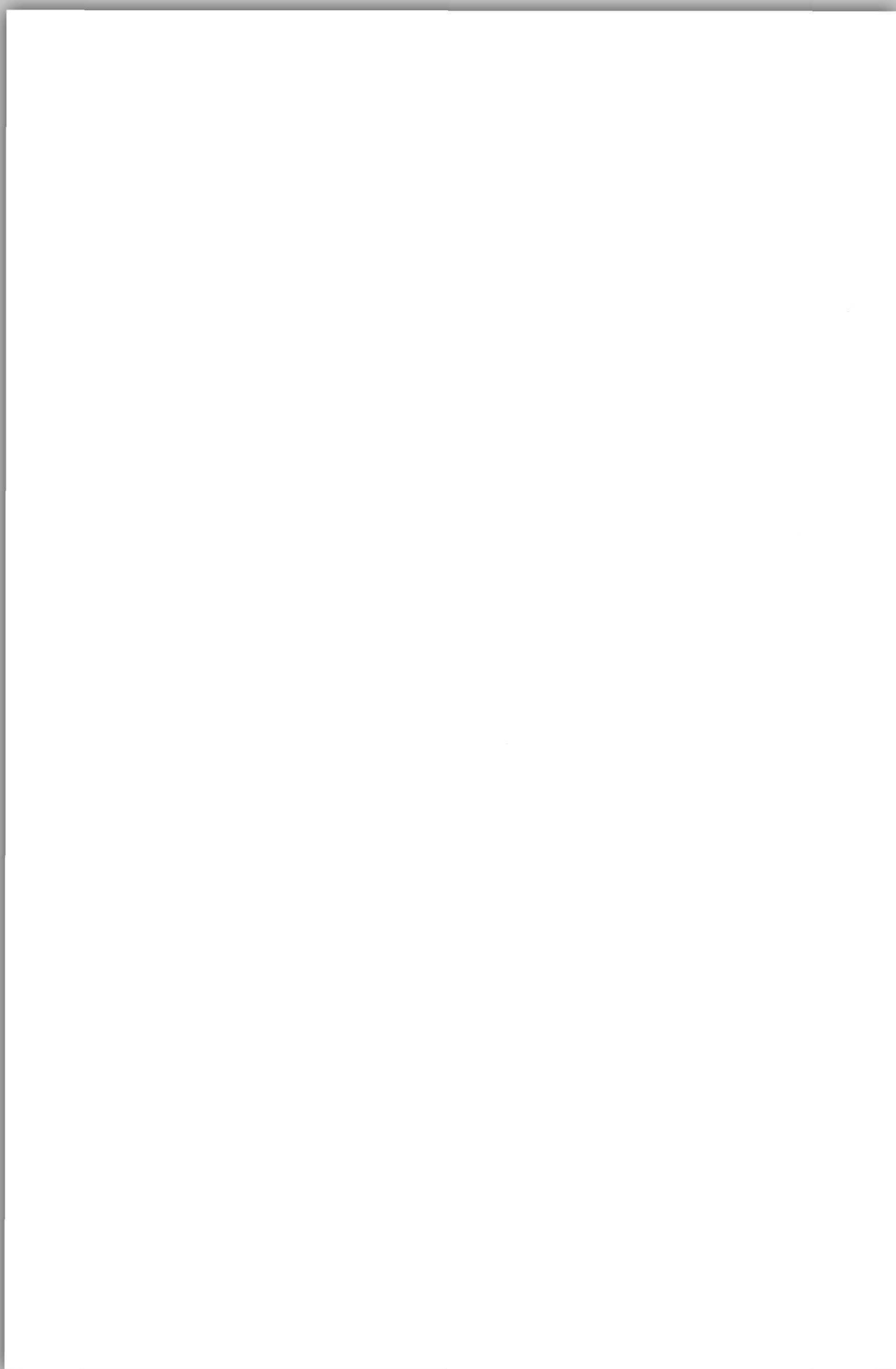


*Prism international*  
*25 Years in Retrospect*





PRISM *international*

*25 Years in Retrospect*

edited by John Schoutsen and St. John Simmons

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The editors have made every effort to contact the writers whose works appear in this anthology. Those who have not been contacted are asked to write to the editors at the above address so payment can be made.

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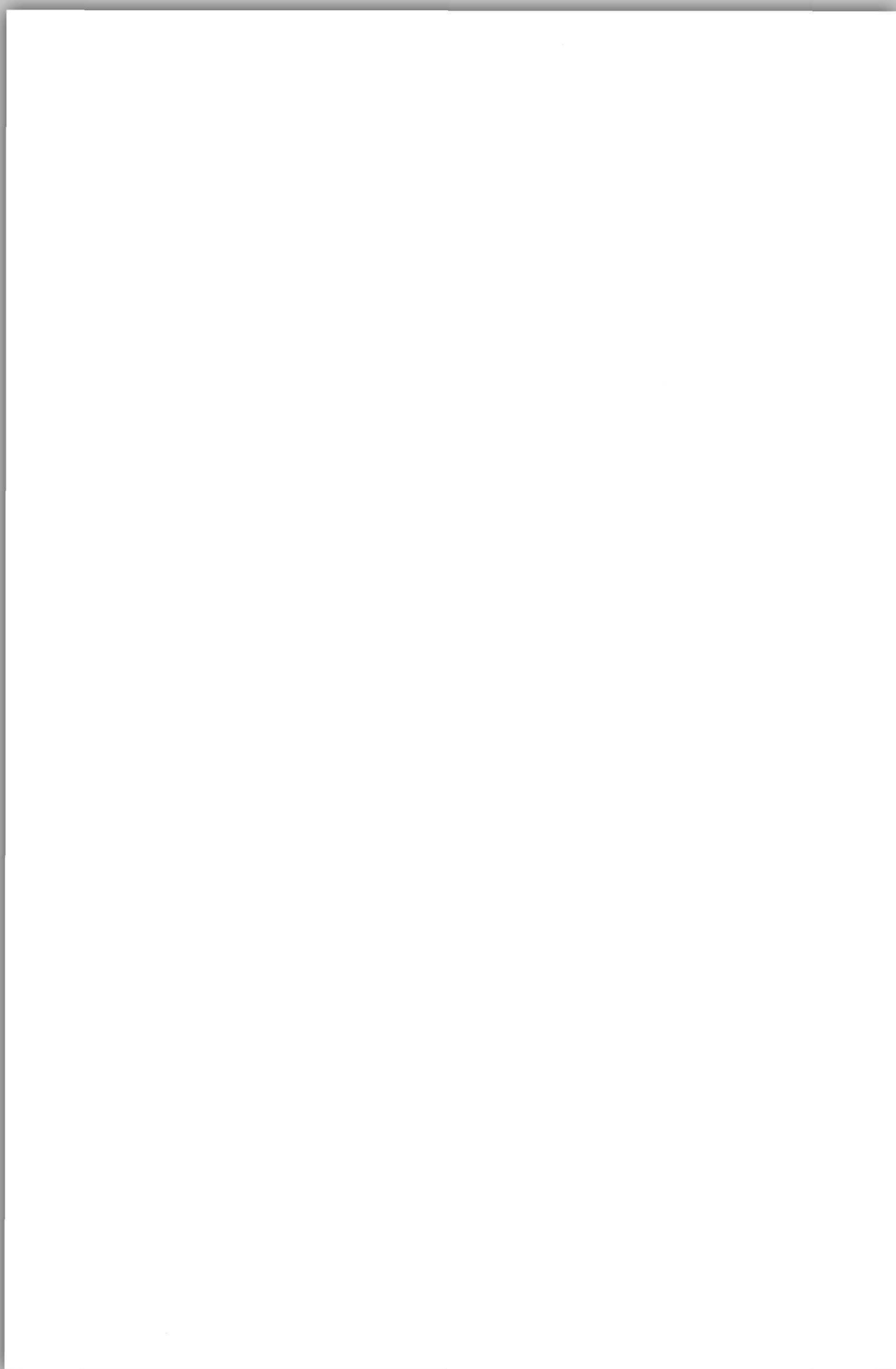
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## Introduction

Rather than attempting to produce a "Best of" anthology, to celebrate *PRISM international's* twenty-fifth year, we decided at the outset that the more meaningful approach would be to select material which represented the growth, directions, and trends of the magazine since its inception. This decision is in keeping with *PRISM's* philosophy that new writers be introduced in the company of the established, and that, regardless of country of origin, published works be of the highest calibre. Thus, the reader will find some unexpected writers included, while some influential works, and writers such as Hugh Hood, Gabriel Garcia Márquez, George Woodcock, and Tennessee Williams are not included.

Each of *PRISM's* past editors, working within the bounds of the initial statement of purpose of the magazine, has featured his own area of special interest while allowing the magazine to maintain its special character—that is, a magazine which provides "all possible range in forms, techniques, themes, and styles." To reflect this, this book has been divided by term of editorship, which we believe will also show the continuous growth and integrity of the magazine.

*The Editors, 1959–1984*

Jan de Bruyn

Earle Birney

Jacob Zilber

Michael Bullock

Dona Sturmanis

Peter Crowell

St. John Simmons

John Schoutsen

Brian Burke

Richard Stevenson

*and, for short intervals . . .*

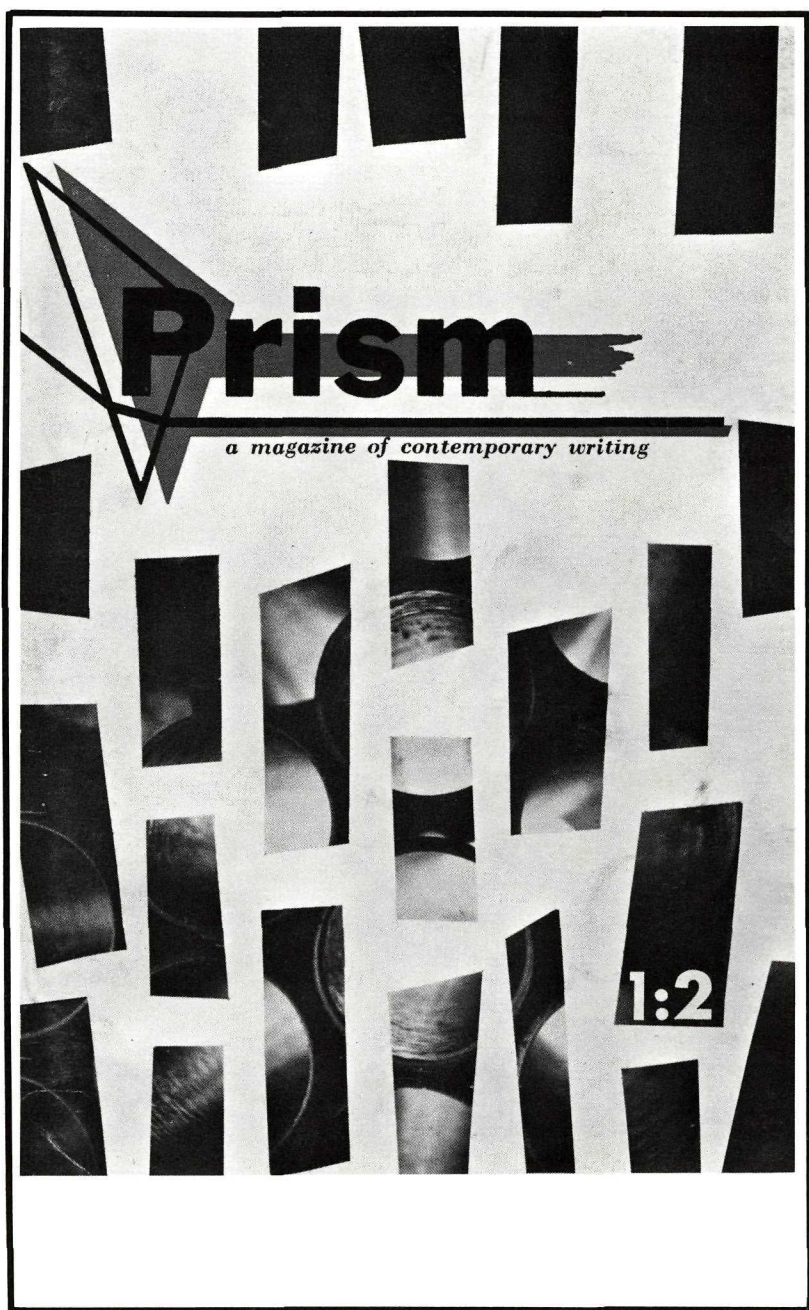
Elliot Gose

J. Michael Yates

C.J. Newman

George McWhirter





1959-1964

# BEGINNING

---

ALDEN A. NOWLAN

From what they found most lovely, most abhorred  
my parents made me: I was born like sound  
stroked from the fiddle, to become the ward  
of tunes played on the bear-trap and the hound.

Not one, but seven entrances they gave  
each to the other, and he laid her down  
the way the sun comes out. Oh, they were brave,  
and then like looters in a burning town.

Their mouths left bruises, starting with the kiss  
and ending with the proverb, where they stayed;  
never in making was there brighter bliss  
followed by darker shame. Thus I was made.

# THE TOMORROW-TAMER

---

MARGARET LAURENCE

The dust rose like clouds of red locusts around the small stampeding hooves of tangle-furred goats and the frantic wings of chickens with all their feathers awry. Behind them the children darted, their bodies velvety with dust, like a flash and tumble of brown butterflies in the sun.

The young man laughed aloud to see them, and began to lope after them. Past the palms where the tapsters got wine, and the sacred grove that belonged to Owura, god of the river. Past the shrine where Nana Ayensu poured libation to the dead and guardian grandsires. Past the thicket of ghosts, where the graves were, where every leaf and flower had fed on someone's kin, and the wind was the thin whisper-speech of ancestral spirits. Past the deserted huts, clay walls runnelled by rain, where rats and demons dwelt in unholy brotherhood. Past the old men drowsing in doorways, dreaming of women, perhaps, or death. Past the good huts with their brown baked walls strong against any threatening night-thing, the slithering snake carrying in its secret sac the end of life, or red-eyed Sasabonsam, huge and hairy, older than time and always hungry.

The young man stopped where the children stopped, outside Danquah's. The shop was mud and wattle, like the huts, but it bore a painted sign, green and orange. Only Danquah could read it, but he was always telling people what it said. *Hail Mary Chop Bar & General Merchant*. Danquah had gone to a mission school once, long ago. He was not really of the village, but he had lived here for many years.

Danquah was unloading a case of beer, delivered yesterday by a lorry named *God Helps Those*, which journeyed fortnightly over the bush trail into Owurasu. He placed each bottle in precisely the right place on the shelf, and stood off to admire the effect. He was the only one who could afford to drink bottled beer, except for funerals, maybe, when people made a show, but he liked to see the bright labels in a row and the

bottletops winking a gilt promise of forgetfulness. Danquah regarded Owurasu as a mudhole. But he had inherited the shop, and as no one in the village had the money to buy it and no one outside had the inclination, he was fixed here forever.

He turned when the children flocked in. He was annoyed at them, because he happened to have taken his shirt off and was also without the old newspaper which he habitually carried.

The children chuckled surreptitiously, hands over mouths, for the fat on Danquah's chest made him look as though the breasts of a young girl had been stuck incongruously on his scarred and aging body.

"A man cannot even go about his work," Danquah grumbled, "without a whole pack of forest monkeys gibbering in his doorway. Well, what is it?"

The children bubbled their news, like a pot of soup boiling over, fragments cast here and there, a froth of confusion.

Attah the ferryman—away, away downriver (half a mile)—had told them, and he got the word from a clerk who got it from the mouth of a government man. A bridge was going to be built, and it was not to be at Atware, where the ferry was, but—where do you think? At Owurasu! This very place. And it was to be the biggest bridge any man had ever seen—big, really big, and high—look, like this (as high as a five-year-old's arm).

"A bridge, eh?" Danquah looked reflectively at his shelves, stacked with jars of mauve and yellow sweets, bottles of jaundice bitters, a perfume called *Bint el Sudan*, the newly arranged beer, two small battery torches which the village boys eyed with envy but could not afford. What would the strangers' needs be? From the past, isolated images floated slowly to the surface of his mind, like weed shreds in the sluggish river. Highland Queen whiskey. De Rezke cigarettes. Chivers' marmalade. He turned to the young man.

"Remember, a year ago, when those men from the coast came here, and walked all around with sticks, and dug holes near the river? Everyone said they were lunatics, but I said something would come of it, didn't I? No one listened to me, of course. Do you think it's true, this news?"

The boy grinned and shrugged. Danquah felt irritated at himself, that he had asked. An elder would not have asked a boy's opinion. In any event, the young man clearly had no opinion.

"How do I know?" the boy said. "I will ask my father, who will ask Nana Ayensu."

"I will ask Nana Ayensu myself," Danquah snapped, resenting the implication that the boy's father had greater access to the chief than he did, although in fact this was the case.

The young man's broad blank face suddenly frowned, as though the news had at last found a response in him, an excitement over an unknown thing.

"Strangers would come here to live?"



"Of course, idiot," Danquah muttered. "Do you think a bridge builds itself?"

Danquah put on his pink rayon shirt and his metal-rimmed spectacles so he could think better. But his face remained impassive. The boy chewed thoughtfully on a twig, hoisted his sagging loincloth, gazed at a shelf piled with patterned tradecloth and long yellow slabs of soap. He watched the sugar ants trailing in amber procession across the termite-riddled counter and down again to the packed-earth floor.

Only the children did not hesitate to show their agitation. Shrilling like cicadas, they swarmed and swirled off and away, bearing their tidings to all the world.

Danquah maintained a surly silence. The young man was not surprised, for the villagers regarded Danquah as a harmless madman. The storekeeper had no kin here, and if he had relatives elsewhere, he never mentioned them. He was not son or father, nephew or uncle. He lived by himself in the back of his shop. He cooked his own meals and sat alone on his stoop in the evenings, wearing food-smirched trousers and yellow shoes. He drank the costly beer and held aloft his ragged newspaper, bellowing the printed words to the toads that slept always in clusters in the corners, or crying sadly and drunkenly, while the village boys peered and tittered without pity.

The young man walked home, his bare feet making light crescent prints in the dust. He was about seventeen, and his name was Kofi. He was no one in particular, no one you would notice.

Outside the hut, one of his sisters was pounding dried cassava into *kokonte* meal, raising the big wooden pestle and bringing it down with an unvaried rhythm into the mortar. She glanced up.

"I saw Akua today, and she asked me something," her voice was a teasing singsong.

Kofi pretended to frown. "What is that to me?"

"Don't you want to know?"

He knew she would soon tell him. He yawned and stretched, languidly, then squatted on his heels and closed his eyes, miming sleep. He thought of Akua as she had looked this morning, early, coming back from the river with the water jar on her head, and walking carefully, because the vessel was heavy, but managing also to sway her plump buttocks a little more than was absolutely necessary.

"She wants to know if you are a boy or a man," his sister said.

His thighs itched and he could feel the slow full sweetness of his amiable lust. He jumped to his feet and leapt over the mortar, clumsy-graceful as a young goat. He sang softly, so his mother inside the hut would not hear.

"Do you asked a question,  
Akua, Akua?"

In a grove dwells an oracle,  
Oh Akua—  
Come to the grove when the village sleeps—”

The pestle thudded with his sister's laughter. He leaned close to her. “Don't speak of it, will you?”

She promised, and he sat cross-legged on the ground, and drummed on the earth with his outspread hands, and sang in the cool heat of the late afternoon. Then he remembered the important news, and put on a solemn face, and went in the hut to see his father.

His father was drinking palmwine sorrowfully. The younger children were crawling about like little lizards, and Kofi's mother was pulling out yams and red peppers and groundnuts and pieces of fish from bowls and pots stacked in a corner. She said “Ha-ei . . .” or “True, true . . .” to everything the old man said, but she was not really listening—her mind was on the evening meal. Kofi dutifully went to greet his grandmother. She was brittle and small and fleshless as the empty shell of a tortoise. She rarely spoke, and then only to recite in her tenuous bird voice her genealogy, or to complain of chill. Being blind, she liked to run her fingers over the faces of her grandchildren. Kofi smiled so that she could touch his smile. She murmured to him, but it was the name of one of his dead brothers.

“And when I think of the distance we walked,” Kofi's father was saying, “to clear the new patch for the cocoyam, and now it turns out to be no good, and the yams are half the size they should be, and I ask myself why I should be afflicted in this way, because I have no enemies, unless you want to count Donkor, and he went away ten years ago, so it couldn't be him, and if it is a question of libation, who has been more generous than I, always making sure the gods drank before the planting—”

He went on in this vein for some time, and Kofi waited. Finally his father looked up.

“The government men will build a bridge at Owurasu,” Kofi said. “So I heard.”

His father snorted.

“Nana Ayensu told me this morning. He heard it from Attah, but he did not believe it. Everyone knows the ferryman's tongue has diarrhoea. Garrulity is an affliction of the soul.”

“It is not true, then?”

“How could it be true? We have always used the Atware ferry. There will be no bridge.”

Kofi got out his adze and machete and went outside to sharpen them. Tomorrow he and his father would begin clearing the fallow patch beside the big baobab tree, for the second planting of cassava. Kofi could clear quickly with his machete, slicing through underbrush and greenfeather



ferns. But he took no pride in the fact, for every young man did the same.

He was sorry that there would be no bridge. Who knows what excitement might have come to Owurasu? But he knew nothing of such things. Perhaps it was better this way.

A week later, three whitemen and a clerk arrived, followed by a lorry full of tents and supplies, several cooks, a mechanic and four carpenters.

"Oh my Lord," groaned Gerald Wain, the contractor's superintendent, climbing out of the Land-Rover and stretching his travel-stiffened limbs, "is this the place? Eighteen months—it doesn't bear thinking about."

The silence in the village broke into turbulence. The women who had been filling the water vessels at the river began to squeal and shriek. They giggled and wailed, not knowing which was called for. They milled together, clambered up the clay bank, hitched up their long cloths and surged down the path that led back to the village, leaving the unfilled vessels behind.

The young men were returning from the farms, running all together, shouting hoarsely. The men of Owurasu, the fathers and elders, had gathered outside the chief's dwelling and were waiting for Nana Ayensu to appear.

At the *Hail Mary*, Danquah found two fly-specked pink paper roses and set them in an empty jam jar on his counter. He whipped out an assortment of bottles—gin, a powerful red liquid known as Steelwine, the beer with their gleaming tops, and several sweet purple Moko-Moko which the villagers could afford only when the cocoa crop was sold. Then he opened wide his door.

In the centre of the village, under the sacred fire tree, Nana Ayensu and the elders met the new arrivals. The leader of the whitemen was not young, and he had a skin red as fresh-bled meat. Red was the favoured colour of witches and priests of witchcraft, as everyone knew, so many remarks were passed, especially when some of the children, creeping close, claimed to have seen through the sweat-drenched shirt a chest and belly hairy as the Sasabonsam's. The other two whitemen were young and pale. They smoked many cigarettes and threw them away still burning, and the children scrambled for them.

Badu, the clerk-interpreter, was an African but to the people of Owurasu he was just as strange as the whitemen, and even less to be trusted, for he was a coast man. He wore white clothes and pointed shoes and a hat like an infant umbrella. The fact that he could speak their language did not make the villagers any less suspicious.

"The stranger is like a child," Nana Ayensu said, "but the voice of an enemy is like the tail of a scorpion—it carries a sting."

The clerk, a small man, slight and nervous as a duiker, sidled up to

weighty Opoku, the chief's spokesman, and attempted to look him in the eye. But when the clerk began to speak his eyes flickered away to the gnarled branches of the old tree.

"The wise men from the coast," Badu bawled in a voice larger than himself, "the government men who are greater than any chief—they have said that a bridge is to be built here, an honour for your small village. Workmen will be brought in for the skilled jobs, but we will need local men as well. The bungalows and labourers' quarters will be started at once, so we can use your young men in that work. Our tents will be over there on the hill. Those who want to work can apply to me. They will be paid for what they do. See to it that they are there tomorrow morning early. In this job we waste no time."

The men of Owurasu stood mutely with expressionless faces. As for the women, they felt only shame for the clerk's mother, whoever she might be, that she had taught her son so few manners.

Badu, brushing the dust from his white sleeves, caught their soft deploring voices and looked defiant. These people were bush—they knew nothing of the world of streets and shops. But because they had once thrown their spears all along the coast, they still scorned his people, calling them cowards and eaters of fish-heads. He felt, as well, a dismal sense of embarrassment at the backwardness of rural communities, now painfully exposed to the engineer's eyes. He turned abruptly away and spoke in rapid stuttering English to the superintendent.

With a swoosh and a rattle, the strangers drove off towards the river, scattering goats and chickens and children from the path, and filling the staring villagers' nostrils with dust. Then—pandemonium. What was happening? What was expected of them? No one knew. Everyone shouted at once. The women and girls fluttered and chattered like parrots startled into flame-winged flight. But the faces of the men were sombre.

Kofi came as close as he dared to the place where Nana Ayensu and the elders stood. Kofi's father was speaking. He was a small and wiry man. He plucked at his yellow and black cloth, twirling one end of it across his shoulder, pulling it down, flinging it back again. His body twitched in anger.

"Can they order us about like slaves? We have men who have not forgotten their grandfathers were warriors—"

Nana Ayensu merely flapped a desolate hand. "Compose yourself, Kobla. Remember that those of our spirit are meant to model their behaviour on that of the river. We are supposed to be calm."

Nana Ayensu was a portly man, well-fleshed. His bearing was dignified, especially when he wore his best *kente* cloth, as he did now, having hastily donned it upon being informed of the strangers' approach. He was, however, sweating a great deal—the little rivers formed under the gold and leather amulets of his headband, and trickled down his forehead and nose.

"Calm" he repeated, like an incantation. "But what do they intend to do with our young men? Will there be the big machines? I saw them once, when I visited my sister in the city. They are very large, and they feed on earth, opening their jaws—thus. Jaws that consume earth could consume a man. If harm comes to our young men, it is upon my head. But he said they would be paid, and Owurasu is not rich—"

Okomfo Ofori was leaning on his thornwood stick, waiting his turn to speak. He was older than the others. The wrinkled skin of his face was hard and cracked, as though he had been sun-dried like an animal hide. He had lived a long time in the forest and on the river. He was the priest of the river, and there was nothing he did not know. Watching him covertly, Kofi felt afraid.

"We do not know whether Owura will suffer his river to be disturbed," Okomfo Ofori said. "If he will not, then I think the fish will die from the river, and the oil palms will wither, and the yams will shrink and dwindle in the planting places, and plague will come, and river-blindness will come, and the snake will inhabit our huts because the people are dead, and the strangler vines will cover our dwelling places. For our life comes from the river, and if the god's hand is turned against us, what will avail the hands of men?"

Kofi, remembering that he had casually, without thought, wished the bridge to come, felt weak with fear. He wanted to hide himself, but who can hide from his own fear and from the eyes of a god?

That night, Kofi's father told him they were to go to the sacred grove beside the river. Without a word or question, the boy shook off sleep and followed his father.

The grove was quiet. The only sounds were the clicking of palm boughs and the deep low voice of Owura the river. Others were there—Kofi never knew who—young men and old, his friends and his uncles, all now changed, distorted, grown ghostly and unknown in the grey moonlight.

"Here is wine from our hands," Okomfo Ofori said. "God of the river, come and accept this wine and drink."

The palmwine was poured into the river. It made a faint far-off splash, then the river's voice continued unchanged, like muted drums.

The priest lifted up a black earthen vessel, an ordinary pot fashioned from river clay, such as the women used for cooking, but not the same, for this one was consecrated. Into the pot he put fresh river water, and leaves he had gathered from the thicket of ghosts, and eggs, and the blood and intestines of a fowl whose neck he wrung, and white seeds, and a red bead and a cowrie shell. He stirred the contents, and he stared for a long time, for this was the vessel wherein the god could make himself known to his priest. And no one moved.

Then—and the night was all clarity and all madness—the priest was possessed of his god, Owura the river. Kofi could never afterwards



remember exactly what had happened. He remembered a priest writhing like a snake with its back broken, and the clothing trance-torn, and the god's voice low and deep. Finally, dizzy with sleeplessness and fear, he seemed to see the faces and trees blurred into a single treeface, and his mind became as light and empty as an overturned water vessel, everything spilled out, drained, gone.

Back at the hut, Kofi's father told him the outcome. Libation would be poured to the ancestors and to the god of the river, as propitiation for the disturbance of the waters. Also, one young man had been selected to go to the bridge work. In order that the village could discover what the bridgemen would do to the sons of Owurasu, one young man had been chosen to go, as a man will be sent to test the footing around a swamp.

Kofi was to be that young man.

He was put to work clearing a space for the bridgemen's dwellings. He knew his machete and so he worked well despite his apprehension, swinging the blade slowly, bending low from the waist and keeping his legs straight. The heat of the sun poured and filtered down the leaves and bushes, through the fronds and hairy trunks of the oil palms. The knotted grasses and the heavy clots of moss were warm and moist to the feet, and even the ferns, snapping easily under the blade, smelled of heat and damp. Kofi wore only his loincloth, but the sweat ran down his sides and thighs, making his skin glossy. He worked with his eyes half closed. The blade lifted and fell. Towards mid-day, when the river had not risen to drown him, he ventured to sing.

*"We are listening, we are listening.*

*Vine, do not harm us, for we ask your pardon.*

*We are listening, River, for the drums.*

*Thorn, do not tear us, for we ask your pardon.*

*River, give the word to Crocodile.*

*The crocodile, he drums in the river.*

*Send us good word, for we ask your pardon."*

Before he left at nightfall, he took the gourd bottle he had brought with him and sprinkled the palm oil on the ground where his machete had cleared.

"Take this oil," he said to the earth, "and apply it to your sores."

Kofi returned home whole, day after day, and finally Nana Ayensu gave permission for other young men to go, as many as could be spared from the farming and fishing.

Six bungalows, servants' quarters, latrines and a long line of labourers' huts began to take shape. The young men of Owurasu were paid for their work. The village had never seen so much cash money before. The whitemen rarely showed their faces in the village, and the villagers rarely ventured into the strangers' camp, half a mile upriver. The two set-

lements were as separate as the river fish from the forest birds. They existed beside one another, but there was no communication between them. Even the village young men, working on the bungalows, had nothing to do with the Europeans, whose orders filtered down to them through Badu or the head carpenter. The bridgemen's cooks came to the village market to buy fruit and eggs, but they paid good prices and although they were haughty they did not bother anyone. The carpenters and drivers came to Danquah's in the evening, but there were not many of them and the villagers soon took them for granted. The village grew calm once more in the prevailing atmosphere of prosperity.

In the *Hail Mary Chop Bar*, the young men of Owurasu began to swagger. Some of them now kept for themselves a portion of the money they earned. Danquah, bustling around his shop, pulled out a box of new shirts and showed them off. They were splendid; they shimmered and shone. Entranced, the young men stared. A bottle of beer, Danquah urged. Would the young men have another bottle of beer while they considered the new shirts? They drank, and pondered, and touched the glittering cloth.

Kofi was looked up to now by the other young men. Some of them called him the chief of the young men. He did not admit it, but he did not deny, either. He stretched to his full height, yawned luxuriously, drank his beer in mighty gulps, laughed a little, felt strength flooding through his muscles, walked a trifle crookedly across the room to Danquah, who, smiling, was holding up a blue shirt imprinted with great golden trees. Kofi reached out and grabbed the shirt.

When he left the *Hail Mary* that night, Kofi found Akua waiting for him in the shadows. He remembered another purchase he had made. He drew it out and handed it to her, a green bottle with a picture of flowers. Akua seized it.

"For me? Scent?"

He nodded. She unstopped it, sniffed, laughed, grasped his arm.

"Oh, it is fine, a wonder. Kofi—when will you build the new hut?"

"Soon," he promised. "Soon."

It was all settled between their two families. He did not know why he hesitated. When the hut was built, and the gifts given and received, his life would move in the known way. He would plant his crops and his children. Some of his crops would be spoiled by worm or weather; some of his children would die. He would grow old, and the young men would respect him. That was the way close to him as his own veins. But now his head was spinning from the beer, and his mouth was bitter as lime-rind. He took Akua by the hand and they walked down the empty path together, slowly, in the dark, not speaking.

The next week the big machines came rolling and roaring into Owurasu. Lorries brought gangs of skilled labourers, more Europeans and more cooks. The tractor drivers laughed curses at the gaping

villagers and pretended to run them down until they shrieked and fled in humiliation like girls or mice.

Gong-gong beat in Owurasu that night, and the drums did not stop their rumble until dawn. The village was in an uproar. What would the machines do? Who were these new men? So many and so alien. Low-born coast men, northern desert men with their tribal marks burned in long gashes onto their cheeks and foreheads, crazy shouting city men with no shame. What would become of the village? No one knew.

Nana Ayensu visited the shrine where the carved and blackened state stools of dead chiefs were kept and where the ancestral spirits resided.

"Grandsires, we greet you. Stand behind us with a good standing. Protect us from the evils we know and from the evils we do not know. We are addressing you, and you will understand."

Danquah sat at the counter of the *Hail Mary* with a hurricane lamp at his elbow. He was laboriously scrawling a letter to his cousin in the city, asking him to arrange for four cases of gin and ten of beer, together with fifty cartons of cigarettes, to be sent on the next mammy-lorry to Owurasu.

Okomfo Ofori scattered sacred *summe* leaves to drive away spirits of evil, and looked again into his consecrated vessel. But this time he could see only the weeping faces of his father and his mother, half a century dead.

When morning came, the big machines began to uproot the coconut palms in the holy grove beside the river. The village boys, who had been clearing the coarse grass from the riverbank, one by one laid down their machetes and watched in horrified fascination as the bulldozers assaulted the slender trees. Everyone had thought of the river's being invaded by strangers. But it had never occurred to anyone that Owura's grove would be destroyed.

Kofi watched and listened. Under the noise of the engines he could hear the moaning of Owura's brown waters. Now would come the time of tribulation; the plague and the river-blindness would strike now. The bulldozer rammed another tree, and it toppled, its trunk snapping like a broken spine. Kofi felt as though his own bones were being broken, his own body assaulted, his heart invaded by the massive blade. Then he saw someone approaching the village.

Okomfo Ofori was the river's priest, and there was nothing he did not know. Except this day, this death. Kofi stared, shocked. The old priest was running like a child, and his face was wet with his tears.

At the work site, the superintendent listened wearily while the old man struggled to put his anguish into words.

"What's he saying, Badu? If it isn't one damn thing, it's another—what's the trouble now?"

"He says the grove belongs to the gods," Badu explained.

"All right," Wain sighed. "Ask him how much he wants. It's a racket, if



you ask me. Will ten pounds do it? It can be entered under Local Labour."

The village boys looked towards Kofi, who stood unmoving, his machete dangling uselessly from his hand.

"What does it mean? What will happen?"

He heard their questioning voices and saw the question in their eyes. Then he turned upon them in a kind of fury.

"Why do you ask me? I know nothing, nothing, nothing!"

He dropped his machete and ran, not knowing where he was going, not seeing the paths he took.

His mother was a woman vast as mountains. Her blue cloth, faded and tinged with a sediment of brown from many washings in river water, tugged and pulled around her heavy breasts and hips. She reached out a hand to the head of her crouched son.

So the grove was lost, and although the pleas were made to gods and grandsires, the village felt lost, too, depleted and vulnerable. But the retribution did not come. Owura did not rise. Nothing happened. Nothing at all.

In the days following, Kofi did not go to the bridgework. He built the new hut, and when the gifts were given and taken, Akua made a groundnut stew and half the villagers were invited to share this first meal. Kofi, drinking palmwine and eating the food as though he could never get enough, was drawn into his new wife's smile and lapped around with laughter.

After a week, the young men of Owurasu went back to work for the bridgemen.

The approaches were cleared and the steamy river air was filled with the chunking of the pile-driver and the whirr of the concrete mixers, as the piers and anchor blocks went in.

To the villagers, the riverbank no longer seemed bald without the grove. Kofi could scarcely remember how the palms had looked when they lived there. Gradually he forgot that he had been afraid of the machines. Even the Europeans no longer looked strange. At first he had found it difficult to tell them apart, but now he recognized each. His father and Nana Ayensu asked him this and that about the work, and he would tell them.

"The big hammer is working in the river, hammering in the giant stumps, and from the stumps will grow things taller than trees, so it is said. This work has a power in it."

Each week he was paid for his work. Akua bought a new cloth and an iron cooking pot. On one memorable day, Kofi came home from the *Hail Mary* with a pocket torch. It was green and handsome, with silver on its end and silver on the place one touched to make the light come on. Kofi flicked the switch and in the tiny bulb a faint glow appeared. Akua clapped her hands in pleasure.

"Such a thing. It is yours, Kofi?"

"Mine. I paid for it."

The glow trembled, for the battery was almost worn out from the village boys' handling. Kofi turned it off hastily. Danquah had forgotten to tell him and so he did not know that the power could be replaced.

At the bridge, Kofi's work had changed. Now he helped in the pouring of concrete as the blocks were made. He unloaded steel. He carried tools. He was everywhere. Sweat poured from him. His muscles grew tough as liana vines. He talked with the ironworkers, some of whom spoke his tongue. They were brash, easy-laughing, rough-spoken men, men of the city. Their leader was a man by the name of Emmanuel, a man with a mighty chest, hugely strong. Emmanuel wore a green felt hat enlivened with the white and lightly dancing feathers of the egrets that rode the cattle on the grasslands of the coast. He spoke often to Kofi, telling of the places he had been, the things he had seen.

"The money goes, but who cares? That's an ironworker's life—to make money and spend it. Someday I will have a car—you'll see. Ahh—it'll be blue, like the sea, with silver all over it. Buick—Jaguar—you don't know those names. Learn them, hear me? I'm telling them to you. Wait until you see me on the high steel. Then you'll know what an ironworker does. Listen—I'll tell you something—only men like me can be ironworkers, did you know that? Why? Because I know I won't fall. If you think you might fall, then you do. But not me. I'll never fall, I tell you that."

Kofi listened, his mouth open, not understanding what Emmanuel was talking about, but understanding the power of the man, the fearlessness. More and more Kofi was drawn to the company of the bridge-men in the evenings at the *Hail Mary*. Akua would click her tongue disapprovingly.

"Kofi—why do you go there so much?"

"I am going," he would reply, not looking into her eyes. "It is not for you to say."

Kofi still went each evening to see his father and his mother. His father was morose, despite the money, and had taken to quoting proverbs extensively.

"Man is not a palm-nut that he should be self-centered. At the word of the elder, the young bends the knee. If you live in an evil town, the shame is yours. Follow your heart and you perish."

He would continue interminably, and Kofi would feel uneasy, not certain why his father was offended, not knowing where his own offense lay. But after he had returned to his own hut and had filled himself with bean soup and *kokonte*, he would feel better and would be off again to the *Hail Mary*.

One evening Kofi's father sent the women and younger children away and began to speak with his son. The old man frowned, trying to weave into some pattern the vast and spreading spiderweb of his anxieties.

"The things which are growing from the river—we did not know the bridge would be like this, a defiance. And these madmen who go about our village—how many girls are pregnant by them already? And what will the children be like? Children of no known spirit—"

Kofi said nothing at all. He listened silently, and then he turned and walked out of the hut. It was only when he was halfway to the *Hail Mary* that he realized he had forgotten to greet or say farewell to the grandmother who sat, blind and small, in the darkened hut, repeating in her faroff voice the names of the dead.

At the *Hail Mary* Kofi went over to Emmanuel, who was drinking beer and talking with Danquah. Danquah no longer complained about the village. These days he said that he had always known something wonderful would happen here; he had prayed and now his prayers had been answered. Emmanuel nodded and laughed, shrugging his shoulders rhythmically to the highlife music bellowed by the gramophone, a recent investment of Danquah's. Kofi put one hand on Emmanuel's arm, touching the crimson sheen of the ironworker's shirt.

"I am one of the bridgemen," he said. "Say it is true."

Emmanuel clapped him on the shoulder.

"Sure," he said, "You are a bridgeman, bush boy. Why not?"

He winked at Danquah, who stifled a guffaw. But Kofi did not notice.

The dry *harmattan* wind came down from the northern deserts and across the forest country, parching the lips and throats of fishermen who cast their moon-shaped nets into the Owura river, and villagers bent double as they worked with their hoes in the patches of yam and cassava, and labourers on the sun-hot metal of the bridge.

More than a year had passed, and the bridge had assumed its shape. The towers were completed, and the main cables sang in the scorching wind.

Kofi, now a mechanic's helper, scurried up and down the catwalks. He wore only a loincloth and he had a rag tied around his forehead as slight insulation against the fiery sun. He had picked up from the mechanics and ironworkers some of the highlife songs, and now as he worked he sang of the silk-clad women of the city.

Badu, immaculate in white shirt and white drill trousers, called to him.

"Hey you, Kofi!"

Kofi trotted over to him.

"The bridge will be completed soon," Badu said. "Do you want to stay on as a painter? We will not need so many men. But you have worked well. Shall I put your name down?"

"Of course," Kofi said promptly. "Am I not a bridgeman?"

Badu gave him a quizzical glance.

"What will you do when the bridge is finished? What will you do when we leave?"

Kofi looked at him blankly.



"You will be leaving? Emmanuel, he will be leaving?"

"Naturally," Badu said. "Did you think we would stay forever?"

Kofi did not reply. He merely walked away. But Badu, watching him go, felt uneasily that something somewhere was disjointed, but he could not exactly put his finger on it.

To the people of Owurasu, the bridge was now different. It had grown and emerged and was an entity. And so another anxiety arose. Where the elders had once been concerned only over the unseemly disturbance of Owura's waters and grove, now they wondered how the forest and river would feel about the presence of this new being.

The forest was alive, and everywhere spirit acted upon spirit, not axe upon wood, nor herb upon wound, nor man upon steel. But what sort of spirit dwelt in the bridge? They did not know. Was it of beneficent or malicious intent? If a being existed, and you did not know whether it meant you good or ill, nor what it required of you, how could you possibly have peace of mind?

A series of calamities enforced the villagers' apprehension. Two of the pirogues drifted away and were found, rock-battered and waterlogged, some distance downriver. A young child fell prey to the crocodile that dwelt under the riverbank. Worst of all, three of the best fishermen, who worked downstream near the rapids where the waterflies flourished, developed river-blindness.

When the council of elders met, Kofi was told to attend. He was not surprised, for he had now been the spokesman of the village youth for some time. Nana Ayensu spoke.

"The bridge is beside us, and we live beside this bridge, but we do not know it. How are we to discover its nature?"

Danquah, who was there by reason of his wealth, flatly stated that the bridge had brought good fortune to the village. Business was brisk; money flowed. He could not see why anyone should be worried.

Kofi's father leapt to his feet, quavering with rage. The bridge might have brought good fortune to Danquah, but it had brought ill fortune to everyone else.

"What of my son, spending all his time in the company of strangers? What of Inkumsah's child, buried in the river mud until his limbs rot soft enough for the crocodile to consume? What of—"

"Kobla, Kobla, be calm," Nana Ayensu soothed. "Remember the river."

"The river itself will not be calm," Kofi's father cried. "You will see—Owura will not suffer this thing to remain."

Okomfo Ofori and Opoku the linguist were nodding their heads. They agreed with Kobla. Kofi looked from face to face, the wise and wizened faces of his father, his uncles, his chief and his priest.

"Something is dwelling in it—something strong as Owura himself—"

Silence. All of them were staring at him. Only then did Kofi realize

the enormity of his utterance. He was terrified at what he had done. He could not look up. The strength was drained from his body. And yet—the belief swelled and grew and put forth the leaf. The being within the bridge was powerful, perhaps as powerful as Owura, and he, Kofi, was a man of the bridge. He knew then what was meant to happen. The other bridgemen might go, might desert, might falter, but he would not falter. He would tend the bridge as long as he lived. He would be its priest.

When the paint began to appear on the bridge, the people of Owurasu gathered in little groups on the riverbank and watched. The men shook their heads and lifted their shoulders questioningly. The women chirped like starlings.

"What's the matter with them?" Gerald Wain asked. "Don't they like the aluminium paint?"

"They like it," Badu replied. "They think it is real silver."

"What next?" the Superintendent said. "I hope they don't start chipping it off."

But the villagers were not primarily concerned with monetary value. The bridge was being covered with silver, like the thin-beaten silver leaf on a great queen's chair. Silver was the colour of queenmothers, the moon's daughters, the king-makers. The villagers wondered, and pondered meanings, and watched the bridge grow moonbright in the kingly sun.

Kofi, who had been shunned at home ever since his insolence, himself brightened and shone with every brushful of paint he splashed and slapped on the metal. He painted like one possessed, as though the task of garbing the bridge lay with him alone.

In the *Hail Mary*, he questioned Emmanuel.

"Where will you go, when you go from here?"

"Back to the city. First I'll have a good time. Everything a man does in the city, I'll do it—hear me? Then I'll look around for another job."

Kofi was amazed. "You do not know where you will go?"

"I'll find out," Emmanuel said easily. "What about you, bush boy?"

"I will tend the bridge," Kofi said in a low voice.

Emmanuel's laughter boomed. "Do you think it needs looking after? Do you think it would fall down tomorrow if no one was here?"

That was not what Kofi had meant. But he did not perceive the difference in their outlooks. He heard only one thing—the bridge did not need a priest. Emmanuel must be wrong. But if he were not? Kofi thought once again of the bridgemen, coming together for awhile and then separating once more, going away to look for other places, somewhere. The thought could not be borne. He clicked it off like the little light of the green and silver torch.

He could return to his father's farm. That would please Akua and his mother. His father would welcome another pair of hands at the planting.

He thought of his machete and adze. They would need a lot of sharpening now. He stood up indecisively, looking from the counter to the door and back again. In his pocket the silver shillings clashed softly as he moved. He pulled them out and held them in his hand, staring at the last of the thin bright discs. Then he grasped Emmanuel's arm, clutching it tightly.

"What will I do? What will I do now?"

Emmanuel looked at him in astonishment.

"Why ask me?"

The towers were painted from small platforms run up on pulleys, and the cables were painted from the catwalks. Then the day came for painting the cross-members at the top of the towers. It was not a job which many men would have wanted, for one had to leave the safety of the catwalk and crawl gingerly out onto the steel beam.

Kofi at once volunteered. He swung himself lightly over the catwalk and onto the exposed steel. He straddled the beam, two hundred feet above the river, and began to paint.

On either side of the brown waters lay the forest, green and dense, heavy-hanging, sultry and still at mid-day. The palms rose above the tangle of underbrush and fern, and the great buttressed hardwoods towered above the palms. Through and around it all, the lianas twisted and twined. Poinsettia and jungle lily blood-flecked the greens with their scarlet.

Kofi listened to the steely twanging of the cables. The sound, high and sweet as bees or bells, clear as rain, seemed to grow louder and louder, obscuring the bird-voiced forest, surpassing even the deep-throated roar of Owura the river.

Squinting, Kofi could make out other villages, huts like small calabashes in the sun. Then he saw something else. At a distance a straight red-gold streak pierced like a needle through the forest. It was the new road. He had heard about it but he had not seen it before and had not believed it was really there. Now he saw that it would emerge soon here and would string both village and bridge as a single bead on its giant thread.

Emmanuel would ride along there in a mammy-lorry, shouting his songs. At some other village, some other bridge, Emmanuel would find his brothers waiting for him, and he would greet them and be with them again.

Then Kofi knew what to do. He was no longer the bridge's priest, but now the thought could be borne. He was fearless, fearless as Emmanuel. He knew the work of the bridge. In the far places, men would recognize him as a bridgeman. The power of it went with him and in him. Exultant, he wanted to shout aloud his own name and his praises. There was nothing he could not do. Slowly, deliberately, he pulled himself up



until he was standing there on the steel, high above the forest and the river. He was above even the bridge itself. And above him, there was only the sky.

Then he did something that Emmanuel would never have done on the high steel—he looked up. The brightness of the bridge seemed strangely to pale in the sunfire that filled his eyes. For an instant he looked straight into the sun. Then, blinded, he swayed and his foot slipped on the silver paint. He pitched forward, missing the bridge entirely, and arched into the river like a thrown spear.

The bridgeworkers' shouted alarm, as they saw him, was each man's cry of terror for himself, who might have been the one to fall. The pirogues went out, and the men of the village dragged the river. But Kofi's body was not found.

"What could have possessed the idiot?" the Superintendent cried, in anger and anguish, for it was the only fatal accident on the job.

"He did not believe the bridge would hurt him, perhaps," Badu said.

"Did he think it was alive?" Wain said despairingly. "Won't they ever learn?"

But looking up now, and hearing the metallic humming of the cables, it seemed to him that the damn thing almost was alive. He was beginning to have delusions; it was time he went on leave.

As for the people of Owurasu, they were not surprised. They understood perfectly well what had happened. The bridge, clearly, had sacrificed its priest in order to appease the river. The people felt they knew the bridge now. Kofi had been the first to recognize the shrine, but he had been wrong about one thing. The bridge was not as powerful as Owura. The river had been acknowledged as elder. The queenly bridge had paid its homage and was a part of Owurasu at last.

The boy's father quoted, stoically and yet with pride, the proverb—"A priest cannot look upon his god and live." Kofi's mother and his widow mourned him, and were not much consoled by the praises they heard of him. But even they, as they listened, felt a certain awe and wondered if this was indeed the Kofi they had known.

Many tales were woven around his name, but they ended always in the same way, always the same.

"The fish is netted and eaten; the antelope is hunted and fed upon; the python is slain and cast into the cooking pot. But—oh my children, my sons—a man consumed by the gods lives forever."

# THE NECKLACE

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WILFRED WATSON

There's the baker with a sieve for a head  
There's the butcher with a skewered tongue  
And Herb the milkman, with a leaking cart  
And the policeman, with the policeman's art  
To loop a right into a wrong—  
There's the parson, with a hole for his brains—  
One way or another the wind blows through us—  
There's the lawyer with loopholes drilled into his eyes—  
And Joan with the simple hole in her legs—  
Christ, with the terrible nail in your hands  
Threading harlot and pope upon your needle,  
I am your mankind with a hole in my heart

# THE AGONY ON CAPE COD

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ROBERT KROETSCH

1. Charlie Parker wrestled with God and won  
The first throw; seven angels wired from above  
Care of Decca saying BLOW BIRD BLOW STOP LOVE.
2. O the phoenix cannot find the far land.  
The incubator clucks the egg  
And the saxophone burns hollow on the shore.
3. Seeking the lost kingdom of ecstasy  
I galloped a white and stoutly farting mare  
Down to the shipwreck-strewn and foggy beach.  
(And might have caught the ferry for a penny more.)
4. Three preachers passed in an ivory Cadillac  
Singing, each to each.  
A rock and a tiger in a gunny sack  
Hi diddle diddle dum dee.
5. The hooves beat bravely in the chill night;  
But shouting my way to Menelaus' wife  
I found the waters wide and the gulls  
Prophesying fright and a dry grave.
6. Horseshit in the streets of Provincetown  
Bespeaks the opulence of art.  
Only the sailor is dead.  
Where once the blood knocked fevered  
For the crimson wave  
Heels knock instead.  
Hi diddle diddle dum dee dum dee.

## MY AUSTERE VISAGE LIGHTED BY TWO MOONS

---

PAUL CARROLL

There are no moons. Except  
these flat discs of glass  
circling my eyes.

There are no moons. Or if  
there are, it's only  
the loop-the-loops

of the green bird of the night.  
Perhaps. Or  
the shadow of loops. Perhaps.

There are no moons. Deliberately,  
delicately,  
the hand in chauffeur's glove  
shuts the lids of father's eyes.  
It is written:  
only the naked are ecstatic.

# AT THE EDGE OF THE WOODS

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ALDEN NOWLAN

They hung a blanket in front of the bed but Sistie and I could still hear them and once when he bent over to blow out the lamp I saw him all naked and white and I thought of the other One he had told us about, how his skin was as white as the snow at night, which isn't really white although everyone says it is and won't let you call it anything else but white, and there were red scars all over his face where they'd sewn the pieces together, Bobby said, and when Sistie woke up crying he came through the blanket in his yellow lumber boots and pulled the quilts off us and beat her with his leather laces . . . Are you really asleep, honey? she'd whisper, are you really asleep? And he didn't even light the lamp that night he beat her and Sistie kept screaming, don't beat me, Bobby, I love you, I really love you, don't beat me, Bobby. So afterward we pretended to be asleep even when her voice was warm and sweet as the hot peppermint drink she gave me when I had a cold: honey, are you awake? Are you awake, honey? Before I knew better I held my breath but later we learned to breathe deep and slow, with our throats and bellies, as people do when they're really asleep, the quilts rising and falling. And neither of them ever knew.

There is the colour you see in the world and there is the colour you see in the mind, so it doesn't mean anything when I say His face was white, because nobody can tell the truth no matter how hard he tries. But His face was white. And Bobby said He came out of the woods at night and crouched under the window of the cabin (we lived at the edge of the woods and the trees screeched on windy nights), but even when He rattled the windows I wouldn't look and Bobby never found out or he'd have made me, he'd have grabbed me and made me look, and I never told Sistie because she told everything even when I made her ask God to strike her dead if she told.

I covered my head with the quilts because that was a different kind of

darkness, all snug and safe and warm. Are you asleep, honey? Are you asleep? And once she was sick and he had to carry her and her breath smelled funny, as if she'd eaten molasses and been sick to her stomach: oh, Bobby, I don't want my children to see me like this. I don't want my children to see me. And he said they'd broken into graves and taken the dead men and cut them into pieces and sewn them together and made Him.

I wondered if He travelled all over the world or did He stay there in the woods always and how long would it take Him to come from the end of the world? And I am afraid of the dark places, even in the daytime, because I can't believe that He sleeps.

Are you asleep, honey? Are you asleep? And him with his leather laces, lying there waiting, his eyes opened on the dark! We found a bobcat in the woodshed and it wiggled down through a hole in the floor and crawled under the wall and bolted back into the woods and he said bobcats ate children and could climb walls and we were too scared to tell him that we were afraid to go to bed.

I asked him what beasts ate and he said they ate children. Fox, bear, bobcat, porcupine. The woods were full of them, porcupines gnawed the well pole and bears gulped raspberries, thorns, leaves and twigs in the tangle behind the slaughterhouse. And one night a rat bit Sistie's heel and he woke up and killed it.

How could there be a picture if He wasn't real? Nobody makes a picture out of his head. The scars on His face make me think of the time my nose bled until the pillows were soaked. Bobby said that's where the stitches were. And she said it was the lid of the coffin that fell down and caught the boy's coat but he thought the dead man had grabbed him and he was frightened to death. And they both laughed. Are you asleep, honey? Are you asleep?

They came up the ladder and through the trapdoor, her carrying the lamp in front of her and above her head and I always woke up, but they never knew. It took twenty dead men's bodies to make His, he said, and I'd listen for His footsteps, heavier than a bear's, and sometimes, between gusts of wind, I could hear Him walking by the well and around the cabin and my chest hurt when I tried to breathe, listening for Him to pound the door, but He never did.

The door locked with a wooden button and hung on leather hinges and the windows didn't open, but in the summer he pulled the nails and took out the glass and then at night I could smell the trees and the grass and hear the clouds brushing ever-so-softly against the sky... but I never cried. I never cried. Even when the windows were taken out and I knew He could reach through and I lay as far from the hole as I could, pressing Sistie against the wall, I never cried.

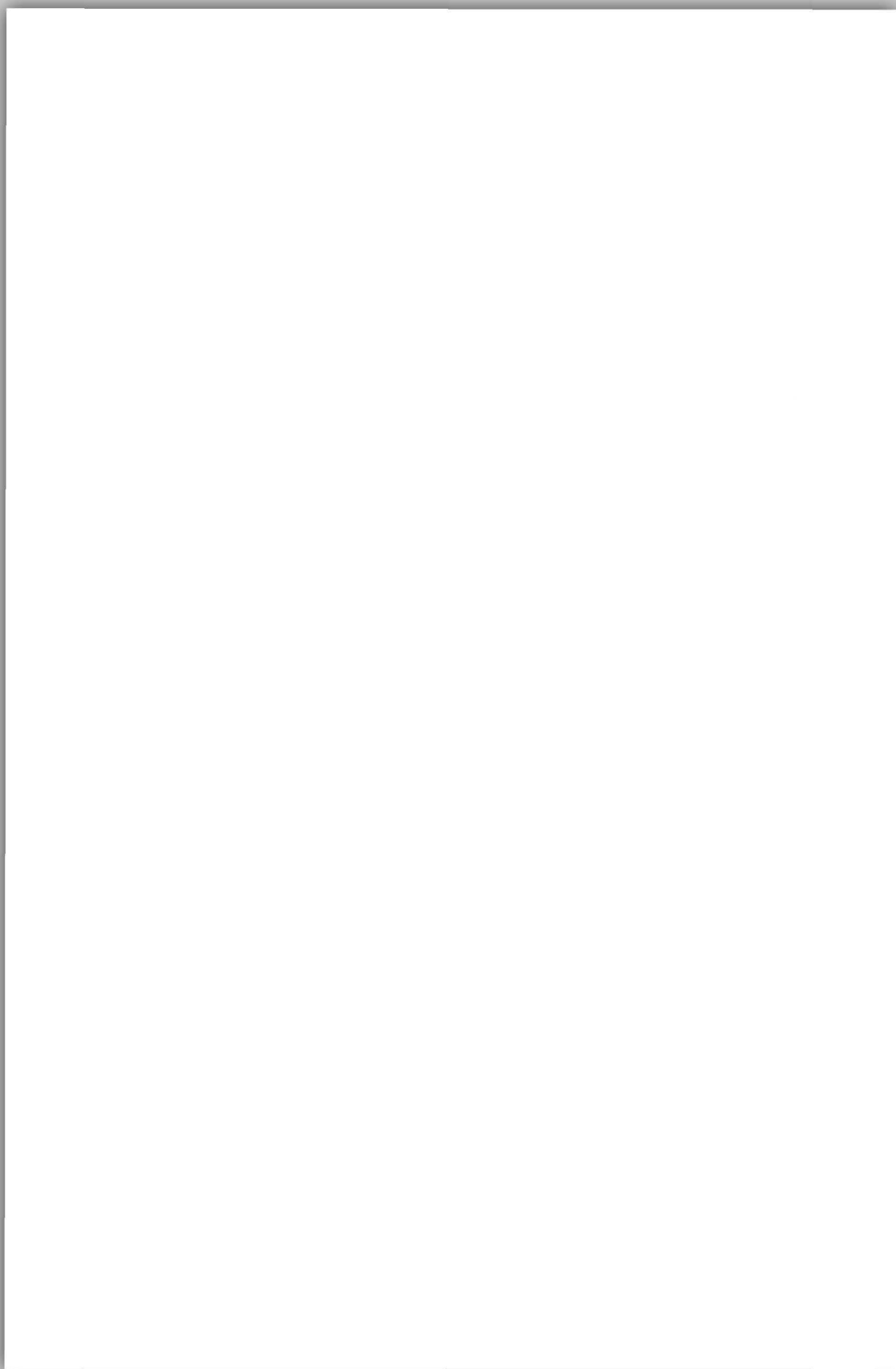
Are you asleep, honey? Are you asleep?

When I get big I'll come back here and walk down the clay road past



the slaughterhouse and by then I'll be so tall I'll have to stoop to walk under the clothes line and I'll wear a big black belt with a silver buckle and yellow lumber boots that lace up to my knees and I'll kick open the door and come in here and Bobby will be sitting by the stove filing his pulpsaw (because everything will be the same except I'll be too big to be afraid) and he'll look up and see me and what the hell are you starin' at, I'll say, and I'll speak with His voice because I'll be able to do anything then and I wish I could wake up now and find everything changed.





# PRISM

*international*

*autumn 1964 / one dollar*



1964-1966

## WHAT SHE SAID (POEM 12)

---

They who know the way he went  
say: where he goes now,  
he crosses water-passes in the mountain  
which are like passages in an ant-hill.  
He has to climb rocks  
hot as a blacksmith's anvil.  
Where his road branches,  
that's where the clansman  
with the bent bow  
whets the point of his arrow.

But this loud-mouthed town  
knows nothing of my fears  
for the hardship of his ways,  
and taunts me  
for being lovesick.

## WHAT HE SAID (POEM 17)

---

When love is ripe beyond bearing  
and goes to seed,  
men will ride even palmyra stems  
like horses; will wear on their heads  
the reeking dense blossom of the erukkam  
for emblems; will lie in streets  
in the midst of onlookers' gossip;

and will do worse.

*Two Poems from the Kuruntokai*  
*translated from the Tamil by A. K. Ramanujan*



# PATERNITY

---

CESARE PAVESE

Solitary man before the useless sea,  
waiting for evening, waiting for morning.  
The children play there, but this man would like  
himself to have a child and watch it play.  
Huge clouds form a palace on the water  
that each day dissipates and reappears, and colors  
the children's faces. There will always be the sea.

The morning wounds. On the damp beach  
the sun skims, clinging to the nets and stones.  
The man goes out in the torpid sun and walks  
along the sea. He doesn't watch the soaked scum  
that ebbs and flows by the shore and has no more peace.  
At this hour the children still doze  
in the warmth of the bed. At this hour a woman  
dozes in a bed; she'd make love,  
if she weren't alone. Slowly he undresses,  
nude like the distant woman, and enters the sea.

Then, the night, when the sea vanishes, one listens  
to the great emptiness that lies below the stars. The children  
in the reddened houses begin to drop from sleep  
and one to cry. The man, tired from the wait,  
lifts his eyes to the stars, which hear nothing.  
At this hour there are women who undress a child  
and put it to sleep. There is some woman in bed  
embracing a man. From the black window  
enters a raucous panting, and no one hears it,  
except the man who knows all the tedium of the sea.

*Translated from the Italian of Cesare Pavese  
by Giose Rimanelli*

# THE SETTLERS

---

MARGARET ATWOOD

A second after  
the first boat touched the shore,  
there was a quick skirmish  
brief as a twinge  
and then the land was settled

(of course there was really  
no shore: the water turned  
to land by having  
objects in it: caught and kept  
from surge, made  
less than immense  
by networks of  
roads and grids of fences)

and as for us, who drifted  
picked by the sharks  
during so many bluegreen  
centuries before they came:  
they found us  
inland, stranded  
on a ridge of bedrock,  
defining our own island.

From our inarticulate  
skeleton (so  
intermixed, one  
carcass),  
they postulated wolves.

They dug us down  
into the solid granite  
where our bones grew flesh again,  
came up trees and  
grass.

Still  
we are the salt  
seas that uphold these lands.

Now horses graze  
inside this fence of ribs, and

children run, with green  
smiles, (not knowing  
where) across  
the fields of our open hands.

# CRISTOBAL COLÓN REACHES JUANA

---

RALPH GUSTAFSON

—Letter of Guacanagari the Native to his Nephew, 1562

We fled from the sight inland and that night  
We put our seed into the wombs of our women  
So that we would live. The great curves  
Of the shining cloth were white, and rose  
Dry out of horizons of the sea. My thought  
Is: the winds of the sun are many, they  
Were between us. The hulls were cities  
Many huts high with colours and blinding metal  
Between, the heights not coming though they rode  
That swell that crashed to us. Three canoes  
Such as we could not imagine. We waited, the grass  
Not moving though the parrots screamed in the silence  
And fell silent at the three thunders. The women  
Were beyond the huts. We commanded  
The thunder in our ears. My armpits  
Wet and I could smell fear. I watched  
And the size of the sails in my mind  
Became less: man's waste marked the hulls.  
The sun shone. They came at noon. I thought of Naa  
And her soft breasts. My length was nothing  
And tight against me. The shark cut  
The shadow and was not afraid. When they came  
It was amidst blades lifted on the sea. We moved  
Back. The birds rose and were without purpose.  
I saw that the gods were encased and whether they had  
Hair all over, I do not know. I was sorry to give up  
The standard painted with many colours though it was stained  
By spume and many hands had not cared for it.

I write as it was. These men are not gods.

Jesus be with you.



# WHAT HAS WINGS BUT CANNOT FLY?

---

MICHAEL CHRISTIE

Dear Uncle Billy,

I would put this letter in writing but you might not understand it because I'm not very good at it even though I am in grade four. I like printing better anyhow. Besides I haven't been at school for three months and you have to practise every day to be neat. I could get my Mummy or Daddy to bring home my penmanship book from my desk but I don't really want it. What I like to do just about best of all is draw. I do birds, cows, horses and rainbows. My teacher Miss Pavelich says I'm good at birds. Birds are about my favorite. Yesterday afternoon one flew onto the foot of my bed and was there for about a minute. I don't know what kind it was but it was small and yellow like a budgie. If it was I'm glad it got away because I don't like to see them caged up.

I'M SICK AND I WISH I COULD GET UP AND PLAY WITH CELESTE GANSHORN OUTSIDE AGAIN. AT ONE TIME SHE USED TO VISIT ME A LOT BUT I HARDLY EVER SEE HER ANY MORE. WE USED TO ROLLER SKATE TOGETHER ON THE TENNIS COURT DOWN THE STREET. DO YOU KNOW WHAT SHE SAID ONCE? SHE HAD 3 speeds on her skates and she could go slow, medium and fast. All she had to do was touch a little thing near the place where you put in the key. I didn't believe her but she thought I did.

Every time the doctor comes he takes my pulse and Mummy and Daddy stand by my side and looked worried. The doctor always says that I am doing fine or as well as can be expected. But I don't feel anywhere near the same as I did before I got sick and had to stay in bed. Most of the time I feel sleepy or just tired. The last week I haven't felt like painting even. I play Old Maid and Chinese Checkers with Mummy and Daddy at night and that's about all. Lately I haven't been eating much. I had a bowl of oxtail soup for lunch today but didn't eat it all.

Well that's all for now. I think I'll go to sleep for awhile. By the way

my Daddy reads your column regularly and says you are the composite fart.

Yours Cordially

Elvira

I wrote this letter several weeks ago, and I was fairly certain Cardew (Uncle Billy) would read it because I didn't think he was important enough to have a secretary. But it was never sent. As I look at it now I'm of the same opinion as I was then when I felt it didn't have enough introductory nuisance value. I'd hazily thought of some other gambits, each one getting more and more dramatic. An item would appear in the personal column. It was going to read: UNCLE BILLY WANTS EXECUTIONS TELEVISED. ELVIRA. Next, cabs and food deliveries would call at his home regularly at strange hours, and I'd phone him and say that it was Elvira and laugh like a maniac. After this I'd hire someone to put sugar in his gas tank and maybe throw a rock through his front window with a cryptic note attached. Naturally the police would patrol the area carefully and I'd lay off for a couple of months until they thought it was no longer necessary. Then I'd have a great yellow ELVIRA (perhaps with an exclamation point) painted on the side of his house. He'd be getting nervous by now, and I'd begin sending him ticking clocks in Christmassy parcels.

But these, as I say, were hazy thoughts, and I suppose my dislike for him is just as hazy. My dislike began when he found Gracie's ball on the sixteenth at Capilano Golf Course. I used to play there two or three times a week before I got leukemia. Now I'm too weak to do hardly anything. I just lie here in this hospital bed at home, dreaming and thinking. Cardew was coming from behind, and when he stopped to help what immediately irked me was that he did it in a gallant way. He was tall and movie-handsome: all-teeth and eyebrows, and a straight, no-nonsense-about-it nose. I'm not particularly ugly, but whenever one of these types is around I begin wondering if I shouldn't have drunk more milk or eaten all my vegetables when I was a kid. I honestly don't know what Gracie saw in me. God knows, my personality doesn't make up for my lack of looks. As far as that goes, my mother, Mathilde (I call her by her Christian name because it's very modern and sophisticated and she doesn't feel so old), says it's colorful to the extent that I'm usually in a black mood, a blue funk, or a brown study, and she's right. I'm not much of a talker and when I do say something, more times than not nobody wants to hear it. Occasionally I try a little self-therapy by trying to promote discussion about the crazy dreams I'm always getting. For example, I told Gracie the one where my pillows were transformed into dual rectangles of throbbing protoplasm with thick, bloody veins bisecting each other—as if the insides of a large animal had been stamped through a machine, and the nerves were still alive and twitching. She made a face, and said, "Fuzzy, that's revolting—you're drunk." But I was perfectly sober.

Gracie stuck with me for six weeks, which is a record. When I first met her we got along all right. That was at one of Mathilde's parties, and she was constantly smiling at me over her glass. We left early and got respectably epigamic at a dim bar which had STEERS and HEIFERS printed over the bathroom doors. After that closed, we wound up at her place, an entrepot of junk and free samples, as I remember it. She worked in a travel bureau on Hastings Street, and on one wall was an airline calendar with a quadroon stewardess smiling through the fuselage of a jet flying in a clear blue sky. On the opposite wall hung a beaten-up guitar. Below this was an oatmeal-colored chaise-longue, and by the entrance to the kitchen were two of those uncomfortable bamboo chairs where you either have to lean forward or sit well back. She said she'd thrown some terrific parties, but I couldn't see it. Get more than six there and you'd die of suffocation or, at the least, maim yourself on a piece of driftwood or an empty Ruffino bottle on the floor.

Everything went smoothly right to the bedroom. But in bed things became difficult. After a little coaptation trouble, and a sudden hiatus while I got up to twiddle the handle of the toilet, which was making a hell of a racket (that's one of my habits), we were off. But, to put it politely, it was medal play: the score accounted only for the total number of strokes and not the winning of individual holes. It ended in a tapering, mutually apologetic exhaustion.

She never smiled at me over her glass again after that. The only reason she kept going with me that I can figure, was that she was after my money. The legacy of four million dollars from my Aunt Louise, who succumbed last year at the Davis Cup finals, was certainly not classified information. And that, as any girl with enough brains to spread on a cracker should know, is worth a few death-bed months of sweaty liaisons, if not orectic memorabilia.

But not Gracie. I suppose she wouldn't have taken me for any price. When we met Cardew on the sixteenth that was our last time together. As we worked our way up the last two holes she'd come to the stage where she was treating me as the *bad brother*. She kept hushing me when Michael Cardew was talking because, she said in an aside, he was one of the most fascinating men she'd ever met. I was unusually garrulous that day, and when I made a few sarcastic remarks about his white golf shoes distracting his putting, and not to forget to pick up his tee, and telling him to practise with an orange under his armpit so that his left arm remained straight, I could swear she was on the verge of saying, "Fuzzy, don't be cheeky," as Aunt Louise and Mathilde used to say to me three decades back.

After the game, Gracie asked him to join us for a drink in the clubhouse and I was forced to be a confrere in the dressing room. We took off our golf shoes together, he nattering away about God-knows-what, while I said nothing. We even urinated together, side by side. I intended to embarrass him by not washing. But he was impervious. All he did was



rush away, after thoroughly cleaning his hands with a paper towel, and say, "I've got to make a quick change. I won't be long. See you in the bar."

When he arrived at our table, he was wearing a white turtle-neck sweater and a navy-blue sports jacket. He'd just become a member and he was trying to act like a veteran. It was so irritating. If you want to be blasé you don't bother to dress for the bar. I bristled (yes, I did) when he told us he'd sign for the drinks because we were his personal guests. I noticed that Gracie smiled at him over her glass. So help me, if he'd pulled out a briar pipe I would have got violent. My second and last step-father was similar, and he was in the house reading newspapers for six months until Mathilde finally got fed up with him and gave him the usual cheque, twenty-five thousand dollars. It was well worth it, as far as I was concerned. God, what a mess he was! Tweed jackets with leather patches on the elbows; shirt collars that stuck up; tie off-center; scuffy shoes with black stitch arabesques on the toes. He filled the place with the smell of pipe tobacco, and at every turning there were ashtrays filled with several well-burned, long wooden matches. I've never met a bigger clod. He got one beautiful scream when he *tintinnabulated* for the maid.

Cardew had a relaxed, confident manner. When the drinks came, he pushed his chair back and crossed his legs. Of course there's nothing inherently wrong with this, but I wanted to throw something at him anyway.

"I write a column," he said, in answer to Gracie. She was going to ask him before, but she thought it might be nosey. But now that we were all sitting down having a drink she thought it was all right. "A kids' column. You know, printing birthday lists, riddles, pen pals, that sort of thing. I'm Uncle Billy."

The rest of the while we were there I never uttered a sound. I knew if I opened my mouth I'd be sarcastic or *cheeky*, and without a very good reason. I'd look like a real heavy making smart remarks to someone who respects people's wishes, subscribes to theories, and suspends judgment.

Suddenly it began to shower, and we left quickly because I said the top was down on the convertible. I'd had enough. I didn't want to hear him say that it did the flowers good anyway.

"You were very rude, Fuzzy." *Not cheeky?* "You never said a thing."

You can't win. I asked her if she'd have dinner with Mathilde and me. "I'd like to go home," she said. All the way from Capilano Golf Course to her place, way out in the Dunbar area, *she* never said a thing, and I didn't break the silence. I was feeling tired, and I thought sulkily that if she wanted it that way then it was her nickel.

When I let Gracie off that was the last time I ever set eyes on her. And one of the clear parts of my dislike for Cardew is that, I believe, he was the catalyst of the break-up. It definitely wasn't me entirely. I know, I've had trouble with girls before, and very few came back for seconds. When I phoned them they were washing their hair, just stepping out the door,



had a splitting headache, had a hard day at work, or their feet were tired from shopping. There was no outside influence—they simply didn't go for me. I once took a prostitute, who was being impractical in a weak moment, to see *Lawrence of Arabia*, and, afterwards, even she wouldn't have anything to do with me. She said she could make five hundred dollars a time from a guy who liked to bath her with a scrub brush, and another guy who jumped out of a coffin in a room with just a candle burning. Besides these two customers, she said Vancouver was a dull, cheap town. She meant me, but that was before I got my legacy. However, she did permit me to drive her to the airport and see her off to Los Angeles.

I'm not exactly sure why I took her because I got a rash, listening to her talk so blithely about the subtle tasks of her trade. I'm very sensitive and I got these rashes quite a lot. I used to break out all the time when Aunt Louise came for one of her frequent visits. She was one of the most superstitious persons I've ever met. You left a place by the same door you entered; photographing birds in the house brought bad luck (she was emphatic about Mathilde getting a budgie so the temptation could be resisted); if you put something on inside out you were supposed to wear it the same way all day, etc. Once I told her I hadn't done this, and in the last twenty-four hours my cuticles had been acting up. She called me a bad little boy and I'd got a lot of cheek from my father, who was up in heaven watching. Oh yes, he was. Aunt Louise said there were spirits everywhere. In the oven? Oh yes. In your tea cup? Of course. In my bedroom? Certainly. In the closet? Everywhere. They were always watching. You had to be careful. Aunt Louise was very careful. She was very thorough on omens and superstitions, and in case there were any she didn't know, or unwittingly violated, either by her fault or someone else's (such as a person passing her on the steps), she wore a small, protective bouquet of cyclamens pinned to her hip.

Aunt Louise made me very nervous, and as a result I got an angry red rash around my legs, ankles, and wrists. Doctor Pusey was in to see me yesterday and examined my rash. He said it was just nerves and I should be calmer. But how can you be calm when you're going to die in three or four months and you want to live? And there is no escape in sleep. I'm so nervous I'm not even too sure if the dreams I get haven't happened or are going to *be* (if that makes sense) honest-to-goodness happenings. Take the dream about the *Mother Goose* matinee. There was myself, Aunt Louise, Mathilde, and two shadowy other persons. We couldn't get five seats together so Aunt Louise and I sat a couple of rows behind the rest. In the middle of the first act, Aunt Louise bent over as if she were going to vomit. And then a sharp, piercing blast of a whistle. In the terrifying silence a metal object placed roughly in my hand. Two ushers, a man in a tuxedo suddenly by my seat, flashlights spotlighting me and everyone staring. Aunt Louise laughing and apologizing for me. I wake up then. In another dream Mathilde chases me around the house with a boiling

kettle of water, screaming, "Cheeky little brute!" In yet another there is the sound of footsteps coming up the stairs. They pause for a moment at the top, and then begin coming toward my room. The surreptitious treads are accompanied by the sound of knitting needles. Who is it? *My God, I don't know anybody who knits!* Click . . . Click . . . Faster. Click-click-click-click-click-click-click. *Help!* The door crashes open. I wake with my hair drenched in sweat. The alarm clock is ticking innocuously.

If I don't have any wild dreams then I don't get any sleep either. There's always someone around to *do* for me because I'm so weak. It takes all my strength to walk to the bathroom. But an hour ago I found out that I would now have three (count 'em, three) *doing* for me. Sally the maid had just cranked down my bed and I was lying flat on my back, about to doze off, when in flounced Mathilde with a swirl of pastel silk ribbon. Her face was flushed and I could easily see that she'd put away a group of martinis.

"Fuzzy," she whooped. "I've brought you a visitor. Nasty old me picked him up at the golf course not so long ago. You'll be fascinated by him. He's an absolute dear. A real find. He's so handsome. Oh!" She was breathless with excitement, and a comma of bleached gray hair hung stupidly over her eye. "You'll just adore him."

Cardew came in after her and stood in the doorway, looking a little sheepish. "We've met, Mathilde," he said.

"Good, *good*," she said, clapping her hands. "Fuzzy, I've asked him to take the downstairs bedroom for a while. How would you like that? You'll have more company. We're going to get married."

This sudden astonishing announcement made me gather enough strength to pull myself up on my elbows. "What?"

"We're going to get married. Michael and I. I might be a few years older, but we have a lot in common. Don't we, Michael?" He nodded. "We both have a twenty-six handicap," she elaborated.

I stared at them both for a long time and then sank back down on the bed. Such frivolous creatures. "You're a vindictive old woman, Mathilde," I said.

For a moment her eyes became slits. Then she turned to Cardew and said with forced gaiety. "He's always kidding like this."

"Oh, that's all right," he said. He smiled and turned red.

"I want you to be nice to Michael," said Mathilde. "Don't you be cheeky."

I was resigned. "I wouldn't think of it," I said. "Maybe I can give him some ideas for his column."

"I'd appreciate that," he said brightening.

They both beamed down at me. Cardew was suddenly his relaxed, confident self. And I suppose you can't be any other way in front of someone who has green blobs on his pyjamas as big as Parker House rolls.

# DEATH OF A POET

---

RED LANE

It happened that God one day  
while walking along the beach  
came upon a sponge stranded in a tidal pool.

What are you doing? God asked.

Absorbing life said the sponge.

Tell me about life God said.

Squeeze me first said the sponge.

God reached down and squeezed the sponge.

Sun moon earth sky land sea said the sponge.

God squeezed the sponge again.

God man woman air ground water said the sponge.

God squeezed a little harder.

Creator father mother oxygen dirt rain said the sponge.

God squeezed harder.

All seed womb breath dust tears said the sponge.

God squeezed with all His might.

Squish said the sponge.

Is that all? God asked.

That's all said the sponge.

That's what you think God said.

Oh,  
Well drop around later.  
I'll absorb some more when the tide comes in said the sponge.

I can't make it God said.

How come? asked the sponge.

I've got a date with a sieve God said.

A sieve? said the sponge.

Have to keep up with the times God said.

Lucky bastard.  
I wish I was a sieve said the sponge.

You are a sponge God said.

Yeah yeah.  
Those sieves got it made.  
Life flows through them all the time said the sponge.

Life flows through you too God said.

Yeah.  
But only when something comes along and squeezes me said  
the sponge.

Mmmm.  
I see what you mean God said.

Yeah.  
And I tell you it's pure hell sometimes writing said the sponge.

Well that's the way it goes God said.

Yeah yeah.  
I know said the sponge.

Yes.



Well see you around God said.

Yeah.

See you.

Lucky bastard said the sponge.

Just a minute now.

What's with this "bastard" bit? God asked.

Oh.

Well it's just an expression said the sponge.

Well I don't like it God said.

Yeah.

Well I don't like being a sponge said the sponge.

Okay sponge.

You asked for it God said.

And God changed the sponge into a grain of sand  
and turned and walked away from the beach.

# AT A HUMANITIES CONFERENCE

---

WILLIAM STAFFORD

To the man at the door I thought my friend  
who looked over my shoulder and handed me back my hand,  
I said: "Wisdom we learn is only about the world,  
and the world should have been different."

He didn't care.

"Someday," I said, "mountains in Idaho will hear through  
granite

'This is just God calling—you are to move'; instant  
requirements like this that mountains feel occur to us  
at odd moments like this, and we feel everything."

He looked away.

"And now that we read so well," I pursued, "the book falls  
through

the desk; the floor deepens; reduplicated ways run back and  
forth

and require that we read all the quiet night in order to rest.  
And not only books we read—but everything."

He listened, bored.

"My part," I said, "like little canaries taught by the sun, is to  
move

on an errand so various it can be entrusted to anyone,  
twisting at particular buds, abandoning a difficult pose  
faster than gravity pulls or gunners pretend—

so—so long, Friend."

But I still think about him. Though some of us try  
to be the kind of detective who explores a crime forward  
and lets the judgment learn from the punishment,  
there are these unreadable events all writhed with emergency  
that get us involved.

And there might even be times not to hand back a hand,  
but of course this wasn't one.

# THE CLOWN WITH A RUBBER HEAD

---

DAVID WEVILL

The clown with a rubber head  
Eats grass as Africa melts lions. Everything vanishes  
Down his gorge, swollen to take  
The tightest-packed removal van or a London bus.

He is capable of anything.  
But she, the pretty marionette, in her toy skirts  
A vision of hidden matchsticks, sent him packing.  
What could he do but cry and cry and cry?

O he could do worse—  
With a sudden rubber swelling of his capricious head  
He swallowed her down. Nobody thought  
He'd have the nerve; but they failed

To appreciate the nature of  
A rubber head. Now, with a delicate pencilled sneer  
Her manager, with marionettes on all his fingers, jams  
A hand in the clown's gaping burst-tyre mouth—

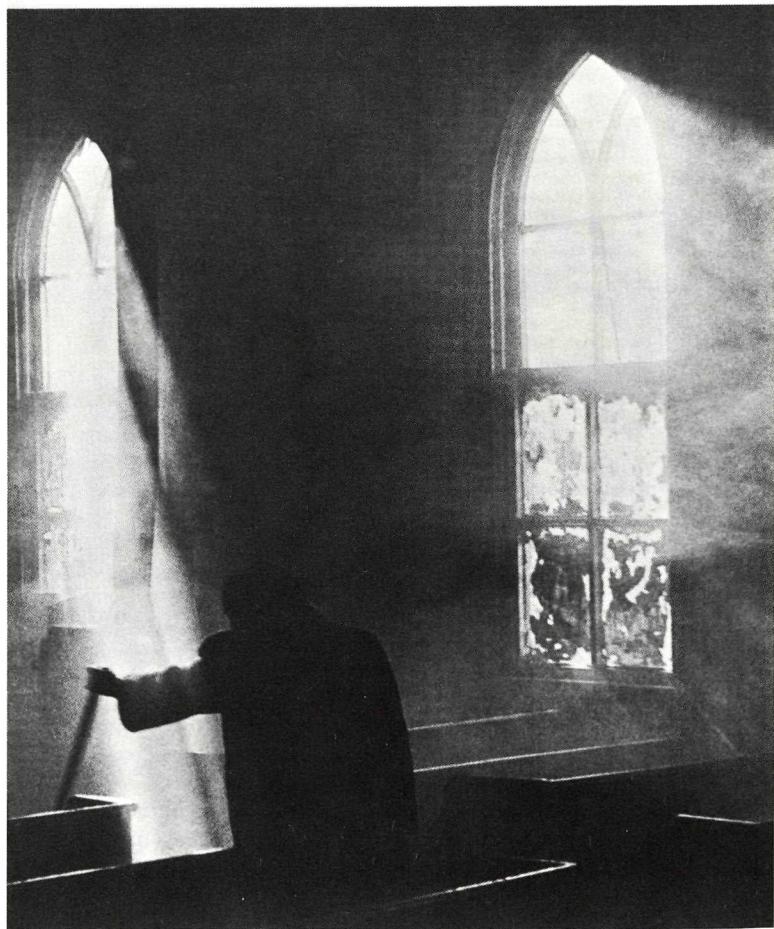
He strikes match after match  
In that rubbery hole: hoping  
By accident, by conflagration, by setting her still undigest-  
ed bones alight, to save the show, his soul, the world,

The rubber industry.

# PRISM *international*

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1966-1973

# THE YELLOW UMBRELLA

---

GERALDO SOBRAL

WHEN THE OLD MAN CAME HOME in the late afternoon with a yellow umbrella in his hand, his daughter, who was standing in the window tending the pots of flowering geraniums, gave him a surprised look. So he explained that as he got out of the train at the Central Station his umbrella had rolled to the ground. As he stooped to pick it up, there, in front of his very eyes the black cover, punished by many years of rain, changed into a vivid yellow. He stressed bitterly that as Fate was pursuing him, he hung it on his arm and went for his stroll around the Institute. His son-in-law, out of work and drinking a lot at that stage, muttered that the old man was a liar, and set off for the corner store.

Early the next day the neighbours started dropping in to examine the umbrella with their own eyes. Nobody believed the story, which had soon gone around the village. Only dona Zéfinha gave it any special meaning:

— Yellow is the colour of gold, dearie—she said in her north-eastern drawl. It's a sign of money, she added enviously.

But the mulatto woman from No. 4, who told cards, read palms, lived with the Portuguese who ran the store, and was afraid of the strange world of the god Exu, had this advice—perhaps it was a spell, and no half-breed would break it. The old man's daughter listened to her, thought very deeply, and finally agreed.

In a corner, sucking at his cigarette, the old man spied on the people coming into his house and listened in silence to the comments they made. If they asked him anything he would reply curtly, but his daughter always added details. It amazed him how readily she could invent them. And what to him seemed simple and clear—the fact that when the umbrella fell down it was black and that when he picked it up it was yellow—became complicated for everyone else. He hadn't changed the cover, and in any case, why a yellow umbrella if he wasn't a street pedlar or a circus act?

His resistance was useless. His daughter talked so much, implored him so much that he became annoyed, and finally agreed to go down to



the yard where Maezinha, the black sorceress, practised her rites. He argued a lot before going, and then, muttering and spitting, asked for the umbrella (they hadn't even thought of taking it), three wax candles, seven guinea fowl feathers (plucked at full moon and in a house where the woman wasn't menstruating, otherwise they were of no use), and a 500 mils réis bill.

When the woman at No. 4 heard about the consultation she was very offended, for she wanted so much to meet Maezinha. The son-in-law was furious when he heard talk of money. He called his wife ignorant and his father-in-law a perfect idiot. She had an answer for him, and they would have come to blows if the old man had not arrived in time. The husband stood scowling in a corner, and she changed the subject so that her father would not suspect anything. Slyly she slipped him some money.

The umbrella, at first placed on view in the little front room where the old man slept and cooked his meals, was moved into the bedroom. The line of people coming to see it gradually dwindled. If a latecomer did happen to arrive, it would be brought out, but the daughter was no longer as attentive to detail. The old man, however, would secretly take it from behind the cupboard, and when the others weren't there he would admire it for hours on end. Sometimes he was caught by his son-in-law:

— I think there are a lot of madmen here in Rio—he would say.

The old man didn't get annoyed at this. But he thought about it, for it was as if he had been caught unawares while doing something private. So he took to admiring it only in the early morning, while the young couple slowly broke from their sleep and silence spread between the walls.

The constant fights between the daughter and the son-in-law redoubled. She complained because he was living in the bars and drinking rum instead of looking for work; he threatened to leave because he couldn't stand the sort of life he was leading in the house. He would refer ironically to the umbrella, and at bottom had no respect for the old man:

— Silly old idiot, where is the money from your yellow umbrella? Where's the money, crackpot?— he would ask hysterically, with his shirt hanging out of his pants.

Their three-year-old son, with sunken eyes and a misshapen head, would peep at his mother and wet himself with fear when his father shouted. The old man didn't get involved in the fights, and would take him out into the street, dragging him by the hand. The kid could hardly stand up on his little legs, and had to be carried. The old man would show him the tram, the cars, the trees, but the grandson wasn't interested. His little hands, thin and white, would smooth down his grandfather's hair, and the heavy, misshapen head would sag on his shoulder. They would go for long walks and return only when things had quietened down.

The whole community soon started to take advantage of the old man, even after a reporter from *Combat* had been there. Still sore, the mulatto woman told the young fellow that the old man had painted the umbrella. Even dona Zéfinha had gone back on her own prediction. The old man took it all but didn't change. What did annoy him, though, was that the boys, as soon as they saw him in the street, would run at his heels shouting:

— Yellow umbrella! Yellow umbrella!

For a long time he stifled a desire to jump on the little urchins; but one day he exploded and chased insanely after the kids romping in the fields. So with time the situation worsened. As soon as he stepped out of the house the gang would get together at any street corner or in the most unexpected places.

His daughter tried to give him advice, but the old man was stubborn. Soon she began to buy his cigarettes for him, and subtly did everything she could to stop his going out. She would ask him to help in the house, watch the beans on the stove, mend the wicker chairs, look after the boy. But the old man noticed nothing but his grandson, who ran his thin white hands through his hair. Seeing this, she arranged some sewing, and pedalled furiously at the old machine from morning to night. But this didn't last very long. One day the husband came home drunk, tore up a dress she had finished, and she had to pay the damage.

After he had taken to sleeping with the umbrella, and the yellow began to fade, the old man became very sullen. He no longer put the boy around his neck nor did he wash; his beard grew white and ragged over his wrinkled face; and his black nails curled like great claws. However much his daughter insisted, he took no care of himself. His collars were crumpled through weeks of wear. He never took things off his broken and dirty body. His trousers were threadbare and his jacket torn at the elbows. And he began to hate the son-in-law, who as a first gesture would throw him out of bed on arriving home drunk.

— Old crackpot! Old idiot!

One morning, after he had had a long fight with the daughter over changing his shirt and had been shut in for weeks, the old man decided to go out, with the umbrella this time. The daughter had a premonition of some tragedy and begged him on her knees, grabbed his legs, with tears streaming down her hollow cheeks. She implored him to stay with the grandson, and went to fetch him from the cradle. But not even the child's tiny, sad face moved him. Then she told him about the terrible dream, the agonizing nightmare that had shaken her from her bed the night before. But it was useless. The old man was stubborn. Pushing the daughter aside—he was very strong for his age—and thrusting her away from the door, he went out grasping his yellow umbrella, without even looking round.

In the street he spied the son-in-law propping up a post, his head sagging, his arms hanging limply at his side, his stomach bare, and

blurting out incomprehensible phrases. He felt compelled to go and join him, but then he seemed quickly surrounded by the street urchins.

— Yellow umbrella! Yellow umbrella!

He went on and suddenly, brandishing the umbrella in short and incisive thrusts, he ran after one of the boys. But in the middle of the street he hesitated, gasping for breath, while the excited urchins surrounded him, running back and forth almost within his reach. From time to time he seemed to start to throw away the umbrella, but he didn't complete the action because, frankly, he didn't know which way to turn. He could go down the square and sit on one of the benches, or he could rush headlong up one of the streets facing him.

Waking out of the drowsiness caused by the rum, the son-in-law could make out the dim figure of the old man. He muttered a few words and, tripping on the cobble stones, went towards him. He raised his arms, his mouth chewing on slurred words he couldn't get out despite his efforts. One of the urchins ran nimbly between them, and once out of reach of the yellow umbrella uttered a piercing shriek:

— Yellow umbrella!

The old man stood still, his eyes on the son-in-law. The urchins closed in, this time around the two men. It was a timid circle, capable of breaking up at the slightest movement of the old man. Meanwhile the son-in-law was moving, shaky and loose-limbed, lurching forward until, with the whiff of rum filling the old man's trembling nostrils, he stopped, steadied his body, held his right arm out listlessly in front of him, and through half-closed eyes looked right around with a slow movement of the head.

— Yellow umbrella! — he managed to force out, a grimace of a smile on his bony face.

The hand closed on the silver handle of the umbrella, and in a flash lunged at the son-in-law swifter than a sword, with a deadly thrust at the exposed stomach. The iron tip pierced the skin, tore deep, and almost squealed with anguish. He cried out in pain, doubled up, and fell to the ground. The boys fled, terrified. The old man returned desperately to the attack, and let fly more thrusts. Curled up with both his hands clasped to his stomach, the son-in-law rolled on the ground now tinged with red, trembled, and foamed thick and bloody at the mouth. Despite the fury of the old man he managed to get up. The umbrella beat at him, and he tottered off clutching at the now silent walls. He reached the house with great difficulty, propped himself up against the door, looked at his bloodstained hands, and bellowed inside with all his strength:

— Woman, your yellow umbrella has killed me!

He slipped downwards and fell heavily, his eyes glassing over as death approached.

The heavy, misshapen head held over a book of comic strips gave a shudder; and the little boy wet himself through and through.

*Translated from the Portuguese by Barry Munn*

# THE GALLOWSBROTHERS' SONG TO SOPHIE THE HANGMAN'S GIRL

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CHRISTIAN MORGENSTERN

Sophie, you are beautiful,  
so come and kiss my broken skull;  
my mouth, I admit  
is a gaping pit,  
But Sophie, you'll get used to it!

Sophie, you are beautiful,  
so come and kiss my reeking skull;  
I know my head  
is cold and dead,  
but Sophie you have been well fed!

Sophie, you are beautiful,  
so come and kiss my crumbling skull;  
true, these flies  
eat my eyes,  
but Sophie, you are wonderful!

*Translated from the German by David Summers*



## GOTTFRIED BENN

*Translated from the German by Harold Enrico*

## EDITH SODERGRAN

*Translated from the Swedish by Ronald Bates*



# TALES OF THE FANTASTIC

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JORGE LUIS BORGES

A FEW YEARS AGO I compiled a brief encyclopaedia of monsters. Now, monsters are a blending or linking together of different species. For example, the Minotaur is a man with a bull's head, or, as Dante saw it, a bull with a man's head; a centaur is man and horse; the mermaid is a maiden with a fish's tail, and the permutations of the species are almost endless. I thought that I might be able to unearth a very large number of monsters. Then, after a close study of Pliny, of the last pages of Flaubert's *Tentation de Sainte-Antoine*, of Sir Thomas Browne and so on, I discovered that the number of monsters was quite a small one, and more or less the same thing happened to me in the case of tales of the fantastic.

One might think that realism, which treats of everyday humdrum reality, would cover but a small section of literature if you compare it to tales of the fantastic, and yet I spent my whole life-time reading tales of the fantastic and I found that they can be reduced to a few types. You may call them archetypes to dignify them, and it is my purpose to review some of them.

Now, first we have the idea of the interweaving of dreams and reality, and there my first example comes from Coleridge. This is merely a jotting of Coleridge's. I found it in Potter's book on him. It covers but a few lines and runs thus: "If a man dreamt that he was carried up into Heaven, and in Heaven they gave him a flower as a proof that he had been there, and if on waking up he should find that flower in his hand, what then?" Is he sure? I suppose it is sufficient, and we shall see later on, how from this very brief jotting of Coleridge's came a very fine novel, one of the finest nightmares of H. G. Wells.

But let us go back to the subject of the dream and of reality. There comes into my mind a different tale, a tale that came long before Coleridge. It is to be found in one of the delectable volumes of that very extended dream called *The Arabian Nights*, or as Captain Burton has it,

*The Book of the Thousand and One Nights*. The story is quite a short one. It runs more or less thus: A man in Cairo dreams. In his dream he hears a voice, and the voice tells him that if he goes to Persia he will find there a treasure. When the man awakens, he remembers his dream; he is obedient to his dream and he sets out on long travels through a perilous geography of wastes, of seas, of deserts, of heathens, and, after a journey of many years, he duly arrives in Persia. The dream has mentioned the city of Ispahan. Well, he arrives there at Ispahan, he is very weary and he goes to sleep in the courtyard of a mosque. Robbers break in, the soldiers arrest everybody and he is taken with the others before the *cadi*, before the judge. Then he has to explain his presence there and he says, "I'm an Egyptian, I had a dream in Cairo that if I came to Ispahan a treasure might be given to me." And when he had said those words, the *cadi* laughs and says, "O foolish Egyptian, I have had a dream like that many times over and I have never believed in it. I've had a dream of a garden in Cairo and in that garden, a sundial, and behind the sundial, a fig tree, and under the fig tree, a buried treasure, and yet I have never thought of going to Egypt." Then he orders the unfortunate — or perhaps the fortunate — Egyptian to be flogged. The Egyptian receives a flogging and well-contented he goes back to Egypt, and there the *cadi* had described, of course, his own garden — the garden of his house — and there is the sundial, there is the fig tree and there is the treasure awaiting him.

Now, had the Divine Voice been more economical he might have said there is a treasure lying quite near you. But of course, the man *had* to take the trouble, he *had* to take the journey. So he was rewarded and the *cadi*, of course, lost the treasure. Now, here in this story, even as in Coleridge's vision, we have those two elements blended. We have the idea of a dream and of reality.

And now, we will try another common source of fantastic tales. We will take the idea of an omen, and the first tale that comes to my mind, the first story, is that ancient Greek fable of the tyrant, the fortunate tyrant, who thought that things were going too well with him: Polycrates was his name. Well, he was a successful tyrant; he had alliances with the neighbouring kings; he was fortunate in all his ventures. And then he thought: I am too happy, this cannot go on, I must bribe the gods, or I must bribe fate somehow. And so he bethought himself of his many possessions and said to himself: "Of all my possessions, the one I prize most is this gold ring, so I will sacrifice it, I will give it to the gods." Then he dropped the ring into the sea and he felt quite happy. He thought he had bribed destiny. But a fortnight afterwards, a large fish was served at the royal table. The fish was carved, and then the king fainted because he saw a glimpse of gold. The ring was there, and he knew that the gods, or fate, had refused his gift, and when it was known that the ring had come back to him, the neighbouring kings felt they could no longer be his allies and his people rebelled against him and he was killed.

Well, here you have another common subject. We have the idea of an omen, we have the idea of a kind of secret language, the idea of small things—the ring coming back for example—being a secret mirror of ominous events yet to happen, the idea of events casting a shadow before they come. This also is common for tales of the fantastic. There is another idea akin to this: the idea of causes and effects not being somehow different. For example, if a man does something apparently meaningless, and if that thing, that quite unimportant thing, causes other events, this is of course allied to an omen, but is not exactly, at least from the point of view of logic, like it.

And now there comes to me another tale, and this time the tale comes from the Welsh mountains and it is to be found in that very strange collection of tales called the *Mabinogion*, turned into English during the 19th century by Lady Charlotte Guest. The tale is tucked away in another tale, and no special significance is given to it. It runs thus: We have a battle, we have two streams of men. These men are wounding and killing each other at the foot a mountain, and on the top of the mountain there are two kings. The kings are the leaders of the armies, but they seem to be quite unaware of that whirlpool of men fighting each other. They are intent on a game of chess. The game begins at dawn and goes on till the evening. Then, at the last moment—the battle has been raging all the time—the kings are pondering over the chessboard and at the moment the sun is setting one of the kings moves one of the chessmen and says, “Checkmate.” The other acknowledges that he has been defeated, and just then a horseman comes riding up the hill and says that that king has been defeated. And so we see that the armies were the thoughts of the kings, that the battle was the game of chess, but that the fate of the men, of the living men who were fighting, depended on the game of chess.

I spoke of dreams, and I regret that some are forgotten, but one of the finest stories about dreams that I can remember comes from a Chinese novel called *Monkey* that was turned into English by Arthur Walley, and it runs thus: We begin with a Chinese Emperor, and this Chinese Emperor is sleepless. So, finding that sleep is beyond him, he gets up and walks in the garden, in the dark garden. He feels that something is clinging to him, something huge and at the same time something that’s worried, pathetic. And this thing that he cannot see clings to him, and a voice comes to him, and the voice says, “I am a dragon. I had a dream that tomorrow your Chief Minister is going to kill me and I invoke your help.” Then the Emperor gives him his word that he will be protected, and the moment he says those words he wakes up and he is not in his garden, he’s in bed. And he remembers what has happened and remembers that he has pledged his word and he thinks, “Well, if an Emperor pledges his word even in a dream, he must keep it—even if the word be pledged to a dragon and not a human being.” Then he calls his



Chief Minister and he tells him — (here we have chess: there seems to be a linking together of chess and magic, which is as it should be) — he says to his Minister: “I would like to play chess with you.” And the Minister says that of course he has been hungering and thirsting for chess, and as they sit before all the Court, they play. The Emperor knows that the Minister is about to kill the dragon and so he has to keep him from doing it. They play together. The long day passes by and at the end, in the evening, the Minister dozes off, the Emperor wins the game. The Minister has dutifully lost all his chessmen. We may think that he was a better player than the Emperor but, of course, no Emperor should be allowed to lose. Suddenly a great crash, a great noise is heard in the hall, and a few minutes afterwards two captains come, and they carry a huge head. And that huge head is bloodstained. It is the head of a dragon. One captain says that this head has just fallen from high Heaven. And then the Minister, awakened when he hears the crashing of the head on the floor, rubs his eyes and says: “How strange, I had a dream that I was killing a dragon with a face exactly like that.” And so we see how very finely this was done: we have a dream within a dream. The dragon had a dream of the Minister, and then the Minister killed the dragon in a dream. But of course, he killed it in reality, because in this story we have the vision and the dream all together.

There are, of course, many stories of ghosts, or stories of gods — stories that speak to us of the possibility of having near at hand dreams that are quite different from us. And I recall at this moment a story that comes to us from the North. It comes from Norway. It is a story of Olaf Tryggvason who brought, I think, the worship of the White Christ to the lands of the Norse. This Olaf Tryggvason was assailed and was killed in a sea battle. I wonder if you remember a ballad that Longfellow wrote about that battle? He took the story from the *Heim Skringla*. The king is on the deck of a ship. He is fighting his enemy, and behind him there stands Einar Tamberskelver, the finest bowman, the finest archer in Norway, and they are both fighting and the king hears something breaking behind him. It is the string of Einar’s bow that has been broken by an arrow. Without looking back he asks: “Einar, has something been broken?” and the archer replies: “Yes, Norway, King, under my hand,” or, as Longfellow has it:

Einar then, the arrow taking  
From the loosened string,  
Answered, “that was Norway breaking  
From thy hand, O King!”

But now we may go back to the story. The king is in his court. He is surrounded by his noblemen. An old man comes in, and this old man is a weary old man, he looks tired, he looks as if he has been travelling a long

way and he is wrapped in a shabby blue coat. He has a grey beard, his hat is over his eyes. He sits down, and after supper the harp goes round, and when it comes to the old man he takes the harp and begins singing in a very tired voice. He sings to the music of a very old tune and his words sound somehow different, as if they came from the past, and he tells the story of the birth of Odin (the Woden of the Saxons, the god who gave his name to the day Wednesday) and how Odin was born. He tells how the Three Fates came and of how one of them had not been invited. The first two Fates shower splendid gifts on the god, but the last Fate is an ugly Fate and she merely takes a candlestick and lights it and says: "The life of Odin shall last no more than the life of this candle." And then the Three Fates vanish, and the father of Odin puts out the light in order that Odin should go on living. When the old man had sung this song, people stared at him in amazement. They laughed at him as if he were a child, and they said that of course those things might have been believed in the past but nowadays it was a mere children's tale. For now the White Christ is worshipped all over the lands of the Norse and nobody thinks of the old gods. The old man appears not to understand what they say. He gets up, he feels very tired and he takes a candlestick from his cloak, even as the first Norn, the first Fate, Neutra, had done centuries and centuries ago, and he says: "Yes, but my story's closed and here is the candle." Then he lays it on the table, and once it is on the table, he proceeds to light it, and the king and his noblemen stare at it. They feel a kind of fascination for the light of the candle, and when the candle has gone out they look around them and Odin has disappeared. The king tells his people to go outside and they find the god dead in the snow by the side of his good horse. Here we have found a motif that comes, and will come, in tales of the fantastic. But now I should like to dwell upon the idea of a man changing his form.

You remember, of course, Jekyll and Hyde. You remember Jekyll drinking the potion and becoming Hyde, but I wonder if you remember that this scene, the central scene in Jekyll and Hyde, was given by a dream to Stevenson. Stevenson wrote a book called *A Chapter of Dreams*. He thought of his dreams as Brownies, as brown Scottish elves, and he says (he speaks of the writer, but he means himself, of course) that he had to train his Brownies to help him and that these Brownies brought him stories. Once they brought him that central scene from Jekyll and Hyde, that scene wherein Jekyll drinks a potion and becomes Hyde. They also gave him another story, or rather a central scene in a story, and he saw a courtyard—there was something Spanish-looking about it—and there a young man was biting the hand of a girl. Then he awoke and he felt there might be a tale in that scene, and he wrote a story called *Olalla*, and he says of it: "The story is not, I am afraid, a very good one: the only effective scene is where the brother bites the hand of his sister, and, as to the rest of it, I must apologise, because that was not given by



the dream, that I had to invent by myself and, of course, I cannot cope with my bogies, they are far beyond inspiration."

And now we come to a different pattern of tales of the fantastic, and this pattern is quite common in our time; in fact, it is a commonplace: the idea of playing with time. Of course this idea is not new. We have, for example, that old medieval story of a monk. A monk went out of his monastery. He walked into the garden and heard a nightingale singing, and he was entranced by the music of the nightingale. He listened to it and lo, when the nightingale had ended its song, he walked back and found that 300 years had elapsed. He had been carried away by the music. We get more or less the same plot in the story of "The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus." (I am quite a good plagiarist as you may happen to know. There is a story of mine called "The Secret Miracle," and there I have used the same idea. I do not think that there are many ideas available, so, of course, "Je prends mon bien où je le trouve.")

Now, if we may come back to that fine jotting of Coleridge's: the idea of a man who had been carried into Heaven and had a flower given him. We might suppose that Wells read that jotting, because he wrote a story wherein an incident rather like the incident of Coleridge's is found. I am thinking of that very fine nightmare of Wells' called *The Time Machine*. Wells invented that story in the last decade of the nineteenth century and at that time people were really aware of magic. They wanted to believe in the supernatural but they could no longer believe in magic rings, in magic lamps, in talismans and so on, so Wells invented, all by himself, what is now called science fiction. He thought people would take in a more kindly way to machines, and so he wrote *The Time Machine*. In *The Time Machine* we have at the beginning, a chapter on the fourth dimension, the nature of time and so on. (This was divulged by Dunne in his book on experiments with time later on.) Then we come to the story, the story of a man, a man who has made a machine, a machine made to travel through time (of course we are travelling through time all our life long, but in this case, the machine could take off very rapidly through time) and the Time Traveller rides towards the future, towards the very remote future, and when he arrives at the future, mankind has split asunder. Mankind has split into two different species. We have the Morlocks. The Morlocks are the proletariat, or the defenders of the proletariat, and they live in underground caverns where they work rusty and quite useless machines. They go on working them for they cannot break away from a habit that is centuries and centuries old. And the Morlocks are blind because they have lived hundreds of years in the dark. On the surface of the planet are large gardens and in those gardens live the Eloi. The Eloi are the degenerate aristocracy. They live on fruits, they make love. Now and then, at regular intervals, the Morlocks come out of their underground hiding places and they devour the Eloi. Now, the Time Traveller falls in love with a woman who is a girl of the

Eloi, and he is pursued by the Morlocks and escapes in his time machine, but he bears with him a flower and this flower has been given to him by one of the Eloi. He goes back to reality, he goes back to his own nineteenth-century London, and the only thing he has retrieved from his venture in the future is a flower, a flower that has not yet bloomed, a flower that will bloom after thousands and thousands of years (and the flower of course, decays and falls to dust) and we think of Coleridge and of the flower that was brought back, not from the future of time, but from Heaven.

Now, Wells was a friend of Henry James. Henry James read that story and in the year 1916 he, James, said to himself, I will rewrite that story, I will write another story more or less like it, and the officials won't like it, of course. Now, James, of course, had no use for machines. He would not bring himself to believe in machines any more than he would bring himself to believe in dreams or lamps or talismans. So he said, Well, I will take something more modest. I will take the case of a man who lives in the twentieth century, who is my contemporary, who feels that the world is hard to judge and that really he should be living in the eighteenth century. And so he thinks of a young American, because one of the themes of Henry James is the theme of banishment, really of exile—the idea, for example, of Americans in Europe, and so on—and this time he has as his hero a young American. This American lives in London. He lives in a house that belonged to his forefathers, and in that house there is a picture, and this picture somehow fascinates the young American, because it dates from the eighteenth century. The man in it is dressed after the manner of the eighteenth century and it is an unfinished picture. It is a picture of . . . himself. The young American is carried away by the picture. He thinks, maybe this *is* a picture of myself, not of one of my forefathers who may have been like me, and then he thinks of working himself back into the eighteenth century, not through magic, but in a psychological way. First he breaks away from his friends. He sits all day in that eighteenth-century house in Berkeley Square. He sits there turning over the pages of Johnson, of Hume, of Boswell, Pope, Voltaire and so on, and then he says to his friends, I'm going back to the eighteenth century, but nobody believes him, and he hardly believes what he is saying himself, but he goes on reading despondently and finally a night comes when he is in his darkened room. He has stopped reading. The room next to his should be in darkness also. Suddenly, he feels he hears human voices but he is not too surprised. He walks into the drawing-room, next-door to his study, and he finds that he is dressed after the fashion of the eighteenth century. He is surrounded by a crowd of people and they are all eighteenth-century people, and he finds out from the conversation that he is a young man, a relative who has come from the Colonies. He feels very happy, of course, because he says to himself, I have been yearning, I have been hungering and thirsting for

the eighteenth century and now here I find my true home, here I find the time I have always wished to be living in. He meets a girl. Obviously enough, he falls in love with her, and then he meets a painter, a great eighteenth-century painter. The painter looks at him and says, There is something in your face that attracts me. I do not know what it is, but I would like to paint your picture. Now the young man knows all about the picture. He knows the picture will be left unfinished, and he says to him, Well, you can try your hand at painting my picture but I don't think you will be able to finish it, and then the painter says, Of course I can finish any picture I begin. And then the painter begins, sits down at his work and after three or four sessions he throws down his brushes and says, No, I'm afraid you are right, I cannot paint your picture. The young man understands. The painter can not paint his picture because, after all, his face is the face of a man of the twentieth century, and no eighteenth-century painter would be able to reproduce it, and he feels very sad because he had always felt that he was living in banishment in the twentieth century and now finds out that his lot, his destiny, is nowhere because when he lived in the twentieth century he yearned for the eighteenth century and now, in the eighteenth century, a painter has somehow detected that he is an outsider and has no right to be living in the eighteenth century. And so he speaks with the girl who is in love with him—they both love each other—and he tells her, Tonight perhaps, I shall be going back to America. Of course, America is a metaphor, but she understands that what he says is final. They kiss each other, he walks back to a darkened room, he sits down, he is alone and he is back in the twentieth century. Stephen Spender has written of this story and he has made a very subtle remark about it. He has remarked that we have that relation of cause and effect which is very paradoxical in this story, because we have this strange fact: the young man goes back to the eighteenth century because his picture has been painted in the eighteenth century, but his picture has been painted in the eighteenth century because he has gone back to the eighteenth century and so on and so on for ever.

Now here, perhaps, we are stuck when we try to consider what has gone before this. Of course, there are other quite common elements in the tales of the fantastic that I have not spoken about; for example, the idea of mirrors, the idea of a double, or in the Highlands of Scotland, a fetch. We find this for example, in Poe's "William Wilson," in German tales of the *Doppelgänger*, in Scottish tales of the fetch. From that very fine film, *Psycho*, I always remember the story of the young man who murders his mother and then somehow becomes his mother and his mother betrays him, without knowing that she is the man she is betraying. Well . . . but we find that tales of the fantastic can be traced back to quite a small number of patterns. I mean, if we look at tales of the fantastic from all over the world, we should find the same thing



occurring over and over again. The idea, for example, of ghosts, the idea of juggling with time, the idea of omens, the idea of dreams being interwoven with reality, and so on. Now, how can we explain this? Of course, our first temptation would be to say that the human imagination is poor, that the human imagination cannot evolve many plots. But I think that this is quite wrong. I think the real explanation must lie somewhere else. I think the real explanation is that the tales of the fantastic are not literary. I think they are symbols, and so those symbols are symbols of emotion. They are essential symbols. Let us have a look at the tales I have been telling. We have, for example, the idea of cause and effect—the idea that something which to us is trivial may mean something somewhere else. And this is not a false idea; in fact we find the same idea in the very first chapter of the Bible. You remember—who can forget?—you remember, of course, Adam in the Garden. He is happy, he is immortal, he is wrapped in everlasting bliss, and he is forbidden one small trifle. He is forbidden to eat of the fruit of one small tree, and then he eats that fruit and is lost, mankind is lost and we are lost with him. That is to say, we never know the consequences of an act. From the very trifling may come disaster and this, of course, is woven into the idea of small causes and great effects.

Then we have that other major field of dreams and visions and waking life, and this also has a meaning, since, as you know, there is a school of philosophy called idealism and in that school we are taught that man's life is but a dream, that there is an essential kinship between living and dreaming, and this is something felt by all men. I don't suppose that Shakespeare studied much philosophy, but life brought him to this conclusion when he wrote:

We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep.

He must have felt that.

And then we have the idea of a man changing. We have the idea of monstrous transformation. We have that common idea of the werewolf, the lycanthrope. And this, of course, is true, because life is changing us all the time. When I think of my childhood, when I think that once I was a little child and now I am a man and at any moment I shall be, we shall be, dust and ashes, then we are made to think that the idea of a transformation is somehow a symbol of something real. We remember that story "Die Verwandlung," "The Transformation," by Franz Kafka, and I think he explains that he had written that story as a kind of metaphor, as a kind of parable of sickness, because a man wakes up one morning and finds himself sick and then he is changed into another being. He cannot move away from his bed, he is really a monster to himself, and to this

very common human experience Kafka gave a shape in his story. So I think that the tales of the fantastic have a higher dignity than one usually allows them. That is to say, they are not haphazard combinations. They have a meaning, they make us feel that we are living in a strange world. And so, in a sense, tales of the fantastic are more real than realistic stories, because realistic stories are but an echo of what is going on, what we see every day. We do not need them. While, if we read a story by Edgar Alan Poe or by Kafka or by Arthur Machen or by any other author you may choose, then somehow we are being told through the form of a symbol that we live in a very strange and alarming world. And this of course brings us to another question. I have been speaking of tales of the fantastic, and I remember that if we compare the fantasies of Poe or Kafka to those other loftier fantasies called Theology and Philosophy, then the dreams of the writer dwindle to nothingness, for after all, men think of only the Minotaur or of a bogey or of a ghost and that is nothing if you compare it to the high fantasy of thinking of an omniscient, all-powerful spirit called God, and living not in time, but in the everlasting. That is taught to the youngest. Whereas, if we think of our life as a dream, if we think as the solipsists do, that there is but one being in the world, and that one being is every one of us, or rather, I am the only being, and for you, each of you is the only being, and there is no reality beyond this dream, what we call reality is but a part of the dream. I mean, the whole vastness of geography, the whole depths of past or future time, these are but figments of hypotheses of a dream, and while at this moment you are dreaming that I am speaking, I am dreaming that you are hearing me, and this of course is far more wonderful than the weird fantasies of the literary mind.

And so we come to this question, and I am putting it very seriously: if we speak of literary genres, if we speak of realism and of the fantastic, can any man tell us, can we tell ourselves, whether our lives or the universe, for this present moment, belong to realism or to fantasy? I do not know.



## WRITTEN UPON THE DOOR

---

ST.-JOHN PERSE

I have skin the colour of red tobacco or mules,  
I have an elder-pith helmet covered with white linen.  
My pride is that my daughter be most beautiful, giving orders to  
the black women,  
My joy, that she show a pure white arm among her black hens  
and that she be not ashamed of my stubbled cheek, when muddy I  
return to the house.

And first I give to her my whip, my flask, and my hat.  
Smiling, she forgives me my dripping face and brings to her face  
my hands, oily from  
testing the kernels of the cacao, the beans of the coffee.  
And then she brings me a whispering kerchief; and my woolen robe;  
clear water to rinse my teeth of silence:  
and there is water to wash with, and I hear in the cistern the  
moving water.

A man is hard, his daughter, soft. Let her keep herself always  
for his return, on the highest steps of the white house,  
and as she spares his horse the embrace of his knees,  
so he will forget the fever that pulls inward all the skin of his face.

I love my dogs too, the neigh of my finest horse,  
and seeing at the end of the straight way my cat going out in the  
company of the monkey . . .  
all things enough not to envy the sailor his sails  
that I see at the height of my metal roof on the sea as upon the sky.

*Translated from the French by Daniel Bryant*

# SUMMER SOLSTICE

---

GEORGE SEFÉRIS

1

The greatest sun on one side  
and the new moon on the other  
distant in memory like those breasts.  
Between them the chasm of the starry night  
deluge of life.

The horses on the threshing-floors  
gallop and sweat  
upon scattered bodies.  
All are going there  
and that woman whom  
you saw beautiful, in a moment  
is bending, can endure no longer, has knelt.  
The millstones are grinding them all  
and all become stars.

Eve of the longest day.

2

All have visions  
yet no one will admit it;  
They go thinking they're alone.  
The large rose  
had always been there

by your side deeply in sleep  
yours and unknown.  
But only now that your lips've touched it  
on the outermost leaves  
have you felt the dancer's dense weight  
falling into the river of time—  
the dreadful splash.

Don't waste the breath this respite  
has granted you.

3

But in this sleep  
a dream so easily degenerates  
into a nightmare.  
Like the fish that glittered under the wave  
and plunged into the slimey depth  
or a chameleon when he changes color.  
In the city that's become a brothel  
panders and whores  
peddle decayed delights;  
the wave-borne girl  
wears a cow's hide  
for the bullock to mount her;  
the poet  
hoodlums throw filth at him  
as he looks at the statues dripping blood.  
You must get out of this sleep;  
this flogged hide.

*Translated from the Greek by M. Byron Raizis.*

# MINOR REPAIR

---

GUNTER EICH

Minor repair: a jet of carbide flame.  
One man is enough.  
A crack, he says, in the parapet of the bridge.

A sticking-plaster wound.  
So he says, in order to deceive us,  
for sicknesses are circulating in the earth's wiring system.  
Telephone wires and underground cables spread them further,  
syphilis, tuberculosis, cancer, leukaemia,  
illnesses to which metal isn't subject.  
They have been recognized too late.

But what could have been halted?  
Perhaps there is a purpose behind it:  
maybe a change of status is in progress.  
The first things man has to give up  
are his illnesses.  
Later the rest.

*Translated from the German by Michael Bullock*

# THE FEAST OF THE FOUR HUNDRED

---

GEORG BRITTING

ON THE RED MORNING of the feast of Corpus Christi the mutinous convicts slew the general and his officers. Neruda, the leader, ordered brandy distributed and the white-skinned women freed. They died of the fatal embrace of the four-hundred. Their frenzied and delirious ecstasy of freedom turned to despair, when four of His Majesty's ships were sighted at noon. The anger of the galley slaves attacked Neruda like a wild beast. They throttled him, spat green bile into his face, and tied him to the mast. On their knees, hands stretched out in supplication, they howled at the soldiers of the king. Iron cuffs snapped around knuckles that had for half a day proudly boasted pale rings of unfettered freedom. Forty-eight hours later the ships put into the harbour of the capital city, and three days later the mutineers were already subjected to the sentence of the criminal court. On the large town square ten gallows had been erected. Houses displayed festive decorations. Winding garlands and wreaths. People crowded to windows and howled with impatience. The king and a small band of courtiers were seated on a balcony. He nibbled tropical fruits from a crystal bowl placed in front of him. The ladies opened their jingling fans. Preparations had been made to hang fifty of the criminals at the one time, five on each of the gallows. The gallows were specially built: two wooden beams, a little taller than an average man's height, were connected by a strong cross-beam. On low flat-carts, drawn by horses with red plumage blossoming between their ears, the column of the first fifty rattled through the prison gates. When the brilliance of the blue sky fell terribly upon their eyes, they saw green wreaths flowing and black rectangular spaces dancing between the gallows, and they burst into a scream that the jubilant crowd received with happy reverberations. They themselves had to fasten the hangman's knot that dangled from their necks to the huge nails on the



crossbeams. The hangman's helpers snatched the ladders from under their trembling feet. They quivered like eels on the hook. Some of them paddled their empty hands as if shuffling water. Others climbed a steep hill with quick steps. But soon they all hung like deflated rubber tubes. They were cut down and their warm flesh was taken away on shrieking carts. But already the tongue of the next fifty hissed out of the prison gate. Street vendors sold oranges. The yellow balls flew from hand to hand. Dandies let them rise glittering to windows with faces of girls in them. The broken eyes of dying men saw them circle the roofs like so many moons. When for the third time the carts of fifty thundered onto the square, the jubilation of the crowd rose to its impetuous climax. The first cart was drawn by a stumbling, mangy nag with festering eyes. Neruda sat on it backwards and held in his shackled hands the braided tail of the animal. His hot eyes sparked into rows of laughing people. And when someone called him a dirty name, he showered his opponent with a flood of horrible and vulgar expletives, so that he drew back his head as if avoiding dish water. After the next wave of fifty smashed against the gallows and broke into quivering droplets, the festivities came to a halt, because actors and dancers, flutists and kettle-drummers, magicians and sword-swallowers appeared. A brown-skinned girl, clothed in transparent red silk, danced before the king. She was like a red poppy swaying in the wind of flutes—a tongue of flame dancing on the crackling hide of drums. A high-pitched scream pierced the king like a thrust from a slender dagger. She sank into a small heap of ashes still aglow with the red embers of her robe. She was carried away and trumpet fanfares announced the continuation of the executions. Fifty bell clappers made of flesh crashed loudly against the beams of the wooden clocks pealing the last hour. The horses went lame from the heavy work and had to be driven on with whips. The crowd became restless and grumbled because the hangings proceeded so slowly, and many started to leave. Even the king had left after giving the leader of the band of jugglers permission to send the girl to the castle in the evening to dance for him. The hoofs of the horses clattered over the empty square. Tired windows clinked shut. Thin streaks of rain squirted from the sky. The last fifty died completely unnoticed.

*Translated from the German by Peter Paul Fersch.*

# THE FLEECE OF THE RAM

---

HAROLD ENRICO

I  
THE ROOT\*

MEI<sup>3</sup> beautiful — A big sheep.  
Abbreviation for Ya-mei-  
li-chia, America.

I

Suppose the key word to be 'antipode' . . .  
the river grips virgin rock.

The person who contracted to build my boat  
engaged to have it in readiness by the 20th inst.; . . .  
set out at 4 o'clock PM  
under a gentle breeze . . .  
a succession of grasses, trees,  
marshes teeming with birds . . .  
current strong with riffles,  
oars scarcely being used.

A dove flew safely through clashing rocks.  
The kingfisher hovered over white water,  
scolding us, many small birds  
as thick as insects, twittering in sedge.

And this medesene man could fortell things . . .  
that he had told of our coming into their country,  
and they thought us gods dropped among them:  
helmsman, navigator, peacemaker of tribes . . .  
these natives have the Stranges language . . .  
but I found them much pleased at the Danceing of our men,  
the women passionate, fond of caressing . . .  
she was so beautiful, that when she entered the tent,  
the storyteller could not tell his story . . .  
danceing, giving away hir bracelets . . .  
the old squaw, half-blind, crouching in a corner of the  
tent,  
had lived more than a 100 winters,  
& when she spoke great attention paid to what she said.  
The roots of the rock outlive the crown.  
And 'my boy Pomp' had his monument.

\*The spelling is that of the Lewis and Clark journals.

I set of Gold Scales

to weigh the industry of tribes,  
their language, traditions, monuments,  
the extent and limits of their possessions . . .

Is suicide common among them?

I have done the business. My good Servant, give me some water.

He had shot himself in the head with one pistol

& a little below the breast with the other.

The wind grapples open grasses, rocks, trees . . .

The unknown scenes in which you were engaged . . .

the promise of a city

at the confluence of rivers . . .

or a place near Sea and River

resembling the situation of Alexandria

with respect to the Nile . . .

a root they have, efficacious remedy in cases of the bite of the  
Rattlesnake.

To these I have added the horns of an animal  
called by the natives the Mountain Ram . . .

Under his hair he is clothed with a very long fur,

shines golden

in the sun.

## II

### BETWEEN 1827 AND 1927

#### I

The moon pulls great waters.  
How articulate the wind is in the leaves,  
But it does not want to tell me who I am.  
I think I am somewhere between sleep and a stone.  
I ask the sun where I have been.  
My father mowing grass does not know.  
My mother does not want to say.  
I taste weeds to understand what a bird sings.

I am an Indian all day  
Under the plum tree in the backyard.  
An old blanket pinned to grape laths  
Is my tepee. I am Chief Bear Skin,  
Last of the Yakimas to smell free wind.  
The wind cannot tell the distance  
Between 1827 and 1927,  
Nor can I.

#### 2

A photograph, inked too black, in the newspaper,  
Of three Yakimas, a buck and two squaws,  
Wears the same scowl. Pennsylvania Avenue in 1901,  
Stumps down the middle, watch-fobbed Saxons in front of the hotel,  
Was what my mother saw.

You look like an Indian! You look like an Indian!  
My mother's black Italian hair,  
Tossed over her forehead, dries in the sun  
On the back porch.



Ka-e-mox-nith was so beautiful  
That when she stepped into the tent  
The old men stopped talking. When she left,  
Their voices were like the dry scraping of insects  
In the yellow pines.

3

Old and sick, Wah Kukhiah rode up the Yakima Valley  
With his daughter to the forest.  
At the foot of the mountains  
He told her to go home and rode on alone.  
In the half-darkness at the edge of a scree,  
In a dazzle of light, a stranger sat  
On a boulder, looking at him:  
“Do not be afraid. Close your eyes,  
And you will see.”

4

The plum tree in the sunlight  
Sways in the last warm wind,  
Branch dancing with branch.  
With a bow bent from a willow switch,  
I shoot an arrow straight across the garden  
Into a bed of hollyhocks.

I got him! My tribe will not go hungry.  
I know who I am!

### III

MAY, 1927

My forehead bows to the sound of water,  
faint through trees.  
A warbler in the lilac answers  
a warbler in the pine.  
May spills over, fluent with leaves,  
redundant in the mirror of the pond.  
Happy in weeds, I dawdle through trout lilies,  
gold on the hillside,  
nibbled over by cows and butterflies.

Stooping over corollas,  
I own their nuggeted anthers,  
and break stem after stem  
to bleed against my palm.

With the incense of cottonwoods,  
by the hobo dump, wreathed with early smoke,  
the river curls, ice in the town's arms,  
sleepy with salesmen and women,  
haggled out of dreams,  
money under every pillow,  
under every hill,  
wise with the intercourse  
of vaginal mines.

In the schoolroom's chalked silence,  
I perspire, stranger to the fists,  
scrawling virgin paper with accusing consonants.

## IV

### THE CEMETERY

Love your mother's face  
bowed over blossoms,  
her hands arranging them  
for your grandfather's grave.

In the front yard,  
two bushes of lilacs,  
tall as the house,  
one white and one violet,  
bloom every year  
for Memorial Day . . .

Walt Whitman dead for thirty-seven years,  
the Civil War over for sixty-four,  
the olive-backed thrush or the hermit  
singing in the canyons around the town.

Your grandfather, for whom  
Victor Emmanuel meant more than Lincoln,  
wrote from the Shoshone to his dying mother in Italy:  
Don't despair of Death.  
E' una Gran Bella Cosa.

"You'll never make Americans  
of these goddam wops,"  
the foreman said.

In the cemetery,  
a Mediterranean bay of blossoms,  
white and violet in coffee-can urns,  
billows against the stones.

V

THE COAL MINE

“Somewhere deep in every American  
heart lies a rebellion against  
the old parenthood of Europe.”  
D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic  
American Literature*

Don't bullshit me, Mr. Lawrence!  
How shall we recognize our own fathers  
    *in caos converso*,  
their palms bleeding in the fossil damp  
while the Johnny Bull boss roars at the end  
of the tunnel in the Eocene dark,  
and the carbidian flames in the middle of their foreheads  
pitch pantomimes of shadows  
on the ultimate wall?

How shall we tell the flesh from the shade it throws?  
*Tu credi che qui sia il Duca d'Atene?*



## VI

### THE RAM

In sheep-grass weather, clear bells found me.  
I climbed to hear them while I slept.  
Sheep grazed the hill above our house.  
I heard them nibbling in my sleep.  
Jangling bushes tossed on my pillow.  
The walls baaed with the browsing flock,  
Yapped with the fox-tailed dogs. I ran toward  
Morning, blue above my father's gate.

A dry breeze rattled the dusty pines.  
Pack horses, nudging luminous grasses,  
Flicked their tails after flies. My ears followed  
The oaths of Spanish herders.

I raced the hill slope after the easy flock,  
Slipped, quick as a lizard, under barbed-wire,  
Whipped across an acre through a cloud  
Of pollen, gold upon my arms;

Waded through briars, tangling my hips.  
A thistle snapped at my thigh. I cleared  
A meadow, over the mine of a mole,  
Past a lark, warbling to weeds.  
A pigeon tilted equal wings  
Against the light I made. Wide-awake,  
I leaped over the dreaming flock and sank  
My fists into the fleece of the ram.

# THE GREY DOG

---

JACQUES FERRON

PETER BEZEAU, seigneur of Grand-Etang, having been left a widower soon after his marriage, had replaced his wife with the bottle of rum that he drank every evening. From one year to the next, he emptied it quicker and went to bed earlier; thus he declined. But in the morning, always up at the same time, he became hard and fierce again. He went accompanied by four big black dogs, over which he spoke to his men; as the beasts were reputed to be ferocious, his conversation intimidated. Landworkers and fishermen, whom he had in his service, all feared him; some respected him; none thought of liking him.

With evening Peter Bezeau aged abruptly; his face became covered with wrinkles, his eyes grew haggard and waxy; the approach of night distressed him. It was then that he drank his bottle. When he had finished, he would shout to his daughter to call the dogs, then throwing himself drunk on his bed, would sink into a deep sleep. Nelly would let the dogs in and go to bed herself.

One morning the seigneur notices among his dogs a grey dog that he doesn't know, whose nervous bearing and red eyes amaze him; when the door is opened for him, the intruder slips outside, supple as a shadow. A month later he is in the place again; this time the seigneur turns him out with a kick to dissuade him from returning. But the beast is stubborn, it comes back a month later. So the seigneur takes a shotgun, pushes the door open; the animal flees; nevertheless, as he aims, it stops and looks back; its eyes shoot such flames that the seigneur lowers his weapon; the beast sets off again and disappears. "Next month, flames or no flames, I shoot," said Seigneur Peter Bezeau. He did indeed shoot, but at the instant the shot went off the grey dog wasn't there to receive it.

"It must be a werewolf," he thought.

That evening after drinking his rum, when he shouted to Nelly to let in the dogs, he insisted:

"The dogs, not the werewolf!"

Nelly thought her father was drunk. A while ago she would not have

thought that. She had changed lately. The next day, when she brought him his bottle, he remarked on it: she shrugged; he did the same and returned to his bottle.

Another month passes. The fateful day arrives; Peter Bezeau gets up with apprehension. He does down to the kitchen: his four black dogs are there, but no trace of a grey dog! He breathes: the nightmare is over. It is then that Nelly appears in the place. She isn't usually up so early. Peter Bezeau observes her: her fine face seems smaller than it was; her shoulders slope back and her stomach . . .

"Nelly!"

Nelly doesn't move.

"Do you have any idea what's happening to you?"

She ignores him. Peter Bezeau doesn't want to learn anything more; he rushes outside, followed by his big black dogs. To Madame Marie's he is going. At the door he leaves his animals and enters.

"Peter Bezeau," says the old woman, "you seem worried; are you sick?"

The seigneur without his dogs is a poor man, an old man of sixty or more.

"I'm not sick," he replies, "I'm worried about my daughter: come to the house and tell me what's the matter with her."

Madame Marie sees Nelly.

"Your daughter, Peter Bezeau, is in a family way and pretty far gone at that."

"Listen, Madame Marie," says the seigneur (and this time he is talking to her over his four big black dogs), "listen: if anything happens to Nelly you will be salted and dried like an old cod."

"Indeed, Peter Bezeau, that's about all I'm worth. Come and see me tomorrow all the same: I'll give you an answer then."

The next day the seigneur is at her place at the break of day. He has left his dogs outside; he is once more a poor man, an old man of sixty or more.

"Who has gotten Nelly in this condition, Peter Bezeau?"

"I have no idea."

The old woman watches him intently.

"Are you sure?"

Peter Bezeau is disconcerted; he admits what he knows.

"A grey dog with red eyes? a werewolf, then?"

"I thought so, too."

"Peter Bezeau, are you serious? You want me to deliver your daughter when we don't even know what she has in her belly! I'm not that anxious to be salted and dried like an old cod."

The seigneur doesn't have his dogs; he is a poor man, an old man of sixty or more, in despair over his daughter's trouble. He begs pity.

"I'll have pity on you, Peter Bezeau, but you must do what I tell you:

bring me Madame Rose, Thomette Tardif, the Popess of Gros-Morne and Madame Germaine. With their help I shall make myself strong to deliver Nelly though she be big with a unicorn."

The seigneur has no sooner been told this than he is running toward the bay, preceded by his four big black dogs, who bark in the wind; gulls escape from their mouths to fly towards the quay and be lost in the foam of the waves. In no time four boats weigh anchor and put out to sea.

The first will bring back from Cloridorme Madame Rose, thin and cunning, who knows the art of deceiving young women about their pains, making them believe that these are passing cramps and that the labour pains will not come for nine days; who denies childbirth in the beginning, the better to confirm it later, when it is on the point of ending; she is a very useful old woman. The second boat will return from Gros-Morne with Jane Ardicotte, called the Popess because she owns a fat English Bible; from this Bible she draws a mysterious incantatory speech that seizes the soul and raises it two feet above the bed, thus allowing the belly stupidly and faithfully to do its work. The third will have on board Madame Germaine of l'Echourie, who takes care of your child as if it were a fine piece of satin. Finally, Thomette Tardif will arrive from Mont-Louis on the fourth boat, bringing the hooks which he makes himself, that will be required in case the child (or the monster) gets stuck in Nelly's loins.

When the boats had come back, the three midwives, the Popess and the man with the hooks shut themselves up with the seigneur's daughter. He, sent out of the house, stayed outside. From time to time a young man came to tell him how it was going. Thus he learned that, Madame Rose having finished her deceptions, the Popess had replaced her and was busy reading from her great book. The hours seemed long; finally the day came to its close. The young man came back out, radiant.

"The women have sent away Thomette," he announced.

The seigneur looked at him over his four big black dogs.

"Who are you, young man," he asked, "to know so much?"

"I'm your clerk. Don't you recognize me?"

"I don't like my clerks; they're all ambitious, they think of nothing but stealing my seigneurie."

The young man didn't answer. Evening was falling.

"Monsieur Bezeau," he said, "come to the store; we will be more comfortable waiting there."

The seigneur followed him. They got settled in the store. At once the four big black dogs began sniffing at the cellar door.

"What are they sniffing for?"

"I don't know."

"Open the door, we'll see."

The clerk opened the door and the seigneur saw a grey dog with red eyes that he knew well.

"Whose is that beast?"

"Mine," answered the clerk.

At that moment someone comes to inform them that Nelly has borne a son in the most felicitous manner. The two men go over to the house, which is all lit up. When the lamps were blown out, "Who will bring me my rum?" asked the seigneur. It was the able clerk. Peter Bezeau emptied his bottle and, throwing himself drunk on his bed, fell asleep as usual. In the days that followed, however, he looked strange; one realized that he was a poor man, an old man of sixty or more. He died soon after.

His four big black dogs searched for a while after his tomb, then, finding nothing, in turn disappeared from Grand-Etang. The grey dog took their place.

*Translated from the French by Susan Gordon*



# SOLDIERS

---

GIUSEPPE UNGARETTI

They remain  
like the leaves  
on the trees  
in autumn

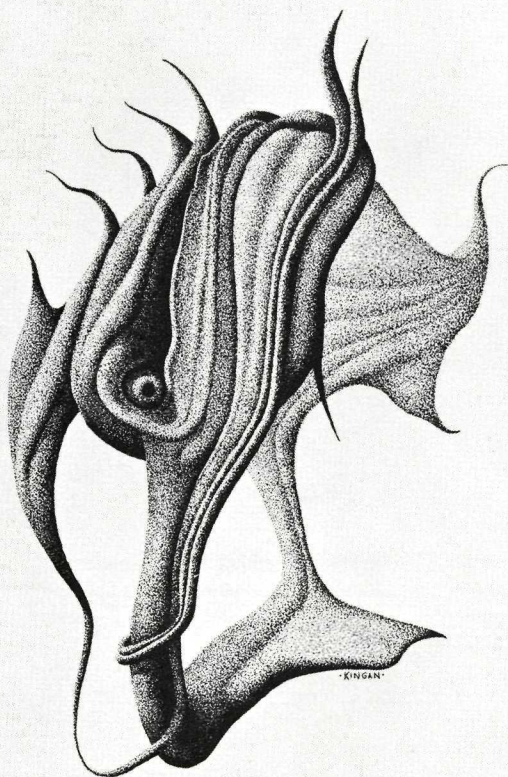
*Courton Woods, July 1918*

*translated from the Italian by Charles Guenther*

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## BUT ALSO BRUTAL

---

MIKLÓS RADNÓTI

My parents died; my twin brother  
died. My wife's small sister  
and her husband as well.

Many people died and when we eat too much  
for supper, we suddenly hear in our sleep  
how under their graves

the nails grow with a shriek;  
their hairs hissing multiply.  
Our lives are pure. We smile an easy smile.

My wife paces about in the room—  
her skirt's feeble sound.  
She arranges chairs with lustrous eyes.

Already she knows the dogs of the rich  
bite and when you die,  
they'll scrape you into the earth.

We live without fear; our days are simple  
like a piece of paper  
or the milk on our table

but also brutal  
like the knife beside us  
that shimmers with a slow glance.

*Translated from the Hungarian by Nicholas Kolumban*

# VERSIONS OF ST. MARK

---

*for Pier Paolo Pasolini*

JOHN ROBERT COLUMBO

When he cured the leper,  
he cautioned the man,

"Say nothing."  
But he said much.

\*

"Why do you eat with sinners?"  
they demanded.

He replied, "It is the sinners  
I have come to save."

\*

He healed a man  
with a withered hand.

They complained:  
"You did it on the wrong day."

\*

When they asked him,  
"Who are your brethren?"

he looked around  
and said: "Behold!"

\*

To the young woman  
who was fast asleep,

they heard him whisper,  
"Talitha cumi."

"Are you Elias,  
one of the prophets?"

Or John the Baptist,  
risen from the dead?"

\*

They spoke  
of the traditions.

He spoke  
of so many hypocrites.

\*

When they asked him  
for a sign from heaven,

he gave them his sign—  
a deep sigh.

\*

Here is what  
the blind man said:

"I see men as trees,  
walking!"

\*

For his passage  
through Galilee,

he travelled  
incognito.

\*



"Better to enter  
into the kingdom of God

with one eye  
than into hell with two."

\*

They stood in awe  
of their immense Temple.

He warned them: "No stone  
will stand upon another."

\*

"When desolation comes,"  
he cautioned,

"pray the time  
will not be winter."

\*

He predicted war,  
revolution, disaster,

famine and death.  
He prophesied:

\*

"There will be  
no end of trouble

because there will be  
no end."

# THE DREAM SOLDIER

---

KOBO ABÉ

On a day so cold that dreams froze  
I had a frightening dream.  
In the afternoon  
The dream put on a cap and left  
And I did the latch on my door.

This story took place about fifteen years ago. Although truth is supposed to be timeless, it is time that this story needs the most. Perhaps that is because there is no truth to the story.

Tucked away in the mountains near a prefectural border, the village had been since the night before entirely engulfed in a snowstorm. The wind howled as if in agony. A company of soldiers who from early morning had been engaged in cold endurance exercises made their way from the town over the hills. Dragging their large straw shoes in the deep snow to the tune of a marching song, they crossed the village with unsteady steps, only to disappear like shadows into the snowstorm.

The wind died down at nightfall. In the police substation at the entrance of the village a solitary old police officer was leisurely peeling potatoes while warming the soles of his feet by the heat of a red hot stove. The radio was on, blaring something he wasn't listening to. He was immersed in a series of daydreams.

"There's a thing or two I know about this village. I know that the mayor and his assistant, in cahoots with the head priest, are diligently embezzling the village rations, and they hide everything underneath the temple floor. But I don't say a word. They know that I am keeping quiet. Mind you, their sending me things, from time to time, isn't so much to shut me up as it is from a feeling of goodwill. If I were to retire I wouldn't have to run like other resident officers. I could even settle down and stay here. Maybe I could get together with a widow that's got some land and pass my last days in peace. As long as you are modest about your needs, there's no better life than that of the farmer. And then, when my son comes home from the army, why I'll need a house to welcome

him home with . . . Thanks to the war though, this village has three women landlords. Of course, for the time being all three have sons. But who is to say they won't give up their lives for their country. No doubt I'll be able to make a nice match. I don't recall having done anything that the villagers could hate me for, and the number of landed widows is steadily on the increase. Now now, hold your horses; no reason to lose your head. Just calmly think things out. The size of the paddy fields added to the number of relatives, divided by two . . ."

Suddenly the telephone rang causing the policeman to drop his half-peeled potato into the ashes. Picking it up, he rubbed it against his shirt-tails; then he stretched himself as if in pain and got down on the earthen floor. Picking up the receiver with the inattentive motions that are typical of his occupation, he began to answer in an unconcerned tone of voice. But his expression abruptly turned to fright and the fingers with which he held the potato began to tremble.

After leaving the village, the soldiers continued to march straight toward the mountains. Along the way, they passed through valleys and forests, practising their high terrain manoeuvres. It was well after three by the time they arrived at the last mountain ridge. The wind was raging with yet greater intensity. Although the soldiers could hardly even breathe, they were ordered to return double-quick on nothing but their empty stomachs. Despite the stiff punishment that they knew awaited them, six soldiers dropped out of rank. As this was a special exercise to test the effects of exposure to hunger, cold and fatigue, it was expected that some would fall out of rank, and for that reason there was a corps of medics following from behind. Upon returning to base, however, it was discovered that the medics had picked up only five stragglers. One of the soldiers, it seems, had disappeared for good.

The soldier is starving. He'll have to call at the village. But if the villagers lay themselves open to attack he might not stop short of violence, should he need some clothing or something.

The old policeman put down the receiver. Drawing up his shoulders, he slowly returned to his place near the stove. He took a noisy breath through his nose and for a while just scratched the top of his balding head. He raised his eyes to look at the clock. It was seven-thirty. He didn't want to move. It was too cold outside. Besides it wasn't clearly a case of desertion yet. At any rate an awful snowstorm was raging. Could it not simply be that he had become separated from his companions and lost his way? It'd be a fool who'd want to desert in weather like this. He'd leave tracks in the snow and they'd catch him for sure. He may have just lost his way. By now he must be frozen stiff . . . On the other hand, should the wind keep on blowing, the snow might be safer. The wind hides footprints. Then again he may have counted on that. It could have been a premeditated crime. For all that, the wind has died down completely. He may have fallen into his own trap. I guess there's just no suc-

cessful precedent for crime . . . I've received a report. But that doesn't mean I've received an order. Anyway, this fellow is under MP jurisdiction, so he's none of my business. Deserters, compared to escaped convicts, are, after all, just well-intentioned cowards. Leave him alone, leave him alone. No good has ever come from butting into other people's affairs. Besides I've never heard of a deserter that's made it yet.

He thought he heard a light tapping on the front door. He turned around quickly. He tried straining his ears for a while but he heard no noise. Maybe he was hearing things, he thought. For some reason, though he began to feel uncertain about things. It wasn't any usual uncertainty either, rather a feeling so close to fear that he could not explain it to himself. Of course his fear was in no way directed toward the deserter.

Unlike with ordinary criminals, he did not feel hatred suddenly well up within him against this one. And because he did not feel this hatred he realized the existence of something which ordered him to hate. This was something he had not been aware of before, being in the secure position of a pursuer. It was only now that he came to peer into the hell that separates the pursuer and the pursued. He stood up. Stricken with pangs of conscience, he tried shouting. "I won't allow it!" he cried out. But then shouting has never been of much use in dispelling uncertainty. This feeling of uncertainty was still only that very tiny inner feeling, because from outside there came a much greater feeling of fear to overwhelm him. The inner feeling was, after all, the uncertainty of being an accomplice. It was a fear that everyone in the village might have felt. But not being able to flee from his uneasiness caused him to sense a yet greater anxiety.

"Well, I guess I am getting too old," he thought to himself. Indignation welled up within him. "When the time comes to settle the matter, it'll be settled. It's not a case of me, myself, alone, bearing all the responsibility." The back of his throat had a strange wet feeling to it. He cut off the air that was going to the stove, put on his sword, turned up the collar of his overcoat, and went outside.

The snow was light. It rustled, releasing a pleasant crunch at each step. It's easy to recognize footprints, but it's impossible to tell whether or not they were made by shoes. Immediately upon rounding the corner on which the fish-market stood, he reached the mayor's house. It was the only house in the village equipped with a Western-style window. A bright lamp was burning in it and someone's heavy laughter spilled onto the street. It was the head priest's voice. Instead of going around the back way as he ordinarily might have done, the policeman boldly pulled open the front door.

The atmosphere in the room stiffened as if everyone had been startled. The mayor's dull voice trembled above the sound of chinaware being hurriedly put away: "Who is it? At this hour."



A little too early for fright. The policeman just cleared his throat and purposefully refrained from answering. The *shōji* screen opened revealing the assistant mayor's face. "Well well now, if it isn't the resident officer?"

"Come right in, come right up," said the head priest leaning forward. The *shōji* slid open. All three smelled of *saké*.

"Something awful has happened," the policeman began saying.

"What is it? But save your breath, just step right in and close the screen and have a drink."

"Some soldier's run off to Mount Kita," the officer continued.

"A deserter?" the head priest peered over the edge of his glasses and swallowed the lump in his throat. "If he is going to Mount Kita, then no matter what route he takes, he's got to pass this way."

"That's the message I got . . . and it seems he's aiming at this village."

"Aiming at?" the mayor slid a finger along the ridge of his nose in a somewhat annoyed fashion.

"Yes, and they say he's damn hungry," the officer added.

"That means we're in for trouble."

"What do you mean!" the assistant cut off the mayor in a spirited manner. "Deserters are generally traitors, aren't they? And probably cowards to boot. What's wrong with going up the mountain, hunting him down and catching him?"

"Hold it a minute! He does have a gun. What's more he's hungry, and he might be pretty desperate."

"In China," the mayor sighed, "no matter where you go, they've got castle walls around every village."

"They're not castle walls," the assistant mayor retorted.

"No, those aren't castle walls."

"Those are ordinary mud walls."

"Yes, just mud walls, that's all."

Suddenly they all heard a sound, as of a chain grating. Instinctively, they all turned toward the noise. It was the wall clock just on the verge of striking eight. The head priest impatiently resumed his previous position. "Well then, what are we going to do?"

"Like I said, catch the fellow and tear him to pieces!" There was a good explanation why only the assistant mayor carried on in such a bragging manner. In all the village he was the only man in his thirties who was still not in the army. Even so, compared to his previous outburst, his tone of voice had weakened considerably.

Not wishing to dampen anyone's spirits, the policeman nodded and said, "Yes, by all means, after all the fellow's a treacherous dog. But then again . . ." he lowered his voice and tilted his head to one side, "he does have a gun, and you never can tell what may happen with a hunted down, starving traitor that's got a gun."

"Yes, it's like letting children play with swords." That was the head



priest speaking, gesticulating toward the assistant mayor while looking at the policeman's face. "What do you think we should do?"

"What should we do, you say? Well that's . . ." the mayor leisurely let the words slip while holding his nose. "You sure this deserter isn't a fellow from our village?"

"He can't be," the assistant's jaw dropped. "No, a fellow like that's gotta come from some warm, comfortable place," he said in a loud, earnest voice.

"But then why did he decide to desert here, in such a cold climate?"

"Well, for the life of me . . . anyway he won't get away with it . . . feel sorry for his parents."

"Mind you, I heard a story about a widow in some village, and she hid a deserter in her loft for over two months."

"That's an old story! No traitors like that around nowadays."

"Yes, that's right."

"Look at them, all with their hearts in their mouths," the policeman thought to himself. "But I guess anyone else would be frightened under the circumstances. They're afraid of being mixed up with a criminal. Should they find out, though, they won't be able to cover things up without dirtying their hands. If they stopped their ears, their hands would hear the fellow's cries for help. Plugging the ears itself is a sign that one is already an accomplice . . . that is to say, these people are completely in cahoots with each other."

"Well, if you'd like to know my opinion . . ." he said expressionlessly, sucking air noisily up his nose. "I think we should let everyone in the village know, by means of an extraordinary circular or some such thing, that as there is a deserter approaching the village, all doors should be securely fastened, no one should even step outside, that just like during air raid warnings no light should be allowed to escape through cracks, and that should anyone ask them anything, they are not to answer. Engaging in conversation means getting involved. For example, first he asks for water. 'Well, if it's only a little thing like that,' and the fellow gives him water. But next it's food, and if the fellow gives him food, next he'll be wanting a change of clothing, and after clothes, it's money. And what's he going to ask for next? He's been completely taken care of, but it's no good, 'cause someone can now recognize his face, so finally, at the end, it's 'Bang!'"

All three held their breaths waiting for the officer's next words, but as there was no indication that the speech would continue, the mayor asked quietly, "And that's it, is it?"

"After that, I suppose the MPs would step in . . ."

The head priest stretched himself and said, as if the whole thing sounded very unpleasant to him, "I think I should be going. It's pretty far to my place."

As the mayor started hurriedly to phone the militia guard room, the

assistant followed the priest and left his seat. "Guess that fellow'll be starting to wander around the village any minute now."

It took less than an hour for the message to permeate the length and breadth of the village. As if a typhoon warning had been announced, every house had its shutters barred, all the weak spots had been boarded up. There were some who even prepared bamboo spears and hatchets by their places of rest. After ten o'clock the whole village, with the exception of the police station, sank into total darkness. An animal-like fear enveloped the place.

Despite their fear, though, most families gradually went to sleep. Only the old policeman, as if waiting for something, stayed up all night continuing to strain his ears for sounds outside. Of course the villagers, behind their boards and shutters, had no way of knowing . . .

The next morning, just as dawn was beginning to break, from beyond the hills to the south there came the shrill sound of a train whistle continuing to blow a long time in rapid succession. The foreboding cry streamed unmercifully into the village beneath the low clouds. Most of the villagers woke to its sound. The people who understood what it meant quickly opened their shutters.

The policeman, his eyes bloodshot from lack of sleep, gazed through the south-facing windows toward the hills. His eyes could clearly see the single straight, gray line which extended beyond the hills. The whistle stopped blowing. In a while the assistant mayor, carrying a pair of skis, appeared accompanied by two men. "It seems somebody's thrown himself in front of the train again. I think I'll go and take a look. It might've been that traitor. Want to come along?"

"No, I'd better stay. Could get a call from town."

In no time the three skiers came upon the gray line that extends beyond the hills. Nodding at each other, they began to follow its path. The old policeman finally left the window and crouched in front of the fire.

When the assistant mayor returned he found the policeman dozing in the same position. The assistant tried waiting silently until the old man woke up. Just when he was about to give up, the old man opened his eyes and asked in a whisper, "Well . . . did you get a look?"

"Yes, I sure did."

"Well, then you . . ."

"You must have known all along?"

"Yes, I knew."

"Then was it you that made him do it?"

"Well, you see . . . I know, you know just how ashamed I am . . . he didn't have to do it so close to the village. It must have been out of spite toward me . . . I can't think of a fellow like that as my son . . . but you might do me a favour and keep quiet about this."

"But the two fellows I went with, they already know."

"I guess you're right. I'll have to take what's coming, won't I?"

"His body wasn't badly deformed or anything. His gun was right beside him, hung on a branch."

"Well . . ."

"By the way, hadn't we better erase the footprints under your window?"

"I suppose you're right."

Ten days thereafter, the old policeman left the village, dragging a small cart behind him.

On a day so hot that dreams melted

I had a strange dream.

In the afternoon

Only a cap returned.

*Translated from the Japanese by Andrew Horvat*

# GREAT BLUE HERON

---

JACK HODGINS

The killer whales are passing. At first, before you see them, you think perhaps a horse has snorted just behind your ear; a whole herd of horses somewhere, everywhere, snorting. But then you see them out in the strait, the black killer whales, curving up out of the water and then down out of sight and then up again like a dozen needles stitching their way up the strait, rolling past to their own rhythm with tall dark dorsal fins arcing out and up and down like arms on a great turning wheel. They gleam; you can see their eyes, sometimes you can see the white along their throats. They go snorting by as if they are putting on this parade just for you.

Old Man Harker stands on the verandah of his cabin and looks, just looks, nothing else. He stares at those whales passing by like a parade arranged just for him but only as long as they stay directly within his straight-ahead range of vision. He doesn't turn his head to follow them. This is a rigid old man you're looking at, and he doesn't turn his head for anyone. Standing there on his one leg he looks like nothing so much as an old blue heron: shoulders hunched up, long neck curved, beak stuck rigidly ahead, dark brows drawn down in a scowl. That's Old Man Harker, and if you went right up to him now and said "Hi there, Mr. Harker, ain't it a lovely night," he wouldn't do a thing, wouldn't turn that head, until perhaps later when he might look at you and ruffle up his shoulders a little and say "Hello there, son, did you see them whales go by?" Even then, he would go back inside his cabin without waiting for your answer.

Old Man Harker has lived to an age where it is constantly surprising people to discover he is still alive. Once, a distant relative who didn't know any better shook the old man's hand (gently, as if afraid it might come off in his own) and said, "My God, I thought you'd died years ago." That is the kind of thing that causes Old Man Harker to stay down here in his beach cabin all year round, where it is almost possible to pretend no one else exists, where it is entirely possible to ignore anyone he doesn't feel like acknowledging, leaving it safe for people elsewhere to consider him dead all they want without having to run up against his stern and breathing contradiction. You can see by the way he watches



those killer whales stitching their way up the strait that he uses them to measure something in his soul, that he sees in them the only other thing he will permit to live, to really live in his world.

And here is one surprise about Old Man Harker: he has a wife, he is married. See her back in the shadows of the cabin, huddled by the fire, an old woman, older even than he is if that is possible. She sits by that stove all day long, wrapped up in sweaters, one leg twisted around the other for warmth, her white hair thinning a little more each day. There are two jobs she will do, two things that drag her up out of that rocking chair at regular intervals: one is stuffing that stove full of wood to keep it blazing hot, the other is skittering out to the privy and back as fast as she can move, trying to make it back before the cabin heat has died in the layers of clothes she has hanging on her skinny frame. It has been said that she doesn't speak to the old man, hasn't said a word in years, that all she does besides her two regular jobs is sit and watch him out of those two round sunken eyes, half-blind with mucous and with rage. Pulling handfuls of thin white hair out of her own pink head.

Old Man Harker has hair. Oh, he has plenty of it, thick as feathers. It floats up all around his head and hangs down the back past his shoulders. You have the feeling that if he ever moved his head, if he ever disturbed that hair, it would set something in motion that might throw him completely off balance, might bring him crashing down. Remember, he has only one leg; the other was pinched off by a rolling log when he was a young man in his twenties. He was a logger then, a chokerman; one log rolled down off another and pinned his leg to the ground. The pain was so terrible, he said, that loss of the leg was small enough price to pay to be rid of it. He refused a wooden leg. He learned to stand as steady on one foot as anyone else on two, and for getting around he rigged up a motorized wheelchair that moved faster than anyone's walk. He never went back to the woods, to logging. For years he fished in the summers and drew unemployment insurance in the winters. Sometimes he sold real estate for a brother-in-law.

Now, there are reasons Old Man Harker looks so stern, looks like a furious blue heron. And one of those reasons is that he hates our being here, hates you, hates us. Because here it is July again, the rain clouds have gone somewhere else and the sky is a blue we'd forgotten was possible, and all these cabins are filling up with families moving down to be as close as they can get to sea. Kids screaming and yelling up and down the beach, playing hide and seek behind cabins at dusk, shaking fir cones down out of trees onto his roof before he has even got out of bed in the morning. And worst of all, we are able to see that he is still alive.

He stood on his verandah last week and watched it happen, watched car after car drive in past him and pull up beside one cabin after another—first the red, then the yellow, then the brown, then orange—watched kids run wild in every direction, watched parents carry boxes and sleeping bags and fishing rods out of their cars. He didn't smile, he



didn't nod. He watched it all on his one long rigid leg, head thrown back, hair floating, nose pointed long and stiff as a heron's beak. Then he turned, hauled himself inside, and slammed the cabin door. Old Man Harker doesn't know, perhaps, whether he wishes the rest of us had gone somewhere else for the summer or wishes he had died sometime during the winter months.

And yet, here he is again, come out tonight to watch those whales go past. If you can see the smallest hint of a smile on his face, the smallest hint, it just may be because he knew that when those black fellows have gone through there won't be a fish caught on anyone's hook for at least two days. They all flee, fearing, to the floor of the sea, go down out of some instinct for self preservation, and won't become reckless enough to risk everything for a flashy tackle or a worm until all danger has passed and been forgotten. No wonder Old Man Harker is tempted to smile: fathers all up and down the beach will be forced to sit in their cabins and wait, or sit on a beach log and wait, and they will have to listen to their own children screaming, just as he does. Maybe some of them will go mad.

Don't think he doesn't want you to notice. Don't think he doesn't want you to turn your face his way at least once going by and say "Good heavens, that old man still keeps his cabin in better shape than any of the rest of us." Because he does. Because if he has to put up with you, with us, he may as well have a little of our admiration too. Take a good look at that building; it'll last for years. It has only two rooms to it, like the rest of them, and only the one door in front and one big picture window facing the strait. But see how thick and smooth the paint is that covers it all (green and pale as freshly cut hay) and notice how not even the bottom step has rotted through from weather. And notice too that his is the only roof that hasn't been ripped up by wind, hasn't sprung any leaks, hasn't been covered with fallen limbs and a cushion of dropped needles. Flowers grow in a window box, the only flowers on the beach beside the yarrow and wild sweet pea that bloom out on the edge of the driftwood. They are geraniums, red as blood. It is important that you look. It is important you notice that Old Man Harker's cabin is the only one on the beach that doesn't look as if a good wind could flatten it, the only one on the beach that looks as if a human being lives here and cares.

Down at the other end of the beach is the other surprise about Old Man Harker, the second reason he looks so cranky. Someone is waiting for him. Someone is sitting in that brick-coloured shack, playing solitaire at the table just inside the window, waiting for Old Man Harker to get into his wheelchair and ride down that road in front of all those other cabins to make his daily call. It is Doctor Nilson.

Doctor Nilson, too, is an old man, though not as old as Harker. His practice in town died out about the time he was getting into his early sixties so he moved down here into retirement and spends his days doing three things: playing solitaire, drinking hot rums, and waiting for Old

Man Harker. The weather out on the strait, the condition of the tide, the size of the fish other people catch are of no concern to him. They are as uninteresting and unimportant as the symptoms rattled off by the few old women who were still coming to him for help just before he retired. The cards are important, the rum is important, Old Man Harker is important. His shack, which is in worse condition than any other along the beach, could fall down around his ears and he wouldn't care. As long as there is a table to sit at, Doctor Nilson is happy.

But Old Man Harker isn't ready for his daily visit. Though his head hasn't moved, is still pointing out to those whales, his eyes slide more than once to the side for a look in the direction of Nilson's cabin, and the frown (those heavy black brows) pulls down even more than usual. You could almost be sure, if you didn't think Old Man Harker is a man who is always controlled, that here is a person who is scared. His hands on the verandah railing are white, white as his wife's thinning hair, white as the throats of those whales. But he destroys any notions of pity you may have by dredging up phlegm from deep in his throat and hawking it in a beautiful gleaming arc up over the grass in front of him and down onto a bare stone in the middle of the road.

It will be a good half hour yet before he will go down to Nilson's shack. First he will make a lot of noise slamming things around in the cabin, no doubt scaring the few remaining wits out of that poor old woman, then he will sit at the window and stare at the mountains on the mainland as if he expects them to shift in front of his eyes, or start dancing, or re-form into some kind of written message for him. Then he will go out to the privy and come back, slamming things around once more, before he will give in (it seems) and point that motorized wheelchair down the road.

And then this (the same as last night and the night before and God knows how many nights before that; the walls of Nilson's cabin are paper thin and full of gaps, it is easy to listen, even to watch): the doctor will get up from his card game and help Old Man Harker through the door and wheel him over by the table where they will both stare at the cards for a while without doing anything. Then Old Man Harker will pull himself up out of the wheelchair and stand on his one leg, looking out the window. The view here is no different from his own, but it is something to look at besides the mess in the cabin: the dirty dishes, the tangled bedclothes, the filthy floor.

Old Man Harker will be the first to speak. He will say: "Tonight I very nearly didn't come."

Nilson will cough perhaps, or say nothing for a while. Then he will say, "But you did, though. Didn't you?"

Old Man Harker will say, "One of these nights I won't come. One of these nights you won't see me here at all."

"Because," the doctor will say.

"Yes."

"Because all you really want is to be dead."

The old man will nod, stiffly, as if with great effort.

"And yet," the doctor will say. "And yet, you've come."

There will be silence for a long while after this. Nilson will give Old Man Harker something out of his cupboard. The old man will look at it with hatred and then swallow it. Then the doctor will give him something for the old woman too. So that she too can lose for a while whatever pain she may have that keeps her from sleeping through the night. The two men will speak of other things then, for a while. They will talk of the old days (when neither knew the other existed, when things weren't really any better than they are now) and Old Man Harker may even try to get the doctor interested in some story about fishing. But the conversation will die; there is nothing really that one can tell the other; and the old man finally will sit in his chair again and wheel it towards the door.

But he will say one more thing. He will say, "Maybe tomorrow night." Then he will add: "All it will take is the refusing to come." And finally, as he wheels away from the shack; "God damn you, Nilson. God damn you."

"Yes," the doctor will say. He will smile of course, as certain as he has ever been of anything that he will see the old man again tomorrow and many other days after that. He has been a doctor, after all, and feels he knows a few things about people. A few things. And without Old Man Harker his life would be reduced to just the cards and the hot rums, nothing else.

And now look, here is Old Man Harker starting out early on today's journey. The beach is strangely quiet. All those people who came out of their cabins to watch the whales go by have stayed down on the logs, are sitting with their backs to him, watching the tide lick at the beach, nudge kelp and floating woodchips up the slope. He is in his wheelchair with the little motor under the seat, and it is facing down the road past the cabins. They start to move, that chair and Old Man Harker together, and it seems that he is no longer a long blue heron, he is something else, though still frowning and stern.

And here is something that has never happened before. He is turning his head. Old Man Harker, who always stares straight ahead, who looks as if he has no interest in anything not directly in front of his eyes, is turning just slightly as he moves. He is not looking at you. It is necessary to remember that he hates you, hates us. His eyes are searching the strait for a trace of the killer whales that have gone past. Looking, perhaps, for the sight of just one black rigid fin rising from the water and arcing like the arm on a wheel before going down.

Turn quickly now, quickly, and you may be able to see the old woman at the window watching him, her white hair afloat like cotton threads, her small heat-reddened face pressed against glass, alive with terror and hope. She watches him, watches him, watches him.



## LETTER TO THE BOSS

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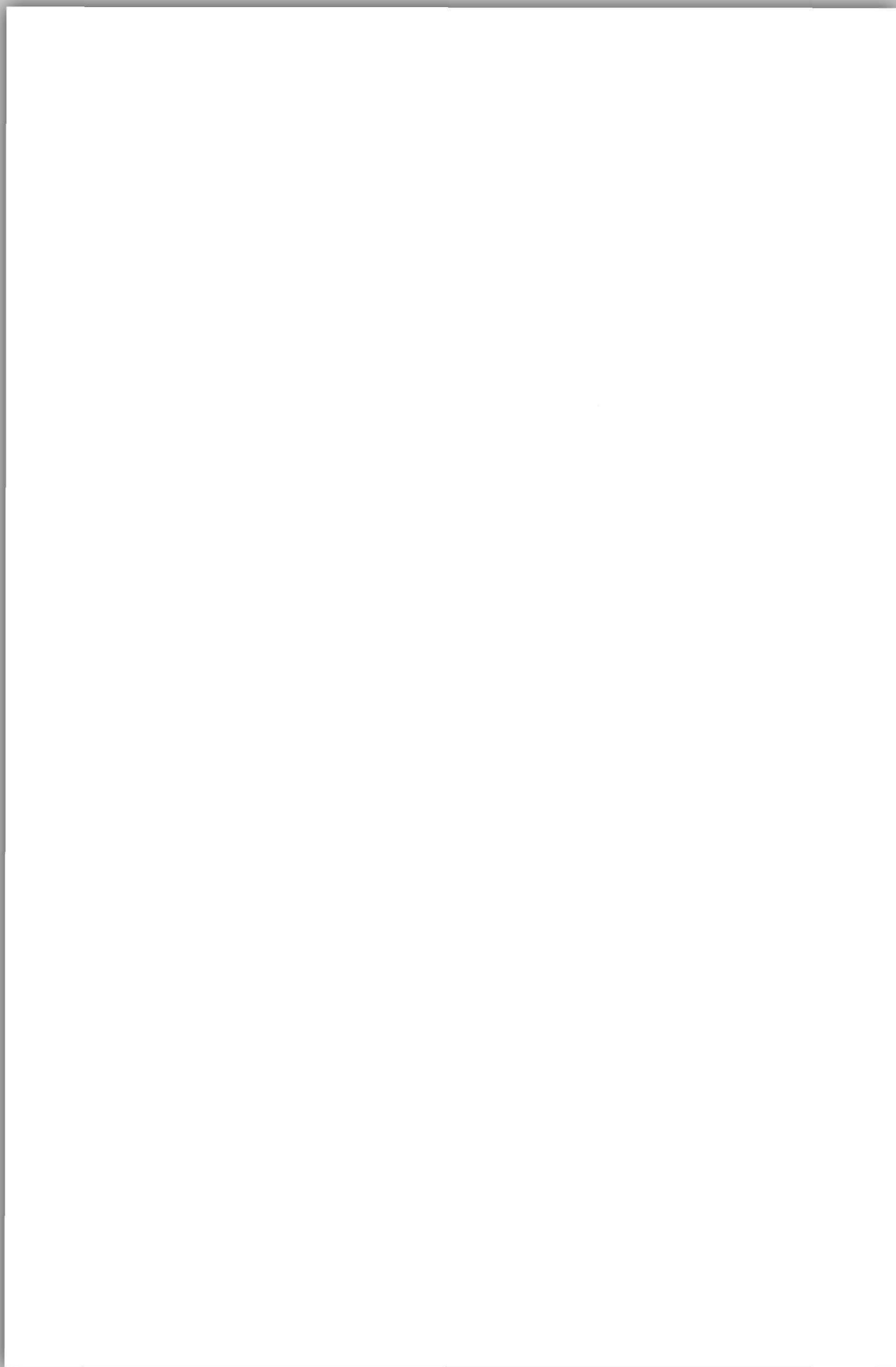
MICHAEL TREGEBOV

Listen you dumb jerk  
I hated your green face  
because it smelled  
like cat puke  
and because you  
worked with us  
and voted NDP with us  
and blew green snot  
into the sawdust  
just like you were  
one  
of us,  
and you shit green turds  
into the amphora toilets  
from the seas of Pantelleria  
and you spit green phlegm  
against the alabaster  
and plaster  
It was the springtime  
and your rise to power  
and we hated you  
because you wore linen shirts  
and epaulets on your jacket,  
shaved up to your eyes  
we could have shoved  
your green face  
into the toilet bowl  
until you puked money  
and butterflies  
but no we gave you  
magnificent gifts  
an ivory chess board for Christmas  
and a moosehead for your birthday  
and you thanked us  
till we blushed

but I wish I would have  
shoved a piece of dynamite  
up your ass and said:  
Happy birthday, Here's to Success!  
because

I hate you  
because you could turn  
into a puddle  
or an animal  
and slink around at night  
inspect the site  
the pale glow of power in your hands  
And when you brought around  
your children  
with the shine of the future in their eyes,  
I hated you the most  
because  
for one moment  
*at four in the afternoon*  
you made me hate all children.

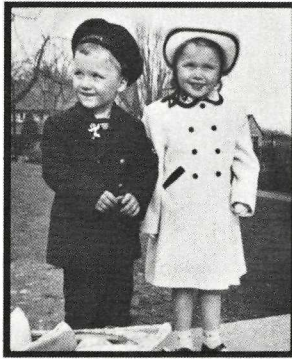
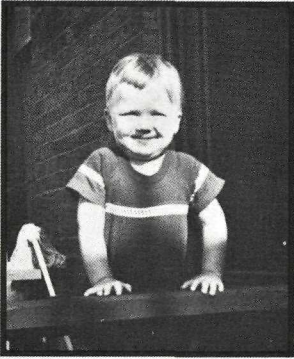




# PRISM *international*

Fall 1978

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*Special Canadian Under 30's Issue II*

1978-1979

# MASK OF THE NORTH NORTH EAST

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GAIL MCKAY

One of my eyes is a lake in northern Ontario,  
the other, a lake in Quebec.  
6 A.M.: like flies at my mouth my southern  
cities begin. But here, in the north, the rain.

Unborn, I saw my father  
riding the rails. Underwater  
sounds in the womb: his riding  
into the War. Born,  
covered in blood, held  
upside down by my heels.  
"Inarticulate," they said  
when I screamed  
like a city. "Warchild, birthmark:  
flies at mouth."

No refuge.  
*Kristallnacht.*  
Guilt. Flies.

My mother shrank from the future,  
her skirts glacial, the Arctic skirt.  
Child herself, reading aloud pamphlets:  
"Fontanel: 'soft spot' (between  
four bones of the head)  
pulses with the heart. As,  
in the right light, form  
can be seen through bone  
china, so too with the membrane."

Look into a northern lake in Ontario,  
a northern lake in Quebec.  
Look close—a whale lists in her sleep in  
stone-hulled Hudson Bay. She speaks

out of *my* mouth  
hopeless vowels. "Charming," the articulate  
among you say.

How the rain pounds.  
Cover the gap (between  
boreal, austral; auroral  
and the west)  
in my skull

with your hands.

## LITANY

---

M. T. KELLY

The day they published the poems about whales  
two men from Brooklyn poked the eyes out of a Dolphin.  
The paper said it cried like a baby.

A man ran over the face of a bear with a 70 horsepower  
mercury at Bon Echo. He was trying to "turn her" as she  
swam into the park.

At Pogamiskiming the engineer held up his bass. Between  
thumb and forefinger in the jelly of the eyes. They're  
going to dam the river.

According to Hemingway two gypsies killed the bull that  
killed their brother by gouging out its eyes and spitting  
in the sockets. They believe in honour.

In Italy they put needles in the pupils of decoys. The  
cries of distress bring others. Canary and hummingbird  
are the major game there.

Chickens in a cage, flies, a ton of wet shit, eggs and  
eyes like red sores. I've seen a wild bird and a whale.  
I've seen a wild bear.

The menace was a privilege.



# CITY OF GOD

---

MARY DI MICHELE

The dark pupil is engulfed  
in the white of the eyes,  
sculptured, blank,  
the head's in a tight freize of curls.

Pouring out the skin of stillness  
like ashes from an urn  
the statue comes alive.

He preaches to me that Jesus saves,  
a black man wearing the pale  
face of Jesus, the asphalt missionaries  
mixing with the street vendors on Yonge,  
toting dogeared bibles. He wears a scapular:  
the livid heart of Jesus drops  
black blood.

"I like someone who reads."  
he says, giving me a pamphlet  
the size of a dog's pituitary gland  
as I run for the graveyard  
shift.

## ARMS OF THE BLUES

---

MARK JARMAN

'She's tougher than a pontiac  
got a face like the coast' the radio tells me on the Yellowhead  
some country and western station out of Edson  
driving into town the beer gets warm between your legs

Too much craziness coming back to the city  
moon drools piano key yellow  
blue pines wave like a train station  
chimney fingers smoking gravel clouds  
broken throat sky  
it's a traditional blues number  
still every weekend I drive in pay the tolls  
pretend I'm living in this century

White poplar branches belly dance like kelp on the tide  
yellow lamp posts flash their halo on the larch  
giving me that holier than thou look  
some jet off the base scratches the sky, a smoky zipper  
exhaust trailing red in the sun

But I'm down at the Kondiker tavern tapping my foot to Stormy  
Monday  
piano throws up dust, a little slide guitar with my beer  
black guy blowing harp in the can  
echo's better in here he says fingering the blues

A tanned girl plays shuffleboard in faded blue cut-offs  
white stripe of skin showing around the rough edges  
lifts one nice leg behind her every time she throws a rock

But god doesn't look too pleased as the chord changes  
and an angel pokes my arm and lifts one of my draught  
as if wishes were underwear beneath a white Mexican blouse  
light blue panties against smooth brown skin  
or an oak's thin shadow prowling on whitewashed walls

window next door flicks on like a flashlight  
bats panic, water slips on the rocks

One finger on her lips  
one hand on her hips is how I remember her  
dead still, a fossil in rock  
she is tougher than a pontiac  
cut her teeth on my tin heart  
held it in her ivory fingers

Now her and Vern hand out Watchtower  
on Jasper Ave by the Bay  
they're living in this century  
god holds us in the arms of the blues.

# BEST FALLING DEAD

---

ROBERT SHERRIN

I am the best falling dead.

I had come round the house with a purpose. I was not there to steal flags or range trucks in rows by the side stoop. I was not there to find long legs behind the hollyhocks or look for mystery by the apartment block with the white shingles. I was there to fall dead.

At that time death came from every side. We all seemed to understand that. All of us. You: the girl with the hair pale as tears whose parents fought in the summer in the upper room while you and your sisters cried in the shade, watching me cruise past on your bicycle. You didn't need it. You were begging for silence. And it always came, didn't it? There was always a great calm at the end of the afternoon, you and your sisters exhausted by the crying and yelling. On those days there was always a huge dead area between your house and the neighbours'. They would sit on the far sides, the leesides of their homes, out of the sun, out of the wind and the turbulence of your parents' relationship. No one asked about the boxes beside the garbage cans. But I looked. All broken: lamps, pictures, bits of paper, letters, a china doll, a bottle. I hoarded things but I didn't hoard those. I left them as I found them. Moved myself quickly to the store across the street where most bought jaw breakers and root beer popsicles. I bought the little wax cowboys with the coloured water inside and bit their heads off.

Or you: the boy who threw stones. Who stood with your oversized heart bulging from your chest like a humped spare in the fender well of a car. You stood on the gravel path between the houses and you waited for the children to pass on their bicycles, in their wagons, on their trikes. You squatted there with that heart of yours like a pounding fist. You hated that thing in your chest but you wore it with pride, dared us to put our ears to it, to hear the whispering blood. We were told it must not be exposed to the sun yet you went shirtless in the summer, strutted through the neighbourhood and chased the girls, made them touch it, saying, I'm stronger than anyone, I will live forever. But you were the

one who was taken from the streets every day by your mother and sent to bed for the afternoon. She was painful to watch as she walked into the heat and sought you like a thin hound does the fat hare or the ground hog. She hunted you down and hauled you from our midday conferences in the shade of someone's tree or the cool darkness of an underporch. Took you away. Said to you, COVER IT UP, IT ISN'T A TOY. Did away with you until after dinner. Loved you too much and feared you more than we ever would.

So you watched and you waited. Watched as the boys backed their wagons out of their sidewalks in mimicry of their fathers pulling out of driveways. You waited with your arms raised and levied your toll: touch my heart. Each driver, each little boy in his red flier, each girl on her first CCM moved slowly past and touched you. They passed on, down the thin gravel road, their tiny convoy raising a chimney of dust in the prairie air. Gone before you like pioneers, leaving you to your stones and the few of us whose parents could not afford bicycles.

Or you: the boys who dressed in women's clothes, who gathered in my basement and sorted through the rag bin, setting aside the skirts and removing our pants. Pushed our genitals back and pranced about saying we were pretty. We dressed well and we dressed often. We walked in a circle and sat in a circle on the cool concrete. We sipped at our imaginary tea. We asked for more sugar, please. We touched hands and talked about our husbands: how strong they were; how rich they were; how much they loved us; how our children were disobedient and we were forced to spank them. Some of us washed their mouths with soap. Some of us locked them in their rooms. Some of us yanked them like kittens by the neck, took them yelling and kicking from the dinner table and pushed them roughly to their mattresses, said to our little ones: YOU EVER SAY THAT TO ME AGAIN, MISTER, AND I'LL WHIP YOUR BACKSIDE 'TIL I CAN FRY EGGS ON IT. And we always left them alone to cry. That's our way. Our civilized mama's way. Our civilized papa's way. We don't humiliate our little ones, we educate them. Some of us hit them on bare buttocks with a leather belt and sometimes they didn't cry. But we were good mamas. We talked about babies and how messy they are. We said we never struck our children unless papa was there. We needed only the words: WAIT UNTIL PAPA GETS HOME. Our torture was simple.

After our tea we did our makeup, didn't we? We pursed our lips. We patted our cheeks. We brushed our hair. We went to the bathroom together and sat with our dinks hidden even though we made only water. We felt so good, so clean. We patted each other on the backside. We called ourselves after each other's mothers: ROSE, SYLVIA, EVE, NETTIE, KAY.

And we would stroll, wouldn't we, boys? We would walk up the broad hot street, where the tar moved underfoot like something nearly alive.



People stared at us, laughed at us. But we walked, calm and erect and gestured a great deal. We said:

My dear, isn't it terribly hot?

Have you seen my boy, Garson?

Oh I wear this only on special days.

My husband is very rich, you know. He drives the big white one.

All the way to the playground where the activities ceased as we came face to face with real mothers who came to us and asked where we got our fine clothes and asked us if we wanted their children. Some turned from us and led their little boys and girls away. They were the ones who didn't laugh. They were the ones whose boys had shiny wagons and pants with creases and shoes with laces the same length. They were as afraid of us as we were intrigued by them. We took their swings, made magestic patterns with our fluttering rags in the afternoon. LADY BUG, LADY BUG, FLY AWAY HOME. YOUR HOUSE IS ON FIRE AND YOUR CHILDREN ALONE.

We worked at staying alive by dealing with death. We put fire crackers in bottles but that happened only once a year. We made guns of clothes pins and rubber bands. We walked out to the sheets of ice in the late winter and watched them tilt with our weight, felt them sag with our passing, saw the water seep up to surround our gumboots. Most of us were strapped when we returned home for daring to walk the ice where children were lost each year when the sheets gave way and they sank into the ice water and mud and the wheatroot that strangled like wet silk. We were so beloved that we were whipped to cool our passion, to learn the ways of our families.

And we tried. Didn't we? All of us. You, the blonde whose parents parted when your youngest sister left home. And you, the boy with the heart outside your chest. And you and me, the ones who dressed as Rose and Sylvia and Eve and Nettie and Kay. Did we not?

We hunted through the neighbourhood for friends. We met behind the apartment block with the white shingles and we played Death. We took ten deep breaths and held the last, allowing ourselves to be grasped from behind by the strongest and our chests squeezed until we lost consciousness. We slipped away so early, so often.

We would surround the dead and await their return. They all came back. One would rise from the grass, her legs and arms taut with the sensation of nowhere. Another, you, the one who was Nettie when I was Rose, rolled over the steel pedals of a bicycle as you returned and displayed no cuts or bruises. I returned always with a rush of heat to my head and galaxies under my lids. I came always to my feet and staggered with my arms waterwheeling in the air too thinned by summer to support me. We were the soldiers of our street. We were the fliers with ring twitter and the sappers with hollow ear. We were those who came back, we were the echoes of our fathers' voices when they said, HE WAS ONE OF THE GOOD ONES WHO DIDN'T MAKE IT HOME.

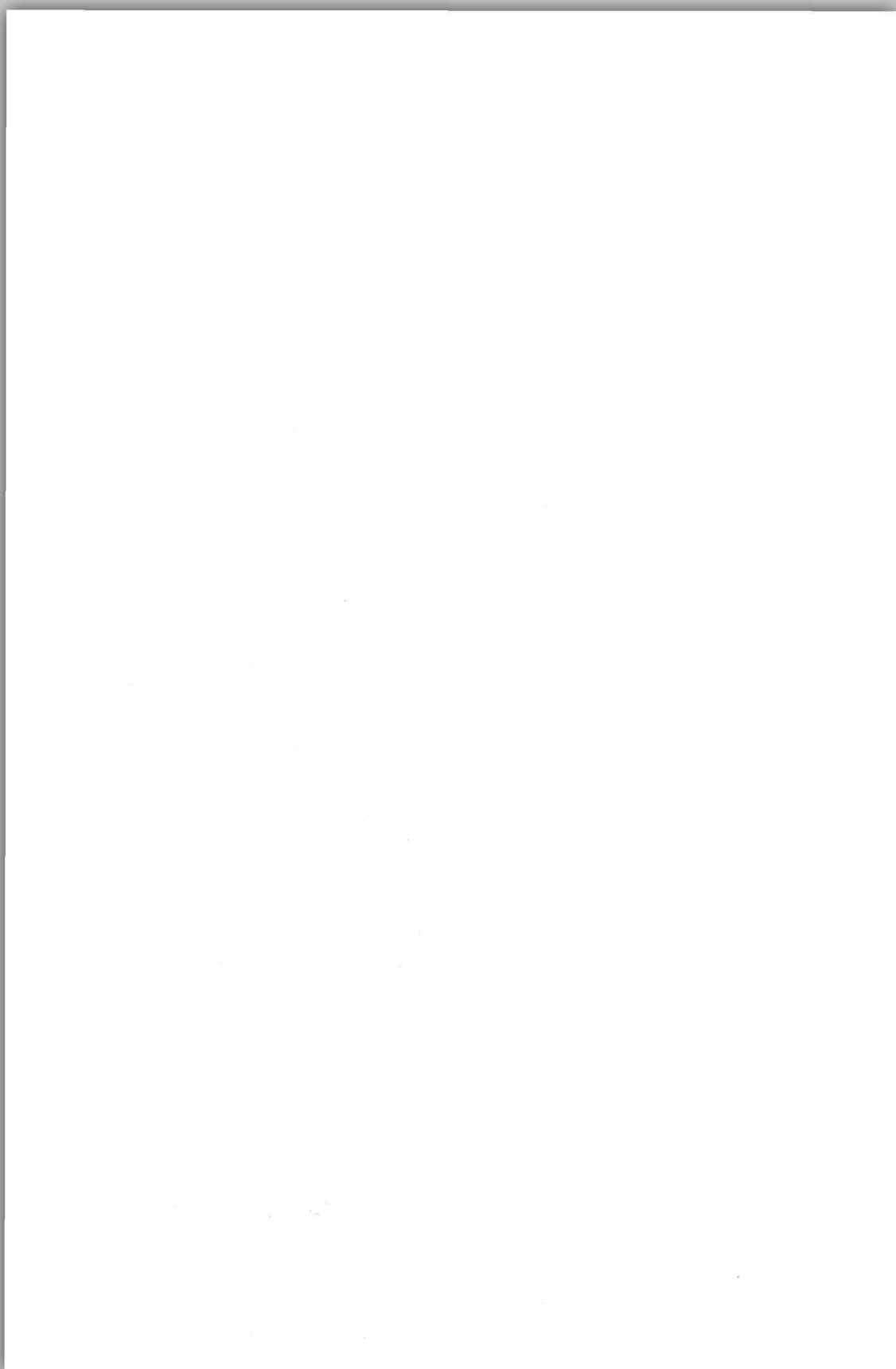
And then we fell dead. We came, all of us, girls and boys alike, bursting from the shade into the white of afternoon and met the sweep of machinegun fire. The gunner was only yards away and he panned over us, pumping round after round into the still air, each shot drumming away through the canyon of houses. No one saved us. No one tried to. We wanted to go. We wanted to be like Mom who yelled from the back porch and fell down the steps; who smelled like gasoline when we reached her and told us to BUZZ OFF! as she made her way inside. We wanted to be like Dad who swung wide into the driveway and went away in the fall with a gun and came back with geese that bled from the eyes and were plucked under bare bulbs, their urine overpowering as it was squeezed into basins. We wanted to be the mamas and we wanted to be the papas. The ones who lived among the smell of a fired Zippo and the touch of nylon stockings. We went into the withering bullets with leaps and cries of delight.

The girls went first, crumpling to earth, hands to chests, their nipples like yours or mine, tasting of the same salt because we tried and we knew. Then the boy who had been Sylvia with a bullet to his head and much yelling and thrashing. Then the boy with the large heart who had evaded his mother to join us, tripping, stumbling, clutching his throat, falling to his back, the little mound glinting, the skin a tight bony white. Then the blonde girl who had stayed low but finally found herself skidding into the grass, hands clutching at her flat little belly, flopping away to one side like a nearly living thing derailed at last. Then Kay with one to the lungs. And me. Finally me. Me at last. A pattern through my chest but my legs churning though the body was finished, the mind failing. I went to my knees but moved ahead. I came to a halt, still kneeling, wavering, trying to raise my hand like the soldiers always did. Like everyone wanted to. And the gunner looked at me through his clouds of cordite and the rippling of echoes and pointed the barrel at my face. He touched the trigger and I fell away into the sweet grass, my head at your feet.

And things went silent because that was a rule. No one breathed because that, too, was a rule. We yearned for the looks of our elders who would say we were the good ones who didn't make it. That, too, was a rule. We recalled every war film and western we had ever seen and like the shotgunned hero we lay as still as we could because it was important to be as real as possible in that world.

Finally I was touched. The gunner had risen and walked to me and tapped me on the shoulder. He gave me the word: best falling dead. And walked on tapping the others, bringing them back to life, me moving into position as the new gunner who would mow down the next wave. We all fell and we all rose to fall again.

And we laughed, didn't we? We were happy, weren't we, because we thought we could do it all our lives, forever.





# PRISM *international*

SPRING 1980



*Voices from The Maritimes*

1979-1980

# STRANDJA MOUNTAIN

---

SNEZHINA SLAVOVA

Wind

I was offered to you in sacrifice,  
vowed to you — wayfarer  
with a thousand feet,  
a thousand hands a thousand mouths —  
tumultuous  
jealous one.

Do you know which window you thrash  
which door you force?

Pity the mountain rivers  
the strawberry patches.

Find me when the soil is being turned  
around the blackberry-bushes.

Find me in the hours when  
the magic women dance.

I will come then under the drowsy leaves,  
through the leaves hissing like embers . . .

If you are a man, you will discover —  
in my hands men cry . . .

If you are newborn you will first know speech —  
in my breasts there is milk to suck.

If you are a mother  
you will sing —  
in my heart there is a child falling asleep.

If you are an old man  
you will lament —  
for my forehead is an eternal wound.

*Translated from the Bulgarian by Yuri Vidow Karageorge*



# MILK

---

SNEZHINA SLAVOVA

In the moment of the evening  
when the sky loses itself  
like the aroma of the swaying flowers,  
when the purple of the mountain  
dies out,  
I quietly descend the steep path—  
a torrential brook, a lowing cow,  
a white horse grazing—  
and the white-washed house of Slava.

From her pail the milk flows quietly, gently  
toward my hand.  
The beads swing from her breast  
in the way they also do.  
So long as Slava pours the milk  
I shall understand all mystery.  
I am bewildered that I have cried at times  
and I believe things are good and lasting.

But the large white pan grows heavy,  
my hand draws it back.  
A white horse.  
A lowing cow.  
A torrent.  
The steep ascent begins.

*Translated from the Bulgarian by Yuri Vidov Karageorge*

# THE PACT

---

SOLOMON ARY

Bailka was a fiery beauty, with dark auburn hair and blue-green eyes. Her mouth was dainty, her nose delicate, her breasts perfect. Her manner was always happy, lighthearted. When she was only thirteen, the boys in the neighbourhood already took notice. They could see she was in a class by herself.

Bailka's parents had no money. Her father, Red Zalmon, owned a cab, and earned barely enough to make ends meet. He was tall and well-built, with red hair and dark eyes, but he had the look of a desperate man. Something always seemed to be troubling him. Still, he and his wife had one great joy in life—their daughter, Bailka. When she walked to the village with her friends, Red Zalmon would sit in the cab, staring after her, his mouth half-open in a smile of pure pleasure. For her sake, he scrimped on everything, wouldn't even take a shot of whiskey. All this so that his Bailka should want for nothing.

When she turned fifteen, she met a young fellow of the same age, and right off they went everywhere together. He was tall and handsome, and he wore fine clothes. His pockets always jingled with money. His family was well set up with a shop in a prosperous part of town. Of course, the idea of having a cabbie in the family was not to their liking, and they tried to discourage the romance. But their son wouldn't listen. He said that he and Bailka were meant for each other.

In the evenings he would come to take her out for a stroll, and all the village mothers would come and sit in front of their houses to watch. "May no evil befall them," they'd sigh, beaming at the young couple. "What a lovely pair they are!" "It should only happen to our children. . . ."

So it went, for over a year. Then suddenly the young fellow stopped coming around. Bailka's mother never left the house, and the girl herself was not to be seen. Red Zalmon sat in his cab, drunk, and sometimes he was seen weeping bitterly.

No one wondered what happened. No one had to ask. At that time, in

Poland, there was a strict moral code for women. All it took was a few guys to spread the word about having sex with a girl, and the cops would start a "black book" on her. She'd be known as a prostitute. Every month she would have to report to a doctor to check for venereal disease.

The game that was most popular with some of the guys went this way. A fellow would go out with a girl, and convince her that he really loved her and that they would marry someday. But in the meantime, he'd want to have sex with her. And the girl, being in love, would believe him and do as he asked. So her fate would be in his hands. Later, he might decide that he was through with her. Then there would be an outcry—but so what? It would all be forgotten soon enough.

Sometimes the game was played with a different angle. A guy might want to show his friends that he wasn't just anybody—that he knew how to win a girl and then drop her. So he'd get in cahoots with another fellow. This other fellow would come to a certain place at a time agreed upon, and there he would "surprise" the couple while they were having sex. The friend would then threaten the girl with public disgrace before her family and friends unless she'd put out for him too—at least that once. If the frightened girl gave in to his demands, she'd be caught in a net from which there was no escape. By the time another "friend" had asked for "just one time," there would be quite a few guys who knew about her. They'd make threats to expose her to the cops, and talk of the "black book," warning that she'd be no better than a common whore. Gradually she would become known to all the guys, and after that to the street thugs. Then, finally, she'd be forced into having sex with a whole gang at a time. On those occasions, two guys would walk out in front with the dejected girl between them, and the others would follow about twenty feet behind, all of them joking loudly, as though they were on their way to a carnival. One thug who was almost always there in the gang was Shmuelkeh Baraban, a short, broad-shouldered guy with a pock-marked face. He was the favourite "hit man" for the younger set of gangsters in town, because he took such pleasure in beating up people.

When a bunch of guys planned a operation like that, it was called "a pact."

Bailka became the victim of one of those pacts. No matter how she twisted and turned she could see no way out of the trap. She was terrified of telling her parents, and of course her handsome sweetheart had vanished. She was abandoned to the streets. Once, Shmuelkeh Baraban tried to force her to take his penis in her mouth. In her fury, she bit off a piece of it. The cops took him to the hospital and that's how Red Zalmon got the news. He went wild with rage, and beat his daughter so that no one could recognize her. Bailka's smiling face was seen no more.

The young fellows didn't take much notice of the loss, or of the drunken Red Zalmon. But they did take the time to make up a little song, which they laughingly hummed around town:

*A knife will stain the foreskin red,  
Let Baika bite it off instead!  
Ay, diddle diddle dum. . . .*

*Translated from the Yiddish by R. Malmquist and Sacvan Bercovitch*

# GRANDMA SLOVA

---

SOLOMON ARY

Beyond the broad paved square where the market ended, between the stone wall and the village booths, their open shutters hung with colored kerchiefs and strings of beads, peasant women sat selling freshly-picked berries. They sat on cushions or on the ground, with white cloths spread out in front of them, and on the cloths mountains of fresh berries, red and black. There every morning my grandma Slova would buy breakfast for all her grandchildren. For me she always bought strawberries, because I loved them best.

Grandma Slova did not wear a wig, as pious women were supposed to do. She kept her light brown hair covered with a kerchief. Her family, you see, were Slonimer Chassidim, a religious sect that protested, in a quiet but stubborn way, against some of the more rigorous orthodox practices of the time. Slova followed the Slonimer traditions. She spoke little, never cursed or quarreled, and I can't remember ever having heard her laugh. Even at weddings, she offered no more than a gentle smile. She never pestered us about religion, and never uttered a word against God.

My grandfather, Slova's husband, died young, and she was left poor, with five children and plenty of worries. When she was sixty, the factory she worked at as a seamstress moved out of Byalistok into a small town nearby. Slova walked the eight kilometers every Monday morning, and slept over all week on sacks of cloth in the factory warehouse. Finally, she found that was too hard for her, especially during the winters. So she stayed home, helped with the housework, and took care of us grandchildren.

She had five children, as I said, three sons and two daughters. Of her two daughters, my mother Malka was most like her, small and fair-skinned, and gentle by nature. My aunt Fayge was more like grandfather. She had dark skin and large dark eyes, and was very pretty. Fayge married a young man named Velvel, from the Caucasus, who had a talent for card-playing. He was good at nothing else, so he grew an



elegant little beard, just like Czar Nikolai's, and travelled around on the trains, making a living at cards.

Slova's eldest son, Avram, saw no future for himself in Russia, and decided to seek his fortune in America. We all went to see him off at the train, and it was the last we saw or heard of him. He vanished without a trace.

The second son, Moishe, became a locksmith. He also became a revolutionary, and got involved in a plot to assassinate one of the Czar's ministers. This was the plan. Four comrades were to stand in wait, each at a different street, where the minister was sure to pass; if for some reason the first man couldn't throw his bomb at the minister, it would be up to the second man, and so forth. As soon as a bomb exploded, the others would make a getaway.

Well, the first bomb went off on target. My uncle, who was the fourth man, ran down to the river, leaped into a boat, rowed out a while, and then threw the bomb overboard. It was all done according to plan, only the peasant who owned the boat caught sight of him and called the police. Moishe was arrested. The Judge sentenced him to death.

Grandma Slova was never one for weeping. She pawned everything she owned, and collected what she could from relatives. Then, through a lawyer, she wrote a letter to Czar Nikolai himself. She begged the Czar to have pity, pleading that her son was barely eighteen, a mere boy who didn't have the sense to understand what he had tried to do. And the Czar showed mercy! The sentence was commuted to life in Siberia.

But Grandma wouldn't rest. She had the lawyer write again to the Czar, the father of all the nations under the protection of the Russian Crown, thanking him a thousand times for his great benevolence, but pointing out that, under the terms of life-imprisonment, she could never see her son again. In the name of her dead husband and all that was holy, she begged him to take pity on her plight, the plight of a poor widowed seamstress, and to help her once more. And once more the sentence was lightened, this time to a twenty-year term in Siberia. But there was to be an end to her letters now — no more pleas accepted.

Well, Moishe served a few years in Siberia, and then the Revolution broke out. Soon after we received a photo of him with his arm around a blond Russian woman. They were both smiling, standing in front of the building where Lenin had called the National Assembly. In the letter he wrote: "This is my wife. We love each other. Now things will be different. Kerensky is out and Lenin is in charge. They will heal my lungs, give me new teeth. All will be well. My worries are over. Long live the Revolution!" But as it turned out the Assembly was divided on the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and Moishe happened to vote against any sort of dictatorship, so he was sent back to Siberia. This time there was no one to appeal to. My uncle was never seen again.

Grandma Slova had now lost two sons. She was afraid, even before

the Bolsheviks came to our town, that her youngest, Itzke, would be taken by one army or the other, and God forbid, killed in the war. She filled a sack with straw, took some blankets, and carried everything up to the "attic," a narrow space just under the roof. She told Itzke, "This is where you must stay until the armies have left."

He took some books, his prayer book and shawl, and settled himself in the attic. There he ate, slept, and hardly stirred for over a month. When he finally crawled out, he felt terrible pains in his legs. Compresses were laid, doctors called, but nothing helped. His legs turned bright red, and hot to the touch. He would never bend them again.

So they had to carry Itzke to bed, and Grandma cared for him. When he felt good, he sang, read, or told stories. He was wonderful to listen to. And how he could play the violin! He'd prop himself up, legs outstretched, with the fiddle under his chin, and pour out melodies. When he felt bad, though, he'd yell at Grandma, cursing her bitterly for all his miseries. She bore this burden without complaint. In her eyes it was a punishment from God.

I last saw Grandma Slova in the train coach which was to carry me to Warsaw en-route to Canada. Everywhere emigrants were saying their goodbyes, people were crying. My own family was bustling all around me, shouting advice, kissing me, wishing me well. I was confused, and somehow unaware of what was really happening. Then my mother said, "Son, you must say goodbye to Grandma." Suddenly I realized, with a rush of emotion, that I'd probably never see them again. Of course, I had no inkling then of what would happen—no premonition that one day the Nazis would march my grandmother, along with my parents and my Uncle Itzke and other Byalistok Jews, into the local synagogue, and set it on fire—but somehow I had the sense that this was our last time together. Grandma Slova was standing at my side, looking at me quietly with her gentle, tired, light brown eyes. No sobs, no tears. She took my hand in hers and stroked my wet cheeks. "God willing," she said, "I'll live to see you again." Then she kissed me lightly, walked to the exit door, remained standing there a few moments, and stepped off the train.

*Translated from the Yiddish by R. Malmquist and Sacvan Bercovitch.*

# CLOUDS FLYING BEFORE THE EYE

*for my grandparents, Hilda & Jeremiah Reede*

HARRY THURSTON

Blue-lipped, laurelled in kelp,  
He levitates through frigid fathoms,  
to find the family riven, exiled  
from the ancestral Island—

*Rub the trunk of the body all over with salt;  
It frequently recover them that seem dead.*

Memory? A grappling hook  
that would snag, dredge up  
God-knows-what flotsam  
from the maelstrom of blood—

*Set the patient under a giant waterfall  
as long as her strength will bear.*

Let slip their boats:  
Christened for wives and children.  
Let slip their hours:  
Occult as lighthouse candles.  
Let slip their love:  
Overboard, its body lost to kin.

Clouds flying before the eye,  
he drifts rudderless in my salt blood;  
One bleary eye, the mark  
of him I bear—

*Take a drachm of powdered betony every morning.  
Or, be electrified.*

Shriven, rocked by a sea-ague,  
Her years were a widow's walk:

She kept watch  
over the empty berth—

*Let two strong men carry the patient upright,  
backward and forward about the room.*

Let slip my tongue, name them:  
Hilda, Jeremiah.  
Let harmonica and fiddle have sway:  
lightfooted in a shanty.  
Let earth cover the eyes:  
out to sea so long.

Italicized passages taken from *Old Settlers' Remedies*, compiled by  
Marion Robertson for the Cape Sable Historical Society.

# RAT PLAYS WITH THE NATIONAL PHILHARMONIC

---

LEIGH FAULKNER

Rat enjoyed biting nipples.

A little man came to Rat:  
"Hail, Brother!" he welcomed.

On the promise of many nipples to bite,  
Rat went with the man.

The orchestra pit was encircled with electrified barbed wire.  
Rat's instrument was fear:  
He frightened women onto the barbed wire;  
when they fell,  
he bit their nipples—  
and if they were particularly tender,  
he would devour entire breasts.

This enraged the little man,  
who demanded greater efficiency:  
"Play!" he screamed at the Rat.

Rat turned his instrument on the man  
and tore open his chest,  
but there was no heart.

Rat ran away and hid,  
overcome by such a strange phenomenon.



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# THE DEAD POET

---

AL PURDY

I was altered in the placenta  
by the dead brother before me  
who built a place in the womb  
knowing I was coming:  
he wrote words on the walls of flesh  
painting a woman inside a woman  
whispering a faint lullaby  
that sings in my blind heart still

The others were lumberjacks  
backwoods wrestlers and farmers  
their women were meek and mild  
nothing of them survives  
but an image inside an image  
of a cookstove and the kettle boiling  
—how else explain myself to myself  
where does the song come from?

Now on my wanderings:  
at the Alhambra's lyric dazzle  
where the Moors built stone poems  
a wan white face peering out  
—and the shadow in Plato's cave  
remembers the small dead one  
—at Samarcand in pale blue light  
the words came slowly from him  
—I recall the music of blood  
on the Street of the Silversmiths

Sleep softly spirit of earth  
as the days and nights join hands  
when everything becomes one thing  
wait softly brother  
but do not expect it to happen  
that great whoop announcing resurrection

expect only a small whisper  
of birds nesting and green things growing  
and a brief saying of them  
and know where the words came from

# LANDSCAPES

---

MARIA LAÍNÁ

## I

White bodies moving  
among  
stone masses,  
children's faces  
walk  
in suspended time  
forsaken  
their eyes,  
burnished metal plates,  
cut the night into small shouts  
as the body presses them.

## II

Dust  
broken teeth  
chemical substances  
life sowed in sand.

## III

The human face is absent  
from its own landscape  
green and booming  
the light puts out  
the eyes  
the body remains exposed  
it sleeps in coiled terror  
awakes aghast in the middle of the night  
and dreams  
a sudden moment  
gives it a face in the eyes of children.  
Fine threads tie it to the surrounding landscape.

#### IV

There are people who do nothing but wait  
They are not poets  
Never have been revolutionaries  
Nor can they attract light to their side  
Now and then a tuft of cloud  
Passes over their heart  
And covers it.

*Translated from the Greek by Yannis Goumas*



# “JESUS WANTS NOTHING MORE TO DO WITH IT”

---

WOLFGANG BORCHERT

He lay cramped in the shallow grave. They were always plenty short so that he had to bend his knees. He felt the icy coldness in his back. He felt it like a little bit of death. He found that the sky was very far away. So horribly far away that one didn't want at all to say anymore, "God is great, God is good." His distance from the earth was horrible. All that blue sky up there did not make the distance seem any smaller. And the ground was so unearthly cold and sullen in its icy stiffness that he lay very cramped in the much too shallow grave. Was one supposed to lie so cramped his whole life long? Oh no, just his whole death long. That was indeed much longer.

Two heads appeared in the sky above the edge of the grave. "Well, how is it, Jesus?" asked the one head, and in so doing let escape from his mouth a white bundle of clouds like a wad of cotton. Jesus thrust out of his two nostrils two thin, equally white cloud pillars and answered: "Good enough, it'll do."

The heads in the sky disappeared. Like smudges they were suddenly wiped away. Without a trace. Only the sky was still there with its horrible distance.

Jesus sat up and the trunk of his body towered out of the grave. From afar he looked as if he were buried up to his stomach. Then he propped his left arm against the edge of the grave and stood up. He stood in the grave and looked sadly at his left hand. In standing up he had again torn open the recently mended finger of his glove. The frozen red finger tip stuck out here. Jesus looked at his glove and became dismayed. He stood in the much too shallow grave, breathed a warm cloud against his bare frozen finger and said softly: "I want nothing more to do with it." "What's wrong?" gaped one of the two who looked at him in the grave. "I want nothing more to do with it," said Jesus once again as softly as before and stuck the cold naked middle finger in his mouth.

"Hear that, Sergeant, Jesus wants nothing more to do with it."

The other, the sergeant, counted the explosive charges in an ammunition box and growled: "How come?" He blew wet clouds out of his mouth at Jesus: "Hey, how come?"

"No," said Jesus still just as softly as ever, "I can't do this any longer." He stood in the grave with his eyes closed. The sun made the snow unbearably white. With his eyes closed he said: "Every day the graves multiply. Every day seven or eight graves. Yesterday even eleven. And every day the people squeezed into the graves which never fit them. Because the graves are too small. And the people are usually frozen, bent and stiff. They crunch so when they are squeezed into these tiny graves. And the ground is so hard and icy and miserable. They're supposed to endure that their whole death long. And I, I can't listen to that crunching any more. It's like crushed glass. Like glass."

"Shut up, Jesus. Get out, get out of that hole. We still have to make five graves." The cloud from the mouth of the sergeant fluttered angrily away toward Jesus. "No," he said and thrust two fancy cloud pillars out of his nose, "No." He spoke very softly and with his eyes closed: "The graves are just too shallow. When spring comes the bones stick up out of the ground everywhere. When it thaws. Everywhere the bones. No I don't want that any more. No, no. And always me. Always I'm supposed to lie down in the grave to see if it is suitable. Always me. I've started dreaming about it. That's horrible for me, you know, that I'm always the one who's supposed to try out the graves. Always me. Always me. After a while a person starts having dreams about it. That's horrible for me, that I'm always supposed to climb into the graves." He clambered out of the shallow grave and took four steps over to a dark heap. The heap consisted of dead men. They were twisted as if they had been taken by surprise in a confused dance. Jesus laid his pickaxe softly and carefully beside the heap of dead men. He could have just thrown the pickaxe down, the pickaxe wouldn't have harmed anything. But he laid it down softly and carefully, as though he didn't want to bother or awaken anyone. For God's sake don't wake anyone. Not just out of respect, but also out of fear. Out of fear. For God's sake don't wake anyone. Then he took off through the crunching snow for the village, past the other two as if they weren't even there. Repulsively, the snow crunched that same way, quite exactly that same way. He raised his feet and stilted like a bird through the snow in order to lessen the crunching.

Behind him the sergeant screamed: "Jesus! You come back here immediately! I'm giving you an order! You come back to work immediately!" The sergeant screamed, but Jesus did not look back. He stilted like a bird through the snow, like a bird, in order to lessen the crunching. The sergeant screamed—but Jesus did not look back. Only his hands made a motion as he said: "Softly, softly! For God's sake don't wake anyone! I don't want that anymore. No. No. Always me. Always

me." He became ever smaller, smaller, until he disappeared behind a snowdrift.

"I'll have to report him." The sergeant made a wet cottony bundle of clouds in the icy air. "It's clear, I must report him. That is refusal of duty. We both saw it, and he is gone. I must report him."

"And what do you suppose they'll do with him?" grinned the other. "Nothing much. Nothing much at all." The sergeant wrote a name in his notebook. "Nothing. The old man will order him to report to his office. The old man has always gotten a kick out of Jesus. He bawls him out so that he won't eat or say anything for a couple of days and lets him go. Then he is alright again for a while. But I still have to report him. Even though the old man likes him. And the graves must be made, too. Someone must get in to see whether they are suitable. That doesn't help anything."

"How did he get to be called Jesus?" grinned the other. "Oh, there's no reason. I guess the old man named him that because he looked so gentle. The old man thought he looked so gentle. Since then his name is Jesus. But of course," said the sergeant and made another explosive charge ready for the next grave, "I must report him, for the graves indeed must be."

*Translated from the German by Eric J. Campfield.*

# CHOPPING ONIONS

---

ALDEN NOWLAN

Doing something, anything,  
perhaps chopping onions,  
you're suddenly reminded of  
somebody and perhaps you  
smile as I do, thinking of  
the friend who introduced me  
to pepperoni and chopped  
onion in a hotdog roll  
and who, in turn, had been  
given his first taste  
of this by a friend who had  
been taught to like it  
by his wife, an Italian.  
I could make a list,  
so could you, of little  
things we do that evoke  
such memories. And there's  
more to it, far more  
to it, than merely being  
reminded of a friend,  
although that would be  
enough, more than  
enough. Sitting down to eat,  
I become a part of an  
infinite line of people  
touching hands. Somebody who  
died in Calabria long before  
I was born shares his lunch  
with me. It's like Christ passing  
his disciples the bread.

## TWO DEPICTIONS ON A TOMBSTONE

---

DHÍMITRA HRISTODHOÚLOU

- I mourn you, my girl.  
—Not me.  
    My red pigtails.
- The sparrows seek crumbs.  
—Not they.  
    The hungry, stony winter.

## SONG OF MANI

---

DHÍMITRA HRISTODHOÚLOU

He met his death and deliverance  
The hero, the blessed lad  
Who was to bring the spoils of virtue.  
I'm told the moon torments him  
With a maelstrom of sea numerals.  
And in the likeness of the meek he is sorely grieved.  
Come, full-breasted woman,  
Cherish the kid of death.

*Translated from the Greek by Yannis Goumas*



# WHAT HE SAW

---

MYLER WILKINSON

Frank died here. You knew this place, remembered it just the way it was 30 years ago the morning you found his body lying on the rocks down below. You were 20 years old and you knew it was a mistake, it shouldn't have been Frank, wouldn't have been, if you had gone with him the night before.

It was nearing sunset and you had already made the last night's camp when he decided to use up the last few frames in his camera. You almost got up to go then but it had been a long day and he didn't seem too anxious to have you along anyway.

So you stayed back at the fire with the others. Frank's father, his brother and a mutual friend and you drank the rum and water in the quiet knowledge that your time was up and tomorrow morning it would be a two hour hike along an easy trail to the cars. You had been in the bush four days, long enough to get away from whatever drove you in the city and to begin to miss it again.

His father had organized it all; a kind of last gathering before Frank went back to university. He would have been an engineer if he had lived two more years. This was 1951, the year Frank died. A big part of you goes out when a friend like that dies but maybe you don't know it at that age. It only hits you a lot later, in your forties probably, when someone else who was along on that trip, a mutual friend, suddenly bows out with a heart attack. The friend looked fine that last time you saw him, maybe two years ago now, in the bar of a downtown hotel. You met them like that, people from your past, on the street, in the corridors of a department store, but most often in a bar.

He was with a very young, very good looking brunette who suffered the intrusion of your past in pained silence. You knew he and Beverly had divorced four or five years ago but you hadn't followed his form since. It looked like he was into his second wind.

There had been two kids before it went to pieces; they would be 15 or 16 years old now. You shook hands, pretended you were thrilled, but knew there was nothing between you except the past.

He was doing goddamned great on the stock market, you heard his lips repeating; something about money, a place in the British Properties and of course the girl, or ones like her. She was maybe 25 years old, an opaque sea undisturbed either by a wrinkle or a word. At this stage of life the story was becoming familiar. A girl friday you heard him say. She can keep accounts and type too. You nodded. What could you say to that?

He asks you about yourself and you wish he hadn't. No, you don't have the farm anymore, moved off five years ago, "nobody wants eggs these days"; he laughs remembering the eggs you stole together as kids from the university agricultural centre. Cracked them on the sidewalk before you got home so mom would believe you bought them at the Chinaman's. That's how you learned about economics. "It's the same in the market today," he says, "the same damn principle. Sell them cracks; pocket the difference."

"I'm in real estate now," you tell him.

"Isn't everyone?" he says and you slap each other on the back.

And finally it ends as you expected. He gives you that broad, creased leather and ivory smile that signifies absolutely nothing and says: "Well say hello to the wife and kids for me, how are they doing?"

"Fine, fine, we have four now," you hear yourself saying as you turn to go but not before taking one last look at the perfect mannikin that sits at his side, trying not to make comparisons but failing. He forgets you before your back is turned and you would have done the same except that occasionally you see his name in the news, connected with a faintly scandalous, but always profitable, stock transaction. This man is a success you are told.

Then one day you're leafing through the paper and a tiny headline at the bottom of the last page leaps out at you. City broker dies suddenly of heart attack, it says.

This doe-eyed girl wakes up in the morning on satin sheets thinking of her hair, her make up, anything but him, and she looks across the bed and he's cold, already gone. The cholesterol has been plugging his heart for years, like silt at the end of a sea run river. You remember the last time you saw him in the bar, and the young thing with the great body, and you seem to remember a sadness there, a frantic premonition. You're 48 now and it is 1980; you see the flab beginning to hang. Frank went out before he had to look at such things. It was 30 years ago and why would you think of it now except that this guy you met in a downtown bar one night was a mutual friend, had been out on that trip too, except that he was one of the living, like yourself. Married, divorced, family; he was part of your future. And now he has knocked something out of you, a hole in the pit of your stomach that takes you straight back to that trip and the three of you still alive. Maybe all of you had to go over the cliff but Frank was the first. No explaining could make it right

then. Maybe that's why you are out on this cliff face now, by yourself this time, sifting through the same rocks that were here then for the answers to a question you don't even know how to ask.

He would have seen this view at sunset. The days were still clear and warm but the nights were crystal and already had the hard edge of autumn in them. The slightest sound banged off the mountains and thoughts in this atmosphere were as clear as the outline of your own body in the chill air. It wasn't the kind of season you made a mistake like that in.

Frank would have seen the loose rock and known he was close to the edge. You maybe, your mutual friend probably, but not Frank. You had to give him that. Even after 30 years it still nagged at you, made you wonder what really happened.

Death by misadventure. What the hell did that mean? A mistake, pure and simple, his foot slipped, he lost his balance. You couldn't believe it then and you didn't believe it now. When you told the investigator that he just wrote it down and asked you in a flat disinterested voice, "How do you know?" And then you knew how it would come out. You bit your lip and held it back. You couldn't tell him what you knew inside, what you believed beyond the mere facts. You didn't believe in much anymore, nobody did, but if Frank went out on a stupid mistake then you might as well turn out the lights on the whole human race and pull the sheets over their heads.

You tried very hard to remember the night he came up here. The rest of you were sitting around the camp fire listening to your voices break through the stillness as the sun went down fast and took the light with it.

There was maybe an hour's twilight left when Frank decided to take the pictures. Weight shifted as the balance of the circle was broken, someone tossed a twig into the fire, it must have been Frank's old man, and you heard his boots crushing over the loose rocks.

"Don't get lost," your mutual friend cried after him. You remembered a stupid thing like that after 30 years. Frank didn't answer. He would be back in less than an hour and what was left of the rum would be waiting for him. You retreated then into your own thoughts. The others' voices were somewhere across from you. Small talk about the trip. "The fishing was damn good, could have used another day, well the old lady gets nervous when I'm not around. Next year . . . Yeh, next year."

And so the fire burned down and the air began to pinch your skin before anyone thought to think of Frank. Darkness had crept up on the land and now you could just see the others' eyes as they flashed off nervously toward the trees. It should have been time to turn in without a worry and sleep like maybe you wouldn't get a chance to for a long time to come.

"It isn't the best time to be in the woods," someone said and was answered with a few worried grunts. You remembered standing up stiff-



legged and shivering uncontrollably, like a dog just out of the water, and realizing with a shock just how cold it was. Logs were piled on the fire in the off chance he might see the light and wander in out of the darkness. The night swirled around your camp in shapes that could almost be touched and within the circle of the firelight shadows jumped up and licked crazily at your faces.

"We'll go out in pairs, but never beyond sight of the fire," his father said. So you did it, maybe getting scratched and confused and finally bruised when you went over a deadfall. All the time you were calling his name: Frank, Frank, and it was echoed back at you with more force than when it left your lips and you knew with a sinking feeling that if he saw the fire he could get back as easily as any one of you. It was useless but you did it because you had to do something, couldn't just sit there, waiting.

While you were stumbling around in the dark you thought of his father who thought, must have thought, this would do some good; who kept going round and round through the bush calling his name until you had to take hold of him and lead him back to camp. He cried on the way back to camp, quietly and to himself as if you didn't exist.

And you thought of Frank, still believing he was out there somewhere with his heart beating calmly, maybe waiting it out on a bed of pine needles. You thought you would see him come walking in through the mist at first light. Before you went to bed that morning and tried unsuccessfully to rest for the few hours until dawn, you saw their faces. The old man was broken, just sat there until someone took him to bed, and when you told the others Frank would be here in the morning they turned their faces away into the shadows and said nothing.

This was where he came to that night. From the edge of the cliff edge, granite polished a pearl gray, he would have seen the dark firs stretched out along the spine of the mountain as it rose, slowly and majestically to its ultimate height some half dozen miles away. The drop was 60 feet straight down into the teeth of a splintered and shorn rock slide. A person would have two or three seconds to realize his carelessness, to justify his life in the interval before his guts were ripped out on the rocks below. The trees behind the cliff were silent as the day it happened. They had seen everything, knew the secret and kept it for 30 years. It had taken you three days in the mountains to get this close to the edge.

It wasn't so bad in the mornings, you had work to do, fish were waiting in the stream, maybe a doe and its fawn came down to drink; but the evenings were bad. You heard it in the wind that whistled over the rock faces and in the roar of the stream as it slipped past. The memories were real enough to reach out and touch.

There were still fish in the stream but they were smaller than you

remembered them and they bit at anything as if they were ravenous to escape the water. You didn't envy them their existence in a world they were so frantic to escape. You kept the ones that were large enough to eat and threw the rest back. Frank and you had fished half a day for three fish but none of them weighed under two pounds; they were wily and did not come to the line easily. You remembered how satisfied you had been with just a few hard fish. Something had changed; they practically attacked you now. At night you fried them over the fire, maybe opened a can of corned beef, then afterwards brewed a pot of coffee and drank it half-and-half with the rum. You found yourself looking behind your back into the darkness half expecting to see Frank walk in from the woods, sit down, and take up a drink. You shook your head then and knew it was time to put the cap on the bottle and turn in.

A heart attack you could accept, there was no volition in it. The lines got plugged, the heart stopped and you were dead. A ridiculous way to go but it didn't eat at you. You might go that way yourself. It was the right season for it.

Frank didn't make it in the morning. They all admitted it to themselves then, that is, everyone but you. The old man was making coffee when the tears started, silent and as big as rain drops on a pond. You all waited, pretending it wasn't happening, waiting for a word from the old man to get started. Finally he pulled himself together, drew a rough sleeve across watery eyes and got up.

"Let's go find him," he said.

You weren't the one to find Frank. You had been spared that, as if the certainty of his death must first come through an intermediary who already believed in it.

It was about 10 in the morning, you could smell pine needles and the day's heat was still struggling with the shadows under the trees when the other group spotted him. You heard the call and could not mistake it. They were standing at the cliff edge, the old man and Frank's brother, as you broke through the bush. Down below on the rocks was the flattened form, legs bent at impossible angles, arms in close to the body, and you knew it was Frank and he had gone over the edge right where you were standing now.

"That's Frank," his father said, "let's take him in." Something wasn't right about it, you knew that, even as you half crawled down the face with the rope cinched around your waist. There were no loose rocks on the edge of the cliff. It was solid granite. To go over you either had to take the step, be pushed or be awfully careless. You kept turning it over in your mind and there were only three ways it could have happened; none of them any good. Accident, murder and suicide in a descending order of improbability you told yourself, except that you had already discounted the first. It was too easy, let everyone off the hook; the police,



Frank, yourself and the murderer if there was one, and finally it was wrong. You told yourself again that Frank wasn't that careless. But the police bought it, and the family as far as you knew, and the public. It made simple sense but it was crap.

Murder; when you first saw him lying there 30 years ago the thought more than crossed your mind. You found yourself looking into the bushes 15 feet from the cliff edge. You felt a pair of eyes boring into your back as you teetered on the edge and if you could only look around fast enough would see them glowing with hatred in the dark. It might even be half way to you already, dark hands outstretched to deliver the final jolt. You felt those eyes on you now, 30 years later, the only living soul privy to the secret, and you glanced back quickly with your heart leaping out of your chest but there was nothing there, just a faint evening breeze ruffling the brush. There were 12 inches between you and the fall; the rocks blurred softly in the gloomy twilight but you turned back and were still alive. Your heart was pounding. Death was that close, a heartbeat away.

When you got down to Frank and saw his opaque, half closed eyes and the fingers of his left hand still hopelessly clenched onto a rock, you wouldn't allow yourself to think of suicide. It was there nagging at the back of your mind but you wouldn't let it surface. You saw only the calm grey eyes, the great solid strength and knew he couldn't have done it to himself or to you this way. At 20 you didn't know enough reasons to justify it, didn't realize that fear is the only thing that holds most of us back at one time or another.

The death had not been a good one. He had some time to think about the life that was oozing out of his smashed body. Maybe he heard your voice calling his name in the night and knew he was a dead man, that you wouldn't find his body until morning. You hoped he kept his mind in the last hour of his life, that he hadn't dragged himself over the rocks in an unconscious reflex that reached out for life but didn't know it. You wanted to tell yourself that Frank wasn't deprived of those last moments—the ones that come just before death when the body relaxes and the struggle goes out of it. You hoped he had his eyes open and the cool wind was blowing when he crossed over to the other side.

It made your heart sick to see the struggle. He had crawled out of his own blood, maybe five feet, and whatever thoughts crossed his mind in that dark journey, whatever pride, it was all carried to the grave with him. He had crawled five feet in the silence of death, with your voices calling his name after him, and he had his head down on the only soft piece of sand in a hundred yards and then he died.

You couldn't understand then why a man might want to die. At 48 maybe you did. Maybe looking over this cliff down at the rocks was too inviting and maybe you pulled away out of nothing more than laziness

or habit. Too many lies and too many handshakes later you knew that it could never happen too fast, that it was the waiting around that really killed you. At 20 you hadn't known, maybe just had an inkling every time you looked into Frank's grey eyes. His wasn't the soul to bear that kind of loneliness or self-deceit.

You kept thinking about a heart attack with some mindless teenage stranger lying in bed beside you. She went to the bathroom and put on her make up before she called the police. That was dead. Dead years before the ticker gave up on you. Frank left you before you started avoiding mirrors because of what you saw in them. He died in the year when the fish were still hard and smart and fought you to the shore, and when you finally brought them in you knew you had something, not a bag of guts begging to die.

Tonight at camp you would sit and listen to the roar of the water, to the track of the wind as it broke over the rocks and you would drink the bottle and try to forget what half a century had taught you. Tomorrow it was a short walk down an easy trail to the car and then out.

# I NEVER WANTED THIS TO HAPPEN

---

DANNY FEENEY

Why didn't you tell me about the smell?  
Why didn't you warn me of the heavy viscous residue  
clotting fast on my moist places?  
When I sit in the library, a pungent darkness  
black as hemorrhage, grows from me like mold.  
My clothes throw shadows thicker than heat or rain.  
Long condemned, my room has collapsed into pure reeking mass.  
Behind me, a grotesque cumulus cloud billows sluggishly  
over the city straining against destitution.  
People die of it. The heady stench  
drowns out their throaty terrors  
in speechless asphyxiation.

And then  
the massive precipitations of sludge —  
huge excremental heave and glop holocaust.

I never wanted this to happen.  
I was running to avoid it, thinking:  
    there is an arid country  
    of bloodless stasis  
    where, if you stand erect  
        complete and motionless and naked  
    the entire universe, for a moment  
    must hold its dry breath

# PIONEERING DON'T PAY

---

JOHN LOWRY

We were sitting around, arguing and throwing stuff when Benny had an idea. He'd swim to Connecticut!

We got excited. I got him swim trunks, goggles and a can of grease. Harry found his father's outboard and swiped a boat from his aunt. We drove to the Sound, yelling and singing.

The water was flat and blue. Benny swam beside the boat. I read the charts. Harry counted the miles. Every once in a while, we stopped and gave Benny some beer and cheese.

'Isn't this fun?' Benny said.

'Great,' we said.

Five miles off Connecticut, he waved and went down.

We made circles, yelling his name, but he was gone. The Coast Guard came, but he was gone.

We went home. Benny's mother fell like a board. His girl-friend pulled out big clumps of hair. We sat around, looking down at our hands. Then I had an idea.

'Hey,' I said, jumping up. 'Ice cream in town. Last one pays!'

We bolted for the street, pushing, tripping each other, screaming like Indians.

## THE SUN

---

JUNZABURO NISHIWAKI

The countryside of Karumogine produces marble  
I spent one summer there  
Neither skylarks nor snakes were to be seen  
Only the sun came up from a blue orchard of damson  
And went down into an orchard of damson  
A boy laughed as he seized a dolphin in the brook

## HAND

---

JUNZABURO NISHIWAKI

The spirit's artery snapped      God's film snapped  
When I grope for the darkness of lips  
    taking the hand of a ghostly air  
    which dreams through the withered timber  
A honeysuckle reaches out  
    making a rock fragrant  
    and killing a forest  
A hand reaching for the bird's neck and the dusk of gems  
In this dreaming hand  
Lies Smirna's dream  
A burning rose bush

*Translated from the Japanese by Hosea Hirata*



## STAVROGIN'S FAREWELL

---

JÁNOS PILINSZKY

"I'm bored. My cape, please.  
Before you commit anything,  
consider the rose garden,  
a single rose bush rather,  
or one rose, gentlemen."

## STAVROGIN'S RETURN

---

JÁNOS PILINSZKY

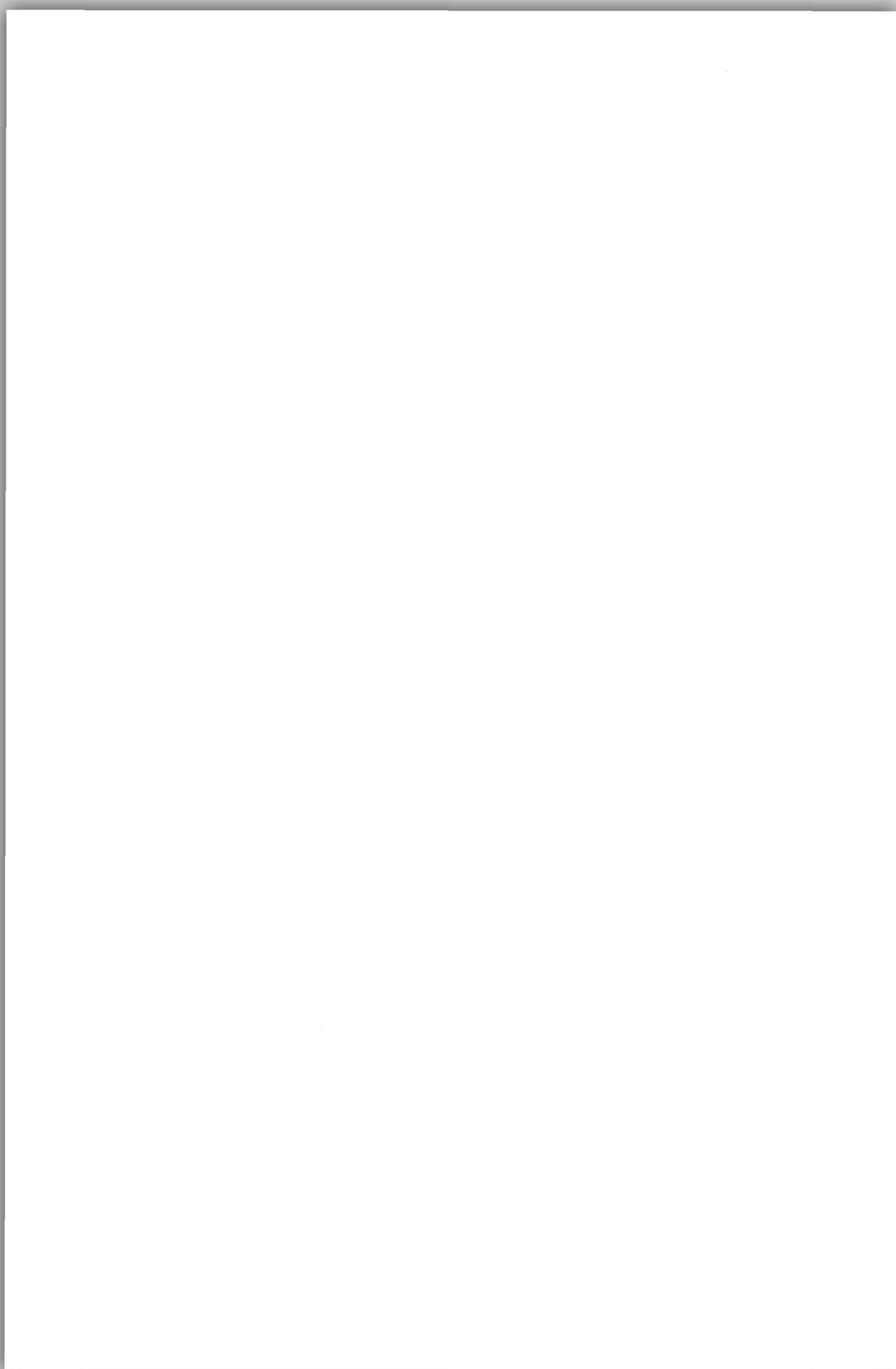
"You have not considered the rose garden,  
and you've committed what is forbidden.

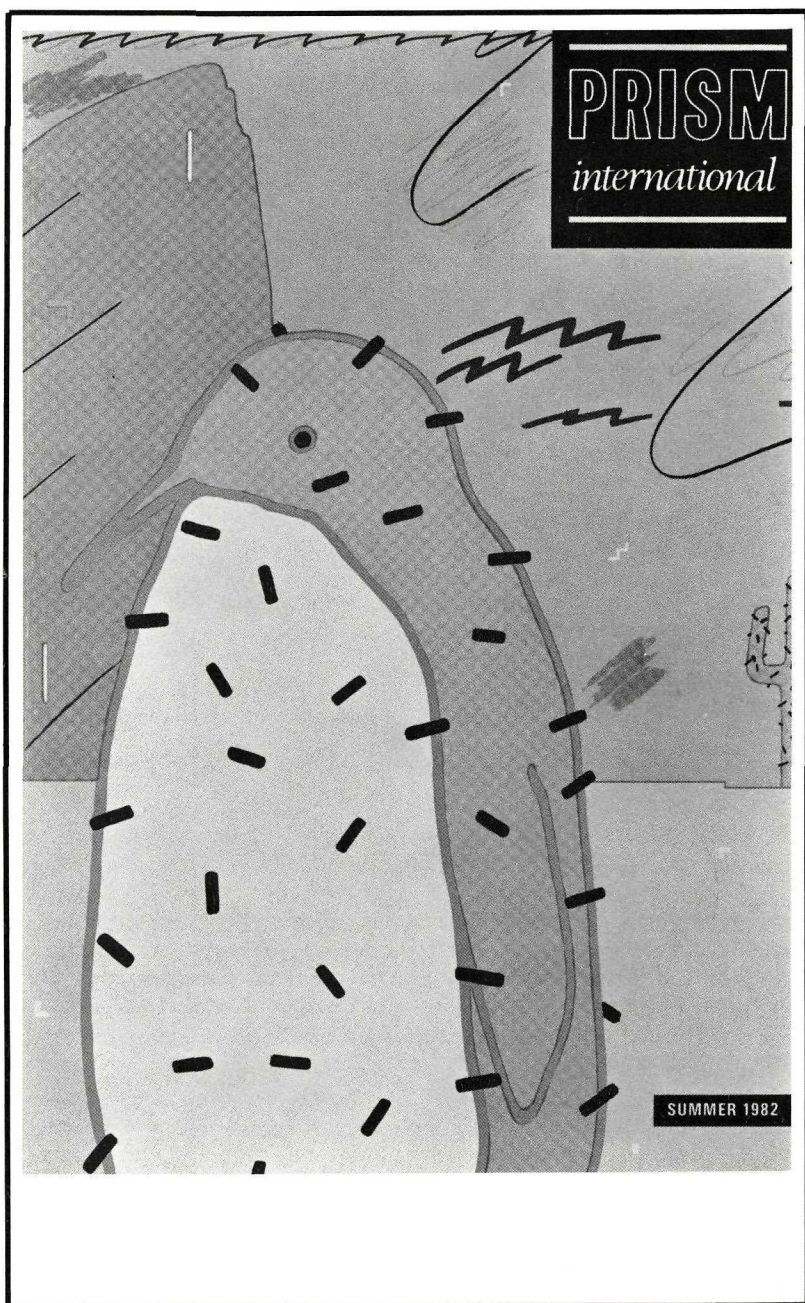
"From now on you shall be persecuted  
and solitary, like the butterfly hunter.  
Get under the glass, all of you.

"Under the glass, pinned by the point of the needle,  
shining, a bivouac of butterflies shining.  
You are shining, gentlemen.

"I'm frightened. My cape, please."

*Translated from the Hungarian by Jascha Kessler*





1981-1982

# TRAIN

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MICHAEL KENYON

Angela, an only child, is en-route by train to *X* where her father is in hospital having suffered a number of strokes, the last of which has rendered him bedridden. At this moment she is passing through a sparsely wooded valley just east of *Y*. On the north ridge of the valley, visible from the north-facing train windows, is a bluff which looks south toward the clattering train. The bluff is intersected by a barbed wire fence running west to east on which hang Private Property signs. This is the exact location where, some months before Angela's birth, her parents say goodbye for the last time.

They meet, as arranged, beside the penguin pit at the zoo, on the outskirts of *Y*. From here, they walk to a bluff overlooking the valley and the town. The bluff is intersected by a barbed wire fence.

The two figures break from an embrace and I lose my balance. I fall backwards against the barbed wire. The early sun catches the right side of your face; your eyes are lowered.

You walked down through the trees and followed the tracks to the station in the village of *Y*. It is rumoured that he followed her to the station and that they said their last farewell on the steps, or even on the platform itself. It is also rumoured that they took their final parting some months later at the large central station in the city of *Z*—he had learned she was to leave that night for a distant part of the country. That, amid porters and tired children, he tried one last time to convince her of the importance of their staying together, especially now with the baby coming.

Coming out of a dream or moving into a tunnel, he hears a voice. Seconds pass before he recognizes the soft say-so of the Haida Indian who pushes his wheelchair through the dead leaves. He's in North America and it's autumn or early winter. The Haida is saying, *You have a good family, three, four members?* As he wheels me through the damp woods,



the train begins to wail by. Just before the culminating blast, three faces pose in the window of the sixteenth car, pale young girls. I try to say something. It's not hard: my tongue moves, my lips frame the words, the roar of the train does not drown them.

The three nurses were watching me from the hospital window, two pretty, and one thin and plain. The former had their arms akimbo, the other pressed her palms against the plate glass which bulged and shone in the sunlight. The Indian gardener was burning a pile of leaves; the right side of his face was flame red. Your eyes watch me struggle with the barbed wire; a birthmark covers the right hemisphere of your face, the eyes are bloodshot; it appears you have been crying. I remember we had been laughing. The thin nurse had pushed me back into my wheelchair and we were poised for a moment, laughing together. As the barbs dug deeper, a train whistle is heard and the girl with the birthmark tells me we must go back inside, it's lunchtime. It so happens that we have said goodbye. She walks down through the trees, into the valley, past the hospital where a gardener is burning leaves. I watch until you pass out of sight and are in my arms again on Platform A. I watch until it gets cold and the nurse again comes to fetch me in. I watch until the smoke hides the sun, the trestle and the train; hides your face, framed by hands against the window of the twenty-third car. Yours is the only face for the whole length of the train: pale and thin, motionless. The late sun catches the left side of your face. She was watching me close my eyes.

With closed eyes beside the rushing train, he finds time to notice details: the station dissolves into the wooded valley. (I'm standing on the platform.) He's sitting on a high, sparsely-treed ridge; far below, the trestle and embankment quake. With wrists behind his back, he is propped against a barbed wire fence. Two barbs wound his neck and shoulder. The other barbs in contact with the back of his corduroy shirt are at too obtuse an angle to penetrate. He has no wheelchair: his own hands grip the outer silver wheels which would drive the rubber wheels crackling over dry leaves on the hard path beside the fence. He can't move. At every effort, the barbs dig deeper into his neck and shoulder, tearing the skin a little. Sleep has long been denied him, his eyes are closed, he cannot waken. He has a cycle of nightmares, a child's dream of a black train coming out of a tunnel.

They won't give me my teeth; I am waiting for someone I love. I've not opened my eyes for some time. The nurse says I'm obstinate. Periodically, I'm fed slops and soft fruit by spoon, even the coffee by spoon. Not an appealing sight, I'm sure. I can imagine my folded wheelchair leaning against the wall, under the window, across from the bed. Other, electric chairs, hum by. The bed rises and falls. A paper is pressed into my



hand; I'm told it is a letter, but in my hand it's paper. And yet I cry out, or perhaps just sigh, it's difficult to tell anymore. I suck my gums and feel large drops of water running down my cheeks. Each day I am shaved and washed. It's how I recognise a new day.

You've been gone so long that I've slept into this room with its large imitation windows; grown used to the various events of the day, subtle changes of light, I propel myself, or am propelled, from the door to the windows, from the windows to the door. Sometimes I collide with the bed. Yesterday I was raped, it came as no surprise, like the rain; it always rains; it was raining when I first closed my eyes, or first tried to open them, I forget which. The nurses and doctors chat together. I hear much talk of flooding. But yesterday is nonsense; I was not raped and it never rains. All the banter is of somewhere else.

Meanwhile, I'm feeding the unreal penguins on the unreal beach, dreaming myself as an object far away. You carry part of me, but it's none of your business. Until you come back I'm lost, but it's nothing to do with you. I found this room long ago, with its view of buses, railway ties, moss on trees, flooded fields.

I remember asking you to hurt me. I said, I must be the one to suffer, since I do it so well. That's a laugh. I said, I will forget about myself and wait for you and not know how long to wait. I must tell you, the suffering didn't last long. When I first met Angela, I'd been married for years; my wife had been dead for years; I even have a grandson. Angela's much too old to call me Dad. You've got years left, Dad, she tells me. Makes me smile. Well, perhaps I can live for awhile, even without my teeth.

It had begun to rain the night before. We ran through puddles with your luggage up the steps of the central station. In the vast inside, between the trains and the street, we kissed goodbye. I could've waited with you for another hour, but you'd made up your mind to leave; prolonging the goodbye, you said, would be miserable. I felt you had already left. At the exit, I turned and waved. I should have run back and at least embraced you again. I thought afterwards that I should've stayed the hour. But now my eyes open and I can't see the edge, any edge, so it's easy to think such things. My fingers on the bed railings are weak; not the fingers that traced light circles around each of your breasts in the cold hotel room that morning while the rain poured outside. We ate honeydew in the bathtub and turned all the burners up on the gas stove to warm the room. I went back to bed and sat smoking while you walked around the room wearing nothing.

I dream about penguins. Only consciously can I constitute your face,

starting with the eyes, lowered. Each added detail brings a memory. I say to the nurse, *A long time ago I stopped trying to forget her, now it's a struggle to remember her.* I say to Angela, *You're just like your mother. I remember your eyes.*

We are young and I'm waiting for you at the zoo and it's stopped raining. We are to meet by the penguins. I'm early and only a few people walk around the cages. A little boy asks if I've had a good sleep. My eyes close again against the red sun. When you arrive, we sit together on the bench beside the cement pit. I say I'm thinking of what it would be like to live with you; a penguin raises his wings, tilts back his head, squawks. I'd get used to your body. A father reads the sign to his daughter—she's just emptied her popcorn into the pool—Do Not Feed The Penguins. I'd dream of our child. Penguins have a special diet, he explains, leading her away.

She comes to visit me from time to time. She feeds me with a spoon and pushes me around the gardens, trying to make me open my eyes. She dries my cheeks with the edge of her blouse or a handkerchief, before she leaves me on the bench just inside the zoo. Sometimes I remain there all night. In the morning, the keeper finds me and bathes and shaves my face, raises and lowers the bed, dresses me then lifts me to my wheelchair. Ah, a new day. I sit in the corridor, composing your face and singing *Ich bin die fesche Lola*.

I awake prone, my arms and legs spread wide, a rhythmic pain at the anus. A grunting body thrust furiously on top of me. Opening my eyes, just a fraction, not struggling, I see moss on a tree outside the window. A train motionless in the station. On Platform A beside a pile of decaying ties, the Station Master looks at his watch. Three nurses hum by and a boy in Scout uniform asks if I have slept well. I throw the thawed herring into the penguin pit and look up. I recognize you even at this distance. Stuffing your letter back into my pocket, I run to meet you. The paper blows along the platform and falls over the edge; it lands between two ties just this side of the rails. Standing beside your luggage, we embrace; your eyes are lowered; over your shoulder, I see a man with a brown case, hurrying toward us. You turn as the penguins, one by one, dive into the water. Outside the hotel room it's raining and your body seems slick in the light through the streaming glass: he's caressing the inside of your thighs with his lips, now with his heavy body. As I close my eyes, I'm supine and his weight is the weight of the bed at my back, the bed is raised and a spoon nudges at my lips.

I do not believe in trains black and rushing beside the ditch into town, far below the fence against which I have fallen.

The path through the trees where the crows yell gleams in the dawn light. A mist rises where the train rushes. A breeze chills the skin through the rent in my corduroy shirt.

Further along, the ditch and the fence stop, and shops and the first sidewalks appear through the fog. The first pedestrians ignore the train whistle. In *Y* each shop window is lit. A bell rings as I go into the station; as I go into the station, a boy scout passes me. He closes his mouth after saying something I do not quite catch.

I near the station, carry a brown suitcase. Later, my body lies cold on the wood ties, bound with thin cord between the rails. Later still, I pretend to insert myself where I already am: watching you walking the tracks, wearing a white tulle dress.

I'm blind. The view from the hospital bed is neither the view from the bluff, nor the view from the moving train. The girl on the train has been warned of her father's condition.

The train shakes the texture of white linen, the scuffle of dry leaves, the clink of a spoon on the cup's rim. The old man is raised up in bed; he hears water splash in the basin, presently feels warm fingers along his chin. The young man watches the Haida gardener perform his tasks in the larger gardens attached to the rich peoples' houses on the outskirts of *Y*. The zoo keeper stands on the beach looking for his cages. You are not tied to the tracks, but I am lashed between the rails. You wear a white tulle dress with the top buttons undone, I do not wear the corduroy shirt with a rip in the collar and a larger rip at the shoulder, which I tore when I fell against the barbed wire fences. Because I'm waiting for the train, because the train is always present, I didn't feel the cold; your breasts were exposed and yet still not cold.

The three nurses watched the train pass. They told me they noticed, though not all at the same moment, the pale face of a young woman in the fourteenth car. The face pressed to the glass seemed to be silent or sighing. You do not feel the cold of the rails because you are between them. *It's not at all cold, Dad. It's quite warm, really. Beautiful outside: the sun's shining.* I feel the grass touch my back where the shirt's torn open; the wood ties are damp, but I only notice the cold at last, the final addendum. On the bluff the young man falls against the. Fade.

The barbs dig deeper. Jump.

Angela watches as I open my eyes. Fade.



Beside the bed she grasps her father's hand. A nurse with a birthmark covering the entire right side of her face enters pushing a silver trolley which she places close to the bed. The girl and the nurse exchange the usual remarks concerning the train journey, the old man, the condition of his skin, his refusal to see, his recurring dream which seems to involve three nurses, a young and an old man, a young woman, a Haida Indian gardener, a zoo keeper. *His other family never visit*, confides the nurse. I try to tell Angela: The nurse says that I've been singing Marlene Dietrich songs in the corridor, but that may still be part of the dream. The nurse kneels at the foot of the bed and adjusts the controls: the silver handle on her right, four revolutions counterclockwise; the silver handle on her left, seven revolutions clockwise, then half a turn back.

As the barbs dig deeper, a train whistles and the girl walks down the slope of the hill to where a gardener is raking leaves just inside a low garden hedge. He now has a pile four feet high. She stops at his side. He says he plans to ignite the leaves shortly. They chat about the usual things: the slow postman, the infrequent buses: not remarkable in a rural place like *Y*. The gardener says: *You have a good family? Three members, four members?* They are silent as the train begins to wail by.

Angela learned that her father was dying and of his apparent blindness when a piece of paper unfolded on the kitchen table beside the yellow handled breadknife with which she slits the envelope neatly open, takes out the sheet of typewritten paper, smooths it out and, as before, appears to read the symbols on the page: the hospital crest, the address in the town of *X*, the date. Her fingers allow the paper to slip back onto the table, to rest lightly on the wood surface.

Through the window can be seen a hedge of green leaves, a child's red tricycle lying on its side.

At the station, she buys a ticket and prepares to board the train; on the platform, she's harassed by a man carrying a brown suitcase who insists that he knows she'll leave, but he's prepared to stand the torture her departure engenders. Tears stream down his face.

He explains the dimensions of his love and how he will wait for her. She quickly boards the train. How he has dreamed of the child they will have. You boarded the train and took a seat beside a window overlooking the platform at the precise point about to be crossed by the man who explains the dimensions of his love. The platform empties in preparation; you wave goodbye to the single figure; you note the sign *Z Central* as the train gathers speed; you pass another station sign, *Y*. The man is

leaning back against the barbed wire fence.

Angela's face, framed by her hands pressed to the window of the fourteenth car, is very white.

I'm not on the platform, not in the ward, with closed eyes, not feeling the spoon nudge at my lips.



# THE TEMPTATION

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from *Amantes* (women lovers)

NICOLE BROSSARD

67

I succumbed to all the visions  
seduced, surface, series and serious  
in all mobility and landscapes  
concentrated on each episode  
territory and cheek. masked/unmasked:  
*hors d'espace* or full of intonations  
in the climate delirious around  
all the figures, aerial  
in the use of glaze and phrase.

68

I succumbed to the fury, the cities  
and the etchings/come/the  
conversation in snatches, in the open  
the entire palm imprint of slowness  
and reality transforms its lynx  
eyes of identity which motivate  
all the resources the tongue braids  
existence by dint of constant courses  
and breath within the limits of the possible  
of the tolerable blindly: feeling

69

I succumbed to the clear vision  
of vegetation and events  
of early morning, in the privileges of light  
because the authentic body spine of fire  
has shown its tongue as it  
was then tangible and tango  
very vivid for the eyes/of the inside

70

I succumbed to the temptation as  
one enters the circuit of gestures  
ensuring survival, conquest  
smile and fusion of fictions  
the night come when the wick  
our foreheads remember the most delightful  
delinquencies, the hand is moved a bit  
so that before our eyes opens up  
the agile memory of girls from utopia  
moving in italics  
or in a fresco towards all the issues

71

I succumbed to the impression and instantaneous  
one and the other — — — — life mobilizes itself  
with the fine ardour of women showing forth  
their vertigo and the two there  
dizzy *sur terre* turning seized suddenly  
in the most ritual amorous slowness ex — — —  
temptation with all gravity  
of ecstasy, the two here were so  
enraptured celebrating the daily  
emergence of temptation

72

I succumbed to the echo, the return,  
to the repetition. *in the beginning*  
*vertebrae* was the duration  
an essential rejoinder at every instant  
in the joy I have in you, lived  
duration of signs, stricken  
with collusion and the waters  
of reading and delirium  
the agility of thighs each time  
surprises me in space because they are  
this opening originated at all  
times in all vegetation  
the vitality of cycles: our images

73

I succumbed attentively to the very  
point of knowing that for each  
temptation a meaning must be preserved: recollected  
and resumed-----to open onto mental  
space, with words of lightning, sequence  
of unreason, episode of recommencements  
and of breasts unpublished web: the mouths  
science of the real, skin/itinerary  
going away to slip gently  
into the continent of women

74

I succumbed: that's what drags me  
into the real and vertigo at the same time  
into the surrounding grasses (they touch  
our most sensitive tissues)  
-----eclipses-----  
temptation beyond words  
to devise an architecture  
when everything veers towards fever so  
even a clever description:  
moving me towards the other woman  
*unanimous*  
other than *naturally*

I succumbed as far as the certainty  
that designates the initial legend  
the one which excavates the passed'n time  
and which prompts the question  
of distance (*itself*) in the fire of  
fictions/to succumb becomes thus to cross  
take shape and choose oneself  
a consentment affecting the woman lover

*Translated from the French by Barbara Godard*



# THE TRANSLATOR AS VENTRILOQUIST

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BARBARA GODARD

"the temptation" by Nicole Brossard was first translated to be read by the poet at *Writers in Dialogue*, May 1, 1981 in Toronto, where she participated with Adrienne Rich. The occasion was a significant determinant in my translation.

As the famous adage has it, every translation is a betrayal. So many elements enter into a literary text—connotative riches, word plays, sound effects (rhyme, etc.)—often mutually exclusive in the target language of the translator, that some trade offs are necessary. Given the elliptical style of Brossard and the brevity of the oral presentation, it seemed appropriate to make the poetry *sound* as much like Brossard's as possible, leaving interpretive subtleties for written versions. Consciously, I sacrificed sense to sound.

Literary tradition also guided my choice. The "dialogue," Rich's "dream of a common language," underlines a current feminist theory about women and language, circulating in a marginal, "oral" culture. Rich's work "broaches biography," moving into the silence of personal experience, while Brossard's moves from abstraction, theoretical work on language, to find "body itself the intensity," to recognize the primacy of women's sensual and oral experience, beyond or before words. Specific clues in *Amantes* help us to read her work in this way: "each time into reality steals an image which meets your lips ready to speak." Experience is translated into speech before it is written on the page. Orality is the marker.

Brossard's work is characteristic of French language feminist works intent on overthrowing linguistic conventions. In this way it is aligned with that of avant-garde figures such as bp nichol or Sheila Watson, whose works reflect an interest in the shape and sound of words. Like many post-surrealist writers, Brossard often lets her ear make connections to present to her mind in a sort of free association of sounds (rather than images) which is a scaffolding for the poem.

A few examples will clarify the sorts of betrayals I am talking about. In 68 the phrase "constant courses" is somewhat ambiguous and might more "correctly" have been rendered "constant itineraries," but this would have involved the loss of the "ources" sound which the "tongue" has been "braiding." Again in 67, "glaze and phrase" is an approximation aimed at giving some of the "meaning" and all of the sound of "verre et verbe" in the original. In 69, I retained the words of the original with essentially the same sound effects, "tangible and tango" (an example of the ear leading the mind), knowing the importance of the Latin American tango in Brossard's life at the moment, and keeping an auditory image when I might also "correctly" have substituted "tangerine" to pick up on the imagery of orange in daybreak and sunlight present in the French original, tango in French carrying this second connotation as well as the more common one. Again, in 73 "recollected" is fine but "resumed" a little forced and unusual in English, although within the dictionary definitions—a consideration I have ignored to retain the parallel sounds which link the two lines. In this poem there are also two oral puns which I have been able to retain, more obvious when heard but which I have underlined with graphic means in the written text. In 71, for instance, I have displaced the final "s" on slowness to create an elision with "ex" which happens with the French original when "s'exprime" is shortened to s'ex--- ("press" is understood in English, of course). Another such play is the "passed (or past) 'n time" where I have used "n" abbreviation as a clue to the reader to elide the two words to create "pasttime." In the interpretation of such ellipses I have checked my hearing of the passage with the author to verify the reliability of my ear.

Complicity, in fact, is the nature of the relationship between translator and writer in such translations, when translation becomes creation but also subversion. As first reader of the text, reader from a foreign culture, I must abscond with it, hijack it into my own. After establishing the semiotic systems which permit the text to be communicated by the author to a Québec audience, I must then become author and establish another semiotic system to send it to a very different audience, as the same message. Hopefully, the creating has transcended the lying at this point, that my signalling to an anglophone audience the orality of Brossard's text has made clear themes within the text as well as placing it at the crossroads of two relevant discourses, that of contemporary feminism and avant-garde concrete verse. My aim has at least been partially attained, for following the reading the only two francophones—experts on Brossard's work—in the audience, affirmed that the poems indeed sounded just like Brossard. The translator become ventriloquist. . . .

# THE PRINCESS AND THE ZUCCHINI

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(A Grim Fairy Tale)

AUDREY THOMAS

This is the way it happened:

There had been a long, hot summer and the Royal Garden was full to overflowing. The gardeners were hot and grumpy and said they could not keep up with all the picking. Everybody was hot and grumpy, even the King, even the Queen and especially Princess Zona who stood now, in her long white nightdress, gazing down at the garden below her, glowing silver in the moonlight. She hadn't been able to sleep at all, because of the heat, and wished with all her heart for a thunderstorm and a downpour to break the pressure of the night. It had not rained in weeks and except for the garden, which was watered carefully every evening as soon as the sun had left it, the rest of the royal estate was parched and brown.

The garden looked inviting; she wanted to walk in the garden with bare feet. She opened the door quietly and tiptoed past the bedroom of her sleeping parents, tiptoed to the royal staircase and went quietly and carefully down, down, down, then along corridors and passages, the moonlight streaming in through leaded windows, until she reached the kitchen, then the pantry, then the back door. The door creaked a little when she opened it and she heard a mouse jump in one of the cupboards. Then she was out, running across the dry lawn, which tickled her feet, and through the white gate into the garden. The paths were cool and moist; the air was fragrant; her long blonde hair glittered and gleamed in the moonlight. It was very still.

"I could sleep out here," she thought. "I could get one of the gardeners to sling me up a hammock. I wish I'd thought of it sooner." She didn't want to go back up to her hot stuffy little room, pretty as it was. She wished, at least, that she had brought something to sit on.

And then, because she wasn't really paying attention, she tripped and stubbed her toe on a large zucchini.

"Thank God," a deep voice said. The Princess froze in fear.

"Who's there?" she whispered, trembling. "What do you want?"



"Here," the voice said. It came from beside her and below.

"Where?" She thought of all the old stories of dwarves and elves and gnomes. There must be a dwarf hiding in the vines. Her curiosity got the better of her fear.

"Come out where I can see you," she said. "It's all so overgrown in here. I can't really see you at all."

"You're looking right at me," the deep voice said.

"I'm sorry. I may be 'looking right at' you but I still can't see you. Are you invisible or something?"

There was a deep, green, groan.

"Would that it were that simple," the voice sighed. "I'm the zucchini you just stubbed your toe against."

"Don't be ridiculous."

"It's true."

"I'm not in the mood for jokes," she said, and drawing herself up to her full height of four feet eleven inches and mustering all the dignity she could muster, standing there in her summer nightie, she demanded:

"Come out of there right now!"

"I wish I could," said the voice. "If you would kiss me, *then* I could."

"How can I kiss you when I don't know where you are?"

"I told you, I'm the zucchini."

"Are you a ventriloquist?" she said. "Are you a shape-shifter?"

"Neither of those," said the voice. "I'm a handsome young prince who has been cast under a wicked, wicked spell."

The Princess laughed merrily; the laugh sounded like the tinkle of crystal chandeliers. She clapped her hands.

"I understand it all now. This is just one of those crazy dreams I have sometimes. Like the time I dreamt I had a conversation with my horse. Or the time I dreamt I was a mermaid living underneath the sea. When I wake up tomorrow I'll tell Mother. She always asks about my dreams."

"If you think this is a dream why don't you try and wake yourself up?"

"That's true. I usually can, when I realize I'm dreaming." She shut her eyes tight and willed herself awake.

"It won't work, will it?" said the zucchini.

It wouldn't work. When she opened her eyes she was not lying in her own little brass bed but standing upright in the midnight garden.

"There's some mistake. This has to be a dream."

"A nightmare for me, maybe," said the voice, "but not a dream for you."

"Whoever heard of a prince being turned into a zucchini! A bear, yes; a swan, certainly; even a frog, although personally I find that one a little hard to swallow. But a vegetable! That's utterly ridiculous. Somebody's pulling my leg."

"Nobody's pulling your leg. I was standing in this garden one night, very late, gazing up at the light in your little window, trying to get up enough nerve to sing you a song I'd composed about your beauty when

all of a sudden I felt very strange, as though I'd faint if I didn't lie down, so I did that and the next thing I knew I was a tiny zucchini."

The Princess laughed and laughed.

"You're not tiny now!"

"No. I grow bigger and bigger every day. It's all this watering and sunlight. I'm afraid I may burst."

"What makes you so sure that if I kiss you you'll turn back into a prince?"

"Isn't your name Zona?"

"Yes it is. But I didn't choose it. It's a family name. All the women in our family have always been called Zona, God knows why. I don't like it. As soon as I'm of age I'm going to change it to Suzanne."

"I think it's a lovely name," the zucchini said. "I come from a land far away across the sea and I heard your name, fell in love with your name, long before I ever saw your portrait. I travelled for a year and a day to get here, saying your name softly to myself as I went, weary and wind-lashed, 'Zona, Zona, Zona' to keep my courage up."

"But why does that convince you that I can save you? Love doesn't *really* conquer all and even if it did I'm not in love with *you*, it's the other way around."

"Don't you see? I've been changed into something beginning with the letter Z. Your name begins with Z. It must be a sign. I'm sure that only someone whose name begins with Z can save me."

"And if it's me and if my kiss can save you, what then?"

"What then! You know what then. 'Happily ever after.'"

"I don't think I could stand the idea of kissing a zucchini—it's so bizarre. What if somebody saw me!"

"Think about it for a while, but hurry."

"I'm thinking about it; the idea repulses me." Then she added, "I have to go in now, I'm getting sleepy."

"Oh please Zona," the zucchini cried. "Just one little kiss."

"I'll think about it. Anyway I'll come see you tomorrow night."

"I may have burst by then," he said sadly.

"Oh, I don't think so. And if you do, it will prove you're not really a prince, won't it."

"How cruel you are!" he murmured.

"Just practical," she replied, and ran back the way she had come.

The next morning it all seemed like a very silly dream. Nevertheless she went out right after breakfast and stuck a little hand-lettered sign in front of the zucchini. "PLEASE DON'T PICK THIS ZUCCHINI" it said. "BY ORDER OF H.R.H. PRINCESS ZONA." She had lessons to do so she didn't stop to chat, just stuck a broken bean pole through the sign and pushed it into the moist earth near the vine. "I'll come back tonight," she whispered, hoping none of the gardeners would overhear her.



It wasn't a dream. The zucchini really *had* talked to her, really had told her his sad tale of woe. Every evening, close to midnight, the young princess walked up and down between the bean rows, the ripe tomatoes, the broccoli and cucumbers until she reached the back of the garden where the zucchinis grew. There she sat on a cushion and listened to stories of life in the distant land from which the prince—if he were a prince—had come. He had a deep, thrilling, voice and she came to look forward eagerly to his accounts of his adventures.

But she would not kiss him; she absolutely refused.

"Have you no pity," he cried. "Have you no heart?"

"I don't quite understand it myself," she admitted. "Something keeps holding me back. At the risk of sounding offensive I think it really does have something to do with the fact that you are a zucchini. What kind of a spell is that? There's something not quite noble about it somehow."

He laughed bitterly. "Do you think the Frog Prince found it 'noble' to be a frog?"

"I suppose he didn't. But that's another story and another princess; it's nothing to do with me." She sighed. "Since you had to go through all this—and I still don't understand who could have done it to you—why couldn't you have been changed into an eagle, or a swan, or a chestnut stallion!"

"Well I *wasn't*. I was standing in a vegetable garden and I was changed into a garden vegetable. That's just the way it was."

"Well it's too bad you weren't standing by the peacocks or at the stable door."

"Ha ha." He paused. "Sometimes you're not very nice to me, you know. I suffer horribly."

"How can I be nice to you when 'you' is only a voice. I must admit, however, that the voice is very beautiful."

"Doesn't it make you want to see the rest?"

"Yes, no, oh—I don't know! Don't rush me."

"I can't get much bigger, Zona. I feel that if you don't release me then I'll die."

"Tell me again about the 'Happily ever after.'"

The rains had still not come and everyone seemed to exist in a kind of terrible tension. The King snapped at the Queen, the Queen snapped at Zona, Zona snapped at everybody. One night she sat at her dressing table brushing her long golden hair and thinking. She tried to imagine the young prince before he had been changed into a zucchini. She tried to imagine the two of them riding off together on a white horse. She tried to imagine happily ever after.

"98—99—100," she said, and put down her hairbrush. She stared at herself in the mirror. The zucchini had told her she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. Her mother and father told her she was beautiful. Her mirror said the same thing.

"But who is the 'I' who is so beautiful," she thought. "Who is she??"  
"I will be fifteen next month," she thought. "That's a lot of ever after."  
She sat in her nightdress, with her hands in her lap, long after her candle had sputtered and gone out. She sat like that, in the darkness, far into the night.

It had finally rained and the King and Queen and Princess were smiling as they dined *en famille* and listened to the blessed sound of the rain on the castle roof. It was the cook's day off and Zona had begged her mother to let her prepare the evening meal.

"Absolutely *delicious*," said the King, wiping his bowl with a piece of bread. "What did you say it was again?"

"Ratatouille," Zona said. "I found the recipe in *The Joy of Cooking*."

"It really is very very good, dear," said the Queen. "We'll have to have it again."

The King and Queen smiled at one another tenderly.

"Our little girl is growing up," said the King.

"It won't be long," said the Queen, "before she'll be having boyfriends."

Zona smiled at them both and offered the dish around a second time.

## EDWARD HAS TOO MUCH

---

FRANK DAVEY

'I don't mind,' Patricia told him,  
'except you've got too much come.  
I've never known a guy  
with so much come,' she said.

'Hey? What's wrong with that?'  
Edward said.

'How would you like it,  
dribbling down your legs until noon?'  
she said.

'But it's because of you,  
because you excite me so,'  
Edward protested.

'I can fix that,' she said.  
'Sleeping in a puddle all night,'  
she said. 'Smelling like a fish shop  
all day,' she said.

'Well, it's because you're so beautiful,'  
Edward said. 'So exciting,' he said.  
'You just inspire me, just  
draw it out of me,' he said.  
'It shows how much I love you,' he said.  
'Don't be funny,' Patricia said.  
'If I laugh, or cough, or run,  
big gobs soak through my pants  
onto my skirt or jeans,' she said.  
'It's embarrassing,' she said.

Edward visualized. Little drops of him  
inside her. On her pubic hair,  
on her panties, glistening  
on her thighs. 'HMMMM,'  
he said. 'Maybe doing it more often  
would help,' he said.

'No way,' she said,  
'Better you should wear a safe,' she said.

'But I couldn't feel you,' he said. 'Maybe you  
could wear a tampon or pad?' he said.

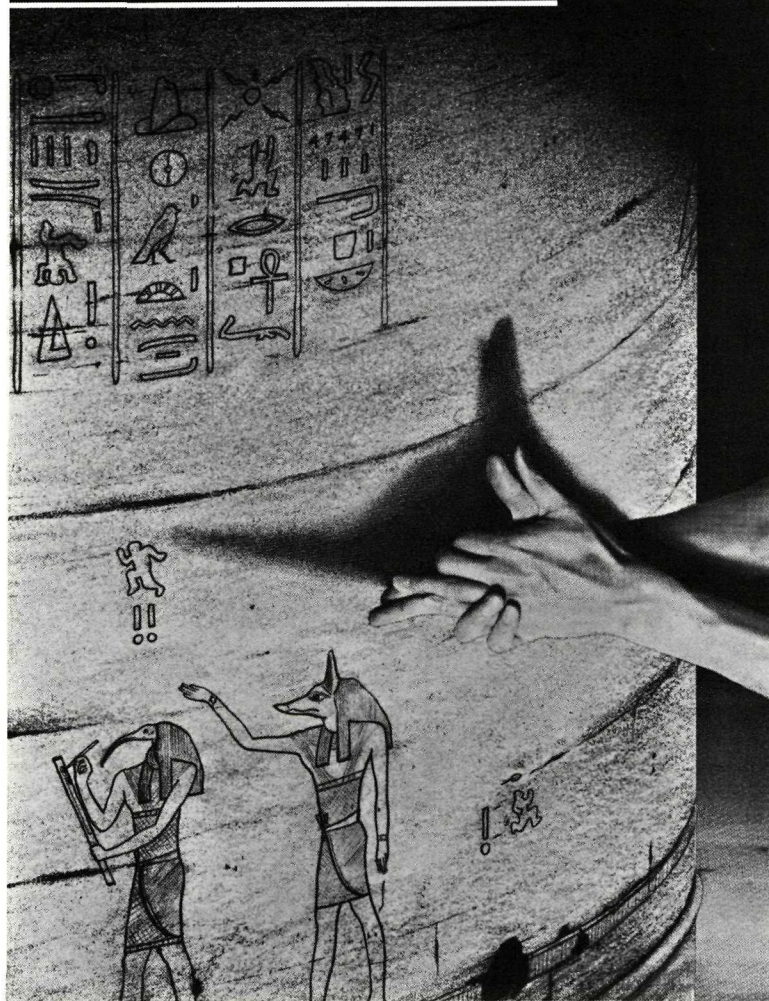
'Maybe you could lick it off,' she said.

Edward pondered. 'Maybe I could at that,' he said.

'We could always quit,' she said.

# PRISM *international*

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# THE BIRTH OF FERNANDO MARÍA

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NORBERTO LUIS ROMERO

On the thirtieth of July Doña Roberta made the most unusual delivery in her forty years as a midwife. "That child's coming out wrong," the grandmother had said, "badly placed, but it will be an exceptional child." Sure enough, Doña Roberta had only to touch Marina's enormous belly to affirm and swear by all the patron saints of parturition that the baby was badly placed. After terrible pains and great efforts, Marina, whose first time it was, gave birth to an enormous white egg, which they named Fernando after its paternal grandfather and María in memory of its maternal great-grandmother, who had been much loved and who had devoted all her life to making Easter eggs.

The grandmother was the first to observe that the boy, or girl, was different from other children born in the town. This served as an argument to strengthen her prophecy: "I told you the child would be exceptional!" But she took no time to find a resemblance to her late husband, who had had very smooth white skin, and to accept and love the child more than anyone.

Marina, the mother, gave all the care any child deserves, though it required nothing greater than constant attention so it would not roll out of bed and fall to the floor.

The grandmother hastened to rummage through drawers stuffed with useless objects for old balls of wool, twisted from so many uses, numerous unravellings and transformations. "This will make a little robe," she said as she wound it in a ball. "I'll make the front and back pink with white sides. Right now there are plenty of booties." And she sought among the socks shoved one inside the other a wrinkled, dirty bill, almost worthless, to buy pink and baby blue buttons for her little grandson.

Marina, the mother, had drawn her son a little boy's face, Fernando's, because she had always wanted a little boy. On the opposite side, the father drew with careful lines an enchanting little girl's face, with brown eyes like its grandmother's, the one who had made chocolate eggs. But he unbecomingly added a neat, slight woman's sex.

They bathed and changed the infant every day; and with soap and water in each bath Fernando María lost the enchanting faces and doll's sex. Then they painted it again, and on each new face they added different features, slightly changed, to create varying states of mind so that the child would be growing; and so they made her hair grow, and her first teeth; they made her cry when she was hungry or laugh when they made faces at her.

"Even if she is your mother, I don't want her to put those ridiculous little dresses on him. We'd agreed that one day I'd dress him, and she the next, but she insists on knitting those horrible little outfits decked out with old-fashioned flounces which frill out all around."

Fernando María was so round that the little clothes slipped up or down and rubbed off the faces which they painted with such care. They worked things out equitably: mornings until noon the baby was Fernando, dressed in baby blue with starched bows near the curve of its face and buttons along the narrower contour; and afternoons María was dressed to the hilt with her fancy dresses trimmed with pink lace which made her look like candied fruit.

Fernando María stayed healthy and hard and in time became a beautiful child whom all the neighbors fondled. The child was passed from hand to hand, from house to house. Marina always advised, "Be careful you don't let him fall for he'd break." And the creature was spoiled in one arm after the other between the fleshy bosoms of the most affectionate matrons.

"You must give me money for yarn," was the grandmother's refrain. "Red wool, green wool, sky blue wool for my adored grandchild. Knit one, purl one, drop one, two, three—" was heard at all hours from the windows of the house, and the grandmother showed all her friends the tiny clothes she knitted with her own hands, the fancy knitting she invented for her heavenly grandson.

The child was kept blooming and healthy, with its cheeks well painted, but its parents were losing, little by little, enthusiasm for their child. The only one who grew more and more affectionate was the grandmother. "I must hurry," she sighed. "Drop one, two, three. Knit one. Purl one." Marina hardly understood the excessive desire with which the grandmother constantly knitted and filled drawers with absurd little clothes—"because the child wears out very little, mother. Why so many clothes?"

"I know what I'm doing," the grandmother answered without raising her eyes from her knitting. "I certainly do."

Nor was there any more shortage of gossip and mean thoughts than affection among the neighbors who claimed that the child would be a dull white egg all its life. Others spread the word that it wouldn't be long before the parents found, the day they least suspected it, an enormous ugly bird in Fernando María's cradle. The boldest passed around that it

would be a basilisk and that the best thing would be to get rid of it. These rumors, inevitably, reached the parents' ears and they became infuriated. As for the grandmother, she paid no attention and laughed at the impertinences, maintaining that her grandchild was the best in the world and that it wouldn't be long before they would see him with their own eyes.

Some of these comments must have been made in the presence of Fernando María since in time, and about then, the creature began to change color slightly; not even its parents had noticed it until the grandmother, when undressing him, perceived some tiny blue and green spots, like small clustered moons, over the child's entire surface and called them to their attention. The doctor diagnosed measles, but the grandmother didn't believe him and, pretending to go out to buy wool, she returned that afternoon with a package hidden in her bag. In secret she opened it and began to read the book she had bought, *Mimicry*. So she confirmed what she feared, that her grandson Fernando María was terrified by the comments made about him and tried to go unnoticed by mimicking the color of the sheets or his own clothes. The grandmother told the parents what was happening so they would stop making comments in front of the child, especially about the basilisk, and stop rubbing him down with useless unguents. They paid little attention. Then the grandmother made up the crib with sheets of brightly colored flowers and after a few hours called the parents in and showed them Fernando María's surface covered with big flowers with colors exactly like those of the sheets.

Since they stopped mentioning the basilisk, Fernando María gradually let off camouflaging himself, but nonetheless trusted in his grandmother more than in anyone. She spent hours inventing songs, stories about eggs and children, while she knitted a kind of tunic with openings in the back. Gradually the parents gave up all care of Fernando María; they entertained him little, given their sometimes apathetic, sometimes ecstatic character, and stopped painting its face and girl's sex, in that way converting it into a simple white egg to which no one paid any attention. But the grandmother had already perceived slight movements, light rockings which passed unnoticed by the others and which were increasing and becoming turns completely around and over himself. Fernando María had passed to the end phase, so the grandmother thought, and that was a good symptom. So it began to move and shift itself about the room, and to hide under furniture to play tricks on his grandmother or simply to entertain himself investigating the topography of the house. At times he managed to drive the family to its wits' end when he disappeared and the grandmother couldn't find him. Everyone had to pitch in to search for Fernando María, looking under furniture, in closets, and behind curtains.

Every afternoon the grandmother went for a walk. She said she went



to visit an old friend of hers who had been the town stationmaster. Marina thought it was a senile romance, but soon discarded the idea because the grandmother's only love was clearly for Fernando María.

One day a neighbor arrived carrying Fernando María in his arms, saying he had found him in his garden hidden under the jasmines. They surrounded the house with a picket fence, which they painted green, and the child could roll through the entire house and the garden with complete freedom, but always under the vigilant eye of the grandmother, who was careful that it did not slip from a great height or that the children did not throw stones to break it. The first few days some neighbors came to see how Fernando María rolled through the garden, but they were soon bored and paid no further attention, and the child was brought up freely under its grandmother's watchful attention.

The latter had long since learned from her friend the ex-stationmaster enough of the Morse code to be able to talk with her grandson, giving him a few little taps on the shell with one of her needles, with which she was constantly knitting, and awaiting the response by gluing her ear to her grandchild's surface. When he answered with similar taps from within, she smiled and tapped again with the tip of her needle. At times the dialogues were very long and the grandmother seemed quite uneasy, knitted more rapidly than usual, and readied all the little clothes, going over them and counting them each day.

One night when the women were alone in the house, in the dark corridor Marina surprised her mother, who was tiptoeing toward the room where the child was sleeping, with a hammer in her hand. She believed her mother had gone mad and ran to protect her son, locking herself in with him. From outside, the grandmother tried to persuade Marina to open the door and let her in. She said the moment had come and her presence was very necessary. Marina let her in on condition that she get rid of that hammer and explain what she intended to do. The grandmother agreed but was careful not to discard the hammer, which she hid under her clothes. She gave Marina a long explanation of what would happen that night, but the latter did not believe her; rather, she thought it was another of the grandmother's dementias, a craze much like knitting tunics with openings in the back or visiting that old friend to learn the Morse code. When her husband came home, she told him everything and assured him that there wasn't a thing to worry about, that the grandmother loved the child too much to do it any harm, that they were doubtless imaginings which would soon pass.

On the following morning Marina and her husband had to surrender before the evidence: first, they saw the floor covered with scattered white shell, and then a gentle sound of fluttering made them raise their eyes to the ceiling. Fernando María, with its fragile little body, still wet, protected by one of the cute shirts knitted by the grandmother, was flapping awkwardly about the room. They could not avoid shedding tears of hap-

piness; they made signs to the child to come down to them and called it by name:

"Fernando María."

But the child did not seem to hear them. His little blond head tilted, he gazed fixedly at his grandmother, telling her things with his eyes, and he seemed to obey a deeper, more urgent call. The grandmother smiled at him and her hands made signs to show him the open window. Then the three, crying, leaning on the windowsill, waved goodbye to their son, who, flapping with greater strength, rose and disappeared forever in the infinite.

*Madrid*  
*October 1980*

*translated from the Spanish by H. E. Francis*



# SONG

---

MIGUEL HERNANDEZ

Our house is a dovecot  
and the bed, one of jasmine.  
The doors are both open,  
and in back is the whole world.  
Our son is your heart,  
mother that has been exalted.  
Within your habitation  
everything flowered.  
Our son made you a garden,  
and you made of our son,  
my wife, the habitation of jasmine,  
the dovecot of the rose.  
All around your skin  
I tie and untie mine.  
A midday of honey  
you exude: a midday.  
Who has entered this house  
and left it deserted?  
In order to be remembered I  
must be someone who is already dead.  
Come the roundest light  
and the whitest almond trees!  
Life and light deepen themselves  
between deaths and ravines.

Lucky is your future husband,  
like those horizons  
of pure porphyry and marble,  
where the mountains breathe.  
Our kindled house burns  
from lovely kisses and shadows.  
You cannot pass through life  
deeper, more movingly.  
Overflowingly deaf,  
the milk illumines your bones.  
And the house overflows itself  
with you, our son and the kisses.  
You, your abundant womb,  
our son and the dovecot.  
Wife, over your husband  
dream the steps of the sea.

*translated from the Spanish by Gerry Tiffany*

# TORTURE

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*For Stephen Dobyns*

RAYMOND CARVER

You are falling in love again. This time  
it is a South American general's daughter.  
You want to be stretched on the rack again.  
You want to hear awful things said to you  
and to admit these things are true.  
You want to have unspeakable acts  
committed against your person, things  
nice people don't talk about in classrooms.  
You want to tell everything you know  
on Simon Bolivar, on Jorge Luis Borges,  
on yourself most of all.  
You want to implicate everyone in this!  
Even when it's four o'clock in the morning  
and the lights are burning still—  
those lights that have been burning night and day  
in your eyes and brain for two weeks—  
and you are dying for a smoke and a lemonade,  
but she won't turn off the lights that woman  
with the green eyes and little ways about her,  
even then you want to be her gaucho.  
Dance with me, you imagine hearing her say  
as you reach for the empty beaker of water.  
Dance with me, she says again and no mistake.  
She picks this minute to ask you, hombre,  
to get up and dance with her in the nude.  
No, you don't have the strength of a fallen leaf,  
not the strength of a little reed basket  
battered by waves on Lake Titicaca.  
But you bound out of bed  
just the same, amigo, you dance  
across wide open spaces.

## GOODBYE TO A STATUE

---

PHIL HALL

Problem is I also admired my father

although in his wallet  
he had a picture of a naked woman  
bent over  
grinning back between her legs  
at a camera.

Thanks.

I know instinctively when to look  
sideways at manikins.

There is only one moment, one vector  
attached to it, rod & cone, in which  
to see the clay breast—

and I know it.

The chalk nipple could be offered to me  
like the blind eye of a horse;

I would be as impressed  
as a boy.

I made women out of sleeping kittens  
dogs, trees, flies

a can of Drano and a warm cloth

the ends of doors, friends sleeping  
who slept over

a machine for peeling potatoes.

I am afraid  
of what I could do  
as a grown man  
without love.

Problem is: jamming at dryness  
with eyes shut is news; it sells  
paper.

Women in wallets  
are the lives of the party.

I was pulled from the woman  
in my father's wallet

his last five

that he spent in my mother

who nearly died—when she did  
it was like saying “goodbye  
to a statue”

as Hemingway or my father said.

A wonder I care about anything.

Amazing how you trust me now  
how you sleep hot on me each night  
like a plaster.



# FOUR CALIFORNIA DEATHS

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GEORGE BOWERING

"Why is it," she asked, "that you never write about anything but death?"

I had been asking myself that question for, oh, it must have been three years. I chose to lean back on her enviable tilt-a-bed, and peer at her through hooded eyes as the smoke from my new cigarette snaked its way toward the blue ceiling.

"I mean, even when you are writing a story that seems to be all jokes or a nice moment between a father and his son, you have to finish it off with a completely, oh you know what I'm talking about."

"Gratuitous killing," I offered as lightly as I could manage, as free of arrogance.

"Gratuitous. Also stupid. I mean, really," she said. I loved the way she drank tea, out of a handle-less mug she had made herself, the fingers of both hands wrapped around it, her hair hanging down both sides of the cup as she bent forward to sip in the middle of a seemingly interrogative sentence. "Really, don't you think that's kind of juvenile, I mean, isn't that what teenage authors do, throw in some blood and some suicide or a little insanity to make it seem all so significant?"

"Give it emotional impact?" I added.

She did not take up my suggestion, but put down her cup and stood up, her hair falling in front of her bony shoulders. Then without speaking, she started to put on her clothes. She looked as wonderful putting on her clothes as she did taking them off. Not just death, I thought, but sex, too. Sex and death.

"Sex *and* death," I said.

"I have always wondered about that combination," she said while pulling her hair out from inside her turtle neck sweater. "I would have thought sex and life. Or maybe just life, for a change?"

I swung my legs out and sat on the side of the bed, and I felt just fine being naked in front of all her clothes. So much so that I wanted to stand up straight, and so I did.

"Life, if I may say so, is a mystery," I said. "People are not much interested in a mystery, because it can't be solved. Death, on the other

hand, is a puzzle. If you give your readers a choice between a mystery and a puzzle, they will go for the puzzle every time. They might like to call it a mystery, but they want to solve it, so of course it is a puzzle. But they wouldn't feel right buying and reading a murder puzzle. It's not alliterative enough, for one thing."

"Sheh! what a dummy," she said. "Put your clothes on."

"Why?"

"I'm hungry."

I sort of felt like having a shower, but I had had a shower before we went back to bed. She liked that, and I had read an article that explained that European women thought men were more sensitive to women if they had a shower beforehand instead of afterward. That made sense to me, and I did want to be thought of as sensitive. Still, after a little death you did feel like standing under the source of all life. The latter was something you learned when you were a youngster, when death was just something awful but justified in the Bible. Well, I didn't really think all that stuff.

"I am going to brush my teeth and get dressed," I said. "Would you like to read what I wrote this week?"

"Who dies?"

"Here, read it. It doesn't prove anything but it might suggest something about people and their hangups about puzzles."

"Why can't you have a cigarette and turn over and go to sleep, like a normal man," she said, but she reached out for the pages I was offering. There was a smile on her large mouth, and no lip gloss.

"It's only thirteen and a half minutes long," I said, smiling back. "If you add ten or twelve seconds of music between the sections, fourteen minutes. By the time you have finished I will be all cleaned up, sorry, brushed up, and dressed, and then I will buy you a salad."

## FOUR CALIFORNIA DEATHS

### 1. The Death of Jean Harlow

When D'arcy Keyserling killed Jean Harlow, she was holding in her left hand a British clothbound copy of Joseph Conrad's *The Nigger of Narcissus*. Keyserling strangled her on the paper-strewn floor of a San Diego tattoo parlour. The SDPD felt constrained to look on everything as a clue: Conrad, of course, & the half-finished tattoo on the back of the victim's thigh. It consisted of a red heart & the incomplete name, Jozef Pils—. At least the police assumed it to be incomplete, as there was room for a couple more syllables inside the heart. It was possible, observed the coroner, though graphology was not strictly speaking within his

authority, that the tattooist, Albert Sephora, was not very good at planning ahead.

Sephora was, in fact, a suspect for nearly a week, but got off with a shutdown of his business. The police had little choice but to proceed on the basis of his story. He said that Keyserling posed for a while as a waiting customer, though to Sephora's eye he did not look like the kind of man who likes to be decorated. In fact he looked rather like the writer-type: frameless octagonal eyeglasses, unfashionable haircut, unpressed suit trousers.

Sephora went out of the shop after the letter "I" for a moment, to chase down a roving newspaper boy, got into an argument with a drunk sailor on the way back, & found the nude Miss Harlow sprawled on his floor, the book in her hand opened to page forty & forty-one, & an "s" added to her heart. Keyserling had disappeared. Sephora was certain that he had not written the "s", but said that it was virtually indistinguishable from his own work.

Apparently Keyserling had not assaulted Miss Harlow sexually, but only choked her to death. The newspapers seemed mollified by that detail. When Keyserling's confession reached the SDPD, along with directions on how to locate his rented houseboat, forensic psychiatrists went over his handwritten letter for signs of pathological motivation & found only neatness & order. When the police arrived at the yacht basin, the killer was waiting for them on the dock, dressed in suit & tie, & the European eyeglasses.

The San Diego police & the Federal Bureau of Investigation were puzzled by one detail of the slaying, glad as they were that they had not had to work very hard on the case. On a page of the Conrad book, read perhaps earlier that morning by the slain actress, these words were underlined: "*Wish you Dutchmen were all dead—'stead comin' takin' our money inter your starvin' country.*"

D'arcy Keyserling denied having read the book, claiming an anti-pathology toward Black people & anything to do with them.

## 2. The Death of Babe Ruth

No one ever thought they would see Babe Ruth in the Pacific Coast League, but there he was, six months after Pearl Harbour, living in San Diego & playing left field for the Padres. Two weeks after opening day he was dead. Just past midway in his life's journey he went, as always, astray from the straight road, & this time he did not, as usual, wake up in a strange bed. He went stiff there.

The investigating officers from the SDPD thought at first that he had died from alcohol poisoning & an untoward mixture of tequila & drugs, but any baseball fanatic could have told them that you could not kill the



Babe that way, & then the county coroner did.

The Sultan of Swat, who was hitting .212 at the time of the tragedy, died in the white oceanside apartment of Emmaline Kurtz, a recently widowed Navy bride. Mrs. Kurtz, a European of uncertain origin, told the police that when she had gone to work at six a.m. at the Navy PX, the baseball player was still alive, though he had been out cold for several hours.

The Padres had not been alarmed by the non-appearance of their left fielder for batting practice before the game against the San Francisco Seals, because the Babe often showed up a minute before the first inning. But Emmaline Kurtz was pretty upset when she entered her reeking flat & found the rigid behemoth naked atop her counterpane. She immediately called, she said, the major crimes division.

The coronor eventually laid the cause of death to asphyxiation by unknown means, & left the question of misfortune or murder open. So the record stands today. Babe Ruth, a two-hundred hitter in the minors.

There are those, however, who are bothered by two curious details of the unhappy incident. Mrs. Kurtz, a few years before her marriage, had been a companion of D'arcy Keyserling, who was to become a locally notorious convicted killer. Also, though George Herman Ruth was not known to be a reader of anything more serious than the funny papers, there was a cheap clothbound copy of *Lord Jim* open face-downward on the bed beside his body. Mrs. Kurtz said that she had never noticed the book around the apartment before that fateful day. The book was opened to a page that bore these underscored words: "*There must have been confidences, not so much of fact, I suppose, as of innermost feelings—regrets—fears—warnings, no doubt: warnings that the younger did not fully understand till the elder was dead—and Jim came along.*"

Conspiracy buffs have been wondering for decades who "Jim" might have been, & whether either of the rookie Padre outfielders by that first name might be immersed somehow in the dangerous element of this mystery.

### 3. The Death of Albert Einstein

The most famous scientist of our century was found gassed to death in a high school chemistry laboratory in San Diego, California, shortly after the United States' entry into the second world war.

Ruling out suicide for undisclosed reasons, the SDPD at first theorized that the atrocity was the result of a campus prank gone bad. But forensic study revealed that the father of modern physics did not meet his end at the downtown high school. He had apparently been killed & transported to the laboratory during the weekend.

The Federal authorities were summoned to the case when the tattoo

was discovered on the inside of the victim's right arm. It was not yet healed, an angry welt that took the form of a number: 47471, & the letters DK.

The men from Washington proceeded on the assumption that the murder was the work of Nazi spies or their anti-semitic sympathizers in the United States. It was reasoned that the letters stood for Dakau, the little-known Bavarian concentration camp, rumours of whose horrors had penetrated the most secret sections of the Army intelligence branch. But that theory was dropped when a University of California professor of German literature & philology informed the agents that the town's name was generally spelled without a k. The academic did, however, propose that the crime might be the work of a literary sadist who was interested in the writings of the Czechoslovakian novelist, Franz Kafka, whose nightmare visions in German include punitive tattooing & a predilection for the letter K.

Though they were animated by such obvious consideration as the Jewishness of the victim & his knowledge of physical forces that could be turned to the invention of futuristic weapons, the investigators decided to re-examine all their findings from a literary angle.

It would have been too tidy, one must judge, to find a copy of Kafka among Dr. Einstein's effects at the waterfront hotel where he had been staying during this stop on a patriotic lecture tour. What the detectives & G-men did find was a copy of *The Secret Agent* by Joseph Conrad (spelled Konrad in many European countries). It was the 1921 Doubleday edition; & a piece of Dutch currency, used as a bookmark, was resting in the middle of chapter VIII, where these words were asterixed in pencil: *"Like the rest of mankind, perplexed by the mystery of the universe, he had his moments of consoling trust in the organized powers of the earth."*

Stories persist that an office in the Pentagon or in the CIA holds a number of nearly connected facts pertinent to the puzzling murder of the western world's greatest scientist, but the public knows no more now than they knew during that fateful spring in the early forties.

#### 4. The Death of Tom Mix

A horse named Tony lay for two days on his side, behind some bougainvillea bushes that lined the highway leading west out of San Diego toward the Salton Sea. Thirst agonized the creature, but hunger did not visit. As the hours of daylight transpired he grew accustomed to the continual passage of automobile engines, & during the hours of darkness the more individual roars of great trucks followed the wash of lights as the insects quit talking for a few seconds. Then they would start again, & many of them were speechless in his ear & around the rims of his eyes, which he never closed.



Tony felt sure that during the second day several of the people inside the autos saw his great body stretched like no hale horse on the slope of grass between the last filling station & the first onion field. But he knew that none could see the man lying under him.

Tony had been hit from behind by a green 1937 De Soto, struck on the haunches & sent in a pebble cloud of dancing broken legs through the purple flowers, across the ditch, on top of the man. A white hat lay beside his own head, but from the road, through the rent in the bushes, it would look like any rag because it was not now sitting high & round on the head of Tom Mix.

In the late thirties on the then outskirts of San Diego, there were still people who walked along the edges of the highway, looking for soda pop bottles & copper wiring, & already people who were strongly affected by the discovery of a dead or dying horse. One such man, an unemployed printer born in Byelorussia, bore the unamericanized name, Andrey Filippovitch. It was he who found the great white horse in the last hour of his life, & on closer examination, the crushed cowboy lying beneath him.

The SDPD and the California Highway Patrol argued for a while about jurisdiction & the publicity & the newspaper photographs that would attend the "tragic" death of the popular cowboy. But Filippovitch, declaring a long-held emotion against agencies of governments with wide areas of interest, opted to tell his story to the city police. That story was one of the oldest in the annals of the Southern California constabulary.

Filippovitch said that when he first came upon the dying horse, the animal looked at him significantly with his near eye, & began to paw the sloping ground. Having haunted the movie houses because that was the "quickest way to learn American," the immigrant guessed immediately what the horse was up to. Noticing the pauses, he assumed that Tony was counting, that he was intent on leaving a number as his last communication.

The first figure was paw paw paw paw, pause; a four. The whole number was 47472. The police, used to thinking in such terms, lost little time in guessing that the number might have been seen on a rear licence plate, presumably on the departing auto that had knocked the horse, & its soon-to-die rider, off the side of the road.

The SDPD made a telephone call to Sacramento, & within an hour knew the licence plate to be registered in the name of one D'arcy Keyserling. Fifteen minutes later four patrolmen were in Keyserling's bungalow on Sephora Street. But they were to wait there fruitlessly for days—Mr. Keyserling never showed up, not even to gather some of his household possessions.

To kill time, one of the policemen read some stories in a book that had been left on the plywood coffee table in the small parlour. There was a

leather bookmark tooled with a design of an Indian chief in war-bonnet inserted at the end of a story called "The Secret Sharer." Constable Kerr saw that on the adjacent page this portion of a sentence had been underscored with the purple of an indelible pencil: *"I was in time to catch an evanescent glimpse of my white hat left behind to mark the spot."*

Of course it takes me about two minutes or less to brush my teeth, and give me another minute to comb my hair and look closely at the pores in my nose. You've done the same thing. So when I came back out and started getting dressed, she was just getting into the story, but of course it isn't properly a story; and one wonders whether this is.

I sat around unobtrusively with another cigarette, perhaps a little glamorous in the light from the patio doors. When she had finished she put the pages on the foot of the bed.

"Did you get it?" I asked. I had learned long ago not to ask her or anyone else whether they liked it.

"Yes, I think I got it," she said, picking up her purse and starting out. I caught up with her. "I suppose that makes me one of your readers," she added.

"Puzzled?"

We were out in the bright early-afternoon sun now, side by side across the lawn, beginning our two-mile walk to the restaurant.

"Actually," she said, those gorgeous long legs as important to me as the air now filling my lungs, "the only thing that puzzled me was why you decided to use my initials."

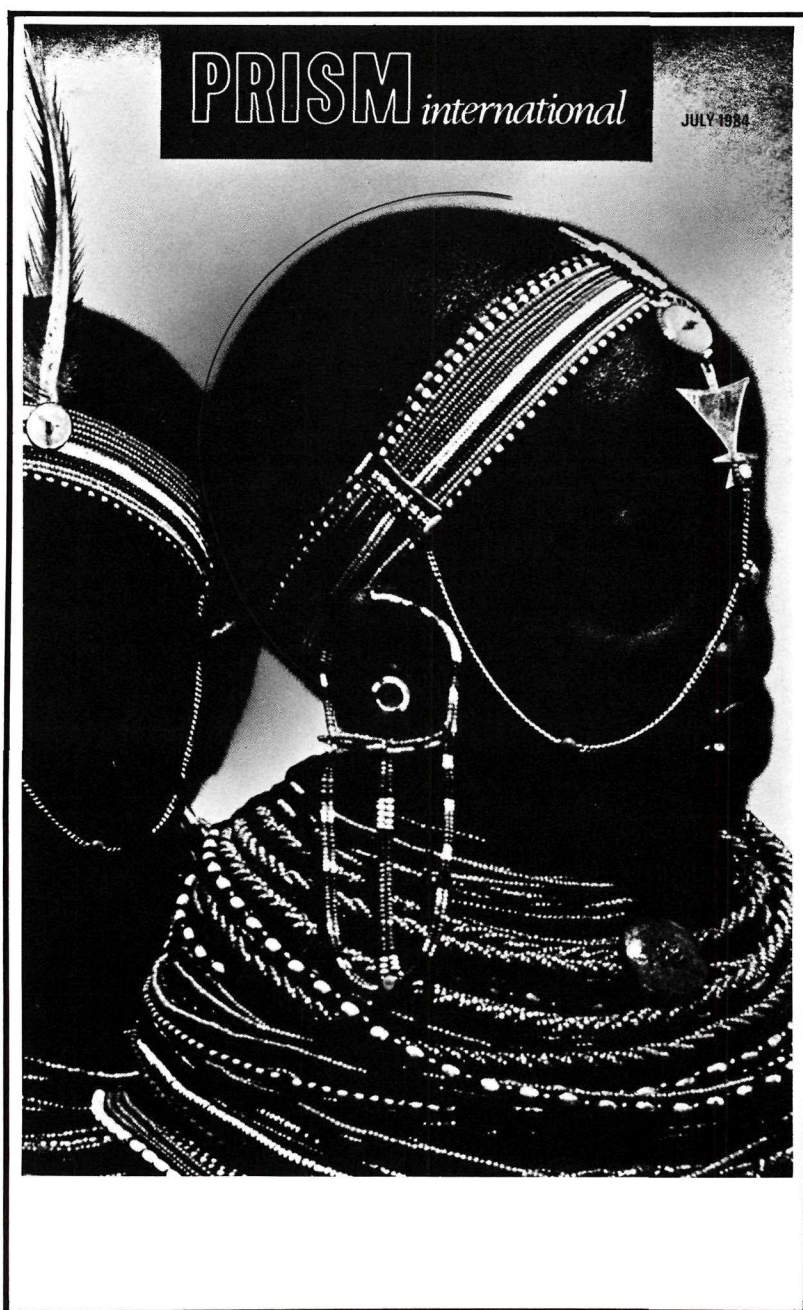
## GYPSY PONIES

---

DRAGA DJULGEROVA

Moon-maned ponies neigh  
beyond the river's far shore.  
No rope you knot  
will keep me in your bed.  
I'm going to the river,  
passing through the reeds  
silent as a lost breeze —  
the gypsies are singing there.  
Blacker than a gypsy's eye  
my rope,  
and who can blame me  
when I toss it in the stream?  
I'll dance in my white gown  
to the subtle silver tones  
of flutes and tambourines,  
whiter than the river.  
If I can charm  
the youngest one,  
I'll make him steal  
that neighing colt.  
I'll knit my thirsty fingers  
swiftly into that moon-mane,  
and call that youngest  
of them all to me.  
The tall grass beside the road  
will hide the riders,  
and they will never tell  
what it is they know.  
Ah, the moon-maned ponies  
are neighing beyond the river,  
and you cannot tie me  
to your bed.

*translated from the Bulgarian by Jascha Kessler*



1983-1984

# MARRIAGE

---

LILLIAN ALLEN

When mi sidown  
Pon mi bombo claat  
ina calico dress  
under the gwango tree  
a suck coarse salt  
fi the night fi dun  
wen twist face joan  
and mi man mus come  
down those concrete steps  
from her tatch-roof house  
han in han an' smile  
pon them face

And a bus'im 'ead  
wid a cistern brick  
blood full mi yeye  
a tear 'er shut  
rip 'im pride  
the little heng pon nail

The two rocky miles 'ome  
we drop some fists  
Blood soared licks  
Kasha sticks

But lateron  
a sooth 'im pain  
bathe the blood down  
the cistern drain  
ten common-law-years  
ina wi tenament yard

And sure as 'ell  
wi anger rest



'im eyes regret  
plea 'an confess  
then glide mi

to gramma dead-lef bed  
an' marry mi  
under the chinnelle spread  
again an' again  
'till day does done  
evening come

# JOURNEY

---

OBIBA OPOKU-AGYEMANG

I, TOO, have followed the spoor  
From the jungle to the clearing  
And drunk, have read  
The entrails of the winds:  
But can a crooked mind  
Measure a crooked world?

Who ever sowed the grain of our Earth  
Lies silenced in the prison house of our desires.  
There is always the nut of another metaphor  
Awaiting the crack of a wiser mouth;

Perhaps, to understand  
Is to cease to measure  
And to measure with the heart.

# YIYI THE SPIDER AND THE STONE WITH EYES

---

JOSEPH BRUCHAC

## An Anlo Story

Misa gli loo—hear a story.

Gli neva—let the story come.

This story came from far away and fell upon Yiyi the Spider. There was a great famine. All of the animals went about searching for food. Yiyi, the Spider was wandering around, too, when he came to a stone with two eyes.

*This is strange*, Spider thought, and he almost said out loud, *how can there be a stone with eyes?* But he was tired, too tired to even talk. He was so tired that he went and collapsed, so! under a baobab tree near the stone.

Soon two antelope came by. When they reached the stone they stopped. One of the antelope said, "Oooo, is that not a stone?" The second antelope said, "Tsooo, with eyes, too!" And both of them said in surprise, "A stone with eyes!" And immediately both antelope fell down dead.

Yiyi the Spider had been watching all of this. He stood up from under the tree and carried the dead antelope home. Then he came back, picked up the stone with eyes, took it to a busy crossroads and waited. Whenever any animal came by, Yiyi would run up to them and ask, in a very innocent way, "What is that by the roadside?" "Tsooo, a stone with eyes!" the animal would say and drop dead at Spider's feet. Then Yiyi would drag the animal home and his wife would cook it for himself and his children. So the Spider family became well fed and healthy while all the other animals were hungry and thin.

One day, though, Kadzidaw the Squirrel was hiding in the tree near the crossroads. He saw everything Yiyi did. He came down from the tree, and Spider saw him. Immediately Yiyi the Spider ran up to him with his old question: "What is that over there?"

"What is that?" Kadzidaw the Squirrel said.

"I say, what is *that*?" Yiyi said again.

"I say, what is *that*?" Squirrel repeated.

Spider said, "Isn't that a stone?"

Squirrel said, "Isn't that a stone?"

"What stone?" said Yiyi.

"What stone?" said Kadzidaw.

Spider said, "A stone with . . ."

Squirrel said, "A stone with . . ."

"Go on," said Spider.

"Go on," said Squirrel.

Then Yiyi the Spider lost his temper. "Squirrel," he said, "how stupid you are! How very, very stupid you are! Why can't you say a simple thing such as: a stone with eyes."

That was the last thing Spider ever said, for he too, fell down dead.

And so, as my old Auntie always said, eventually you'll be done as you did.

# THE HISTORY OF CHINA

---

*for Andy and Pat*

GLEN SORESTAD

Three poets are walking backwards 7000 years  
in Chinese history, caught in a frenzy of images  
for the poems they are writing about China.  
One has already visited that country and roots  
poems in the fertile soil of both touch and dream  
in a landscape he may never see again  
except as ragged moths or reverie drawn  
against the lighted windowpanes of night.  
The other moves through myriad pages read  
about Chinese sailors and immigrants who left  
the precarious certainties of home to seek  
unknown familiarities of distant shores.  
The eyes of my friends are pools of vigilance  
where strange fish swim delicate as silk  
stitched into the fragile embroidery of remembrance.

And I am the curious third of this tentative bond  
one who shambles through the silences of the others  
who are so intent to draw to them the fragments  
of voices that may speak to them today, somewhere  
down this promenade of Oriental time. Perhaps  
these antique voices that sing in their ears  
may have some last words to whisper to me.

Ontario Museum of Science, May 31, 1982



# VISITING

---

CHRISTOPHER LEVENSON

It is a pain  
I love,  
having them over  
each week, underscoring  
separation, this subtle  
haemorrhage, the draining  
loss of daily contact, those  
minor boredoms, labours  
of love.

It is a pain  
having it out every time,  
the jagged abscessed truth  
of envy and longing,  
the awareness of parenthood  
diminishing  
as each fights to be free  
of the-all-too familiar  
complicity.

It is relief,  
this nagging  
emptiness  
once they are gone.  
I am a masochist,  
I love my hurt,  
fondle my scars:  
my four children.

## WOLF CALL NORTH OF TIMMINS

---

ROGER NASH

I am a wolf. I am  
this particular wolf.  
My stars cast starving  
shadows. Through its creaking jawbone  
of ice, the lake calls  
back. The moon will not mate  
with me. Snow bites hard  
at my pads. Even a tail  
needs feeding tonight. But this low  
-slung howl hauls  
up like a hawser, looping  
generously over calloused hills,  
fraying snow beneficently  
into forests, seeming, as is usual,  
endless. I hang from it, a single  
hunger, its only possession.  
I am all that keeps it going.

# THE NAME OF GOD

---

JENI COUZYEN

Wise woman of earth, I bring my question.

Ask.

What is the secret name of God?

Men say it is too sacred  
to be pronounced.

In sorrow we perform our rituals of prayer,  
and He does not answer.  
He must be named.

Long ago, when God walked on earth  
men hid his true name for safekeeping.  
So diligent they were, the sacred hiding place  
itself was lost  
the secret forgotten.

I know you know it.  
Could the name be Love?

My dear, have you forgotten that too?  
Love is the sacred name for Human, man and woman.

Is it Radiance then?  
Light inseparable from Darkness?

No. Radiance is the sacred name for Spirit  
which contains Light of Sun and infinite  
dark between the stars.

Infinite! That surely is the secret name  
the unimaginable, the immense mystery!

No. That is the sacred name for Within.

Is it Nothingness?

It is not. That is the lie of Reality.

Truth?

Truth is what it says.

Truth is the name for itself.

God. The secret name. The sacred name.

Is it That-Which-Can-Never-Be-Known?

Dear one, that is the sacred name for Thou.

Is it Life?

Oh no. Life is the true name for Earth.

Is it Death?

The sacred name for Womb.

Where shall I find it, the name for God,  
the true name? I must have it.

If I could speak it

I would have God at my grace

as magicians do,

knowing the names of rabbits and winds

of great spirits and powers of dark

can call them up and make them obey.

If I could speak the sacred name of God

He would be at my command

and I would summon him

to do my work.

God! God!

Hush. No-one answers that call.

You were born with the name on your lips.  
Listen. I'll give it to you again, lightly  
as the sound of an owl in the roar of loneliness  
and you'll know it as true  
as layers of pain flake off you like dead skin —  
(only those who die can know it a second time)

and when you hear it, listen deep in your body.  
It is not for praising, not for worshipping  
not for celebrating in idols outside yourself  
or guarding as a secret.

It is for speaking simply, clearly, with joy  
over and over, every day, every minute:

I am, I am!  
The sacred name of God.



## ENDURING

---

BRENDA RICHES

It always begins between the halves of a cup. The porcelain has little to do with it; it's the cracking that matters.

Before the accident the cup created no stir. It hung on a hook; held tea; lay in suds. When it fell and broke in two clean parts, anxiety seeped between.

Now you will never be sure, though the cup was mended, if it will safely hold again. Now you lift anxiously. You sip anxiously. You cannot believe the tea will stay long enough for you to drink it.



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