

Previously Unpublished Poems by Alden Nowlan

He Is Astonished Upon Opening The Door

Red roses have blossomed
overnight in the snow.
The girl wears blue;
she opens her jacket; you see
the prints of overshoes
on her breasts.

Batman and Robin
are racing after
her, the snow
flying from their capes,
fogging their plastic
goggles.

Oh, will the flowers explode,
release a soporific
gas when they bend
down with their
microscopes?

I was a grown man before I knew
it snowed in Arabia.

Englishmen have gone there
to make war and have become
ministers to kings only because
they were permitted to touch.

Ripe olives on black bread,
flat beer spiced with licorice
for the men at arms
in the kitchens
of the palace.

And you, masked one,
O Lordly executioner.

Meeting

You are as perversely beautiful
as a boy's incestuous wish, the invocation
of an old man at odds with time.
When I look down into your face,
your right eye half-hidden by your hair
as though you peered through rushes,
my desire is so strong,
your response so certain
that even at this party
where the conversation undulates
like the wings of locusts
and only the lights
from our eyes
touch,
your knees
open like a flower.

My grandfather owned a factory
in Yugoslavia, but we were not Slavs.
That was a province that had been taken
from Hungary, but we were not Hungarians.
My father still talks
of how things were done in peacetime.
I tell him, Father, this is peacetime.
And he says, yes, but it is not the same

If we had gone to bed
together, we might have lain
all night weeping

for your parents and grandparents,
for my parents and grandparents,
for Hungary and Yugoslavia,
for Jews who belong nowhere
and for those who belong in one place
too much to belong anywhere else,
for the fog
of the Atlantic coast,
for all the neon lights of Montreal.

Perhaps you are not
as I imagine you,
but each of us has only
himself and his
imagination,
so if you say
none of this is true
it won't matter
because I could never love you
enough to make this
your poem and not mine.

Until this moment
I believed you made me kiss you
like a father, no,
it was like a young uncle:
you turned your head
so I could not reach your mouth
and brushed your lips
against my cheek.

Now it seems
we kissed
like lovers
who have learned
it is no use
yet cannot avoid
some kind of goodbye.

Professor Squint's Valedictory

I was a bad teacher
believing my students
to be my equals. That
is a mere observation
and not a boast
or even a plea
for forgiveness. The best
are those who despise you
a little a very little,
without your ever
finding them out.

The Great Rejection

To refuse love
when freely given:
is the first
even the only
sin
and the guilt
therefrom
a kind of worship,
as when
red stains appear
on the white petals
of the roses laid
around the feet
of the miraculous statue.



-Pepita

The Jealous Wife

Don't lie, you hate me, the jealous wife accused.
And at first she couldn't
have been more mistaken.
But she kept repeating
herself
until it was true.



Adam's Song

If we were able
to play
this game
without ceasing,
the time would come
when we were transformed
into pure
energy,
a new sun.

I enter your body to forget my name.