



Once, for three months, he had left lying on the dining-room table a book of photographs, "Davies' Pictorial Views of Russia," but she avoided the open pages of blurred onion spires and wide wind-battered faces. Only once he had seen her from behind the French doors gaze at a space of wolf-haunted snow, as though she could see beneath the whiteness and past its ancient trees. The next day, he had found the sooty spine of the book in the kitchen stove. This was the same place he had once come upon the charred skeleton of the favourite dog of his early years, the remains of which he had previously kept in a glass case in the parlour. He had thus the occasion to ask slyly if burnt calcium had given the bangbelly its special rich juiciness.

It was in the twenty-eighth year of their marriage when it happened. It was a well-known occurrence then, in the area around Drummondville, as was probably the case in other rural areas thereabouts, for a young man to make welcome money, or those of a thrill-seeking character, to find pleasure, in early evening grave-robbing. A recently buried corpse, especially that of a victim of dissipate ways or a strange wasting disease, would bring a good price from McGill medical school, and coffins of the wealthy often yielded rich treasures. But youths told tales of corpses coming to life as they were lifted from their coffins, or of stolen jewels which forever tormented the robbers.

It was common, especially during the preserving cold of winter, to see from one's window the flickering lamplight in the distant cemeteries.

Frank himself, in his younger, freer days, had participated in this profitable venture, not so much for pleasure, but more as a lark, on the dares of his friends.

He had laughed as Peter, raising the sooty lantern, revealed a face comic in its deathlike mask. The black smudge of eyebrows against the white forehead made his friend's face float above him in the frosty night air. A fingered shadow of an old maple lay across the freshly-packed earth.

"Poor Will," Peter breathed. The black silence gave volume to his words and they boomed like a churched incantation. "His mother is sick and he can't leave! Hah! He doesn't know what he's missing! I'll imagine you'll have a few words to say to him tomorrow!"

"Oh, seeing Willy home!" Frank sang gaily, as he pulled the shovel from the crude sledge. But as he lifted the heavy, rattling, wooden case, as Peter pried open the damp lid, the jesting stories he had heard returned to haunt him. Grimly, he forced his gloved hands to touch the soft bulk.

He and Peter laughed and imagined the wealth this adventure would bring, as they neared the lights of the city. Their prize was valuable, the body of an exceedingly tall young man whose family refused to donate the remains to the university. But their gaiety turned to prayerful silence as they were forced once more to handle the cold figure. This was the last time Frank made such a trip, and Peter never troubled to ask him again. Still, they continued to watch the winter sunset and in the deep bluenose of evening, even past closed curtains they could see the wandering flashes of light and hear the desperate laughter.

The wind blew their breath back at them as Frank and Lucy, accompanied by Jemima, now married to an unstable sailor struck with wanderlust, drove back towards town in the sleigh from a country wedding celebration. The drink there had flowed freely, and the liberties Frank had taken with his tongue and wit had caused Lucy no end of irritation. "Well, Davey," he roared, "you've done it again! expect I'll be back here in six or seven months, eh?" The groom shuffled his feet and coughed sheepishly, glancing at his third wife, a widow in her sixties.

Now he and Jemima were singing loudly and frostily, as the toiling horses, their breath freezing in the night, tugged at the heavy sleigh. Lucy sat quietly in her corner, clutching her small end of the bearskin cover.

The tired horses were pulling more and more slowly, as a rough wooden sledge, its lantern swinging crazily as it veered from side to side, sped past. "Well, Lucy, I told you I wasn't the only one there who was enjoying himself!" He gestured towards the passing driver, who swore drunkenly at the single horse. His two passengers swayed at the turns; one, his black coat flapping open in the wind, was being propped up by his companion. In the kerosene light their white faces hung for the moment suspended above their speeding tracks.

The lamplit faces loomed close, then, as the sledge pulled sharply away, the middle passenger lurched forward and up from his seat, then toppled sideways from the moving sledge. His friends took no notice of his situation, but shouted at the horse to move faster.

"Hah!" sang out Jemima. "What did they put in that punch anyway?" She and Frank pointed and shook with laughter. But this was not right, and offended Lucy. "Frank, stop the sleigh," she commanded. "After all, you are a doctor, and you cannot just leave him here to die! Come back here! Your friend is hurt!" she called after the reckless drivers. No one answered, only the swinging lamp could be glimpsed between the trees in the distance, its light growing dimmer.

Frank coughed and winked. "Oh, a rest in the snow will do wonders to revive him. He'll feel like a new, sober, cold sober man in the morning. I know. Why, many's the time I've returned from a late soiree and - well maybe you'd better not know about that, eh?" But he pulled the reins short and stopped the sleigh. He looked back at Lucy slipping on the hoof-packed snow as she walked towards the dark sprawled mass.

"Come, Frank, we must help him. He'll freeze out here!" Her voice carried echoing through the close air. She touched the victim's black-clothed shoulder, the soft flesh slipped under her touch and she could feel a protruding bone beneath the frost-covered worsted. Stooping and groaning, she turned him over. "Disgusting!" she whispered, then called back to the sleigh where Frank was just setting aside the reins. "You were right, you should smell him!" A cold ethered odour drifted from the ground.

"Are you alright?" she asked as she glimpsed his paper-skinned cheeks, his straw-dry hair tipped with frost. One eye was closed, the other stared up at her through a milky, opaque haze.

Sheelagh Russell is a fourth year honours English student at UNB. Sheelagh considers herself a professional student but she also devotes much time and enthusiasm to her position as Co-Editor of these pages, *The Inside*. Many of Sheelagh's poems and short stories have been published in the *Bruns*, as well as in *Floorboards* and the Montreal based periodical, *Inter-course*.

This story is very different from other pieces she has written in that it is a character sotry set in nineteenth century Quebec. Although Sheelagh modestly says she doesn't like "Fainthearted Lucy", she admits it is the best thing she has ever written.

After graduation Sheelagh hasn't the faintest idea what she's going to do, so she'll probably end up at graduate school keeping her status as a professional student. If so, she hopes it won't be in Fredericton as she has already spent her entire twenty years here.
