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International Cultural Bureau
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Editor's note:

The excerpts presented in this book have not been edited by the Department of External Affairs.

Also available is a similar book on French Canadian writers, published in French.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Canadian Writers: Foreign Publishing Rights contains selections of the works of 17 English Canadian authors chosen by the Playwrights Union of Canada, the Writers' Development Trust, the League of Canadian Poets, and the Arts Promotion Division of the Department of External Affairs. The works are representative of English Canadian literature in fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and drama.

For each writer, the catalogue includes biographical information, a sample of the writer's work, reviews of that work, and the name and address of the literary agent or publisher who controls foreign rights. The catalogue also includes information on Canadian government funding for international translation.

The catalogue is distributed through Canadian diplomatic missions abroad, primarily to foreign publishers. The material is presented so that the user can contact the publisher or agent directly for further information.

II. CANADIAN GOVERNMENT FUNDING FOR INTERNATIONAL TRANSLATION

Administered jointly by the Department of External Affairs and the Canada Council, the International Translation Grants program provides assistance for the translation of works by Canadian authors into languages other than French or English for publication abroad. The works of Canadian writers of poetry, fiction, drama, books for children and young people, and serious non-fiction are eligible. Assistance is based on the current translation rate in the country of the publisher.

The foreign publisher intending to publish the translated work should be able to demonstrate that publication of the book is feasible only if translation costs are subsidized. Publishers are encouraged, wherever possible, to use a Canadian translator for the foreign language edition.

Application for assistance may be made by the Canadian-owned publisher who holds the translation rights for the work or by the authors or their agents.

Application may be made at any time; however, requests must be submitted before the translation is completed. The following information and documents must be included:

- general information about the foreign publisher, including a current catalogue;

- the amount of the translation assistance requested and the basis for its calculation;

- the name, address, and professional qualifications of the translator;

- the size of the planned print run;

- a copy of the translator's contract with the foreign publisher;

- a copy of the foreign publisher's contract with the Canadian publisher, author, or agent.

Payment of the grant will be made directly to the translator of the work, at the publishing house which will publish it. Grants are generally made in two instalments, the first when the grant is approved and the second upon receipt of two copies of the foreign language edition.

Information concerning the program may be obtained from Canadian missions abroad, or from the Canada Council at the following address: 99 Metcalfe Street, P.O. Box 1047, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1P 5V8.

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PIERRE BERTON

VIMY

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BIOGRAPHY

Pierre Berton works in all branches of communications and is perhaps the best-known author and broadcaster in Canada. He has written revue sketches and a musical comedy for the stage; plays and documentaries for radio, television, and films; a daily newspaper column; and more than 30 books, several of which are internationally known. He is seen weekly on the CBC's top-rated panel show, "Front Page Challenge," and heard daily on the Toronto radio station CKEY.

Berton has won numerous awards, including three Governor General's Literary Awards for non-fiction (for THE MYSTERIOUS NORTH, KLONDIKE, and THE LAST SPIKE), two National Newspaper Awards, the Stephen Leacock Medal for Humour, the Canadian Authors Association Literary Award for non-fiction, and the Canadian Booksellers Association Author of the Year Award. He wrote and read the narration for the documentary film, City of God, which has won more than 30 awards, including the Grand Prix at Cannes. He is an Officer of the Order of Canada and holds six honorary degrees, as well as the City of Toronto's Civic Award of Merit. He is chairman of The Heritage Canada Foundation, the country's charitable trust.

Born in 1920 and raised in the Yukon, Berton worked in Klondike mining camps during his university years and spent four years in the army. He spent his early newspaper career in Vancouver where, at 21, he was the youngest city editor on any Canadian daily. He moved to Toronto in 1947 and in 1951 was named managing editor of Maclean's, Canada's largest magazine. In 1958 he joined the Toronto Star as associate editor and columnist, leaving in 1962 to start his own television program, "The Pierre Berton Show," which ran until 1973.

A director of McClelland and Stewart, Canada's leading book publisher, Berton lives in Kleinburg, Ontario. He is the father of eight children.

SUMMARY

Pierre Berton's 33rd book, *VIMY*, is the result of two years of research into the human side of the most famous of all Canadian battles. Berton and his research assistant, Barbara Sears, were able to interview 77 survivors of the battle, but Berton says that a treasure-trove of unpublished manuscripts, letters, and diaries formed the real core of the story. No fewer than 47 manuscripts came to light, of which 33 were still in private hands.

In an author's note to the book, Berton writes: "One thing that impressed me in the unpublished material is the eloquence of the writing. A good many Great War veterans obviously felt the need to record their experiences. Some did it to get it off their chests, others for the more important purpose of leaving a memoir for their sons and daughters."

The result is a stirring account of how the Canadians, on April 9, 1917, did what neither the French nor the British had been able to do — seize the most powerful enemy bastion on the Western Front.

As Berton says: "My purpose has been to tell not just what happened but also what it was like. I have tried to look at the Vimy experience from the point of view of the men in the mud as well as from that of the senior planners."

REVIEWS

"*VIMY* is a triumph. It succeeds on every level — as Canadian history; as military history; as social history and — above all — as the history of a journey shared by tens of thousands of men . . . the tale is told through the eyes of individuals whose deaths in this hell and whose survival of its horrors give what could have been — and has been till now — the only sense of hell that counts: we, too, are taken there and lose our innocence — forever. *VIMY* stops the human heart and breaks it over and over again."

Timothy Findley

"Another magnificent Berton book. A vivid, deeply researched work that chronicles the horrors as well as the glories of the Canadian troops and their World War I leaders . . . Once again he demonstrates his unique skill in entertaining while handling a subject that every Canadian should know about. This time it is Vimy."

Richard Rohmer

". . . this book delineates one sharp moment in Canadian history — the battle that was fought at Vimy on six endless days in April 1917 . . . By interviewing survivors and using previously unpublished diaries, Berton has scrupulously recreated the wholesale carnage of that killing ground. He explains how during that bloody process of achieving a victory previously denied the French and the British, we gained adulthood. It was a magnificent victory, and this is a magnificent book. *VIMY* is Berton at his best and that's the best there is."

Peter C. Newman

"The terrible event that made so many Canadians aware of themselves and their identity for the first time, recorded by a master of the narrative art . . . in particular the unpublished memoirs of Vimy's survivors, as shaped by Berton into his story, form one of the most moving accounts of war and battle ever written."

Bill Kilbourn

Chapter Eight**The Final Days**

■ 1

In late March, the Royal Marine Artillery began to move its 15-inch howitzers into the rear of the Canadian positions – a sure sign that an attack was coming. These gigantic guns each weighed twenty tons and hurled a fifteen-hundred-pound projectile at enemy strong points and dugouts. It took nine tractors, each pulling one or two trailers, to haul the various parts of the weapons to the gun pits. Crawling forward at a sluggish eight miles an hour, they tore up roads and snarled traffic behind the lines.

The guns came up in pieces and were put together like a Chinese puzzle, bolted to an iron latticework in a pit twenty feet square. The assembling could occupy four days, the gunners working with only two fifteen-minute breaks each day, for dinner (bully beef soup) and for tea (bread and jam). They were all strong, powerful men, none under five feet ten inches, most well over six feet, and they slept on the ground beside their weapons.

Night after night, the ammunition trucks streamed along the main roads, piling up thousands of shells, like so many potatoes, in pits covered with earth and straw. At night, the shouts and curses of the mule-skinners turned the air blue. When the first phase of the artillery plan went into effect, forty-two thousand tons of ammunition lay piled up behind the lines. An additional twenty-five hundred tons poured in daily to feed the hungry cannon.

On a sunny afternoon at the end of March, Ed Russenholt, a Lewis gun sergeant from Winnipeg, climbed a small hill overlooking the Vimy sector to watch the guns firing below. The view was spectacular. The shoot, which had begun on March 20, would continue until April 2, by which time no fewer than 275,000 shells would have been hurled at the Germans. Yet only half the guns were allowed to fire at this early stage in order to conceal from the enemy the true strength of the artillery. Sergeant Russenholt sat with his back against the corner of a stone wall and began counting the seconds between a gun's muzzle flash and the explosion of its shell on the ridge beyond. He soon had to give up; there were too many guns, and they never stopped. Five hundred guns were firing that day – guns of every size, shape, and trajectory – a line of flame stretching from the Scarpe to the Souchez. The field batteries alone were under orders to fire five hundred rounds per day and the total statistics, as Russenholt shortly discovered, were staggering. He walked over to the 10th Brigade machine-gun battery where he was told the gunners were firing as many as three hundred thousand rounds per night per gun, changing barrels constantly and covering every enemy road junction.

The gunners lived more comfortably than the infantry, but they also lived in fear of premature bursts. A bad batch of 18-pounder ammunition had arrived in these last days before the battle. Ernest Black, a law student from Toronto, and his fellow field gunners feared it more than they feared the enemy cannon. Many of the time fuses were defective, the shells exploding as they left the muzzle. Black and his comrades, testing their ammunition, found

two prematures in six rounds fired; one fell short and killed an officer and a sergeant on the Arras-Souchez Road.

By this time there were so many guns firing that Black found himself in a perilous position. His battery was in the front row of seven rows of guns, each of them firing a percentage of prematures. When such a defective shell burst it flung a pint of steel marbles directly in front of it, all travelling at top speed in a narrow cone twenty-five feet wide and one hundred feet deep. In this hail of small projectiles were two whirling chunks of brass, both lethal — the fuse that hadn't worked and the shell case that had blown off. All night and all day Black and the others were treated to the nerve-racking whine of these shrapnel bullets and the accompanying howl of the fuses and shell cases hurtling at them. Only a thick wall of sandbags at their backs provided any protection.

In those final days, the tempo of activity at Vimy quickened with the intensity of sound as events moved toward a final crescendo. The Canadians raided the enemy trenches every night, probing for scraps of information. It was a costly business. The raids and the German guns took their toll. In the fortnight before the battle, 327 Canadians died; another 1,316 were wounded or lost.

And some went sick. Will Bird was suffering from the early stages of mumps and didn't know it when, on the night of March 28, he was transferred to the sniping section and sent out with a veteran marksman named Harry Pearce, who had eighteen kills to his credit. As the bombardment thundered overhead, the two lay out on dry strips of brick and blocks, above the mud, concealed behind a slitted steel plate that had been camouflaged on the enemy's side with wire and rubbish. Two days went by during which each man took turns peering through the slit with binoculars, examining the enemy lines. Then, on the third morning, Bird saw a German rise waist high in his trench and look around. Bird got him in the cross-hairs at a hundred yards and shot him dead. Even as Pearce was recording the kill in his record book, a second German rose. Bird shot him, too. A third stood up, so sharply defined in the sights that Bird could count the buttons on his tunic. He shot him in the left breast. Two more of the enemy appeared, one of them carrying binoculars; when Bird shot him, the binoculars were flung in a high loop above his head. His comrade raised his rifle and pointed it in the direction of the snipers. Pearce gripped Bird's shoulder. "Shoot!" he said. "You won't get a chance like this all day."

But Bird couldn't continue. A wave of nausea swept over him. "Go ahead yourself," he said, "I've had enough." Pearce took quick aim and Bird saw the dark flush that spread over the German's face as he went down. Pearce shot two more Germans in quick succession, but for Will Bird the future novelist, his sniping days were over. Back in the trenches he told his sergeant he'd had enough of butcher's work. The following day, half delirious from his case of mumps, he was shipped by ambulance to Mont St. Eloi.

Tossing on his hospital cot, unable to sleep because the sniping still preyed on his mind, he would miss the Battle of Vimy Ridge. But he would never forget that cold morning when he, William Richard Bird, aged twenty-five, late of Amherst, Nova Scotia, stared not only into the faces of the men he was about to kill but also into the deepest recesses of his own soul.

2

By April 2, every infantryman knew every detail of the attack except the date and the time. Every division had a thick, typewritten volume, carefully guarded, each copy numbered, that covered every conceivable operation from the use of tram lines to the burial of the dead.

Now, the second phase of the artillery plan went into effect as the guns that had been concealed from the enemy came into action. For the next seven days, the Canadian and British artillery pounded the enemy positions until one million rounds had been fired. The Germans called it the Week of Suffering.

There had never been anything like it in history: fifty thousand tons of high explosives raining down on the demoralized and disoriented Prussian and Bavarian troops. For all of that time, the men in the German front lines had to stand to, unable to wash or shave, their rations heavily curtailed because supplies could not be brought forward under the intense bombardment. Ration trips that had once taken fifteen minutes now took several hours. Even the deep dugouts were not entirely secure, for the new armour-piercing shells with the delayed-action fuses could penetrate for twenty feet or more.

For the Germans, sleep, when it was possible at all, became fitful. The artillery carried out feints – creeping barrages, which seemed to signal an attack, or sudden intensifications in certain areas to throw the enemy off guard. These contributed to the Germans' confusion. Lulled by false alarms, wearied by constant orders to stand to, they grew complacent. In vain, Ludendorff urged that more batteries be brought forward; his artillery was being outgunned three to one. But by the end of the Week of Suffering his extra batteries still weren't in position.

As the shelling intensified, so did the work behind the Canadian lines. The regimental tailors and their assistants were hard at it, sewing up canvas buckets for the bomb carriers. The pioneer companies were making wooden signs, each bearing a regimental shoulder patch to mark for the runners the quickest route back to battalion headquarters. Battalion scouts began to familiarize themselves with overland routes to avoid the clogged trenches and tunnels. Tools of every kind, from wire cutters to picks, were cached in underground storage areas. In one sap alone, the RCRs stored 46,000 rounds of rifle ammunition, 200 shovels, 150 picks, and great rolls of barbed wire.

On the night of April 3, the Corps faced an unexpected crisis: the RFC reported that the Germans were evacuating the Vimy front. If that were true,

then all plans for the capture of the ridge would have to be abandoned. Front-line officers reported the situation normal along the line, but when the RFC reports persisted, the 29th Battalion (Vancouver) – known as Tobin's Tigers, after their original commander – was ordered to find out what was going on.

The Tigers were about to be relieved by the Royal 22nd of Montreal – the famous "Van Doos." Nevertheless, Captain Harry Clyne, who knew of a gap in the enemy wire, organized a patrol, crawled across No Man's Land, peered cautiously over the enemy parapet and, to his amazement, found the German trench empty. Water oozing from footsteps in the mud indicated it had been occupied only a few minutes earlier.

Clyne sent out scouts to the right and left: *nothing!* He and his men moved cautiously forward to the support line only to discover, to their astonishment, that it, too, was empty. They crept along the deserted trench and, as a flare shot up, huddled in a corner of the traverse. In the light they spotted a few German stragglers, unshaven, exhausted, their greatcoats caked with mud. All were high-tailing it to the rear.

What was going on? Had the Germans decided upon a ruse – to evacuate the forward areas and set up a new and stronger defensive line farther back, perhaps on the reverse slopes where they would be protected by the great bulk of the ridge? If so, all the planning and training, all the bombardment and split-second timing for the assault would be worthless.

Clyne, pondering the problem, made plans to seize at least one prisoner to confirm his suspicions. Then, suddenly, it seemed as if the entire German army was descending on his small patrol on the double. These were fresh clean troops in unsoiled greatcoats, leaping into the support trench on his right and dashing past his concealed patrol to occupy the forward line.

Clyne knew he had to get the message back as fast as possible. That wouldn't be easy. He gave each man the same message: "No retirement on the Vimy front – corps relief only." But how to get back with the fresh troops surrounding them? Clyne's only advice to his sergeant was to "go where the mud is thickest."

Through the mud they crawled, over the parapet of the trench to the very edge of a vast crater, fifty feet deep, two hundred feet wide. Their own troops held the far side, but two German sentries loomed up ahead, on the near lip, barring their way. Clyne sent his men in pairs, creeping around the enemy post with orders to race for their own lines even at the risk of being shot at by their own men.

Miraculously, they all made it. The Van Doos, who had already relieved the Tigers, had given the patrol up for lost. Now they couldn't believe their eyes: how could such a group get through the wire and the German trenches, remain for two hours behind the enemy lines, and return without a scratch? It was fortunate they did. The word went back to Corps headquarters that the enemy trenches were manned and there was no need to abandon the plan.

The Germans, aroused now, shelled the Canadian front and had their revenge. Two members of Harry Clyne's bold little patrol were killed by shrapnel.

By April 6, Good Friday, senior officers knew the date of the attack but not the time; it had been postponed for a variety of reasons from April 8 to April 9. The weather that Friday was bracing, "the bluest of spring mornings, cold enough to be exhilarating, too cold to be delicious," in Andrew Macphail's notation. The news from across the Atlantic was equally exhilarating: the United States had declared war on Germany. Few had time to give that much thought: everyone's mind was concentrated on the coming battle. The sacred had to give way to the profane. When Canon Frederick George Scott, the senior chaplain of the 1st Division, tried to organize a Good Friday service, he was told everybody was too busy to attend.

It was a day of hard work and sober reflection. Over on the 2nd Division front, Major James DeLancey, the second in command of the 25th Battalion (Nova Scotia Rifles) – the man who would take them over the top – told a meeting of officers that if only one man was left alive their objective must be taken, and unless their plight was drastic they must not call for help from any other unit.

On the enemy side, the jitters were growing. At the far left of the sector, sentries of the 38th Battalion from Ottawa looked out across No Man's Land and, to their astonishment, spotted a lone German soldier, carrying his pack and rifle and walking directly toward them. He was a young private of the 11th Bavarians, short and blond and in good condition, apart from the mud caking his grey uniform, but the bombardment had been too much for him. The sentries shook their heads in amazement: something must be wrong if one of the enemy was allowed to walk into their trench in broad daylight.

That afternoon, the artillery obliterated the already badly shattered village of Thélus on the forward slope of the ridge, just below the crest. Its underground shelters were strongly defended by German machine guns. Now two hundred artillery pieces were turned on the ravaged community. Farther to the left the village of Farbus and Farbus Wood, on the far side of the ridge, received a similar battering.

The weather was so clear that Bill Breckenridge, detailed for an advance party of the Black Watch, could see the smears of white chalk thrown up by the Germans in their trenches along the ridge. The rest of Breckenridge's battalion was again bivouacked in the Dumbbell camp, six miles behind the lines; the advance party's job was to prepare the jumping-off trenches for the coming battle. As they trudged past the old French cemetery, Breckenridge looked soberly at the long lines of crosses and asked himself: "Can the Canadians drive Fritz from the Vimy Ridge after the French and the British failed?" It seemed to him an almost impossible task.

On the plank road that ran from Mont St. Eloi to the Arras-Souchez highway, the party stopped to rest. Breckenridge cast his eyes back to the village and the shattered twin towers of the old abbey perched on the hilltop. All around him the great guns lay in wait, guns of every calibre – row upon row – lined up on an old sunken Roman road that had once known the tramp of Caesar's legions. As the sun began to sink, the sky took on a deeper hue; Breckenridge had been here before, but now it seemed to him more beautiful than he'd ever known it. A phrase popped into his head: "Even in the jaws of death, life is sweet." He thought of his home in Sherbrooke and the turmoil that lay ahead. Who could survive? Who would fall? It occurred to Bill Breckenridge that *everybody* expected to survive, including himself.

By now, in the gathering dusk, the towers of the abbey had blended into a single spire. On that Good Friday evening, it seemed to Breckenridge that it had taken on the shape of a great monument, overshadowing the battlefield.

On this journey to the front line, everything would stand out sharply in Breckenridge's memory: the sight, for instance, of an artillery post disguised so well as a shattered tree trunk that it was hard to tell it from a row of real trees that lined the Arras road; or the scenes in Pont Street, flooded by April showers, where men continually slipped off the bathmats into the mud to the merriment of the others; or the sight of troops sloshing through the water of another sunken road known as the Quarry Line – as unconcerned as if they were walking down the main street of their home village.

In the Grange Subway, labour battalions were still clawing away at the chalk, creating dugouts off the main subway to be used for the headquarters of various battalions. Here, Breckenridge vainly tried to find a place to sleep; the tunnel was so tightly packed with snoring troops that there wasn't a square inch of space to be had. He and the others moved up into the forward trench system only to be driven back by a rain of mortar shells. Finally, they returned to the Quarry Line to join a group from the field ambulance cooking a midnight dinner over a charcoal brazier. "I can't give you a bunk but I can give you a stretcher and a blanket," one of them offered. Breckenridge and his party accepted gratefully, flung themselves onto the ground, and dropped off to sleep.

Andrew Macphail had left the rear areas near Mont St. Eloi about the same time as Breckenridge to walk with his son, Jeffrey, to the Corps headquarters at Camblain l'Abbé. The road was good, but when he returned six hours later it reminded him of cream that had been churned into butter. Horses were fainting and falling, lorries spewing up stones, transport jammed for miles in both directions, a drizzle starting to fall – yet everybody was cheerful and punctiliously polite. As the guns gobbled the ammunition the traffic continued its snail-like pace, hour after hour. Workers at a YMCA coffee stand counted the three-ton trucks moving up the line, all loaded with shells, and figured that in a single twenty-four-hour period two thousand had passed that way.

Everywhere, as night fell, the work went on. The Zivy Subway was being rushed to completion. Tramways were being pushed forward as close to the front line as practical. Bridges were being thrust across the parallel lines of trenches so that the supporting troops would not be held up. The Canadian wire had to be cut to allow the attackers to go over the top and into No Man's Land unimpeded. Dumps were being assembled, dressing stations set up in the ruins of Neuville St. Vaast, and the great Zivy Cave made habitable for even more men. In the Vincent, Tottenham, and Cavalier subways, huge dressing stations were being completed. And out in No Man's Land that night, whole companies of infantry were silently digging away ahead of the forward line, building the shallow jumping-off-trenches — three feet deep and no wider than a man's shoulders — that would give the first wave of attackers a head start at Zero Hour. But not all of those who dug trenches in No Man's Land that night would ever experience that moment. Even as they worked, the enemy shells exploded among them, destroying the sweetness of their youth.

Other men died that night and not all of them in No Man's Land. That same afternoon, Corporal Eric Forbes of the 6th Field Company, Engineers, stood beside the Arras-Souchez road watching the traffic. Up came an officer with a company of men. "Corporal," he asked, "do you know of any place around here my men could rest? We're a tunnelling company and we're going up to the ridge. We have to get some rest because we have to work all night." Forbes found a billet in a building behind the armoury where others were also sleeping. The tunnellers entered, slipped out of their equipment, and settled down on bunks of wire and netting. Fifteen minutes later a shell with an instantaneous fuse struck the building, killing twelve, wounding thirty. Just a few inches higher and it would have passed over harmlessly.

For Eric Forbes, this was a moment of horror. He was twenty-four, a Nova Scotian who had been studying engineering at Queen's. He'd joined a militia company of engineers because that would count as a credit toward his degree. He'd been working as purser on a boat out of Boston the summer war was declared. A telegram had ordered him into active service. Now here he was, standing outside a ruined building, his gorge rising as an old friend, the company driver William Stalker, staggered toward him, trying to stuff his guts back into the jagged hole in his belly before collapsing at Forbes's feet.

3

Saturday, April 7, dawned, another fine day, the kind of spring morning that makes a man feel good to be young and alive. With the battle only forty-eight hours away the attacking brigades began to organize their advance headquarters. As Brigade Major, it was Duncan Macintyre's task to make arrangements in the Zivy Cave. By afternoon the job was complete and the headquarters personnel of the 4th Infantry Brigade were sloshing forward with their kits and office supplies through the deep mud of the communication trenches, only to be halted by a flurry of shelling. One man died, another was wounded.

The cave itself was jammed with men, casting grotesque shadows in the candlelight as they played cards or brewed tea over small fires or carved their names on the chalk walls. A stream of humanity constantly shuffled in and out, splashed by water that dribbled from the roof above covering everything in an inch and more of grey slime. Stretcher-bearers staggered under wounded men whose cries punctuated the general buzz of voices. Carrying parties entered, dumped their loads, and went off for more. Mud-covered men stumbled in from the front to catch a few winks of sleep. To Macintyre, the stench of foul air, mud, cooking, sweat, urine, chloride of lime, and stale tobacco was nauseating. More than four hundred men had crowded into the cave, tracking in so much mud that a layer of wet ooze carpeted the chalk floor.

While Macintyre was setting up his headquarters, others were still out beyond the forward lines, preparing the way for the assault and probing the German defences. Two companies of 48th Highlanders had established themselves on the rear lip of one crater in broad daylight, as nervous a position as existed in the Vimy sector. One pair of scouts managed to work their way across No Man's Land and right into the German lines, so close they could hear the sentries chatting. Nothing would do but that the sergeant-major of one of the companies, Taffy Willis, should decide, against all orders, to attack a German post. He crept up to the enemy line, tossed three Mills bombs, emptied his Colt revolver and then, in frustration, flung his steel helmet at the Germans before getting back unscathed. It was not a healthy place to be; four of his men died that day in No Man's Land; six more were wounded.

Private Andrew McCrindle, a nineteen-year-old from Montreal, was also heading for No Man's Land early that afternoon with a work party from the 24th Battalion (Victoria Rifles) detailed to dig more jumping-off trenches. With his big glasses, his baby-blue eyes, his snub nose, and his smooth, innocent face, the skinny McCrindle bore little resemblance to the recruiting poster stereotype of the jut-jawed, gimlet-eyed fighting man. This would be his first battle, and so it gave him a good feeling to pass the hundreds of big guns lined up, almost hub to hub, and talk to the gunners, who boasted to him about the twelve-mile range that would drop shells far in the German rear to prevent reserve troops moving forward.

McCrindle was curious about the long ropes tied to the barrels of the big howitzers. The gunners explained that the trajectory was so high it was beyond the range of the usual mechanism designed to lower the barrel. Four men had to haul it down with ropes. But the German guns were still in action, as McCrindle's party found out when they worked with pick and shovel in front of their own trenches. The Germans spotted the chalk waste thrown up by the diggers and brought down a rain of shells. The work party scuttled to safety through the Zivy Subway and took refuge in the Zivy Cave.

The German aerial observers, floating in the cloudless skies above, had spotted the chalk and alerted the enemy batteries. In their frail sausage balloons they peered down at the mismash of wriggling trenches, trying to make sense of the dun-coloured world below, seeking other tell-tale clues to pinpoint the date of the offensive they knew was coming. The balloons were under constant attack by the Royal Flying Corps – frustrating and dangerous work for the British and Canadian pilots. The Germans were able to winch their sausages to the ground faster than the airmen could manoeuvre to destroy them. It was a costly business: for every enemy balloon shot to pieces the RFC lost a flying machine.

Young Billy Bishop of No. 60 Squadron, late of Orillia, became an official ace that day and also won his first decoration, the Military Cross. He had been given a specific balloon as a target, but just as he dived on it he heard the rattle of machine-gun fire and found himself in combat with the enemy. Fortunately, the German flew directly in line with Bishop's gun. Bishop shot him down but lost the target, which had been hauled to earth during the combat. Frustrated, he disobeyed orders to keep above one thousand feet, dived at the balloon and attempted to destroy it in its bed, scattering the crew and at the same time doing his best to avoid both the anti-aircraft guns and the balls of rocket fire that the British called "flaming onions."

Now he was in a real pickle: his steep dive had caused his engine to fail. Bishop went into a glide, heading for an open field, sick at heart, knowing that he would shortly be either dead or a prisoner. Like those of others before him, his thoughts turned to home. How his parents would worry when he was reported missing! But like most heroes and all air aces, Bishop was blessed with more than his share of luck. At fifteen feet above the battlefield, his engine kicked in and he streaked for home, so close to the ground that no ack-ack gun could get him and no pilot would dare dive on him. Below him in the Vimy trenches, the startled Germans missed their aim. Behind, the balloon he'd dived on was a mass of flames.

It was a bitter-sweet victory for Billy Bishop. When he got back to base he found that three other pilots from his squadron, all good friends, had been lost in a battle with Manfred von Richthofen's *Jagstaffel II*, giving the German ace his thirty-seventh kill and, coincidentally, a promotion to captain. "Oh, how I hate the Hun," Bishop wrote to his fiancée that night. "They have done in so many of my best friends. I'll make them pay, I swear."

On the ground that evening, the signals section of the Black Watch was ordered to bring up the battalion's rations from the dump on the Quarry Line. For Bill Breckenridge, these last few days had been a nightmare of fetching and carrying. The signallers seemed to be constantly on the move, night and day. And, in those last crowded hours, movement became more difficult. Breckenridge and his carrying party were barred by sentries from using the Grange Subway, now restricted to one-way traffic forward. But no one liked

using the trenches, which were by then waist-deep in water, so, after some discussion, the party decided to chance a route above ground.

Breckenridge was the first man out of the communication trench. Hunched well over, loping along at top speed, he willed himself to dodge the enemy bullets.

"Where are you going?" the man behind him shouted.

"Never mind where I'm going," Breckenridge panted. "Don't follow me unless you want to. If you know a better way, go to it. I'm getting out of here as quickly as I can."

When, at last, they tumbled into the Cross Street trench, Breckenridge felt as if a ton of weight had suddenly been removed from his shoulders. With the mud splashing over their uniforms they followed the trench to the Quarry Line. There they filled their ration bags and headed into the traffic stream moving up the Grange Subway. It was hard work, balancing the bags on their shoulders, trying to avoid stepping on the hundreds of men curled up on the wet chalk floor or simply standing, three deep. "Watch where you're going," Breckenridge heard one man grumble; and another: "What size boots do you wear?" Gingerly he and the others picked their way through the narrow subway, squeezed into the headquarters dugout, deposited their loads, and settled down as best they could.

As night fell and the rumble of guns continued and the occasional starshell illuminated the debris of No Man's Land, the Royal Flying Corps swept across the Douai Plain behind the ridge and bombed the Douai airport, where von Richthofen's *Jagstaffel* was quartered. Richthofen's own all-red Albatross barely escaped being blown to pieces, but as the last of the raiders droned off into the night, the German ace was able to get some sleep. It was a fitful slumber; he tossed on his cot, continuing to dream of guns firing above him. Suddenly the dream became a reality: he sat bolt upright in bed at the sound of a low-flying airplane directly above his hut. The noise increased until it filled his quarters. The plane, he realized, could be no more than one hundred feet above him. Instinctively, in his fright, Germany's greatest pilot pulled the blankets over his head just as a bomb shattered the window of the hut. Von Richthofen leaped up, ran out onto the tarmac, pistol in hand, and fired a few shots at the vanishing British plane. Then he returned to his troubled sleep, awaiting the coming dawn.

PHYLLIS GROSSKURTH

MELANIE KLEIN:

HER WORLD AND HER WORKS

Information on rights

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BIOGRAPHY

Phyllis Grosskurth was born and raised in Toronto, where she attended St. Clement's School and the University of Toronto, obtaining an Honours B.A. in English. She graduated from the University of Ottawa with an M.A. and from the University of London with a Ph.D. She now lives in Toronto and is a professor of English at the University of Toronto.

Grosskurth is the author of THE WOEFUL VICTORIAN: A BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS, HAVELOCK ELLIS: A BIOGRAPHY, and MELANIE KLEIN: HER WORLD AND HER WORKS and the editor of MEMOIRS OF JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS. In addition, she contributes articles and reviews to magazines and periodicals including The Observer, The Daily Telegraph, New York Review of Books, and Saturday Night. On the strength of her books, she has become one of the few Canadians with an international reputation for biography. In 1965 Grosskurth was the winner of the Governor General's Literary Award for non-fiction and the University of British Columbia Award for biography. She was short-listed in 1981 for the Arts Council of Great Britain's National Book Award.

SUMMARY

Phyllis Grosskurth's MELANIE KLEIN is the first full-scale biography of one of the most important — and controversial — early psychoanalysts, a woman who challenged Freud and who pioneered the field of child analysis.

Until recently underestimated in North America, Melanie Klein was a leading figure in psychoanalytic circles from the 1920s until her death in 1960. Now, drawing on a wealth of hitherto unexplored documents as well as extensive interviews with people who knew and worked with Klein, Grosskurth has written a superb account of this fascinating, complicated woman and her theories — theories that are still growing in influence around the world.

The book opens in turn-of-the-century Vienna with Melanie Klein's troubled childhood: her domineering mother, her ineffectual father, her beloved, wastrel brother. Grosskurth shows us Klein's marriage to a man with whom, Klein says, she was "up to a point in love," and the birth of her children. We see Klein sinking into depression under the weight of a joyless marriage (complicated by her mother's interference) and then entering analysis with Sandor Ferenczi, a close friend of Freud. Under his guidance, Klein begins to change and grow, as she applies her own analysis to her work with emotionally disturbed children.

The narrative moves to Berlin as Melanie Klein becomes a member of the Berlin Psycho-Analytic Society and is analysed and further encouraged in her work by Karl

Abraham. She begins to publish and, after a warmly received series of lectures in London, she accepts an invitation from Ernest Jones to come to England to practise.

But, as Grosskurth makes clear, this courageous, forceful woman was to encounter (even encourage) opposition. Indeed, she was to spend the rest of her days embroiled in heated conflicts over the nature of her work and in struggles for control of the professional organization to which she belonged. These conflicts were first and foremost with Sigmund Freud and his acolyte daughter Anna, then with several of the British analysts who had originally welcomed her so enthusiastically, and, most tragically, with her own daughter Melitta, whom Klein had introduced to the psychoanalytic world when the girl was still a medical student in Budapest.

Melanie Klein was not only a highly organized theorist and effective practitioner, but an extraordinary woman. This book about her is a major contribution to psychoanalytic history.

REVIEWS

"This ultimately sympathetic biography has been comprehensively researched, leaving the impression that every available piece of evidence has been unearthed and carefully weighed....It is impossible in a review of this length to do even minimal justice to this exhaustive biography. Readers interested in psychoanalytic theory and in details of the internecine strife among different schools of psychoanalytic thought will have much to absorb them."

Ken Adachi, Toronto Star

"In this thorough and scholarly biography Phyllis Grosskurth for the first time pieces together, with the help of Klein's son and the British analysts she interviewed, the life of this extraordinary woman and the factors in it that influenced her theories."

Rosemary Dinnage, New York Review of Books

"Marked by clarity, intelligence and grace, this book is an immensely fascinating biography."

Ken Adachi, Toronto Star

"...Klein is an ideal subject for biography. And Grosskurth handles her with consummate skill."

Jean Smith Mottershead, Edmonton Journal

"There is no doubt, however, that she (Grosskurth) is an expert at reconstruction, painstakingly weaving together personal correspondence, tidbits from interviews, and other fragments of history to create a comprehensive and coherent narrative."

Meagan Daley, Books in Canada

"Phyllis Grosskurth is arguably our most accomplished biographer, versatile, thorough, eloquent, and fearless in advancing into areas where the material she deals with is likely to be esoteric to the layman....and one of the most impressive aspects of Grosskurth's achievement is the skill with which she makes the theories of the contesting psychoanalysts and the terms of their arguments comprehensible to the lay reader."

George Woodcock, Canadian Literature

"Professor Grosskurth has written a Christmas cake of a book, rich and dense, studded with disparate and provocative terms, which will provoke eager debate among Kleinians and non-Kleinians alike."

W. Ann Mully, MD, Humane Medicine

Chapter One

Early Memories

Melanie Klein was the stuff of which myths are made. Seemingly secretive about her past, indomitably self-assured about her present, her very being aroused speculation and suspicion. In a sense, she sought this enigmatic role; in another, it was thrust upon her by enemies and friends alike. Her enemies—who were numerous during her lifetime and after—spread scurrilous gossip about her. Her supporters, tenderly protective, assured the world that she was extremely discreet about her private life. She was more transparent than any of them realized, but in the course of her turbulent passage she learned the caution necessary to safeguard her work, and for most of her career the woman and her work were indistinguishable.

Melanie Klein was a woman with a mission. From the moment she read Freud's paper *On Dreams* (1901)¹ in 1914 she was enraptured, converted, and dedicated to psychoanalysis. Captivated by the concept of the unconscious, she followed its seductive lure into speculative depths from which even Freud had retreated. This was her offense: for daring to branch out on her own paths of investigation, she was branded, vilified, and mocked. Her detractors, by attacking the woman herself, sought to devalue her contribution to the knowledge of the mind. The innuendos about a shadowy past have been so widespread that a whole subliterature about the woman, her family, and her early work has proliferated. The truth is both simpler and more complex—and certainly more elusive—than her defamers have imagined.

During the last decade of her life, Melanie Klein began to receive numerous inquiries, particularly from America, about the history and development of her concepts. She was delighted by the interest, particularly as she feared that her work might not survive, an anxiety her colleagues often heard her voice. To the queries from abroad, she listed the facts of her life in virtually formulaic fashion: the information that her father had been a doctor and that she also had intended to study medicine but was prevented by an early marriage; her introduction to psychoanalysis through reading Freud's work while living in Budapest and her subsequent analysis by Ferenczi; the latter's encouragement to pursue investigations into child analysis; her joining Karl Abraham's group in Berlin in 1921; the invitation by Ernest Jones to give a course of lectures in child analysis to the British Psycho-Analytical Society in 1925; and her subsequent decision the following year to settle in England. To this was appended a bibliography of her major works: *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* (1932), *Contributions to Psycho-Analysis, 1921-1945* (1948), *Developments in Psycho-Analysis* (1952), *New Directions in Psycho-Analysis* (1955),² and *Envy and Gratitude* (1957). *Narrative of a Child Analysis* was to be published a year after her death, in 1961.

In 1953 she began work on a brief autobiography, which she continued at intermittent intervals until 1959, the year before her death. It is cautious, repetitious, ingenuous, and evasive—and invaluable to an understanding of the woman. There are also various fragmentary pages, as though she were attempting to rework the document until it reached its final, acceptable form. Similarly, all through her life she tended to write initial drafts of her most

important letters. Aware of her position in the psychoanalytic movement, she realized the importance of setting down selected facts of her early life. Both a childlike vulnerability and a mature self-knowledge shine through the implacable façade of the public image.

Melanie Klein was the first European psychoanalyst to become a member of the British Psycho-Analytical Society, and ultimately she became its dominant influence. A somewhat exotic figure when she settled in England in 1926, rumored to be at odds with the Freuds, father and daughter, in disrepute with the Berlin Society of which she had been a member, a divorcee in the days when divorce still carried an aura of scandal, she inevitably became the subject of gossip. What, it was asked, had she done with her husband? To this day a ribald story makes the rounds that she ate him up.

The unpublished Autobiography is in the possession of the Melanie Klein Trust. Her story, as she relates it, is the "official" record. However, in 1983 a large collection of early family letters was discovered in her son's loft. These letters reveal information very much at variance with some of the facts related in the Autobiography. Why, then, did she not destroy them, since she must have been aware that they would ultimately be discovered? Several explanations are possible. Perhaps certain letters are not destroyed because the subject wants the truth ultimately to be told, even in its unpalatable aspects; yet naturally one is ambivalent about exposing desires, fears, and embarrassment to public scrutiny.

In Klein's case, it is possible that she simply could not bear to part with some of the most important areas of her past. Most of the letters from her mother and her brother seem to have been preserved, whereas only a single letter from her husband survives. The letters kept her relatives alive in a very concrete way. To the distanced biographer, her mother and her brother emerge from the letters as very different people from the portraits in the Autobiography; and it is conceivable that Klein idealized them to the point where the real and the official figures merged indissolubly.

In her Autobiography she moves back and forth in time and, in reflecting on time past and time present, she has created a family romance. Just as much as an analyst, a biographer finds self-mythologies revealing in their revelations of displacements, condensations, and evasions. Yet how can one encompass her turbulent life in a single telling, how give the allotted weight to each event and person who helped shape the course of that life?

Her background was one of both conventionality and rebellion. Her father's early life fascinated her, but the details she gives are scrappy and inconsequential. She does not even mention his date of birth (1828), but explains that Moriz Reizes came from a rigidly orthodox family, somewhere in Poland—the exact location she apparently regarded as irrelevant. It actually was Lemberg (now Lvov), Galicia, the site of one of the oldest and most distinguished universities in Europe.³ Her grandfather she describes as a "businessman," possibly a small shopkeeper, or a dealer in cattle or lumber.

For years her own father was known as a *bocher*—a student of the Talmud, the ancient, many-volumed codification of Jewish law and tradition. Yet Moriz Reizes must have had a very private inner world where he nursed his own hopes and dreams, probably influenced by the Haskalah, the Jewish emancipation movement that met strong opposition from both the orthodox rabbinate and the Hasidim in Galicia. One day he announced to his pious, simple parents that he had passed the general matriculation examinations and, worse still, intended to study medicine. He supported himself while in medical school (presumably in Lvov) by tutoring. Many years later he told his daughter that when he was taking his first examinations he knew that his mother was at home praying that he would fail. By the time he passed all his examinations he had broken away completely from his orthodox tradition, although he never cut the ties with his family.

As a child, Melanie loved hearing about her father's courage during a cholera epidemic. In answer to an appeal for doctors to go out to the Polish villages, he not only went but, unlike the other doctors who would stand at the windows telling the victims what to do, Moriz Reizes boldly entered the cottages and treated the patients as he would have done if they had been suffering from any other complaint. When he returned, he found a letter from his mother imploring him not to risk his life. Whether this act of heroism actually happened or not is immaterial; Klein believed that it had.

He was married twice, but Klein is vague about the details of the first marriage. It probably took place prior to his medical studies, because he was married in Jewish rites to a girl he had never seen prior to the wedding. The marriage was unsuccessful and was "soon dissolved"—in Klein's reckoning, when her father was about thirty-seven. No reason is given, but it is an indication of his independence and rebelliousness.

He was in his mid-forties when, on a visit to Vienna, he met a black-haired beauty, Libussa Deutsch, who was staying at the same boardinghouse. He immediately fell in love with this "educated, witty, and interesting" young woman, with her fair complexion, fine features, and expressive eyes. Her death certificate indicates that she was born in 1852, twenty-four years after her future husband. If she was such a beauty and the daughter of a rabbi, why did she marry this Polish stranger with whom there are no signs that she was infatuated?

In actual fact, Reizes was a general practitioner in Deutsch-Kreutz, a small town (which later became Burgenland, Austria) about seventy miles from Vienna, two or three miles inside the Hungarian border. Libussa, on the other hand, lived not in Deutsch-Kreutz (where Klein situates her) but in Warbotz (Verbotz) in Slovakia. She was named after Libussa, the mythical founder of Prague who in the nineteenth century became the symbol of Czech national identity. Klein's failure to give her mother's real birthplace could be accounted for if she despised the Slovaks, particularly as Slovakian Jews spoke Yiddish. Her mother, however, was proud of her origins and in a letter of 1911,

written to Melanie who was staying in a resort on the Baltic, quoted their new Slovakian housemaid: "You will see what a loyal maid you will have in me, for only a Slovak girl can be so loyal and devoted when she gets such good treatment as I do. The Hungarians are all treacherous, slovenly, thievish, and irresponsible."

Melanie was much attracted to the cultural ambience of Libussa's family, in which both the father and grandfather were widely respected for their scholarship and tolerance. (Libussa's brother, Hermann, who was to play an important part in their lives, attended a Jesuit school.) Melanie's great-grandfather, Rabbi Mandel Deutsch, was noted for his gentle disposition. One of the longings of Melanie's childhood was to have known her maternal grandmother: "I longed for her to be living, because I never had a grandmother, and I knew this was a nice, kind and pleasant woman." This is an interesting statement from a woman who herself was apparently far more successful as a grandmother than as a mother. It is also interesting that she never knew or showed any interest in her maternal grandfather. Perhaps she imbibed this lack of interest from her own mother. There was certainly a pattern of matriarchy in the family. But she never formed even an image of her father's mother, and was patently scornful of all of his family. She says of the Deutsch family: "The whole impression I got, in contrast to my father's family, was one of a good family life, very simple, in restricted circumstances but full of knowledge and education." Seventy years later, Klein still shuddered at the memory of her revulsion towards her father's sister and her husband on the occasions when they appeared, dressed in the ritual kaftan that Polish Jews had adopted from eighteenth-century aristocrats.

According to Klein, Libussa and her two sisters were consumed with a passion for learning, and these determined young autodidacts gained knowledge by reading and discussions with their father. Melanie admired the way her mother had taught herself to play the piano. She had a vivid recollection of Libussa pacing up and down the wide veranda of a summer flat they rented in Dornbach, on the outskirts of Vienna, totally absorbed in a book of French idioms she was memorizing. For Klein this was a demonstration of intellectual passion, since opportunities for her mother to put these idioms to practical use were almost nonexistent. There is evidence that as a young woman Libussa did have some respect for learning: she was attracted to her future husband partly because of his command of ten languages. Other relatives recalled Karoline as the clever sister, while Libussa was known as the beauty of the family. In any event, Libussa's later letters are written in German that indicates the language did not come easily to her.

The letters exchanged between the engaged couple in 1874 put a slightly different emphasis on Melanie's image of her mother. Libussa freely admits in her letters to her fiancé that she composed them very carefully, sometimes writing them out twice. Moriz was very eager for them to exchange letters in French—a suggestion Libussa stubbornly resisted, giving as an excuse that she did not want to deprive the other members of her family of the pleasure of

reading his letters. When she did include a phrase in French it was awkwardly expressed. Moriz writes with flowery ardor, Libussa with self-conscious restraint. "I feel only too clearly," she wrote on one occasion, "that I will not be able to follow your lofty and enthusiastic flights which keep you in the highest heights, in ever growing, enthusiastic distances. My wings are tied. I am too earthbound even to dare to dream of following you."

After their marriage in 1875 the couple settled in Deutsch-Kreutz. Here three children were born in quick succession: Emilie in 1876, Emanuel in 1877, and Sidonie in 1878. At some point, probably between the birth of Sidonie and the birth of Melanie on March 30, 1882, the family moved to Vienna,⁴ undoubtedly in the hope of improving their straitened financial circumstances. They could not have been so naïve as to harbor any expectation that a middle-aged Jewish doctor of Polish origin could achieve professional success.⁵ Dr. Reizes was forced to take on a dental practice (indeed, he seems at first to have been a dentist's assistant) and to supplement his income by acting as a medical consultant to a vaudeville theater.

Their difficult financial circumstances made it necessary for Libussa to open a shop—not only in itself a humiliation for a doctor's wife, but also personally distasteful because in addition to plants she sold reptiles, from which she cringed in horror. Melanie does not speculate on her mother's choice of a somewhat bizarre type of shop, but notes that such was the power of her mother's beauty that customers loved to drop in to chat with her. She adds that Libussa's customers "understood" that she was a "lady," not a common shopkeeper—a rather curious disclaimer for her to feel obliged to make. One of Melanie's earliest memories was of being taken to visit this place into which her mother disappeared every day. The shop was an integral part of their lives until 1907, when Libussa was finally relieved of this burden.

A change in their fortunes occurred with the appearance of Moriz Reizes' father in their midst (when, Klein does not say). Since the death of his wife he had been living with a daughter, who one day turned him out of the house. Melanie's mother "readily" agreed to take him in, and apparently he lived with them peacefully until his death—an event that changed their lives, for he not only left them with some savings, she says, but with a winning sweepstakes ticket worth 10,000 florins.

As far as Melanie was concerned, their new apartment in the middle-class Martinstrasse seemed luxurious. The Martinstrasse was in Waching, then a suburb of Vienna. She blocked out the details of the first, rather squalid fifth-floor flat in Borsegasse where they had been living,⁶ while she delighted in everything about the new one—the balcony, the gleaming silver, the fact that she had new clothes and that her father gave her mother diamond earrings to mark the occasion. At the same time, her father bought the house in which he conducted his dental practice. "It seemed to me an enormous thing that my parents should actually own a house. The pride and happiness that I felt about these changes made it clear to me that I had been worried

about the financial difficulties, I would say poverty, which preceded the move."

Now at this point Klein seems to have enmeshed herself totally within the family romance. The money was actually lent to them by Libussa's younger brother Hermann, a successful lawyer who had lived with them while a student.⁷ In a letter of September 9, 1906, Libussa wrote to Melanie and Arthur Klein that Uncle Hermann "considered it the best deed in his life that he had stepped in for us and thus enabled us to live free of any worries about rent for nineteen years—which at the end brought us even into the possession of property. On that occasion he reminded me of his having to raise money before each time the rent was due; he did not at all profit from it. At that time, he said, he had got 20,000 gulden,⁸ of which he invested 9,000 in the house. The furniture had cost him another few thousands, and the remaining thousands he needed for his business. If he had at the time bought that house in Brigittenau, it would by now have trebled in value. Yet he did not wish to burden me with all this now, he said, he was just indulging in melancholy thoughts. Now he really cares very much that he will be paid—for our sake as well as his."

Hermann never let them forget their indebtedness to him, and in a letter of October 10, 1902, written from Venice, Melanie's brother, Emanuel, voiced his resentment at the news that Libussa had to borrow the money from Hermann to pay for Melanie's trousseau: "That Uncle had to help out once again is very disagreeable to me! To the devil with him for that! Whenever I hear the name of this good, weak, and conceited man I have to think of those twelve years of my childhood and youth which he darkened and destroyed irreparably for me—and each time I feel something that chokes me rising up in my throat, and my heart gets black with gall." Klein, on the other hand, is disinclined to say anything disagreeable about him because she basked in the knowledge of being her uncle's favorite. In her Autobiography she recalls: "I was very fond of him and he too spoilt me very much. I heard him say many things, among them that, being so beautiful, a young Rothschild would come to marry me. He also had a lovely big dog, on which I rode."

Melanie was five at the time of the change in the family fortunes, and the move coincided with her starting at the local state school in the Alsenstrasse. From the beginning she was very happy there. Until then there had been no children of her own age with whom to play, and she enjoyed their company immensely. She had also inherited the family passion for knowledge and soon became an ambitious student, very conscious of her marks; it was particularly important for her to receive a report with the words *wurde belobt* (commended).

An early photograph of Melanie aged about six shows her standing confidently beside Emanuel and her older sister Emilie. Her whole demeanor exhibits a remarkable self-assurance. In old age she told people, "I absolutely was not shy." She was fond of telling friends about an incident that occurred on her first day at school. The teacher, in order to draw out the shy children,

asked them, "Who is Marie?" so that all the little Maries would put up their hands and reply, "I am Marie." While many of the other children were crouching timidly behind their desks, Melanie, bursting with impatience to speak, put up her hand. The teacher said kindly, "Now say nicely 'My name is Marie,'" to which she replied, "My name is Melanie." Regarding the child a little reproachfully, the teacher chided her, "Your turn hasn't come yet." Melanie felt a little embarrassed, but she knew she had to make the gesture because she was the only Melanie and her turn would not have come. Melanie would never let herself be overlooked in life.

Her ambition was clearly stimulated by the fact that she was the youngest of four children, and very much in competition with her older siblings. The eldest, Emilie, was six years old when Melanie was born, her only brother, Emanuel, five, and Sidonie four, so that the first three always seemed to her a much older, integrated unit. Not only was she the youngest and the most helpless, but she had other causes for grievance. Her mother at some point — "later on" — told her that she was unexpected, but Melanie seems to have sensed this almost from the beginning. "I have no particular feeling that I resented this," she reflects, "because there was a great deal of love towards me." These words were written when she was in her mid-seventies, and they must be considered later in connection with her theories about infantile emotion.

Another possible grievance was that her mother had breast-fed the three older children but Melanie had a wet nurse "who fed me any time I asked for it." How did she know? She does not say whether her mother was unable to nurse her or whether she was too busy tending the shop. The next sentence, following the statement about the fecundity of the wet nurse, reads: "At this time Truby King⁹ had not yet done his devastating work." She then abruptly drops the subject of breast-feeding and continues, within the same paragraph, an account of the attention Uncle Hermann lavished on her. The juxtaposition is very revealing.

In other words, far from being helpless and neglected, she was a beautiful Jewish princess, obviously the favorite of her mother's brother, and also — a fact not mentioned in her memoir — her mother's favorite daughter. Again, it must be remembered that this account was written at the end of a career in psychoanalysis in which her own technique became famous for its multiple and deep interpretations; but in her recollections she uses none of her own concepts to further an understanding of herself as a child. There is none of the transfixed attention that she would apply to one of her own patients. She seems utterly remote from the child she was, nervously pulling away whenever she encounters a memory that might be painful or disturbing to her image of her childhood. This could be interpreted as a failure of nerve, yet in the analytic situation she had always insisted that the analyst must maintain a distance from the analysand, never allowing any glimpse into his own private life. How, then, could she break down that barrier between herself and the putative reader when she had spent most of a lifetime building

a remote image of herself? As with Freud, we have to turn to Melanie Klein's theoretical papers to find her real turbulence reflected in the conclusions she drew from patients in case studies. The very fact that she seized upon psychoanalysis with such passion indicates that the anxieties which beset the young Melanie were far deeper than her bland account would suggest. Freud had already created a model of public autobiography for other analysts to emulate. *An Autobiographical Study* disappointed many with its self-protectiveness, whereas *The Interpretation of Dreams* contains the inner Freud — although here, too, the author masked any traces that would lead back to himself.

In Klein's autobiographical memoir, immediately following the passage about the admiration her uncle felt for her, she turns again to reflections about her father: "I don't think I sufficiently understood my father, because he had aged so much by this time." The image of her father weaves in and out of the narrative — his temperament, his interests, his gifts, and, above all, his relative neglect of her. Here was perhaps her greatest grievance. Not only was her conception a mistake, but her presence scarcely intruded itself upon his consciousness. He was an "old fifty" when she was born. "I have no memories of his ever playing with me. It was a painful thought to me that my father could openly state, and without consideration for my feelings, that he preferred my older sister, his first-born."

She longed for some sign of approval from this man who always struck her as immensely learned. Whenever Melanie asked him for the meaning of a French or German expression, he never had to consult a dictionary. With time she realized that his French was a little quaint and outdated, as it was bound to be, having been learned from perusing Molière and Racine. Nevertheless, this did not diminish her admiration for his knowledge.

One wonders about her feelings — and Libussa's — about his inability to establish himself professionally. He despised the music hall where he served as medical consultant, not only because of its boredom but because he scorned the morals of the English *artistes*. He loathed being tied down to attending the performances night after night, but the stipend was necessary to supplement the family income.

This music hall figures in Melanie's earliest memory of her father, an incident that took place when she was about three. Her mother was still at the shop, and the servant was handing him the little rissoles he had every night before leaving for the Orpheum. The child clambered up on his knee and he pushed her abruptly away. "That," she recalled laconically, "is a painful memory." Her one fond memory was of his holding her hand as they walked up the hill to the house where they spent the summer at Dornbach.

Yet she says that every day, on her way back from school, she would fetch her father from work and they would proceed home together for their midday meal. Again, this detail is puzzling: his working space was in the family flat, so that it would appear to be the father, not the daughter, who did

the fetching. (Probably she transposed her facts because she wanted to suggest that her father had his office in a separate location.¹⁰) She fails to mention whether this strange, shut-away man ever said anything to her on these daily walks. On only one occasion was he moved to strike her, an incident she clearly provoked. When she refused some food, he remarked that in his day children ate what was given to them. Melanie replied cheekily that what was done a hundred years ago did not apply today — knowing full well what the consequences would be. On the other hand, when she was thirteen she overheard him boast to a patient¹¹ that his youngest daughter would go to the gymnasium, an assertion that awakened her resolve to do just that. Who knows if her ambition was stimulated by her anxiety to have her father pay her some notice? In retrospect, she believed that she did not sufficiently understand him. Perhaps, she rationalized, he did not pay much attention to her because he was so old when she was born.

The family's good fortune did not continue long. Certainly before the end of the century they had fallen on bad times again — this Melanie largely attributes to her father's "senility" — and her mother assumed responsibility for holding things together. They even had to take in a permanent boarder.

With her mother it is a different story. "Up to the present day," Klein recalls, "I still think a great deal about her, wondering what she would have said or thought, and particularly regretting that she was not able to see some of my achievements." According to Klein, Libussa was a gentle, unassuming woman. "She has in many ways remained my example and I remember the tolerance she had towards people and how she did not like it when my brother and I, being intellectual and therefore arrogant, criticized people." This is an astounding description in light of the tough, domineering woman who emerges from Libussa's letters. At the age at which Klein was writing, it was particularly painful for her to write about a mother-daughter relationship, so it is difficult to know — even after the passage of time — to what degree she was indulging in remorse or idealization. She seemed, too, to continue to be troubled by the nature of her parents' marriage.

Moriz Reizes was obviously in love with his wife and extremely jealous of her, but Melanie, while aware that her mother was completely devoted to her family, suspected that she still pined for a young student in her hometown who had died of tuberculosis. Certainly Melanie often detected dissatisfaction in her mother — and possibly contempt. "I have never been able to get to the bottom of this," Klein muses, "whether she was simply not passionate or not passionate as far as my father was concerned, but I do believe that occasionally I saw a slight aversion against sexual passion in her, which might have been the expression of her own feeling or upbringing, etc." She says nothing about whether she was an affectionate, loving mother; and the correspondence reveals that Libussa found it very difficult to express her feelings.

Klein could never recall an occasion when her parents went out alone together. She evokes a united Jewish family; while not rigidly orthodox,

Melanie's childhood was steeped in Jewish ceremonial, and she was always deeply aware of her Hebraic background. Both parents maintained a strong feeling for the Jewish people, "though," she remarks cryptically, "I am fully aware of their faults and shortcomings." She would never have been able to live in Israel, she asserts. At one point her mother tried to keep a kosher household but soon abandoned the attempt, particularly as she was opposed by her strong-minded children. Klein describes the circle in which they grew up in Vienna as "anti-Orthodox."

However, certain ritual celebrations were always maintained. Melanie had a lasting attachment to the first evening of Passover, particularly because she, as the youngest child, took part in the traditional service. "Since I was very keen to get some attention and to be more important than the older ones, I am afraid this attitude influenced my liking of that occasion. But there is more to it. I liked the candles, I liked the whole atmosphere, and I liked the family sitting round the table and being together in that way."

The ceremonies connected with the Day of Atonement also left her with pleasant memories. Every detail was interesting to her: the black coffee preceding the festive meal, the day of fasting which she spent with her mother at the synagogue. Like the other children, Melanie was dressed in her best clothes and was keenly aware of being scrutinized by their mothers, although her own mother was too deeply engrossed in her prayers for such frivolity.¹² On Friday evenings, too, Libussa would recite short prayers from a lilac velvetbound prayer book her husband had given her as a wedding present. After only a few minutes she would close it and return it to the wardrobe; in Klein's view, these religious observances were an expression of family tradition rather than true piety. She felt this impression to be confirmed when her mother told her admiringly of the doomed student in her hometown who, on his deathbed, declared, "I shall die very soon and I repeat that I do not believe in any god." The tone in which her mother related this story convinced Melanie that she had been in love with him.

During the period of family affluence Melanie had what she describes as "French governesses." Since she was attending school at the same time, it would appear that they were more like nannies — or possibly maids-of-all-work — than proper governesses. The term "governess" is indicative of the snobbish fantasies that pervade the Autobiography. Undoubtedly the young women contributed to Melanie's knowledge of French, which she learned early. The first one, Mlle Chapuis, was hired from a convent, but did not stay long because she was so homesick. The second governess, Constance Sylvester, came from the same convent.¹³

When Melanie was eight or nine, she was "tortured" by the belief that one day she would turn Catholic, which she knew would torment her parents. What is puzzling is how these middle-class Jewish parents could have exposed her to such a temptation. When she poured out her heart to the gentle Constance, the latter would reply, "Well, if you have to do it, you can't help

it." At school she felt deprived when she saw the Catholic children running to the priest and kissing his hand, receiving in return a pat on the head. Once she plucked up courage to do the same, a guilty secret that she at long last revealed in her autobiography.

While always feeling "Jewish," she was never a Zionist, and her way of life was in no way distinguishable from that of a Gentile. Yet as a Jewish child in Catholic Vienna she must have been acutely conscious that she was an outsider and a member of an often persecuted minority. Psychoanalysis became for many Jews a religion with its own rites, secrets, and demands of unswerving loyalty. Melanie Klein, when she eventually discovered psychoanalysis, embraced it as ardently as any convert to the Catholic Church.

Melanie's education in the broadest sense — accumulation of information, training in analytic thought, understanding of human beings — is difficult to gauge. Her detractors dismiss her as "an uneducated woman." Her admirers regard this lack as an asset, emphasizing that she was unencumbered by conventional patterns of organizing and assessing data and that her strength lay in her fresh and original insights. While there is truth in both views, she was by no means lacking in education in a conventional sense.

At the lyceum she learned French, English, "and all the things that a girl of good family [*sic*] was expected to know." She also learned much from her brother and sisters, who were very proud of her precocity; while they often teased her, they repeated to each other the clever things she would say.

Her relationship with Emilie — their father's favorite — seems to have been ambivalent from the beginning. "I think [*sic*] that I had an attachment for my eldest sister and that she was very fond and proud of me. I remember that between ten and twelve I felt unhappy before going to sleep¹⁴ and Emilie was kind enough to move her couch near to mine and I went to sleep holding her hand." But as Melanie developed intellectually, it was clear that there was no rapport between them; and from the family letters, Melanie encouraged malevolent feelings in her mother toward her envied older sister.

The debt Melanie felt she owed her other sister deserves reflection. Sidonie died of scrofula in 1886, when she was eight and Melanie four. This was the first of a long series of deaths that punctuated Klein's life, each reactivating the original fear, grief, and bewilderment. It is not clear how long Sidonie was ill before her death, but since the disease was a form of tuberculosis it is probable that it was at least a year or two. At that time tuberculosis was highly infectious (and there was also a belief that it was hereditary), so Melanie is clearly repressing a deep fear of illness that was implanted in her from early childhood. Her memories of Sidonie date from her sister's return from hospital.¹⁵ "She was, I have no doubt, the best-looking of us," Klein says; "I don't believe it was just idealization when, after her death, my mother maintained that. I remember her violet-blue eyes, her black curls, and her angelic face." No wonder Melanie was "absolutely never shy." She had to assert herself in view of the fact that her mother told her that she

had been unwanted, Sidonie was the best-looking in the family, her father openly expressed his preference for Emilie, and Emanuel was considered something of a genius. Sidonie must have been the center of family attention as she lay in bed wasting away; yet what Melanie remembers is her sister's kindness to her. Emilie and Emanuel took great pleasure in teasing little Melanie, coming up with difficult geographical names like Popocatepetl, while the bewildered child had no idea whether they were genuine or not. The ailing girl took pity on her sister and taught her the fundamentals of arithmetic and reading. "It is quite possible that I idealize her a little," Melanie reflects, "but my feeling is that, had she lived, we would have been the greatest friends and I still have a feeling of gratitude to her for satisfying my mental needs, all the greater because I think she was very ill at the time." She continues: "I have a feeling that I never entirely got over the feeling of grief for her death. I also suffered under the grief my mother showed, whereas my father was more controlled. I remember that I felt that my mother needed me all the more now that Sidonie was gone, and it is probable that some of the spoiling was due to my having to replace that child."

Emanuel was undoubtedly the major influence on Melanie's early development.

He seemed to me superior in every way to myself, not only because at nine or ten years of age, he seemed quite grown-up, but also because his gifts were so unusual that I feel that whatever I have achieved is nothing in comparison to what he would have done. From a very early age I heard the most beautiful piano-playing, because he was deeply musical, and I have seen him sitting at the piano and just composing what came into his mind. He was a self-willed and rebellious child and, I think, not sufficiently understood. He seemed at loggerheads with his teachers at the gymnasium, or contemptuous of them, and there were many controversial talks with my father . . . My brother was deeply fond of my mother, but gave her a good deal of anxiety.

Melanie dated her deep attachment to Emanuel from her ninth year, when she wrote a patriotic poem with which he was greatly impressed and which he helped her to correct.

From at least this time onwards, he was my confidant, my friend, my teacher. He took the greatest interest in my development, and I knew that, until his death, he always expected me to do something great, although there was really nothing on which to base it.

When she was sixteen she wrote a little play that he thought was a harbinger of her latent literary capacities but, although she went on to try her hand at novels and poems (which she claimed that she later unfortunately destroyed), she very early realized that her bent was not artistic; yet Emanuel was not wrong when he recognized her creative potential. Freud spoke of the confidence imparted to a male child by a mother who has absolute belief in

his destiny. Melanie would undoubtedly have preferred her father to express this kind of faith in her, but Emanuel served as an inspiring surrogate.

Yet her father's boast that she would attend the gymnasium while she was still only a student at the lyceum instilled in her the determination to enter the gymnasium even though it was the middle of the year. Her brother, thoroughly approving, coached her in Greek and Latin, although he was an impatient teacher. When she muddled up her Latin conjugations he would exclaim sharply, "You a scholar! You must become a shop assistant!" Nevertheless, she managed to pass the entrance examinations, and "life took on an entirely new aspect for me."

She was fired by ambition. Not only did she intend to study medicine, she asserted, but she planned to specialize in psychiatry — an extraordinary ambition for a middle-class Jewish girl when one thinks of the vicissitudes Freud was encountering in his profession at that very time in Vienna. About this time, Moriz Reizes' health began to deteriorate rapidly, and the household was held together by the indomitable Libussa. Melanie seldom had a new dress; the theater or a concert was a rare event; but she felt gloriously alive, infused with that deepest of all the passions, intellectual fervor. Unknown to her mother, she read far into the night — an indication that her mother did not encourage her intellectual interests. Her homework she did on the tram between home and school. Her brother proudly introduced her to his friends, and Melanie blossomed into a vibrant young woman.

The idols of this group were the playwright Arthur Schnitzler, the philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, and the journalist Karl Kraus, editor of *Die Fackel* (torch), which made its first appearance in 1899. It was an immediate success with Vienna's progressive youth, who identified with its voice of protest against the corruption and spiritual and intellectual lethargy of the Austrian Empire. They delighted in Kraus's idiosyncratic prose style. One of his most quoted aphorisms was: "Psychoanalysis is the mental illness [*Geisteskrankheit*] of which it purports to be the cure." According to George Clare, in *Last Waltz in Vienna*, Kraus hated the Jew in himself, and longed for the disappearance of his race through assimilation and intermarriage. Emanuel was impressed by Nietzsche's affirmation that the superman must abandon conventional morality and live at a level of intense passion and creativity. His own writing was modeled on Nietzsche's aphoristic style, infused with Kraus's caustic wit. Melanie was drawn to Schnitzler's themes of love and sexual (in)fidelity, upon which she focused her own later fictional writings.

It was only to be expected that father and son would disagree. Klein remembered a fierce argument between them as to whether Goethe or Schiller was the better poet. Emanuel maintained that there was nothing in Schiller, whereas his father declared that Goethe was a charlatan who dabbled in science, and quoted a long passage from his favorite poet to prove his superiority.

The family affiliations can be reconstructed partially from the Autobiography and, more reliably, from the recently recovered correspondence. The picture of Emanuel that emerges from Klein's account is that of a willful, restless, angry youth, at odds with his father and a source of perpetual worry to his mother, to whom he was nevertheless attached. When he was twelve he had scarlet fever followed by rheumatic fever, which affected his heart. What Klein fails to mention is that he also developed tuberculosis. It probably preceded the rheumatic fever, which would have produced subacute bacterial endocarditis.¹⁶ Melanie knew that her mother was filled with self-reproach because she had allowed him, while he was still convalescing, to join a family excursion to the Prater. As a result he suffered a relapse from which he never fully recovered; and his sister was always bitter that "the family" had forced him to go with them.

In many little ways, Libussa conveyed to the rest of the family the contempt she felt for her husband. Scholarly, withdrawn, inept at business, he left the management of the household in the hands of his wife. The only way he could assert his superiority was by his intellectual prowess, and it was particularly galling to be challenged by his clever, conceited son. Libussa did not hide her pride in Emanuel and in Melanie, whose beauty was bound to catch a good husband. Emilie, on the other hand, is something of a cipher — not very pretty and not at all clever. Nevertheless, her father befriended her, preferring her to the assertive Melanie. It was made clear to father and daughter, in the subtle ways families express such things, that they were excluded from the humid, symbiotic entanglement of Libussa, Emanuel, and Melanie.

Klein later claimed that Emanuel entered medical school despite the objections of his parents, who were concerned about his health. However, his letters do not give the slightest indication that he had any interest in medicine; he fancied himself as an artist, a writer, a musician — he wasn't exactly sure which. In any event, his lack of practical ambition filled his mother with impatience. He stuck out medical school until October 1900, when he transferred to the Faculty of Arts. In her Autobiography, Klein says that Emanuel, knowing that he had not long to live, "stopped his studies, and got permission to do some travelling, because he felt that he wanted to use his gifts as a writer as much as possible." She then adds a cryptic comment: "I know another factor which might have driven him from home, but I will speak of that later on." She never reverts to the subject. She is probably referring to her resentment that Emilie and her husband seemed to be taking over the family home so that there was no room for her brother.

Emanuel convinced himself that his main motive for abandoning his medical studies and leaving Vienna was his certainty that he was doomed to an early death; he intended to live life to the full in the time left to him. His mother shared his view that the climate of Vienna was detrimental to his health, and she settled a small allowance on him to enable him to seek lands of sun and beauty in the traditional pattern of the dying artist. It was in this

role that Emanuel saw himself, and he dramatized the situation to the full. His letters for the next couple of years are full of complaints about the meagerness of his allowance. The knowledge of his mortality, Klein says, "of which he never spoke [*sic!*] must have had a great deal to do with his being rebellious and at times difficult." Quite clearly, the whole family was so terrified of tuberculosis that the dread word was never used.

In the meantime Moriz Reizes gradually faded away until one day people realized that he was actually dead. The cause of his death on April 6, 1900, is listed officially as pneumonia; but since Klein has been describing him as "senile" for some years, it is likely that he was suffering from Alzheimer's disease or some comparable disorder. There is no photograph of him among the numerous family mementos.

In any event, his death precipitated a crisis; and the ensuing events reveal something of the complex family dynamics. In the first place, Emanuel was not told of his father's death until two months later — when he returned to Vienna in June. This might suggest that he and Moriz Reizes had parted on bad terms. Apart from his romantic aspirations, which were focused on the Mediterranean, he was irritated by his mother's constant fretting. A deeper and more disturbing element seems to have been Melanie's impending marriage.

Family circumstances may have been extremely stringent, but somehow enough money was found for a number of photographs of Melanie to have been taken during this period. She is a voluptuous dark beauty with heavy-lidded eyes, and already fully aware of her striking profile. She was aware, too, of her desirability, as all her brother's friends seemed to be falling in love with her. When she was only seventeen she met her future husband (then twenty-one), a second cousin on her mother's side, who was visiting Vienna from his home in what was then the Slovak part of Hungary.

Arthur Stevan Klein was a serious young man who was studying to be a chemical engineer at the elite Swiss Federal Technical High School in Zurich (a kind of M.I.T.). His unpretentious looks — small head and slight frame — were unimportant in comparison with his intellectual gifts. Emanuel was impressed by him, a fact that would weigh heavily with Melanie. Very soon after he met Melanie, Arthur proposed, or so she implies. What on earth made this ambitious young woman so ready to accept him, when clearly it meant the end of her professional ambitions? In later years she told some of those close to her that it was her "passionate temperament." She admits that she was not in love with him at first, but claims that "it did not take very long for me to fall in love with him." She then adds: "From that time I was so loyal that I refrained from any entertainment where I might have met other young men and never expressed a feeling that I already had in my mind, that we were not really suited to one another. Both loyalty to my fiancé, with whom I was up to a point in love, and circumstances, prevented me from mentioning this to my mother or my brother." There is no reference to what they did

together, what they talked about — no sense of the nature of their relationship. And there it was, this first great mistake of her life. What were the “circumstances” that prevented her from expressing her misgivings to her mother and brother, who, she suspected, realized that her future husband was a very “difficult” person? Not only was she not in love with him, but she sensed in Arthur a certain rigid inflexibility and a will as strong as her own.

Melanie is terse about the degree to which the economic situation affected her choice: “. . . it would not have been easy for me to return to my studies, which I was longing to do. Whether or not this was the main factor in my doing something which I knew was wrong — my marriage — I cannot say, but it must have been an important reason.” While marriage to Arthur had to be postponed for several years, at least he had prospects, just as Moriz Reizes had seemed to have to Libussa’s family. In worldly terms, he was by far the most suitable of her admirers.

Emilie, while not as pretty or clever as her younger sister, attracted just as many suitors by her gentle, passive femininity. One young doctor, Leo Pick, fell madly in love with her. With Moriz’s death, their marriage seemed eminently suitable to Libussa. As Libussa planned it, Leo could take over his late father-in-law’s practice, and the flat would be renovated so that Libussa would have her own quarters and share the kitchen with the young couple. All this Leo acceded to reluctantly, and the marriage took place on December 25, 1900.

Melanie was encouraged to pay an extended visit to her prospective in-laws while Arthur was on a training tour in America. Libussa fitted her out like a desirable commodity and sent her off to Rosenberg to give the engagement some firm reinforcement. Libussa felt compelled to arrange her children’s lives like pawns on a chessboard, but when one is an indigent widow one is not left with many options.

Emanuel, in his quest for sun and creativity, brooded constantly on the pittance he was given for an allowance — the money allotted him was, unfortunately, inadequate to sustain his delusions of artistic grandeur. His dead father’s clothes were made over for him, another of the grievances he was accumulating, particularly as he saw the finery bestowed upon his sisters. Emilie’s trousseau must have cost Libussa a certain amount, and now Melanie had to be outfitted so that she would make a good impression in Rosenberg. Grumbling Uncle Hermann (now with a family of his own) was called upon to help pay for the renovation of the flat and the two dowries. There was not much left for Emanuel, who felt deprived, banished, and forgotten.

It was a family riddled with guilt, envy, and occasionally explosive rages, and infused with strong incestuous overtones. Melanie’s impending marriage was the prelude to Emanuel’s death through disease, malnutrition, alcohol, drugs, poverty, and a will to self-destruction. Melanie Klein was made to feel responsible for his death and she carried the guilt with her for the rest of her days — just as Emanuel had probably intended she should.

¹ Über den Traum

² Developments in Psycho-Analysis and New Directions in Psycho-Analysis also included papers by her colleagues.

³ At the time Galicia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Poland, as a separate entity, was formed after the First World War. After World War II Lvov was taken by the Russians and is now part of the Ukraine.

⁴ Melanie was born at Tiefer Graben 8.

⁵ It was in 1882, the year of Melanie Klein's birth, that the German-Austrian student fraternities passed the infamous Waidhofer Resolution, which declared that "every son of a Jewish mother, every human being with Jewish blood in its veins, is born without honor and must therefore lack in every decent human feeling."

⁶ This must have been their second home in Vienna.

⁷ It could not have been for very long, since he was born in 1856.

⁸ According to Dr. Michael Wagner of the Institut für Wirtschafts-und-Sozialforschung Wien, in 1900 10,000 gulden was about three times the annual income of a senior civil servant in his early fifties. Where did Hermann get the money? Probably from an investment. According to his daughter, Trude Feigl, it would have been totally out of character for her father to have bought a lottery ticket.

⁹ A New Zealand pediatrician who advocated a strict regimen for babies.

¹⁰ An old photograph shows the building at 1 Martinstrasse bearing a plaque that a dental practice had been established there in 1849. The house has since been demolished.

¹¹ Here she inadvertently gives away the fact that patients came to the family dwelling.

¹² Another astonishing detail, since Libussa's letters reveal her to have been obsessional about clothes.

¹³ Does she actually mean an orphanage from which they were able to obtain cheap help?

¹⁴ One would like to know the reason for this. The onset of menstruation?

¹⁵ There is no official record of Sidonie's death in Vienna. Is it possible that Melanie fantasized her memories of her and that she died before Melanie's birth? In that case, Melanie would have felt that her own birth was in some sense a replacement of her sister.

¹⁶ I am indebted for this explanation to Dr. Ronald Mavor, who was trained as a specialist in tuberculosis. That Emanuel had tuberculosis I have on the understanding of Eric Clyne (Klein's son) and Emilie's daughter-in-law, Hertha Pick.

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BIOGRAPHY

Born in Western Australia, Lyn Hancock has an avid interest in travel and adventure. She is a well-known naturalist and the author of six books, including *THERE'S A SEAL IN MY SLEEPING BAG*, *THERE'S A RACCOON IN MY PARKA*, and *LOVE AFFAIR WITH A COUGAR*. As well, Hancock writes regular travel and wildlife features for *The Globe and Mail* and various national magazines.

Hancock specializes in topics from the personal viewpoint — travelling alone, with packsack, notebook, and camera, to find adventure in the outdoors, whether it is stalking a walrus, sharing muktuk on a longliner with an Inuit family, or swimming a wild river to have tea with a trapper.

She believes in assiduous research (she has several academic degrees) but is more interested in communicating environmental values to the general public through a good story line, graphic writing, personal involvement, and humour. She writes on anything that fascinates her. Hancock's home is now Mill Bay, British Columbia.

SUMMARY

In 1953 Roger Tory Peterson introduced British naturalist James Fisher to North America, as they took a 48 000 km journey throughout Canada and the United States. The result of their trip is the now-famous book *Wild America*.

Thirty years later, Lyn Hancock and a group of naturalists, including Peterson and wildlife artist Robert Bateman, recreated that odyssey, starting in Newfoundland and ending in the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea. They set out to discover what changes had been wrought since 1953. They found Audubon sanctuaries and national wildlife refuges. They met people like a birdwatcher in Gulfport, Mississippi, who had persuaded a whole city not to develop its waterfront, but to keep it for nesting terns. They saw hundreds of varieties of birds, whales, panthers, alligators, sea lions, and sea otters and laid to rest the notion that North America is nothing but freeways and concrete, or polluted lakes and forests. The result of their journey is *LOOKING FOR THE WILD*, a colourful account of their adventures. *LOOKING FOR THE WILD* includes an introduction by Roger Tory Peterson and original illustrations by Robert Bateman.

REVIEWS

"The wilderness could use more allies like Lyn Hancock."

Bruce Patterson, *Calgary Herald*

"Lyn Hancock's boundless energy and enthusiasm makes the Tazmanian Devil look like a pussy cat."

Gerry Gerow, Outdoor Writers of Canada

"Lyn Hancock communicates the environmental message . . . in a style that few others can match."

Grant Hopkins, Ottawa Citizen

"LOOKING FOR THE WILD is written in the entertaining style that has made Hancock a household name for books such as THERE'S A RACCOON IN MY PARKA, and illustrated by a wild-life artist whose works fetch a small fortune at fine art galleries."

Joseph Kula, Vancouver Province

Chapter One**Off to Newfoundland April 12-16**

"Dearly beloved, as we are gathered together in the bus," Gus intoned facetiously from the wheel of his rented van as we left St. John's and turned southwest across the Avalon Peninsula, "let's start reading *Wild America*." Although we had all read and reread Peterson and Fisher's book before, we were to read it again daily on the trip.

April 12, the first day of our expedition, set the routine for the next one hundred days. Bird walk before breakfast. Read what Peterson and Fisher did on the same day thirty years before. Explore their destinations and add more of our own. Lunch on the trail usually overlooking some body of water, park, sewage lagoon, or cemetery, all good birding places. Explore again in the afternoon. Dinner and check-in to a motel on the edge of town, again preferably in some birdy area. Reread Peterson and Fisher at night to compare and contrast our experiences. Bird walk again at midnight — for dedicated types like Gus Yaki and Tess Kloot and Miss Smith.

Tess Kloot from Australia is a wonderful and remarkable person. Pint-sized, exuberant, strongly Aussie-accented, Tess had got into bird watching late in life when she heard a blackbird singing. She is the coauthor of two bird books, has a special Bird Room in her house, and is as passionately fond of birds as she is of her children (or as I, another Aussie, teased, her "chooldren"). She would be with us almost all the way. As James Fisher sought the differences between Europe and North America but found instead similarities, so Tess sought the similarities between Australia and America and would discover vast differences.

Miss Smith is a single-minded, determined, very independent lawyer who had given up a successful practice in British Columbia to travel the world after birds. She had already driven Peterson's route around America on her own but was prepared to do part of it a second time to gain new insights from Gus.

One of the most important activities of the day — besides birding, forever now a verb — was updating our bird list. Birders usually keep lists of birds they see in a day, in a year, in a lifetime. Birders to whom the list is the thing are called bird twitchers, because they twitch from one place to another in an all-out effort to add just one more bird to their list.

We too added interest to our trip by counting numbers and species. Whenever Fisher found a new bird, he would shout "Tally-ho!" When Tess did, she sometimes got carried away and came out with "Wacko" in fair dinkum Down Under lingo. Each night we recorded our sightings in columns against a checklist published by the American Ornithologists' Union.

I recorded other things too — even people — in my field notebooks, on my tape recorder, on messy scraps of paper. My neck was permanently hung round with cameras, lenses, tape recorder, notebook, and when I could find time to use them, binoculars. Tess kept bringing me a succession of pens on chains that went around my neck with everything else.

Although birding was our predominant interest (for an increasing number of people, it is their connection to the natural world), we had wider aims — the search for wildness in America and the effect of humankind on that wildness. And although our group was committed to looking for Wild America, I knew that each of us would have to come to terms with what we meant by wildness. For some it is a thousand miles of tundra, for others a strip of forest beside a highway. In places no longer wild, we would need to look for ways in which people were working to bring back some of that wildness.

Newfoundland is an appropriate place to start, for the discovery of North America began here with the Vikings in about 1001 A.D. The province's people strive to maintain an older, traditional lifestyle based on fishing and sealing. Newfoundland is appropriate too in its geography. With its glaciated landscapes, wind-stunted vegetation, and sub-arctic climate, Newfoundland contrasted sharply with the rest of our journey south to summer.

With steady rain, monochrome scenery, birds hidden or not yet arrived, it was rather a dreary drive across the barrens and boreal forests of the Avalon Peninsula. Perhaps because of this landscape, Newfoundlanders have colorful villages with even more colorful names, like Famish Gut, Empty Basket, Gripe Point, Bleak Joke Cove, Leading Tickle, Heart's Desire, Heart's Content, Heart's Delight, and Cupids. You can brighten many a foggy day by imagining the stories behind such names as Run-By Guess, Come By Chance, Seldom Come By, and Nancy O. And from the salt boxes of the farthest fishing coves to the row houses or elegant townhouses of innermost St. John's, Newfoundlanders paint their homes in vivid purples, greens, yellows, reds, oranges — whatever colors of paint, some say, are on special that day.

A stream of memorable pictures passed by: houses like Neapolitan ice cream clothing the steep hillsides of each tiny cove; spruce poles leaning neatly against their walls for fences, firewood, or flakes (fish drying racks); rows of cod and capelin hanging out to dry by lace-curtained windows; sheep and goats lazing in the middle of the road. Every time Gus braked to point out a bird, I would rush to squeeze in a photograph.

The island of Newfoundland is relatively sparse in its native flora and fauna, although numbers and species have increased in the past thirty years. It is an island in an isolated position on the lee side of North America and has only recently emerged from the last Ice Age, less than ten thousand years ago. Its rocks, part of the Appalachian system that extends to the southern United States, are very old and hard. They are slow to break up and, scoured by glaciers, produce thin, coarse soil. Much of Newfoundland's soil is thought to have been dumped onto the Grand Banks to the southeast, enriching the fishing grounds there but impoverishing the island. A harsh climate and offshore sea ice, which retard spring and shorten the growing season, along with the poor soil, keep Newfoundland's plant species to a minimum. And this year, spring was later than usual.

Newfoundland, however, has lost less wild habitat than most places in North America, and it has gained species. Some were introduced accidentally, others were planned. From Europe by sailing ship came insects, weeds and roadside plants, house mice and Norway rats, earthworms, slugs, and woodlice. From the mainland came green frogs, snowshoe hares, moose, and mink. Since Peterson and Fisher made their trip, spruce grouse, ruffed grouse, mallard ducks, evening grosbeaks, chipmunks, cinereous shrews, the European skipper butterfly, and the ubiquitous starlings have joined Newfoundland's fauna.

Gus — a tireless teacher, with one hand cupped to his mouth as a megaphone while he steered with the other — kept up a running commentary. He pointed out diversity amid the apparent monotony: countless bogs and ponds that in summer come alive with birds like greater yellowlegs, mergansers, and black ducks; the wind-stunted, bushy-topped spruce trees once used as stovepipe and chimney cleaners by inventive fishermen, and the heathland dotted and clumped with sheep laurel, partridge-berry, and Labrador tea.

We stopped at Butterpot Provincial Park, a favorite picnic spot in summer. It was therapeutic to get out of the van and become intimate with the land, to feel the spongy sphagnum under my feet, to see the glitter on the tamarack backlit by a fitful sun. Today we were on the lookout for a willow ptarmigan — the bird Newfoundlanders call a partridge — although they were at a low point in their population cycle. I wanted to find a moose. Half a dozen were introduced to Newfoundland in 1878 and 1904, and the population has since increased to 50,000. But Gus pointed out dryly, "That 50,000 could be hiding behind 500,000 spruce trees." And they were.

Although we did not see willow ptarmigan that day, we did see other birds. Tiny blotches on telephone lines became red crossbills in the telescope. Dots in the sky circling tightly like balls on an unseen string were pine siskins perhaps in courtship flight. Blobs on rock piles like helmeted sentries focused into horned larks. Staccato flutters in woodlots landed to become golden-crowned kinglets, dark-eyed juncos, pine grosbeaks, and the captivating black-capped and boreal chickadees. "Chickadees are birds that charm everyone," said Gus admiringly. "They will take food from your hands. In Britain, one of their kind, the blue tit, learned to take the caps off milk bottles to get at the cream that rises to the top of unhomogenized milk."

Because Newfoundland (excluding Labrador) is an island, some species differ in appearance, behavior, or song from their mainland cousins. American robins, for example, are darker in color (perhaps because of higher humidity), and they rarely seem to nest around houses. Another oddity we saw was a white-winged crow. We were to record several other albinistic characteristics during our journey.

About thirty-five miles from St. John's, we stopped at Salmonier Nature Park, a one-hundred-acre enclosed area within a three-thousand-acre wilderness reserve, designed to provide people with a cross-section of Newfoundland wilderness. Kevin Moore, the acting manager, led us over the long, winding trails of Salmonier to show us animals we had little time to look for in the wild: moose, caribou, red foxes, lynx, and snowy and boreal owls.

"At Salmonier," Kevin explained, "we have enclosed pieces of the wild but have made barriers unobtrusive, so people see wildlife in as near a natural setting as possible. Mammals in particular are difficult to see in the wild — that's why I became a birder — so we've got to show them in a place like this. Hopefully, the people who get turned on to enjoying wildlife here will get turned on to the general conservation." Not all wildlife at Salmonier is enclosed. Visitors can see the free-roaming caribou of the Avalon Wilderness Area through telescopes at the caribou viewing tower.

We headed next for Cape St. Mary's Seabird Sanctuary at the southwestern tip of the Avalon Peninsula. Newfoundland has unique and outstanding seabird colonies. They are spectacular and easily accessible. All but one are islands, which inhibit predators such as fox and mink, and which have steep cliffs to create strong air currents for birds to launch themselves out to sea. Cape St. Mary's is not an island, but it has a couple of miles of steep cliffs for seabirds to nest on.

The skies promised something like sunshine as we roller-coastered over the headlands and around the coves south of Placentia Bay. Peterson and Fisher had had to trek in ten miles to Cape St. Mary's from St. Bride's, with a pack pony to carry their gear. We had it easy in our comfortable van. But despite a now-automated lighthouse, and a visitor center to handle the thousands of people who now take guided tours of the sanctuary between May 24 and Labor Day weekend, the land and the birds were much the same, and we had it all to ourselves.

We left the van at the lighthouse and followed a narrow trail through public sheep pasture along the cliffs. We stepped into another world — an Arctic tundra world — lush, green, and spongy underfoot, pregnant with excitement overhead.

You hear them long before you see them — an incredible din of cries and whines, croaks and squawks, growls and gargles. "It's like a symphony," said Tess, "an undercurrent of guttural roars, the bass tones, and above those, the screams, the tenor tones." Then the wind shifts, you round a bend in the headland or drop behind a hill, and the din stops abruptly, like a radio shut off. Only the sound of surf crashing far below remains.

You see them long before you recognize them — a blizzard of birds wheeling, whirling in the air, rafts of dark shapes bobbing, clogging the waters offshore. Then the mist lifts and you get a quick glimpse of The Stack, a giant rock chimney severed from the land by a narrow chasm covered with

gleaming white pearls. Then the pearls lift from the cluster to become snowflakes, and you know that you are seeing a veil of northern gannets, large pelicanlike birds that set up their summer homes each year at Cape St. Mary's, Newfoundland's largest gannet colony, the second largest in North America.

The swirling fog hides the stage again, but the music continues. Such sounds led Jacques Cartier and other early sailors to find and explore the New World colonies. The cries of kittiwakes, murre, and puffins at Baccalieu Island acted as navigation aids to guide sailors to a safe landing on the fog-shrouded coast. Once upon a time a man could be publicly whipped for disturbing seabirds on Baccalieu. Unfortunately, the birds on other islands were disturbed to the ultimate when their flesh and eggs provided fresh food for men on boats long stuck at sea, their feathers were sold for decoration and mattress stuffing, their bodies were rendered for oil and then burned for fuel or taken for fish bait. By about 1802 the great auks on Funk Island, the last North American rookery, were destroyed, and the species was soon extinct.

While Gus, Tess, and Miss Smith pushed on expectantly toward The Stack, Jim Buschman, the other photographer in our group, lollygagged behind with me to photograph alpine bistort and bunchberry sprouting from lichened black rocks at our feet. Common loons still in winter plumage skeined across the sky. Rafts of gorgeous harlequin ducks, starkly plumed common eiders, long-tailed oldsquaws, and razorbills with their Jimmy Durante beaks, rode the whitecaps out to sea.

You need binoculars and telephoto lenses to capture these, but once at The Stack, you are so close to the nesting birds, only 50 feet away, that you feel you can reach out and touch them. Don't — the narrow chasm between you and them has taken more than one life. However, there is no need to stand giddily peering 260 feet down into an abyss. Just curl up in a natural rock armchair, scalloped by erosion for your comfort, and watch the gannet show.

It was impossible not to feel the excitement when we visited — in the air, on the land, in the water. Three thousand murre, penguinlike and immaculate, standing side-by-side, layer-upon-layer along the shelves of rock; twenty thousand black-legged kittiwakes, delicately pretty birds some call tickle-lace, nuzzled in pairs beside them; and at least three thousand pairs of gannets. More would arrive later.

While Gus leaned dizzily over the cliff edge counting numbers and species, the rest of us remained amazed by the awesome spectacle on The Stack — thousands of gannets in their most spectacular plumage, gleaming white except for jet-black wing tips, saffron-washed heads and blue-tinged

eyes. Tess noticed bright green stripes on their ankles. Jim pointed out the blue-black stripe under their beaks, a symmetrical design that reminded him, when they put their heads up, of rocket ships taking off.

Hatched here, accustomed to people, seemingly safe on their isolated rock top, the gannets went about their business oblivious to our excitement. They had enough of their own. With back-pedaling wings, splayed-out feet, and tail used as a rudder to slow them down, incoming birds landed, jostled to their nesting site, and dropped seaweed, moss, or pieces of stick. Pairs of gannets, mated for life, bobbed up and down, bowed to each other, faced-off chest to chest, and clashed bills. Sometimes we did not know if the birds were making love or war. "That's not an expression of hostility," explained Gus. "It could have originated that way, but now that they're mates, they recognize each other and clap beaks to reinforce contact."

Some of the gannets were sky-pointing, stretching their necks and pointing their bills to the sky. Gus commented, "That means one's about to take off, so he wants to tell those around him, 'Don't jab me as I go.' It can also mean that his mate is nearby and he is sky-pointing to signal, 'Hi, honey! I'm here.'"

The most spectacular gannet display is its dizzying plunge-dive into the sea to feed. Six feet of white wings fold and the gannet turns into a torpedo, cleaving the water's surface to toss spray ten feet high. As one plummeted into the ocean, Gus explained that air cells between its skin and the muscles of its neck and shoulders inflate to cushion the impact, and its bill clamps shut. A gannet does not spear fish on the way down. Its eyes are positioned in front so it can gauge depth accurately and come up at a fish from below. It gulps down its catch when it breaks into the air again.

Most of the gannets at Cape St. Mary's were fishing far from The Stack, but Jim and I tried to photograph their flight as they wheeled around the cliff face, all going in the same direction. At the time of our visit, courtship and nest sprucing were in vogue. Three weeks before, only two hundred pairs of gannets had come to Cape St. Mary's from their wintering quarters at sea along the southeastern coast of the United States. Now in mid-April we counted roughly three thousand pairs, about the same as Peterson and Fisher had done on the same day thirty years before. Soon more than five thousand pairs would be nesting at this gannetry.

Although gannet colonies in North America have decreased to six since the exploitive years of the early explorers, the gannets at Cape St. Mary's appear to be increasing. The previous year, Bill Montevecchio and John Wells, two Newfoundland ornithologists, had discovered fifty chicks on the mainland close to The Stack, a "biologically significant" event. Now over a hundred pairs nest there, despite disturbance by people, foxes, sheep, weasels, and dogs.

A solitary murre sat atop a boulder in the middle of The Gannet Stack, but the gannets appeared unperturbed. They own the rock now, but back in 1880 murrees were the original nesters. Like gannets, murrees spend most of the year at sea. Then, beginning in April, breeding murrees fly in to spend their summers on land. They stand on cliff ledges like books in bookcases hundreds of feet high. In line, facing the cliff, with white breasts, black backs, and two white wing borders like buttons on their tail feathers, murrees remind me of men in tuxedos lined up at a urinal. (Although in the wild murrees have no occasion to walk, the ones which I describe in my book *There's a Seal in My Sleeping Bag* that incubated under my sweater, hatched in a tent, and then followed me as their official mother, Konrad Lorenz-style, walked very well.)

There are two kinds of murrees in Newfoundland, common and thick-billed. Thick-billed murrees differ from common murrees in having slightly larger bodies, stouter bills, and an obvious white line on their upper mandibles. About 17 percent of the common murrees at Cape St. Mary's were in their ringed or bridled phase, that is, their eyes were circled with a fine white ring that ran backward like a streak.

One murre looked a kingpin of the gannetry, although the other murrees were lined up in more usual fashion along ledges on the mainland cliffs. They were close to us, but we needed a boat to see the whole colony. As we strolled the headlands, we saw only a fraction of them. Gus, with no fear of heights, saw more by bending over the cliff edge. At this time, not all breeding murrees had arrived. Gus counted about 2,500 common murrees, but no thick-billed ones. Later in the season there would be about ten thousand pairs of common murrees and perhaps a thousand pairs of thick-bills.

Although thick-billed murrees winter in Newfoundland, they are chiefly birds of the High Arctic. Only since the early 1950s have they been known to nest in Newfoundland. Peterson and Fisher recorded the first substantial colony of nesting thick-bills at Cape St. Mary's.

Men eat murrees. Newfoundlanders call them turrs and shoot up to half a million of them annually. There are no bag limits, and some hunters kill five hundred at a time, easy pickings from powerboats with automatic shotguns. Newfoundland is one of the few places in the world where it is legal for nonnatives to kill seabirds without restriction.

Almost all of the scientific research into the natural history of Newfoundland has been done since 1950, the same year the Newfoundland Natural History Society was founded by legendary ornithologist Leslie Tuck and one year after Leslie Tuck was appointed as the province's first Dominion wildlife officer. His name stands above all others in bringing knowledge of Newfoundland's natural history to the public eye.

Leslie Tuck was there at the airport to meet James Fisher in 1953, and he personally escorted Fisher and Peterson to Funk Island, the former home of the great auk and still one of Newfoundland's most important seabird colonies. Seabirds, especially murre, were Les Tuck's passion. Although he died in 1979, he is still remembered fondly by ornithologists studying seabirds today in Newfoundland, including David Nettleship, Bill Montevicchio, William Threlfall, John Piatt, John Wells, and Bruce MacTavish, who are continuing his unfinished work. We met some of these men at Memorial University and accompanied them on field trips.

Places we really wanted to visit were Gull, Green, and Great islands in the Witless Bay Seabird Sanctuary. These islands have the largest concentration of seabirds in eastern North America, the largest breeding concentrations of the parrotlike puffins and pretty kittiwakes in the western Atlantic, and the second-largest colony of murre.

Even though the Witless Bay sanctuary is less than twenty miles from St. John's and only a few miles from shore, it is not as accessible as Cape St. Mary's. To reduce human disturbance, visitors need a special permit from the Wildlife Division of the Department of Tourism if they wish to land on Gull Island. Only in exceptional circumstances are they allowed to land on Green or Great islands.

You can see the birds from the water by boat without harming them if you keep at a safe distance and use binoculars: shelves of black-legged kittiwakes and clouds of great black-backed gulls and herring gulls; skeins of whirring murre and razorbills circling the cliff line; black guillemots exploding from crevices at the shoreline; Atlantic puffins launching themselves from grassy hummocks at the skyline. To see the diminutive storm petrels, you must wait till evening, when under the cover of darkness, birds who have spent the day at sea return to their mates deep inside burrows. Then the night is full of ghosts, dark whirring shapes and a medley of underground sounds. The night flight of the petrels is unforgettable.

We could not get a boat to the islands because the bay was full of ice: not until mid-May would fishermen be ready to take us out to the islands. The height of the bird watching season in this sanctuary is the last two weeks of June and the first two in July; by the second week in August almost all the seabirds have gone.

We stopped for lunch by a deserted fish-processing plant in the village of Witless Bay and set up the scope. The kittiwake cliffs of Gull Island, only three miles away, were easily visible. And in between, wherever there was ice-free water, bobbed hundreds of common eiders and oldsquaws not yet departed for their northern breeding grounds.

I looked for puffins. They had been coming in since early April to find their mates, select their sites, and dig out their burrows. But they would not be laying eggs till late May and early June, and it would not be till early July that the chicks hatched and the colony become galvanized into frenzied feeding activity.

Of North America's 310,000 Atlantic puffins, 225,000 nest on the three islands of Witless Bay. Like its other alcid cousins, this chunky "sea parrot" can race through the water after fish and catch them with its pincerlike bill. (Having had to pull a protesting puffin from a burrow, I well know the power of its scimitarlike beak.) It jerks the fish to the roof of its mouth and secures it to a series of spiky serrations with its tongue. Amazingly, a puffin can already be carrying several fish crossways in its bill when it catches even more. Unfortunately for the puffin, it is often easier to get hold of a fish in the water than to keep it on the way back home. Scavenging gulls constantly patrol the colony to badger incoming puffins and snatch fish destined for the chicks in the burrows.

Rapidly increasing gull populations, especially in Witless Bay, are causing problems for puffins. Bill Threlfall told us that the numbers of herring gulls, great black-backed gulls, and black-legged kittiwakes have risen sharply since 1966, probably as a result of human sewage, garbage, and offal from proliferating fish-processing plants. Gulls thrive on mankind's wastes, but some researchers feel that gulls also pick on puffins, pirating their fish and chicks.

There are other problems for the puffins of Witless Bay. Their preferred food — that of other alcids, as well as cod and whales and man — is a greenish silver, sardine-sized fish called capelin. When the capelin come ashore to spawn on high tides in June and July, fishermen wade into the water to take them by the truckload. The capelin fishery expanded in 1972 to international status, survived five years of over exploitation, then crashed in 1978. The puffins on Great Island had a bad year in 1981, when the capelin fish, a puffin's normal diet, failed to come inshore. David Nettleship called the breeding season "an almost total failure."

However, since 1981 the puffins seem to be faring well. Bill Threlfall said that "in 1982 there were more capelin around than fishermen had seen in twenty years." Up to a point, populations can remain stable in the face of such fluctuations, but they also become more vulnerable to other factors, such as in the case of puffins and murrelets, toxic chemicals, oil pollution, and drowning in fish nets.

From Witless Bay we continued down the coast to Cape Race, stopping wherever the road overlooked the sea to look for birds. It was a drab and wintry world, the low tide grounding icebergs in the mud, the fog hovering, ready to hide our views. No brightly colored houses relieved these landscapes. Then in the middle of the windswept barrenlands we found a lonely shack labeled Seventh Heaven.

We left our rambling gravel road and clambered joyously over the tilted, table-top, wave-polished rock that shelved into the sea at Cape Race, one of the most forbidding places in Newfoundland. It is the closest point of land to where the "unsinkable" *Titanic* went down exactly seventy-one years ago to the day of our visit. Amid the black boulders and crashing, spuming surf were common eiders, oldsquaws, American black ducks, purple sandpipers, and ruddy turnstones. The sun shone for one glorious moment in a tiny cove, and there bobbing on the waves of that deserted beach swam one lone dovekie, the smallest of Newfoundland's seabirds. Tess was in birders' heaven.

Next morning Bill Montevecchio and John Piatt took us on a trip to Cape St. Francis, north of St. John's.

On Water Street in St. John's — the oldest in North America, the guide books said — a man was selling dead harp seals from his truck. "The best flippers, the biggest flippers in many years, the biggest, fattest, sassiest pups," proclaimed the signs. Yet most sealing vessels lay idle in the keyhole harbor. Few boats had bothered to butt their way through the unprecedented ice this year, and anyway, there was little market for seal pelts. Markets had collapsed because of the lobbying of protesters, and Newfoundlanders were bitter.

Ice conditions were the worst since the turn of the century. The harbor was clogged and giant icebergs scintillated on the skyline whenever the sun shone. The ice caused problems for more than sealing ships. Already fifty white-beaked dolphins had been crushed to death by huge ice pans. Four to five hundred killer and humpback whales had been trapped in shallow water as ice stretched headland to headland and cut off the bays.

Bill and John's colleagues in the whale rescue team from Memorial University were angry that the world — aroused by subjective, selective media coverage — censured Newfoundland for hating seals and whales when many Newfoundlanders, including fishermen, do their best to save such entrapped creatures every year. Headlines grab more attention when teary-eyed, virginal white baby seals drip blood from hunter's clubs, or ice-entrapped and net-imprisoned whales die from fishermen's gunshot wounds. A story about the death of the last Eskimo curlew is much more engrossing than the current comeback of the seals and whales.

Compared with thirty years ago, marine mammals on the North Atlantic coast are doing quite well, either maintaining or increasing their once-dwindling numbers. The 800 humpback whales between Nova Scotia and the Gulf of Maine in 1952 have increased to 4000 in 1985. About 200 right whales (so called because they float when dead) now thrive in the Bay of Fundy; a few years ago, they were on the brink of extinction. Nevertheless, seals and whales continue to compete with people for the same codfish and capelin, and they increasingly enmesh themselves in nets. Some people's patience runs thin, the pendulum swings, and again the animals are threatened with over-hunting or environmental mismanagement.

There are fewer eagles, merlins and peregrine falcons today, according to Bill Threlfall. But there are more seals, more whales, more gulls, more kittiwakes, more fulmars, more gannets, and in some places like Witless Bay, more puffins and common murre. More starlings, more mallards, more Canada geese, more ruffed grouse, more evening grosbeaks. More moose. There are harlequin ducks breeding for the first time in Newfoundland. Black-headed gulls and manx shearwaters are breeding for the first time in North America.

Then why do the scientists feel, in the words of Bill Threlfall again, that "seabirds are now in greater danger of extinction due to oil development, commercial fishing, and hunting, than at any time in their history," including the days of the great auk? Perhaps because seabirds are always vulnerable and because of what has happened elsewhere in the past. Toxic chemicals in the Gulf of St. Lawrence have devastated double-crested cormorant colonies, caused growth deformities and locomotory defects in young gannets, and reduced the number of razorbills by half. Heavy metal poisoning along the New England coast has caused a decline in the tern populations. Hunting, oil fouling, and drowning in fish nets have reduced common and thick-billed murre species in the eastern Canadian Arctic. The inability of puffins to find capelin — either because the capelin population crashed after 1977 or because they schooled in deep water, beyond the puffins' diving range — caused less than half the normal number of puffin chicks on Great Island to be fledged in 1981. It could happen again.

Scientists fear the threat of oil above all. Les Tuck estimated that half a million seabirds die annually from exposure to oil, not just spectacular and headline-grabbing spills like that of the *Torrey Canyon* but the regular and illegal discharge of refined oil by tankers or lubricating oil by trawlers and cargo ships. John Piatt wrote that "more seabirds die from oil pollution in Newfoundland waters than anywhere else in eastern North America." For especially vulnerable seabirds like murre and puffins, a single drop of oil can be their death, plastering their feathers, destroying their natural insulation and bringing their skin into direct contact with the frigid sea. Even holding a murre with greasy hands can destroy its feathered insulation. Recently, scientists have begun to think that oil ingested while the birds preen also reduces female fertility, impairs the growth of chicks, and makes all birds more vulnerable to environmental stress.

Will people make a difference? And if so, whom? Industrialists? Governments? Scientists? Or ordinary people who just like looking at a butterfly, a dovekie, a baby harp seal?

We spent our last day in Newfoundland with Bill and Fiona Day, who had shared their home with us all week. We went looking for the natural world in the streets of St. John's. Most people who saw us cruising the oldest and most grandiose houses and gardens in the city would think we were studying history or architecture.

Wrong. We were looking for pine grosbeaks, strikingly plumaged wine colored birds. We did not find any grosbeaks, but we did see four starlings on a chimney and three boreal chickadees on a hedgerow. Out at Long Pond past the university, Miss Smith "got" a dozen ring-billed gulls.

We took another trip to Signal Hill, an island of Newfoundland "wilderness" within the city. Most people drive up Signal Hill (as we had done before) to see the view, to visit Cabot Tower built in 1898 to commemorate John Cabot's landing on Newfoundland's shores in 1497, or to see where Marconi received the world's first wireless signals sent across the Atlantic from England.

We rambled across its windswept heathlands looking for willow ptarmigan among the mountain alder, dwarf birch, and Labrador tea. Gus pointed out how plants in this acid soil restrict their moisture intake by having hard, leathery, narrow, or curled-up leaves. Tess was intrigued by the massive mats of mountain cranberry that the Newfoundlanders call partridge-berry and gather annually for sauces, jams, and jellies. Signal Hill was one of the very few sites in Newfoundland where Scottish heather had become naturalized.

Suddenly three willow ptarmigan, two males and a female, exploded from the bushes with a loud whirr of wings and resounding cackles. The cock birds, already in rusty brown breeding plumage, were vying for a mate. The object of their attention was still wearing much of her winter white.

Herring gulls laughed overhead, but the loveliest sound of all was the song of the fox sparrow, one of the most abundant birds in Newfoundland and one of the earliest to arrive in the spring.

After five days of mostly birding, we were ready for a break. But not Gus. That night he took us to dinner in an old restored house on Duckworth Street. At the entrance, we were all straining in the dark to see some paintings in a next-door window when he said dryly, "I hope you've got your binoculars. There are some starlings sleeping above you."

THE DIVINERS

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honorary degrees. Between 1969 and 1974, Laurence was writer-in-residence at the universities of Toronto, Western, and Trent.

BIOGRAPHY

Born in Neepawa, Manitoba, in 1926, Margaret Laurence graduated with a B.A. from the University of Winnipeg in 1947. She lived in England, Somaliland, Ghana, and Canada before her death in 1987, and was the mother of two children.

Laurence is one of Canada's foremost novelists. She began writing at the age of eight and received an honourable mention from the Winnipeg Free Press four years later. Laurence authored a total of 15 books, including novels, short stories, essays, and children's books. Numerous books, articles, and theses have been written about Laurence's work, and several of her books have been adapted for broadcasting.

Laurence received numerous awards, such as the Governor General's Literary Award for fiction for A JEST OF GOD in 1967 and for THE DIVINERS in 1975 and the Beta Sigma Phi First Novel Award for THIS SIDE JORDAN in 1961. She was named Companion of the Order of Canada in 1971, B'nai Brith Toronto Woman of the Year in 1976, and Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 1977. She was also awarded the City of Toronto Award of Merit and the Periodical Distributors' Award, as well as 12

SUMMARY

The story line of *THE DIVINERS* shifts between the present of today and a past consisting mainly of the depression years and the early 1940s. We reach Manawaka through the memories of the heroine, Morag Gunn, a successful writer who, with a love-hate response to her home town, has finally settled by a river near a small Ontario town suspiciously similar to the one she has left behind. No longer young, and alone except for her daughter Pique, who will soon leave, she has reached a point of reckoning. Faced with an isolation she both fears and welcomes, she feels compelled to relive and to some extent re-create her life, to find among the memorabilia a sense of who she is and what has made her. Although she is determined not to launder the past, she realizes that her struggles to reconstruct must inevitably become a blend of poetry and truth.

Her memories of childhood are especially painful. Orphaned at an early age and unofficially adopted by Christie, the town garbage collector, and his wife Prin, she is ostracized not only by her social status of "poor white" but by her sullen pride and her determination to escape. In her sketches of Manawaka's seamy side, Laurence exposes the hypocrisy and insensitivity of the bourgeoisie whose concern for appearances denies the poor any dignity or self-respect. Laurence subtly expresses two related themes that are central to her writing: the privateness of human emotion and the isolation of the individual within society.

Morag consciously chooses a life of exile. Looking back over her life, she sees to her shame that, instead of dismissing Manawaka's superficial values, she was deeply influenced by them. Her abandonment of Christie and Prin and her subsequent ambitions were motivated, in part, by a determination to disprove society's judgment of her. Some 40 years later, after a respectable but soul-destroying marriage, an affair with her Métis lover Jules, and an illegitimate child by him, she finds herself once again on the fringes of society, freed from its demands, but haunted by old ghosts and pained by the memory of lost emotions. Part of the price for her intellectual freedom is the breakdown of her marriage and her flight from a domineering husband, her unfinished love affairs, and her daughter's ambivalent response to her.

Intellectually, Morag recognizes that her misfortunes and inadequacies have much to do with her role as an artist. Emotionally, she must reconcile her choice with her desperate need for love. Yet, while Morag is battered she is not defeated. Her remorse and occasional self-pity are balanced by her candour, her sensitivity, and her wry humour. In *THE DIVINERS*, the tragedies of her past become an impassioned and unsparing examination of personal responsibility.

REVIEWS

"THE DIVINERS...succeeds brilliantly, as much for its stylistic innovations as for the stark and smouldering realism of the heroine...she (Laurence) has woven a blazing tartan banner, shot through with the colours of flesh and blood and pain and victory."

Dave Billington, Montreal Gazette

"The clarity of Laurence's vision arises from her ability to communicate the strength and range of a character's feeling without making the character step beyond his normal range of expression."

Merlin Homer, Toronto Citizen

"The reputation of good Canadian literature comes from novels like Margaret Laurence's THE DIVINERS... from beginning to end Laurence reveals the literary skill which has made her a unique and powerful novelist."

Sandra McCormick-Delisle, Waterloo Chronicle

"In terms of pure craft the book is intricate in language, plot and characterization. But even more than this, it's dangerous. Laurence constantly flirts with disaster, but she comes through beautifully each time."

John Kiely, Kitchener-Waterloo Record

"With THE DIVINERS Margaret Laurence has written an extremely readable and a very moving novel but it is the element of control that is perhaps the most remarkable feature of the book."

Ann Crosby, St. John's Evening Telegram

"...THE DIVINERS is a terrifically appealing portrait of a Canadian artist growing and searching for her beginnings, for 'the living water' which nourishes her art and her soul."

Jennifer Sweeney, Alumni Gazette, University of Western Ontario

"Margaret Laurence's THE DIVINERS is a fine book, one of the most compelling stories I've read in a long time, and one of the most masterfully written."

Carolyn Ouellette, Western News

"THE DIVINERS is full of unique, apt imagery which supports and enriches its many themes...Margaret Laurence's true ear for dialogue grows as she catches the voice of her time and place. Read, learn and enjoy the best from Canada's most talented and compassionate writer."

Bernice Lever, The Canadian Author and Bookman

Chapter One

The river flowed both ways. The current moved from north to south, but the wind usually came from the south, rippling the bronze-green water in the opposite direction. This apparently impossible contradiction, made apparent and possible, still fascinated Morag, even after the years of river-watching.

The dawn mist had lifted, and the morning air was filled with swallows, darting so low over the river that their wings sometimes brushed the water, then spiralling and pirouetting upward again. Morag watched, trying to avoid thought, but this ploy was not successful.

Pique had gone away. She must have left during the night. She had left a note on the kitchen table, which also served as Morag's desk, and had stuck the sheet of paper into the typewriter, where Morag would be certain to find it.

Now please do not get all uptight, Ma. I can look after myself. Am going west. Alone, at least for now. If Gord phones, tell him I've drowned and gone floating down the river, crowned with algae and dead minnows, like Ophelia.

Well, you had to give the girl some marks for style of writing. Slightly derivative, perhaps, but let it pass. Oh Jesus, it was not funny. Pique was eighteen. Only. Not dry behind the ears. Yes, she was, though. If only there hadn't been that other time when Pique took off, that really bad time. That wouldn't happen again, not like before. Morag was pretty sure it wouldn't. Not sure enough, probably.

I've got too damn much work in hand to fret over Pique. Lucky me. I've got my work to take my mind off my life. At forty-seven that's not such a terrible state of affairs. If I hadn't been a writer, I might've been a first-rate mess at this point. Don't knock the trade.

Morag read Pique's letter again, made coffee and sat looking out at the river, which was moving quietly, its surface wrinkled by the breeze, each crease of water outlined by the sun. Naturally, the river wasn't wrinkled or creased at all—wrong words, implying something unfluid like skin, something unenduring, prey to age. Left to itself, the river would probably go on like this, flowing deep, for another million or so years. That would not be allowed to happen. In bygone days, Morag had once believed that nothing could be worse than killing a person. Now she perceived river-slaying as something worse. No wonder the kids felt themselves to be children of the apocalypse.

No boats today. Yes, one. Royland was out, fishing for muskie. Seventy-four years old this year, Royland. Eyesight terrible, but he was too stubborn to wear glasses. A marvel that he could go on working. Of course, his work did not depend upon eyesight. Some other kind of sight. A water diviner. Morag always felt she was about to learn something of great significance from him, something which would explain everything. But things remained mysterious, his work, her own, the generations, the river.

Across the river, the clumps of willow bent silver-green down to the water, and behind them the great maples and oaks stirred a little, their giant

dark green tranquility disturbed only slightly by the wind. There were more dead elms this year, dry bones, the grey skeletons of trees. Soon there would be no elms left.

The swallows dipped and spun over the water, a streaking of blue-black wings and bright breastfeathers. How could that colour be caught in words? A sort of rosy peach colour, but that sounded corny and was also inaccurate.

I used to think words could do anything. Magic. Sorcery. Even miracles. But no, only occasionally.

The house seemed too quiet. Dank. The kitchen had that sour milk and stale bread smell that Morag remembered from her childhood, and which she loathed. There was, however, no sour milk or stale bread here—it must be all in the head, emanating from the emptiness of the place. Until recently the house was full, not only Pique but A-Okay Smith and Maudie and their shifting but ever-large tribe. Morag, for the year when the Smiths lived here, had gone around torn between affection and rage—how could anyone be expected to work in such a madhouse, and here she was feeding them all, more or less, and no goddamn money would be coming in if she didn't get back to the typewriter. Now, of course, she wished some of them were here again. True, they only lived across the river, now that they had their own place, and visited often, so perhaps that was enough.

Something about Pique's going, apart from the actual departure itself, was unresolved in Morag's mind. The fact that Pique was going west? Yes. Morag was both glad and uncertain. What would Pique's father think, if he knew? Well, he wouldn't know and didn't have all that much right to judge anyway. Would Pique go to Manawaka? If she did, would she find anything there which would have meaning for her? Morag rose, searched the house, finally found what she was looking for.

These photographs from the past never agreed to get lost. Odd, because she had tried hard enough, over the years, to lose them, or thought she had. She had treated them carelessly, shoved them away in seldom-opened suitcases or in dresser drawers filled with discarded underwear, scorning to put them into anything as neat as an album. They were jammed any-old-how into an ancient tattered manilla envelope that Christie had given her once when she was a kid, and which said *McVitie & Pearl, Barristers & Solicitors, Manawaka, Manitoba*. Christie must have found it at the dump—the Nuisance Grounds, as they were known; what an incredible name, when you thought of the implications. The thick brown paper stank a bit when Christie had handed it to her, faintly shitlike, faintly the sweetish ether smell of spoiled fruit. He said Morag could have it to keep her pictures in, and she had taken it, although despising it, because she did not have any other sturdy envelope for the few and valued snapshots she owned then. Not realizing that if she had chucked them out, then and there, her skull would prove an envelope quite sturdy enough to retain them.

I've kept them, of course, because something in me doesn't want to lose them, or perhaps doesn't dare. Perhaps they're my totems, or contain a portion of my spirit. Yeh, and perhaps they are exactly what they seem to be—a jumbled mess of old snapshots which I'll still be lugging along with me when I'm an old lady, clutching them as I enter or am shoved into the Salvation Army Old People's home or wherever it is that I'll find my death.

Morag put the pictures into chronological order. As though there were really any chronological order, or any order at all, if it came to that. She was not certain whether the people in the snapshots were legends she had once dreamed only, or were as real as anyone she now knew.

I keep the snapshots not for what they show but for what is hidden in them.

SNAPSHOT:

The man and woman are standing stiffly on the other side of the gate. It is a farm gate, very wide, dark metal, and old—as is shown by its sagging. The man is not touching the woman, but they stand close. She is young, clad in a cotton print dress (the pattern cannot be discerned) which appears too large for her thin frame. Looking more closely, one can observe that her slight and almost scrawny body thickens at the belly. Her hair is short and fluffy, possibly blonde. The man's head is bent a little, and he is grinning with obvious embarrassment at the image-recorder who stands unseen and unrecorded on the near side of the gate. The man appears to be in his early thirties. He is tall and probably strong, narrowly but muscularly built. His hair is dark and somewhat unruly, as though he had combed it back with his fingers an instant before. In the far background, at the end of the road, can be seen the dim outlines of a house, two-storey, a square box of a house, its gracelessness atoned for, to some extent, by a veranda and steps at the front. Spruce trees, high and black, stand beside the house. In the further background there is a shadow-structure which could be the barn. Colon Gunn and his wife, Louisa, stand here always, in the middle 1920s, smiling their tight smiles, holding their now-faded sepia selves straight, hopeful, their sepia house and sepia farm firmly behind them, looking forward to what will happen, not knowing the future weather of sky or spirit.

Morag Gunn is in this picture, concealed behind the ugliness of Louisa's cheap housedress, concealed in her mother's flesh, invisible. Morag is still buried alive, the first burial, still a little fish, connected unthinkingly with life, held to existence by a single thread.

SNAPSHOT:

The child sits on the front steps of the house. She has lost the infant plumpness which presumably she once had, but she is built stockily, at age about two. Her hair is straight and dark, like her father's. She looks grave, although not unhappy. Thoughtful, perhaps. She wears a plain cotton dress with puffed sleeves and a sash, and she or someone has tucked it modestly around her knees. Beside her sits a grinning mongrel dog, tongue lolling out.

The dog, as one would not guess from the picture, is called Snap, short for Snapdragon. He always follows Morag around the yard, keeping an eye on her. He is a mild-natured dog, easygoing, and he never once snaps at anyone, despite his name. He would snap at thieves or robbers if there were any, but there aren't, ever. Morag's mother lets Snap sleep in Morag's bedroom, to keep her company. Some people wouldn't have allowed a dog to sleep at the foot of a bed, but Morag's mother doesn't mind, because she knows Morag wants Snap to be there so as she will feel safe. Morag's mother is not the sort of mother who yells at kids. She does not whine either. She is not like Prin.

All this is crazy, of course, and quite untrue. Or maybe true and maybe not. I am remembering myself composing this interpretation, in Christie and Prin's house.

SNAPSHOT:

The child, three years old, is standing behind the heavy-wire-netted farm gate, peering out. The person with the camera is standing unseen on the other side. The child is laughing, acting up, play-acting goofily, playing to an audience of one, the picture-taker.

What is not recorded in the picture is that after Morag's father has taken this picture, he asks her if she'd like to have him help her climb the gate. Her father never minds helping her. He always has time. Her father is beside her, then, and lifts her up and sets her on the very top of the gate, holding her so she will not fall. She hangs onto his shoulder and puts her face beside his neck. He smells warm and good. Clean. Smells of soap and greengrass. Not manure. He never stinks of horseshit, even though he is a farmer. Morag's father lifts her down from the gate, and they go into their house. The house is very huge, full of strange corners and places to explore. It even has a diningroom, with good furniture, a sideboard and a big round table. The Gunns eat in their diningroom every single Sunday without fail. There is a cupboard under the front stairs, into which Morag crawls when she wishes to find hidden treasure. It goes a long way back and is just high enough for her to stand up. Inside, there are stacks of books that once belonged to Alisdair Gunn, Morag's grandfather, who came here a long time ago and built the house and started the farm when probably nothing was here except buffalo grass and Indians. The books have leather bindings, and smell like harness, only nicer, and the names are marked in gold. Also in this cupboard are vases and plates, painted with orange chrysanthemums and purple pansies, and old dresses, long, with lace on the sleeves, blue velvet and plum-coloured silk, fragile and rustling. A few spiders and ants live in that cupboard, but Morag is not afraid of them, or of anything in that house. It is a safe place. Nothing terrible can happen there.

I don't recall when I invented that one. I can remember it, though, very clearly. Looking at the picture and knowing what was hidden in it. I must've made it up much later on, long long after something terrible had happened.

SNAPSHOT:

The child is leaning out the window, an upstairs window. She is smiling down at the person with the camera. Her face is calm, serene. Her straight black hair, neatly trimmed, comes just to the level of her earlobes.

What the picture does not tell is that Morag is leaning out the window of her own bedroom, a room not too small and yet not too large. It has a white dresser with a pale leaf-green ruffled curtain around the bottom, and underneath there is a white (cleaned every day) chamber pot for her to use during the night if she has to go. This is nice, because it means she never has to go outside to the backhouse in the winter nights. There is also a white-painted bed, with a lovely quilt, flowers in green and pink on a white background, very daintily stitched, maybe by a grandmother.

I recall looking at the pictures, these pictures, over and over again, each time imagining I remembered a little more. The farm couldn't have been worth a plugged nickel at that point. The drought had begun, and the Depression. Why in these pictures am I smiling so seldom? A passing mood? Or inherited? In my invented memories I always think of my father smiling, possibly because he really seldom did. He is smiling in the only picture I have of him, but that was for the camera. Colin Gunn, whose people came to this country so long ago, from Sutherland, during the Highland Clearances, maybe, and who had in them a sadness and a stern quality. Can it ever be eradicated?

SNAPSHOT:

The child's black straight hair is now shoulder-length, and she is four years old. She is sitting primly on a piano stool in front of an old-fashioned high-backed upright piano. She is peering fixedly at the sheet music in front of her, which, from the dimly seen word "Roses" may be guessed to be "Roses of Picardy." Morag wears a pullover which appears to be decorated with wool embroidery, possibly flowers, and an obviously tartan skirt. Her hands rest lightly on the keys and her feet do not reach the pedals.

My concentration appears to indicate interest and even enthusiasm. I did not yet know that I was severely myopic and had to peer closely to see anything at all.

Let the snapshot tell what is behind it. Morag's mother, before she married, was a piano teacher in Manawaka. She is now trying to teach Morag how to play, and Morag really loves the lessons and is very good and quick at picking up how to do it. The livingroom is not used for everyday, but Morag and her mother go into it quite a lot in the afternoons. The carpet is royal blue, patterned with birds whose wings are amber, dove-grey, scarlet. On the piano is a red glass filled with cornflowers, and a very miniature tree made out of brass, with small bells attached to it. If you put the piano stool up as high as it will go, and start off quickly enough, it twirls all the way down again with you twirling on it. Morag's mother plays, not the plonk-plonk-plinkety-plonk of Sunday school music, but very light, very light.

And that is the end of the totally invented memories. I can't remember myself actually being aware of inventing them, but it must have happened so. How much later? At Christie's, of course, putting myself to sleep. I cannot really remember my parents' faces at all. When I look now at that one snapshot of them, they aren't faces I can relate to anyone I ever knew. It didn't bother me for years and years. Why should it grieve me now? Why do I want them back? What could my mother and I say to one another? I'm more than ten years older now than she was when she died — and she would seem so young to me, so inexperienced.

SNAPSHOT:

The child is standing among the spruce trees at the side of the house. She wears overalls, and her long hair is untidy. She is now five, or thereabouts. She squints a little, against the painful sun, trying to keep her eyes open so the picture of her will be nice, but she finds it difficult. Her head is bent slightly, and she grins not in happiness but in embarrassment, like Colin Gunn in the first picture. Only the lower boughs of the spruce trees can be seen, clearly, darkly.

Now, those spruce trees, there, they were really and actually as tall as angels, dark angels perhaps, their boughs and sharp hard needles nearly black except in the spring when the new needles sprouted soft and mid-green. The grass, there, didn't grow right underneath the trees, but Morag used to go to the edge of the road and pull up couchgrass as high as herself, carrying it back in armloads and spreading it, already drying in the heat, under the spruces. The walls of her dwelling, her playhouse, were single lines of stones she had found on the dusty rutted road. The fallen spruce cones and the dandelions and wild honeysuckle and purple vetch and pink wild asters were the furnishings — chairs, tables, dishes. All for the invisible creatures who inhabited the place with her. Peony. Rosa Picardy. Cowboy Joke. Blue-Sky Mother. Barnstable Father. Old Forty-Nine. Some of the names came from songs she must have heard, "Cowboy Jack" and "The Wreck of the Old Forty-Nine." The latter was especially fine, inaccurate as the words might have become in her head throughout the years.

T'was a cold winter's night,
 Not a soul was in sight,
 And the north wind came howling down the line;
 Stood a brave engineer,
 With his sweetheart so dear,
 He had orders to take the Forty-Nine.
 She kissed him goodbye
 With a tear in her eye,
 Saying, "Come back quite soon, oh sweetheart mine,"
 But it would have made her cry
 If she'd known that he would die
 In the wreck of the Old Forty-Nine.

And so on. I recall that song from later on, but it must've been sung to me young. Who would have? Maybe we had a radio. Where the other names came from, I wouldn't guess. I played alone, mostly, as it was too far to go to seek out other kids. I don't think I minded. I preferred my spruce-house family, all of whom I knew as totally individuated persons (as the pretentious phrase has it, when describing okay fiction). Strange and marvellous things used to happen to them. Once Cowboy Joke's pinto threw him over a ravine, as in "Little Joe the Wrangler He Will Never Wrangle More," and he would've been a goner except that Rosa Picardy and myself, with great intuition, had happened to build a couch of moss in that precise place.

Another time, Peony and I, although warned not to by Blue-Sky Mother, went into a deserted grain elevator, hundreds of miles high and lived in only by bats, dragons and polar bears, on different levels, bats highest, and succeeded after many perils in discovering a buried treasure of diamonds and rubies (known to be red, although I had never seen one) and emeralds (which I thought must be the same brave pale mauve as the prairie crocuses we found in spring even before the last snow went).

I remember those imaginary characters better than I do my parents. What kind of a character am I? Old Forty-Nine smoked a pipe and sometimes spat a giant globule into the local spittoon (a word I loved, although I'd never seen one, and visualized as resembling a chamber pot, only more dignified and decorated). Peony, not unnaturally, had curly blonde hair, the opposite of mine, and sweet little rosebud lips like those on the unreachable dolls in Eaton's catalogue. Rosa Picardy, my alter ego, I suppose, was somewhat sturdier. She did brave deeds, slew dragons and/or polar bears, and was Cowboy Joke's mate. Unlike the lady in the song, Rosa Picardy could never have expired gently while sighing —

Your sweetheart waits for you, Jack
Your sweetheart waits for you,
Out on the lonely prairie,
Where skies are always blue.

No. Rosa Picardy had her head fastened on right. Not for her the martyr's death, the grave where only the coyote's (pronounced kiy-oot's) wailing voice paid sad tribute. Rosa was right in there, pitching.

Does that say anything about my parents, or only that I was born bloody-minded? I WAS born bloody-minded. It's cost me. I've paid through the nose. As they say. Also, one might add, through the head, heart and cunt.

The spruce-house family must have appeared around the time my mother took sick. The whole thing was so quiet. No outer drama. That was the way, there. But I remember it, everything. Somewhat ironically, it is the first memory of actual people that I can trust, although I can't trust it completely, either, partly because I recognize anomalies in it, ways of expressing the remembering, ways which aren't those of a five-year-old, as though I were older in that memory (and the words bigger) than in some subsequent ones when I was six or seven, and partly because it was only what was

happening to Me. What was happening to everyone else? What really happened in the upstairs bedroom? No — the two bedrooms. He was moved into the spare room. People couldn't be that sick together in the same bed, I guess.

MEMORYBANK MOVIE: ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS

Mrs. Pearl from the next farm has come to Morag's house. She is an old woman, really old old, short and with puckered-up skin on her face, but not stooped a bit. Her face is tanned, though, which makes her look clean. She makes dinner and swishes around the kitchen. The stove is great big black and giant — oh, but good and warm. Summer now, though, and it is too *hot*. Morag has to wash her hands. The pump brings the water to the sink, but you have to chonk-chonk-chonk it, and she is not big enough to get it going. Mrs. Pearl chonks the pump, and the water splurts out. Morag takes the sliver of Fels-Naptha and washes her hands. For dinner. That is what you have to do.

"How come you're here, Mrs. Pearl?"

"Your mum and now your dad is kinda sick, honey," Mrs. Pearl says matter-of-factly, "and I just come to help out. You and me's going to have our supper in a minute, so you run along and play now, and I'll call you when it's ready. I'll bet a purty you're hungry, eh?"

Morag does not reply. She tries to reach the pump handle so she can rinse her hands, but although five years old is big, it is not big enough. Mrs. Pearl obliges.

"I think," Morag says, "I'll just go upstairs for a minute and see my mother and father."

Something is happening. Morag senses it but cannot figure it out. Mrs. Pearl is trying to be kind. Morag is scared, and her stomach aches. If she eats anything, she will throw up.

"No, honey," Mrs. Pearl says. "You're not to go upstairs. There's a good girl. Doctor MacLeod will be along in a little while, and he wouldn't want you to go bothering your folks when they're feeling kind of poorly, now, would he?"

"I want to see my mother," Morag says. "I am going up to see her right now. I won't stay long, Mrs. Pearl. I promise."

But the Big Person grabs Morag's wrist before Morag can slither away. Mrs. Pearl's hands are very strong, a trap like for mice or gophers or that, crunching down.

"No, you don't," Mrs. Pearl says sharply. "They're too sick to see you, just now, Morag. They don't want to see you."

"How do you know?" Morag cries. "You don't know anything about it? They do *so!* Let go of me!"

Mrs. Pearl does not let go. Then Dr. MacLeod's car comes whamming into the yard. He is a tall man with brown hair and a smile. Morag now does not trust anyone who smiles.

"Hello, Morag."

She will not speak to him, or smile. She is not letting on that anything is happening.

"It's all right," he says, the doctor says. "It's going to be okay. Don't you worry, now."

When he comes downstairs, he and Mrs. Pearl go into the livingroom (where no one ever lives; it is for Best), and close the door. Morag hears their voices but not their words. Then Dr. MacLeod leaves. Nothing else happens that day or night.

The days snail along, and Mrs. Pearl is still there. Every morning and evening she sprays Morag's throat with a sticky yellow stuff, saying it is good medicine which Dr. MacLeod has given. Morag sleeps in the kitchen now, while Mrs. Pearl takes Morag's upstairs room.

Mrs. Pearl's husband Henry comes over every evening and eats with Mrs. Pearl and Morag. He is old. He milks the cows. Once he asks if Morag would like to go with him to the barn, to see him milking the cows.

"No," she says.

Not *No Thanks*. And feels bad for having been rude. But she hates Mr. and Mrs. Pearl, for being here.

During the nights, there have been no sounds from upstairs, at least none that Morag has been able to hear, for the stairs go up from the livingroom, and the kitchen door is closed and locked at night so that Morag will not wander upstairs. Then one night Mrs. Pearl forgets to lock this door.

Dr. MacLeod had been that evening, and Morag had been sent out to play long after supper, when it was nearly dark. Mrs. Pearl's face looked scary when she put Morag to bed, but she said not a word.

Morag is alone in the dark. The stove hisses a little and sighs, as the fire dies down. Morag gets up and tries the door and it opens into the livingroom. She stands barefoot, the linoleum cool on her skin, and listens.

From upstairs, there is a sound. Crying. Crying? Yes, crying. Not like people, though. Like something else. She does not know what. Kiy-oots. She knows only that it is her father's voice. There is no sound of her mother's voice, no sound at all.

Morag, terrified, scuttles back to the kitchen like a cockroach — she is a cockroach; she feels like one, running, scuttling.

Next morning, Mrs. Pearl does not have a talk with Morag. Not that day. Or the next. But finally. When?

"Morag, honey, they have passed on," Mrs. Pearl says, blushing, as though caught in a lie, "to a happier land, we know."

Morag does not imagine that they have gone to some real good place. She knows they are dead. She knows what dead means. She has seen dead gophers, run over by cars or shot, their guts redly squashed out on the road.

"I want to see them! I have to!"

"Better not," Mrs. Pearl says firmly. "There, there, honey. You just cry."

And so of course Morag does not know how much of their guts lie coiled like scarlet snakes across the sheets. She does not cry, not then. Mrs. Pearl's leather arms and flat breast stifle and sicken her, and she pushes the wellmeaningness away. She stares unblinking, like fledgling birds when they fall out of their nests and just stare.

"You *are* the brave girl," Mrs. Pearl says. "Yes, that you surely are."

There is silence all around, and then Mrs. Pearl says something else.

"It was the infantile, dear. The infantile paralysis."

Morag has never heard either word before. She asks, and Mrs. Pearl tells her that it is a sickness which usually happens to children.

The lowest and largest boughs of the spruce reach down and touch the earth, making a cave, a small shelter into which no one can see. She is not doing anything. Cowboy Joke and Rosa Picardy and the others are not here now. They have gone away. For good. Once and for all.

Morag is talking in her head. To God. Telling Him it was all His fault and this is why she is so mad at Him. Because He is no good, is why.

If it was the infantile, though, why them and not her? She is the kid around here.

Next day, Morag goes upstairs and looks in all the bedrooms, carefully, but everybody has gone. Vanished. She has not seen them being taken away.

"Honey, come here a second," Mrs. Pearl says.

Morag comes to her, reluctantly.

"Listen, Morag," Mrs. Pearl says, clicking her false teeth and then putting a hand over her mouth, "you're gonna be living with Mr. and Mrs. Logan, dear, in Manawaka. Christie Logan, that is. He was in the Army with your dad, honey, and he and Prin have offered to take you, seeing as there ain't none of your own relatives hereabouts. They're not what you'd call a well-off couple, but they're kind, and they got no children of their own. I'm sure you'll get on dandy with them, once you're used to it. It was real kind of them to offer."

Morag says nothing. She has learned you can't argue when you are a kid. You can only wait not to be a kid any more.

Mr. and Mrs. Pearl have a broken-down old car, black and rattling, like a hearse for clowns.

They drive off, and Mr. Pearl stops the car on the road just outside the fence and goes back.

"Won't be but a minute."

Morag does not look back, but she hears the metallic clank of the farm gate being shut. Closed.

Now I am crying, for God's sake, and I don't even know how much of that memory really happened and how much of it I embroidered later on. I seem to remember it just like that, and yet, each time I think of it, are there new or different details? I recall it with embellishments which don't seem likely for a five-year-old.

Infantile paralysis — that was what they called polio, then.

The land, house and furniture had to be sold to pay the mortgage, Christie told me years later, but Henry Pearl managed to winkle the piano and a few other things out and over to his place, and quietly sold them when he could, and no one who knew about it in South Wachakwa or Manawaka ever told on him. He put the money into a bank account for me to have at age eighteen. He died of pneumonia about five years later. So I never had the chance to say anything to him about it, when I was old enough.

That's all there was to them, my parents. Christie toted me along once to see their gravestone in the Manawaka cemetery when I was about eight or ten. I didn't want to go, and hardly looked at the stone, and wouldn't place on its grey granite the bunch of peach-coloured gladioli (naturally, half-wilted, one of Christie's salvage operations). Christie scowled but didn't say a word. I was raging because he'd made me go. And now I no longer know whether I was furious at Christie, or at them for having gone away, or whether I was only afraid and didn't know that I was. Now I would like to see that grave, only once, although I know quite well it couldn't tell me anything.

Were they angry at me often, or only sometimes? Did my father feel he'd done well with his life, or that he was a total loss, or did he feel anything? Did my mother feel pleased when she saw him come in from the barn, or did she think to herself — or aloud — that she'd married beneath her? Did she welcome him in bed, or did she make a habit of turning away and muttering she had a headache? Did he think she was the best lay he'd ever had, or did he grind his teeth in hardly suppressed resentment at her coldness? No way of knowing. Why should it matter now, anyway?

They remain shadows. Two sepia shadows on an old snapshot, two barely moving shadows in my head, shadows whose few remaining words and acts I have invented. Perhaps I only want their forgiveness for having forgotten them.

I remember their deaths, but not their lives. Yet they're inside me, flowing unknown in my blood and moving unrecognized in my skull.

Information on rights

Foreign rights (world rights except for Canada) to KURELEK: A BIOGRAPHY are controlled by the author. She had no agent as of February 1988. (Canadian publisher: Macmillan of Canada)

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SUMMARY

This is the first full account of William Kurelek, one of Canada's most popular and best-known painters. Famous for his evocative prairie landscapes and for his award-winning illustrated children's books, Kurelek was also a powerful writer. In six years of research, Patricia Morley has unearthed intriguing new information from many private sources. She has viewed thousands of Kurelek's paintings and conducted hundreds of interviews.

Kurelek came from Ukrainian pioneering stock. He celebrated his own heritage as well as that of other Canadian immigrants in many series of paintings on some of the ethnic groups in Canada: Ukrainian, Polish, Jewish, Inuit, Irish, French-Canadian. As an adult convert to Roman Catholicism, he was also famous for his prophetic paintings.

His first one-man exhibition at the Isaacs Gallery in Toronto established Kurelek in the Canadian art world. He soon became known as a man of tremendous faith and imagination. His gifts were expressed in his paintings, his writings, and his life.

In 1977 Kurelek died of cancer at the age of 50. Morley has caught many of the facets of this extraordinary life and — above all — its depths. This is not hagiography but a shrewd yet sympathetic study of a remarkable artist whose work mirrored his life. The book includes over 90 black-and-white photos, 8 colour plates, and a haunting self-portrait on the cover, which Kurelek painted when he was only 23 years old.

BIOGRAPHY

Born and educated in Toronto, Patricia Morley received a Ph.D. in Literature from the University of Ottawa in 1970. She is now professor of English and Canadian Studies at Concordia University in Montreal.

Morley has been a prolific freelance writer for the past 20 years and has written eight books, scores of articles, and hundreds of book reviews. Her publications include numerous studies of Canadian writers. Her special interests include Canadian literature, painting, and women's writings.

An avid gardener and frequent traveller, Morley is currently working on two new biographies and a book on modern Japanese women. She lives near Ottawa.

REVIEWS

"...a rare and sensitive understanding of his tormented inner life."

Mark Abley, Saturday Night

"...an admirable study...conscientious and articulate."

William French, The Globe and Mail

"[Morley's style is] harmonious, pleasurable, enlightening and her own...impressive and a good read."

Leo Serroul, Compass. A Jesuit Journal

"...an absolutely fascinating life."

Mair Verthuy, CBC Home Run (Montreal)

"Morley remains faithful to the spiritual dimension inherent in Kurelek's work."

Sharon Drache, Ottawa Jewish Bulletin and Review

"The Ukrainian community should be happy about it... Morley brings Kurelek back to his roots, to his own community."

Yaroslav Kit, The Ukrainian News (Edmonton)

"Patricia Morley has done what all first-rate biographers do — she has bent and moulded the biographical form to reveal William Kurelek's purpose. And she has found a way to explain her subject thoroughly while still remaining succinct, pointed and fascinating. She has vividly pictured Kurelek's emergence from the maelstrom of his life as one of Canada's most successful artists."

Joan Murray, Curator, Robert McLaughlin Gallery

Chapter One**Kurelek: The Man and the Myth**

Kurelek's life is one of the strangest stories ever told. In the telling, the biographer is oddly companioned by the painter himself. This artist was compulsively confessional, haunted by his own experience and determined to understand it. I was astonished to discover, over the course of my research, that Bill was writing his own story for *thirty years* — that is, for all of his adult life. The earliest version, eight fat scribbles of handwriting, dates from 1947 when he was twenty. It was apparently written in an attempt to explain his physical and emotional problems to a Winnipeg doctor. During hospitalization in Britain in two psychiatric hospitals during the early 1950s, Bill wrote, and was encouraged to write, his life story. He also painted his traumas, and even attempted to exorcise his hatred and anger by symbolic paintings of revenge. Was it narcissism, this relentless self-examination? Or something more complex?

His autobiography was first published in 1973 by Cornell University Press by means of photographing an unedited typescript five hundred and twenty-three pages long. Bill had been revising *Someone With Me* throughout the sixties, aided by various friends. Publication became possible when a psychology professor decided to use it as a textbook. Through the last four years of his life, Bill continued to revise his manuscripts.

Obviously his own story was of primary importance to him. He saw it as both unique and typical, an encouragement to other troubled souls. The "someone" of the title is God, who is credited with saving Bill's life, restoring him to health and success, and guiding him through "this tragic, puzzling, yet wonderful world.... And He has asked me to get up because there is work to be done" (A2 175). Soon after his death, a version of the autobiography was reprinted. It had been slightly revised by Bill and was greatly abridged by an editor.

Given the abundance of self-portraiture, there are those who thought that I was wasting my time. What need was there for a biography when the subject himself had written so extensively about his life? An opposite theory is voiced by biographer Phyllis Grosskurth, who finds autobiography to be helpful to the biographer "only to the extent that it reveals displacements, condensations, and evasions." *Only?* These are strong words. Bill's evasiveness had been borne in upon me slowly, over a period of months, even years. I was unwilling to dismiss *Someone With Me* lightly, and equally unwilling to leave the last word to Bill. Biographer and autobiographer form an incongruous couple, with very different approaches to a life. The biographer's job is not to supplement or update but to see differently, freshly. And in that seeing lies the tale.

William Kurelek was an unusual individual, as most great artists have been. Yet his talent for depicting the essence of common experience led journalists to call him "The People's Painter". He is perhaps best known for his realistic paintings of farm scenes, many of them set in Western Canada where he had grown up. This twentieth-century Krieghoff loved nature, but there

were nearly always people in his landscapes. His scenes of people in groups, at work and at play, are in the tradition of the medieval Flemish masters. Weddings, funerals, seed-time and harvest, in daylight or at night: nothing escaped his notice or his brush. His narrative skill turned paintings into stories. His faith made them prophetic, sometimes harsh. Like Pieter Brueghel and Hieronymus Bosch, whose works he acknowledged as major influences on his own, Kurelek's vision is both social and religious, even mystical. He caught the feeling of the richness and vastness of prairie life; of what James Bacque calls the natural terror, mystery, and abundance of earth.¹

In his late twenties he found release from mental and emotional anguish through religious faith. His autobiography serves to witness to that faith and to encourage other troubled souls to seek help from the same source. The residue of his pain and the stern side of his faith issued in prophetic paintings which warned of judgment to come. Angered by a society he saw as secular, permissive, and materialistic, Kurelek could thunder like an Old Testament prophet or a modern Savonarola. His painted thunderings were silent, and beyond sound. A series of illustrations of the Passion of Christ intended as a teaching tool for the Church became a graphic statement of his own religious faith.

He also painted *trompe-l'oeil*, still-life scenes of coins, bills, stamps, letters, and other trivia, with a command of perspective and illusion that convinces the viewer that the actual objects are on canvas. He painted allegories of states of mind, the demons of his own suffering, and surreal fantasies; self-portraits, where the background contains a collage of autobiographical events and symbolic objects. He portrayed various ethnic cultures. In short, he painted the world as he saw it, and in that view lies extraordinary power and fascination.

Catholics, Ukrainians, Jews, and many other groups feel a personal connection with the artist through his paintings and his experience. Kurelek's life is significant because he struggled with tremendous difficulties, with madness and attempted suicide, and won. Shy and sensitive, he saw himself in adolescence as the ugly duckling of the fairy tale, with very little chance of becoming a swan. The drive to transform that ugliness into beauty and that failure into success was very strong. He was determined to find and fulfil the great destiny he had intuited as a boy. He was convinced that, within the vast scheme of things, there must be a reason for his personal suffering. He would find it, or die in the attempt.

Out of the maelstrom, or perhaps from a precarious foothold on its edge, he found faith and his own artistic genius. He eventually achieved fame, even wealth. The story is in the torments, the triumphs, and the joy. And in the contradictions. Kurelek reveals everything, and nothing. The man who loved to write explanatory texts for his paintings remains, in the end, an enigma.

Born in 1927 to Ukrainian-Canadian pioneers near Whitford, Alberta, Bill grew up strongly influenced by the landscape, the farm routines, and the

rural culture which fed the artist's imagination in innumerable ways. The first seven years of Bill's childhood were spent there, and the next dozen in Stonewall, just north of Winnipeg. The flat black farmland of Manitoba and the life of its immigrant settlers became the subject of many of his paintings and one of the deepest emotional attachments of his life.

Two periods in his life were crucial. One was the Stonewall years of youth and early adolescence, when a lack of athletic and mechanical aptitudes and a hypersensitive personality made him a target for sniping from bullies at school and a disappointed father at home. Yet the Stonewall years were also rich in joys. The joy would be recalled — and painted — later, after the pain had been cauterized and the healing begun.

The other was his time in Britain, where the bitter legacy from Stonewall erupted like an angry boil. Old hurts threatened to overwhelm Bill, to drown him in a sea of hatred and guilt. They might well have done so, had it not been for the faith which was given to him there. This vital seven-year period was critical in Bill's development. It was truly the fulcrum of his life. His hospital period, and the writing and painting that accompanied it, marked the depths of his bitterness and pain. The next few years saw his conversion to Roman Catholicism,² a considerable degree of healing, and the European training which lies at the root of his techniques.

Within months of his return to Toronto in 1959, there would be dramatic changes to his fortune. He met a prestigious dealer, was offered work as a framer, and had a solo show. That first exhibition at The Isaacs Gallery, in March of 1960, was an immediate success. By late 1962 Bill was established as a major Canadian painter and had married to begin his own family. In the last fifteen years of his life he painted literally thousands of paintings, achieving a degree of fame and popularity that very few have matched. It is curious that the period of "normalcy and success", as he called his last fifteen years, is given almost no room in his autobiography, even in the revisions that were written in his last years.

One of Bill's subtlest and perhaps unconscious creations is the myth of himself and his experience. *Someone With Me* is mainly concerned with his unhappy experience as a child and an adolescent; with his breakdown and hospitalization; with his religious search for and acquisition of faith. The first edition ends with his marriage and the briefest of summaries of his subsequent career in Toronto. It appears to have been written in 1962. In actual fact, his story underwent continual revisions until shortly before his death. The revisions, however, were not intended to update the story chronologically. We should ask why the portion of his life that appears to be the major one, the last eighteen years, which saw his rapid rise to fame, is ignored in fact but emphasized in theory, since the ultimate *success* of his artistic career was to him an important part of his myth.

In hospital, Bill described his problem as depression and depersonalization. He was at this time an extremely introverted, isolated personality,

obsessed with his own problems and almost incapable of relating to others. His autobiography lays most of the blame for this condition on the father he both hated and adored. Dmytro Kurelek was a man whose own life had been harsh and difficult. He had survived the First World War as a child in the Ukraine, and he had weathered drought and depression in Western Canada in the thirties. He hoped to see his children achieve the security he had never enjoyed.

Tragic ironies in Bill's life include the fact that he was the first of seven children; that his younger brother John appeared to be everything in a son that Dmytro wanted and Bill was not; and that when Bill was twelve, the Second World War removed most hired men from Canadian farms. His father had to have help from his two sons. In these emergency conditions, Bill's mechanical ineptitude earned criticism which set going a vicious circle of fear and error. The symbiotic relationship between Dmytro and Bill was different from that between Dmytro and his other children: different, and very difficult.

Bill's religious faith restored his feeling of personal worth and led him into a community of caring individuals where his self-confidence began to grow. His *conscious* mythology was entirely God-centred. He credited God with his healing, and found in his Christian faith a reason for his previous suffering. He saw his painting as a God-given talent and a means to preach in the marketplace. He also saw himself as a kind of Jeremiah, although he never used this term. Firmly expecting both a coming Holocaust and a coming Heaven, he warned his audience of approaching cataclysm.

Bill's unconscious mythology reveals itself more subtly, culminating in a phrase near the end of his autobiography, "my comeback to normalcy and success". "Comeback" is a curious word, reminiscent of an athlete or an entertainer. Normalcy and success are not particularly Christian goals; indeed, the latter seems secular unless understood within a New Testament context of paradox and inversion, where a failure in the eyes of the world can be understood as success in the eyes of God. Bill's pride in achieving normalcy and success is the restored pride of an individual who has been told many times that he was abnormal and stupid, and that no one could earn a good living from painting. His psychological need to prove his father wrong and to win his admiration was a motivation that Bill understood less clearly than his Christian goals but that was operating powerfully in his life.³ The need to succeed was also part of the immigrant experience and was thus inherited by Bill from his family's situation.⁴

The old wounds made success a necessity, one that was inextricably tied to a basic insecurity and a desperate desire to be the son his father wanted. Tragically, Bill never recognized that his own need to succeed as an artist and as his father's son was the mirror image of Dmytro's need to see his children acquire the education and security that fate had denied to him. To Bill, his father's drives were "materialistic", while his own were spiritual and therefore legitimate. He publicly condemned his father's ambition to see his children

successful, but was passionately disappointed when Dmytro failed, for many years, to perceive that his son was a very successful artist. The irony was lost on Bill. There were blind spots in his view of his parents which a lifetime would prove too short to correct.⁵

His early years on the farm with his parents and the tortured climax of these years in England constitute the heart of his own story. In theory, his individual experience is important largely as exemplar. In practice, Bill found the infinite details of his personal experience to be of absorbing interest. He structures that experience as steps in the education of an artist, a portrait of the artist as a young man. He read James Joyce in his late teens, and was deeply impressed. Joyce's fiction and Van Gogh's life became secular icons in his imagination. Identifying with Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, Bill became proud of his poverty, his eccentricity, even his depression. This romantic and bohemian phase lasted till he was nearly thirty. In 1957, a magnificent self-portrait shows his new maturity and strength. It would subsequently grace the cover of the 1980 edition of his autobiography.

Self-portraits from Bill's teens and twenties depict him as a homeless wanderer on the road of life, leaning into the wind in a belted trench coat and "porkpie" hat, a touch he got (by his own admission) from an early Joseph Cotten film. From childhood he had a sense of being destined for great things. His stay in Netherne Hospital "seemed to be fated" in order that he should realize "the essential weakness and fragility of mankind". In a locked hospital ward he was touched for the first time with real pity for someone other than himself. Released from hospital, he met a sympathetic priest, "as if things were working out according to a hidden plan."

After Bill's conversion, theology transformed a secular, Joycean myth into a sacred one. Now Kurelek believed that God had permitted suffering so that good could come out of it. His suffering had broken his selfishness and pride, and had helped him to become a better artist. Now he could "start living" (A2 155). Ironically, the so-called "living" upon which he embarks after entering the Church, namely his successful Toronto years, is a period that seems to contain for him little or no autobiographical interest. Like the romantic myth where marriage is an end rather than a beginning ("and they lived happily ever after"), the act of religious commitment signified the end of the story. It completed the myth that structures the autobiography and that explained Kurelek to himself.⁶ A vital part of that myth (in an almost Old Testament sense, where fat flocks reward the man of faith) is the attainment of success in his chosen career. At the end of the second edition, Bill describes himself as "a full, unqualified success", fulfilling and surpassing his parents' concept and ambition.

The Kurelek story has, in the phrase beloved by Hollywood, a cast of thousands. There are hundreds of people who knew and helped or were helped by the artist. The fascination of their stories and the reasons that drew them to the artist have become a part of the web. In the epic cast, starring

roles belong to his dealer, two publishers, a Russian baroness devoted to the poor, and a British woman whom Bill credited with saving his life. Curious as it may seem to those who have approached the artist's life by way of his autobiography, his father remained the one who influenced him most and whose praise was always sought. The ambivalence felt by the artist in this relationship reveals itself only gradually, and cut to the bone. As we begin to understand it, we will begin to understand his father's son.

Bill was fortunate in having as his promoter a young dealer whose own star was rising just as fate brought them together in 1959. For his extraordinarily rapid rise to prominence in the 1960s and '70s, the artist was indebted in no small measure to the support of The Isaacs Gallery. In 1970, introducing a major Kurelek Retrospective at the Edmonton Art Gallery, Avrom Isaacs wrote of the feeling of a vast, sparsely populated land evoked by the strong lines of horizon and fences in Kurelek's western landscapes. His immigrant paintings stood alone in an area where little had been done save in documentary photography. As for his protest paintings, Isaacs described them as *avant garde* at a time when fashionable art was abstract and value-free. Such paintings had their own quality of abstraction in the way in which they dissected the surface into simple planes. Isaacs stressed that a unified vision underlies the entire work, no matter what the subject: "There is an intensity in his painting which converts all his work into a religious act."⁷ That intensity suffused everything he touched.

His *oeuvre* consists of thousands of paintings, and a surprisingly large body of writing: fourteen books with brief texts accompanying his paintings, dozens of journals, texts to many of his individual paintings, and vast numbers of letters. His spelling is original and his syntax unsound, but a storyteller's gift and the intensity noted by Isaacs give life to his words as to his art. Novelist W. O. Mitchell found Bill remarkably ignorant of the craft of writing, while Isaacs called him a "gifted writer". The truth lies somewhere in between.

Bill cared nothing for words, save as a medium to convey meaning. He spoke as he wrote and wrote as he talked, in a colloquial idiom that reflects his rural background and the haste with which his words were set down. His diction is often unique, while his writing may induce laughter, irritation, admiration, and anger.⁸ He was cavalier with regard to the facts of his own life, being unwilling to spend the time required to check. Time was a jealously guarded commodity assigned to his art. Thus dates and other facts in his autobiographical writings are often inaccurate. Some of the elegant simplicity in his published texts is due to professional editing.

Kurelek lived intensely and very fully a relatively short life span of fifty years. Occasionally his writings and talks are marred by self-pity or self-congratulation. But of the intensity of his suffering there can be no doubt. His difficulties in defining himself to himself and his father had many roots, but ethnicity remained a central strand. Had the circumstances of his home and

the ambitions of his hard-pressed immigrant father been different, his life might have been infinitely easier. A less sensitive individual, a different individual, might well have suffered less in very similar circumstances. His writings and psychiatric drawings record the hell he endured for many years. He experienced his own passion, and could thus understand Christ's; having known both hatred and love, he could understand love the better. Part of his maturation involved the exploration of his roots, and his celebration of them.

The work was prodigious, the time very short. It was a heroic life, one filled with struggle and achievement, with loneliness and private modes of joy. The loneliness lay hidden, in the last twenty years, beneath a mask of sociability and family life.⁹ He repeatedly observed in letters that very few people were interested in his projects or his experiences in executing them. The companionship sought in marriage had failed to meet his unrealistically high expectations. He told his publisher that only God understood him.

Why did he do three paintings a day, and glory in the tally? Why did he work seventeen-hour shifts? Kurelek himself called his work habits fanatical, obsessive. The motivation behind this punishing schedule is complex, rooted in a troubled childhood, an adult faith, and a continuing loneliness. After a painting trip, eager for comments, he would proudly display his new series in the living-room of a friend, or in his own own basement. His paintings, saying eloquently what his lips could not, were his chief means of communication with other humans. Paintings were also a means of communication with God and Nature; they reflected his gratitude and awe in ways that were beyond words. Obviously he painted for money, and he painted to preach. He painted to define himself to himself as well as to the world at large. And for self-justification. Perhaps he painted to keep sane. Or to impress his father. His seventeen-hour stints may well have included an element of flagellation, especially when we remember that he lived and worked with frequent pain in his back and knees. These long work sessions gave him tremendous pride and satisfaction. *He could do it.* The power flowed from his brush and shouted his being aloud.¹⁰

In 1968, in the context of a discussion on building a bomb shelter, Kurelek considered the kind of death he would choose to die in peacetime. He chose cancer. Ironically, fumes from his paints may have induced tumors. In 1977, cancer claimed him.

17 Shifting Portraits

There were two funeral ceremonies, November 6 and 7, the first for family and close friends. Some one hundred mourners more than filled a local funeral parlor. Kurelek lay in an open coffin, wearing a Ukrainian shirt beneath a tailored jacket. Ukrainian music was sung by a church choir led by his brother-in-law, Nat Olynyk. On the following day, a memorial Mass was held at midday in the church where Kurelek had painted a Resurrection mural

earlier that same year. Corpus Christi was filled to overflowing. The spectacle was dramatic and impressive. The country was mourning one of its heroes. Incense rose as censers swung. Robed in white, symbol of the Resurrection, a dozen priests filled the sanctuary. Almost all were Irish Catholics. Toronto's Ukrainian community was surprised and disappointed to find not a single Ukrainian priest, Catholic or Orthodox, sharing in the ceremony. The elements that Kurelek had held together in his life had separated, with his death, like oil and water.

Jean wore a Ukrainian blouse to the funerals. She said that her husband was with God. She was smiling and serene.

The interment followed. A long line of cars drove through heavy rain to Resthaven Cemetery on Kingston Road at Brimley, in Scarborough. Discouraged by the downpour, some mourners remained in their cars. Huddled beneath umbrellas, the others scattered quickly after the brief graveside service. The coffin remained on the grass, to be lowered later. Still later, a brass plaque was added, which read, "William Kurelek. Living with Christ."

The eulogy in Corpus Christi was given by Father James McConica, who had known the artist since the late 1950s. Dr. McConica spoke of Kurelek as rooted in his family, his people, and his God. He called his faith heroic, inspired, even consuming: "In a life that was in every way extraordinary, it may be oddly fitting that the end should come when he was still so vital and secure in his strength. We will remember him always at the height of his powers." That faith, he continued, is inscribed in the enduring legacy of the paintings:

It is also inscribed in the hearts of all whose lives he touched . . . It can be read in powerful images in this very Church, in the three panels he painted over the altar of the Blessed Sacrament: the loneliness and seeming defeat of death, the power of the Resurrection, and the final victory of life and hope. At the apex is his vision of the overwhelming power of Christ's resurrection . . . It was his last major work to be completed; and it is his message to us today . . . Proclaiming [the Resurrection] was the constant theme of his work, even when it was not outwardly religious. His love of ordinary people, his vital sense of life, his blunt, plain style, as unadorned as was the man himself, made him perhaps the first truly national painter Canada has seen . . . The thing that mattered most to him was the life of the ordinary man and woman. And they stream through his canvasses . . . They are God's gathering in what the artist in his autobiography called "this tragic, puzzling, yet wonderful world". I believe he lived his life so urgently because he wanted to arouse the consciences of men to the needs of this vast human family of God — needs of the body and needs of the spirit.¹

After the memorial Mass, McConica felt an extraordinary sense of peace, and the conviction that Kurelek's life was completely fulfilled.

There was no shortage of public eulogies, and they were glowing. The press called Kurelek "the people's painter", a man with a vision, an artist of extraordinary achievement and of intense significance to Canada and the world. Father Kevin Kirley termed him a quiet man, shy and boyish, with a penetrating glance, "a man who had known suffering, physical and mental anguish, but who had expunged all bitterness from his heart." Kurelek was described as a strong, courageous man who was also a seeker, "still very much a pilgrim with us all".²

Eulogies, by definition, are one-sided; not necessarily dishonest, simply partial. Anyone wishing to canonize the artist must wrestle with a second Kurelek, a dark and puzzling figure. If bitterness was truly expunged from his heart, it was routed only in the last few weeks of his life. His final state of mind will always remain a mystery. But how can we reconcile his public protestations of forgiveness with his equally public denunciations of his father's ill-treatment of him? For nearly half a lifetime those protestations played a major role in Kurelek's inner and outer life. His religion taught him that what mattered was the will, not the emotions. He forced his will to forgive while his emotions fought a rearguard action. By Kurelek's own account, his father had taught his family to harbor grudges. Having sown the wind, Dmytro would reap the whirlwind.

Artist Jacques Hnizdovsky perceived two opposing forces in his friend's psyche, "extreme goodness and cruelty". He failed to understand how a man as sensitive and intelligent as Kurelek could remain blind to the fact that his mother had obviously been forced to leave her young children in order to work in the barns and the fields. Surely, Hnizdovsky writes, Kurelek could have seen that his parents loved him and wished him well: "Deep in his soul Kurelek knew this and this is why he again and again returns to the same problem as if to confess his own injustice towards his parents."³ Hnizdovsky had been impressed by the senior Kureleks: "Without question Kurelek's mother would stand as an embodiment of pure love; right after her I would put his father."

Kurelek had begun life with the central paradox of loving and hating his father. Like all who strive to be saints or martyrs, the artist struggled always with feelings of love and hate, forgiveness and vengeance, humility and pride, masochism and joy. His need for self-justification was very strong. Barry Callaghan found him a stubborn, vain, and generous man, "a troublesome mixture" of humility and fierce pride: "He had an excuse for everything. He could be narrow and prejudiced. He was always a contradiction to me."⁴

In Callaghan's eyes, Kurelek was harsh, judgmental, and unforgiving. He judged himself and he judged others, as his father had done before: "He blamed his father for his own temperament. Sometimes he mistook his own harshness for his father's. Some of the wounds he suffered were self-imposed, but he blamed his father for them, not understanding that he wounded and

judged himself." Callaghan saw Bill as insecure, lacking in confidence yet fiercely determined to *be someone*. The autobiography seemed to be something absolutely necessary to him to satisfy a sense of destiny and to heal his pain. Eric Freifeld's view is very similar. Freifeld believes that during his decade away from Canada, Kurelek changed very little; he was vain and self-centred: "There was always a central narcissism."

Sincere self-delusion has been called the privilege of genius and the secret of success. Was Kurelek aware of these contradictions within himself? At some level of consciousness he must have been. In his painting of Judas in torment, where a hand covers one eye, the face suggests his own. What were his frequent public protestations of success but the reassurance needed by one who lacked self-confidence yet desperately *needed* to succeed? His "doomsday" pronouncements swung wildly between modesty and pride. To his patron and friend Dr. Wachna he had written that he lived in a "classy" neighborhood inhabited by doctors and engineers, the type of men admired by his father. He was bitterly disappointed by his father's failure to attend the banquet in his honor given in 1968 by the Ukrainian Business and Professional Men's Association; these men, he told Shorey on the day of the banquet, were "the very class of people, wealthy, influential professionals that it had been my father's ambition I should become." The pride is obvious, yet nearly everyone who knew the man was impressed by the humility that marked his daily words and actions.

He was called generous, even by those most critical of him. His charities were legion, his small acts of kindness beyond count. His debts of gratitude to Margaret Smith and Av Isaacs were paid many times over, yet his parents' efforts on his behalf were slighted or ignored, brushed off as acts of mere duty. His parents, he wrote in 1972, were "obligated" to help him. The context clearly implied that such necessary actions were hardly praiseworthy, unlike the freely given help of strangers.⁵ The twin series of works in the mid-sixties in honor of his father and mother both end in denunciations of them, as we have seen, although the Forewords stress that Kurelek is fulfilling the biblical injunction to honor one's parents.

For his part, Dmytro seems to have publicly acknowledged his son's success by the 1970s. He was impressed by the letter from the Queen, thanking Kurelek for the gift of a painting; and he was somewhat awed by the prices the paintings commanded. In general, the relationship was much improved. The father was shattered by his son's untimely death, and grieved deeply. He said it was "unjust" that his son should die before him. Tragically, the block in their communication had never been healed. In hospital, the son had longed to tell of his recent trip to the Ukraine, while the father longed for just such news, but something had stood in the way: "They both wanted the same thing but couldn't communicate," Kurelek's sister observed.⁶ The remark covered a lifetime.

The death, like the life, was a scene of contradictions. The surgeon remembers his final days as peaceful and serene. But on the evening of November 3, a strange scene took place in Kurelek's hospital room. His wife described it to me in 1981. He cried out. Holding his wife's hand, he struggled to rise from his bed and to break loose from his oxygen mask. Shouting "Jean! Jean!" he tore off the connection. There were elements of violence and confusion in the death that followed almost immediately.

In the end, we come back to Dr. McConica's intuition: this was a life completely fulfilled. He may well have been right. Kurelek drove himself cruelly, but for most of his adult life he did what he wanted to do: paint. And gloried in the doing. He was not happy unless he was working and the work that mattered most was painting. In Catholicism he had discovered a reason for his pain, even for his anxieties, one that satisfied him fully. His joy was very real. He had found, in his own words, success beyond his wildest dreams. How many of us can say the same?

In the summer of 1983, on a cliff overlooking the St. Lawrence, I watched three hang-gliders soaring like giant dragonflies over the great river. I had gone on Kurelek research to Québec City, and to a Christian Brothers farm near St. Nicolas on the south shore. On the drive back with James Halpin and Father Leo Letarte, we were arrested by the spectacle of the hang-gliders in flight and stopped to watch. The priest said that it must be a fantastic feeling, like a drug high: "Bill must have felt the same thing, sometimes, of being carried beyond himself."

It was a sunny, windy day. We parked and walked past an old stone farmhouse to the cliffs. There was a sheer drop of two hundred and fifty feet to the river. The tide was half out, the water turquoise and purple and blue. The green fields were dotted with vetch, mustard, daisies, and orange tiger-lilies. Darting swallows seemed to imitate the human flyers. A red and orange glider swooped low over our heads at the speed of a car on a freeway. Suspended horizontally, the flyer held onto metal handlebars while his legs were held in a harness at the knees. I gasped at the colors, the nearness, the sheer audacity of the man. The thought came to me: Bill must have felt like that.

Two boys were helping another flyer prepare for take-off. Methodically he unpacked the parts from a dufflebag and assembled them. A black-and-yellow glider, like a great bat, took shape. The man would hang below a metal triangle, the trapeze. The wings were thirty-three feet wide. I asked if he felt free when he flew, and he said Yes, but it was hard to explain. I asked if he was afraid, especially on take-off. He replied in French, We have confidence in our wings. He said he could fly in all seasons but he liked winter best, when he could hear the ice forming in the river. The cold made it more challenging. Then he steadied himself at the edge of the cliff, facing out, the boys holding

the wing tips. At the next gust of wind he jumped forward. He was flying. It seemed unreal. I could sympathize with Halpin, who disapproved: "If they dropped, they'd kill themselves. You'd have to be crazy to do that."

But the priest's imagination had been caught; he saw the danger as part of the game. "You have to, Jimmy, St. Paul said it. It's not crazy, you accept without understanding. Like the freedom of the Cross."

The wind was in our faces, the air alive with swallows. The river moved in its steady path to the sea. I thought of Kierkegaard's phrase "the leap of faith". I thought of those who found Kurelek's life strange, radical, incomprehensible. I was looking at challenge accepted; at daring, mystery, and joy. It was time to leave.

THE PROGRESS OF LOVE

Information on rights

Douglas Gibson Books, published by McClelland and Stewart and the first personal imprint in Canada, was launched in 1986 with the fall publication of Alice Munro's *THE PROGRESS OF LOVE*.

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her work, and she has made an official visit with a writers' group to China.

*Munro's fame abroad is matched by the admiration she enjoys in Canada, where she has won the Governor General's Literary Award for fiction three times — for *DANCE OF THE HAPPY SHADES* (1968), *WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?* (1978), and her latest collection of stories, *THE PROGRESS OF LOVE* (1986). Her other works, *LIVES OF GIRLS AND WOMEN* (1971) and *SOMETHING I'VE BEEN MEANING TO TELL YOU* (1976), continue to attract new readers, while *THE MOONS OF JUPITER* was a major best seller when it appeared in 1982.*

BIOGRAPHY

Alice Munro was born and grew up in Wingham, Ontario. After high school she spent two years at the University of Western Ontario, married, and moved to Vancouver and Victoria, where she became the mother of three daughters. She returned to southwestern Ontario in 1972 and now lives in the town of Clinton with her second husband.

*Every year her writing continues to reach a wider audience, with magazines such as *The New Yorker* and *Paris Review* anxious to publish her stories. Countries as distant as Norway and Australia have invited her to speak about*

SUMMARY

Following the same careful four-year cycle that produced *WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?* in 1978 and *THE MOONS OF JUPITER* in 1982, Alice Munro completed *THE PROGRESS OF LOVE* in 1986.

The 11 stories in this collection reveal all of Munro's familiar skills, but they also represent an advance in her art. The "love" of which the title speaks is much more than conventional sexual love between adult men and women. More complex patterns of love — for example, between brothers, or between members of different generations — emerge in fascinating variety in this book.

Time also plays a new, more important role. Many of the stories span events as much as half a century apart, and the past is gracefully interwoven with the present that it continues to affect.

REVIEWS

"THE PROGRESS OF LOVE is probably the best collection of stories—the most confident and, at the same time, the most adventurous—ever written by a Canadian."

David Macfarlane, Saturday Night

"There is nothing fancy, nothing showy about this book; it is just wonderful reading from beginning to end."

Paul Skenazy, San Francisco Chronicle

"This book is wonderful, a rare pleasure. I'm not merely recommending it; I'm urging you to read it."

Mordecai Richler, Book of the Month Club News

"Audaciously honest....she writes stories that have the density—moral, emotional, and sometimes historical—of other writers' novels."

Joyce Carol Oates, New York Times Book Review

"Is it an exaggeration to say that Alice Munro flirts with and often achieves perfection in the short story form? I among many others do not think so."

Ken Adachi, Toronto Star

"If any short story writer is, today, walking Chekhov's path, it is Alice Munro."

Linda Volk, Ottawa Citizen

"A born teller of tales....Because they are an endangered species, we should bless and rally round those writers who have a lot to say. Alice Munro is one of them."

Lynne Sharon Schwartz, Washington Post

"The stories leave you with a certainty that there can't be anything better."

Marty Gervais, Windsor Star

"And we read, fascinated, wishing the stories would never end."

Audrey Andrews, Calgary Herald

"Beautiful...there is not another Canadian writer as good in what she does."

William French, The Globe and Mail

I got a call at work, and it was my father. This was not long after I was divorced and started in the real-estate office. Both of my boys were in school. It was a hot enough day in September.

My father was so polite, even in the family. He took time to ask me how I was. Country manners. Even if somebody phones up to tell you your house is burning down, they ask first how you are.

"I'm fine," I said. "How are you?"

"Not so good, I guess," said my father, in his old way—apologetic but self-respecting. "I think your mother's gone."

I knew that "gone" meant "dead." I knew that. But for a second or so I saw my mother in her black straw hat setting off down the lane. The word "gone" seemed full of nothing but a deep relief and even an excitement—the excitement you feel when a door closes and your house sinks back to normal and you let yourself loose into all the free space around you. That was in my father's voice, too—behind the apology, a queer sound like a gulped breath. But my mother hadn't been a burden—she hadn't been sick a day—and far from feeling relieved at her death, my father took it hard. He never got used to living alone, he said. He went into the Netterfield County Home quite willingly.

He told me how he found my mother on the couch in the kitchen when he came in at noon. She had picked a few tomatoes, and was setting them on the windowsill to ripen; then she must have felt weak, and lain down. Now, telling this, his voice went wobbly—meandering, as you would expect—in his amazement. I saw in my mind the couch, the old quilt that protected it, right under the phone.

"So I thought I better call you," my father said, and he waited for me to say what he should do now.

My mother prayed on her knees at midday, at night, and first thing in the morning. Every day opened up to her to have God's will done in it. Every night she totted up what she'd done and said and thought, to see how it squared with Him. That kind of life is dreary, people think, but they're missing the point. For one thing, such a life can never be boring. And nothing can happen to you that you can't make use of. Even if you're racked by troubles, and sick and poor and ugly, you've got your soul to carry through life like a treasure on a platter. Going upstairs to pray after the noon meal, my mother would be full of energy and expectation, seriously smiling.

She was saved at a camp meeting when she was fourteen. That was the same summer that her own mother—my grandmother—died. For a few years, my mother went to meetings with a lot of other people who'd been saved, some who'd been saved over and over again, enthusiastic old sinners. She could tell stories about what went on at those meetings, the singing and

hollering and wildness. She told about one old man getting up and shouting, "Come down, O Lord, come down among us now! Come down through the roof and I'll pay for the shingles!"

She was back to being just an Anglican, a serious one, by the time she got married. She was twenty-five then, and my father was thirty-eight. A tall good-looking couple, good dancers, good card-players, sociable. But serious people—that's how I would try to describe them. Serious the way hardly anybody is anymore. My father was not religious in the way my mother was. He was an Anglican, an Orangeman, a Conservative, because that's what he had been brought up to be. He was the son who got left on the farm with his parents and took care of them till they died. He met my mother, he waited for her, they married; he thought himself lucky then to have a family to work for. (I have two brothers, and I had a baby sister who died.) I have a feeling that my father never slept with any woman before my mother, and never with her until he married her. And he had to wait, because my mother wouldn't get married until she had paid back to her own father every cent he had spent on her since her mother died. She had kept track of everything—board, books, clothes—so that she could pay it back. When she married, she had no nest egg, as teachers usually did, no hope chest, sheets, or dishes. My father used to say, with a somber, joking face, that he had hoped to get a woman with money in the bank. "But you take the money in the bank, you have to take the face that goes with it," he said, "and sometimes that's no bargain."

The house we lived in had big, high rooms, with dark-green blinds on the windows. When the blinds were pulled down against the sun, I used to like to move my head and catch the light flashing through the holes and cracks. Another thing I liked looking at was chimney stains, old or fresh, which I could turn into animals, people's faces, even distant cities. I told my own two boys about that, and their father, Dan Casey, said, "See, your mom's folks were so poor, they couldn't afford TV, so they got these stains on the ceiling—your mom had to watch the stains on the ceiling!" He always liked to kid me about thinking poor was anything great.

When my father was very old, I figured out that he didn't mind people doing new sorts of things—for instance, my getting divorced—as much as he minded them having new sorts of reasons for doing them.

Thank God he never had to know about the commune.

"The Lord never intended," he used to say. Sitting around with the other old men in the Home, in the long, dim porch behind the spirea bushes, he talked about how the Lord never intended for people to tear around the country on motorbikes and snowmobiles. And how the Lord never intended for nurses' uniforms to be pants. The nurses didn't mind at all. They called him "Handsome," and told me he was a real old sweetheart, a real old religious gentleman. They marvelled at his thick black hair, which he kept

until he died. They washed and combed it beautifully, wet-waved it with their fingers.

Sometimes, with all their care, he was a little unhappy. He wanted to go home. He worried about the cows, the fences, about who was getting up to light the fire. A few flashes of meanness—very few. Once, he gave me a sneaky, unfriendly look when I went in; he said, "I'm surprised you haven't worn all the skin off your knees by now."

I laughed. I said, "What doing? Scrubbing floors?"

"Praying!" he said, in a voice like spitting.

He didn't know who he was talking to.

I don't remember my mother's hair being anything but white. My mother went white in her twenties, and never saved any of her young hair, which had been brown. I used to try to get her to tell what color brown.

"Dark."

"Like Brent, or like Dolly?" Those were two workhorses we had, a team.

"I don't know. It wasn't horsehair."

"Was it like chocolate?"

"Something like."

"Weren't you sad when it went white?"

"No. I was glad."

"Why?"

"I was glad that I wouldn't have hair anymore that was the same color as my father's."

Hatred is always a sin, my mother told me. Remember that. One drop of hatred in your soul will spread and discolor everything like a drop of black ink in white milk. I was struck by that and meant to try it, but knew I shouldn't waste the milk.

All these things I remember. All the things I know, or have been told, about people I never even saw. I was named Euphemia, after my mother's mother. A terrible name, such as nobody has nowadays. At home they called me Phemie, but when I started to work, I called myself Fame. My husband, Dan Casey, called me Fame. Then in the bar of the Shamrock Hotel, years later, after my divorce, when I was going out, a man said to me, "Fame, I've been meaning to ask you, just what is it you are famous for?"

"I don't know," I told him. "I don't know, unless it's for wasting my time talking to jerks like you."

After that I thought of changing it altogether, to something like Joan, but unless I moved away from here, how could I do that?

In the summer of 1947, when I was twelve, I helped my mother paper the downstairs bedroom, the spare room. My mother's sister, Beryl, was coming to visit us. These two sisters hadn't seen each other for years. Very soon after their mother died, their father married again. He went to live in Minneapolis, then in Seattle, with his new wife and his younger daughter, Beryl. My mother wouldn't go with them. She stayed on in the town of Ramsay, where they had been living. She was boarded with a childless couple who had been neighbors. She and Beryl had met only once or twice since they were grown up. Beryl lived in California.

The paper had a design of cornflowers on a white ground. My mother had got it at a reduced price, because it was the end of a lot. This meant we had trouble matching the pattern, and behind the door we had to do some tricky fitting with scraps and strips. This was before the days of pre-pasted wallpaper. We had a trestle table set up in the front room, and we mixed the paste and swept it onto the back of the paper with wide brushes, watching for lumps. We worked with the windows up, screens fitted under them, the front door open, the screen door closed. The country we could see through the mesh of screens and the wavery old window glass was all hot and flowering—milkweed and wild carrot in the pastures, mustard rampaging in the clover, some fields creamy with the buckwheat people grew then. My mother sang. She sang a song she said her own mother used to sing when she and Beryl were little girls.

*"I once had a sweetheart, but now I have none.
He's gone and he's left me to weep and to moan.
He's gone and he's left me, but contented I'll be,
For I'll get another one, better than he!"*

I was excited because Beryl was coming, a visitor, all the way from California. Also, because I had gone to town in late June to write the Entrance Examinations, and was hoping to hear soon that I had passed with honors. Everybody who had finished Grade 8 in the country schools had to go into town to write those examinations. I loved that—the rustling sheets of foolscap, the important silence, the big stone high-school building, all the old initials carved in the desks, darkened with varnish. The first burst of summer outside, the green and yellow light, the townlike chestnut trees, and honeysuckle. And all it was was this same town, where I have lived now more than half my life. I wondered at it. And at myself, drawing maps with ease and solving problems, knowing quantities of answers. I thought I was so clever. But I wasn't clever enough to understand the simplest thing. I didn't even understand that examinations made no difference in my case. I wouldn't be going to high school. How could I? That was before there were school buses; you had to board in town. My parents didn't have the money. They operated on very little cash, as many farmers did then. The payments from

the cheese factory were about all that came in regularly. And they didn't think of my life going in that direction, the high-school direction. They thought that I would stay at home and help my mother, maybe hire out to help women in the neighborhood who were sick or having a baby. Until such time as I got married. That was what they were waiting to tell me when I got the results of the examinations.

You would think my mother might have a different idea, since she had been a schoolteacher herself. But she said God didn't care. God isn't interested in what kind of job or what kind of education anybody has, she told me. He doesn't care two hoots about that, and it's what He cares about that matters.

This was the first time I understood how God could become a real opponent, not just some kind of nuisance or large decoration.

My mother's name as a child was Marietta. That continued to be her name, of course, but until Beryl came I never heard her called by it. My father always said Mother. I had a childish notion—I knew it was childish—that Mother suited my mother better than it did other mothers. Mother, not Mama. When I was away from her, I could not think what my mother's face was like, and this frightened me. Sitting in school, just over a hill from home, I would try to picture my mother's face. Sometimes I thought that if I couldn't do it, that might mean my mother was dead. But I had a sense of her all the time, and would be reminded of her by the most unlikely things—an upright piano, or a tall white loaf of bread. That's ridiculous, but true.

Marietta, in my mind, was separate, not swallowed up in my mother's grownup body. Marietta was still running around loose up in her town of Ramsay, on the Ottawa River. In that town, the streets were full of horses and puddles, and darkened by men who came in from the bush on weekends. Loggers. There were eleven hotels on the main street, where the loggers stayed, and drank.

The house Marietta lived in was halfway up a steep street climbing from the river. It was a double house, with two bay windows in front, and a wooden trellis that separated the two front porches. In the other half of the house lived the Sutcliffes, the people Marietta was to board with after her mother died and her father left town. Mr. Sutcliffe was an Englishman, a telegraph operator. His wife was German. She always made coffee instead of tea. She made strudel. The dough for strudel hung down over the edges of the table like a fine cloth. It sometimes looked to Marietta like a skin.

Mrs. Sutcliffe was the one who talked Marietta's mother out of hanging herself.

Marietta was home from school that day, because it was Saturday. She woke up late and heard the silence in the house. She was always scared of that—a silent house—and as soon as she opened the door after school she

would call, "Mama! Mama!" Often her mother wouldn't answer. But she would be there. Marietta would hear with relief the rattle of the stove grate or the steady slap of the iron.

That morning, she didn't hear anything. She came downstairs, and got herself a slice of bread and butter and molasses, folded over. She opened the cellar door and called. She went into the front room and peered out the window, through the bridal fern. She saw her little sister, Beryl, and some other neighborhood children rolling down the bit of grassy terrace to the sidewalk, picking themselves up and scrambling to the top and rolling down again.

"Mama?" called Marietta. She walked through the house to the back yard. It was late spring, the day was cloudy and mild. In the sprouting vegetable gardens, the earth was damp, and the leaves on the trees seemed suddenly full-sized, letting down drops of water left over from the rain of the night before.

"Mama?" calls Marietta under the trees, under the clothesline.

At the end of the yard is a small barn, where they keep firewood, and some tools and old furniture. A chair, a straight-backed wooden chair, can be seen through the open doorway. On the chair, Marietta sees her mother's feet, her mother's black laced shoes. Then the long, printed cotton summer work dress, the apron, the rolled-up sleeves. Her mother's shiny-looking white arms, and neck, and face.

Her mother stood on the chair and didn't answer. She didn't look at Marietta, but smiled and tapped her foot, as if to say, "Here I am, then. What are you going to do about it?" Something looked wrong about her, beyond the fact that she was standing on a chair and smiling in this queer, tight way. Standing on an old chair with back rungs missing, which she had pulled out to the middle of the barn floor, where it teetered on the bumpy earth. There was a shadow on her neck.

The shadow was a rope, a noose on the end of a rope that hung down from a beam overhead.

"Mama?" says Marietta, in a fainter voice. "Mama. Come down, please." Her voice is faint because she fears that any yell or cry might jolt her mother into movement, cause her to step off the chair and throw her weight on the rope. But even if Marietta wanted to yell she couldn't. Nothing but this pitiful thread of a voice is left to her—just as in a dream when a beast or a machine is bearing down on you.

"Go and get your father."

That was what her mother told her to do, and Marietta obeyed. With terror in her legs, she ran. In her nightgown, in the middle of a Saturday morning, she ran. She ran past Beryl and the other children, still tumbling down the slope. She ran along the sidewalk, which was at that time a

boardwalk, then on the unpaved street, full of last night's puddles. The street crossed the railway tracks. At the foot of the hill, it intersected the main street of the town. Between the main street and the river were some warehouses and the buildings of small manufacturers. That was where Marietta's father had his carriage works. Wagons, buggies, sleds were made there. In fact, Marietta's father had invented a new sort of sled to carry logs in the bush. It had been patented. He was just getting started in Ramsay. (Later on, in the States, he made money. A man fond of hotel bars, barbershops, harness races, women, but not afraid of work—give him credit.)

Marietta did not find him at work that day. The office was empty. She ran out into the yard where the men were working. She stumbled in the fresh sawdust. The men laughed and shook their heads at her. No. Not here. Not a-here right now. No. Why don't you try upstreet? Wait. Wait a minute. Hadn't you better get some clothes on first?

They didn't mean any harm. They didn't have the sense to see that something must be wrong. But Marietta never could stand men laughing. There were always places she hated to go past, let alone into, and that was the reason. Men laughing. Because of that, she hated barbershops, hated their smell. (When she started going to dances later on with my father, she asked him not to put any dressing on his hair, because the smell reminded her.) A bunch of men standing out on the street, outside a hotel, seemed to Marietta like a clot of poison. You tried not to hear what they were saying, but you could be sure it was vile. If they didn't say anything, they laughed and vileness spread out from them—poison—just the same. It was only after Marietta was saved that she could walk right past them. Armed by God, she walked through their midst and nothing stuck to her, nothing scorched her; she was safe as Daniel.

Now she turned and ran, straight back the way she had come. Up the hill, running to get home. She thought she had made a mistake leaving her mother. Why did her mother tell her to go? Why did she want her father? Quite possibly so that she could greet him with the sight of her own warm body swinging on the end of a rope. Marietta should have stayed—she should have stayed and talked her mother out of it. She should have run to Mrs. Sutcliffe, or any neighbor, not wasted time this way. She hadn't thought who could help, who could even believe what she was talking about. She had the idea that all families except her own lived in peace, that threats and miseries didn't exist in other people's houses, and couldn't be explained there.

A train was coming into town. Marietta had to wait. Passengers looked out at her from its windows. She broke out wailing in the faces of those strangers. When the train passed, she continued up the hill—a spectacle, with her hair uncombed, her feet bare and muddy, in her nightgown, with a wild, wet face. By the time she ran into her own yard, in sight of the barn, she was howling. "Mama!" she was howling. "Mama!"

Nobody was there. The chair was standing just where it had been before. The rope was dangling over the back of it. Marietta was sure that her mother had gone ahead and done it. Her mother was already dead—she had been cut down and taken away.

But warm, fat hands settled down on her shoulders, and Mrs. Sutcliffe said, "Marietta. Stop the noise. Marietta. Child. Stop the crying. Come inside. She is well, Marietta. Come inside and you will see."

Mrs. Sutcliffe's foreign voice said, "Mari-et-cha," giving the name a rich, important sound. She was as kind as could be. When Marietta lived with the Sutcliffes later, she was treated as the daughter of the household, and it was a household just as peaceful and comfortable as she had imagined other households to be. But she never felt like a daughter there.

In Mrs. Sutcliffe's kitchen, Beryl sat on the floor eating a raisin cookie and playing with the black-and-white cat, whose name was Dickie. Marietta's mother sat at the table, with a cup of coffee in front of her.

"She was silly," Mrs. Sutcliffe said. Did she mean Marietta's mother or Marietta herself? She didn't have many English words to describe things.

Marietta's mother laughed, and Marietta blacked out. She fainted, after running all that way uphill, howling, in the warm, damp morning. Next thing she knew, she was taking black, sweet coffee from a spoon held by Mrs. Sutcliffe. Beryl picked Dickie up by the front legs and offered him as a cheering present. Marietta's mother was still sitting at the table.

Her heart was broken. That was what I always heard my mother say. That was the end of it. Those words lifted up the story and sealed it shut. I never asked, Who broke it? I never asked, What was the men's poison talk? What was the meaning of the word "vile"?

Marietta's mother laughed after not hanging herself. She sat at Mrs. Sutcliffe's kitchen table long ago and laughed. Her heart was broken.

I always had a feeling, with my mother's talk and stories, of something swelling out behind. Like a cloud you couldn't see through, or get to the end of. There was a cloud, a poison, that had touched my mother's life. And when I grieved my mother, I became part of it. Then I would beat my head against my mother's stomach and breasts, against her tall, firm front, demanding to be forgiven. My mother would tell me to ask God. But it wasn't God, it was my mother I had to get straight with. It seemed as if she knew something about me that was worse, far worse, than ordinary lies and tricks and meanness; it was a really sickening shame. I beat against my mother's front to make her forget that.

My brothers weren't bothered by any of this. I don't think so. They seemed to me like cheerful savages, running around free, not having to learn

much. And when I just had the two boys myself, no daughters, I felt as if something could stop now—the stories, and griefs, the old puzzles you can't resist or solve.

Aunt Beryl said not to call her Aunt. "I'm not used to being anybody's aunt, honey. I'm not even anybody's momma. I'm just me. Call me Beryl."

Beryl had started out as a stenographer, and now she had her own typing and bookkeeping business, which employed many girls. She had arrived with a man friend, whose name was Mr. Florence. Her letter had said that she would be getting a ride with a friend, but she hadn't said whether the friend would be staying or going on. She hadn't even said if it was a man or a woman.

Mr. Florence was staying. He was a tall, thin man with a long, tanned face, very light-colored eyes, and a way of twitching the corner of his mouth that might have been a smile.

He was the one who got to sleep in the room that my mother and I had papered, because he was the stranger, and a man. Beryl had to sleep with me. At first we thought that Mr. Florence was quite rude, because he wasn't used to our way of talking and we weren't used to his. The first morning, my father said to Mr. Florence, "Well, I hope you got some kind of a sleep on that old bed in there?" (The spare-room bed was heavenly, with a feather tick.) This was Mr. Florence's cue to say that he had never slept better.

Mr. Florence twitched. He said, "I slept on worse."

His favorite place to be was in his car. His car was a royal-blue Chrysler, from the first batch turned out after the war. Inside it, the upholstery and floor covering and roof and door padding were all pearl grey. Mr. Florence kept the names of those colors in mind and corrected you if you said just "blue" or "gray."

"Mouse skin is what it looks like to me," said Beryl rambunctiously. "I tell him it's just mouse skin!"

The car was parked at the side of the house, under the locust trees. Mr. Florence sat inside with the windows rolled up, smoking, in the rich new-car smell.

"I'm afraid we're not doing much to entertain your friend," my mother said.

"I wouldn't worry about him," said Beryl. She always spoke about Mr. Florence as if there was a joke about him that only she appreciated. I wondered long afterward if he had a bottle in the glove compartment and took a nip from time to time to keep his spirits up. He kept his hat on.

Beryl herself was being entertained enough for two. Instead of staying in the house and talking to my mother, as a lady visitor usually did, she demanded to be shown everything there was to see on a farm. She said that I was to take her around and explain things, and see that she didn't fall into any manure piles.

I didn't know what to show. I took Beryl to the icehouse, where chunks of ice the size of dresser drawers, or bigger, lay buried in sawdust. Every few days, my father would chop off a piece of ice and carry it to the kitchen, where it melted in a tin-lined box and cooled the milk and butter.

Beryl said she had never had any idea ice came in pieces that big. She seemed intent on finding things strange, or horrible, or funny.

"Where in the world do you get ice that big?"

I couldn't tell if that was a joke.

"Off of the lake," I said.

"Off of the lake! Do you have lakes up here that have ice on them all summer?"

I told her how my father cut the ice on the lake every winter and hauled it home, and buried it in sawdust, and that kept it from melting.

Beryl said, "That's amazing!"

"Well, it melts a little," I said. I was deeply disappointed in Beryl.

"That's really amazing."

Beryl went along when I went to get the cows. A scarecrow in white slacks (this was what my father called her afterward), with a white sun hat tied under her chin by a flaunting red ribbon. Her fingernails and toenails—she wore sandals—were painted to match the ribbon. She wore the small, dark sunglasses people wore at that time. (Not the people I knew—they didn't own sunglasses.) She had a big red mouth, a loud laugh, hair of an unnatural color and a high gloss, like cherry wood. She was so noisy and shiny, so glamorously got up, that it was hard to tell whether she was good-looking, or happy, or anything.

We didn't have any conversation along the cowpath, because Beryl kept her distance from the cows and was busy watching where she stepped. Once I had them all tied in their stalls, she came closer. She lit a cigarette. Nobody smoked in the barn. My father and other farmers chewed tobacco there instead. I didn't see how I could ask Beryl to chew tobacco.

"Can you get the milk out of them or does your father have to?" Beryl said. "Is it hard to do?"

I pulled some milk down through the cow's teat. One of the barn cats came over and waited. I shot a thin stream into its mouth. The cat and I were both showing off.

"Doesn't that hurt?" said Beryl. "Think if it was you."

I had never thought of a cow's teat as corresponding to any part of myself, and was shaken by this indecency. In fact, I could never grasp a warm, warty teat in such a firm and casual way again.

Beryl slept in a peach-colored rayon nightgown trimmed with *écru* lace. She had a robe to match. She was just as careful about the word "*écru*" as Mr. Florence was about his royal blue and pearl gray.

I managed to get undressed and put on my nightgown without any part of me being exposed at any time. An awkward business. I left my underpants on, and hoped that Beryl had done the same. The idea of sharing my bed with a grownup was a torment to me. But I did get to see the contents of what Beryl called her beauty kit. Hand-painted glass jars contained puffs of cotton wool, talcum powder, milky lotion, ice-blue astringent. Little pots of red and mauve rouge—rather greasy-looking. Blue and black pencils. Emery boards, a pumice stone, nail polish with an overpowering smell of bananas, face powder in a celluloid box shaped like a shell, with the name of a dessert—Apricot Delight.

I had heated some water on the coal-oil stove we used in summertime. Beryl scrubbed her face clean, and there was such a change that I almost expected to see makeup lying in strips in the washbowl, like the old wallpaper we had soaked and peeled. Beryl's skin was pale now, covered with fine cracks, rather like the shiny mud at the bottom of puddles drying up in early summer.

"Look what happened to my skin," she said. "Dieting. I weighed a hundred and sixty-nine pounds once, and I took it off too fast and my face fell in on me. Now I've got this cream, though. It's made from a secret formula and you can't even buy it commercially. Smell it. See, it doesn't smell all perfumy. It smells serious."

She was patting the cream on her face with puffs of cotton wool, patting away until there was nothing to be seen on the surface.

"It smells like lard," I said.

"Christ Almighty, I hope I haven't been paying that kind of money to rub lard on my face. Don't tell your mother I swear."

She poured clean water into the drinking glass and wet her comb, then combed her hair wet and twisted each strand round her finger, clamping the twisted strand to her head with two crossed pins. I would be doing the same myself, a couple of years later.

"Always do your hair wet, else it's no good doing it up at all," Beryl said. "And always roll it under even if you want it to flip up. See?"

When I was doing my hair up—as I did for years—I sometimes thought of this, and thought that of all the pieces of advice people had given me, this was the one I had followed most carefully.

We put the lamp out and got into bed, and Beryl said, "I never knew it could get so dark. I've never known a dark that was as dark as this." She was whispering. I was slow to understand that she was comparing country nights to city nights, and I wondered if the darkness in Netterfield County could really be greater than that in California.

"Honey?" whispered Beryl. "Are there any animals outside?"

"Cows," I said.

"Yes, but wild animals? Are there bears?"

"Yes," I said. My father had once found bear tracks and droppings in the bush, and the apples had all been torn off a wild apple tree. That was years ago, when he was a young man.

Beryl moaned and giggled. "Think if Mr. Florence had to go out in the night and he ran into a bear!"

Next day was Sunday. Beryl and Mr. Florence drove my brothers and me to Sunday school in the Chrysler. That was at ten o'clock in the morning. They came back at eleven to bring my parents to church.

"Hop in," Beryl said to me. "You, too," she said to the boys. "We're going for a drive."

Beryl was dressed up in a satiny ivory dress with red dots, and a red-lined frill over the hips, and red high-heeled shoes. Mr. Florence wore a pale-blue summer suit.

"Aren't you going to church?" I said. That was what people dressed up for, in my experience.

Beryl laughed. "Honey, this isn't Mr. Florence's kind of religion."

I was used to going straight from Sunday school into church, and sitting for another hour and a half. In summer, the open windows let in the cedary smell of the graveyard and the occasional, almost sacrilegious sound of a car swooshing by on the road. Today we spent this time driving through country I had never seen before. I had never seen it, though it was less than twenty miles from home. Our truck went to the cheese factory, to church, and to town on Saturday nights. The nearest thing to a drive was when it went to the dump. I had seen the near end of Bell's Lake, because that was where my father cut the ice in winter. You couldn't get close to it in summer; the

shoreline was all choked up with bulrushes. I had thought that the other end of the lake would look pretty much the same, but when we drove there today, I saw cottages, docks and boats, dark water reflecting the trees. All this and I hadn't known about it. This, too, was Bell's Lake. I was glad to have seen it at last, but in some way not altogether glad of the surprise.

Finally, a white frame building appeared, with verandas and potted flowers, and some twinkling poplar trees in front. The Wildwood Inn. Today the same building is covered with stucco and done up with Tudor beams and called the Hideaway. The poplar trees have been cut down for a parking lot.

On the way back to the church to pick up my parents, Mr. Florence turned in to the farm next to ours, which belonged to the McAllisters. The McAllisters were Catholics. Our two families were neighborly but not close.

"Come on, boys, out you get," said Beryl to my brothers. "Not you," she said to me. "You stay put." She herded the little boys up to the porch, where some McAllisters were watching. They were in their raggedy home clothes, because their church, or Mass, or whatever it was, got out early. Mrs. McAllister came out and stood listening, rather dumbfounded, to Beryl's laughing talk.

Beryl came back to the car by herself. "There," she said. "They're going to play with the neighbor children."

Play with McAllisters? Besides being Catholics, all but the baby were girls.

"They've still got their good clothes on," I said.

"So what? Can't they have a good time with their good clothes on? I do!"

My parents were taken by surprise as well. Beryl got out and told my father he was to ride in the front seat, for the legroom. She got into the back, with my mother and me. Mr. Florence turned again onto the Bell's Lake road, and Beryl announced that we were all going to the Wildwood Inn for dinner.

"You're all dressed up, why not take advantage?" she said. "We dropped the boys off with your neighbors. I thought they might be too young to appreciate it. The neighbors were happy to have them." She said with a further emphasis that it was to be their treat. Hers and Mr. Florence's.

"Well, now," said my father. He probably didn't have five dollars in his pocket. "Well, now. I wonder do they let the farmers in?"

He made various jokes along this line. In the hotel dining room, which was all in white—white tablecloths, white painted chairs—with sweating glass water pitchers and high, whirring fans, he picked up a table napkin the size of a diaper and spoke to me in a loud whisper, "Can you tell me what to do with this thing? Can I put it on my head to keep the draft off?"

Of course he had eaten in hotel dining rooms before. He knew about table napkins and pie forks. And my mother knew—she wasn't even a country woman, to begin with. Nevertheless this was a huge event. Not exactly a pleasure—as Beryl must have meant it to be—but a huge, unsettling event. Eating a meal in public, only a few miles from home, eating in a big room full of people you didn't know, the food served by a stranger, a snippy-looking girl who was probably a college student working at a summer job.

"I'd like the rooster," my father said. "How long has he been in the pot?" It was only good manners, as he knew it, to joke with people who waited on him.

"Beg your pardon?" the girl said.

"Roast chicken," said Beryl. "Is that okay for everybody?"

Mr. Florence was looking gloomy. Perhaps he didn't care for jokes when it was his money that was being spent. Perhaps he had counted on something better than ice water to fill up the glasses.

The waitress put down a dish of celery and olives, and my mother said, "Just a minute while I give thanks." She bowed her head and said quietly but audibly, "Lord, bless this food to our use, and us to Thy service, for Christ's sake. Amen." Refreshed, she sat up straight and passed the dish to me, saying, "Mind the olives. There's stones in them."

Beryl was smiling around at the room.

The waitress came back with a basket of rolls.

"Parker House!" Beryl leaned over and breathed in their smell. "Eat them while they're hot enough to melt the butter!"

Mr. Florence twitched, and peered into the butter dish. "Is that what this is—butter? I thought it was Shirley Temple's curls."

His face was hardly less gloomy than before, but it was a joke, and his making it seemed to convey to us something of the very thing that had just been publicly asked for—a blessing.

"When he says something funny," said Beryl—who often referred to Mr. Florence as "he" even when he was right there—"you notice how he always keeps a straight face? That reminds me of Mama. I mean of our mama, Marietta's and mine. Daddy, when he made a joke you could see it coming a mile away—he couldn't keep it off his face—but Mama was another story. She could look so sour. But she could joke on her deathbed. In fact, she did that very thing. Marietta, remember when she was in bed in the front room the spring before she died?"

"I remember she was in bed in that room," my mother said. "Yes."

"Well, Daddy came in and she was lying there in her clean nightgown, with the covers off, because the German lady from next door had just been

helping her take a wash, and she was still there tidying up the bed. So Daddy wanted to be cheerful, and he said, 'Spring must be coming. I saw a crow today.' This must have been in March. And Mama said quick as a shot, 'Well, you better cover me up then, before it looks in that window and gets any ideas!' The German lady—Daddy said she just about dropped the basin. Because it was true, Mama was skin and bones; she was dying. But she could joke."

Mr. Florence said, "Might as well when there's no use to cry."

"But she could carry a joke too far, Mama could. One time, one time, she wanted to give Daddy a scare. He was supposed to be interested in some girl that kept coming around to the works. Well, he was a big good-looking man. So Mama said, 'Well, I'll just do away with myself, and you can get on with her and see how you like it when I come back and haunt you.' He told her not to be so stupid, and he went off downtown. And Mama went out to the barn and climbed on a chair and put a rope around her neck. Didn't she, Marietta? Marietta went looking for her and she found her like that!"

My mother bent her head and put her hands in her lap, almost as if she was getting ready to say another grace.

"Daddy told me all about it, but I can remember anyway. I remember Marietta tearing off down the hill in her nightie, and I guess the German lady saw her go, and she came out and was looking for Mama, and somehow we all ended up in the barn—me, too, and some kids I was playing with—and there was Mama up on a chair preparing to give Daddy the fright of his life. She'd sent Marietta after him. And the German lady starts wailing, 'Oh, Missus, come down Missus, think of your little *kindren*'—'*kindren*' is the German for 'children'—'think of your *kindren*,' and so on. Until it was me standing there—I was just a little squirt, but I was the one noticed that rope. My eyes followed that rope up and up and I saw it was just hanging over the beam, just flung there—it wasn't tied at all! Marietta hadn't noticed that, the German lady hadn't noticed it. But I just spoke up and said, 'Mama, how are you going to manage to hang yourself without that rope tied around the beam?'"

Mr. Florence said, "That'd be a tough one."

"I spoiled her game. The German lady made coffee and we went over there and had a few treats, and, Marietta, you couldn't find Daddy after all, could you? You could hear Marietta howling, coming up the hill, a block away."

"Natural for her to be upset," my father said.

"Sure it was. Mama went too far."

"She meant it," my mother said. "She meant it more than you give her credit for."

"She meant to get a rise out of Daddy. That was their whole life together. He always said she was a hard woman to live with, but she had a lot of character. I believe he missed that, with Gladys."

"I wouldn't know," my mother said, in that particularly steady voice with which she always spoke of her father. "What he did say or didn't say."

"People are dead now," said my father. "It isn't up to us to judge."

"I know," said Beryl. "I know Marietta's always had a different view."

My mother looked at Mr. Florence and smiled quite easily and radiantly. "I'm sure you don't know what to make of all these family matters."

The one time that I visited Beryl, when Beryl was an old woman, all knobby and twisted up with arthritis, Beryl said, "Marietta got all Daddy's looks. And she never did a thing with herself. Remember her wearing that old navy-blue crêpe dress when we went to the hotel that time? Of course, I know it was probably all she had, but did it have to be all she had? You know, I was scared of her somehow. I couldn't stay in a room alone with her. But she had outstanding looks." Trying to remember an occasion when I had noticed my mother's looks, I thought of the time in the hotel, my mother's pale-olive skin against the heavy white, coiled hair, her open, handsome face smiling at Mr. Florence—as if he was the one to be forgiven.

I didn't have a problem right away with Beryl's story. For one thing, I was hungry and greedy, and a lot of my attention went to the roast chicken and gravy and mashed potatoes laid on the plate with an ice-cream scoop and the bright diced vegetables out of a can, which I thought much superior to those fresh from the garden. For dessert, I had a butterscotch sundae, an agonizing choice over chocolate. The others had plain vanilla ice cream.

Why shouldn't Beryl's version of the same event be different from my mother's? Beryl was strange in every way—everything about her was slanted, seen from a new angle. It was my mother's version that held, for a time. It absorbed Beryl's story, closed over it. But Beryl's story didn't vanish; it stayed sealed off for years, but it wasn't gone. It was like the knowledge of that hotel and dining room. I knew about it now, though I didn't think of it as a place to go back to. And indeed, without Beryl's or Mr. Florence's money, I couldn't. But I knew it was there.

The next time I was in the Wildwood Inn, in fact, was after I was married. The Lions Club had a banquet and dance there. The man I had married, Dan Casey, was a Lion. You could get a drink there by that time. Dan Casey wouldn't have gone anywhere you couldn't. Then the place was remodelled into the Hideaway, and now they have strippers every night but Sunday. On Thursday nights, they have a male stripper. I go there with people from the real-estate office to celebrate birthdays or other big events.

The farm was sold for five thousand dollars in 1965. A man from Toronto bought it, for a hobby farm or just an investment. After a couple of years, he rented it to a commune. They stayed there, different people drifting on and off, for a dozen years or so. They raised goats and sold the milk to the health-food store that had opened up in town. They painted a rainbow across the side of the barn that faced the road. They hung tie-dyed sheets over the windows, and let the long grass and flowering weeds reclaim the yard. My parents had finally got electricity in, but these people didn't use it. They preferred oil lamps and the wood stove, and taking their dirty clothes to town. People said they wouldn't know to handle lamps or wood fires, and they would burn the place down. But they didn't. In fact, they didn't manage badly. They kept the house and barn in some sort of repair and they worked a big garden. They even dusted their potatoes against blight—though I heard that there was some sort of row about this and some of the stricter members left. The place actually looked a lot better than many of the farms round about that were still in the hands of the original families. The McAllister son had started a wrecking business on their place. My own brothers were long gone.

I knew I was not being reasonable, but I had the feeling that I'd rather see the farm suffer outright neglect—I'd sooner see it in the hands of hoodlums and scroungers—than see that rainbow on the barn, and some letters that looked Egyptian painted on the wall of the house. That seemed a mockery. I even disliked the sight of those people when they came to town—the men with their hair in ponytails, and with holes in their overalls that I believed were cut on purpose, and the women with long hair and no makeup and their meek, superior expressions. What do you know about life, I felt like asking them. What makes you think you can come here and mock my father and mother and their life and their poverty? But when I thought of the rainbow and those letters, I knew they weren't trying to mock or imitate my parents' life. They had displaced that life, hardly knowing it existed. They had set up in its place these beliefs and customs of their own, which I hoped would fail them.

That happened, more or less. The commune disintegrated. The goats disappeared. Some of the women moved to town, cut their hair, put on makeup, and got jobs as waitresses or cashiers to support their children. The Toronto man put the place up for sale, and after about a year it was sold for more than ten times what he had paid for it. A young couple from Ottawa bought it. They have painted the outside a pale gray with oyster trim, and have put in skylights and a handsome front door with carriage lamps on either side. Inside, they've changed it around so much that I've been told I'd never recognize it.

I did get in once, before this happened, during the year that the house was empty and for sale. The company I work for was handling it, and I had a key, though the house was being shown by another agent. I let myself in on a

Sunday afternoon. I had a man with me, not a client but a friend—Bob Marks, whom I was seeing a lot at the time.

"This is that hippie place," Bob Marks said when I stopped the car. "I've been by here before."

He was a lawyer, a Catholic, separated from his wife. He thought he wanted to settle down and start up a practice here in town. But there already was one Catholic lawyer. Business was slow. A couple of times a week, Bob Marks would be fairly drunk before supper.

"It's more than that," I said. "It's where I was born. Where I grew up." We walked through the weeds, and I unlocked the door.

He said that he had thought, from the way I talked, that it would be farther out.

"It seemed farther then."

All the rooms were bare, and the floors swept clean. The woodwork was freshly painted—I was surprised to see no smudges on the glass. Some new panes, some old wavy ones. Some of the walls had been stripped of their paper and painted. A wall in the kitchen was painted a deep blue, with an enormous dove on it. On a wall in the front room, giant sunflowers appeared, and a butterfly of almost the same size.

Bob Marks whistled. "Somebody was an artist."

"If that's what you want to call it," I said, and turned back to the kitchen. The same wood stove was there. "My mother once burned up three thousand dollars," I said. "She burned three thousand dollars in that stove."

He whistled again, differently. "What do you mean? She threw in a check?"

"No, no. It was in bills. She did it deliberately. She went into town to the bank and she had them give it all to her, in a shoebox. She brought it home and put it in the stove. She put it in just a few bills at a time, so it wouldn't make too big a blaze. My father stood and watched her."

"What are you talking about?" said Bob Marks. "I thought you were so poor."

"We were. We were very poor."

"So how come she had three thousand dollars? That would be like thirty thousand today. Easily. More than thirty thousand today."

"It was her legacy," I said. "It was what she got from her father. Her father died in Seattle and left her three thousand dollars, and she burned it up because she hated him. She didn't want his money. She hated him."

"That's a lot of hate," Bob Marks said.

"That isn't the point. Her hating him, or whether he was bad enough for her to have a right to hate him. Not likely he was. That isn't the point."

"Money," he said. "Money's always the point."

"No. My father letting her do it is the point. To me it is. My father stood and watched and he never protested. If anybody had tried to stop her, he would have protected her. I consider that love."

"Some people would consider it lunacy."

I remember that that had been Beryl's opinion, exactly.

I went into the front room and stared at the butterfly, with its pink-and-orange wings. Then I went into the front bedroom and found two human figures painted on the wall. A man and a woman holding hands and facing straight ahead. They were naked, and larger than life size.

"It reminds me of that John Lennon and Yoko Ono picture," I said to Bob Marks, who had come in behind me. "That record cover, wasn't it?" I didn't want him to think that anything he had said in the kitchen had upset me.

Bob Marks said, "Different color hair."

That was true. Both figures had yellow hair painted in a solid mass, the way they do it in the comic strips. Horsetails of yellow hair curling over their shoulders and little pigs' tails of yellow hair decorating their not so private parts. Their skin was a flat beige pink and their eyes a staring blue, the same blue that was on the kitchen wall.

I noticed that they hadn't quite finished peeling the wallpaper away before making this painting. In the corner, there was some paper left that matched the paper on the other walls—a modernistic design of intersecting pink and gray and mauve bubbles. The man from Toronto must have put that on. The paper underneath hadn't been stripped off when this new paper went on. I could see an edge of it, the cornflowers on a white ground.

"I guess this was where they carried on their sexual shenanigans," Bob Marks said, in a tone familiar to me. That thickened, sad, uneasy, but determined tone. The not particularly friendly lust of middle-aged respectable men.

I didn't say anything. I worked away some of the bubble paper to see more of the cornflowers. Suddenly I hit a loose spot, and ripped away a big swatch of it. But the cornflower paper came, too, and a little shower of dried plaster.

"Why is it?" I said. "Just tell me, why is it that no man can mention a place like this without getting around to the subject of sex in about two seconds flat? Just say the words 'hippie' or 'commune' and all you guys can

think about is screwing! As if there wasn't anything at all behind it but orgies and fancy combinations and non-stop screwing! I get so sick of that—it's all so stupid it just makes me sick!"

In the car, on the way home from the hotel, we sat as before—the men in the front seat, the women in the back. I was in the middle, Beryl and my mother on either side of me. Their heated bodies pressed against me, through cloth; their smells crowded out the smells of the cedar bush we passed through, and the pockets of bog, where Beryl exclaimed at the water lilies. Beryl smelled of all those things in pots and bottles. My mother smelled of flour and hard soap and the warm crêpe of her good dress and the kerosene she had used to take the spots off.

"A lovely meal," my mother said. "Thank you, Beryl. Thank you, Mr. Florence."

"I don't know who is going to be fit to do the milking," my father said. "Now that we've all ate in such style."

"Speaking of money," said Beryl—though nobody actually had been—"do you mind my asking what you did with yours? I put mine in real estate. Real estate in California—you can't lose. I was thinking you could get an electric stove, so you wouldn't have to bother with a fire in summer or fool with that coal-oil thing, either one."

All the other people in the car laughed, even Mr. Florence.

"That's a good idea, Beryl," said my father. "We could use it to set things on till we get the electricity."

"Oh, Lord," said Beryl. "How stupid can I get?"

"And we don't actually have the money, either," my mother said cheerfully, as if she was continuing the joke.

But Beryl spoke sharply. "You wrote me you got it. You got the same as me."

My father half turned in his seat. "What money are you talking about?" he said. "What's this money?"

"From Daddy's will," Beryl said. "That you got last year. Look, maybe I shouldn't have asked. If you had to pay something off, that's still a good use, isn't it? It doesn't matter. We're all family here. Practically."

"We didn't have to use it to pay anything off," my mother said. "I burned it."

Then she told how she went into town in the truck, one day almost a year ago, and got them to give her the money in a box she had brought along for the purpose. She took it home, and put it in the stove and burned it.

My father turned around and faced the road ahead.

I could feel Beryl twisting beside me while my mother talked. She was twisting, and moaning a little, as if she had a pain she couldn't suppress. At the end of the story, she let out a sound of astonishment and suffering, an angry groan.

"So you burned up money!" she said. "You burned up money in the stove."

My mother was still cheerful. "You sound as if I'd burned up one of my children."

"You burned their chances. You burned up everything the money could have got for them."

"The last thing my children need is money. None of us need his money."

"That's criminal," Beryl said harshly. She pitched her voice into the front seat: "Why did you let her?"

"He wasn't there," my mother said. "Nobody was there."

My father said, "It was her money, Beryl."

"Never mind," Beryl said. "That's criminal."

"Criminal is for when you call in the police," Mr. Florence said. Like other things he had said that day, this created a little island of surprise and a peculiar gratitude.

Gratitude not felt by all.

"Don't you pretend this isn't the craziest thing you ever heard of," Beryl shouted into the front seat. "Don't you pretend you don't think so! Because it is, and you do. You think just the same as me!"

My father did not stand in the kitchen watching my mother feed the money into the flames. It wouldn't appear so. He did not know about it—it seems fairly clear, if I remember everything, that he did not know about it until that Sunday afternoon in Mr. Florence's Chrysler, when my mother told them all together. Why, then, can I see the scene so clearly, just as I described it to Bob Marks (and to others—he was not the first)? I see my father standing by the table in the middle of the room—the table with the drawer in it for knives and forks, and the scrubbed oilcloth on top—and there is the box of money on the table. My mother is carefully dropping the bills into the fire. She holds the stove lid by the blackened lifter in one hand. And my father, standing by, seems not just to be permitting her to do this but to be protecting her. A solemn scene, but not crazy. People doing something that seems to them natural and necessary. At least, one of them is doing what seems natural and

necessary, and the other believes that the important thing is for that person to be free, to go ahead. They understand that other people might not think so. They do not care.

How hard it is for me to believe that I made that up. It seems so much the truth it is the truth; it's what I believe about them. I haven't stopped believing it. But I have stopped telling that story. I never told it to anyone again after telling it to Bob Marks. I don't think so. I didn't stop just because it wasn't, strictly speaking, true. I stopped because I saw that I had to give up expecting people to see it the way I did. I had to give up expecting them to approve of any part of what was done. How could I even say that I approved of it myself? If I had been the sort of person who approved of that, who could do it, I wouldn't have done all I have done—run away from home to work in a restaurant in town when I was fifteen, gone to night school to learn typing and bookkeeping, got into the real-estate office, and finally become a licensed agent. I wouldn't be divorced. My father wouldn't have died in the county home. My hair would be white, as it has been naturally for years, instead of a color called Copper Sunrise. And not one of these things would I change, not really, if I could.

Bob Marks was a decent man—good-hearted, sometimes with imagination. After I had lashed out at him like that, he said, "You don't need to be so tough on us." In a moment, he said, "Was this your room when you were a little girl?" He thought that was why the mention of the sexual shenanigans had upset me.

And I thought it would be just as well to let him think that. I said yes, yes, it was my room when I was a little girl. It was just as well to make up right away. Moments of kindness and reconciliation are worth having, even if the parting has to come sooner or later. I wondered if those moments aren't more valued, and deliberately gone after, in the setups some people like myself have now, than they were in those old marriages, where love and grudges could be growing underground, so confused and stubborn, it must have seemed they had forever.

BLOOD TIES

Information on rights

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BIOGRAPHY

David Adams Richards was born in Newcastle, New Brunswick, in 1950. He attended St. Thomas University, an affiliate of the University of New Brunswick, in Fredericton, and became part of the town's writing community, which included Nancy Bauer, Fred Cogswell, Kent Thompson, and Alden Nowlan. It was at this time that he completed his first novel, THE COMING OF WINTER, which was published in 1974 to widespread critical acclaim.

With the publication of BLOOD TIES in 1976, Richards became recognized as a major voice in Canadian writing. A collection of stories, DANCERS AT NIGHT, followed in 1978, LIVES OF SHORT DURATION in 1981, and ROAD TO THE STILT HOUSE in 1985.

In 1983 Richards succeeded Alden Nowlan as writer-in-residence at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton, where he still lives.

REVIEWS

"I am always suspicious of chronicles about depressed rural areas. They remind me of Robertson Davies' hilarious accounts of novels like *The Prairie That Broke The Plough*. This one, however, is special and achieves a kind of brilliance through its slow precision.

BLOOD TIES covers a two-year period in the life of the MacDurmot family in northern New Brunswick, and in outline this life is so dreary that to describe it would be to destroy it. What comes across, however, is the quality of their feelings for each other and their friends, and a dignity in the face of ugliness that is impressive.

Maufat MacDurmot works for the railway. His wife, Irene, takes care of her mother at the farmstead across the way, and keeps a spotless house for him, their son Orville, their daughter Cathy. A great deal of the book is seen through Cathy's eyes as she deals with her emerging sexuality, the bleakness and beauty of her environment. One-eyed Orville's complex little mind is not so easy to fathom: he is one of the maimed (and there are many in this book) and consoles himself by stealing mass candles, closing himself in his room, snaring rabbits in winter.

There are many other characters: Leah, Cathy's half-sister, who finally leaves her drunken husband, John; Cathy's boyfriend, whose impulses are fascinatingly destructive; and Lorne, Maufat's greedy brother-in-law. Their experiences as members of an inbred, depressed community form a kind of chain-dance, and because Richards handles time so well, give lives that are superficially dull and stultifying a rich dimension.

Cathy and Orville grow and change in the course of the book. Leah pulls out of a desperate marriage and travels

west. Old Annie dies: in a scene of elegant pathos Maufat and Lorne sell her farm to American potters and weavers: small glasses and beards mean nothing to Maufat but he's not comfortable with them, or Lorne's smart-talk with them. Cathy comes through her romance with John with a terrible insight into his destructiveness. Irene remembers Maufat's courting, his absolute acceptance of her, his loving.

Foolish to recount events in this book; the textures of landscape and feeling are more important. It is long, in places, but it always builds. Richards cares about his characters and redeems a blighted landscape of scarred men and bent-over women with eloquence. The Maritimes are at last getting a new set of writers they deserve."

Marian Engel, The Globe and Mail

Chapter Two

He was in the henhouse all afternoon — why he did not know except that something, something a long way from him came back at moments when he sat there. There were still the hens themselves, though gone now for the last few years — yet there were still the hens themselves. He remembered them scratching — and when he was home from the hospital, his arms and face still wrapped, he remembered them turning away from his hand and clucking at him through the hole. The hens were *here*, as if hen breath on the air, and outside there was the house in the autumn afternoon, and behind the house the hammock, sagging without weight or width, stirring slightly in the wind. And there was the clapboard and the flecks and chips of wood about, the silence of the dirt, when his boots scuffed at it, making the noise of his boot and dirt.

There was being closed off and remembering — and for long periods of time the peace and tranquillity of only breath, and not the remembering. Then there was himself scratching at his neck when it itched, and scratching at his arms when they itched, and at moments, just to see how long these moments would last, not scratching the itch, the itch growing on the burn scars.

There was the smell of vapour and age when he urinated into the dirt while drinking his beer, for the beer and the urine both gave him that sense of pleasant satisfaction that he had just known. It was of that dim time when he ran out on a June evening, the summer just beginning, the chirpin and croaking of things in the marsh along the bog, into the small white outhouse where he urinated then — and in the sun on a June morning the blue flies lazing on the bowl.

All afternoon he sat there drinking, not drinking steadily or quickly, but drinking with the case beside him, the opener beside the stool. He went back to the house at dark.

There he sat in the dark, his large fists closing and opening on the white table, the blue table-cloth that last night she had folded and left over a chair. She had taken it and folded it so neatly, he watching her hands press it in toward her stomach, he watching her hands. Then she laid it over the chair and looked at him. When she looked at him he looked away from her.

"Now don'tcha go burnin this with cigarettes or nothin — remember the last one ya did it to."

He said nothing because he could think of nothing more to say. Then she went about cleaning the cupboards and the sink. Then she took the iron and the board and did his work-clothes and socks. He said nothing.

Tonight his fists folded against the white table. He picked up another beer and opened it, drank it slowly, looking out into the darkness, hearing the wind and leaves against the foundation and frame, hearing the autumn as if it was some force dropping onto the field — the weeds with twisted stems.

Because what was it? Yes, it was the cloth folded so gently into her stomach, much as a little girl would fold things; and it was *her*, last night washing the cupboards and ironing his things, sweat on her forehead and under her arms — and it was absurd, he loved her because of the sweat under her arms and the movement of her thin arm, the movement of the iron over the clothes. When he looked at her that way, doing those things, he said inside, *she's gonna go, she's gonna go.*

He said nothing. After a time when the clothes were done she folded them and sat down. A miller crawled against the glow of the naked bulb, its small powdered wings spreading and closing.

"Ya ever see a miller this late?"

"What?"

"Ya ever see a miller this late?"

He turned and looked about him:

"No, I haven't — I haven't ever," he said.

The she said:

"Well, I got all yer clothes done and laid out for ya."

"I don't know why," he said. "I don't know why ya'd bother, cause I'm the old scar-faced bastard, cause —" Then he stopped, felt hollow.

And he looked at her but the face wasn't the same face at all — it was turned and small wrinkles showed near the lips. He thought she was going to cry and he didn't look at her for a long time. Then he stood suddenly and left the kitchen, went into the room where he sat on the chair, scratching his fingers against the fabric. After a time she came to the doorway and watched him.

"Ya wanta play cribbage or somethin'?"

He shook his head.

"I could skunk ya," she said.

He shook his head.

"Ya don't even wanta be skunked," she said.

"Look — you look —" he said, yet again he never finished and again when he saw her face it was wrinkles and her chin was quivering. "No, I'm gonna go ta bed," he said. Standing, he walked past her and into the bedroom, where the bedroom air was, where she was in the scent and drawers and dresser smell and where she was in the wall and bed and things. Where she was body and form without body and form. She came to the bedroom door as he lay upon the bed, his clothes still on.

"You want tea or toast or something?" she said.

"No."

"You want me ta make up yer lunch for tomorrow?"

"Might quit," he said. "Yep, just might quit."

"Cecil," she said.

"Might quit," he said.

Then he looked at her and laughed.

"Cecil," she said and her voice quivered. "Now yer doing good — now yer doin good back there."

He laughed. Nervous because he was laughing and he couldn't stop — he was laughing and his arms pressing against his stomach.

"Might quit."

"Cecil," she said. And then she began to laugh, for a moment — then she began to cry.

He looked at her shoulders shaking and her face in her hands and her right leg pressed in that way against the door-frame, her thigh and hip so balanced against it. And when she had said, "I'm goin," he had said, "Go then — go on, ya stupid bitch, ya stupid —" but she was calm and her face was calm and she stood. When she had said, "I haveta go now cause me and Ronnie haveta go," the way she looked was cold and calm as if everything was out of her — as if she had already gone. Then something direct and desperate filled him that he thought would never be there.

He lay on the bed watching her shoulders shaking, her hands at her face. After a time she wiped the tears and looked at him, her face reddish.

"Oh I'm stupid cryin," she said.

Again he could think of nothing.

"Stupid old cryin," she said.

"Yes, stupid old cryin," he said, turning his back to her. After a time he heard her in the kitchen fumbling with the cards — as if she would be forever in the kitchen; that in the years and months and days she would be there in the kitchen.

He turned his back to her and closed his eyes.

It was the Christmas before when he and Shelby had taken the Scotch and left the house, travelling downriver. The snow was falling in huge wet flakes against the windshield and on the road and they drank and sang.

"Ya haveta take her ta midnight Mass, don'tcha?"

"Don't if I don't want to."

"Don'tcha, don'tcha?"

"Fuck off now."

"Don'tcha?"

"Fuck off now."

They sang songs they didn't know the words to and made up the words themselves though the words were meaningless at times. Yet the more meaningless they made the words the louder they sang. They went to the wharf and drank — and all along, the houses were lighted and people were inside. They kept the motor running and drank the Scotch.

"Ya know she bought this out of her own pocket," Cecil said.

"Well, we should save some," Shelby said.

"Fuck it," he said. "Outa her own pocket — outa her own goddamn pocket, fuck it."

"Are ya takin her ta Mass?" Shelby said.

"Fuck it."

The snow was falling heavy and wet on the wharf road and the bay, and the bay not yet frozen so they could hear it above the sound of the car, swelling and black. Then it was eleven, and then it was after eleven, yet they didn't move.

"Maybe ya should take her," Shelby said. They heard the church bells at the Indian reserve ringing.

"No, now will you screw off," Cecil said.

"It's Christmas," Shelby said.

"I know, ya goddamn stupid son of a whore," Cecil said. Then he took the bottle and closed it. The bells at the Indian reserve were heard so faintly across the swelling water. For a moment they said nothing. He looked at Shelby and Shelby was staring at the huge flakes of snow.

"Christ," Cecil muttered. He turned the car around and headed off the wharf. Then he said: "She's gotcha on her side too — wanting me ta take her ta midnight Mass — I know it's Christmas, ya fucker."

"I know ya do."

"I know it's Christmas."

"I know ya do!"

"Well, shut up about it then."

Shelby didn't speak.

"Well, shut up about it then."

Shelby said nothing.

"Ya fucker."

They drove back along the main road slowly, the branches of the spruce covered with the wet pure snow and the flakes getting larger under the lights. Then Shelby said:

"Ya know what I'd like to do some day?"

"Go out west, ya I heard all about it."

"I'd like ta go sliding some day this winter," Shelby said, as if not hearing what Cecil had said.

"Maybe I can get Ronnie ta go with ya," Cecil said laughing.

"Why not, it's fun sliding — didn'tcha ever slide, ya bastard?"

"I slid more than you did," Cecil said. They rounded Oyster River bridge.

"Maybe Ronnie'll take ya — I'll ask him some day."

Shelby didn't answer. They came around the turn and as they did so a car was coming toward them on their side of the road, and all Cecil could see was lights and the absence of the wet snow — just light glaring out of the darkness on his side of the road.

"Pull over, ya son of a whore?" he screamed.

Then his head went down to the steering wheel and in that moment something else took control and he had no thought; yet his head was down and he turned the car in toward the ditch, high banked on his side, and he saw snow again, and when the pole came it seemed to come over the top of the car, and the snow was now on his face and he was wondering why the snow was in his mouth and nose. Shelby was clutching at his arm yet the car wouldn't stop. It had gone through the high banking and there was snow again. Then the pole seemed to go across the top of the car and he felt himself falling to Shelby's side and yet not letting go of the wheel. When falling he was weightless as if he had been picked up and lifted some place by some force over which he had no control. Then he knew nothing except that the car was on its roof.

The car settled on its roof, and then only darkness and silence. "You alright?" he said. He shook Shelby. "You alright — Christ, Shelby, we haveta get out of the car, you alright?" He fumbled with the door-handle in the dark, trying to understand why it wouldn't open, and he kept saying: "Shelby, you alright?"

There was no movement — Shelby's hand relaxed and limp by the shift. Cecil lifted himself again and tried to find the door-handle, using the force of his right arm to free his legs, which were tight and cramped under the dash.

When he found the handle he had to push at it again and again before it would open, and all this time he kept saying "Shelby we haveta get out now, ya bastard, you alright?" Yet there was no movement or answer. When the door opened Cecil lifted himself up. The snow was falling soundless and smooth, the large wet flakes against his face and eyes, and he looked to the sky watching it. It was strange yet for almost a minute he did nothing but watch the flakes, which he couldn't see until they were almost to his face, fall out of the deep onto the gutted ditch. It was quiet. Shelby didn't answer.

He pulled himself out and stood in the soft snow up to his knees and looked about. He couldn't see the other car at all, and they had travelled at least a hundred yards along the ditch and clipped a railing post and all this he didn't understand. He thought they had just stopped and turned over. How had they travelled so far? And what was Shelby doing still in the car?

"Shelby," he said. "Shelby."

"You dead or what?"

"You dead or what?"

What struck him at first was something comic; he felt at first like laughing and slapping Shelby and saying, "Shelby, ya son of a whore; Shelby let's get out and beat that bastard." Because all the time the car was moving across the bank of snow with the snow in his mouth and face he had no fear. It was something *other* — like excitement or nervousness, and if he had any thoughts he thought, "I'll beat that bastard." Then when the door opened and he saw the sky and the snow falling from it and the coolness was on his face, he felt for that long moment a peacefulness, so that he forgot, or couldn't bring himself to move. But now he was running through the snow to the passenger door. He was yelling: "Shelby, Shelby," and he couldn't control his voice. Now what came on the air was the scent of tires and gas — the smell of the winter road, the wood from the post, splintered here and there, and the snow already covering it.

He reached the passenger side and yanked open the door. Inside the splintered glass from the windshield, with snow covering the dash and the roof. Shelby lay slumped, his right arm hanging down across the shift.

Cecil stopped yelling. For a second he stared at everything — trying to comprehend everything — the glass, the snow, the small humped body looking black. The snow falling kept bothering his eyes because he wanted to see everything.

"Goddamn it, Shelby," he said.

Then he reached inside and picked him up as if he were a child. Even though there was no movement, though the body was relaxed, it felt weightless in his arms; even though the snow was deep — to his knees and beyond — the body was weightless in his arms. He carried him to the road, and laid him down carefully.

He took off his jacket and placed it over him and took off his shirt and placed it under his head. He stood bare-chested with the snow falling on him. Yet the snow didn't bother him — it wasn't cold. It burned at his eyes because he tried to see everything and when it hit his bare skin it was warm. He didn't notice it at all any more; he rubbed it away from his eyes and never bothered with it. Then he thought he must go back to the car and take the seat blanket and put it under him, so he ran back again.

He had to lift Shelby once more and put the blanket down — then he placed the jacket and shirt in the same positions. When he lifted Shelby's head to place the shirt Shelby opened his eyes slowly and then closed them.

"Ha ha," Cecil said. "You alright?"

"Ha ha, you alright?"

He stood. The snow was soaked into his pants and boots and coming down on him. The road was empty. He stood there for a while looking down at Shelby and then turned and ran toward the bridge.

The snow was coming at his back as he ran, and he saw his breath on the black air, and when he reached the bridge he saw where the car had gone. Like himself, the driver had swerved to the right in order to avoid the collision and had gone over the ditch and down into the gully. When he stopped running he could see vaguely where the car was — that it had smashed through the snow and naked alders and lay on its side near the water.

"Jesus Christ," he said. He looked up and down the road. There was no sound or movement — no other car, no voice except his own; the snow seeming to fall out of a flat dark sky.

When he looked down and saw the car he didn't want to go to it — something inside him wanted to run, some horror wanting him to run along the road; hide. And yet he knew that he must. He waited. There was no car or sound — the heaviness of his own breathing. He waited.

The gully was steep and the snow, in drifts, sloped downward, gorged by the path of the car. When he stepped from the road and began to descend the snow was at once to his hips, wet and thick, and then above his hips to his belt and waist. Now he felt cold — freezing — and his teeth chattered against each other, and the alders scraped against his naked back and arms and caught at his face. The cold was more one of terror than anything; even though he was bare-chested, even though the snow had gotten inside his pants and boots — it was a cold people feel when sick with expectation. The car lay on its side by the water, frozen over, the underspan of the small bridge brooding with ice and blackness and weight. And still his mind couldn't understand it all. How was it to understand it all?

He was drinking with Shelby — yes, and then they went out the door and down to the wharf and yes, Shelby started talking stupid like Shelby always did because

Shelby was always talking stupid about Leah because he didn't know Leah, and then they came back up because Shelby wanted to come back up, he didn't want to stay at the wharf with Cecil drinking. Or was it the other way? Was it he himself wanting to come up and see her — to see her and say: "Ya need more icicles on the tree," and she would say: "Ya, it's pretty sparse," and he would say, "Ronnie, you get ta bed or Santa Claus ain't gonna come."

He didn't know. The car had the look of death in the ground where it lay, gorged ground with the snow packed on it — caught on its belly, and the snow still falling gently — unconcerned. What time was it? Leah would be at Mass and then Lorne would drive her home after Mass, and the snowfall. He tried not to look at the car, yet his eyes were continually fixed on it as he went down once or twice, losing his balance in the alders that hung round him, putting his arm out before him. And all the while his eyes were fixed on the car, the four wheels motionless specks — the total body a motionless form. When the day before Leah brought the bottle in from town with a bag of parcels she lifted it out of its bag and looked at him, smiled and said:

"This is for me and you tomorrow."

He said nothing.

"I went and got Ronnie a toboggan."

He said nothing.

Then this evening while she and Ronnie stood on stools and placed the icicles haphazardly on the tree Shelby came in. He took the bottle from the cupboard after they had finished Shelby's wine and he said:

"Here's ta Christmas."

Then they had one drink and then two, and then they left the house and went for a drive. Even though he knew it was impossible — at the hour they left, he hoped for some woman walking the road — for some woman.

"Christ," he muttered. "Christ."

His throat was full, as if at any moment he would burst into tears — with Shelby lying on the road like that. And it was his fault — his because Shelby had wanted to go home, because it was Christmas eve.

Then as he reached the car, with his pants and boots and legs soaked and his flesh red, all those thoughts at once escaped him. He thought and felt at this moment nothing. On the flat hard icy surface of the beach the car lay, the front grille bent and twisted and the roof almost collapsed. He stared at it, and the ever-familiar smell of gas and tires came to him — the scent of something destructive, of death itself in the form of metal and glass. After a moment he called "Hello" softly, as if he would disturb something if he spoke any louder than that, and after another moment he called "Hello" again. Yet there was no sound. He remembered Shelby on the road — with the jacket over him — and wondered if he was alive.

Here he could walk easier, with no more than four inches of snow. He went first to one door and then to the other — looking in. In the driver's seat a body lay forward, the roof pressed on its head. He opened the door swiftly and threw it back, and stepped back himself. Then there was the stove again and the redness when he was thrown back with that desperate energy and force and the blinding scalding on his face and hands.

He left the woman in the seat — couldn't bring himself to touch her. And the thing that struck him most of all was that she had a new coat on, and her small purse still sat upon the dash. That she had a new coat on, stained with the blood from her face.

He turned and looked toward the bridge and then he sat down and put his hands to his face. After a time, he did not know how long a time, he heard a car. He sat up thinking of Shelby again and, turning almost wildly — to leave her behind — began to climb the bank, looking toward the road as he did so, his hands almost clawing at the snow. He saw the light flashing red in the dark air and heard a radio, and a man speaking. He kept climbing the bank — trying to get up the bank, to leave her — to go away, when his clawing hands touched a limp small body in the alders.

He stood quickly and then fell over backwards and, rising again in a second, lunged forward, without idea or motive. He was crying now, and yet in the distance, on the road above came the sound of the man and the radio.

He snatched the infant in his hands and brought it with him, but he didn't look at it, felt it small, like a small animal in his hands. When he reached the top and stood on the road again the snow was falling faster, the wind blowing it to and fro across both ditches into his face and eyes. He carried the small body in his hands and walked toward the police car. Yet at this moment he didn't know whether he walked or ran, stumbled or stood straight. Everything was far away, distant — he saw the dim outline of the young officer in his heavy winter blue, and the patrol-car door opened. The officer was bending over Shelby — and Shelby was just some black hump on the ditch of a snowy road. Nothing now made any impression on him — he felt at one moment that he would throw the infant down and run, and in another instant he wanted to go back to the car and take the woman out. He kept walking — his eyes blinded by the full weight of the snow in his face, his legs so weightless that he didn't know how or where he stepped.

"Hey you," he said. "Hey you," he said louder. The officer stood and came toward him, shining the flashlight into his eyes.

When the officer came closer he lowered his flashlight. Cecil could see a young man — no more than twenty-one, the blue peaked cap with the yellow stripe, the snow scattered and blowing off the peak. He walked very straight and orderly as if he were marching, the only noise the rustle of the coat and his high leather boots.

"How is he over there?" Cecil said.

"I called in for an ambulance — he's alright — he's only —"

The young man stopped speaking and looked at Cecil. He stepped backwards and muttered something that was indistinguishable from the sound of the snow and the trees grating, and his face contorted — his jaw went slack as if a man with no tongue was trying to make himself understood.

"Oh god — God help us."

Cecil stared at him and smiled. He did not know why — but he was smiling and conscious of smiling the way Ronnie sometimes smiled when he was afraid. Then the officer turned away and vomited.

"There's a woman down there, goddamn you, goddamn you stupid — there's a woman down there, when will we get the woman down there —"

The officer said nothing, he was vomiting, and over the car radio came the static of someone calling. Cecil, for the first time, realized that the baby was dead — that what he had felt so much like some tiny animal in his arms was a limp dead child. He stared straight into the snow blinding his eyes, and held it and held it — as if to keep it warm until the ambulance came.

This morning he had taken her to the station. He said:

"Ya'd think ta Christ Maufat'd a got ya a pass."

"I didn't want no pass, Cecil — yer gonna go ta work, aren't ya Cecil?"

"Might, might not," he said. He looked away from her, at the train watering, the steam shooting out at times from its underbelly. Then he fumbled with his watch and took it off.

"Here, you keep this — ta watch the time."

"What," she said, she was staring at the snaps of her blue suitcase.

"Ta keep the time — it never worked on my wrist anyway."

He handed it to her and she looked at him as she took it, placing it in the pocket of her blue coat. The train pulled forward and halted with almost the same sound as if it was shunting.

She got upon the platform of the car and looked at him — their grey eyes level in the cool morning air. The noises of the traffic of the town. She said:

"I'll write ya, eh, and see how yer doin and everything."

"Good," he said. There was nothing inside him — regret nor pity nor desperation, just the hum in his ears of a thousand different things, the pigeons scattering about on the naked parking-lot; because the night before when she had come to bed she lay quietly, without a muscle moving, on her side and after a time he reached his hand out quietly and touched her back, and then just as quickly and as cautiously he removed it, and she said "Goodnight," and he didn't answer, and she said, "Goodnight," and he said, "Ya goodnight."

Regret nor pity nor pain. Then she said:

"You'll see about Ronnie until I send for him, will ya?" She looked down at the pavement below the platform where she stood, her right hand on the metal railing. He handed her the suitcase.

Then she bent down quickly and kissed him, not on the mouth but on the side of the mouth, and lost her balance while doing so, so that he grabbed her with his left hand and kept her steady.

"Ya know it's my kid too, ya know — ya know that eh?" he said.

She didn't answer — but something went clouded and dim on her face.

"Never mind," he said. "You get a good job."

He thought she was going to cry again, and he couldn't stand it when she cried; it was as if (when she cried) she was sitting in the room with her best dress on, with her hair done all day long — as she did for three months one winter, and he said: "What're ya crying for, ya stupid bitch?" "Cause yer not workin — yer not workin." "Well, you get a job, ya stupid son of a whore — get a job." "I will, me and Ronnie'll go away and I'll get a job and me and Ronnie we'll go —"

Tonight he sat in the dark house his large fists closing and opening on the white table. At moments the wind blew so heavily and the rain came so fiercely that he felt sheltered and warm.

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For foreign rights inquiries about CELESTIAL NAVIGATION please contact:

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BIOGRAPHY

Paulette Jiles was born in Salem, Missouri, in 1943. She attended the University of Missouri at Kansas City and, after a semester at Universidad Autonoma de Mexico, graduated in 1968 with a degree in Spanish Literature.

Jiles emigrated to Canada in 1969 and began work as a freelance writer for CBC radio. From 1969 to 1973 she travelled extensively in Europe and North America and then worked with native communication organizations in the Arctic and subarctic until 1983. Most recently, she has taught creative writing at the David Thomson University Centre in Nelson, British Columbia.

Since the publication of WATERLOO EXPRESS in 1973, Jiles has been recognized as one of the most powerful voices of her generation. In 1984 CELESTIAL NAVIGATION was published to critical acclaim. It won the 1984 Governor General's Literary Award for poetry, the Gordon Lampert Memorial Award for best new poet, and the Pat Lowther Memorial Award from the League of Canadian Poets.

SUMMARY

CELESTIAL NAVIGATION includes a large number of poems from WATERLOO EXPRESS as well as many new, exciting pieces that examine the politics of childhood and love, explore the rigours and blessings of living in the Far North, and tell of a life full of excitement and discovery.

The poems are divided into five sections:

- 1) is from WATERLOO EXPRESS, poems of travel;
- 2) is Paper Matches, poems concerning personal development, love, and sailing around on the Great Lakes;
- 3) is Griffon Poems, about the ship Griffon, which sailed through the Great Lakes and disappeared in 1679;
- 4) is Northern Radio, about the North, woodstoves, snow, and bush-planes;
- 5) is recent poetry, actually prose-poems, about childhood and the Arctic.

REVIEWS

"If the mind is a galaxy, Paulette Jiles is an astronaut....Like a star-seeker charting the unknown, Jiles sets out on a voyage of discovery to realms that are so often discussed as points on a map; the structure of a family, the intense rage of thwarted love, the dyslexia of travel, the vagaries of history."

Liane Heller, Toronto Star

"It rings so true, all the way through, including in its pain as well as its times of communality, shared humanity, delight in sharply-etched unforgettable images. It is alive and quivering with a kind of molten excess of being."

Dennis Lee, Poetry Editor, McClelland and Stewart

"These poems give a powerful sense of personal intimacy without being in any way autobiographical, partly because the subjectivity of Jiles's lyrics is controlled by an unerring sense of form, unfettered by formal metrical or strophic demands, responding solely to her aesthetic intuition for wholeness....For Jiles experience is a borealis that comes in acid dyes and she has encapsulated this experience brilliantly in CELESTIAL NAVIGATION."

Dorothy Parker, Journal of Canadian Poetry

CELESTIAL NAVIGATION

1

We came here by chart and intention,
with calipers and T-square, past shoals
marked XX like a kiss with teeth.

Behind us the drowning sound of following waves,
never free of them, waving white fingers
as if saying, good luck. The glib

assumptions of following waves, they dump on
your stern and climb aboard in an uproar of foam
and illegal entry. Our windy destiny like luck
or navigation brings us to this harbour;
False Detour Channel; anxious mariners, wet
as laundry.

He is exultant, he finds the place where we
are on the chart with fingers like calipers and
nautical miles.

At night when we are safe at anchor he opens
a book called *Celestial Navigation*. With this
kind you can sail the high seas, get straight
to the Solomons, we could turn pirate. You use
a sextant and shoot the sun. It recovers.

2

I'll learn to navigate too, I said, what if
we are sunk in mid-Pacific, drift on a
life-raft eating turtles, I should know this
nautical magic, these incantations.

You wouldn't need to know, he said.
I would take care of that.

But what if you drown, what if the
killer whales eat you, maybe you never
thought of that.

Do I make you feel immortal?

EVERYTHING THE LOON SINGS ABOUT

Everything the loon sings about is
monumental and jewelled.

Everything matters and
floats. They take nothing calmly.

These must be domestic arguments
out there in the bay, other women,
divorces.

We are held by two anchors, bow and
stern, the sails in their crisp bags
crackle and later I will have
dreams of being rammed in the forepeak
as we sink in columns of
fairy bubbles toward whatever
the bottom holds.

Pines full of turpentine bend
with bitter grace over the shore.
They are right,
everything matters.

5 THE WOMAN ON THE BOWSPRIT

I live on the prow of *The Griffon*
dressed in copper bands, a
woman of salt and cedar.

I am pure decoration, like a hood
ornament.

Life here on *The Griffon's* nose
is variable. I was carved
by a master carver in Montreal,
a sort of chiselling obstetrician.
He gave me form, it was his
thick hands I sprang from, shedding
chips and shavings. Men instinctively
like me and no wonder.

At night the men speak to me. I
animate, under their voices
everything works right, I am intelligent
and funny, I have that fine, smooth
skin of women who never
move their faces.

By day the landscape goes by.
There are birds, rock, other things.
The wind gives us motion or not.

Now that the ship is broken and foundered
on Russel Island, the men
have deserted me to live among the Indians
if they are lucky (those women, quick

with paddles, dressed in vermilion and
minks). I float face-up in this
primeval freshwater bath.

Being alone is a terrible surprise.
It's like landing on the moon.

Look at the world.
There are waxwings overhead and a
shoreful of trees, pebbles like eggs
in the peacock-coloured water.
I float among their bread and their boots.

What was it they wanted?
Did they know what they really wanted?
There is one more question
in this series of questions
which is what do I want
which I never ask, being wooden, being
a decoy,
for the next crew, the next
ship, for
whoever will settle
on this perilous water, which is
perfectly clear.

6 THE CAPTAIN WAS KILLED

People said the captain was killed in the surf because
we ran out of red cloth, but it was different.

His arm went up and the rest of him went under, he was
all white and flash. The clothes came floating back
first, the rags we knew so well, a shoe. The wind jumped
up out of the headlands and all the sails filled over
the wreck with a great noise, like you hear from a crowd
when something happens, and explosion of white sail and
the wind was blowing the wreck toward anything, toward
whatever was ahead.

He was cutting bacon for their captain and he sliced off
his fingertip and it bled. The people stared, it was the
final clue, the end of the mystery novel. Later when he
waded ashore again and demanded men to help repair the ship
somebody killed him.

He should have told them in the first place, it's too late
now, we want to prove we are people, we have failures and
hopes and women. We still seem dangerous but now we are
killable.

And now we are here forever. The snow will come in columns.
We can try to say we were just passing through. As a last,
desperate gamble, we will try to act like human beings.

NIGHT FLIGHT TO ATTIWAPISKAT

We are flying directly into darkness, the
dim polestar rides on the starboard wing, Orion
and his blue gems freeze in the southwest.

Our rare and singular lives are in the hands of the
pilot; after him the radar and one engine. There were
two engines when we started out but the other one
died. We watch

the starboard propeller feather in slow, coarse
revolutions. The pilot says we will make Attiwap-
iskat or
some place.

Icarus, our pilot and our downfall.

Two thousand feet below dim lakes pour past as if
on their way to a laundromat. How could we have
sunk so low?

At times like this I consider life after death
as if it were a binary system, there are
no half-lives. We track cautiously down
the Milky Way, home of nebulae and Cygnus.

We are footloose in the corridors of the aurora.

The long stream of my life is flying out behind
this airplane like skywriting on the subarctic
night, fluttering, whipped with urgency. Each
episode was always cut off from the last, I used
to find myself a series of hostile strangers, startled
in doorways. Now they

gather themselves up, the wives, daughters, friends,
victims, perpetrators, the one with the pen and the
other carrying a blank mask, another at present
at the cleaners.

They catch up and slam together like
a deck of cards, packed into the present
moment. Is there a soul in there, a queen?
I draw one out; it's the ace of airplanes.
The radar repeats a fixed,

green idea. The pilot fees for the radio touch
of Thunder Bay.

At a thousand feet we make quick decisions
about our loyalties, the other engine might fail,
the suitcases of our hearts might be opened with
all that contraband, the jewels and screams, we
might have things to declare;
 the observable universe is my native country
 poetry is my mother tongue
 the ideas I have purchased on this side of the
border don't amount to more than a hundred dollars.
What comes after this?

What do you mean, what comes after this?
This is it.

Attiwapiskat approaches, a Cree village
on a cold salt coast, flying patchwork quilts in
several more colours than are found in nature,
shining with blue-white runway lights.

We will sleep in the guesthouse tonight, that
refuge of displaced persons. The pilot will
go down and repair the valve and say nothing happened.
(We flew into darkness at the rim of the world,
where distant lights broke through and something
failed us. Then at the edge when we were stamped
and ready to go through we were turned back.) We
can unload and forget it. But I will remember
and then go back and forget again.

This is Attiwapiskat, everything is as it should be.
We slide down to the airstrip through salt fogs
from Hudson Bay that slip through the night like
airborne bedsheets.

We get off, still life with sleeping bags.
Approaching us is an earthman,
speaking Cree.

CHRONOLOGY BEGINS

Chronology begins with the stars.
It is fall, the Seven Sisters rise above
the evening and the geese have already
gone to Mexico in shattered lines.

Who has time for
these things? Arguments and debts?

We might go out and die
 among the asters. Already
there have been two car wrecks,
 one near Dinorwic and the other

turned over and over into
 the Sturgeon River. The Seven Sisters
 are an old, bright fatality, which has
 reached the world of anti-matter,
 net floats in space.

The time we have is winter time,
 the sun is a rare occurrence, we are
 wasting minutes, these
 arguments over the phone.

WINTER NIGHT ON THE RIVER

The cabin is dipped in darkness, tie-dyed.
 Only the red from the woodstove grate and reflections
 on tin plates escape. Sirius picks at the window. Diapers wave
 at half-mast, desperately clean. The children watch
 the insides of their eyes. Things will be revealed in dreams
 to them, economy-sized revelations, tiny ideas.

The body shuts down. Hot pine ticks in the stove.
 We sleep because we have to dream, as when

we are awake we must speak. Speech and dreams;
 behind the banner of these old imperatives we

have marched for two million years, to what
 (unspeakable) end? On the banks of the Severn

River and the subarctic night; and now one of the
 children calls out sharply, ambushed by dreams.

DREAM I

In this dream we have the mysteries of
 the moon's confusions. People pass by on
 the snowy road, followed by the luminous morse
 of lightning bugs. Several feet

behind them drift their voices.

Maybe they will sue somebody, maybe
 not.

"We never knew it was dependency," they
 say, "we thought it was love."

Who would have told us otherwise?

They pass by, unidentifiable, familiar,
 carrying torches of regret. We all thought
 it was love, everything was love except
 love, and that was
 only passion.

DREAM III

This dream is a throwback.
Stars shine through it at the eyeholes.
Why has it come here again? The air sticks around
its body, it stands and watches
every night,
its head in the constellations.
Its fingers husk the topknots of the spruce.
It has patience, the patience of bones
that lay buried in overhangs,
skulls with heavy browridges, waiting
in the dead matrix
for the archaeologist.

For now it is just standing around
out there. Some day it will begin to
speak, only to me, the insistent
whisper, each night and then it will shout.
Then there will be the fingers fumbling
at the lock, it will walk out of the
nightmare with a tearing sound.

SYMBOLS

"Snow will be used for the inability
of people to communicate with
each other. It will represent alienation.
We are a cold country."

Are these opinions or commands? Our words
galloped off for the horizon, taking
our vocabulary with them,
since then everyone talks about
getting along with others and improving
relationships, which can never be
solved, only traded in
for others.

This is the country of the sky, dilating
stars pull brilliance from outer space,
green curtains slide across
a mysterious scene: the borealis and its
moonshow.

Once at night I was stopped by a comet,
it blew up in green splinters.
"This is life in the remote interior," I said
to myself and the shards extinguished separately
as they fell.

We were awarded this sight like badges
of merit, campaign ribbons.
We grow accustomed to pure hallucination.
The mind is an eye, it knows something
it tells only in dreams
(an arctic ocean breaking over frozen
bicycles, fireflies flash in the winter night, a
blacktail deer stands in the white drifts saying
this is your mind).

THE MIGRATORY LIFE

We almost get used to this moving around, the migratory life; cats and dogs cower in the backs of trucks or vans, there are always the last few articles that drive everyone insane, but can't be thrown away; a Mexican poncho which was a gift from a cousin who bought it in the San Diego Navy, a stuffed elephant spilling packing and devoid of plush, the massive maroon of *The World Book*. A new school looms in the south, big as a county jail. I wonder what kind of clothes they're going to want me to wear? It's always like this; secret crushes on boys who wear undershirts and are named Joe Bob in the place behind, and new, terrible half-men in football sweaters named Lonnie in the place coming up. We are like Aztecs. It's because nothing works. We try again. Maybe it will work next time. We are working on a logic of tangible qualities rather than one of propositions, but neither helps when I find myself moving down onto some perfectly innocent small town in Missouri in an avalanche of odds and ends.

We drive through Lake Ozark and Osage Beach, through all those places which smell like good hamburgers and catfish. We are in a Ranch Wago because the n fell off, who knows when. It is laying on the highway somewhere stuttering its one letter over and over as we bear on. The dog pukes in the back. The cat swarms over my shoulder to get at him while he's preoccupied with throwing up. Everyone laughs. This is astoundingly funny. Gypsy and Stonewall fling themselves at each other among jars of pinto beans and *The World Book* and Mexicali ponchos.

I am not really in my right mind here between one town and another, it is that no-time space which terrifies all nomads. We pass Kiddie Jungle Petting Zoos and roadside emporiums, floating dancehalls on converted barges. With a sort of teenage sneer I mention that we are also a Kiddie Jungle Petting Zoo but Poppa Daddy stops for coffee and doesn't want to hear another word out of me.

How about if I write you a note, I think to myself but me and my sister begin to fight, a real death-struggle, mortal combat, over who gets how many soda pops.

I see the dining emporiums, they are like visions. I wish I was in there with a big straw picture hat and a dress with white shoulder straps, among people I do not know personally and will never know personally. Therefore I will appear among them mysteriously. Their names will be Lonnie and Duane and Joe Bob. They will not know I lurch around Missouri in dented Ranch Wagons full of household pets and tennis shoes and cooking utensils. I am thirteen or fourteen now, sometimes twelve, but like the family abode I shift here and there with amazing rapidity.

I am emerging from this move, the beans-and-poncho move, with a deep regard for this Ozark stopping place where we have halted, suddenly seized with a keen desire for a life of degeneracy among the floating dancehalls. There are two of me and one of them says *keep them happy* and the other says *jump from the car now, emerge as only you can by falling from a speeding object, quick, before we gain too much momentum.*

Ah, but here comes Poppa Daddy back with the coffee and Nehis and all the gates shut up on the lidless world. There will be no jumping from doors or hats or catfish. There is a town a hundred miles from here where we will arrive and unload beans and everything.

On the other hand, my sister and I have already heard the music. It is our music, they were playing our song in there. It is as if in some other time-warp there is a roadside emporium for each one of us, whose music is always playing at the back of our minds, a sort of celestial roadhouse, a cosmic bar and grille with Bar-B-Q and windows that look out on a river, and the waitress knows your name. In the confines of the worried mind you can go there and order whatever your heart desires; if you are on speaking terms with your heart, if you know the names of your desires. Maybe they will be printed on the menu.

And, as in dreams when we recognize perfect strangers, we will know everybody there. They will say, where have you been so long? And you think up some excuse: I was lost in the upper reaches of the Orinoco, maybe, or I had a hot date in Hong Kong. Inside each one of us it's always Amateur Night at the Dixie Bar and Grille.

We drive away from the Jim'N'Judy Starlight Cafe and Dancing Sat. Nites, my sister and I stare at each other, we are not smiling but.

Information on rights

World English-language book rights to DOMESTIC FUEL are available, except in Canada. Translation rights are available in all languages, and most subsidiary rights are available. Please contact:

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BIOGRAPHY

Erin Mouré was born in Calgary in 1955 and attended the University of Calgary. She later moved to Vancouver, briefly attending the University of British Columbia, before going to work for VIA Rail. Several years ago she moved to Montreal, where she continues to work for VIA Rail in a managerial capacity.

Mouré's first poetry collection, EMPIRE, YORK STREET, was short-listed for the Governor General's Literary Award for poetry. Her poetry has also received the DuMaurier Award for poetry (1982) and the Pat Lowther Memorial Award from the League of Canadian Poets for DOMESTIC FUEL in 1985.

DOMESTIC FUEL was on the Toronto Star's list of 10 best books of 1985 and was recommended by Books in Canada.

SUMMARY

In DOMESTIC FUEL, as in her previous books, EMPIRE, YORK STREET and WANTED ALIVE, Erin Mouré writes of urban life, of the landscapes in the Canadian West, of political awareness in an age of terrorism, of motion, and of desire.

There are four sections in the book. The first section, "A Sporting Life," introduces us to a chaotic modern world, in which violation and repression are the order of the day. In Section II, "Speaking in Tongues," the poems centre on language itself and its powers to heal and subvert. The last two sections, "Thaw" and "Domestic Fuel," bring together poems that suggest a mood of acceptance and some hope, concentrating on love, memory, and the restorative rhythms of everyday life. As in all of Mouré's work, there is special emphasis on the words, hearts, and voices of women.

REVIEWS

"Surely a top candidate for the Governor-General's poetry award, this collection impresses with its subtle power, risk-taking syntax and exposure of the raw flesh of existence."

Ken Adachi, Toronto Star

"If you are an Erin Mouré fan, her new book of poems DOMESTIC FUEL is charged with energy....Her poems are fresh and tough and lovely."

Stephen Dale, Now Magazine

"Erin Mouré is...an intense, unique voice. Her love of language produces poems that are vibrant and knotted with thought."

Louise McKinney, Quill & Quire

"Mouré's celebration of art over artifice in DOMESTIC FUEL combines with a stunning purity of language and ideological location. Here, significantly, *energy* matters. She embraces the female, touches night, denounces blindness."

Judith Fitzgerald, Books in Canada

"A fine reputation precedes Erin Mouré: a Governor-General's Award nomination, three books of poetry, and numerous journal credits. She deserves the reputation, and demonstrates the reason for it with DOMESTIC FUEL."

Andrew Vaisius, Waves

"DOMESTIC FUEL is Erin Mouré's best book yet. The style that was developing in WANTED ALIVE, her previous book, reaches a fine level of sophistication and control here."

Leona Gom, event

"DOMESTIC FUEL is a fine collection, angry and gentle by turns, political and lyric. As such it is rare in modern poetry: a truly honest, personal, impassioned body of work that deserves to be widely read."

David Manicom, Rubicon

"She has developed a distinctive style that will now win her acclaim beyond our national boundaries."

Carolyn Hlus, Canadian Book Review Annual

"...a brilliant and lively book of poetry, one of the best I have read in a long time."

Marion Mintis, Canadian Materials

Dawn Of The Unwed

Enough of secret wedded bliss!
My glands have stopped their wailing,
insistent as sirens, traffic pulled to the curb
as my desire flashed, high speed
passage of blue
When I look at my stereo it starts up
crazily, the mat under the record
spinning
Enough of this static.
I'm tired of your body coming over to mine
in its taxi & raincloud,
your cigarette smoke reeling down the wall,
tonight's newspaper unread
I'm sick of shaking your sad stains
out of the bedsheets,
sick of putting your sperm in me like money!
Or: I'm not sick, I'm happy.

To be free of you,
to dream,
to carry my own desire in me,
broken open, unwed, crow black, a drowned lake,
ocean-swell of gloom

Fusillade

You who claim to pretend nothing
in your neediness.
Your ruse only works for awhile, then ends.
To pretend the heart
a palpable organ, for donation or transplant:
For months, when we walked or drank beer as friends,
or spoke of the fine glow of oranges,
took baths in sunlight, coffee, soft brown bread

I wore your heart in my chest
stubbornly,
pumped my own blood thru it into the air,
my chest delicate, touchy, angered
by the least sentiment.
My chest ate & ate to keep your heart alive,
the famished convert.

The heart is yours, I'll shovel it out of me.
I'd rather depend on my own.
You can't climb in & out of my chest, like a cupboard.
To you, a bowl of saliva?

A lettuce with flames!
No more!

Your heart is not Shakespeare.
I've thrown it out of me.
It's not a grenade!

Spirit-Catcher

What I am is never clear, is the heart
lonely, is a word, dusk,
bed-eaten
Love, I am the veined-blue iris in your hand
when you clench fists
breaking over nothing
I'm the dust during years of renovation, the pulse
of cats
The disturbance of light, the still loaf of rye
The shudder, ecstasy you bring me
as if it were grace, or usual

My body is the thing you see that's slowly
dying,
the first click of the phone
before a ringing
It won't focus cleanly in the hemisphere we're in
where women are hungry & the dead are pushed full of bread
& sewn
An excess in the mouths of presidents
who talk of the nation's *sanctity*, the right to *pray*
of which there is none
We pray without right, as we must

just as I drink, to get out of my body,
out of the light's psychic noise on my skin
It's said the spirit leaves us thru the mouth, which
is why I speak to you
The maps of my body fail me, a sheer bulk
stopping transmission
closing shop
My silence, deaf as radar

Professional Amnesia

He remembers family reunions at Lake Somewhere; each summer
the women running toward the water
laughing,
holding eggs in spoons

In his memory they keep on running,
he can't remember when they reach the water,
their clothes streaked with sand & grass
Or is it
the target shoots he claims had happened,
shooting at old records, ribbons, plastic soldiers
thrown up by the other children,
his cousins, who never grew

In his memory the women are still running,
the water does not rise to meet them,
they run right out of his life
so their names are forgotten
Family names
Family memories, the accusations one parent made
against the other
while he sat outside, his head
pressed against the cold tree that shaded his room

He remembers who stayed away each Christmas but not who came,
who wouldn't cut the turkey,
who stood up in shirt & tie & armbands
& sharpened knives against the steel.
The eaters are forgotten, the celebrations spontaneous
combustions;
when he speaks of family
the women are running out of it, into a summer lake of air

Secret Kisses

It's now that our kisses don't seem real.
It's because they don't happen in real places,
but in the rough nerve of alcohol,
the rough sniper of clothing, caught in the wall's shadow,
fed by wine.
& night,
& the stars' incense falling
into our bare arms' reach
Oh ache, I love you
Oh alphabet, your secret nest is harboured in my tongue
Oh agony released in dreams, my body
craves you

As if it were nature
I could kiss any *man* & pretend it's you-
The world would stay in its brown corridors
& not care!
I want an age where I can turn my neck

& kiss you at dinner
among real roast beef & oranges,
real salads,
our co-workers watching,
I want to pull your head close with my fingers,
I want to be clumsy,
I want my lips to feel kissed by you,
to feel natural
& not so crooked or so rare

West

As if prairie is, the
dry yellow grass cut by gravel, roads of industry,
asphalt, hot noise of flies in the ditch
Crickets in summer, the edge of Wetaskiwin Alberta
coming into town, car heat trapped
by the roof & windows, the woman
trapped by her shirt & bare legs, the field's green
whisper

How in my body, resting
in the night's silence of Montréal,
the west in me,
chart & bearing, grass in my voice as I am speaking,
its intonation,
my distance from it,
la culture ou l'inculture
the hot air cooling finally in me
rough slam of the pick-up door
The clicking of an engine as it cools,
the vehicle empty

in Wetaskiwin, outside the Co-op, it is
the failure of consumption
to mean anything,
the pride which is a road flat upon the prairie
between post offices, *Wetaskiwin, Falun, Ma-Me-O*
where our memory is no older
than the grasses, crickets deafening the soft ditches,
men & women in the roles of small-town painfulness
& rocky soil
Pulling the cut truck of barley down the road with
farm machinery,
#3 Damp if the elevator takes it,

this western,
 this goddamn music on the radio, inside my body,
 visible if I speak or not,
 wherever I am sleeping

Speaking In Tongues

Someday I'll show you where I stood,
 the year the flames were tongues,
 our idiot foreheads
 speaking in tongues, torches, singing, tongues of children
 8 years old in winter clothing, testing the harshness
 of cold steel

Lick the fence, my head dared
 & my tongue froze sudden to the metal links
 of the fence between two schools
 Unwise child in a field of snow,
 in a city of backyards & bouffant hair,
 the death of presidents on TV,
 the silence of women everywhere

But frightened cold, stuck to the fence,
 my tears ran hard in the lonely hub of Calgary,
 which was nowhere,
 my friends gone into school
 the fence not as high as I imagine
 the snow more trampled
 The Baptist who came out in shirtsleeves from the other school
 who poured sweet coffee on my tongue to free it,
 my body displaced from dreaming
 his arms white with cold
 Sometime I'll show you how he warmed me, in the empty snow,
 the coffee spilled between us,
 at the chain-link fence where it clove the air in two,
 where my life touched & untouched,
 a shy flame
 not yet capable of speaking

Doe-Face

Soft fur of her doe-face in the snow below the rails
 Brown on brown body, warm-blooded, still
 The cow elk hears the ticking of
 her hunger
 The animals of prey do not attack her
 Know she will die here & they will eat from her
 Easy meat
 Hit by the passenger train, skidded down

the snow slope into silence
Wild she gazes, soft ears spread out, supplicant among trees
her body alert as the trains speed above
Their track so civilized & named
A siding called Palliser, below it
the elk waits, grass torn from beneath the snow
as far as she could nuzzle,
unable to stand
Already she does not know what her life was, she
becomes the snow, lain in trees under the mountain

It's our emotion, not hers
She doesn't feel the heart welling up
or know she waits to die
That's just us, projecting our own incapacity,
her body still alive
suffering pain without cry or madness
She looks up, her long ears & animal intensity,
legs folded under her,
a brown patch in the white sentence
She watches our train pass,
without coming down from our dangerous track
to know & rescue her from hunger
To touch her
Bringing in our arms, like game wardens,
a warm shot for her

At Night

At night, we embrace each other's clothes & hope to find us,
if anyone,
ourselves. Arms' length.
Using the stories.
Once, we say:
when I was walking back after the film, the dusk
pressed flat on the curve of the Hydro building,
the whole force of the sky
compressed in front of me
& Later, a man on the corner wearing one sheet of paper
on his head, it blew off & he picked it from the road
& replaced it, repeating everything
His gesture

How we are virtually imprisoned
one step out of our bodies, our sweaters
wrapping thin air.
The violence inside families.
The heart's small noise, what is it, incurable,

drives us.
Being unable to compare,
this is madness:
shunning comparison.
The heart's noise is a cool urge to metaphor.

*Bless us & these thy gifts, heavy
with the weight of desiring.*

Glow

Sitting in the old glow of summer, elbows
hunched over knees,
a bone marker in the green yard, clothed:
In the sun the body gives up its drugs
for stories.
The trees have run to the edge of the clearing, trampling their leaves.
They wait, tipped over, burnished, alive.

In the kitchen the kettle has boiled dry, the children lance long cries
into the yard.
Still the body sits, empty, staring dull eyes at the wood's edge.

Far away the branches tremble, tear their heart-
beat thru the air.

Desire creeps back to the body like a dog.
Children run from the house, the door bangs, somewhere
a key clicks in the ignition of a car.
Even the children, like trees, stand back from the body,
which hunches silently.

It touches their shadows with its hand.
Then stands up, a bone marker facing the yard.
"Once," the body begins, talking softly, raising & lowering its
arms, white semaphor, its voice bending over & over,
pushes the years down.

Its life has been the death of many, today the body knows
what the pain was,
& how much it cost, & how many others
broke down crying & admitted everything: subversion, forbidden papers,
the knives.

The body looks around, the children play quietly away from it,
when it gets old, it knows they will not come.
It dreams of the last days it will spend, in bed,
stuck with tubing, the voices loud.

Even now the body knows, a bone marker in the glow of summer,
the trees halted impossibly out of reach,
the children impossibly far & immune to calling
The body already wise stands & falters in need of its drug

Gale Force

In your mouth my sentence begins
to say *sentence*
as if there were no more quaver
in the air between our mouths
& our speeches were all invented
at the end of a railway platform in the weeds
Now part of our body, my breast touches
sentence under the skin,
between our mouths, folding
Force of sentence

In your mouth my sentence opens, kissing you with its noise,
where I am no longer sleeping
where the railway has ended & waves loosely
in the heat risen up between the weeds
I dream
two women in the strange yard washing the trees,
having washed each single tree
it is daylight;
the wrung-out rags spread on their shoulders
to dry
Our tough reusable wings

In your mouth my sentence is periodically sentence,
my skin crying short uttered joy:
it is out loud
it is out noise
it is over there & here

Heat risen past us, *gale force*, the trees
shining bright in the yard,
between our bodies, pale wings, & the railway

How I Will Look At You

If light has a certain texture, if you can
weave it in & out of our warm skins
& pull us together,
two figures drowning in a building, the colour,
what it would be
how they would find us
Today Princess Grace of Monaco died,
brain hemorrhage after a car accident.
& the lost family was found in unmarked territory,
burned up, six bones inside their car.

Light, handfuls of light
woven together, the fabric of identity,
I with you,
identify me, touch me, stubborn, my hands

Last night I dreamed I kissed you finally,
unasked for, my desire clumsy,
your skin worn & startling
I held you with my hands to kiss you
& you answered, then pushed me away

So I woke, it was 5am,
your kiss had lifted the light out of my room
out of the sky
into my body, charged with the taut thread
I stole from you, happily
I got up then, dressed & worked alone
the light burned
between my lips
& melted, & turned to daylight, the way
I will look at you this morning,
if I see you, how they will find us,
if you let me be

Information on rights

For foreign rights inquiries about THE GREY ISLANDS please contact:

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BIOGRAPHY

Born in Toronto in 1947, John Steffler now lives in Cornerbrook, Newfoundland. He graduated from the University of Toronto in 1971 with a B.A. in English and from the University of Guelph in 1974 with an M.A.

In addition to writing, Steffler has taught English at Grenfell College in Cornerbrook since 1975. His first book of poems, AN EXPLANATION OF YELLOW, was published in 1981. It was followed in 1985 by THE GREY ISLANDS.

In 1987 he published his first children's book, FLIGHTS OF MAGIC, which is illustrated by his wife. Steffler has two children.

SUMMARY

After four years in Newfoundland, Martin Hoffman still feels as out of place as when he first moved there from Toronto. In an effort to take possession of his new home, he goes to spend the summer in an abandoned village on the Grey Islands, a remote place off Newfoundland's northwest coast known for its mysterious power and beauty.

From the moment he is put ashore, he is caught in a process of change. The island and the people who visit him there — some living, some dead — change him. The island too, as he sees and describes it, becomes altered by his changing vision.

The sequence of poems, prose sketches, and anecdotes presented in THE GREY ISLANDS is Martin Hoffman's account of a Newfoundland journey. This is more than a book of poems; it is an account of the journey of discovery and the placing of self. The book vividly re-creates Newfoundland's outpost milieu and people in language that is sometimes comic, often moving, and always deeply caring.

REVIEWS

"This is a book of such excellence that someone in future is liable to say about the author: 'Steffler — Steffler? — oh yes, he wrote THE GREY ISLANDS, didn't he?' Yes, he certainly did, and reading it I feel like a 'deeply astonished' codfish."

Al Purdy, Books in Canada

"What holds the reader's attention and what makes the narrative whole, is Steffler's fine ear for dialogue in the tales by local fishermen, his lively, yet spare images in the poems and his rich catalogue of sea detail."

Douglas Lochhead, Telegraph Journal

"It is a remarkable book, not only for the quality of the writing, which is uniformly excellent and often inspired, but also because of the bold concept that lies behind it. . . . THE GREY ISLANDS is . . . the most significant collection of poetry inspired by Newfoundland since E.J. Pratt's *Newfoundland Verse*. . . . It may be one of the most important collections of poetry published in Canada this year."

George Woodcock, Poetry Canada Review

"THE GREY ISLANDS is a piece of genius, a psychological drama in poetry and prose which tells the story of a Toronto man's retreat on deserted islands off Newfoundland's east coast. . . . Steffler's dazzling ability to interweave imagination and reality, to people the empty physical space of the islands with the narrator's fertile imagination in what really amounts to a dramatic novel. . . . Steffler has charted in THE GREY ISLANDS a rich, elaborate personal odyssey. Watch for him in the future."

Andrew Brooks, Canadian Literature

The first job they gave me, their new town planner straight from U of T, when they'd driven me round the place, thriving Milliken Harbour, and we sat in the "conference room," myself and the councilmen – two contractors, the fish-plant manager, and the man with the liquor commission franchise – and I asked were there any areas that needed immediate attention, and they all agreed the bears was a headache this time o'year, tearin hell outa the town dump, a danger to folks goin out there, and some of them roamin right into town, everyone phonin worried complainin night and day, and you couldn't stop the young fellers going out for a lark and gettin the bears drunk and tryin to ride on their backs, and one day somebody'd get killed and sure as hell the council'd be to blame. They wanted to talk about cheap fencing and scarecrows and machines that go bang every thirty seconds. I got them a grant and had an incinerator put in, and that's still the most popular thing I've done. Four years ago. And the rest has been mostly road signs and litter barrels and organizing the odd parade.

Town planner. Town joe-boy is what I've been. But whose fault is that? I'd find lots to do if this place meant anything to me. Or if the people wanted to change a thing. And I'm dying bit by bit, shrinking, drying up along with my dreams of the New Jerusalem, the four-gated golden city with market squares and green belts and pedestrian streets and old buildings restored and tourist money pouring in. I laugh at that now, an old pain I screw myself with, and every once in a while (like every day) it hits me I've got to get out of here to save what's left of me, and I keep up with the trade magazines and write to people I used to know, but there's nothing going, there isn't a job from here to B.C. And I think then how lucky I am, Bill driving cab in Toronto for Christ sake and David in some office block in Ottawa, and I figure I'll sit tight till something turns up, at least it's a good place to raise kids. That's one lie that's easy to swallow. There's lots of fresh air and there isn't much crime and the people are friendly is what I always say, the people are wonderful. And we head for the mainland every chance we get, Karen dying for Yonge and Bloor, Kensington Market, Spadina Avenue. And I'm dying for it too. We get there and drag ourselves over the sidewalks and I hate the place. Two weeks every year. We're like ghosts looking for something we've lost. The city changes in four years, people move, we don't have a home. And we change too. We fade slowly. Into ghosts.

always the fear I'll
somehow run amok

the stories:
they went to get him at the summer's end
the cabin open
cold porridge on the stove

never a trace of him

how he went mad and jumped from a cliff
was abducted by spirits
fell down a pirate treasure shaft and
walked into Shangri-La.
burned his clothes and hid in the trees
until everyone sailed away

•

After supper the daughters all fight, do dishes, take turns
slamming the bathroom door.

I stand in the empty parlour. Ashtray-carpet smell. Bride-
dolls veiled in dust on the tv. Last Supper tapestry, silver and
navy blue. One wall covered in family photographs:
Christmas, Mom, all 10 or 20 kids lined up in their Sunday
best, more of Mom. No sign of a father anywhere. A
bounder? Runaway? Wouldn't disgrace the wall with his face.

Maybe a different father for every one.

Easy now. Might be a virtuous lady joined to an
unphotogenic man. Badly disfigured. Kept in the attic. Tale
of bitter suffering there.

Maybe a Sufi. Scared of losing his soul.

Or he's the only one who can use a camera. Shutter-bug
mariner. Comes ashore. Click click. Night with the wife.
Next day back on the bounding main. Obvious answer.

•

evening water, white,
soft as a bird
we putt-putt-putt past headlands grey as clouds,
rolling our milky wake.

deep in the hills
a thin bay.
boats Nels knows, five,
six families already there, rocking,
drifting, knocking together
over the swarming squid, like a
village picnic, everyone beckons
calling,

and we drop anchor, drift
in with the rest.
sweet sea smells stirring the warm air.

That's where I was born, Nels says, pointing.
head of the bay: a beach-side meadow, bright
fireweed on the smoky slope.

not a building in sight.

•

Two rock paws, a wharf to the left and a gravel beach
between, the cabin crouching there ten feet from the shore.
A white door and a stoop facing the waves. Long grass
ducking, galloping up a hill.

A thick pitted padlock is held to the door with spikes.
Splinters and holes up and down where it's been ripped out
and hammered back. A contest. Keepers and takers. Owners
and travellers. Out here the law is the other way. The right
to shelter takes first place.

Stove, table, two metal bunks. Mattresses once used in
bayonet practice probably. Yellow linoleum nailed to the
table top, dirt deep in the cracks and gashes. Chain oil,
blood, rust, fat, scrawled in like a diary. All the guys gutting
their ducks and fish here, cleaning their guns, stripping their
engines down, hands dripping black spreading bolts and
bearings among the plates of beans.

Feathers turn and lift in the corners when you walk. Back of
the stove mush-bottomed boxes, plastic bags bloated with
rot, shrunk potatoes gone into sprouts, liquid carrots,
cabbages yellow, burst.

Men coming out here at the end of their calculations and
budgets and fights and fantasies. Building into crude space.
A good time hacking and arsing out at the furthest edge. No
home. No sofas. No wives. High boots, hunting knives and
booze and not getting washed. Then, the time used up or
unable to stand it another day, laughing and boasting they
run to their boats or planes, dropping what nobody owns.
And half what they brought. Cupboard crammed with stale
pancake mix, margarine, sugar, salt. Salt for godsake! Like
me everybody brings salt. Nobody takes it away.

•

I thought I was headed for silence
but this island blares and bustles
as hard as any town

the sea slops and thumps
gurgles and knocks
suddenly loud
 (so close I turn expecting some
 person or creature climbing the bank)
suddenly muffled
steered away by the wind rustling
the grass, whispering up the wall
and the gulls
their single distant cries piercing
the shore's roar
their spiral bickering, jeers,
griefs, alarms
sharpen the air: salt
made audible.
even a bumble bee
touring slowly in at the door
and out
can make the cabin hum like a guitar

•

The unfamiliarity of the sounds of the sea combined with the fact that I'm alone here and always half expecting someone to come to the cabin makes me uneasy at night and keeps me from sleeping. An apartment above a busy street would be no worse. I expected the sea to lull me, not keep me awake.

I hear the sound in too much detail. Whole groups and tiers and ranges of sound within and behind the obvious slap and slosh, wash, thump, gurgle and slurp. I hear knocks and hisses and crackles. At times last night it sounded as though the cabin was being hit by a stream of tiny weightless particles – powdered sand in the wind or pellets of snow. I thought it could almost be the sound of fire starting, and got out of bed to look around.

•

Under everything I'm often vaguely anxious, uneasy in the middle of my actions here. So many things strange to me. The tide for example. It constantly changes the terrain in the low shoreland east of the cabin, and I'm always a bit afraid of getting stranded there.

Paths appear and become submerged. Little knolls that I cross on foot at one time of the day and fix in my memory as landmarks, at another time of the day have turned to islands.

At low tide the sea is bordered by natural meadows. The incoming tide slides up into these grassy fields – a beautiful lush sight – but tricky as far as walking is concerned. It's often impossible to know before stepping forward into the tall grass whether my foot will find solid earth or water below the leaves – and if there is water, how deep it will be.

•
Night on the island is full of power. In the dark the land and sea are released from the spell of logic and industry the sun's light places upon them. The water, the trees and hills rise up. They roam and assume what shapes they wish.

At one point last night I stepped out of the cabin and was startled by the gigantic glaring presence of the moon, its reflection reaching in a broad flashing path down the sea, like a river of cold light falling straight to the cabin door. I had never seen the moon so large or so white, and its light seemed too sharp, too keen and alert: as if grinning – not hungrily exactly – but with knowing, exultant power, like some great animal.

It moved briskly, this creature of light, rippling its body with easy energy. And I stood swallowed up, gazing into it. But I could not bear it for long. It was too massive and too cold to confront alone. In a rush I turned back to the cabin and opened the door: the relief! the lantern throwing its cone of warm light over the table, my book, the woodstove crackling contentedly.

•
who were these people?
what did they make of this place?
were they always thinking of somewhere else as home? Ireland, St. John's, clattering streets, sun?
was this a break, a long side-loop in their lives?
a chance to get rich on fish?
a way to survive until something better beckoned?
were they lost? baffled? blown here they didn't know how?
were they home here, planted and satisfied, Eden's

humble attempters? the cod and ducks and berries
limits to the only world they hungered for?

so little left to speak for them.

white stones in the boggy burying ground, a few
small houses fallen in. rich plots of weeds.
a path leading nowhere under the gulls.

what about it, you young girls, you old women?
what did you dream at night with the fire out
and wind tugging the roof?
ice? an ocean of ice closing the island round?
green glimmering mountains grinding the island down?

was it summer you dreamt of? split fish spread in
the sun? dresses and shoes for Sunday paths?
courting in meadows? bells in the blue air?
your babies, your sweet curly heads, their tiny
fingers clinging?

was it wood stacked in a shed you saw, the stove
fat and red? your family's faces around the supper
lamp, their backs a wall to the night?

whatever you dreamed, you are gone.

your dreams gone too.

•
today a sadness in the light itself
the silence
the any-direction-you-want-to-take day

I swim in sadness
breathe it
walk through it like a diver
in some still lagoon

the sadness of things stalled in the earth
with its normal naps and ecstasies

always pain and roughness
right in the clear flow of love

some black root that feeds
on perfect weather.

my children. my family.
their talk, the ways their bodies
pull my blood across the emptiness

•

The cemetery. I notice how many graves of children there are. Lists of children often on one stone with a phrase preserving their parents' love and sorrow. This hits like an axe. Especially looking up from the small marble plaques to the few ruins, the sea.

I feel very near these people. Life's lonely effort so plain here.

Also a kind of duty to them. Since I've made myself their guest, though likely the most ignorant one they've had, not knowing who they were. All I see is where they lived and that they died here and were left behind. But I feel the need to tell this if I can.

•

Steady rain all day and the air still. Sweeping the cabin this morning I lifted a piece of linoleum and found a trap door, the entrance to Carm's root cellar — just a hole in the rock really, neatly packed with peat. All that seemed to be down there at first was mummified potatoes, and then I noticed a biscuit tin set back on a ledge under the cabin floor. Inside the tin was a Bible, and in the Bible a photograph of a girl. I took these up into the light and spent a long time looking at them, wondering why they were there. The girl, seen from the waist up, is standing against a white clapboard wall. She is wearing a kerchief and a dark coat buttoned to the throat. Her hair, where it shows at her forehead and above one shoulder, is black. She is handsome, her face lean, her jaw and cheekbones strong. Her eyes are large and dark by the look of it. But there is no light in her face, no smile, no desire to please. She is not angry, nor is she frightened or withdrawn into herself, but she is guarded all the same. She does not like whoever is looking at her. I would guess she is eighteen or nineteen. There is nothing written on the back.

The red ribbon book mark and the photo were both at the same place in the Bible: Genesis 32, all about Jacob's travels. I thought about keeping the Bible up to read, but finally decided to put it back where I found it, the tin tightly shut and the photo inside.

•
five tons of fish slippery as
pumpkin seeds on the longliner's deck,
I lift my foot high and wade
into them, feeling their bodies press
my sinking legs, stepping
on eyes and bellies, things
I usually treat so carefully.

two splitting tables ready to go,
Cyril gives me a knife and shows
how to slit the throats just
back of the gills then run the
blade down the belly seam to the tail.

I do this, passing the opened fish
to Ross who tries to twist their
heads off on the table's edge
the way Cyril tells him to. but
some of these fish having
necks thick as a wrist, Ross
struggles and Cyril shows him again
using his weight, using the table's
edge, until he gets it down pat.

taking the fish last, Cyril
moves his knife twice, down
one side of the spine and back with
a quick jerk, stripping the spine away
like a chain of ice,
his blade never touching the meat,
laid flat now, the white
triangular ware, the Newfoundland trade,
and he skids that into a barrel
for Pete to scrub.

the table's old wood gets
plush with blood then ridged
in grey scum and Pete sloshes
a bucket of water under our hands
and the scuppers gradually clog and we
move knee-deep in fish and blood
a thick pool washing heads and entrails
under us and blood drips from our jackets
spatters our faces and dried and
spatters our faces again, and I squeeze

my gloved hands and the fat and blood
pour out of them like gravy
and all around the air is flashing
white gulls, shrill with their crazy
hunger, wheeling, diving to
fight for the floating guts.

all this life being
hacked apart, us letting
blood out of its envelopes,
the world suddenly seems to be all
alive, blood running inside
of us and outside of us, inside
our hands and over them, with little
between the two, a cover of skin
keeping me in or out I'm not
sure which, but some sharp
bones have gone into my hands
and some of the running blood is mine.

ANNE SZUMIGALSKI

DOGSTONES: SELECTED AND NEW POEMS

Information on rights

*World rights to DOGSTONES are available.
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BIOGRAPHY

Anne Szumigalski was born in London, England, in 1922 and raised in Hampshire. She came to Canada in 1951 and settled in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, in 1956.

She has been active in the Saskatoon writing community as teacher, editor, and founding member of the Saskatchewan Writers Guild, one of the oldest writers' groups in Canada. Szumigalski has read and performed her poetry in Canada, the United States, and Britain, including at the International Poetry Festival in 1982 and the World Poetry Festival in 1986. She was nominated for the Governor General's Literary Award for poetry in 1984 and 1986. Her books were included in the Literary Press Group's Writers' Choice campaign in 1986 and 1987.

Most recently she was writer-in-residence at the Centennial Public Library in Winnipeg. In addition to DOGSTONES, published in 1986, Szumigalski has written six other books since 1974: WOMAN READING IN BATH, A GAME OF ANGELS, DOCTRINE OF SIGNATURES, RISKS, INSTAR, and WILD MAN'S BUTTE (with Terrence Heath).

SUMMARY

DOGSTONES contains some new poems as well as a selection by the poet and her editor of Szumigalski's best work from four collections. Szumigalski has described DOGSTONES as both a looking back and a looking forward. She hopes that the retrospective part of the book will help others to assess her work, while she describes the new poems as the beginning of another phase of her writing.

The identifying mark of Szumigalski's poetry has been the rolling, lolling play of sound. She breaks down words and ideas, cavorts in their multiple parts, savouring the sound of every syllable, and then rolls them all back into a whole. Her poetry is philosophical, with daring stylistic and emotional experiments.

REVIEWS

"In recent years Szumigalski has found the ideal form for her coloratura sensibility: poems in which sparsely punctuated blocks of rhythmic prose function as verse paragraphs, each following the other in a process of interior logic. . . . She is clearly superior to many better-known poets."

Fraser Sutherland, The Globe and Mail

"For those familiar with her work, or those who have seen her poetry only in periodicals and admired it, this book provides a thorough catalogue of the poet at her best. . . . Her greatest strength is to communicate both horror and beauty with a single image."

Richard Streiling, Quill & Quire

"... it documents accurately the development of a writer over a major chunk of her writing life. DOGSTONES registers the stylistic progressions of Anne Szumigalski's poetry through four of her books over a 15-year period. The poems are selected from books that are highly singular in their own right ... and so there is the danger of dilution. But the selection is eventful not only in highlighting these earlier books, three of which are out of print, but in revealing a tenacious poetics open to and always pushing for perceptual and stylistic change. ... Szumigalski really is a technician of the potent. DOGSTONES demonstrates the generative method of her writing and the range of it that might not be apparent within a single volume; the selection reveals more than a part. Each gesture in the writing has created the ground for the next writing. She is a valuable poet because of this; always at the front edge of her writing and perception."

Fred Wah, Prairie Fire

VICTIM

Ah the cliff edge — where so many murders are
done

Can't you see the body among the boulders
Far down on the beach?

While seagulls scream they are filming
A frail girl in a thin nightgown
Prone on the distant rocks

Mr. B and I are walking hand in hand
Up the cliff path knowing
That under our feet
Disaster and drama are making a second-rate
movie
Take no notice my darling Mr. B
Tell me a simple answer to the urgent question
Who am I? Who are we?

Mr. B is a known madman a suspected
murderer
I think the cops are after him for being himself
For not sobbing
For not beating his breast
When he finds a victim on the beach
Bloody and wet in the tide
Was that my body we saw down there Mr. B
Twisted in seaweed Who am I? Who was I?

He picked me up on the beach

I am the tiny girl in the thin nightgown
That Mr. B carries in a seashell
In his trousers pocket among
The sticks of Dentyne gum and the spent flashbulbs
Oh I am glad I am dead and can't see
The dirty darkness in here

I was murdered last Thursday but even so
The heat of his groin
And all the fumbling that goes on there
Is disturbing my final rest

SKEPS IN THE ORCHARD

We signed the contract

your part was to lie in the orchard
every afternoon and sleep
mine was to sit and watch you
until you wakened

When autumn came
it was rather chilly for both of us
I folded by shoulders into a blanket
as you slept
your breath rose whitely
into the cool air

The shape of your breath is a cone
it is the shape of inside silence
called null
and from the cone's tip
a word is squeezed out
the word is
worm
worm
worm

the word is latent
the word is fishhook

the word has no sound
it has only a shape
O O O

tip of a needle
is a steel cone
it could get broken
into your finger sewing

it could travel up your arm
and about and around you
until it felt your heart's pull
and pierced itself in

your head is a fat cone
wound with heavy brown hair

or

with soft white hair

or

all the hair could fall out
and show your round head
dull newborn mouse pink
and then a word could be written on your head
with the gray cone tip of a lead pencil

the word is grist
thistle
brush
cerise

words are hive bees
each has the shape of its hum
a winged O

they are flying home in a formation
with the shape of a curved blade
returning to the straw hive
with its knotted tip

From A Game of Angels

**SITTING UNDER DEATH'S
RICH SHADE**

in June I visited a charnel house
in Holland I was searching
for a friend I wore black gloves
the attendant showed me great respect

it is tidy in there
smells faintly of the dark earth
at Easter the members of the Sepulchre Society
polish up the bones and arrange
them in order of rank and sanctity

I was looking for a huge bony skull
with a small round hole
in the left temple
— a healer had once trephined the head
to let out evil —

when I had found him
I knotted him into my kerchief
and carried him home

*Frans I began
I have so much to tell you
will you or won't you hear
my confession?*

he was silent smiled sadly

*Frans I told him
may I say at last
that once I desired you? a bit
of me is broken
because of your memory*

no tears fall from dead eyes
his grin becomes toothy, lascivious

*damn you I cry out
you would not take me
when I was fifteen and dangerous*

THE BEES

you speak in a dry voice of the sunburnt skin on the face of the woman who tells through a mouthful of grit of an unpainted house scoured by the sun where she stands on an old chair with a thin rag in her hand trying to clean the window where dirt has lodged in the corners of the frame

she tells of when you were a boy lying faceup in a field of many-coloured clover set upon by bees their humm humm bumblebees groundbees purring in their furry bodies you see them huge as cats leaping from the clover flowers and chasing you down the gravel road through a wire fence and into a field of tall green wheat where you crouch breathless with your hands around the back of your neck trying to ward off those darts from piercing the delicate flesh behind your earlobes

the hum grows louder and louder it comes from overhead where one lazy plane is flying and now the earth tilts so that the sky is below you are falling into a pit of sky deeper than the slough deeper than the well

slowly through space you fall more than a month you name the days as you fall you write the names with a white pencil of smoke on the walls of the sky

on the fourth sunday you see that at last you are approaching the plane a silver insect not at all like a bee it is tin like a christmas present its edges sharp as a toy car hood

after dinner you play in the yard with your new toy you don't need winter boots because there is no snow *this is a black christmas* your mother explains *it is dark all over there is a war on we must pray for peace* and she ties her new red kerchief very tight under her chin

outside it is stony cold the pebbles under your feet are sharp you can see the pointed stars they sting your eyes with their light the yard is silvery not black you throw the tin plane up it falls into the trough where a foal is drinking there is ice on the foal's lip humm humm humm the airplane flies through the night the passengers are singing as they fly *you are younger than you were in the summer they sing you are getting younger all the time soon you will shrink down to a baby small enough to get back into your mother you will ride inside her all winter you will hear the squeelch of the floormop you will hear the squeak of the cloth as you try to clean the corners of the window*

while you were away while you were off in the sky the woman and the house have crumbled and blown away now there is just one wall left standing just one window with no glass through it you can see the prairie and far away the crumpled riverbed under the window stands an old chair with a rung missing

and a stained cooking pot full of rain where a bumblebee is collecting water for her family, they live in a hole in the ground

and dryly you explain to your child how the sun is really an image of our idea of the sun just as the prairie is a reflection of our need for flatness *consider* you tell him *the clever dance of the bee which is in the exact shape of her idea of distance*

JERUSALEM

that city of glass these words are printed in the book that lies open before you I'm reading over your shoulder and cannot see your face but I know that your slightly bulging eyes blue as glass are staring at the page I know that from between those eyes the thought darts out and hits the print with its point that never again will you enter jerusalem

send me I want to tell you but you hush me with the warmth of your hand which is resting on my hand am I cooling your fingers or are you warming mine this question occurs at the same time as conjectures about my journey to that place of iron doors and minarets lighted against the sky whose gates are closed until morning

whose walls are huge blocks of traprock says the book where men in black homburgs weep and wail their tears down their faces, run down the stones leaving long ribbons of rust

soon I shall scale these walls and enter the city and search up and down the streets for those whose names were once known to you will they put on a false front of flesh will they come shaved and powdered to greet me

or when at last I see them face to face will they turn quickly away and hurry down a sidestreet while one explains to the other a new process for adding gold to the glass of an office building *it's true* he admits that the windows shine rather dully in the sun but then the people inside never have to pull down the blinds for in that place there is neither glitter nor glare but always just enough light to read by

DESIRE

desire is not like a wedding which rushes relentlessly towards us from the other end of time it comes unexpected as a cloud inviting questions and implying answers *can three lovers meet as two* we ask can they walk out of a summer's morning and roll as all true lovers must in the dewy wayside grass without one of them feeling neglected, worse still pitied, by the other two can four lovers meet as three or must they remain always two pairs as isolated from each other as we all are from the begetter of our uncertainties and does all this apply not only to lovers but to brothers and sisters both secular and holy

darling we shall say to our child *you were born of our surprising ability to couple and couple again without weariness without a thought for the garden half-planted for*

the book half-read certainly we shall never tell her of our present condition what an effort it is to keep up an interest for the sake of our tinpot relationship for the sake of our parenthood for the sake of the future which while we lie here locked in each other is rapidly crumbling into the past

A PINEAL CASEMENT

a pineal casement opens in her forehead perhaps it is a window perhaps a french door the thick bluish panes are leaded to one another are leaded to the frame the rod of the latch is of old but unrusted iron the peg is a new one of grey steel

in the same way that the cotter fits neatly through any of the latcheyes the nub of the mind may slip through any of several ideas she chooses the conjecture that whatever comes out through the port is a dream but whatever goes back in and slams the door behind it is foolishness born of panic

these thoughts she covers with double muslin the kind used as curtains in the imagined house of her infancy curtains which hang from bone rings and blow in and out on whatever breeze there is, flopping at the edges as small rain dampens them

MATER DOLOROSA

the face of the child his simple strength the faith of his mother who believes he is that inner thing the centre the true hard core the absurd little garden where he scatters his first seeds the birds believing it's his intention to feed them naturally not breadcrumbs and suet like the old couple next door

his mother imagines a conversation when he asks these neighbours for a few hints on what has gone wrong with his plantation their own yard being a riot of flowers

she finds it difficult not to be disappointed in his lack of skill but still she believes that one day something will flare in his head and run like fire to his hands

meanwhile she buys nasturtium pods and sunflower seeds thinking these too large for the beaks of songbirds *you have reckoned without the goldfinch* the boy tells her *who can perch on a single reed yet opens these husks making short work of next year's hopes*

then in winter there are mice who never sleep in their tunnels under the snow but run about seeking this morsel and that all night she hears their tiny nibblings which bring her to anxious tears

the son in his mercy looks up at his mother reassuring her that her disillusion will melt away when life rises again from the dirt *when will that be* she asks but the child whose eyes are hard as nuts won't tell her that

BRONWEN WALLACE

COMMON MAGIC

Information on rights

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American Film Festival in 1982. Their second film, That's Why I'm Talking, is a documentary study of Canadian poets and their poetry.

Wallace continues to live in Kingston, where she is currently working on a new collection of poems, tentatively entitled NEARER TO PRAYERS.

BIOGRAPHY

Bronwen Wallace was born in Kingston, Ontario, in 1945. She attended Queen's University there and has an M.A. in English. At various times she has worked as a day-care teacher, secretary, civil servant, bookstore clerk, teacher, housewife, mother, and, most recently, counsellor at a local shelter for battered women and children. However, writing poetry is what she prefers to do.

Wallace's first collection of poetry in 1980 was a double book with Mary di Michele, BREAD AND CHOCOLATE/MARRYING INTO THE FAMILY. It was followed by SIGNS OF THE FORMER TENANT in 1983 and COMMON MAGIC in 1985. Her work has also been anthologized, most recently in Full Moon, Anything is Possible, and The New Canadian Poets: 1970-85.

Wallace's second collection won the Pat Lowther Memorial Award from the League of Canadian Poets in 1984. She also received the DuMaurier Award for poetry in 1980 for a selection of poems published in event magazine.

In addition to writing poetry, Wallace works as a filmmaker with partner Chris Whynot. Their first film, All You Have to Do, received a Red Ribbon at the

SUMMARY

COMMON MAGIC is concerned with finding one's place. It begins with a specific journey through a specific landscape – that of southern Ontario – and moves out from there to an understanding that one's "place" is not only geographical, but political and spiritual as well.

The political journey explores the contemporary landscape of sexual politics and the map here is a feminist one, a cartography of those experiences which traditional geographers have often marked as unknown territory, wild zones. Yet the journey also moves towards the recognition that feminism, like any other "ism," is a human response, not an Immortal Answer, to the problem of how to live with courage and integrity. It is from this recognition that the spiritual exploration evolves, moving, as all such explorations move, toward that point which marks both the end of one quest and the departure for further, deeper journeys.

In all of this, the landscape is a "common" one, defined by the details of home and family, of the city, of the everyday conversations and pastimes of "ordinary people." But because of the nature of the journey – and because of the vision by which that journey is seen and described – these common things do not appear commonplace, but instead disclose the wonder and the magic that is always in them.

REVIEWS

"Since Bronwen Wallace's new collection of poetry came into my hands, I have been playing semantic hide and seek with the title, COMMON MAGIC. Is magic, then, common? Is the common magic? Both? In Wallace's hands, the answer must be all of the above. Her ground is common ground; her language and tone, however, illuminate that ground, making it new, making it magic.

"Wallace's language is, as always, plain, common, if you wish. Not for her, the artful and artificially stretched metaphor, the weighty myth. She employs the conversational tone, and familiar images of everyday, using a collective 'you' to address her readers and to include them in her vision. It makes her extraordinarily accessible, though not for one minute does one feel that the feat is easy, or that one could do it as well as she.

"In her earlier collections from Oberon, MARRYING INTO THE FAMILY, and SIGNS OF THE FORMER TENANT, Wallace speaks often of family, friends, children, finding herself on a continuum. For her, that continuum is obviously an important measure of order and identity. In COMMON MAGIC she returns to those themes, but with a subtle difference.

*'... My friends keep on asking
What I'm doing here, and I keep on
not having the answers ...'*

"But not having the answers is an answer. There is a sure confidence in COMMON MAGIC that reveals itself in Wallace's calm acceptances. She speaks now from a strength and an acceptance that was by no means absent in her earlier work, but was less articulate, perhaps less recognized.

*... But even the dead go on changing
Whether I want to admit it or not.
There's another coming to terms
and another ...*

"COMMON MAGIC is a personal statement. That it not to say, as other reviewers have said, that her work is subjective, womens', restricted, and therefore unimportant. It is to say that Wallace addresses her readers surely, quietly and openly, demonstrating that the common magic residing in her commonplace, resides also in ours.

*'... You'll take a map, of course,
and keep it
open in front of you on the dashboard,
though it won't help.
... there are places yet
where names are powerless
and what you are entering
is like the silence words get lost in
after they've been spoken ...'*

"Wallace doesn't force her readers to see, nor to see anything her way. She offers a way of seeing.

"Wallace has a decided flair for stopping in mid-sentence on one line, and completing the thought on the next; two incomplete lines each with their own sense, merge in the completed thought to extend the meaning. It is a synergy more difficult to achieve than it looks.

*'... How else to say it
except that the body is a limit
I must learn to love ...'*

"In many of the poems, this effect is echoed and deepened by the placement of final stanzas on a separate page. It is a thoughtful layout that indicates a clear editorial understanding of the author's work.

"It is clear that Wallace has come to terms with herself, her strength, her life and her work. COMMON MAGIC is a work of strength, and the powerful simplicity that can come only from experience.

Judith Russell, The Whig-Standard Magazine

One by one my friends move away
to become legends. What news I have of them
arrives like postcards with foreign stamps
or those messages that always look
as if the person who wrote them
was thinking of something else the whole time

Me, I keep on living here, without meaning to.
Friends ask me why, I say *light*,
I say *lake*, I say *cost of housing*,
but it doesn't add up and most of them know it.
The ones who don't tell me how nice it must be
to feel rooted. Like an oak tree
or as if my feeling for the place
were something I could cultivate
as easily as turnips or potatoes.
Other people take me to the mountains,
or try to make me love an ocean,
but all I can see are more postcards.
"Too fancy for me," I tell them,
trying to keep it casual,
but my face muscles start to rearrange themselves:
my grandfather's look, half-sullen, half-sly
whenever anyone would mention Toronto or Montreal.
The look that told you most people were tourists to him
and there was nothing he could do about it.
(Meaning, he didn't want to.
Meaning, he'd never been twenty miles from his hometown
and that was enough for him.)

For most places, there are two kinds of geography
and it's no different here.

The men know land and weather,
who owns it and for how long,
what to prepare for when you can.
Being men, they have access to maps
and county records, almanacs.
Their wives know it differently.
Not just who married who
but what it was like and why,
how the kids turned out in the end.
This may be gossip,
but that doesn't make it unimportant.
You can't have your daughters marrying men
who beat their wives, raising children
who will tear all over the countryside
making fools of themselves.

"What's bred in the bone," my grandmother said,
"comes out in the flesh."

All of which I can accept, like the look
in my mother's eyes these days
when she tells me of another wedding or another death,
saying it's time for you to learn all this.
(Meaning, some day you have to decide
what you're doing here.)
But I'm not sure I want it.
I could tell you that this place
holds me like a family and mean it,
but that also means it holds me back.
These people who know who I am, who I've been,
for generations
assume a certain ownership
and the hard part is, I recognize their right.

I wanted something simpler,
a place of origin,
direct as the love I imagined feeling for the dead,
believing grief made love perfect.
But even the dead go on changing,
whether I want to admit it or not,
there's always another coming to terms
and another.

My friends keep on asking
what I'm doing here and I keep on
not having the answer.
The thing I worry about most though
is that my children are getting older
and I could get stuck here
through another generation, without meaning to.
The thing I keep seeing is my grandfather's face,
letting you know that Toronto and Montreal
were nothing to him, he belonged right here.
Bluffing you
into believing it.

INTO THE MIDST OF IT

You'll take a map, of course, and keep it
open in front of you on the dashboard,
though it won't help. Oh, it'll give mileages,
boundary lines, names, that sort of thing,
but there are places yet
where names are powerless

and what you are entering
is like the silence words get lost in
after they've been spoken.

It's the same with the highways.
The terse, comforting numbers
and the signs that anyone can read.
They won't be any good to you now.
And it's not that kind of confidence
you're after anyway.

What you're looking for are the narrower,
unpaved roads that have become
the country they travel over, dreamlike
as the spare farms you catch
in the corner of your eye,
only to lose them
when you turn your head. The curves
that happen without warning
like a change of heart,
as if, after all these journeys,
the road were still feeling
its way through.

A man comes up on your right—blue shirt
patched from the sky—solid and
unsurprised. He doesn't turn his head
at your passing and by the time your eyes move
to the rear-view mirror, the road has changed.
But it's then you begin to notice
other people: women hanging clothes from grey
porches, a clutter of children on the steps.
Like the man, they do not move
as you go by and you try to imagine
how you must look to them: metallic glimmer
on the bright rim of their sky,
disturbing the dust
that settles behind you, slowly,
through the day's heat,
while in your mind's eye, their faces
form and change with the rippling patterns
sun and cloud make on the fields,
like the figures that swim below your thoughts
in the hour between dream and waking.

It makes you think of the people you love,
how their faces look when they don't know you're
watching them,

so that what you see there
forces you to recognize
how useless your love is, how little
all your hopes, your good intentions
can ever do for them.

Only now, this doesn't hurt any more,
becomes part of your love, in a way,
just as the dry-weather drone of the cicada
belongs to the heat, to the dust that sifts
like ash over the shiny leaves,
this country you're travelling through,
where the farmlands draw their nourishment
from an ancient mountain range,
and houses rise, insistent
as the rock and almost as indifferent,
making all your questions
about why people came here,
what they liked about it,
why they stayed
as meaningless as questions you might ask
of the trees or the earth itself.

You, who have lived your whole life believing
if you made enough plans
you wouldn't need to be afraid,
driving through a countryside
only the road seems to care about,
to rediscover every time it enters
with that kind of love that's partly tenderness
and partly a sort of confidence
you can't put words around.
Like the look
the people at home will give you
when you get there: nonchalant and almost too deep
for you to see, as they turn back
to whatever held them
before you came.

COMING THROUGH

It's the time of day you like best: that hour
just before dark, when the colours
and shapes of things seem to forget
their daylight boundaries, so that the sound
of someone whistling in the street is the last pink
light on the horizon, fading through other sounds
of traffic and laughter into lilac, into blue-grey.

Nothing is solid now. Against the sky the trees
are so still they vibrate with the effort
of holding themselves in and the walls of the houses
hesitate as if they might dissolve,
revealing the lives behind them, intricate
and enchanted as the lives of dolls.

You had a friend who opened
secrets for you like that
and when you think of her now
it's mostly on evenings like this one,
when the last of that light
which is itself a kind of silence
gives to the room a mirror-like quality,
translucent as a memory.

You can almost smell the coffee you'd make for her then,
see the steam rising from the blue cup, her fingers
curled around it, warming themselves.
You can still see the way her hands moved
when she talked, creating a second language,
drawing you in
to the very centre of her words
where the real stories lived.

And her eyes, following your sentences
wherever they led,
until it seemed those nights
you entered each other's lives
as if they were countries,
not the superficial ones that maps create,
or ordinary conversation, but the kind
that twist and plummet underneath a day's events
like the labyrinths you followed as a child
or the new-made world that opened
for you alone when you discovered lying.

You lived within each other then
and each of those nights was a place
you inhabited together, a place
you thought you could return to always.

The headlights from a passing car outside
startle the bright ghosts that gather
in the corners of the room. It makes you remember
the bedroom you had as a child
and how you huddled under the covers like a snail,
watching the goblins who lived in the dresser drawers

glide across the mirror and over the ceiling
into your bed. It was the smell of your teddy bear
that saved you then and the satin edge of the blanket
at your cheek as smooth as sleep.

It was the voices of your parents in the kitchen,
far away as growing up and as safe. Even by day
your parents filled their lives with such a confidence,
you believed they had been born into adulthood
or arrived there, years ago, before
there were any history-books or maps, and made it
their very own sort of place. Not like you.

Stubbing your toes on the furniture that changed
overnight, your arms suddenly appearing
from the sleeves of your favourite jacket
like a scarecrow's,
like somebody else.

You can laugh at it now, although
it's only lately you've begun to realize
how much of your time you've spent like that:
almost a guest in your own life,
wandering around waiting for someone
or something to explain things to you.

It was always late when she left
and you'd stand in the doorway, waiting
till she'd started the car, then
sit in the dark yourself
for the twenty minutes or so it took her
to drive home. As you locked up, checked the kids
you could imagine her doing the same thing,
so that on those nights sleep was just another opening,
another entry you made together.

She's been dead for a long time now.
You'd thought that would make a difference,
but it hasn't. And though you feel angry
at your need for an explanation
it's still there. As if she owed it to you somehow.
As if somebody did.

Oh, you've learned the accepted wisdom of it.
Can even feel yourself healing these days, almost
strong enough now to re-enter the place
you inhabited together. And you know
you'll never figure it all out anyway;
any more than you can understand your neighbours
from what you see in their lighted windows
framed, like public advertisements.

And yet.

A part of you resists all that.
Resists it with the pure, unthinking stubbornness
you lived in as a child,
that harder wisdom
you are rediscovering now.
Some people are a country
and their deaths displace you.
Everything you shared with them
reminds you of it: part of you in exile
for the rest of your life.

MELONS AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT

For Carolyn Smart

*"Child," said the lion, "I am telling you your story, not hers.
No-one is told any story but their own"—C.S. Lewis,
A Horse and his Boy.*

I keep having this dream
where the women I love swell up like melons,
 night after night.
It's not surprising, really.
They've reached that age
where a woman must decide once and for all,
and this summer most of them are pregnant.
Already their eyes have changed.
Like those pools you discover once in a while,
so deep with themselves
you can't imagine anything else swimming in them.
The eyes of pregnant women. The women I love
fallen into themselves, somehow, far beyond calling,
as if whatever swims in their bellies
where pulling them deeper and deeper.

I think that women's lives
are like our bodies.
Always at the mercy, you might say.
A woman turns 32 and her body lets her know
it's time to decide.
Or maybe she just loses her job and can't find another,
so she figures she might as well have the babies now as later.
The days become all mouth then
and everything smells of milk.

Her body goes a little vague at the edges
like it felt that time at summer camp

when she was learning how to hang in the water
without moving.

"Drown-proofing," they called it.
Said it could hold you up for hours.
These are the days that slow
to the pace of glass,
the world outside a silent, lazy smudge
on the horizon somewhere.

"After my son was born," a friend told me,
"in those first few months, whenever he was asleep,
I'd spend hours putting on makeup,
just so I could touch my own face again,
just so I knew I was there."

In the dreams they are green and determined,
growing larger by the minute, and there's something
I need to warn them about before it's too late,
but they go on ripening without me.
So far, I always find myself awake
before anything else happens,
hands in the dry night, exploring the bed
for a mess of pulp and seeds.

Meanwhile, my son turns ten this summer.
Every morning, he plays baseball in the park next door,
leaving me quiet for coffee and the paper.
But it never works. It's his voice, rising
through the noise of the game, that shapes me still,
the way, years earlier, his turning knotted my belly,
the kick under my ribs, aimed at the heart.
When I take my coffee to the bleachers, he ignores me.
He's the smallest boy on his team, but he's got a good arm.

The coach gives him third base, usually, or shortstop.
Right field is a demotion. I can tell he feels it
by his walk, though his face shows nothing.
It's like the sadness in his wrists when he's up to bat,
knowing he'll manage a good base hit, probably, but never
a home run.

He's the kind of player every coach needs on the team
and, watching him stretch for a fly ball, I can see
how I'm the one who needs to grow up.
I carried him like the future, unmarked, malleable,
but what I gave birth to isn't like that at all,
isn't a life I can decide for any more.
This is what my son knows already;
he just wants to get on with it.

What I get on with is this dream
where women swell up like melons,
ready to ripen or burst.
I want to believe I am dreaming for my friends,
for all the things I'd tell them if I could.
How they are bound by this birth forever
to the lives of other women, to a love
that roots itself as deeply
as our need for the earth.
I want to tell them this
is an old, old story,
but of course they can't listen.
They are ripening into their own versions of it
as if it had never happened to anyone else before.
These women I love so much.
Their recklessness. Like that fly ball
at the speed of light
stinging into my son's glove.

LEARNING FROM THE HANDS

They say it's in the opposition of the thumbs.
For all we know, whales sing in five-act plays,
but they can't write them down.
In a few million years—our wings slimming into arms
or paws flexing to fingers—we've made great strides
in the animal kingdom, most of it on our hands.

Some hands can see.
Those of the blind, of course, the delicate whorls
of their fingertips shining like eyes,
and maybe those of certain healers,
though perhaps it's more like sonar guides them
to the cells' cry for help; the hands of potters, definitely,
and wood-carvers, old men who can free
fantastic animals from glum wood;
but mostly hands, being hands, insist
that touch is the first mystery, wiser than sight.
Everywhere pregnant women place a hand to the belly,
listening for the first flutter-kick, the child inside
rocked by the warm walls of its mother's body,
stronger, even, than the sound of her heart.

All our lives, the hands of strangers feed us
and closest to our skin we wear
whatever their hands have learned, the small humiliations
they carry in to work with them each day.

We deliver ourselves to the hands of doctors
and carpenters, engineers, pilots, dentists, cab-drivers,
some guy tightening bolts on an assembly-line somewhere
stoned or hungover, angry at his foreman,
in love with the new girl in payroll
or just plain bored, we trust him
with our lives every time we start the car.
No wonder jugglers and magicians say
that magic is in the hands,
which are never really quicker than the eye,
only more sure of themselves.

This is how we live,
in a world run by thugs
who think a hand is just a weapon,
like the body, a machine for following orders,
filling the fields and oceans of the earth
with the ones that have refused.
This is what hands have become
after so many centuries, having to learn
how much they can endure
before the nerve-ends underneath the fingernails
stop screaming at the brain.
And something else the hands know
only too well: how often they must measure
the little they can do
against how long it takes.

We each carry our life in our hands—
the palm's cartography unfolded
for the fortune-teller, as if the future mattered—
our deaths, which belong to us from the beginning,
visible, necessary as the past
which nothing can take from us, ever.

There are nineteen small bones in the hand
and nineteen small muscles. *Eight muscles
are inserted into the bones of the thumb.
All are used in combination
and all movements of the thumb are complex.*
They can gouge a mountain,
put an eye back in its socket;
they are the needles thought needs to piece
the world together, the brain's light
threaded through the thumb;
or the heart's—hands are the only arrows
of desire that can reach what they want,
they mean what they can do

to bring us here, our hands
what we have instead of wings,
the closest we can come to flight.

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DAVID FRENCH

SALT-WATER MOON

Note to the reader

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BIOGRAPHY

Nothing is more exhausting and exciting than looking for ways to put my own interior life on the stage. And of course, never being satisfied. Ever.

David French is one of Canada's favourite and most successful playwrights and, as a survey by the Playwrights Union of Canada recently revealed, he is the most-often-produced playwright in Canada. Born in Coley's Point, Newfoundland, in 1939, French moved to Toronto in 1945. He started writing for his high school yearbook and had several short stories and poems published in the United Church monthly magazine The Canadian Boy. After graduating from Oakwood Collegiate, French studied acting, first in Toronto and later at California's Pasadena Playhouse.

In 1960 he returned to Toronto, where he worked as an actor in CBC television drama. Two years later he sold his first script, BECKONS THE DARK RIVER, to the CBC. He subsequently gave up acting to concentrate on writing, and wrote several scripts for radio and television, as well as a novel, A COMPANY OF STRANGERS.

In the early 1970s, French's play LEAVING HOME was produced for the Tarragon Theatre's first full season and immediately established French as one of Canada's leading theatre writers. The play's sequel, OF THE FIELDS, LATELY, opened at the Tarragon the following year and won the Chalmers Canadian Play Award. Both plays went on to be produced throughout Canada, in New York, in Europe, and on television. French's other plays include ONE CRACK OUT, THE RIDDLE OF THE WORLD, and JITTERS, which has been acclaimed as Canada's best comedy.

French's SALT-WATER MOON received the 1985 Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding New Play, the Hollywood Drama-Logue Critics Award, and the Canadian Authors Association Literary Award for drama. The play was the smash hit of the 1984/85 Toronto theatre season and has been produced at major theatres in Canada, the United States, and Scotland.

French lives in Toronto and spends summers writing at his cottage in Prince Edward Island. He is currently working on a new play and a screenplay.

SUMMARY

SALT-WATER MOON takes place at Coley's Point, Newfoundland, on a splendid moon-filled night in August 1926. Eighteen-year-old Jacob Mercer has returned from Toronto to the tiny Newfoundland outport, hoping to win back his former sweetheart, Mary Snow. But Mary has become engaged to wealthy Jerome McKenzie, and she is still hurt and bewildered by Jacob's abrupt departure a year earlier. She will not be easily wooed.

REVIEWS

"Tender as a caress, delicate as a love poem...tremendous!"

Jamie Portman, Southam News

"A gem of a play, an old-fashioned love song that is as affecting, funny and as evocative as a dream."

Stephen Godfrey, The Globe and Mail

"It's a long time since Canadian Theatre has been graced with a play as well written...as this one."

Audrey M. Ashley, Ottawa Citizen

"A lovely play, lovingly written...We've not met the likes of Mary and Jacob on any stage in many a long day. You'll not soon forget them."

Polly Warfield, Hollywood Drama-Logue

"SALT-WATER MOON Shines."

Nels Nelson, Philadelphia Daily News

The Characters:

Mary Snow

Jacob Mercer

The Place:

The front porch and yard of the Dawe's summer house in Coley's Point, Newfoundland.

The Time:

An August night in 1926

SALT-WATER MOON

The front porch of a house that was built in the last half of the nineteenth century, probably by a ship's captain or local merchant. It has a solid feel about it, this porch. You just know that the interior of the house would consist of oak banisters and newel posts, wide halls and high ceilings. And that every timber was hand-chosen and pit-sawn and constructed by men who built houses the way they built boats — to last.

On stage right of the porch is a rocker.

There is not much of a yard, because they built their houses close to the sea in those days to make easy access to the waters where they made their living. In fact, the house stands quite close to a road that runs in front of it, a gravel road skirting the rocky embankment that holds back the sea. Some indication of this road should be on the set, though it need not be realistic.

It is a lovely night in August, 1926. A warm night in this tiny outport at the edge of the sea, a night lit by the full moon and a sky full of stars.

At rise: MARY SNOW is alone on stage. She sits on the front step, training a telescope on the sky. MARY is seventeen, a slender, fine-boned, lovely girl with short black hair. She is wearing a short-sleeved yellow satin dress and black flat-heeled shoes. She wears no makeup except for a slight hint of red on her cheeks. The only jewellery she wears is her engagement ring.

Slight pause. Then MARY rises and crosses into the stage left part of the yard and again peers at the sky through the telescope.

A moment later JACOB MERCER's voice is heard offstage, singing faintly as though he were some distance down the road stage right. His voice carries so faintly, in fact, that MARY spins around and faces that direction, listening intently, not sure whether it is her imagination.

JACOB: (to the tune of 'Pretty Redwing')
'Oh, the moon shines bright on Charlie Chaplin,
His boots are crackin' for the want of blackin',
And his baggy trousers they want mendin'
Before they send him, to the Dardanelles.'

(MARY stands riveted to the spot, her eyes searching the shadow-pocketed road, almost afraid of what might walk into view, but still straining to listen... But the song has ended, and there is only silence. With an inward shrug, she assumes it is imagination — the ghost of last summer — and resumes her study of the stars.)

(At that moment JACOB MERCER appears on the road stage right. He is about six months older than MARY, a solidly-built, good-looking young man in a store-bought suit and brown fedora. In his right hand he holds a cardboard suitcase held together with a rope tied in a half-hitch knot. At first sight of MARY, he instinctively sets down the suitcase and removes his hat. He watches her so intently it is as though he is holding his breath... Finally, JACOB clears his throat, and MARY whirls around, startled. They stand motionless, staring at one another for a long moment)

JACOB: (finally) Hello, Mary. (Then) Aren't you even going to acknowledge me? (Pause) The least you could do is make a fist.

MARY: (beat. Quietly) It was you I heard...

JACOB: What? Just now?

MARY: I heard your voice on the road, and I said to myself, No, it couldn't be him...

JACOB: It is. (Then) Why? Who'd you 'ink it was, a spirit? The ghost of Bob Foote roaming the roads? Poor Uncle Bob in blackface out for a last howl at the moon?

MARY: That's not funny, Jacob.

JACOB: It wasn't meant to be.

MARY: Making fun of the poor old soul, and him tonight in a closed casket. It's not right.

(Slight pause)

JACOB: (crosses slowly to the porch) Don't tell me you still believes in spirits? I can hardly credit it, a young girl like you. (Nods at the house) The Right Honourable and Lady Emma must find it some odd. (He sets down the suitcase)

MARY: I don't see what's so odd about that, believing in spirits.

JACOB: Don't you?

MARY: No.

JACOB: What? Looking at the sky t'rough a spyglass and over your shoulder for ghostes? (Pronounced 'ghostus') You don't find that odd?

MARY: No. Neither do Mr. and Mrs. Dawe.

JACOB: Then Jerome must, him being a schoolteacher. He must wonder who in the world he's become engaged to.

MARY: Just because I takes an interest in the stars, Jacob, don't mean I shuts my eyes to the wonder that's around me. Now do it?

JACOB: I suppose not.

MARY: The day Father died in the Great War, Mother saw him at the foot of the bed in Hickman's Harbour. He was killed at Beaumont Hamel, more than two t'ousand miles away, yet Mother woke up to find him standing side-on to the bed, and she stared at him, she said, till he faded into the light of morning.

JACOB: I knows. I've heard you tell it.

MARY: Well then. (She turns away)

(Pause)

JACOB: Oh, look, Mary, it's a shame to get off on the wrong foot after all this time. I'm sorry I said that. It just slipped out.

MARY: What?

JACOB: That crack about old Bob looking like a bootblack. I never meant to make light. That's just me.

MARY: No odds. I don't imagine Mr. Foote minds now.

(Slight pause)

JACOB: It's bad enough that he's dead at all, but to come home looking like the ace of spades... Must be tough on Mrs. Foote.

MARY: No mistake.

JACOB: I saw the wreath on the door as I was passing, so I went inside to pay my respects. There was a crowd in the parlour, the closed casket sitting on two wooden chairs. I figured it was Mrs. Foote inside, till she walked out of the kitchen with the Right Honourable and Lady Emma. Figured old Bob was still on the Labrador along with Father and wouldn't be back till next month.

(Slight pause)

MARY: He was sitting in the bunkhouse, they said, and bent down to take off his boots. He died before he hit the floor.

(Slight pause)

JACOB: Is it true what I heard? Is it true Mrs. Foote went down to the wharf yesterday to meet the mailboat? Hoping to get a letter from Bob?

MARY: True.

JACOB: Instead there's a pine box on the deck with his body in it. And Bob in that box all packed in salt.

MARY: It's a sin.

JACOB: Takes 'ree weeks for the boat to get here. And him burnt black from that rock salt. Jesus.

(Pause)

Still, he couldn't have picked a nicer night for a wake, could he? It's some lovely.

(Pause)

It's that bright out I bet I can read the hands on my pocket watch. (He removes his watch from his vest pocket) Look at that. Ten to ten. I can pick out the maker's name, almost: Tisdall... (Winds the stem for something to do) ... Yes, maid, it's some night. Not the best time to be studying the stars, though. Not with a full moon. (Slight pause) It's hard to see the stars with the naked eye on a night like this. (Slight pause) I suppose that's why you'm using the spyglass. (Slight pause) What kind is it?

MARY: Yes, you can't wait to hear the answer, can you? Standing there with your eyes afire, drooling to hear what make of telescope.

JACOB: Don't be foolish.

MARY: Well, as if you cares what make it is, Jacob Mercer. You're just spitting out the first words that pop in your mouth.

JACOB: I wouldn't have to, Mary, if I wasn't made to feel a stranger.

MARY: Well, you *are* a stranger.

JACOB: I wasn't once.

MARY: You are now.

JACOB: Suit yourself.

(Pause)

(almost to himself) Some welcome home this is.

MARY: What did you expect, a band? A band with me at the head, clapping my hands: 'Why, it's the Prodigal Son, boys! All the way back from Toronto! Strike up the drum!'

JACOB: Now who's making fun?

MARY: You're lucky I'm still speaking to you! Some wouldn't let you step foot in the yard! (She sits on the step)

(Pause)

JACOB: All I asked just now was a simple question. There's no call to be sarcastic.

MARY: Isn't there?

JACOB: No. It don't become you. A yellow dress becomes you, Mary, more than sarcasm... Not that you don't have every right to be cross. I don't blame you, I suppose.

MARY: So you shouldn't.

JACOB: No. You have every right to carry a grudge. Every right in the world. I'm the first to admit it. Besides...

MARY: Besides what?

JACOB: Besides, I already knows the make of spyglass. It's called a Black Beauty. We have one at the house. Father got it from a Sears-Roebuck catalogue back in 1902. Ours has a cracked lens.

MARY: Oh, you t'ink you're some smart, don't you? Well, you're not, Jacob Mercer. And you're not one bit funny, either.

JACOB: That's not what you used to say.

MARY: I'm learning all about the stars now. That's more than I ever learned with you. I can see the satellites of Jupiter with this telescope, and the mountains of the moon.

JACOB: Imagine that. Imagine that cold white eye up there with mountains in it.

MARY: The moon has more than mountains. The moon has valleys and seas and bays. All as dry as a biscuit, Jerome says. All with beautiful names.

JACOB: Such as?

MARY: Ocean of Storms, for one. Sea of Rains. Bay of Rainbows. Lake of Dreams.

JACOB: That's the only water Jerome McKenzie could sail without getting his socks wet, the Lake of Dreams.

MARY: Don't you start in on Jerome, either. He knows a lot more than you gives him credit for.

JACOB: A year ago you wouldn't have said that. A year ago you had your own notions about the moon. Remember that?

MARY: No.

JACOB: You don't recall saying the Man in the Moon was set there for not obeying the Sabbath? He wasn't good enough for Heaven, you said, so God set him betwixt Heaven and Earth. You don't recall saying that?

MARY: No.

JACOB: Sure you do. I had a toothache that night, and we walked to Clarke's Beach so's Billy Parsons could charm my tooth. 'Don't pay him,' Mother said. 'Mind now. And don't t'ank him, either, or the charm won't work.' Oh, that was some night.

MARY: I don't recall.

JACOB: You don't seem to recall very much, suddenly, and you with a memory on you like a camera.

MARY: (rises) Well, perhaps it suits me *not* to remember. As if you're any different. You remembers only what you wants to remember, Jacob, and the rest you forgets. (Starts up the steps)

JACOB: Like what?

MARY: Like what? (Turns to face him) Like running off last August, that's what! Or has that suddenly slipped your mind?

(JACOB says nothing)

Didn't have the courage to say goodbye, did you? Not so much as a card in the past year!

JACOB: I'm no good with cards...

MARY: You wrote your mother.

JACOB: Once.

MARY: Twice.

JACOB: Twice then.

MARY: I saw her at church that Sunday just before we went back to St. John's in the fall. She told me you was boarding with Sam and Lucy Boone on Oakwood Avenue. Working for the Fairbanks Block and Supplies.

JACOB: Yes. Making concrete blocks.

MARY: A whole year you've been gone, boy, and now you just walks in off the road. Steps off the nine o'clock train in Bay Roberts and expects me to recall some old night when Billy Parsons charmed your tooth. Are you forgetting I'm spoken for?

JACOB: I'm not forgetting.

MARY: Then you haven't changed one bit, have you? Still the same, in spite of your fancy hat! Still the schemer!

(Pause)

JACOB: It wasn't just some old night, and you knows it. A lot happened that night besides my toothache.

MARY: A lot's happened since.

JACOB: I suppose.

MARY: Too much.

JACOB: Perhaps.

MARY: Then don't keep dragging up what's best forgotten. Leave it buried.

JACOB: Can't be done, Mary. Nights like this brings it all back... The smell of honeysuckle on the road. The new moon that night like a smile over the Birch Hills. A smile that became a grin. Remember that?

MARY: Yes, a lot you noticed the moon.

JACOB: Indeed I did.

MARY: You hardly gave it a second glance. Stumbling along the road to Clarke's Beach, your hand tight to your jaw. Whimpering like an old woman.

JACOB: I don't recall.

MARY: No, you wouldn't.

JACOB: You wasn't much comfort, if it comes to that. Harping on spruce gum every inch of the way.

MARY: I mentioned it once.

JACOB: Once?

MARY: Once. 'Why don't we get some spruce gum?' I said. 'That'd kill the pain.'

JACOB: And where in the name of Christ would we find a black spruce in the dark of night? That's like telling a drowning man to head for shore.

MARY: Oh, go on with you.

JACOB: Spruce gum. My Jesus.

MARY: Lucky for you we made it to Clarke's Beach. 'Shoot me, Mary! Put me out of my anguish!'

JACOB: I never said that, now.

MARY: Then strutting in to Billy's like you was dropping in for tea. White with pain but still with a grin. Snapping your braces with the same hand you'd just been gripping your jaw with all the ways from Coley's Point. (Pronounced Cōley's)

JACOB: I don't want to argue with you, Mary. I never come all this way to fight.

MARY: 'Oh, by the way, Billy. I almost forgot to mention. I have a pain in my tooth.'

JACOB: Drop it, I said.

MARY: It's all coming back now.

JACOB: He put his finger on my tooth, Billy did, and prayed, and seconds later the pain left. That's it.

MARY: 'Sorry to trouble you, Billy. Next time I'll just get spruce gum.'

JACOB: Once you gets going, you can't stop, can you? No mistake.

MARY: I'll never forget the walk home, either. How often you stopped to admire the sky. How often you stopped to tie your laces.

JACOB: It worked, didn't it?

MARY: Yes, it worked. By the time we got back the Dawes had locked me out. Just as you planned.

JACOB: We spent the night up on Jenny's Hill, the two of us. And the rest, as the preacher said, is history.

MARY: Yes. (Beat) Ancient history.

(Slight pause)

Besides, the Dawes don't lock me out now: I'm older. I'm seventeen now and more responsible.

JACOB: And just as superstitious, in spite of Jerome. Old Bob Foote was the same. He wouldn't go in the woods without a scrap of bread tied up in a red hanky to ward off the fairies. Christmas Eve he was too scared to go nigh the barn. Claimed the horses got down on their knees to pray.

MARY: Scoff all you wants to, boy. I'd like to see you walk past the graveyard alone on a dark night, without whistling.

JACOB: Oh, don't be foolish. There's not'ing to be frightened of. Unless it's one of the boys up to his mischief. Like the time Bob Foote got the scare of his life, the poor soul.

MARY: Why? What happened?

JACOB: Didn't you hear? He was walking past the Church of England this night, old Bob was, and one of the boys — I t'ink it was Wiff Roach — was got up in a red sheet and a pair of cow horns. And just as Bob got abreast of the graveyard, out pops Wiff from behind a tombstone.

MARY: Oh, my God.

JACOB: That's not the best part. Old Bob is whistling along past the church, walking on the balls of his feet, like someone trying to tiptoe t'rough life, a finbone of a haddock in his vest pocket...when all of a sudden he sees this big shadow 'cause Wiff has his back to the moon. The shadow drops down over Bob Foote like the wings of the Angel of Death, and he gives a shriek and spins around. And there's Wiff with his arms out wide and he growls at old Bob, 'Bob Foote,' he says, 'I'm the Devil, my son, and I've come to get you!'

MARY: Oh, what a sin.

JACOB: And Bob sings out at the top of his voice, — (Drops to his knees and clutches his hands in a gesture of entreaty) — 'Don't harm me, Devil, for the love of Christ! I'm married to your *sister!*'

(MARY laughs, in spite of herself. JACOB laughs along with her)

MARY: (finally) Oh, you. You almost had me believing. Well, you just wait. Some dark night you'll be walking home alone and it won't be Wiff Roach you hears behind you. I wouldn't make fun, if I was you.

JACOB: Go on with you.

MARY: Just you wait.

JACOB: That's all old foolishness.

MARY: It is, is it?

JACOB: Old wives' tales.

MARY: What if I told you I saw a Jackie Lantern this summer? What would you say to that?

JACOB: Now, Mary.

MARY: I did.

JACOB: A Jackie Lantern? One of those lights that's supposed to come after dark and carry off bad little girls and boys?

MARY: My mother saw it, too. The both of us.

JACOB: What? You've been to see her?

MARY: Just after we arrived here this summer. Mrs. Dawe let me go home for a week. I took the train to Clarendville and the boat to Random Island. All by myself.

JACOB: I don't suppose she recognized you?

MARY: I didn't expect her to. I was only nine years old the last time I saw her. That still bothers her, I can tell, that she had to put Dot in a Home and me into service. But what could she do? When Father was killed, she'd slip into those queer moods that still haven't left her. Moods that last for weeks on end, staring at the floor, forgetting to comb her hair... Anyway, I went to Hickman's Harbour like I said, and we was sitting out on the porch one night, when along comes this ball of light. It floated up from the shore and bobbed straight for the churchyard.

JACOB: A ball of light?

MARY: Yes. I've never seen the like of it. It was as bright as any star in the sky tonight.

JACOB: Was it blue?

MARY: Yes...

JACOB: That figures. I saw a light like that once. My first and last summer on the Labrador. The Skipper called it St. Elmo's fire.

MARY: Are you making this up?

JACOB: (hand on heart) The God's truth.

MARY: All right then.

JACOB: I was ten years old. Father was still fighting in France, so I was the head of the family. I marched down to Will McKenzie's store and signed on. Jerome was helping out. He gave me my crop: my oilskins and rubber boots, and salt beef and sugar for Mother. I made twenty-four dollars for six months, and that was fishing from sunrise to starlight, and out of that come twelve dollars for the cost of my crop. I never went at it again, I can tell you.

MARY: What about the blue light, Jacob?

JACOB: I'm getting to it... The men have a custom, Mary, if it's your first time across the Strait of Belle Isle. One of the men gets all dolled up like Neptune. Up he climbs over the bowsprit, the God of the Sea, with a razor in his hand and a bucket of tar.

MARY: What's that for? The razor and tar?

JACOB: That was *my* first question.

MARY: Was there an answer?

JACOB: I soon found out. They held me down on the deck, the men did, whilst Neptune shaved off all my hair and tarred my face.

MARY: Now that's one sight I would've paid to see. You must have looked some fright.

JACOB: Blacker than Mr. Foote looks now in the last night of his wake... I sat apart on the deck that night, away from the other men. Too ashamed to be seen... That's when I saw your light, Mary. It was perched atop the mizzenmast. A ball of light, just pulsing away.

MARY: (relishing the comparison, almost tasting it on her tongue) Like a blue star.

JACOB: (beat) Like a what?...

MARY: You heard me. Like a blue star.

JACOB: Go on with you. Stars aren't blue.

MARY: Some are. Some are blue, some are red, some are yellow. There's a blue star in the sky this very minute. The fourth brightest star in the summer sky.

JACOB: Is that a fact?

MARY: Indeed it is. I've seen it myself. It's in the Constellation of the Harp.

JACOB: The Constellation of the Harp?

MARY: Yes, the Constellation of the Harp. So there.

JACOB: Show it to me then.

MARY: No, you're just making fun of me. Besides, I've wasted enough of my time. I've got t'ings to do.

JACOB: Like what?

MARY: Like what?

JACOB: Yes, like what?

MARY: Lots of t'ings.

JACOB: Name one.

MARY: Well, like...like that suit of Mr. Dawe's. He wants it pressed for the funeral tomorrow. He's one of the pallbearers.

JACOB: Yes, I suppose that wouldn't look right, would it, for the Right Honourable Henry Dawe, Member of Parliament, to look less than his best? Not with the Orange band leading the hearse and all hands in back stepping to the beat of the Death March. No, that wouldn't

look right. Him in his black crepe armband and white gloves and a suit he might've slept in.

MARY: That's right.

JACOB: (beat. Smiles) Look, why don't you just show me the blue star and then I'll be on my way? It'll only take a minute.

MARY: Will you promise to go, if I shows it to you?

JACOB: I promise. Word of honour.

MARY: All right then, I'll show you the blue star. But only because you don't believe me. I wants to see you choke on your own smirk... (She walks away and turns to face him) First off, you have to know where the Big Dipper's at.

JACOB: The Big Dipper? Sure, any fool knows where that's to.

MARY: Where?

JACOB: (points) Right there. Right over Spaniard's Bay. And up above it's the Little Dipper pouring into it.

MARY: Come here then, and I'll show you the blue star...

(JACOB gets behind her, close)

MARY: Now pay attention. I'll tell it the way Jerome does, so you'll always find it yourself in future. You watching?

JACOB: Oh, I'm all eyes, Mary. (He breathes in the fragrance of her hair as though bending before a bouquet of wildflowers) All eyes, ears, and nose.

MARY: (disturbed by his closeness) All right, now. First off... First off, keep your eye on the Big Dipper. That's where we starts from. Now you see those...those...

JACOB: Those what?

MARY: (takes a step away) Those two stars that makes up the left side of the bowl? Those two?

JACOB: (edging closer) Which two?

MARY: (impatiently) Those two!... (Although she remains facing away, she is acutely aware of his closeness) Now pretend your finger is a pencil. What you does is you runs a line between those two stars, like this, and you... (She swallows hard)

JACOB: You what?

MARY: You keeps on going and runs the line straight up like this, up and up and up...

JACOB: Up and up and up...

MARY: Yes, until you're at the Constellation of the Harp. That's those six stars right there. See? One, two, t'ree, four, five, six...

JACOB: Don't look much like a harp to me.

MARY: No odds. That's its name. The Constellation of Lyra. L-y-r-a. That means harp in a dead language.

JACOB: (beat) What's that you sprinkled on yourself tonight? Smells as nice as fresh bread. What is it, vanilla?

MARY: (turns on him) All right, that's it for you, boy! That's it!

JACOB: What?...

MARY: I'm not wasting my time a second longer! Remain ignorant all your life! See if I cares!

JACOB: I was paying attention, sure.

MARY: Indeed you wasn't!

JACOB: Indeed I was.

MARY: What did I do then? Show me.

JACOB: All right, I will.

MARY: And just the way I told it, mind.

JACOB: Word for word... You took your finger like a stick of pencil and you drew a line betwixt those two stars there, and you kept on a line as straight as a plumb up to the crown of the sky, till you struck the Constellation of Lyra, which means harp in Greek.

MARY: Latin.

JACOB: (his finger raised straight overhead) All right, Mary, what now? I can't stand here all night, reading the sky like Braille. What's next?

MARY: That's it boy. That's Vega you're pointing at.

JACOB: Vega?

MARY: The blue star! Look! (She thrusts the telescope at him) See for yourself!

(JACOB takes the telescope and aims it at the star. While he has the telescope to his eye, MARY studies him secretly)

JACOB: Well, I'll be...! It is so blue. Look at that. Almost as blue as St. Elmo's fire... (He turns to MARY — slyly) Where did you say the red star was?

MARY: Never you mind where the red star's to. Next it'll be the yellow one. Find it with your naked eye, I'm going inside.

(MARY reaches for the telescope but JACOB backs away)

Give me that!

JACOB: No. Not till you shows me a red and yellow star.

MARY: The yellow one's the sun! See it in the morning. Now give me the telescope!

JACOB: Anger don't become you, Mary, any more than sarcasm. Makes your knuckles white and scrunches up your face.

MARY: You promised, Jacob!

JACOB: I promised I'd go; I never said when.

MARY: (beat) All right, there's a red star in the Little Dipper, if it's that important to you. Hurry up and look.

(With deliberate slowness JACOB trains the telescope on the sky)

JACOB: So there is, Mary. A red star in the corner of the bowl... Like the Devil had one eye and was staring down at me. Winking.

MARY: No mistake.

JACOB: The way he prob'ly winked that night on Jenny's Hill, though neither one of us noticed. Did you ever tell Jerome about that night?

MARY: He knows all there is to know.

JACOB: All?

MARY: Yes, I told him everyt'ing.

JACOB: That you didn't.

MARY: Not that there was much to tell.

JACOB: That's more like it.

MARY: Well, there wasn't.

JACOB: Keep saying that, Mary, you might convince yourself. I doubt it would take much to persuade him otherwise. All his life long, Jerome, he'll be scratching his head and pondering: 'Did she? Or didn't she?'

MARY: Listen, I wants you out of this yard, and right away. I don't want you here when Jerome gets back. Is that understood?

JACOB: Now that's odd. First you tells me you have to get in soon and put on the flat-iron for that black serge suit of the Right Honourable's. Then the truth slips out, don't it? Just as smooth as the lie you told.

MARY: It's none of your business, one way or the other. I don't have to answer to you now. So go on!

JACOB: I wondered why you had on your good dress tonight, with a touch of red on your cheeks. What's that from? Still using the red paper inside the lid of a Cocoa tin?

MARY: What odds if I am?

JACOB: All dolled up for Jerome McKenzie, is that it? You and the moon just waiting for the Cock of the Rock to pull up in his Touring car?

MARY: That's right. What of it?

JACOB: What'll you do then, the two of you? Sit here a spell and gaze at the sky?

MARY: We might.

JACOB: (imitating JEROME, an earnest and studious young man) 'The distance betwixt the earth and moon, Mary, is...oh, let's see...one hundred t'ousand miles, give or take an eighth of an inch.'

MARY: It's a quarter of a million miles, stupid, and he don't speak like you.

JACOB: My God, Jerome has some fund of useless knowledge, don't he? Teaches Grade Eleven in that t'ree-room schoolhouse, but give him a fishknife, he'd slit his own t'roat.

MARY: Why should he be cleaning fish? He's a schoolteacher, and a good one. He knows a lot more than you'll ever know.

JACOB: Is that a fact?

MARY: Yes, it's a fact.

JACOB: Well, ask him what happened on the morning of July 1, 1916 and see how much he knows.

MARY: Any schoolchild in Newfoundland knows what happened on July 1, 1916.

JACOB: Oh, no doubt he could tell you the entire Newfoundland Regiment was wiped out at the village of Beaumont Hamel in the first battle of the Somme. Out of seven hundred and fifty men, only forty not dead or wounded. That he might know. But could he tell you what the weather was like that Saturday morning? How the sun rose on a lovely summer day, with a mist on the valley floor, and poppies in scarlet patches, and clouds making shadows that raced over the

green fields of Picardy? Could he tell you that? How one regiment after another was wiped out — the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, the Border Regiment, the Essex. And then it came the Newfoundlanders' turn. Colonel Hadow walked twenty yards forward and gave the signal. The Captain blew the whistle, and the men went over the top, heading straight into the German cross-fire, knowing they was walking alone t'rough the long grass of No Man's Land into certain death. Not a single man flinched or looked back, just kept on walking in perfect drill formation, the sun glinting off their bayonets. Could he tell you what all the observers noticed that day as the Newfoundland Regiment walked into the storm of machine-gun bullets and mortar shells: how all the soldiers to a man tucked their chins into their forward shoulders like sailors leaning into a gale of wind? Could he tell you that?...

(MARY says nothing)

...No, and that he couldn't. 'Cause his own father wasn't there to tell him the real story, was he?

MARY: All the men couldn't enlist, could they?

JACOB: My father volunteered, didn't he, goddammit? And so did yours. Only yours is buried today under the bronze statue of a caribou in the fields of France.

MARY: Father enlisted for the same reason yours did. Will McKenzie wasn't in that position.

JACOB: No, he didn't need the dollar a day they paid. The same wage as the Canadian privates. More money than he'd ever made in his life, Father. More money than he could make at fishing, especially when he went into collar to a merchant like Will McKenzie. That's a term I bet Jerome never explained to you, in collar. He's prob'bly too busy pulling on his oars in the Lake of Dreams to explain the real world.

MARY: I knows what it means, in collar.

JACOB: What?

MARY: It means to sign aboard a fishing schooner. The fishermen go into collar the first of May and come out of collar the end of October when the schooner is moored for the winter.

JACOB: Yes. 'The first of May is Collar Day/
When you're shipped you must obey.'

MARY: If your father had been a shareman, Jacob, he would've come out of collar as soon as the voyage was over last summer, as soon as he tidied up his traps. No odds if they did come home early.

JACOB: But he wasn't a shareman, was he? He only shipped out for wages. Which meant that Will McKenzie had him in collar for another two months and could do what he liked with him!

MARY: (beat) All right, but what you're feeling right now, Jacob, has only to do with that, what Will McKenzie did to your father last summer. There's no need to take it out on his son.

JACOB: Even Mrs. McKenzie did more for the war effort than her husband. At least she knitted socks for the Women's Patriotic Association.

MARY: Most of the women did, sure.

JACOB: Yes, and all Will McKenzie could do was wait for a brave man to march home so's he could whittle him down to size seven years later. The same man who was part of the famous Blue Puttees, same as your own father. The same man who crawled t'rough the trenches at Gallipoli in 1915 in his tropical fit-out, twenty-seven days on the firing line without taking off a stitch or having a wash. The same man who endured the November storm they called the worst in forty years, with two hundred men swept away in the flooded trenches or frozen to death when the rains stopped and the killing frost set in. Rubbing their feet with whale oil and stuffing 'em into sandbags filled with straw... He'd sit in the mud at Suvla Plain and try to eat a piece of bread and jam, and the flies that t'ick the bread would be black before he could get it to his mouth — the same flies that bred in the corpses in No Man's Land...

(MARY winces, and turns away)

...He still wakes up in a sweat, Mother says. Rats are crawling over him, the way they done in the trenches in France. Rats bigger than cats snapping at his boots and stepping over his face in the dark, their whiskers tickling his ears... But the worst of the dreams always start the same way: with the women in black ploughing the fields, no more than the fling of a stone from that tiny French village, July 1, 1916. The day he faced the German guns and lived, lying wounded in No Man's Land, with that tin triangle of the 29th Division on his back — a piece of metal cut from a biscuit tin and painted red. He couldn't move an inch or the tin would glint in the sun and the snipers would pick him off. So he lay there under that blazing sun of July till dark came, pressing his pain into the bloodied earth beneath him. One of the men the Germans called the 'White Savages'. And this is the same man, Mary, that was under the t'umb of Jerome's father last summer and had to do what he was told, the law being the law, Military Medal or no! (He has to turn away to hide the rage that makes him want to smash the moon from the sky)

(Pause)

JOHN MURRELL

FARTHER WEST

Information on rights

Foreign rights to FARTHER WEST are controlled by the author, who can be reached through:

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Murrell is also recognized as a major translator/adaptor of foreign language classics into English; he has adapted Chekhov's Uncle Vanya and The Seagull, Ibsen's Master Builder, Machiavelli's Mandragola, and Sardou's Divorcons.

Murrell has recently completed his second year as head of the Banff Playwrights Colony and is currently working on two new plays, OCTOBER and THE WOMAN FROM THE TOWER.

BIOGRAPHY

Internationally acclaimed playwright John Murrell is from Calgary, where, as a teacher in public schools, he first began writing plays as exercises for his students. He is probably best-known for his plays MEMOIR and WAITING FOR THE PARADE. MEMOIR has been translated into more than 15 languages and has been performed in over 25 countries worldwide, including a successful three-year run at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre in Paris. WAITING FOR THE PARADE is one of the most frequently produced Canadian plays. It has been produced around the world, from the historic Lyric Theatre in London, England, to the State Theatre in Pretoria, South Africa, and has been heard on CBC radio and seen on CBC television.

Murrell's FARTHER WEST was produced by Theatre Calgary in 1982 and by Toronto's Tarragon Theatre in 1986. NEW WORLD, Murrell's most recent work, was co-produced by Toronto's CentreStage and the National Arts Centre in Ottawa in 1985.

AN INTRODUCTION

These two extraordinary plays by John Murrell take very different journeys but they arrive at the same place — literally, the shores of the Pacific Ocean: English Bay in *FARTHER WEST* and China Beach in *NEW WORLD*. They are both edge-of-the-continent plays, and their shared impulse is toward some world beyond the frontier. This sense of personality and destiny lived out on the *edge* provides the plays with their intensity and urgency. John Murrell's characters don't give themselves too many chances; they insist upon acting out the full implications of the instant.

These plays which end at the same place have very different origins. *FARTHER WEST* (first produced in 1982 and substantially revised in 1985: it is the new version which is printed here) began with a newspaper clipping describing an actual *crime passionnel* in which a Calgary prostitute, May Buchanan, and her lover barricaded themselves in a hotel-room and murdered one another. This was the fact from which *FARTHER WEST* grew, and grew away, but the real beginnings of the play, in my opinion, go back to the late 1970s, when John Murrell was commissioned by the Stratford Festival to write a play called *Parma*. This work was to be a wholly free and independent adaptation of the plot of John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, and as John Murrell and I discussed the work at length over several months, it was clear that he was eager to explore in epic terms the widest possible range of sensual experience and erotic obsession, and how these

crack apart a social order. As it turned out, *Parma* remained unfinished Stratford Festival business, but the playwright's fixation with the themes of sex and freedom was clearly transported into another epic play, which became *FARTHER WEST*. The Canadian West in the last decades of the nineteenth century is worlds away from an Italian Renaissance court, just as the erotic identity of a woman in her prime is worlds away from the sexuality of adolescent siblings, but the white heat of desire that Murrell wanted to capture survived the transition between these worlds. And survived *blazing*.

FARTHER WEST spans six years, 1886 to 1892, and travels from Rat Portage (now Kenora), Ontario, via the Northwest Territories, to British Columbia. On the other hand, *NEW WORLD* (first produced in 1985) covers only twelve hours and never moves out of sight of China Beach. It is also the first of John Murrell's mature works to be set in the present. The play unfolds and flowers as an elegant, witty comedy, energized by its anger and burnished by its melancholy. The play's siblings — two brothers and a sister, all British-born but having spent their adult lives in different countries — find themselves dragged kicking and screaming into a middle age of warring illusions and delusions. Murrell is a great chronicler, in *NEW WORLD* as in earlier plays, of the perils of maturity. For just as May Buchanan in *FARTHER WEST* eloquently demands the right to a continuing search for discovery, the three Rennies in *NEW WORLD*, Bob and Bet and Larry, find themselves at the gate of self-discovery and must decide,

gingerly and not without panic, whether to pass through. The origins of this work, I believe, come from the playwright's deep affection for and familiarity with the plays of Anton Chekhov. For the Stratford Festival, Murrell wrote new versions of both *Uncle Vanya* and *The Seagull*, which released his affinity for the subtle rhythms, emotional convolutions and beautifully nuanced tone which link *NEW WORLD* and its Russian predecessors (not forgetting, too, another spinoff, Bernard Shaw's Chekhovian *Heartbreak House*, also an apocalyptic vision filled with brilliant invention and mordant wit).

Two plays, then, which seem so different, and yet two plays which also seem to belong together. In practical terms, of course, both were shaped and realized by the same remarkable director, Robin Phillips. Both plays, too, contain roles specifically written for that most astonishing actor, Martha Henry, whose Cleopatra-like infinite variety would be a miraculous and daunting inspiration for any playwright. (Put the passionate will and fire of May Buchanan beside the nervy drive and wit of Carla Rennie and you will have some small glimmering of this great actor's range of possibilities, and also of this playwright's subtle response to it.)

Both plays are also profoundly informed with John Murrell's passion for music, and, in particular, for opera. To call both plays 'operatic' might be to invite the derision and condescension of those who won't understand and don't love opera. Murrell, however, does know and does understand, and he pours that

sensibility into his writing. Both plays contain references to, and fragments from, opera, and both plays have sequences conceived and organized in operatic terms: *FARTHER WEST*, for instance, has at least two specifically defined quartets (the laundry scene in Act I, the May-Violet-Hanks-Shepherd scene in Act II), and *NEW WORLD* contains some splendid trios and duets, as well as a Papageno/Papagena pairing in Peter and Linda. The rapturous final scene in *NEW WORLD*, filled with music cues, is a culmination of melodic themes, just as *FARTHER WEST* has, woven through it, two songs which are modulated like *leit-motifs*. The music in John Murrell's plays — his 'operatic' style, if you will — suggests a more intensified plane of emotion and experience. Opera itself presents a heightening of feeling which, at one and the same time, is taken to the level of the abstract, of pure emotion, and still kept absolutely human because the instrument is the most personal of them all, the voice. So, too, John Murrell's lyric theatre, which is anticipated and supported by the incidence of music itself in his plays, presents both a *stylistic* search for an intensified verbal expression and a *thematic* search for a higher plane of personal existence. His use of music is central and elemental, just like the recurring images of the sea and the sun in both plays (images which also link them to his earlier play *Memoir*). Murrell's texts are filled with naturalistic detail, the sounds of dogs and birds, but as in Chekhov, these sounds are not part of a realistic background but a poetically arranged orchestration complementing the words. Murrell's

music offers a similar counterpoint. Indeed, the meaning of FARTHER WEST cannot really be grasped without a study of its music (both words and music written by the playwright) and how it serves to contrast and support the text, expressing an underlying world of yearning and innocence beneath a violent physical reality.

The plays belong together, too, simply because they seem to be about so many of the same subjects. They show John Murrell's deep-rooted and moving concerns about friendship and family, seen both in the gallant camaraderie of May Buchanan's invented, improvised family, and the shifting, binding disparities within the Rennies' blood ties. They both present societies in which characters who are seen as 'outsiders' – Violet and Carla and even Bet – make their way with courage, crackling wit and bravura. They bring together characters from many different backgrounds – the Canadians, the Americans and those with mysteriously mixed bloods in FARTHER WEST, the British, the Americans and the Canadians, both English and French, in NEW WORLD – onto the arena of the new west to test themselves against a landscape which offers them everything and nothing. The plays show us worlds exploding; the glass ball in NEW WORLD is an objectification of the way that May Buchanan's world shatters into pieces and cannot be repaired. Both FARTHER WEST and NEW WORLD celebrate risk and obsession, which is what makes them so complementary, so Canadian, and, as is my belief, so autobiographical. These are plays, above all else, of self-definition.

John Murrell thrusts us into the world of those who push themselves to the edges of continents both geographic and emotional, and who, on that brink, discover the wild, and perhaps demented, exhilaration of willingly, wilfully straddling absolute annihilation and total freedom.

Urjo Kareda

REVIEWS

"A work of genuine dramatic power, reflecting Murrell's customary feel for evocative language and the whispering subtleties of behaviour."

Jamie Portman, Southam News

"Murrell transforms the tawdry into something deeply humorous and truly mythic."

Ray Conlogue, The Globe and Mail

"One of the most striking qualities of Murrell's dramatic landscape is his emphasis on women as creators of their own rules and environments."

Martin Knelman, Saturday Night

Characters (in order of appearance):

MAY BUCHANAN
 A MAN IN BED WITH HER
 VIOLET DECARMIN
 SEWARD
 NETTIE MCDOWELL
 BABCOCK
 LILY REEVES
 ROSS
 THOMAS SHEPHERD
 RAGLAN
 HANKS

The action takes place in Ontario, British Columbia, and in the North West Territories of Canada, between the years 1886 and 1892.

Rat Portage, Ontario. Summer, 1886. Afternoon.

A narrow bed. MAY, in her early thirties, is lying there with a much older man. She is naked. He wears dirty woolen drawers and an undershirt. He is very still, on his stomach, his eyes closed, one arm wrapped around MAY.

Music: the first act tune, 'Dear Maisie,' played on harmonica, concertina, or piano. (See Music Appendix)

MAY: Next? Next was rich old Mister Leslie, who called me his 'little ray of sunshine.' Because I made his 'posy grow.'
 [*She laughs.*]
 I was fourteen years old. Next? A German boy from Berlin, Ontario. Had shoulders like a gallows-tree, that wide! Held his big hand over my mouth, from start to finish. Afraid I might scream. I wouldn't have. Next? A drill-master from the military academy over in Hull. He whispered his commands into my ear, and I whispered back, 'Yes, sir!' Because that excited him. Next? Well, I took up with a druggist from across the back lane. Because I was scared I'd caught something, and figured he might cure me of it. Turned out I was just getting older, getting to be a woman. He couldn't cure me of that. Next? ... Well, one day my old dad comes into my room. I'm lying there – just exactly as I'm lying here right now – being cuddled by this fellow who sharpens scissors and carts off trash, I think his name was Callaghan. My old dad just stares at me for the longest time. Doesn't gnash his teeth nor tear his hair, like they do in story books. And Christ knows, there's no tears that well up in his aged eyes! Callaghan? He sleeps through the whole thing, of course. And I – I stare right back, straight at my

old dad. Don't whimper nor run howling down the hall. Christ knows, I don't fall at his feet to ask forgiveness!

[As she continues, MAY will slowly unwrap the MAN's arm from her waist, get out of bed, and get fully dressed, including stockings, shoes, coat and hat. The MAN stirs slightly, but his eyes remain closed.]

Finally my old dad says: 'You can't carry on like this, May. Not in my house. Not anymore! You better move on, girl, better start moving farther west! You travel far enough west,' he says, 'maybe you'll find some Godforsaken place where there's no rules – no laws, no judges. But you mustn't go just to the Red River,' my old dad says. 'You have to go much farther than that! No, not just to the Rocky Mountains or the far Pacific! Not just to China either,' my old dad says. 'China's hardly the start of your journey! Even in China they got such things as manners. Morals! They got certain prescriptions for female behaviour! I tell you what, girl,' he says, 'you'll know you've wandered far enough, when you can knock a man down, right in the street, and climb on top of him – or he can knock you down, climb on top of you – and the children walk past, and the wagons roll past – and even the stray dogs don't stop nor turn round for a second look at your contaminating presence! Get packed, now, May, and move on!' He points out the window, towards the Methodist Church steeple. 'That way's west,' he says. So I crawl out from under Callaghan. I get myself dressed, I get myself packed. I look at my old dad, for the last time. And I say, 'I can't figure out why everybody around here thinks you're a halfwit, Dad. I thank you for your wise and honest advice. At last I got some direction in life!' And I walk right out. I look around for that steeple. And I move on! ... Callaghan slept on for hours maybe, there in my bed. He always slept like the dead afterwards. Well, most of you are like that!

[She is nearly dressed by now. She looks down at the MAN in the bed.]

So? Is that what you wanted to hear? Ready for the next exciting chapter? Want to know what happened to me – right here in Rat Portage – just this morning?

[She prods him with a finger or a foot. He grunts, smiles. Maybe he rolls over, but doesn't open his eyes more than halfway. As MAY completes her story, she finishes dressing, takes a small suitcase from underneath the bed. She locates a few articles of clothing among the bedclothes, and throws them into the suitcase. The MAN's eyes soon close again.]

Just this morning – right here – down at the dry goods store, I knew my time had come! I was looking at some stuff which they call velvet – which isn't velvet at all. Figuring how many

yards of it I could get with two dollars in silver. All of a sudden, this little mongrel pup runs right up under my skirts! The little shop clerk's little mongrel pup! Well, there I was! Dancing around on six legs, giggling like an idiot child! The little shop clerk, he says, 'You know, I was going to drown that mutt! Thought he was useless! Now I see he's got a nose for game! A born hunter!!' And he laughs like an idiot too! And I'm laughing harder than ever! But then – he stops laughing, the little clerk. And I stop laughing too. I turn around and follow his eyes – to this woman – who's staring at us! She passes through about fifty shades of red, curls her lip up! And she trots right out of that shop, fast as she can! But she stops in the doorway, turns back, and gives me – a look! Like an animal forced to look at the mess it's made! Like maybe I'd knocked that little shop clerk down and climbed right up on top of him! And all we'd done was have a good laugh!! So – I knew it was my time to start moving again. Christ knows, this isn't China! Nowhere near! And, like my old dad says, China's hardly even the start for me! See what I mean?

[She prods the MAN again. He utters a long satisfied sigh and begins to snore softly. MAY finishes packing and snaps the suitcase shut, singing:]

'He said to me, on our first night,
He said to me, "I love you!"
He said to me, "Your eyes are bright,
Bright, bright as the stars above you!"'

[All dressed and packed, she looks down at the sleeping MAN for the last time:]

Thanks so much. I knew you'd be understanding – though plainly broken-hearted! Well, most of you are like that.

[She smiles, then picks up her suitcase and goes out, singing:] 'Sing

doodle-oodle-oodle-doo,

Sing oodle-doodle-daisy!

Sing doodle-oodle-oodle-doo,

What happened next, dear Maisie?!

[She is gone. Her voice fades. Music for the scene change: the first act tune, played by harmonica, concertina and/or piano.]

Calgary, North West Territories. Spring, 1888. Morning.

Atlantic Avenue, muddy and dusty at the same time. MAY comes in with her suitcase. She wears some of the same clothes, but much more soiled and worn now. A dog barks, off. MAY stops, takes out a handkerchief, wipes her face and hands.

MAY: [Sings softly to herself] 'He said to me, "Your skin is pink,
Your cheeks are satin roses!"
He said to me, and gave a wink,
"Lass, let's at least rub noses!"
Sing doodle-oodle-oodle-doo,
Sing oodle —"
[She looks up and stops singing as VIOLET comes in, staggering along the wooden sidewalk. She is no longer young. Her complexion suggests French-Canadian or Métis, but her accent is of no fixed origin.]

VIOLET: Mother of Christ!!
[She is followed by SEWARD, who pushes her, prods her along the sidewalk. About the same age as MAY, he is dressed all in dark blue; a dark blue cap with some sort of badge on it.]

SEWARD: You have somewhere to go? Woman?!

VIOLET: Mother of Christ!
[They don't see MAY at first.]

SEWARD: Watch your language! This is a public thoroughfare!

VIOLET: Mother of God!

SEWARD: A regular woman wouldn't even know such language, much less use it! You have somewhere to go?!

VIOLET: Of course! Certainly! I can always go home!

SEWARD: You mean Room Six, over at the Central?

VIOLET: *[Shakes her head 'no']* Seattle! My mother'll take me in. She's still quite a young woman herself!

SEWARD: I thought you came from back East somewhere.

VIOLET: *[Laughs]* Who told you that?

SEWARD: You did! Last time I hauled you in! Walk, woman, walk!!
[He shoves her.]

VIOLET: I am walking!!

SEWARD: What's wrong? Can't earn your keep anymore? Did they throw you out?

- VIOLET: I earn a better wage than you, Constable! And there's nobody at the Central sober enough to throw me out!
- SEWARD: Walk then! [*He shoves her.*] Walk!!
- VIOLET: Mother of Christ —!
 [*They see MAY. VIOLET staggers up against a post, tries to pull herself together. SEWARD and MAY hold a long, a very long, look. She smiles and sings, softly, slowly:*]
- MAY: 'Sing doodle-oodle-oodle-doo —
 Sing oodle-doodle-daisy! —'
 [*SEWARD grunts, turns on his heel, and goes out quickly, dusting off his sleeves, then his cap. VIOLET stares at MAY, who continues watching SEWARD, off, singing:*]
 'Sing doodle-oodle-oodle-doo,
 What happened next, dear Maisie?'
 [*Without taking her eyes off SEWARD, who has disappeared, she speaks in VIOLET's direction:*]
 He's a beauty!
- VIOLET: Constable Seward? Isn't he just?!
 [*She moves to MAY.*]
 Thinks he's God, or the Prince of Wales, or somebody! He acts like he knows you. You must've run into Seward some place before?
- MAY: Oh yes. I run into Constable Seward everywhere. Practically everywhere I ever was. From the very first.
- VIOLET: You're not from around here, are you? How's my colour look? Awful?
- MAY: Mm. How long since you put it on? [*She puts down her suitcase, sits on the edge of it.*]
- VIOLET: Oh, you can't get the really good stuff! Not way the hell out here! How's my hair look? Awful? [*She sits on the edge of the suitcase too.*]
- MAY: You want some breakfast? I saw a little place down the street.
- VIOLET: Mayo's? Don't eat there! They make a stew by tossing rotten potatoes into the same ditch water the Chinaman dumps his suds into! You have anything to drink?
 [*MAY takes a small bottle from her coat pocket, offers it to VIOLET.*]
- MAY: I got that from a Baptist deacon in Swift Current. It tastes like perfume, but it's got less kick.
- VIOLET: [*Salutes MAY with the bottle.*] Violet Decarmin.

- MAY:** May Buchanan.
[*They shake hands.*]
- VIOLET:** Welcome to Calgary! [*She salutes again, drinks, then hands the bottle back.*] That charming sty I was just evicted from is called the Hotel Liberty! [*She laughs.* **MAY** *drinks, then puts the bottle away.*] I don't actually live there! I just like to spread my – my custom around! [*She laughs.*] Generally I'm over across the river, at the Central. Favourite flophouse for every saddle tramp that wanders this far north and west of the Dakotas!
- MAY:** You think maybe they've got a vacancy?
- VIOLET:** At the Central? They've got almost nothing but vacancy. Vacancy and me! [*She laughs.*] Are you passing through?
- MAY:** That's right. Generally.
- VIOLET:** On your way to where?
- MAY:** Farther west.
- VIOLET:** Oh. Smart girl!
- MAY:** Well – you want to walk me over there? [*She stands.*]
- VIOLET:** To the Central? I could – [*She stands too.*] – maybe later. The awful thing is – I'm not paid up. They won't let me in. Probably won't even let me onto the verandah! 'Walk, woman, walk!' [*She laughs.*]
- MAY:** You come on with me. I'll pay you up. [*She picks up her suitcase.*]
- VIOLET:** It's twelve dollars! Or thereabouts.
- MAY:** You can give it to me when you get it.
- VIOLET:** Oh? You must be a rich man's daughter or somebody!
- MAY:** Rich men's daughters aren't generally moving farther west. [*They start down the street. NETTIE races in and grabs VIOLET. She is very young and frail, and dresses even younger.*]
- NETTIE:** Violet!!
- VIOLET:** Mother of Christ!!
- NETTIE:** Mean woman! Nasty woman!
- VIOLET:** Hold on now –!
- NETTIE:** Bad woman!!
- VIOLET:** Whoa!!
- NETTIE:** Where were you? I woke up afraid –!

- VIOLET: Let go of me!
- NETTIE: I thought old Seward had hauled you in again!!
- VIOLET: Nettie McDowell –
- NETTIE: Where were you?!
- VIOLET: Right here at the Liberty! Nettie McDowell –
- NETTIE: All night long?
- VIOLET: I'd like you to meet Missus May Buchanan, who is passing through!
[NETTIE and MAY shake hands.]
- VIOLET: Nettie came in last month. From Saskatchewan. She's not stupid, just slow.
- NETTIE: Lovely morning!
- MAY: Yes, it is.
- NETTIE: Look at that sky!
[They look. NETTIE clings to VIOLET.]
- NETTIE: You were at the Liberty all night long?!
- VIOLET: Well, see, I was talking with somebody, somebody very nice – and then I fell asleep.
- NETTIE: Where're you headed?
- VIOLET: The Central.
- NETTIE: Oh, they won't let you in! Mister Copithorne says he's not even going to let you onto the verandah!
- VIOLET: Missus Buchanan's generously offered to pay me up!
- NETTIE: 'S that right? You a rich man's daughter or somebody?
- VIOLET: Tell us all about yourself!
[She takes MAY's suitcase and hands it to NETTIE, who carries it. SEWARD has come back in, at the far end of the street. They don't see him for a moment.]
- MAY: I come from a little place nobody ever heard of. Back East. But my more-or-less general direction in life is – or has started to be –
[She sees SEWARD and stops. VIOLET and NETTIE see him.]
- NETTIE: Oh Jesus!
- VIOLET: It's okay, angel! Missus Buchanan knows him. Knows him inside out, backwards and forwards!

NETTIE: 'S that right?
 [MAY stares at SEWARD another long moment, then begins to sing:]

MAY: 'He said to me, "Your eyes are blue,
 As pools both cool and shady . . ."
 [She moves on, in SEWARD's direction, followed by VIOLET and NETTIE.] 'He said, "I will be ever true,
 And you will be my lady!" . . .'
 [They go out, passing very near SEWARD. He turns, watches them as they go.] 'Sing doodle-oodle-oodle-doo —'
 [VIOLET and NETTIE join in:]
 'Sing oddle-doodle-daisy!
 Sing doodle-oodle-oodle-doo,
 What happened next, dear Maisie?'
 [They are gone, laughing. After a moment, SEWARD follows them out, again brushing his sleeves and cap anxiously. A dog barks, off. Music for scene change.]

Calgary, North West Territories. Winter, 1888–89. Morning.
 Parlour of MAY's house on Edmonton Trail. NETTIE, much better dressed than before, is seated on an ottoman. MAY, also better dressed, stands behind, putting up NETTIE's hair. VIOLET, better dressed and coiffed, and a man named BABCOCK (in his fifties, well-dressed), are near a small wood-burning stove. He is seated, she is standing. They are listening to LILY REEVES sing. LILY, originally from Missouri, a blowzy, bloated woman in her twenties, is in a large armchair, tucked up with several blankets. She sings. (The tune from Wallace's Maritana is in the Music Appendix.)

LILY: 'Words cannot scatter
 The thoughts we fear,
 For though they flatter,
 They mock the ear!
 Hopes will still deceive us
 With tearful cost,
 And when they leave us —'

NETTIE: Ouch!

MAY: Sssh!

LILY: [Sings at the same time.]
 'The heart is lost!
 And when they leave us
 The hea-ea-ea-eaaaaart —'
 [A sort of cadenza. VIOLET and BABCOCK are impressed.]

- LILY: '—aaaaart — is lost!
[VIOLET and NETTIE applaud. BABCOCK yelps his approval, shouts 'Bravo!']
- VIOLET: Mother of Christ!
- LILY: Thank you, thank you.
- VIOLET: The sweetest thing I ever heard! Truly is! How about you, Babcock?
- BABCOCK: I heard Missus Nordica once in Montreal. Cost me ten bucks too! I'd rather hear Lily any day!
- NETTIE: Ten bucks?
- MAY: Hold still, Nettie! We're almost done.
- NETTIE: Don't pull.
- LILY: I had some strength in my voice a few years back. Before I took sick, started to travel. I was never meant to! Some people aren't meant to ever travel.
- MAY: Some aren't meant to ever do anything else. [*She smiles.*]
- LILY: [*Shudders.*] Jesus, ain't it cold!
- BABCOCK: I had two horses freeze to death already this winter! One of 'em was standing right next to the heat too. I got a big wood-burner down at the stables! You could fit half a dozen of these little black puffers into it! [*He indicates the stove.*] But this old horse was standing there, practically rubbing up against the damned thing! We found him next morning, one half of him still warm as toast! But his other half was froze solid!
- VIOLET: [*Hoots.*] Oh, Babcock!
- BABCOCK: As God's my witness!
- VIOLET: You're full of it!
- BABCOCK: Trouble was, you see, he manoeuvred hisself around till it was his left side which was exposed to the cold! It was his left side which froze! Of course, that's where the heart is! His heart froze!
- VIOLET: [*Laughs.*] This gets better and better!
- BABCOCK: God's my witness! We cut him open! I took out his heart and held it in my hand, like a big red rock! Till it melted!
- VIOLET: Mother of Christ!
- MAY: There, Nettie! You look like something out of a picture book! [*NETTIE stands, parades around the room.*]

NETTIE: A pretty picture book, May?

MAY: Oh, for certain! One of those real old, real beautiful picture books! With real gold on the pictures. On Sir Lancelot's spurs and in the ladies' hair!

NETTIE: I really do?
[A dog barks intermittently, off.]

MAY: Sit down, Nettie. Lily, sing us another piece. [She moves to LILY.] Or maybe you and Mister Babcock are ready to go upstairs for a while?
[LILY looks at BABCOCK, tries to smile.]

BABCOCK: Hell, we can go upstairs anytime! It's not even noon yet!

MAY: You're always the first one here.

BABCOCK: I like to come early, avoid the crowds! [He laughs.] And besides, I love to just watch all of you. Together. Putting your hair up. Having breakfast. [To LILY.] How about 'Little Peach In An Orchard Grew'?

LILY: I don't know that one anymore. I used to. I used to know all the songs!
[She sniffles. MAY takes out a bottle of eau de cologne, rubs some into LILY's neck and arms.]

MAY: Maybe you should go on upstairs. Maybe Mister Babcock can help you remember 'Little Peach' upstairs?

BABCOCK: Hell, what's your rush? There's plenty of time for upstairs! Today Lily feels like singing! Don't you?

LILY: I guess.

MAY: [To BABCOCK.] As long as you know you're paying for her time, one way or the other.

BABCOCK: Sing anything, Lily! Anything that'll keep our hearts from freezing solid!

VIOLET: Well, yours wouldn't be any big red rock, Babcock. More like a gum drop, I'd say! [They laugh.]

BABCOCK: How 'bout 'Dear Maisie'?! [Sings hoarsely.]
'She said to me, "Now lay you down,
And I will lie quite near you" —'
[Loud knocking at an exterior door, off.]

VIOLET: Mother of Christ!

LILY: Who's that?

MAY: Somebody around front.

- VIOLET: Who do we know that'd come knocking around front, this time of day? [*She starts out.*]
- MAY: Wait! Nettie? You go.
[NETTIE starts out.]
And listen! If he's a stranger to you, just say your mother's not at home right now. You don't expect her before late afternoon.
[NETTIE pauses a moment, silently repeats this message, then goes out. More loud knocking, and a dog barking, off. VIOLET looks off, after NETTIE.]
- BABCOCK: He's in one hell of a hurry, whoever he is!
- VIOLET: Could be that cowboy who's always sniffing around after Nettie!
Or that Chinaman with the rat traps!
- MAY: Go ahead and sing, Lily! Gently –
- LILY: [*Sings, neither loud nor fast.*]
'He said to me, on our first night,
He said to me, "I love you!"
He said to me, "Your eyes are bright,
Bright, bright as the stars above you!"'
[BABCOCK joins in, clapping and tapping his foot, trying to pick up the volume and the tempo.]
'Sing doodle-oodle-oodle-doo,
Sing oodle-doodle-daisy!'
[MAY and VIOLET are still watching the entrance. The latter sings along, half-heartedly.]
"Sing doodle-oodle-oodle-doo,
What happened next, dear Maisie?
[LILY starts the second verse alone, somewhat faster and louder.] 'He said to me, "Your skin is pink,
Your cheeks are satin roses!" –'
[NETTIE comes back in, followed by ROSS. He is very young, wears overcoat, boots and hat. Singing is interrupted.]
- LILY: Oh! [*She coughs.*]
- NETTIE: I don't know who it was, May! It was him!
[*She points at ROSS, who blushes, takes off his hat.*]
- ROSS: My name's Ross.
- MAY: I'm May Buchanan. [*She moves to him. They shake hands.*] Are you lost, Mister Ross? Snow blind? What can we do for you?
- ROSS: I - I heard about you. About all you – ladies –

- MAY: God! You're shaking like a shot rabbit!
 [*All laugh except ROSS.*]
- MAY: You better go and stand next to the stove!
- ROSS: Thanks. [*He moves to the stove. A dog barks, off.*]
- VIOLET: [*To ROSS.*] Stand as close to it as you can bear, precious! We don't want any of your warm little organs turning into little red rocks!
 [*All laugh except ROSS. He blushes, stands with his back to the stove.*]
- MAY: New to Calgary, Mister Ross?
- ROSS: Yes. Yes, ma'am. From back East.
- MAY: Just like me. Passing through? What business are you in?
- ROSS: I – oh, I guess I'm looking for work.
- MAY: [*Smiles.*] But I expect that's not what you're looking for in my house?
 [*VIOLET and BABCOCK laugh.*]
- ROSS: No, ma'am.
- MAY: No. And I expect you still have a little something saved up? Of whatever you brung from back East?
- ROSS: A little.
- MAY: [*Smiles.*] All right then. That's Violet Decarmin. That's Lily Reeves, who is about to give us a little more music. And that's Nettie, who you met at the door.
 [*ROSS nods to each of the women, then looks at BABCOCK, waiting for him to be introduced. He isn't. ROSS extends his hand.*]
- ROSS: Name's Ross.
- BABCOCK: So you said! [*He doesn't shake ROSS's hand, but turns to LILY, sings, prompting her.*]
 'I said to her, "Your eyes are blue
 As pools both cool and shady!"'
 [*LILY joins in, at BABCOCK's feisty tempo.*]
 'I (He) said, "I will be ever true,
 And you will be my lady!"'
 [*BABCOCK claps and stomps again, forcing LILY on, even faster.*]
 'Sing doodle-oodle-oodle-doo,
 Sing oodle-doodle-daisy!'
 [*VIOLET joins in, even louder and faster, and then begins to dance, an impromptu jig or reel.*]

'Sing doodle-oodle-oodle-doo,
What happened next, dear Maisie?!'
[LILY starts the next verse, somewhat perkier now herself.]

LILY: 'He said to me, "Now lay you down,
And I will lie quite near you!"'
[BABCOCK and VIOLET join in. ROSS looks on, still shaking. He unbuttons his coat.]
'He (I) said, "Forbear to make a sound,
My mother must not hear you!"'
[MAY steps forward, dances a few steps with VIOLET. BABCOCK is delighted, whoops. NETTIE, who has been watching ROSS constantly, laughs, joins in the singing.]
'Sing doodle-oodle-oodle-doo,
Sing oodle-doodle-daisy!
Sing doodle - !'
[ROSS suddenly blurts out, quite loud.]

ROSS: Fact is - I'm in sort of a hurry here!
[Singing and dancing stop. They all look at him. He blushes.]

BABCOCK: What'd I tell you? His five bucks is burning a hole in his pocket! [He laughs.] Or something else is!

ROSS: [To MAY.] Sorry. I - I didn't come here for a concert, you know.
Or a square dance! Sorry.

MAY: That's all right, Mister Ross. You want to go upstairs?

ROSS: Upstairs?

MAY: There's two big rooms upstairs. Each has its own woodburner.
Extra blankets in the cupboard at the end of the hall, and a
bottle of Irish under the washstand.

ROSS: Upstairs?

VIOLET: [Grabs his hand.] Come on, sweetums! I'll show you!

ROSS: No! [He pulls free of VIOLET, moves toward NETTIE.] She can
show me. Miss - Nettie. Can't she?

MAY: If you like.

VIOLET: Mother of Christ! She can't show you a thing that I can't show
you!

BABCOCK: Except a good time!

VIOLET: Shut up, Babcock!
[BABCOCK laughs. NETTIE takes ROSS's hand tentatively.]

- NETTIE: Come on then. But May's done my hair just like a picture book. See? You mustn't pull it!
- ROSS: Oh – wait just a tick?
[*He takes his hand out of NETTIE's, and turns to MAY. She moves nearer.*]
- ROSS: That'll be how much, Missus Buchanan? I like to keep these things regular. [*He reaches into his coat.*]
- MAY: Depends on how long you stay. But you can ante up later. No need to make your mind up right away.
[BABCOCK and VIOLET exchange a look, titter.]
- ROSS: That's all right! My mind's made up! I know exactly what I want to –! [*He takes a long-barreled pistol from his coat, quickly takes a step or two backwards, and trains the gun on the others.*] Stop now! Stop right where you are!!
[BABCOCK leaps to his feet, starts forward.]
- BABCOCK: For Christ's –! What in hell –!?
- ROSS: I'm warning you!! [*He points the pistol directly at BABCOCK, who freezes.*]
- BABCOCK: Jesus-Mary-and Joseph!
[*With the gun still trained on BABCOCK and the women, ROSS half-turns, shouts off, very loud.*]
- ROSS: Mister Seward?!!
- LILY: Seward?!
- VIOLET: [*At the same time.*] Mother of Christ!
- LILY: No –!
- VIOLET [*At the same time.*] Not again!!
- LILY: No!! [*She sniffles.*]
- MAY: Hush, Lily!
- ROSS: Constable Seward, sir!!! [*Turns quickly back to the others.*] Missus Buchanan, I am arresting you! For the unlicensed purveyance of intoxicants! And for the keeping of a disorderly house! The rest of you ladies, for being known denizens of the same! And you, Mister Babcock, for frequenting of the same! All such acts, punishable under the statutes and ordinances of –!
[*Half-turns, shouts desperately.*] Mister Seward!!!
[*The exterior door is heard, being slammed shut, off. LILY, weeping, shoves the blankets aside, tries to get out of her armchair.*]
- LILY: Oh no – oh God – I can't –!!

- MAY: It's all right, Lily. It'll be all right.
 [LILY falls back into the chair. MAY turns, smiles at ROSS, then shouts off, past him.] Please come in, Constable!
 [SEWARD comes in, nearly frozen, wearing boots, hat, and a voluminous buffalo coat over his police uniform.]
- ROSS: All secure, Constable! They've been apprised of the charges against them!
- SEWARD: Good. That's good. [He gestures and ROSS puts the pistol away.]
- MAY: Make some room for Mister Seward by the stove!
- SEWARD: No, thank you. [He takes off his hat.]
- MAY: But you're shaking! Worse than Lily! Worse than this boy you sent in here to do a man's job!
 [VIOLET laughs.]
- ROSS [To MAY.] You just keep quiet, Missus! Mister Seward will do the talking!
- MAY: Of course. [To SEWARD.] I'm worried about your health. That's all.
- SEWARD: It's yourself you ought to worry about! Mister Babcock? You're free to go, sir.
- ROSS: But I already said –
- BABCOCK: Thank you. [He puts on his hat and coat.]
- ROSS: I already told him he's charged with frequenting of a—!
- SEWARD: Our quarrel's not with the frequenters, Mister Ross. But with these – [He indicates the women.] – who make it so frequently and cheaply available.
 [BABCOCK starts out.]
- BABCOCK: Thanks, Constable. Cold, isn't it? [Hesitates.] February! Ever occur to you it's – a trifle harsh for these ladies –?
- SEWARD: Ladies? Better go while you can, Babcock. Supposed to get even colder.
 [BABCOCK goes out quickly.]
- NETTIE: [Faintly.] Bye-bye!
- SEWARD: It's a long walk to the Office of Police, Missus Buchanan. You and your women better wrap up nice and warm.
- LILY: [Sobs.] We have to – walk?!
- MAY: What happened to your wagon, Constable? The one we always have such a good time in?

- SEWARD: That's no concern of yours! It's for more important business.
- VIOLET: More important to *who*?
- SEWARD: I haven't got all day! Move, woman!
- MAY: Go on, Violet. Like the Constable says. Upstairs, and get ready.
- LILY: Oh God —!
- MAY: It'll be all right! [*She smiles at them.*]
- VIOLET: Come on, let's bundle you up, Lily! You know you catch any little thing that's going around! Nettie?
[NETTIE *has been staring at ROSS, who blushes.*]
- NETTIE: Right here!
[VIOLET *goes out, shepherding LILY and NETTIE in front of her. MAY calls after them.*]
- MAY: Fetch me my scarf and coat! And the doeskin gloves!
- SEWARD: Constable Ross?
- ROSS: Sir?
- SEWARD: This house has a back stairs, I believe. Leading directly down from the second floor? [*He looks at MAY.*]
- MAY: That's right.
[ROSS *stares at them for a moment, then understands.*]
- ROSS: Oh yes, sir! Sorry, sir! I'll — I'll stick with them!! [*He hurries out after VIOLET, LILY and NETTIE.*]
- MAY: They won't make a run for it, Constable. They're faithful.
- SEWARD: To the trade?
- MAY: To me,
- SEWARD: Well, they're women.
- MAY: As far as I know. I never had any complaints. [*She laughs, moves closer to him.*] Young Mister Ross is a fine addition to the force. A recent recruit?
- SEWARD: That's no concern of yours.
- MAY: Are you sure you won't cuddle up to my stove? You're still shaking like a leaf! Real susceptible to the cold, aren't you?
- SEWARD: Just keep still. You don't know anything about me.
- MAY: Oh now — we've known each other — haven't we? Practically forever. [*She lays her hand on his chest.*]

- SEWARD: Take your hand off me.
- MAY: I'm admiring your coat. Standard issue? Comes with the job?
- SEWARD: I know you, at any rate! You're not fooling anybody. We know about women like you. But most of us – most of them turn a blind eye. Or worse! Take your hands off me!
- MAY: But this isn't even properly lined, my God! [*She puts her hand inside his coat.*] You could double-line this. In velvet maybe. What they call velvet out here. Wouldn't that feel nice?
- SEWARD: Goddamn – you –
[*She puts her hand inside his jacket.*]
- MAY: This jacket's like tissue paper too! Mercury frozen solid inside every thermometer in the Territories, you go around dressed for July!
- SEWARD: You take your – whore's hands –!
[*She slips her hands inside the waistband of his trousers.*]
- MAY: If you had a mother, if you had a sister or a wife, she'd look after you better.
- SEWARD: [*Closes his eyes.*] – off!
- MAY: But I'm the only woman you've got. [*She continues, moving her hands underneath his clothing.*]
- SEWARD: Goddamn –
- MAY: Now – for eight and a half cents – I could buy a yard of stuff – just as soft as velvet anyway. Just as sturdy, just as warm ...
- SEWARD: May – Buchanan – [*His hands reach out for her throat, then her breast. ROSS suddenly comes into the parlour, chattering.*]
- ROSS: I'm hurrying them, Constable, but they don't–!
[*He stops. He sees what's happening between MAY and SEWARD. SEWARD opens his eyes, turns, stares at ROSS for a moment, then suddenly shoves MAY away, roughly. Fastening his clothes, he hurries out of the room. ROSS stares at MAY for another instant. She smiles at him. He turns and hurries out after SEWARD.*]
- ROSS: Constable –?!
[*The offstage exterior door is heard, being opened, then slammed shut immediately. A dog barks, off.*]
- MAY: [*Sings softly to herself.*]
'Sing doodle-oodle-oodle-doo,
Sing oodle-doodle-daisy!
[*VIOLET, unseen, calls from the stairwell.*]
- VIOLET: May?! Come here! Lily just won't stop crying!!

-
- MAY: [Calls back, not loud.] Never mind! The wolves are gone! I fed them poison meat!
- VIOLET: [As above, off.] What'd you say?!
- [MAY starts out of the parlour, singing.]
- MAY: 'Sing doodle-oodle-oodle-doo,
What happened next, dear Maisie?'
[She is gone. Music for scene change.]

Calgary, North West Territories. Summer, 1889. Afternoon.

The back yard of MAY's house on Edmonton Trail. Communal laundry is in progress; all of the women, lightly, loosely dressed. VIOLET is scrubbing, washing. NETTIE is rinsing, wringing. MAY is hanging clothes on a long droopy line. LILY, at an upstairs window, sipping a drink, wearing a shawl or kimono, is now seriously unwell.

- MAY: [Sings slowly, freely.]
'He said to me, on our first night,
He said to me, "I love you!"'
[NETTIE joins in, harmonizing.] 'He said to me, "Your eyes are bright,
Bright, bright as the stars above you!"'
- LILY: [Sighs.] Oh, that's a sweet old song!
[VIOLET skips the refrain, prompts the next verse.]
- VIOLET: 'He said to me, "Your skin is pink" -'
- LILY: I always loved that song!
- VIOLET: [and NETTIE]
"Your cheeks are satin roses!"
- LILY: Always thrilled to it!
- VIOLET: [and NETTIE, MAY]
'He said to me, and gave a wink -'
- LILY: Before I started to travel!
- VIOLET: [and NETTIE, MAY]
"Lass, let's at least rub noses!"
[They laugh. NETTIE hums the refrain underneath.]
- LILY: Jesus only knows how long it's been since I felt like singing!
- VIOLET: [Calls up to her.] Not any better today, Lily?
- LILY: Never going to get any better, I don't guess!

- VIOLET: Flummery!
- LILY: It's not flummery! [*She coughs.*]
- VIOLET: One of Maud Lewis's ladies got real sick last winter. Swelled up with the dropsy, retaining water, just the same as you! But I saw her yesterday, down at the Liberty, lean as a whippet again, dancing like a bride!
- LILY: Mm. Is she a black lady?
- VIOLET: What difference does that make?
- LILY: Black ladies never die sick! They die old sometimes, but they never die sick!
- VIOLET: She wasn't black!
- LILY: But she may have a drop of black blood, way back somewhere, which protects her!
- VIOLET: Her name's McKirk, she was born in Glasgow!
- LILY: Scottish, huh? Well, they hardly ever die at all!
- VIOLET: Mother of Christ!
[MAY laughs. LILY sips. Laundry work continues.]
- MAY: 'Sing doodle-oodle-oodle-doo,
Sing oodle-doodle-daisy!'
[THOMAS SHEPHERD comes in, along the lane behind MAY's house. He is in his late twenties, but powerful, already weathered. He weaves a bit as he walks, half-drunk. The women don't see him at first.]
- MAY: [and NETTIE]
[Harmonizing as before.]
'Sing doodle-oodle-oodle-doo,
What happened next, dear Maisie?'
[VIOLET prompts the next verse.]
- VIOLET: 'He said to me, "Your eyes are blue" —'
[MAY and NETTIE join in. LILY hums a descant.]
- VIOLET: [and NETTIE, MAY]
"'As pools both cool and shady!"
He said, "I will be ever true" —'
- 218 SHEPHERD: [Sings out loudly.]
"'And you will be my lady!!!"'
[Startled, NETTIE shrieks. They all turn and see him.]
- LILY: [Peering from her window.] Who's that?

SHEPHERD: My favourite song, ladies. My absolute favourite!
[*They look him over. NETTIE giggles.*]

NETTIE: Lovely afternoon!

SHEPHERD: Yes, it is.

LILY: Who's that?

SHEPHERD: It certainly is! Not one cloud up there! Not one whisper of a cloud! [*He smiles at MAY.*]

LILY: Who's that?!

SHEPHERD: And my favourite song, right out of nowhere! What more could a man ask for?
[*MAY moves to him.*]

MAY: I'm May Buchanan. [*They shake hands.*]

SHEPHERD: Thomas Shepherd.

LILY: Who is that?!

MAY: [*Calls up to her.*] The man's name is Shepherd, Lily! [*Turns to SHEPHERD.*] We haven't seen you before.

SHEPHERD: No, probably not. [*He retains her hand in his.*]

MAY: New around here? Passing through?

SHEPHERD: Depends. My plans just now are changeable, highly changeable.

VIOLET: That's what they all say! [*She laughs, approaches him, extends her hand.*] Violet Decarmin. Welcome to Calgary! [*He smiles at her, hangs onto MAY.*]

SHEPHERD: Thank you. [*To MAY.*] I own some land south of here. On Sheep River. Bought it sight unseen. Saw it for the first time this morning!

VIOLET: South? There's nothing south of here but starving Indians and fat Yankees!

SHEPHERD: Well – now there is!
[*MAY slowly frees her hand from his.*]

MAY: Would you like to come in? Have something to drink?

SHEPHERD: I can't.

VIOLET: You got two legs, two lips and a gullet! You can step in for a quick drink!

SHEPHERD: I'm buying cattle this afternoon. I ought to try and keep a clear head.

MAY: [Smiles.] Maybe you should've considered that a couple of saloons ago!
[He laughs.]

NETTIE: We got coffee! You could have some coffee!

MAY: Leave the man be, ladies! He knows what he wants.

SHEPHERD: Yes, I surely do. That's what they always say: 'Old Shepherd at least knows what he wants!' [Moves close to MAY, takes her hand again.] Might you be in later? To visitors?

MAY: Might be. How much later?

SHEPHERD: As soon as I can. After supper?

MAY: All right. Probably. Don't have much more to drink.
[She frees herself again. He steps back, grins, tips his hat.]

SHEPHERD: Missus Buchanan.

MAY: Mister Shepherd.

SHEPHERD: Ladies! [He tips his hat to the others, and goes out, weaving, singing.]

I said to her, "Now lay you down,
And I will lie quite near you!"
I said "Forbear to make a sound,
My mother must not hear you!"

[Laughing, he disappears. MAY turns, looks at VIOLET, NETTIE and LILY, all of whom are staring at her expectantly. She frowns and goes back to work, hanging up clothes. The others exchange looks and titter. NETTIE goes back to the wringer. VIOLET stares after SHEPHERD. LILY leaves the window for a moment, returns with a fresh drink which she sips and dabs on her forehead.]

MAY: [As she goes back to work.]
'Sing doodle-oodle-oodle-doo,
Sing oodle-doodle-daisy!'

NETTIE: Thomas – that's a good name!

MAY: 'Sing doodle-oodle-oodle-do –'

NETTIE: A good man's name!

VIOLET: [Loud.]

'What happened next, dear Maisie?!'
[She and MAY exchange a look. VIOLET laughs. NETTIE leaves the wringer, stares off after SHEPHERD too. LILY also looks off, in that direction. They are all looking that way.]

- NETTIE:** He's from back East too, I guess. Has eyes just like yours, May. Those eyes that can total you up, know you inside and out in half a minute! From back East, probably sweated in some factory for every nickel he's got! Now he's come out west, to find land and cattle. And the right woman before he's too old. Rarely touches the booze, I bet. Only today he got a little careless!
[She turns, looks at MAY. LILY laughs, coughs.]
- LILY:** He's come from up North. Got that nasty spark in his eye that they always got, when they broke themselves for gold and never found any! He's fed up, worn out, and mean as two weasels! Nothing for him to plant a claim on now but some woman — God help her! He swears and fornicates, and believes with his fists now that his heart's broke! And when a woman gets 'a little careless,' she's called a damned drunk!
[She looks at MAY. VIOLET suddenly laughs sharply, sarcastically.]
- VIOLET:** He's a Yank. A Yank who's done time for stealing — I don't know what — something of no real value! Something bright or silly that took his eye. Now he's come up North to try and hide from all that! He's one of them that never really grows up! Still falls down taking off his own trousers! He's a bloody Yank, yes, 'cause they all show their teeth when they smile, like a set of loaded dice! Chances are, we'll never see him again. From south of the line, they all get blind drunk on two glasses of watered beer! *[Sings, imitating SHEPHERD.]*
 "'And you will be my lady!'"
[NETTIE and LILY laugh. VIOLET turns, looks at MAY. They are all looking at her. She turns away, finishes hanging up the wet clothes.]
- MAY:** He's a man. A man with feet and legs and a backside and privates and a belly and a chest and shoulders and a neck and a head with hair on top of it and nothing of much concern to me inside it!
[The others titter. She turns, looks at all of them.]
 Thomas Shepherd of Sheep River! That's not the sort of kindling to start fires under me. I've got to travel farther, much farther, before I find anybody — anything that'll start any fires in me!
[The others grin, exchange looks, laugh.]
- VIOLET:** Crackle, crackle.
- LILY:** Spark, spark.
- NETTIE:** Flicker, flicker!
[They laugh louder. MAY dismisses them with a gesture and starts out.]

VIOLET: Crackle, crackle!

LILY: Spark, spark!

NETTIE: Flicker, flicker!!
 [MAY hurries out, as though pursued. VIOLET and NETTIE run out
 after her, and LILY disappears from the upstairs window, all shouting,
 singing, ad lib, over and over.]

VIOLET: Crackle, crackle!!

LILY: Spark, spark!!

NETTIE: Flicker, flicker!!
 [They are gone, their voices fade. Music for scene change.]

Note to the reader

Plays by Sharon Pollock are available from:

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Playhouse Theatre, and the Stratford Festival. Several of her plays have been translated.

Pollock won the Governor General's Literary Award for drama in 1982 for BLOOD RELATIONS, which has had many productions, including a recent one by the Young Vic Company in London, England. Her other plays include WALSH, THE KOMAGATA MARU INCIDENT, ONE TIGER TO A HILL, A COMPULSORY OPTION, WHISKEY SIX CADENZA, and several plays for young audiences. DOC, which critics have called Pollock's finest work to date, was recently produced at several regional theatres across Canada and won the 1986 Governor General's Literary Award for drama and the Chalmers Canadian Play Award.

BIOGRAPHY

Any play I write begins as an attempt to understand the world around me.

Sharon Pollock was born in Fredericton, New Brunswick, in 1936. She went to school in Quebec's Eastern Townships, then returned to New Brunswick, married, moved to Toronto, and had five children. In the early 1960s Pollock moved back to Fredericton and worked as box office manager for Theatre New Brunswick, where she was involved in all aspects of theatre, including acting. In 1966 she moved with actor Michael Ball to Calgary and quickly established herself as one of Canada's best playwrights.

Pollock has written numerous plays for stage, radio, and television. Her plays have been produced at theatres across the country, including the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, Edmonton's Citadel Theatre, Theatre Calgary, Vancouver's

Pollock has been playwright-in-residence at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa and at Alberta Theatre Projects, and has been artistic director of Theatre Calgary. She has also taught at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia and at the University of Alberta, and was head of the Banff Playwrights Colony for four years. Pollock lives in Calgary, but is currently in Regina, where she is writer-in-residence at the Regina Public Library.

REVIEWS

"... DOC emerges as Pollock's finest work yet...She has made a strong personal statement with universal implications."

Brian Brennan, Calgary Herald

"...a finely-tuned emotional jigsaw puzzle."

Louis B. Hobson, Calgary Sun

"...(DOC) will have the same impact wherever it is performed...what happens onstage has the truth of good theatre."

Jo Anne Claus, Saint John Telegraph-Journal

"...an emotional steamroller of a play."

Robert Crew, Toronto Star

The Characters:

- EV: an elderly man in his 70's
 CATHERINE: his daughter, in her mid-30's
 KATIE: Catherine, as a young girl
 BOB: Ev's wife, Catherine's mother
 OSCAR: Ev's best friend

Playwright's Notes:

Much of the play consists of the sometimes shared, sometimes singular memories of the past, as relived by EV and CATHERINE, interacting with figures from the past. Structurally, shifts in time do not occur in a linear, chronological fashion, but in an unconscious and intuitive patterning of the past by EV and CATHERINE. A stage direction (Shift) marks these pattern changes which are often, but not always, time shifts as well. In production, music has been used to underscore the pattern shifts, however the characters' shifts from one pattern to another must be immediate. They do not "hold" for the music. The physical blocking must accommodate this immediacy and the stage setting facilitate it.

The "now" of the play takes place in the house in which CATHERINE grew up and in which EV now lives alone. The play is most effective when the set design is not a literal one, and when props and furniture are kept to a minimum. I think of the setting as one which has the potential to explode time and space while simultaneously serving certain naturalistic demands of the play.

A kaleidoscope of memory constitutes the dialogue and action of the opening sequence. It is followed by a scene set more firmly in the "now". EV is "old" during these two segments, as he is at the opening and closing of Act Two. Although EV relives the past as a younger man, we never see CATHERINE any age but in her mid-thirties. She is able to speak across time to her father, to her mother, and to her younger self. CATHERINE and KATIE blend, sharing a sense of one entity, particularly in the scenes with her father's best friend, OSCAR. This should not be interpreted to mean that CATHERINE and KATIE share one mind or are always in accord. They are often in conflict.

OSCAR is first seen in the opening sequence wearing a Twenties-era hockey uniform. He is a young man about to enter medical school. OSCAR's scenes with KATIE cover a four year period prior to and ending with BOB's death. In the scenes he shares with BOB and EV there is a longer, more chronological unfolding of time. For the most part, we see him as a man in his mid-thirties.

We see BOB in her mid-twenties to mid-thirties. She wears a dressing gown which has a belt or tie at the waist, and under this she wears a slip. The material of the gown is satin or satin-like; the gown itself has the look of a tailored long dinner gown when appropriately belted. On other occasions, undone and flapping, it has the appearance of a sloppy kimona. Is it necessary to say that her descent into alcoholism, despair, and self-disgust must be carefully charted?

EV as an old man wears glasses and a worn cardigan sweater.

There are liquor bottles on stage in Act One; they have been removed from the set in Act Two. A trunk is useful on stage; it holds photos and memorabilia; as well, it provides a storage place in Act One for OSCAR's hockey uniform, and the clothing into which he and EV will change.

In some productions all characters are always on stage with the exception of EV, who is free to exit and enter during the play, and KATIE, BOB, and OSCAR who exit near the end of the play. In other productions there has been a greater freedom of movement re characters' exits and entrances. The script indicates where a character "may enter" or "may exit". If this is not indicated, the character must remain on stage.

Act One

In the black there is a subtle murmuring of voices, with the odd phrase and word emerging quite clearly. They are repeats of bits and pieces of dialogue heard later in the play. The voices are those of KATIE, OSCAR, BOB and the young EV; they often speak on top of each other.

Light grows on EV, who is seated by the open trunk. He holds an unopened letter. A match flares as BOB lights a cigarette in the background. Light grows on BOB, on OSCAR who is smoothing tape on his hockey stick, and on KATIE who concentrates on moving one foot back and forth slowly and rhythmically. EV slowly closes the trunk, his focus still on the envelope he holds.

CATHERINE enters. She carries an overnight bag as well as her shoulder bag. She puts the overnight bag down. She sees KATIE. She watches KATIE for a moment, and then speaks to KATIE's rhythmic movement.

CATHERINE: Up-on the carpet...you shall kneel...while the grass...grows in the field

(KATIE's motion turns into skipping as KATIE turns an imaginary skipping rope and jumps to it)

Stand up straight
Upon your feet

KATIE: (speaks with CATHERINE. The murmuring of voices can still be heard but they are fading)
Choose the one you love so sweet
Now they're married wish them well
First a girl, gee that's swell

(KATIE's voice is growing louder, taking over from CATHERINE)

KATIE & CATHERINE: Seven years after, seven to come

KATIE: (alone)
Fire on the mountain kiss and run
(jumps "pepper" faster and faster)
Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor,
Rich man, poor man, beggar man thief

BOB: Doctor

KATIE: Doc-tor!!! (stops skipping)

CATHERINE: (removing her gloves) Daddy?

EV: (looks up from the envelope) Katie?
(stands up) Is that you, Katie?

KATIE: (skipping towards EV singing) La da da da daah.
(KATIE continues her "la dahs" skipping away from EV as OSCAR speaks)

OSCAR: Hey, you and me, Ev.
(EV looks at the letter and sits back down)
Best friends. Ev and Oscar, Oscar and Ev – and if we weren't
– I think I'd hate you.

KATIE: (stops skipping but continues) La dada da daah

BOB: Why don't you open it?

OSCAR: You see, Ev – you're just too good at things.

BOB: Go on, open it.
(The murmuring voices have faded out)

OSCAR: It makes people nervous.
(sound of an approaching train whistle)
It makes me nervous.

- BOB:** Listen.
(The train whistle is growing in volume. KATIE stops her “la da da dahs”)
Your Gramma, Katie, his mother. She’d set her clock by that train. Set her clock by the junction train crossing the railway bridge into Devon. Must be what? Three-quarters of a mile of single track spanning the river? And midnight, every night, that train coming down from the junction – half-way across three-quarters of a mile of single track its whistle would split the night...and that night do you know what she did?
- EV:** (his focus on the letter) No.
- BOB:** She walked out to meet it.
- EV:** No.
- BOB:** You wanna know something, Katie?
- KATIE:** No.
- BOB:** Your father’s mother, your grandmother, killed herself...Katie!
- KATIE:** What!
- BOB:** She walked across the train bridge at midnight and the train hit her.
- KATIE:** That’s an accident.
- BOB:** She left a letter, and the letter tells him why she did it.
- KATIE:** There isn’t any letter.
- BOB:** What’s that?
- KATIE:** Daddy?
- BOB:** And he won’t open it cause he’s afraid, he’s afraid of what she wrote.
- KATIE:** Is that true, Daddy?
- EV:** No.
- KATIE:** Is that the letter?
- EV:** Your grandmother was walking across the Devon bridge—
- KATIE:** What for?
- EV:** Well – it was a kind of short cut.
- BOB:** Short cut?

EV: And she got caught in the middle of a span and she was hit and killed.

CATHERINE: I stayed with her once when I was little...I can hardly remember.

EV: (continuing to talk to KATIE) It was after your mother had Robbie.

KATIE: Why didn't I stay with you and Robbie and Mummy?

EV: Your mother was sick so you stayed with your Gramma.

CATHERINE: Yes...and she made me soft-boiled runny eggs, and she'd feed me them and tell me stories about Moses in the bullrushes, and I...and I...would peel the wallpaper off behind the door, and she'd get angry.

EV: That's right.

CATHERINE: Why didn't she jump?

OSCAR: A hat trick Ev! Everybody screaming – everybody on their feet – what's it feel like, Ev?

BOB: He doesn't care. He doesn't care about anything except his "prac-tice" and his "off-fice" and his "off-fice nurse" and all those stupid, stupid people who think he's God.

EV: (to KATIE) Don't listen to her.

BOB: You're not God.

EV: Your mother's sick.

KATIE: No she isn't.

OSCAR: God, you're good. You fly, Ev.

KATIE: Why do you keep saying she's sick?

OSCAR: You don't skate, you fly.

KATIE: She's not sick.

EV: Your mother's –

KATIE: Why do you keep saying that!

EV: Katie –

KATIE: No!

CATHERINE: For a long time I prayed to God. I asked him to make her stop. I prayed and prayed. I thought, I'm just a little girl. Why would God want to do this to a little girl? I thought it was a

mistake. I thought maybe he didn't know. I don't know what I thought. I prayed and prayed... Now, I don't believe in God.

KATIE: And if there is a God, then I don't like him.

EV: She isn't well.

(BOB slowly opens a drawer, feels inside it, and runs her hand along a chair cushion. She continues to quietly, unobtrusively look for something as KATIE and EV speak)

KATIE: Tell Robbie that. He wants to believe that. I want the truth.

EV: I'm telling you the truth.

KATIE: No! Do you know what I did yesterday? She kept going to the bathroom and going to the bathroom and I went in and looked all over and I found it. In the clothes hamper with all the dirty clothes and things. And I took it and I poured it down the sink and I went downstairs and I threw the empty bottle in the garbage so don't tell me she's sick!

BOB: It's gone.

(BOB looks at KATIE. In the following sequence, although CATHERINE is the speaker, BOB will act out the scene with KATIE)

CATHERINE: No. No, don't.

BOB: It's gone.

CATHERINE: No.

BOB: You.

CATHERINE: No.

BOB: You took it and I want it back.

(BOB grabs KATIE)

I want it back!

CATHERINE: It's gone now and you can't have it.

BOB: Where? You tell me where?

CATHERINE: I poured it out.

BOB: No.

CATHERINE: Down the sink.

BOB: No.

CATHERINE: It's gone, forget it.

BOB: It's mine, I want it back!

CATHERINE: Gone.

BOB: No fair!

(BOB struggles with KATIE)

CATHERINE: Let me go!

BOB: No right!

CATHERINE: Let me go!

BOB: You had no right!

(KATIE strikes BOB, knocking her down)

CATHERINE: Daddy!

EV: Katie?

(EV gets up from his chair and moves to look for CATHERINE. OSCAR may follow him. EV does not see CATHERINE, nor she him)

OSCAR: You know my father wishes I were you. He does. He wishes I were you. "Oscar," he says, "Oscar, look at Ev – why can't you be like Ev."

BOB: Look at what your father did.

KATIE: You lie.

OSCAR: I say nothing. There's nothing to be said. "You got to have that killer instinct on the ice," he says. I play goalie – what the hell's a killer instinct in a goalie? Then he says, "Oscar," he says, "Oscar, you are goin' into medicine."

EV: Katie?

OSCAR: My Dad's a doctor so I gotta be a doctor.

BOB: Your father hit me and I fell.

KATIE: You're always lying.

BOB: See?

KATIE: He didn't hit you.

BOB: See?

KATIE: I hit you! – Get away from me!

OSCAR: What's so funny is you're the one so bloody keen on medicine – you'd kill for medicine. (laughs) Hey Ev, kill for medicine, eh. (laughs)

BOB: Your father's mother, your Gramma, killed herself and he's afraid to open it.

KATIE: (covers her ears) Now they're married wish them joy
First a girl for a toy
Seven years after, seven to come,
Fire on the mountain, kiss and run

(EV returns from his search for CATHERINE. OSCAR follows him. KATIE sees CATHERINE, and moves towards her, speaking the verse to her)

KATIE: On the mountain berries sweet
Pick as much as you can eat
By the berries bitter bark
Fire on the mountain break your heart

KATIE &

CATHERINE: Years to come – kiss and run – bitter bark –

(CATHERINE sees EV, who sees CATHERINE. CATHERINE speaks softly, almost to herself)

CATHERINE: Break your heart...
...It's me, Daddy.

EV: Katie?

KATIE: When I was little, Daddy.

CATHERINE: It's Catherine now, call me Catherine...well...aren't you going to say anything?

EV: You're home.

CATHERINE: Ah-huh...a hug, a big hug, Daddy, come on.

(CATHERINE and EV embrace)

Ooh.

EV: What.

CATHERINE: How long has it been?

EV: Be ah...

CATHERINE: Four years, right? Medical convention in where? Vancouver, right?

EV: That's right. Vancouver.

CATHERINE: Montreal, Toronto, Calgary, Van, where haven't we met, eh?

EV: Here.

- CATHERINE: Yup. Not...not met here.
(CATHERINE notices the envelope in EV's hand)
What're you doing with that?
- EV: Oh – just goin' through things. Clearin' things out.
(CATHERINE, getting out a cigarette, turns away from EV)
- BOB: Katie's afraid of what she wrote.
- KATIE: (to CATHERINE) Is that true?
- EV: Are you here for this hoopla tomorrow?
- CATHERINE: Not really.
- EV: There's gonna be speeches and more speeches. I lay the cornerstone, and dinner I think.
- CATHERINE: Ah-huh.
- EV: I got it all written down with the times.
- CATHERINE: Ah-huh.
- EV: I got it downstairs... You wanna take a look? ...Not here for that, eh.
- CATHERINE: No. I came home to see you.
- EV: Pretty sad state of affairs when your own daughter's in town and can't attend a sod-turnin' in honour of her father.
- CATHERINE: So I'll go, I'll be there.
- EV: Coulda sent a telegram, saved the air fare.
- CATHERINE: Christ Daddy, don't be so stupid.
- EV: Sound like your mother.
- CATHERINE: I learnt the four letter words from you.
- EV: Bullshit.
- CATHERINE: I said I'd go, I said I'd be there. So. (pause) I'm proud of you, Daddy.
- EV: Did you know it was a write-in campaign?
- CATHERINE: Oh?
- EV: The niggers from Barker's Point, the mill workers from Marysville, they're the ones got this hospital named after me. Left to the politicians God knows what they'd have called it.
- CATHERINE: Well, I'm proud.

- EV: Some goddamn French name I suppose – what?
- CATHERINE: Proud, you must be proud having the hospital named after you.
- EV: The day I first started practice, that day I was proud. Was the day after you were born... There was a scarlet fever epidemic that year, you remember?
- CATHERINE: No Daddy.
- EV: Somebody...some couple came in, they were carryin' their daughter, what was she? Two, maybe three? I took her in my arms...could see they'd left it too late. I remember that child. I passed her back to her mother. Hold her tight, I said. Hold her tight till she goes... Do you remember that woman holdin' that child in the hallway?
- CATHERINE: No Daddy.
- EV: No. That was your mother...that was your mother.
- BOB: Blueberries, Katie.
- EV: You were just little then.
- BOB: Blueberries along the railway tracks, and every year we'd pick them and sell them. I was the youngest, and Mama was always afraid I'd get lost, but I never got lost.
- (CATHERINE looks at BOB)
- Not once.
- (Pause)
- EV: What are you thinkin'?
- CATHERINE: (looks away from BOB) Nothing...You've lost weight.
- EV: Of course I lost. I damn near died. You didn't know that, did you.
- CATHERINE: No. No, nobody told me.
- EV: Well it was that goddamn heart man. It was him gave me a heart attack.
- CATHERINE: Really?
- EV: What the hell's his name?
- CATHERINE: Whose?
- EV: The heart man's!
- CATHERINE: I wouldn't know, Daddy.

EV: Demii – no, Demsky. I go to him, I tell him I been gettin' this pain in my ticker, and he has me walkin' up and down this little set a stairs, and runnin' on treadmills. Jesus Christ, I said to him, I'm not tryin' out for a sports team, I'm here because I keep gettin' this pain in my ticker! For Christ's sake, I said, put a stethoscope to my chest before you kill me with these goddamn stairs!

CATHERINE: So how are you now?

EV: It would've served the bastard right if I'd died right there in his office – do you remember how good Valma was with your mother?

CATHERINE: I remember.

EV: Every statutory holiday your mother's killin' herself or seein' things crawlin' on the walls or some goddamn thing or other, and Valma is like a rock, isn't that right?

CATHERINE: I guess so.

EV: So I come home from Demsky's, and I get the pain in my ticker and I wait all night for it to go away, and long about four or four-thirty, I phone Valma. Valma, I say, I'm havin' a heart attack, Valma – and she drops the phone nearly breakin' my ear drum and I can't phone out and I'm damned if I'm gonna get in that car and die all alone on Charlotte Street like that foolish Hazen Arbeton – If you were livin' in town, I'd have phoned you.

CATHERINE: You couldn't if Valma dropped the phone, Daddy.

EV: I'd have phoned you first!

CATHERINE: Would you?

EV: Well if I'd known she was gonna drop that goddamn phone I would have.

CATHERINE: What about Robbie?

EV: Who?

CATHERINE: Your son – Robbie.

EV: I'm not senile, I know who the hell Robbie is, what about him?

CATHERINE: You could have phoned him.

EV: I couldn't phone anyone! I was connected to Valma and I couldn't get disconnected!

CATHERINE: Would you have phoned him if you could?

EV: He wouldn't be home.

CATHERINE: How do you know?

EV: He's never home.

CATHERINE: Do you see him much?

EV: How the hell could I if he's never home?

CATHERINE: Do you *try* to see him!

EV: Of course I try! Have you seen him, phoned him, been over to visit?

CATHERINE: For Christ's sake Daddy, I just got in.

EV: Do you write?

CATHERINE: To Robbie?

EV: Yes to Robbie! You sure as hell don't write to me!

CATHERINE: I don't have the time.

EV: Some people make time.

CATHERINE: Why don't you?

EV: I'm busy.

CATHERINE: So am I.

EV: Mn. (pause) Does he ever write you?

CATHERINE: No.

EV: So you wonder why?

CATHERINE: He's busy! Everyone's busy!

EV: Bullshit. It's that woman of his.

CATHERINE: It isn't.

EV: Paula.

CATHERINE: Who's Paula?

EV: She thinks we're all crazy.

CATHERINE: Well maybe we are, who in hell's Paula?

EV: His wife!

CATHERINE: You mean Corinne.

EV: What did I say?

CATHERINE: You said Paula.

EV: Well I meant Corinne! (pause) Paula. Who the hell's Paula?
(pause)

BOB: Pauline.

EV: Pauline now, that was a friend of your mother's. Died a cancer,
died in your room, and where did you sleep?

CATHERINE: In this room

EV: because

CATHERINE: the maid had left

EV: and your mother nursed Pauline right through to the end.
Didn't touch a drop for three months.

(As CATHERINE turns away, she sees BOB)

BOB: Not a drop for three months, Katie.

(Pause)

EV: Best...best office nurse...I - ever had.

CATHERINE: Who, Mummy?

EV: Not Mummy, no. Valma. She ran that office like Hitler rollin'
through Poland, and good with your mother -

CATHERINE: (turns back to EV) I know, forty years like a rock.

EV: That's right, like a rock, but I call her with that heart attack,
and she goes hysterical. I never saw that in her before. It was
a surprise. It was a goddamn disappointment. She comes
runnin' into the house and up the stairs and huffin' and
puffin' and blue in the face and - I'm on the bathroom floor
by this time. She sees that, and gets more hysterical. She's got
to run next door - my phone not workin' bein' connected to
her phone which she dropped breakin' my ear drum - and
she phones the hospital. And then we sit - I lie, she sits - and
we wait for the goddamn ambulance, her holdin' my hand
and bawlin'.

CATHERINE: Poor Valma.

EV: Poor Valma be damned! If I'd had the strength I'd have killed
her. I kept tellin' her two things, I said it over and over - one,
you keep that Demsky away from me - and you know what
she does?

CATHERINE: She is sixty-seven.

EV: I'm seventy-three, you don't see me goin' hysterical! And I'm
the one havin' the heart attack!

CATHERINE: Alright.

EV: You know the first thing I lay eyes on when I wake up in that hospital bed? Well, do you!

CATHERINE: No, I don't know, no.

EV: First thing I see is that goddamn Demsky hangin' over me like a vulture. Demsky who gave me the heart attack! ...Next death bed wish I make I sure as hell won't make it to Valma.

CATHERINE: Well...it wasn't a real death bed wish, Daddy. You're still here.

EV: No thanks to her!

(Pause)

CATHERINE: So?

EV: So what?

CATHERINE: Jesus Daddy, so how are you now?

EV: I don't read minds, I'm not a mind-reader!

CATHERINE: How are you!

EV: I'm fine!

CATHERINE: Good.

EV: What?

CATHERINE: I said good. Great. I'm glad that you're fine.

EV: Got the nitro pills...pop a coupla them. Slow down they say. Don't get excited, don't talk too fast, don't walk too fast, don't, don't, don't, just pop a pill.

CATHERINE: Is it hard?

EV: Is what hard?

CATHERINE: Is it hard to slow down?

EV: ...The nurses could always tell when I'd started my rounds. They could hear my heels hittin' the floor tiles, hear me a wing away.

(OSCAR starts to laugh quietly)

Did I ever tell you...

OSCAR: That's what you call a Cuban heel, Ev.

EV: ...'Bout those white woman's shoes I bought on St. Lawrence?

CATHERINE: For the O.R.

- EV: That's right. They were on sale, real cheap, but they fit my foot cause my foot is so narrow.
- OSCAR: Still, a woman's shoe, Ev?
- EV: A good shoe for the O.R. was hard to find then!
- CATHERINE: So you bought two pair.
- EV: And I wore em. – How did you know?
- CATHERINE: You told me.
- EV: I told you.
- CATHERINE: Don't you remember? You and Uncle Oscar would act that whole story out ...Do you see Uncle Oscar? (pause) Daddy? (pause) Well...anyway...so, what was the other thing?
- EV: Mn?
- CATHERINE: The other thing. You kept telling Valma two things, Demsky, and what was the other?
- EV: Don't tell Katie. I musta said that a dozen times. I could hear myself. You're not to tell Katie. You're not to tell Katie.
- CATHERINE: Why not?
- EV: Because I didn't want you to know.
- CATHERINE: Why not?
- EV: Because I knew, even if you did know, you wouldn't come – and my heart would've burst from that pain.
(CATHERINE and EV look at each other. CATHERINE looks away)
Look at me – look at me!...
(CATHERINE looks at EV)
You knew. That goddamn Valma, she told you.
- CATHERINE: No –
- EV: You think I don't know a lie when I hear it, I see it, right in your goddamn eyes I can see it.
- CATHERINE: Alright, alright, Valma did write –
- EV: Ignores every goddamn thing I tell her.
- CATHERINE: You could have died, Daddy.
- EV: If you gave a damn you'd have been here!
- CATHERINE: I don't want to fight.

EV: You afraid?

CATHERINE: No.

EV: I'm not afraid.

CATHERINE: God.

EV: Looked death in the face in that goddamn bathroom. It's not easy starin' death down with Valma bawlin' beside you. Every bit a your bein' directed, concentrated on winnin', not lettin' go... (gets out nitro pills; unscrews top while talking; takes pill by placing it under his tongue during his speech) Hated, hated losin'! Always. Hockey, politics, surgery, never mattered to me, just *had* to win. Could never let go. Do you know...do you know I saved Billy Barnes' life by hangin' onto his hand? I would not let him go till the sulfa took hold. I hung onto his hand, and I said Billy, goddamn it, you fight! And he did. They said it was the sulfa that saved him, miracle drug in those days, but you could never convince Billy of that. "Goddamn it, Doc, it was you!"... I opened his belly two or three years ago. Opened his belly and closed his belly. Inoperable carcinoma... "Are you tellin' me this thing is gonna kill me, Doc?" I reached out my hand and he took it... Hung...onto my hand...

CATHERINE: I would have come, but you didn't want me to know.

EV: But you did know, didn't you. That goddamn Valma, she told you, and you didn't come.

CATHERINE: I'm here now.

EV: Bit of free time, drop in and see the old man, eh?

CATHERINE: No.

EV: But if his ticker gives out and catches you typin', too bad.

CATHERINE: Don't.

EV: So were you workin' or weren't you workin'?

CATHERINE: I'm always working.

EV: And that's more important than your own father.

CATHERINE: Don't start.

EV: A woman your age should be raisin' a family.

CATHERINE: What family did you ever raise? You were never home from one day to the next so who are you to talk to me about family?

EV: Your father, that's who. The one who damn near died with no one but an office nurse by his side.

CATHERINE: Valma loves you!

EV: That's not what we're talkin' about here. We're talkin' about you and your work and your father dyin', that's what we're talkin' about!

CATHERINE: Are we?

EV: That's what I'm talkin' about – I don't know what the hell you're on about – I don't know what the hell you're doin' here!

CATHERINE: I just came home to see you, I wanted to see you...have you got any idea how hard it was for me to come home, to walk in that door, to, to come home?... Have you?...and when I leave here...my plane...could fall out of the sky, you could get another pain in your ticker, we could never talk again...all the things never said, do you ever think about that?

EV: You mean dyin'?

CATHERINE: No, more than that, I mean...I don't know what I mean.
(Pause)

EV: Are you still with that...whatshisname?

CATHERINE: Sort of.

EV: What's his name?

CATHERINE: What's it matter, you never remember.

EV: What's his name? Dugan? or Dougan?

CATHERINE: That was before, years before, Daddy.

EV: You should get one and hang onto one, Katie. Then I'd remember.

CATHERINE: I...

EV: What?

CATHERINE: I said it's difficult to keep a relationship goin' when when you're busy, right?

EV: Why don't you marry this whosits?

CATHERINE: Yeah, well...Whosits talks about that.

EV: I'm still waitin' for a grandsort you know.

CATHERINE: I'm too old for that.

-
- EV: You're soon gonna be – how old are you anyway?
- CATHERINE: Besides I'd only have girls.
- EV: Robbie's got girls...girls are all right... You can have girls if you want.
- CATHERINE: I said I don't know if I want.
- EV: But get married first.
- CATHERINE: Actually – I've been thinking...of...of maybe calling it quits with whosits.
- EV: Quits?
- CATHERINE: Ah-huh.
- EV: You're callin' it quits.
- CATHERINE: The work you know. Makes it hard.
- EV: I thought this was the one. What the hell was his name, Sturgeon or Stefan or –
- CATHERINE: His name doesn't matter.
- EV: Stupid goddamn name – an actor, an actor for Christ's sake.
- CATHERINE: We're not goin' to get into whosits and me and marriage and me and kids and me, all right?
- EV: You go through men like boxes of kleenex.
- CATHERINE: I don't want to talk about it!
- EV: Jesus Christ, I can't keep up.
- CATHERINE: No you can't! You can't even remember his name!
- EV: Burgess Buchanan, that was his name! And you sat in the lounge at the Bayside and you said, "Oh Daddy, you just got to meet him, he's such a nice fella, he's so understanding, and he's so this and he's so that and he's..." So explain to me what went wrong this time?
- CATHERINE: Why do we always end up yelling and screaming, why do we do that?
- EV: I care 'bout you!... I want to see you settled, Katie. Happy. I want you to write, letters, not... I want you close.
- CATHERINE: ...I do write somebody you know. I write Uncle Oscar...every once in a while...when the spirit moves me.
- EV: Not often.

- CATHERINE:** No. Not often. But I do. Write letters to someone. I do make the time. I know you and he don't keep in touch any more but I like to.
- EV:** Not lately.
- CATHERINE:** No, not lately. I...why do you say that?
- EV:** He was fly-fishin'. He slipped and fell in the Miramichi with his waders on.
- CATHERINE:** (upset) No... Did - did you see him?
- EV:** At the morgue when they brought him in.
- CATHERINE:** I mean before. Did you see him before? Were the two of you talking?
(EV shakes his head)
Why not?
- EV:** Too late.
- CATHERINE:** Now it's too late.
- EV:** Too late even then. Even before. Too much had been said.
- CATHERINE:** I wish you'd have told me.
- EV:** Would you have come home for him?
- CATHERINE:** ...Probably not.
- EV:** So what difference does it make?
- CATHERINE:** I like to know these things. Whether I can come or not. I can't help it if I'm in the middle of things.
- EV:** You make sure you're always in the middle of something. It's an excuse. How old are you now?
- CATHERINE:** Stop asking me that.
- EV:** You're gonna end up a silly old woman with nothin' but a cat for company.
- CATHERINE:** It'll be a live-in cat which is more than you've got with Valma.
- EV:** If I wanted Valma here, she'd be here.
- CATHERINE:** So you don't want her here, eh? You like it alone. Sitting up here all alone!
- EV:** I am not alone!
- CATHERINE:** You and Robbie, the same city, you never see Robbie!

- EV: Go on! Why doncha go on! You go so goddamn much to say, why don't you say it! I am alone and it's you left me alone! My own daughter walkin' out and leavin' her father alone!
- CATHERINE: How many years before you noticed my bed wasn't slept in?
- EV: Don't go pointin' your finger at me! Look at yourself! What the hell do you do? Work, work, work – at what, for Christ's sake?
- CATHERINE: I write! I'm good at it!
- EV: Writing, eh Katie?
- CATHERINE: Don't call me Katie!
- EV: I'll call you by the name we gave you and that name is Katie.
- CATHERINE: It's Catherine now.
- EV: Oh, it's Catherine now, and you write Literature, don't you? And that means you can ignore your brother and your father and dump this Buchanan jerk and forget kids and family, but your father who gave his life to medicine because he believed in what he was doin' is an asshole!
- CATHERINE: I never said that!
- EV: My whole family never had a pot to piss in, lived on porridge and molasses when I was a kid.
- CATHERINE: Alright!
- EV: And fought for every goddamn thing I got!
- CATHERINE: And it all comes down to you sitting up here alone with Gramma's letter!
- EV: I am goin' through things!
- CATHERINE: Why won't you open it?
- EV: I know what it says.
- CATHERINE: Tell me.
- EV: You want it, here, take it.
(CATHERINE grabs letter from EV. She almost rips it open, but stops and turns it in her hand. Pause)
- CATHERINE: Did Gramma really walk out to meet it?
- EV: It was an accident.
- CATHERINE: What was Mummy?
- EV: You blame me for that.

CATHERINE: No.

EV: It was all my fault, go on, say it, I know what you think.

CATHERINE: It was my fault.

EV: Oh for Christ's sake!

(EV moves away from CATHERINE. He sits, takes off his glasses and rubs the bridge of his nose. He looks at CATHERINE, then back to the glasses which he holds in his hand)

...Your mother...

CATHERINE: Yes?

EV: Your mother and I -

CATHERINE: Tell me. Explain it to me.

BOB: There were eight of us, Katie, eight of us.

OSCAR: (softly) Go, go.

BOB: How did my mama manage?

(OSCAR stands up, holding two hockey sticks. He is looking at EV, whose back is to him. EV puts his glasses in his pocket)

OSCAR: Go.

BOB: All older than me, all born before he went to war.

OSCAR: Go.

BOB: Him, her husband, my father, your grandfather, Katie.

OSCAR: Go. Go!

BOB: And her with the eight of us and only the pension.

OSCAR: Go!! Go!!

BOB: How did my mama manage?

(BOB may exit. Shift)

OSCAR: Go!!! Go!!!

(OSCAR throws a hockey stick at EV who stands, turns, plucking it out of the air at the last minute. They are catapulted back in time, rough-housing after a game)

Go!!! The Devon Terror has got the puck, out of his end, across the blue line, they're mixing it up in the corner and he's out in front, he shoots! He scores! Rahhhhh!

(OSCAR has ended up on the floor with his hockey sweater pulled over his head. EV, who's scored, raises his arms in acknowledgement of the crowd's "Rah!". EV helps OSCAR up)

You know somethin' Ev? This is the truth. Honest to God. Are you listenin'?

EV: Yeah.

(EV takes off his "old man" sweater and hangs it on the back of a chair. During the following dialogue, OSCAR changes out of his hockey clothes, putting them in the trunk. He removes a jacket, pants and shoes for EV, and a suit of clothes plus shoes for himself)

OSCAR: When I think of medicine I get sick. Yeah. The thought of medicine makes me ill. Physically ill. Do you think that could be my mother in me?

(EV slips out of his slippers and removes his pants. OSCAR will put the pants in the trunk)

EV: Maybe.

OSCAR: My father says it's my mother in me. At least she had the good sense to get out. Leaving me with him. How could she do that?

EV: I dunno. (puts on suit jacket)

OSCAR: The old man calls her a bitch. And now nuthin' for it but I got to go into medicine.

EV: So tell him no.

OSCAR: I can't.

EV: Stand up to him.

OSCAR: I can't.

EV: Just tell him.

OSCAR: It'd break his heart.

EV: Shit Oscar, it's your life, you can't think about that.

JUDITH THOMPSON

WHITE BITING DOG

Note to the reader

Judith Thompson's plays are published by the Playwrights Union of Canada, and are available from:

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Toronto. The play won instant recognition for Thompson. It went on to be produced by Montreal's Centaur Theatre, Vancouver's Touchstone Theatre, and The Next Theatre Company in Chicago. Thompson's second play, WHITE BITING DOG, won the 1984 Governor General's Literary Award for drama and was first produced by the Tarragon Theatre. Her new play, I AM YOURS, also ran at the Tarragon.

Thompson recently co-ordinated a writers' workshop at Smith College in Massachusetts. She currently lives in Toronto, where she is playwright-in-residence at the Tarragon Theatre and writes scripts for television, including CBC's "Airwaves" and "Street Legal." Her radio play, A KISSING WAY, was recently heard on CBC's "Vanishing Point" series.

BIOGRAPHY

That's why I'm a playwright. To explore the human chasm between the social persona and the inner life; to find out who people really are.

Judith Thompson was born in Montreal. She attended high school and university in Kingston and worked as a life skills counsellor during the summers. Her mother directed plays in which Thompson often performed and her passion for theatre led her to the National Theatre School in Montreal, where she graduated from the Acting Program in 1979.

Although Thompson worked briefly as a professional actress, she became more and more interested in writing and won acclaim when a workshop of her first script, THE CRACKWALKER, was produced by Théâtre Passe Muraille in

REVIEWS

"Judith Thompson's *WHITE BITING DOG*...is orgiastic and poetic in its use of language, excessive in its theatricality, and achieves its power by an accretion of extraordinary images... Any play...which pushes against the limits of theatrical naturalism has to accomplish one very difficult thing: it has to create its own world. Miss Thompson, in *WHITE BITING DOG*, does this. And that is an amazing accomplishment."

Carole Corbeil, The Globe and Mail

"(Judith) Thompson has the best ear of any playwright now writing in Canada."

Carole Corbeil, The Globe and Mail

N.B. Because of the extreme and deliberate musicality of this play, any attempts to go against the textual rhythms, such as the breaking up of an unbroken sentence, or the taking of a pause where none is written in are DISASTROUS. The effect is like being in a small plane and suddenly turning off the ignition. It all falls down. This play must SPIN, *not* just turn around.

The Characters:

- CAPE:** A very handsome silky young man who could seduce almost anybody in twenty minutes. He is *compulsively* seductive, extremely charming and manipulative. He thinks and speaks very quickly, changing mental gears constantly and with great alacrity. He seems to be flirting with everyone he talks to. He even flirts with the audience while telling them the most terrible things about himself. Mid to late twenties.
- GLIDDEN:** The kind of man others refer to as "lightweight." He is kind, loves to play pranks and wants desperately for his life to be like a Norman Rockwell painting. He is dying of a disease contracted from the constant handling of sphagnum moss — gardening was one of his chief pleasures. In the last few years he has realized that people constantly patronize him and he fights this. Without his wife he has no reason to live. Late fifties or early sixties.
- PONY:** Her clothing should express her directness: natural fabrics, simple walking shoes, subdued colours, no prints, nice lines. Clothes are for comfort, but are always neat. Her hair should be out of her face, but should not bring attention to itself. She is deeply ethical. Anywhere from twenty to thirty-five or so.
- LOMIA:** She is not knowingly campy and is not a performer. She is obsessed with her physical being. She is often very shy and girlish as well as nasty and powerful. She is buffeted by sensation. Her words are out before the thought is clear in her head. Her clothes should *not* conform to the stereotype of a flamboyant woman. Forty-five to fifty-five.
- PASCAL:** He was brilliant at physics and at chess. He strives to approach the world and every thought freshly. He spends all his time thinking about experience. His costume and hair should reflect this. He can be of any colour or ethnicity. Twenty to thirty.

WHITE BITING DOG

Act One

It is dark on stage. CAPE is drumming on his bongo drums. He reaches a peak, stops, doubting the reason for drumming, starts again, then stops. Unsure, as if he had heard a peculiar noise, he steps a few steps towards the audience, hands and body shy, but with a lot of energy. His voice is soft and polite, hesitant, but with a confidence underneath the gentlemanly softness.

CAPE: Did it even happen? Sure it happened. It happened, I'm not crazy, I know! I arrived at the Bloor Street bridge, and I climbed up on the wall, right? And I was gonna do it, I was just about to jump when I heard this drum sound, as if the whole city knew, boom boom *boom* boom BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM... (speaks in small strange voice) "I'm not gonna hurt you." (turns quickly) Who's that? A cop? There's nobody! Just! A white dog! Beside me! How did it...

"YOU'RE JUMPING TO HELL" the dog, the *dog* spoke.

So I...answered—

"BUT I'M LIVING IN HELL...ANYWAY."

"YOU'RE LIVING IN HELL, 'CAUSE YOU AIN'T DONE YOUR MISSION."

"WHAT'S THAT?"

"TO SAVE YOUR FATHER FROM DEATH. TO SAVE YOUR FATHER FROM DEATH."

The dog...spoke! I'm not kidding! This dog actually spoke she saved me from the plunge; it was the weirdest—

(GLIDDEN rushes out of bed, and out of his room onto the landing)

GLIDDEN: OUT OF THE TUNNEL, OUT OF THE TUNNEL, OUT OF THE... (makes a sound like a cockaburro; sits down, instructing) We *don't* pull pussy by the *tail*, Gliddy, we don't pull pussy by the...

CAPE: Dad? What are you doing?

GLIDDEN: To turn my stomach.

CAPE: What?

GLIDDEN: To turny my stomach, to... (half awakens) Ahhh. What...what...what time is it?

CAPE: It's late, you were sleepwalking.

GLIDDEN: Isn't it way past your bedtime? You have...hockey practice tomorrow at six, don't you? You — *hop* it to *bed* right —

CAPE: DAD WAKE UP. I'm twenty-six years old and the only time I play hockey is Sunday nights with a bunch of dentists.

GLIDDEN: Oh. Yes, of course, *I* knew *that*, I was just...having you on! *Pulling your leg.*

(CAPE fakes a laugh)

Never too old or too sick for a bit of a joke! ...Hey, how about a piece of toast?

CAPE: Toast? No thank you, but I could get you one, if—

GLIDDEN: Me? Oh not for me thanks. I'm for a bit of...booze. (gets drink)

CAPE: Were you having the nightmare? About the...boat in the ice?

GLIDDEN: What? Oh yes, no. I — don't know — one dream I had, very nice, was your mother, your mother in a taf-taffeta dress, green, at a...party... My Gawd what a hostess, never let anyone feel — left out, you know? Even the ugliest person in the corner, why she'd talk to fellas with boils so bad you'd want to throw up just looking at them.

CAPE: Why don't I take you to bed?

GLIDDEN: Don't patronize me.

CAPE: I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

(GLIDDEN is gripped by pain)

CAPE: Should I get your medication?

(CAPE starts to get a drink. GLIDDEN walks across the room)

GLIDDEN: Nope, no, you know — I think I'm going to die tonight.

(CAPE turns suddenly)

CAPE: But you can't. You can't you have to fight it Dad you have to kick and punch and...

(CAPE is holding GLIDDEN, shaking him. Peat-moss falls out of GLIDDEN's pajama top)

Dad I just don't think that's very funny any more.

GLIDDEN: Sorry... It's...cool...on the...stomach... It's...

CAPE: (cleaning up) ...I just don't think you should do it any more.

GLIDDEN: I'm not...any more, I'm not any more that man who designed ships' engines...made ya wear your hockey helmet, I'm...I'mmm...a rotting tree turning into a swamp, a...

(GLIDDEN sways, almost falls. CAPE catches him)

CAPE: Dad!

(CAPE pulls his father onto the couch. GLIDDEN lies on CAPE's lap; CAPE strokes his father's forehead)

There. Just lie for a minute.

(Sound of skateboard is heard)

GLIDDEN: What— What the heck is that sound do you know I've heard it every day now for..

CAPE: That's a skateboard. Down the steep hill.

GLIDDEN: Ohh. You know I think I should have accepted that offer. You remember from Australia? Back in— I think a hot country might have understood me. Hey, did you know that in Sydney, there are nine beaches within the city limits? WITHIN THE CITY LIMITS! Nine beaches!

CAPE: Nine!

GLIDDEN: Within the city limits! Yes... Yes I even — have this sort of daydream...that...well...I think they might have made me Prime Minister of that country. Cornball eh?

CAPE: No! No — I've often thought of running for Alderman.

GLIDDEN: ...Sometimes I can even imagine being carried on the backs of the miners. I'd be Labour, of course, the miners from, say...Wogga Wogga — BUT anyway, it's too late *now*...

CAPE: Not yet.

GLIDDEN: (getting up) Maybe not — tonight. Maybe not tomorrow. But soon. When it's you, you know, you know— You know... (pausing at stairs) Are you sure you won't have that piece of toast?

CAPE: Yes.

GLIDDEN: Have it your way...ah...don't forget to turn out the lights and lock the door before you go to bed, eh?

CAPE: (shaking) Dad? Should I...uh...sit sit with you? What should I...?

GLIDDEN: Listen. Auntie Grace, remember? When Gracey was dying and I wouldn't eat wouldn't sleep wouldn't move from under her bed, just lay there breathing dust she said to me "Glid," she said, "Look at the kettle, and think of me. I'm WATER now, I will be

STEAM." That helped. (says it faster, like a kid's rhyme) Look at the kettle and think of me, I'm water now, I will be steam. *I'm water now, I will be steam.* That's all it is. (goes into room, returns for a moment)

CAPE:

...If I save HIM, I save myself, get it? I don't know why I have been given this...chance. Me, a lousy young...lawyer with a wife a wife who — in the whole of four years of marriage I did not smile at her once. Not once! I had never smiled at anyone, *really*, except a baby once, on the street. I couldn't. I — didn't have the...stuff to make a smile...rise up. It wasn't THERE. NOTHING WAS. Nothing *was* ever there — for other people, do you KNOW what that...I could fake it, of course, it was simple to make the faces, smiles, laughter, lust — I laughed so much, in fact, that I was...noted for my laugh. (laughs a very infectious laugh) But it's tiring, I couldn't keep it up, so at night in my home, I would sit in the dark, just sit in the dark on the living room brown shag carpet and Janis, would sit in the kitchen, under the light...brushing her hair. Just brushing and brushing and brushing... Every day I felt...sicker... to hear another client — swallow his coffee — to smell the personal, unique smell of someone's bare head as they stood next to me on the subway — was excruciating pain. That's...the only way I can express it. I could not be happy. So, on a Sunday in January, I went into the kitchen — she hid her brush, I said, "I think I'll get some popcorn, hon." She said "That would be neat" and made a (purses lips as if to say "mmm") face with her lips that she always made and I went. I went to the Don Valley Parkway bridge and was stopped by a dog. Who gave me a mission: to save myself by saving my father from death. So I staged a breakdown, crying in court, urinating in the waste paper basket. The firm gave me leave, Janis has filed for divorce, so here I am now, and... It's failing. He is... dying...fast so I'm drumming, I'm drumming and drumming in the hopes that the dog — a dog would hear drums, don't you think? I KNOW she exists, I—

(GLIDDEN drags a large bag of peat moss onto the landing, and starts holding his hands far above his head and dropping the moss on himself)

D-duh-Father? Da-Daddy what are you— (to audience) No, no it's nothing, eh? He he just...it's — a...mineral in the dirt, or..

(GLIDDEN is breathing strangely)

Ohhhhhhh! Oh no, oh no, (grabs GLIDDEN) Father, Father look at me, listen I, please! Please don't give in, please—

GLIDDEN: (stands up violently) POP POP POP POP ROCK ME TO GRAVENHURST ROCK ME TO GRAVENHURST ROCK ME TO GRAVENHURST ROCK ME TO GRAVENHURST (opens eyes wide) I'M NOT A ROCK CONCERT NOT A ROCKABYE ROCK, NOT A ROCKABYE, ROCKABYE CONCERT, ROCK ME TO GRAVENHURST, ROCK ME TO...

(GLIDDEN passes out. CAPE catches him and puts him over his shoulder)

CAPE: Gravenhurst is where the family's all buried this is it! It's all over there is no way out.

(CAPE dumps GLIDDEN on his bed, comes out, returns to throw bag of peat moss into his father's room, comes out again)

Hear that? Hear that? That's the...grinding of teeth again — I — I bet it's the devils that my great aunt told us about, under the Don Valley Parkway, that's THEIR way of laughing, GRINDING their teeth — they're laughing because they think that they have me but they don't — they don't, do they? 'Cause the white dog is coming, she's coming now oh somebody tell her tell her I'm in trouble, tell her to HEEEEEEEEEEEELLLLLLLLLLLLLP!! — the drums. Maybe she'll hear the drums (starts drumming) white dog, dog from the bridge oh QUEEN of dogs oh please oh help oh help oh (stops) It's not working. What'll I do what'll I — A SONG! A song, yes, they sing in CHURCH (sings, to the melody of *Agnus Dei*) A — ahhhhhhhhh laaaaaa whiiiiitee dog pleeeeeeeeeease...

(PONY is heard singing, off. She enters, continuing to sing until she notices CAPE when he says "Hello." CAPE speaks after he has heard the word "dog" for the second time)

PONY: Your *eyes* do shine so *bright* and clear my *dear* my Queenie dear 'cause you're my *dog* my doggie dog I love ya *sooo* I always will 'cause your *eyes* do shine so *bright* and clear my *dear* my Queenie dear and I *hope* you never *shed* a single *tear* my Queenie dear 'cause you're my *dog* my doggie —

CAPE: Oh my God! Oh my God that's it this is IT she's HERE — (runs out of the house) It's — it's — a GIRL!! I guess an *angel*, kind of a... Hello!

PONY: Oh!

CAPE: I...heard you sing!

PONY: Oh...

- CAPE: Don't be...embarrassed it was...what — what —
(Intending to ask PONY what the answer is, CAPE suddenly realizes that maybe she is *only* a girl)
What — are — you — doing out after — curfew?
- PONY: Curfew? There's no curfew here!
- CAPE: Yeah but that guy that guy that strangled the cheerleader, he's still loose!
- PONY: I'm not afraid of some weasel. Who are you?
- CAPE: I'M...you *know*?!
No.
- CAPE: I'm *the guy*. That lives...here. Who are you?
- PONY: Just a girl.
- CAPE: *Just* a girl?
- PONY: I think so.
- CAPE: I — don't — think so, I think — I mean — if you're just a girl what are you doing wandering the streets singing songs to a dog?
- PONY: Well, to tell you the truth, I'll be honest with ya, I was lying on my fold-out in my furnished bachelor on Albany and I got this UNRESISTIBLE urge to get up and go out for a walk. And when urges like that come along, I listen to them so I did. I just walked where my feet took me.
- CAPE: — and they took you HERE?
- PONY: Well. I don't feel like walking any further.
- CAPE: So you don't KNOW where you're going? (realizes she is an unknowing agent of the dog)
- PONY: Not particularly.
- CAPE: You're so brave!
- PONY: Ha. You obviously don't know me very well.
- CAPE: What, what do you mean?
- PONY: I mean that when you've done one-fifty down Thunder Bay Road and ya've jumped out and picked up an S.I.D. and watched him die right in front of your nose going out for a midnight stroll is tiddlywinks. Seen?
- CAPE: S.I.D. —

- PONY: It stands for sudden infant death, and it is a very tragic thing.
- CAPE: Oh. You — you were an ambulance man?
- PONY: Only for four years.
- CAPE: Only.
- PONY: You want to watch me. I'm sarcastic.
- CAPE: You saved lives then, you — you saw the m-m— (uses face and body to indicate the word "movement")
- PONY: You better believe it. Heck my first day on we get a call from this Chinese family downtown, eh, so we walk into the house and this kid takes us to the bathroom and ya know what we see? This old Chinese guy sittin' on the toity bleedin' from every hole in his body; nose ears dink mouth, everything, just pourin' out blood, so my supervisor looks at me and she goes "That's cute."
- CAPE: Didn't all the blood make you queasy?
- PONY: Who me? You kidding, dissection was my favourite subject!
- CAPE: Yes? Why's that?
- PONY: I don't know. It always made me feel — I don't know, like I was a top model or something.
- CAPE: You — (tries to keep her there) — name! Name, what is your name?
- PONY: Daid, Pony. (hits herself) I mean, Pony Daid.
- CAPE: I'm Cape, Cape Race. Does — does that sound — familiar to you?
- PONY: Sure. I even been there. Are you from there?
- CAPE: Where? Oh! Cape Race? No. No!
- PONY: Well how come you're named for it?
- CAPE: 'Cause 'cause you know why? 'Cause I am the way the word sounds, I think. Do you — think?
- PONY: I can see that.
- CAPE: You're the first person who could! Hey! Why did you leave the ambulance business?
- PONY: I'm not at liberty to say.
- CAPE: Oh please?
- PONY: Swear you won't reveal it?

CAPE: Swear.

PONY: Speeding.

CAPE: They fired you for speeding an ambulance?

PONY: They fired me 'cause they knew I was gonna quit and their pride was hurt.

CAPE: Why, why were you gonna quit?

PONY: 'Cause it was a bum operation. Like I'm an order-oriented person, eh, a neat bar my Dad even called me, and this was the slackest outfit I ever saw! Something you'd think would be the tightest, and it was the slackest! Nobody gave a fig! So I said to myself "Pony, if you want order you're gonna have to be your own boss and that's all there is to it."

CAPE: So NOW, you save lives on your *own*?

PONY: Kinda. I got my own fix-it stand, for things though eh, not people, up at the mall, out in Mississauga.

CAPE: Ah...would you — would you like to come in?

PONY: What, for a — tea?

CAPE: Tea? Sure, sure I can make tea.

(Pause)

PONY: Um — just in case you're a bad guy, although I don't think you are, I think I should tell you that I have been trained by this Vietnam vet — Herb.

CAPE: Hey! Hey you think I'd hurt *you*? My life is in your hands!

PONY: Pardon?

CAPE: Just a — manner of speech — ah — well! Here it is!!

PONY: Well. This is quite the — bare room.

CAPE: Yeah? Oh yeah we — Pap and me keep breaking things — a couple of oxes.

PONY: Oh I like a clean room — although I do like the occasional knick-knack. Nice clock. Hey, ya dropped your mitten.

CAPE: P-please put that back.

PONY: Why?

CAPE: He ah — Pap wants it there he — it's been there for over a year, do you believe it? Ever since the — ah — the old duck dropped it when she left — left. He — he thinks it'll bring her back or something.

PONY: Poor guy. Is he a little —

CAPE: He — he's dying. In fact, he is going to die tonight, if nothing stops him. But you — you know that, don't you?

PONY: Well — there is a kind of a creepy feeling... Also if I do say so you're acting a little — shook up.

CAPE: Yes, yes I'm very shook up.

PONY: I don't blame you, eh, I'd flip out if anything happened to my old man.

CAPE: You understand?

PONY: Oh yeah, like I'm wild about my dad, just wild. He's very interesting you know. He collected mice!

CAPE: Mice! He was a mouser?

PONY: Kinda. He'd spend all Sundays with them, building run-wheels and such. Huh. He had two hundred and twenty-six at one time. Freaked the mum right out.

CAPE: How many now?

PONY: None any more. My dad had to gas them. Not meanly, though. He's the projectionist for Kirkland Lake, where I'm from. Us kids really lucked out, eh, got to watch every film fifteen, sixteen times.

CAPE: Look, I can't beat around any more I — listen — if you think I'm nuts just leave, but — I have to ask — are — are you here — to help us?

PONY: What, you and your dad?

CAPE: Yes.

PONY: Well, not that I was personally aware of. I guess I could be.

CAPE: Okay, I'm gonna spill the whole boodle — as I said, if you think I'm insane — just walk away. But every word is pure truth.

PONY: I'll believe you.

CAPE: Okay. See, I was a lawyer, married, making money, everything was — in place; only trouble was, I have a disease, where I hated — I hated living so much my teeth were ground down to baby teeth. One day it got so bad that I had no choice; I went to the Danforth Bridge, climbed up on the wall, and I was just about to kill myself when I saw a dog, a white dog, just sitting there. And then a real miracle happened — the dog — the dog spoke. She told me that I was JUMPING TO HELL.

-
- PONY: A white dog?
- CAPE: Yeah, a small white dog with bu-blue eyes.
- PONY: I don't believe it!
- CAPE: You've got to!
- PONY: No, I mean I believe what you say, but I'm freaking out because I had a white *dog*, like that, she was probably the being to which I was very closest of all, Queenie, and I *know* she had ESP in her, things happened all the time, and then just last month she died then I get this overpowering urge to come here?
- CAPE: The — the dog told me that to *save* my father was *my* only hope; if he lives, I'm cured, now you've come along, and *you* you've *saved lives!*
- PONY: Boy. Boy I knew something important would happen to me sooner or later. 'Cause — well — I feel shy to say it, but — well, I — yeah. I admit it, I I'm a psychic.
- CAPE: Yes?
- PONY: Yeah!! Like this isn't a very good example, but up in Kirkland, whenever I wanted the traffic light to change, I'd just squeeze my bumcheeks together, eh, hard as I could, till I almost passed out but it worked, it worked every time.
- CAPE: Well!
- PONY: Oh, I did bigger things too — I — well I never used it to save a human life, but I a couple times I found out HOW to save them.
- CAPE: You did?
- PONY: Yeah. All I would do is, I would concentrate on the question "How do I save them?" like a trance and then an answer comes out. It's worked three times. One was Queenie. That's my dog. I hooked right into her mind and she told me what was wrong! Another was a private matter to do with my brother Wade's wife, Linda, and one was when Chrissy Pilon was missing and I took them right to the house where he — the guy — had her. Now they COULD have all been like a coincidence, but —
- CAPE: No, they weren't. They weren't at all. You — are — here...to save our lives!! You have...
- PONY: I knew it! I knew I'd do something special more than work in a mall!
- CAPE: ...Could you go into your trance now, he's *very* bad.

- PONY: Um *sure*, I don't mind but — this feels so — kinda — normal, you know? I — like I wonder if we could have something for the — underneathness?
- CAPE: Oh yes! Sure. (turns out lights; moves to drums) How's that?
- PONY: That is excellent. You keep on doing that, and I'll just *concentrate* real —
- (They make contact)
- Oh yeah, keep up that drumming, that's —
- CAPE: His name is Glidden, Glidden Race.
- PONY: Glidden — Race...okayyy — mm-mm...
- (PONY holds her breath, sways. They both almost go into trance. The drumming is spectacular. PONY shudders and says in LOMIA's voice, or LOMIA says through a screen)
- PONY: Ooooooooooh that's lovely darling could you just do the inside of my arm, oh God that is delicious I just made a lovely thick fanny burp!
- (CAPE jumps up, turns on the lights)
- CAPE: Ahhhhhh! What — what what was that?
- PONY: I don't know, I didn't even hear me, but whatever you heard, that's what it is. It's what the answer is, I know, I feel it.
- CAPE: But but but that — that was my — my mother my oh. That was her voice. That was my mother's voice. (almost vomiting)
- PONY: Jeeps. You obviously don't get on with your mum.
- CAPE: But her words came out of YOUR mouth, didn't they? What does that mean?
- PONY: It means her coming back is the only thing gonna save your dad.
- CAPE: What?
- PONY: I know it, I can feel it in my feet. Oh yeah, when I get it that way it's always right, right as anything.
- CAPE: That means I — I have to convince her somehow to come back for good?
- PONY: Yes. Yes it does.
- CAPE: But — but I can't. I can't bring her here.
- PONY: Why not?

-
- CAPE: Because she's corrupt. You know what she did to my father? She fucked around on him for years, then dumped him. He turned to mush, shaking, sweating all the time, the snakes at his office were thrilled, saying at their cocktail parties he was impotent that's why she left. He was turned to mush and it's her fucking fault it's FUCK HER. You know what I'd do if my dream came true? I'd like to get on National TV and tell them how she made me drink my own nose bleeds from fruity jam jars. She did! And she *farts* like no person should, she — oh *dear*, I — I am sorry pardon me. I guess the trance — Look, basically, I'd rather she not come back here 'cause I'm afraid we'd argue, and that I might harm her...
- PONY: I thought you said if you saved your Dad you wouldn't be strange any more.
- CAPE: This is different.
- PONY: Just — don't harm her. Get a grip.
(The doorbell rings)
- CAPE: Who — who the hell could that be?
- PONY: Oh pizza fraud likely. I heard you get that all the time down here.
(CAPE opens the door. LOMIA and PASCAL are standing outside. PASCAL half whispers throughout the scene and keeps his hands about his face)
- CAPE: (whispers, shocked) Mu-um.
- LOMIA: (in a hoarse voice) Be-before I explain this intrusion could could somebody get me a glass of water? I've got tortures in my throat worse than — (coughs) Please?
- PONY: I'll get it!
- CAPE: Mum. (voice and hands shaking) What-what-what-what...
- LOMIA: Not — yet, darling, give me a moment, I — oh God I feel dizzy this room is so — empty — and strange... I — oh uh Pascal could you hold me up OH I feel as if I'm gonna fall through the floor it's awful...is is your father in Sonny?
- CAPE: My father?! I — What — Mother! It's it's four in the morning it's...
- LOMIA: Is it? Well yes, I suppose that is unorthodox, but the time is not the...
- PONY: Clean water's best thing for a strep for sure.

- LOMIA: Thank you...is not the point. (drinks) Oh. You have no idea what it feels like to have a condemned house in one's throat — ah — Sonny, you've met Pascal, haven't you? Yes, yes, that time at the liquor store, with the glasses person — uh —
- CAPE: Mum I-I told you then my-my name is Cape now —
- LOMIA: (not hearing) Oh! Is that so —
- PASCAL: How's it keeping, Cape?
- CAPE: Yeah, yeah, Pascal, is that — ah — scab permanent or is it there all the time? Ha ha just kidding! We — ummmmm — we were just — ah — going for a stroll.
- PASCAL: It's — it's — keen out there, sharp and —
- PONY: I can see the two of you have the same virus.
- LOMIA: No, no Pascal's chosen to whisper, because the English language is the language of death, right foof?
- PASCAL: Like box cars — shuts *out*, and kinda locks *in*. It's corrupt to the — colon — (mimes colon)
- CAPE: Ha — That's a joke, yes? That's funny, that — what is a colon again? Oh yeah col — it — is — I —
(LOMIA almost faints)
- Mum? Are you — are you all right? Wh-why are you in your nightgown?
- LOMIA: We've just been — in a fire!
- CAPE: What?
- LOMIA: My ankles are still shaking...look! Look!
- CAPE: MUM what HAPPENED your your place burned down?!
- LOMIA: It was blocking our path to the — ohh. It made everything so BRIGHT and...
- PASCAL: It was white. White fire. Like being tied to a stake. I know how the — witches felt —
- CAPE: Here Mum, put this under your head, you —
- LOMIA: My heart was just — pounding it was SO terrifying, nothing could describe it, nothing — the cat, Blacky *died*, he choked right in front of us and oh GOD I mean we think that the girl in Theology down the hall with that light red hair she — she had to take pills to sleep so she might have — Oh I hope NOT I mean

we just ran we — Oh sorry darling I guess I'm talking your head off I — I guess I'm in shock, is this shock? Yes, I guess we're both in — shock. I mean shock. Oh.

PASCAL: The cat clawed her throat — look! Maybe trying to get — in! Her.

LOMIA: Ohhhhhh. The worst thing is that it was all my fault!!

PONY: (to herself) I'll get some blankets.

(CAPE gestures to his old upstairs room)

CAPE: (puts his arms around Lomia) No, no, don't say that. I'm sure it WASN'T.

LOMIA: But I ASKED HIM TO LEAVE!! Geoffrey, this — speed freak acquaintance of Pascal's.

PASCAL: He was...depressed.

LOMIA: *And* we felt sorry for him but — well we finally HAD to ask him to leave after three weeks, nicely of course, and he did, but then, about seven hours later, I smelled something, and no, we hadn't left the burner on, so I looked at the door and — there were these little black curls — I opened it and this — monster of black smoke hurled itself at me!! OH I — darling could you give me a little room?

(CAPE has been sitting too close)

CAPE: Oh. So — sorry. I must — my body odour must —

LOMIA: It's just that I'm extra-sensitive after the fire — and...

CAPE: You and...smells. Once she stayed in the Four Seasons for a week because they were *painting* next door...

GEORGE F. WALKER

CRIMINALS IN LOVE

Information on rights

Foreign rights to CRIMINALS IN LOVE are controlled by the author, who can be reached through:

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CRIMINALS IN LOVE is the second play in a trilogy. It received the Chalmers Canadian Play Award in 1984 and the Governor General's Literary Award for drama in 1985. Produced by Factory Theatre, CRIMINALS IN LOVE was the longest-running new production in Toronto's 1984/85 season. BETTER LIVING and BEAUTIFUL CITY, the first and third plays in the trilogy, were produced by Toronto's CentreStage.

BIOGRAPHY

I think that everybody alive has an obsession. That's what I focus on in the characters.

George F. Walker was born and raised in the east end of Toronto, where he graduated from Riverdale Collegiate.

While working as a taxi driver in the early 1970s, he noticed a Factory Theatre Lab poster requesting original scripts. He answered the advertisement with PRINCE OF NAPLES, a popular farce that marked the beginning of a long association between Walker and Factory Theatre; he was playwright-in-residence there from 1971 to 1976 and artistic director in 1978/79. He has also been associated with the Toronto Free Theatre, and he spent a year as playwright-in-residence at the New York Shakespeare Festival.

Walker is one of Canada's most prolific and successful playwrights. His plays — such as ZASTROZZI, THEATRE OF THE FILM NOIR, FILTHY RICH, THE ART OF WAR, and GOS-SIP — have been produced in theatres from Sydney, Australia, to Houston, Texas; from Whitehorse, Canada, to Glasgow, Scotland.

SUMMARY

CRIMINALS IN LOVE is about a young couple, Gail and Junior, who are in love in the working-class end of a big city. Despite a jailbird father and a live-in wino pal, Gail and Junior sort it out, against all odds — as much as two teenagers from the wrong side of the Parkway ever can.

REVIEWS

“...a pessimistic view of life but leavened with nuggets of humour and lovingly drawn characters.

It's enough to make you cry — if you weren't laughing so much.”

Robert Crew, Toronto Star

“...this is one of the funniest plays to be seen in a long time...skewers all expectations.”

Stephen Godfrey, The Globe and Mail

Persons:

JUNIOR Dawson	19, GAIL's boyfriend
GAIL Quinn	18, JUNIOR's girlfriend
WILLIAM	a bum, 45 to 65, with a slight east-European accent
HENRY "Senior" Dawson	early 40s, a cheap crook
SANDY Miles	19, lean, alert
WINEVA Dawson	late 30s, former earth mother, now small-time crook

Place:

Various locations in the working-class east end of a big city. The set should be simple, suggestive, allowing spaces for inventive lighting.

Time:

Almost summer.

Note:

The punctuation of this play carefully adheres to the author's instructions. The frequent omission of question marks, for example, is deliberate.

Scene One

Dusk.

A schoolyard. A small grassy slope. GAIL and JUNIOR are entwined. She is on her back with her hands behind her head. He has one leg over her thighs and his head under her sweater. He is making many varied and muffled sounds of pleasure. Her mild enjoyment turns gradually to restlessness and eventually impatience.

Behind them, some distance away, a bum is curled up against a wall.

GAIL: Junior?... Junior.

JUNIOR: (something muffled)

GAIL: God, Junior, it's time to move on...try some other part of my body. Sex does not begin and end at my chest. Do you realize how much time you spend under my sweater.

JUNIOR: (something muffled)

GAIL: I'm beginning to think there's something wrong with you.

JUNIOR: (pulls head out) I love them. I...I can't think of anything else to say.

GAIL: But it keeps me, you know, passive. What can I do to you when your head is under there. I'm tired of running my fingers through your hair.

JUNIOR: That's all I need. My hair is sensitive. It's exciting, really. (he goes under her sweater)

GAIL: It's not that it's not...you know nice. Well, sometimes it's boring. But mostly, Junior it's well...Were you breast fed.

JUNIOR: (pulls head out) I have no problem about breasts. I've never had a breast thing in my life. I just like yours...that's all I can say really. And I love being under your sweater. Try to understand.

GAIL: Try to understand what.

JUNIOR: That I love being under your sweater.

GAIL: How can anyone understand something like that. You've got to give me a reason. You love being under my sweater, because...

JUNIOR: Because why.

GAIL: I don't know. You tell me.

JUNIOR: I don't know. I just do. Try to understand.

- GAIL:** Let's stop. Let's talk.
- JUNIOR:** Five more minutes. (goes under the sweater again)
- GAIL:** No now.
- JUNIOR:** (something muffled)
- GAIL:** Junior. Get out of there!
- (GAIL grabs a fistful of hair. Twists. JUNIOR yells. Sits up suddenly. Pause. GAIL grabs her jacket from the grass beside her. Puts it on. Zips it up)
- JUNIOR:** Will you marry me.
- GAIL:** You just had a vision didn't you. The two of us married and always together. Twenty-five or thirty years with your head under my sweater. Maybe we could even have it written into the wedding vows somehow. A condition.
- JUNIOR:** I ask you to marry me all the time.
- GAIL:** Yeah, and it's just now occurring to me why. I used to think it was because you were scared.
- JUNIOR:** Scared? Scared of what.
- GAIL:** That no one else ever would.
- JUNIOR:** I'd never ask anyone else. So who cares if anyone else wouldn't...or would.
- GAIL:** What?
- JUNIOR:** I dream about you. You're my salvation.
- GAIL:** I hate it when you say shit like that. I don't think you even know what it means.
- JUNIOR:** You save me.
- GAIL:** From what.
- JUNIOR:** My true destiny.
- GAIL:** Which is.
- JUNIOR:** Fuck all.
- GAIL:** Pathetic. I hate it when you talk like this.
- JUNIOR:** Fuck all is what I came from. Fuck all is where I'm going without you.
- GAIL:** Just knock it off, okay.
- JUNIOR:** Why do you like me.

GAIL: I love you, honey.

JUNIOR: Because I love you probably.

GAIL: Probably yeah. It's a great love you've got for me. It's something to be admired in a man. I admire your capacity.

JUNIOR: Yeah. You explained it to me once. It seemed to make sense. I got ahold of the idea at the time. I remember telling a friend about it. He just laughed. It sounds better when you say it. Say it.

GAIL: What people in real love do is give things to each other. What you give me is your full attention. The first time we kissed even. You threw your arms around me. Closed your eyes and just held on. It wasn't the world's greatest kiss, but I said to myself here's a guy who can concentrate on what he's doing... Get it?

JUNIOR: Sure. Will you marry me.

GAIL: When I get a job.

JUNIOR: I've got a job.

GAIL: I know you've got a job. I didn't forget. The answer to your question was when I get a job.

JUNIOR: Why.

GAIL: You know why. Why?

JUNIOR: So you won't have to be afraid I'll fuck-up.

GAIL: No. Jesus. Pathetic. Not that you won't fuck-up. Just so I'll know there's something I can do to control things. Keep things moving. Whatever happens.

JUNIOR: Well whatever happens just has to be me fucking-up. I've been thinking about it and there just isn't anything else that can go wrong.

GAIL: There are things in this world beyond your control. Your plant could close. You could be laid off. Etcetera. You should have voted to unionize that place, you know.

JUNIOR: I was gonna. But the only union that would take us in was controlled by communists.

GAIL: Who says.

JUNIOR: I'm not sure. Someone put the word out.

GAIL: You should have looked into it more.

JUNIOR: What, who put the word out, or the communists?

GAIL: Both.

JUNIOR: How.

GAIL: You could have asked me. I could have told you that a little dose of the red menace might be just what that place needs.

JUNIOR: You should go to university, Gail. You're smart enough to be anything.

GAIL: Thanks. (stands) I need your advice really badly.

JUNIOR: Why are you getting pissed off.

GAIL: Don't tell me what I should do.

JUNIOR: It wasn't an order or anything.

GAIL: Look. Let's not get into the habit of talking about what we should do. What we could do. It's a dumb way to live so let's just kill that way of thinking right away. Let's just talk about what we want to do. I want to get a reasonably good job. Period.

JUNIOR: I want to get married.

GAIL: Great. Now we've got a plan. Something to aim for.

(JUNIOR stands too. Puts his arms around her)

JUNIOR: You look great. When you stood up like that your body looked amazing. When you talked...you talked like a lawyer. You're perfect.

GAIL: So are you.

(They kiss)

JUNIOR: I need some advice.

GAIL: (suspiciously) Yeah?

JUNIOR: I'm supposed to visit my dad tomorrow.

GAIL: Yeah.

JUNIOR: In jail. He's in jail.

GAIL: Yeah I know that, Junior.

JUNIOR: Well, should I.

GAIL: Don't you want to.

JUNIOR: He's ridiculous you know. He's the most ridiculous man in the whole world. He can't even steal hubcaps. He writes bad cheques and tries to cash them at the wrong bank. He's a crook. That's bad enough. But he's so fucking bad at it.

GAIL: Where's this leading?

JUNIOR: He's my legacy.

GAIL: Do you know what that word means, Junior.

JUNIOR: Legacy is at the other end of destiny.

GAIL: What.

JUNIOR: If you put all the things of life along a ruler...legacy is at one end and destiny is at the other.

GAIL: All right. Sure. So?

JUNIOR: What's to be gained by seeing him. Except making the connection again.

GAIL: Between the two ends of the ruler you mean.

JUNIOR: I guess.

GAIL: Maybe you just feel sorry for him. And want to take him a present.

JUNIOR: He's sad. He's my family. But he scares me. He's so ridiculous he's terrifying.

GAIL: Why don't you just think of something he can use in prison. And take it to him. A mission of mercy.

JUNIOR: He gets sentenced tomorrow. After my visit. That's why they brought him in to the city jail... So?

GAIL: What?

JUNIOR: Well I could estimate, I guess. Five years anyway. I mean I'd have to buy him something that would last.

GAIL: I know you want to talk about this, really talk about it...but it's hard, eh. We do this all the time, Junior. Talk about your dad. You use me to figure out what he means to you. Maybe you should just figure it out for yourself once and for all.

JUNIOR: Without you?

GAIL: Tonight. Before the visit.

JUNIOR: But without you.

GAIL: I'll go home.

JUNIOR: What'll I do.

GAIL: You can stay here. It's quiet here. You can think here.

JUNIOR: Sure. I guess. Are you leaving now.

GAIL: (kisses him) It's okay, honey. It's not a big deal. You've made him a big deal in your life. Think of some way to make him just what he is.

JUNIOR: That sounds good.

GAIL: (starts off) Call me later.

JUNIOR: Be careful. Walk quickly. Walk on the side where the street lights are. Don't talk to anyone.

(GAIL is gone)

Walk real fast. No, run instead. You can run beautifully. Go ahead. I'm watching! No one is following you. Run!

(JUNIOR sits. GAIL comes back on. Firm look in her eyes)

GAIL: Look. Just relax. I can make it home just fine. I was brought up in this neighbourhood. I got along fine in it before I met you. I'm leaving now. I'm not going to run. I'm going to walk. And I'll be all right! So relax!

(She leaves. Pause. JUNIOR leans back on his elbows.

WILLIAM, the bum against the wall, sits up suddenly)

WILLIAM: What... What's all the... Please don't kill me. Please. I don't eat garbage. Don't make me eat it. There's dead flies... Please. What... Where. (looks around)

(JUNIOR is staring at him. Long pause)

JUNIOR: Bad dream?

WILLIAM: Another garbage-eating dream. It's recurring. Terrifying in its detail... Where's your girlfriend?

JUNIOR: Gone.

WILLIAM: Argument?

JUNIOR: Nah. You all right?

WILLIAM: I'll have to check. (checks his body) Okay, so far. Just let me examine the essentials. (puts his hand in his pants) Dry as a bone, as the saying goes. I'm fine. I recognize you. You're one of the local kids.

JUNIOR: And you're one of the local bums.

WILLIAM: I've been seeing you around since you were this high. Ten, twelve years. You've certainly changed with time.

JUNIOR: You haven't. I think you're even wearing the same coat.

WILLIAM: Passing ships in the night. That's what we are in a way. Urban freighters. I'm not carrying though. Absolutely without contents.

JUNIOR: What?

WILLIAM: I'm saying we've known of each other's existence all these years and we've never acknowledged... We've never talked.

JUNIOR: My mom wouldn't let me talk to bums.

WILLIAM: She's had a change of heart, dear woman.

JUNIOR: She's dead.

WILLIAM: Ah. So what's the impediment.

JUNIOR: I...don't know.

WILLIAM: Can I join you.

JUNIOR: Sure.

WILLIAM: Or you could join me. Your preference, entirely.

JUNIOR: It's more comfortable on the grass.

WILLIAM: If you say so. (stands with difficulty) Actually I've found that grass is fine during the day but concrete is better for evening restings. No dew, you see. Doesn't get wet. I hate getting wet. It's the worst thing about my way of life. Involuntary bladder activity. Absolutely the worst thing there is. (sits next to JUNIOR. Puts out his hand) William.

JUNIOR: Junior.

(They shake)

WILLIAM: William...William.

JUNIOR: Yeah I got it the first time.

WILLIAM: No. It's just that there used to be a last name that went along with it and I'm trying to remember what it is.

JUNIOR: Seriously?

WILLIAM: Please no pity. That will come. I think it began with a K. William K... K... Well I won't push it. Don't want to hemorrhage. (groans, falls over) Jesus. That was a pain. Probably the spleen.

JUNIOR: Listen, the liquor store's still open. I could go get you a bottle.

(JUNIOR is picking WILLIAM up)

WILLIAM: Oh God, you think I'm an alcoholic. How quick they are to judge, Lord. We the meek of the earth. Absolutely without defence. Cursed by society.

JUNIOR: I'm sorry. I thought... I'm sure I've seen you brown-bagging.

WILLIAM: Oh. I drink. I drink much. Often. Almost non-stop. But I know, and here I use a relative term, when I've had enough. Therefore, honestly, and without smiling, I can say I am not an alcoholic. A bum, yes. There's a tricky distinction here. But enough of me. Why aren't you out with your peers. Pushing buttons in the electric amusement places. Drinking draft beer. Fucking the dog. And the puppies too if the worst of us have our way.

JUNIOR: I've got some thinking to do.

WILLIAM: About your girlfriend?

JUNIOR: She's part of it.

WILLIAM: A fine girl. Very sturdy. I've observed her over the years as well.

JUNIOR: Yeah?

WILLIAM: From a discreet distance. No hands. Honestly. No touching ever. Of course I can't be responsible for my private thoughts and they are truly disgusting.

JUNIOR: You're kind of weird.

WILLIAM: But I function as a gentleman. When I function. What's the problem. The obstacle — the absolute thing you're wrestling with.

JUNIOR: Nothing easy to describe. Just how to get by. Become something. Hang on.

WILLIAM: Hanging on is the true problem of the age. I wrestle with it daily myself. So often I think of just giving up and letting myself plummet into the depths of degradation. Into the absolute pit. I'm so tired of this bourgeois existence.

JUNIOR: Mister, I know what that word means, and it ain't you.

WILLIAM: Once again I call upon the rules of relativity.

JUNIOR: What?

WILLIAM: From my perspective, I see a great distance yet to fall. I feel positively middle-class in comparison.

JUNIOR: You're a bum.

WILLIAM: Truth is, I'm just pretending. Yes, I have a bank account! I can withdraw money at any time. Check into a hotel. Order up a steak. Have an all-night bath with bubble. Drink cognac. Live splendidly.

JUNIOR: Why don't you!

WILLIAM: Why should I!

JUNIOR: Why shouldn't you. Or why don't you then.

WILLIAM: You have a truly devastating aptitude for logical debate. I think I'll answer the first question. I don't do these things because I am not destined to live like that.

JUNIOR: What?

WILLIAM: I was about to tell you about the "call of the pit." Its great echoing voice. "Come down William," it says. "We know you want to."

JUNIOR: You said destined. You know about destiny?

WILLIAM: I am the inventor of the modern connotation.

JUNIOR: I've got a thing about destiny.

WILLIAM: Then we should talk more.

JUNIOR: No. It's a bad thing. I should go.

(JUNIOR stands. WILLIAM pulls him down)

WILLIAM: Sit down. Destiny as a concept of the mind and soul is what you're afraid of. I'm talking pure economics, politics, social patterns. I'll have to tell you my entire life story for you to understand.

JUNIOR: That'd be great. Sometime soon. (stands)

WILLIAM: What's wrong with now.

JUNIOR: I thought I'd go for a walk. I think better walking.

WILLIAM: I talk well sitting or walking. I'll come along. You don't have to listen. But seriously do you mind, I would love some company.

(They look at each other. Pause)

JUNIOR: Sure. Okay. (helps WILLIAM up)

WILLIAM: Where to.

JUNIOR: We'll just walk.

(They start off)

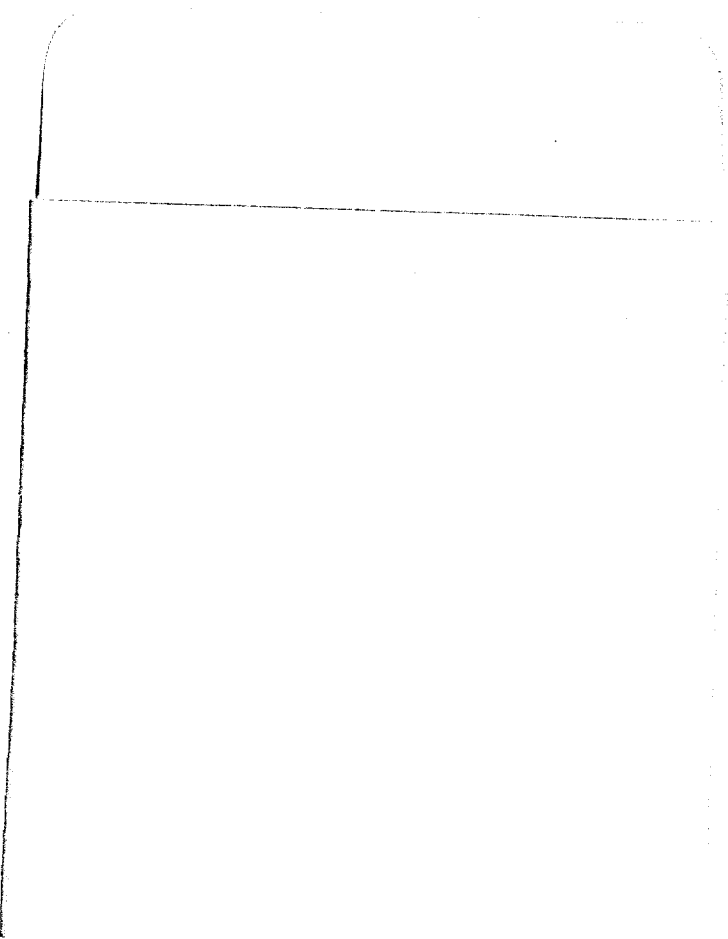
WILLIAM: It's always hard to leave a place you're fond of. Goodbye wall. Goodbye concrete. Goodbye grass. Now where were we. Ah yes. My life. My absolute history...

They are leaving. Blackout.

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