

# *The New Orphic Review*

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ERNEST HEKKANEN is the author of thirty-one books. The most recent are *The Misadventures of Bumbleberry Finn*, *The Shipwrecked Heart*, *Exhuming Carl Jung*, *The Radio Interview*, *The Clown Act*, *Harbinger of Fall*, *The Well*, *The Lambing*, *Man's Sadness*, *Sometimes I Have These Incendiary Dreams*, *The Island of Winged Wonders*, *Dementia Island* and *The Last Thing My Father Gave Me*.

## Artists, Writers, and Redundancy

### Ernest Hekkanen

OVER THE PAST summer, I had the opportunity to take in a lot of museums in Europe, in cities such as Venice, Florence, St. Moritz, Paris, Zurich, Basel and Lucerne. One day I viewed so many paintings, retinal impressions disturbed my inner eye when I lay down to sleep. Pictures floated past in a stream of consciousness. Picasso's deconstructed women ended up in Rembrandt's darkly chiaroscuroed paintings. My overexcited optical lobe wouldn't let me rest.

Things which are less obvious in North America are often blatantly obvious in parts of Europe, and one such thing has to do with the context that has given rise to art and literature. The Piazzale degli Uffizi, which lets onto the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, is a perfect example. The Piazzale degli Uffizi might be better termed The Avenue of the Patriarchs. On high pedestals flanking the street one finds large sculptures depicting da Vinci, Dante, Machiavelli, and others. These sculptures look down on the tourists and hawkers in the street, reminding one that art, literature, economics and power have long enjoyed a close association, ever since the rise of such Italian city-states.

Only very few individuals attain enough renown to end up having their features carved in stone and placed along The Avenue of the Patriarchs. The faceless masses remain faceless even though they exist in greater numbers than do the wealthy and the powerful. Just as impressive as the sculptures that flanked the Piazzale degli Uffizi was the frenetic activity going on in the street. Hustlers of every description were trying to make a buck off the tourists: quick-sketch artists, trinket salesmen, pickpockets, beggars, sellers of questionable reproductions,

and street performers, usually mimes who could be animated by tossing them a few coins. It was a blatant example of the authorities (above) feeding off the energy of the slaves (below). It has always been thus and will always be thus, I imagine.

In Paris, Margrith and I stayed in the Montmartre area. Up on the hill, not far from the Sacré-Coeur, is a plaza overrun by quick-sketch artists. Stand still for a few seconds too long and you are accosted by street-artists determined to do your portrait. It's a thriving business, judging from the number of quick-sketch artists; indeed, the quick-sketch artists nearly outnumber the tourists. The objective, of course, is to make the tourists feel less faceless in the faceless crowd and so relieve them of a few Euros.

Art, needless to say, is an industry in Paris. In three days Margrith and I saw four museums: Musée National d'Art Moderne at the Centre Pompidou, Musée d'Orsay, Musée du Louvre and the Musée Picasso. The Musée d'Orsay is housed in an old railway station converted into a museum devoted primarily to the era that gave rise to the Impressionists. The Centre Pompidou carries on from that era right up to the present day. In the Pompidou one finds artwork by the Dadaists, Cubists and Futurists. While I was perusing these paintings and sculptures, I recalled to what extent artists often feed off each other's energy. Often they glean from one another to the point of being copy cats. Take, for example, certain paintings by Braque and Picasso; they could very well have been executed by the same person. The same goes for many of the artworks produced by Paul Klee, Joan Miro and Max Ernst. There is a considerable amount of overlapping.

In the Centre Pompidou, a conscious attempt has been made to muddy what qualifies as art. We were presented with pop-culture icons turned into objets d'art and objets d'art that were little more than news events and survive as "art" because they came out of a historic context and were connected to art movements. For example, Marcel Duchamp's urinal tipped on its back, signed "R. Mutt, 1917" and called a *Fountain*. Had that piece been executed by Marcel Duce or Marcel Chump, it would not now be exhibited at the Pompidou. Duchamp, a prominent member of the Dada Movement, has earned, on the strength of his renown, the *Fountain's* right to be exhibited in the Musée National d'Art Moderne.

By that point in our viewing, Margrith and I had reached the area devoted to artwork produced by artists determined to push at the boundaries of art. To enjoy such artwork one must appreciate, first and foremost, the concept which has given rise to it. Here we viewed a grand piano padded by great wads of burlap, with a red cross on its side. Another grand piano, utterly silent, had been installed in a burlap-padded room. To fully appreciate such works of art, one must have an

eye for incongruity, if not irony. Indeed, in this instance, the cleverness of the concept mattered far more than the upholstering job.

Here, we also viewed a video performance by an artist dressed in a garter belt and nylons, using his body to smear paint on something flat. Typically, the video was grainy and the image so poor it was difficult to make out the details. I'm sure, at one time, this particular artist's work must have caused the same sort of sensation as Duchamp's urinal. After all, the aim of such an artist is to *cause* commentary. Indeed, commentary caused by such an objet d'art is more important and of far greater relevance than the actual objet d'art. Commentary – or perhaps, I should say, newsworthiness – becomes the measure which determines the value of such art. The context which has given rise to such works of art is of far greater importance than the actual objet d'art. The objet d'art is, therefore, little more than a reference point in time; it is a document that allows for the Art of Commentary to take place. According to these rules, any artifact, even a rusty, wrinkled car fender thrown down on a gallery floor, becomes an objet d'art worthy of commentary.

Following upon the heels of the Garter Belt Artist was a slide presentation of someone's family and a voice droning on about each member. The slides weren't particularly beautiful or interesting (indeed, they were quite ordinary) and the commentary was of little importance – at least to me, because I couldn't understand a word of what was being said. However, the exhibit did give rise to the thought that I could resurrect my father's endlessly boring home movies, add a bit of commentary and call the piece a work of art. To make certain my work would be viewed with the proper gravity, I could interject some post-modern jargon.

If I sound as though I'm being facetious, I am, in fact.

At the risk of seeming extremely provincial, many contemporary artists, it seems to me, are driven by the need to be novel, shocking, clever or even questionable – in order to cause a sensation that will grab attention or make headlines. I remember, in Vancouver about twelve years ago, there was an artist who intended to snuff out a rat by the name of Sniffy. The artist became a short-lived sensation discussed in newspapers and on the radio. There was a countdown to the date of the rat's execution, which failed to take place because the authorities intervened. Despite the fact that the rat's execution did not take place, indicating to me that the work of art hadn't been completed much beyond the conceptual stage, it did achieve its aims – to cause commentary. The same sort of thing is happening in literature, judging from the countless stories that cross my desk. The desire to be controversial or shocking seems to drive many writers; they put more emphasis on that than they do on the actual craft of writing.

I have a theory as to why this is occurring – one that isn't terribly original or revolutionary, I must admit. Since the time of the Italian

city-states, when only a few artists and writers were able to rise to prominence, art and literature has undergone a democratization process, and now nearly any faceless individual in any faceless crowd can call him or –herself an artist, with the result that it is difficult to determine whether their work is good, bad or simply irrelevant.

I might be hopelessly old-fashioned and perhaps ignorant, but it seems to me that artists and writers are straining too much for effect, in the hopes of being singled out from the crowd. But this straining for effect simply testifies to what extent the roles of artist and writer have been diminished, if not rendered irrelevant. After all, what more can be said? What more can be pictured? What more can be caught in a photograph or on video? After seeing so much art in Europe, I was forced to ask myself: Is there a sufficiently good excuse to perpetrate the redundant act of rendering yet another image? I am overwhelmed by similar feelings upon walking into a monstrously large library or bookstore. What is the excuse for so much verbiage? Why commit the folly of writing yet another story or book? Too much of the stuff already exists.

However, if I apply this same logic to each and every endeavor engaged in by human beings, they would all prove to be hopelessly redundant, futile exercises amounting to nothing. The purpose of any occupation, even an artistic one, is to feed, clothe and house. The reason so many redundant, superfluous occupations exist is because human beings have been fruitful and have multiplied to the point of possibly causing a calamity that will lead to their extinction. Indeed, every human endeavor is futile. We simply have to realize that fact to enjoy the cosmic joke that is our existence.

Artists and writers are among the first individuals to understand, and to have to deal with, the above conundrum, and much of what is being produced nowadays is an expression of this underlying sense of futility. After all, dealing with one's own facelessness in a faceless crowd comprised of innumerable, faceless people who have multiplied to the point of redundancy must be an existential exercise of overwhelming futility.

Upon arriving back in Nelson, British Columbia, officially one of the Best 101 Small Art Towns in North America, Margrith and I took in what was offered at Artwalk 2002. Except for the work of a few artists, we were struck by the tawdriness of the displays. So much of the artwork was downright bad, if not kitschy. In part, the shoddiness of the artwork has to do with the context that gives rise to it in this town. While the town does have an art school, it has been downsized by the provincial government to the point of now being irrelevant. Unlike the French, Italian and Swiss governments, the one here in B.C. is an enemy of that which enriches society. Also, the emphasis at the Kootenay School of the Arts is on craft rather than on art, and that has furthered the decline of art in this town.

By the time I finished taking in Artwalk 2002, I was feeling so deeply dissatisfied with what I had seen, I wanted to rush back to the Centre Pompidou and view the video of the Garter Belt Artist. At least the Garter Belt Artist and his poorly produced video gave me pause for reflection.

## What More

A park bench that faces the lake.  
Sunlight slanting down over shoulders.  
A mountainous reflection rippling in water.  
Bulrushes standing taller than a heron.  
Marshy surrounds. Irises blooming yellow.  
A sky so crystalline it edges into seeing.  
What more does one want or need?

Ernest Hekkanen



WAYNE PORTER lives in Kemptville, Ontario. He has written a novel, *Drum Keepers*, which he is preparing to publish. “The Echo” and “A School of Our Own” are based on events taken from *Drum Keepers*. In Ottawa he writes training courses and manuals for social workers whom he manages in his work in social services. He is currently working on a second novel.

## A School of Our Own

Wayne Porter

THIS IS THE story of our school. It’s as true as I can remember.

The old Residential School was set on fire the morning of June 14<sup>th</sup>. Emily never liked it anyway. She got to the fire pretty fast considering she was pregnant. We all just stood there and watched it burn. Emily’s eyes watered and she set her jaw. She absorbed yet another slap across the face. She said, “We’ll build another one, one that’s ours, not theirs.”

Stuck in the ground beside the school was a homemade spear with a note attached. The message worried me. It was written the same way as the threat to Emily’s little brother, Curt.

### NEXT TIME WE’LL BURN MORE THAN BOOKS.

Emily looked at it. “Another threat, but they know they have to deal with all of us, if that’s what they want. I guess they’ll have a story to brag about with their friends in the hotel this afternoon.”

We let the fire burn. It smoldered for a few days. There were a few little fare-ups when the wind caught a book or something and it ignited because of the fresh air. That Sunday we got together to clean up the mess. We were covered in black from the charred pieces of wood as we sifted through it to find anything worth saving. One of the friendlier town cops showed up while we were working. We asked him if the guy who did this was in jail. He said, “Not yet, but I have a list of names. I still need some solid evidence. It’s a serious charge to bring on someone. You have to be real sure you’re right.”

I asked him, “Where are you going to keep a real criminal, anyway? Your jail’s always full of Indians.” One of the guys yelled at him to get

out and help us pick up some of the hard evidence he needed. The cop laughed and took off in the cruiser. Walter threw the spear at his car in fun, but missed.

That night Emily called for a tribal circle. We all love Emily. She's done more good for us to help erase some of the harm those goddamned Residential schools have done than any government program or compensation deal I ever heard of. She's determined to live like a real Indian – Aboriginals, she calls us. She says, "I'll never give in again."

At the circle she told the story of the Drum. That story is sacred to her. She always tells it to focus our attention on the tribe. It's the ancient story of the great fire that destroyed the forest and killed many human beings and animals. "That tribe, from years before my memory, struggled to survive the winter. During that time a little girl tapped on the skin of a rabbit that was drying on a wooden frame. She was chased away but one of the elders took that frame and fixed it into a drum for her. He gave it to her as a gift of hope after the fire. That Drum became the symbol of the Chief's authority. Now we cannot even remember the name of the first Chief who honored it and passed it to the future. His name is lost in the past until we go to the spirit world to meet him. The Drum has been handed down through the generations of our people." It is now in Emily's keeping.

Emily received it at the blockade she went to down in the States – South Dakota, I think. She met a Chief there who got it from another old Chief back in the 1930s. The old Chief's tribe was killed in the 1880s by the Calvary. They were all slaughtered. Men, women, and children all butchered for no reason at all. That old Chief spent the winter grieving the loss of his tribe and his society. He honored their spirits and in the spring he buried them together on the hill above his fire pit. A couple of years ago the bones were uncovered by three college students digging to smother their campfire. They found the bones of a human hand and called the police. Those skeletons caused the biggest damn demonstrations and blockades since the States was in the war in Viet Nam. Emily went down there to join the fight. She got mixed up in it after her little brother was shot by some son of a bitch who was mad about having to use a detour. Nothing ever happened to the man who shot Curt. He was lucky Curt lived or they would've done him for murder or we would've done him ourselves.

Emily met Brian down there in South Dakota. He was one of the organizers. The Chief who got hold of the Drum back in the 1930s gave it to Brian, because Brian is the great-nephew of that very same Chief whose tribe was massacred. When Brian met up with Emily he gave the Drum to her because he knew she was the one for whom it was intended. He knew there is something special about her. She sees things in life the rest of us can't. When he gave her the Drum he told all the human beings there at that celebration that Emily is now the Drumkeeper. He

said, "When we were massacred we lost our past. We were disillusioned and wandered without purpose. That was the greatest loss our society suffered. Today the past and the future are joined again, through Emily. She will walk on her road toward the future and honor our ancient values. Emily is now Chief and Drumkeeper."

Brian is drawn to her. We all are. We like Brian, but he's just a little too serious about what he's trying to do. He wants us to have our own government and schools and laws based on our old values. He works night and day to accomplish that. We all know he has a big heart, too. Maybe he's got the only heart big enough to hold Emily's love.

Emily is the kind of person you meet and don't ever forget. She's like the spirits she tells us about. When she talks about trees and other things in nature you think she's one of those things like a giant tree that keeps its place through whatever happens. She just stands her ground and never backs away. She teaches our kids about Aboriginal values and stories. She knows the old legends and she gets the kids to act them out with her. We all watch them out there, being snakes or eagles or the west wind, Mudjekeewis. I often have to wipe my tears away. I try not to let anyone see me cry. Sometimes the emotions she brings out in me, I just can't hold inside. My school memories are filled with horror and hell those religious brothers taught us Indians. Emily really loves our kids and it shows every time she's with them.

When she talks to us everybody listens. She just holds our attention and says the things most people only think to themselves. She says them right out loud though. That means it's okay for the rest of us to talk about our problems. It seems right when she does it, nobody ever feels embarrassed or ashamed when she talks about all the bad things that go on here. We've had our share of problems, the drinking and fights, kids getting hurt by their parents, and lately it's those drugs and sniffing gas that ruins our lives. Emily just says it and we listen. She asks us to stop and think. She tells us, "Those problems don't belong to us. *They* brought the trouble here, give it back and let them deal with it. We can live by our own values and let them do what they like with theirs."

That night at the circle she asked us if we wanted a new school for the kids, one we would build for our purposes. "We'll build a school to honor our values and to let us teach our stories and history in our own language." We all wanted that, so a bunch of us got together to find a place to build it and get it done before winter. That night I remember well because the Chief who gave Brian the Drum came to the circle to talk to us about Emily. He stays with us now and tries to watch out for Emily and the kids. He said in his quiet way, "Emily is a gift from the great spirits of the past. I have seen my people rise up again, through her strength. She is beyond our understanding. I hope all of us find the road she walks on because it will lead us back to the spirit world in peace."

The decision we made that night was a turning point for our Tribe. We walked away with a purpose that was ours. We would build something to reflect our values that we could pass on to our children.

The next morning it was very warm. The mosquitoes were thick down by the water. About twenty of us headed out on our four-wheelers. We decided to build our school along the river in the middle of the Reservation. The next person with a match would have to risk being caught on our land. I knew if we caught him it would be years before anyone saw his bones again.

We found a spot just before lunch. Emily and Brian and the rest of us looked it over. It was along the river where it cuts into the forest a little and then bends around back out onto the grassland. The bow in the river was big enough for a school for about a hundred kids. When we had all seen it Brian said, "We'll build it with logs and mud mortar like in the old days."

Emily wanted an outdoor area to teach the kids about nature. She taught outside most of the time, even in winter. She always said if you want to appreciate yourself as a human being you have to do it outside. There was room for a permanent wigwam and a place to go for solitude. If some of the kids couldn't concentrate on school she would take them over there and find a quiet spot for them to sit and watch nature. None of the kids would come back crying or angry, they'd come back with a story about something they'd seen or heard. Emily would use those times to make the child feel special. Not like my teachers who beat me with a stick if my mind wandered for a minute thinking about the nature outside of those windows.

Once we found that place and agreed on it as a tribe we started to send work parties out there every day that was nice weather. Emily went everyday with whoever would come with her. She told me our spirits would be in those logs if we wanted them to be. Our sweat and energy sure were. It was hard work in the hot sun, but we all felt good as we saw the school being built.

Emily said, "A lot of healing is being done here. People who have suffered attacks on their human bodies can build something worthwhile to rid themselves of those memories." Even the children helped. They carried and fetched stuff and gave us their ideas of what they wanted in their school. It was the best time our tribe ever had.

The Chief came by sometimes, but he was too old to help. He sat on the logs and told us stories of his youth and where he came from. I remember one day he told us about a tree. He told us how much air it cleans and how much soil it keeps in place and how much life it supports on itself. "One tree," he said, "and we have thousands on this Reservation. There are many lovely things left in nature and many things we can never see again." He used his voice to sound however he wanted to be heard. His voice took you with him. His stories eased my spirit.

When I have troubles his voice is still there in my memory. I often found myself standing still not doing anything except listening.

His stories were sad and subtle. He tempted our spirits to join him and walk with him toward the spirit world. Many human beings who heard him speak that day were not able to accept the temptation.

Emily always said that the lessons taught here would not be learned by everyone. She said, "Some people will make hard choices and we cannot change that." She only hoped that one day the lessons would be remembered and that those people would find their way back to the spirits. Not all roads to the spirits are safe.

One day in September I went to town with Brian to buy some windows for the school. It's too cold here in the winter to be outside all day, even for Emily. Brian always tried to talk to the people in town whenever he went there. He looked a lot more white than I do so it usually worked for him. That day, though, he was with me. I'm one of the Indians they don't like too much. I've been in my share of trouble with the store owners when I didn't have the money to feed my kids. They used to throw me in jail sometimes. I guess that was too expensive for them, because now the police just drive me back here and tell me to stay away. Well, that day, Brian met a guy he knew and told him we were building a new school. That guy was interested. He said, "It's a shame that somebody burned the old school." Brian asked him if he and his brother wanted to come help. Brian said, "You know we can use the help and you and your brother are good workers." The man said he'd talk it over with his brother. On the way home I asked Brian if he was crazy because nobody back at the Reservation wanted any of them out there. Brian said there were some people in town who don't want to live as enemies with us. When they come to help, our people will change their minds.

The next afternoon was Sunday. Those guys pulled into the parking lot we had used for the old school. They came with their tools and brought two other men with them. We all felt uncomfortable until one of them pulled a case of beer off the back of his truck and asked, "Do you boys like a drink now and then?" That kind of broke the ice.

We headed back to where the new school was being built. When we got there Emily and Brian were sitting down having a break. Emily looked at Brian with eyes that could kill, but Brian stood up and welcomed them. He told Emily they were here to help. "These men are here to build something good for our children. We hope our children may one day see more friendly times. If that happens we here today may feel proud of our cooperation." Brian was always trying to make things peaceful and right. He wanted to have our own laws and stuff, but he also wanted to live in peace with our neighbors. Emily didn't give a damn about the people she lived next door to as long as they didn't ruin the world.

Those guys and a few others came to help once in a while. Everybody got a little more comfortable each time. We started to see them as human beings. I think they felt the same way. The Chief told them some of the old stories. They were interested in how we thought. One day they brought their wives and kids and we all had a day building the school and sharing what food we had. The kids played in the river and ran around the clearing, playing tag. Emily enjoyed the day. She admitted that Brian might be right. "Someday we will all honor nature. That time may start now with those of us here, within this school."

By the first weekend in October we were almost finished building the school. We decided to have a celebration the next weekend. It was Thanksgiving for most people and it was a time of thanks to nature for us as well. We invited the people from town who had helped us and told them to bring others if they wanted. On Sunday we gathered at the school. Many people brought food and we had deer from the hunt the week before. We spent the day talking about the things that happened while we built the school.

Brian had asked the Chief to dedicate the school. He asked him because over all those years he had kept the Drum safe. That's a big reason why we were able to be there that day. The Drum has powers that help us follow our roads and honor nature. After dinner everyone was just sitting around talking. The Chief came dressed in his ceremonial clothing and his headdress. He walked to the front of the group and put his finger across his lips to ask for silence. People quieted down, conversations ended, and the kids stopped playing their games. He stood silent for a few moments looking at the sky. When everyone was quiet he said, "Listen to that silence. That was here before we came." We heard birds chirping and the leaves rustling, but there were no other sounds.

"I will tell a story about our history as human beings," he said.

"I am old and cannot follow, as the deer runs through the woods.  
I am old and cannot see the eagles where they fly.  
My time has almost vanished, I now see the spirits in the sky.  
My road is almost finished, but I have no tears to cry.

Today, I can see into the future.  
I see a new beginning and see our people there.  
They are strong and they are happy.  
They run like rabbits and hunt like the Great Bear.

We have all the ancient people to admire and to follow.  
We have all of our young children to teach how to be free.  
The old ones were the lessons and the new ones are the pupils.  
They will be joined together by each day we let that be.

Today we come together to see those lessons started.  
 Today we can see all the lands which will be free.  
 It will be these children's teachings that bring about that wonder.  
 It will be these children's lessons that will teach us to be free.

Today all of the old ones are smiling down upon us.  
 The great Chiefs and the great warriors who gave their lives away.  
 They gave their lives for nature and all of its vast richness.  
 They gave their lives so all of us would be here on this day.

Only one here knows the future or where our roads will lead us.  
 Only one can ever know that and those gifts belong to her.  
 She has shown us a path which our children may share with her.  
 It is she, the DrumKeeper, who will lead us to our future.

We can never follow her completely for her road is hers to make.  
 We must know that she is well and her vision is our destiny.  
 She will lead us to the future to where the spirits live.  
 Her road will lead our children to where we cannot see."

I looked at Emily when he had finished. Her youth and her wisdom were beaming. Her spirit is joined with the ancient values. That little girl whose Drum became our symbol of truth knows Emily's heart. The little girl's spirit helps to guide Emily to a future with hope, for our people.

Emily walked to the front and said she would tell the people the words Black Elk spoke after he saw the massacre at Wounded Knee. She said, "Our ancestors from the south were murdered in the same way as Black Elk's people. These are his words."

"Black Elk said, 'I did not know then how much was ended. When I look back now from this high hill of my old age, I can still see the butchered women and children lying heaped and scattered along the crooked gulch as plain as when I saw them with eyes still young. And I can see that something else died there in the bloody mud, and was buried in the blizzard. A people's dream died there. It was a beautiful dream.'"

When Emily finished she asked Brian to tell the story of the meeting of his uncle and his grandmother. She said, "Only those two skeletons of our ancestors' tribe do not lie in that old heap of Indian bones. Their lives were forever changed and forever lonely. Their path back to the spirits was not happy. They only found happiness when they met. Their happiness lasted only a few moments in all of their lives."

Brian walked to the front and told the people about the meeting between his grandmother and his great uncle.

“I remember that it was this time of year. The leaves along the road leading from the waterfall were outstandingly beautiful. The air was fresh and crisp. I could smell the smoke from my uncle’s fire pit. The breeze that carried the smell numbed my cheeks. We arranged to meet there because he was old. He didn’t want to go to town again, now that he had reconciled his feelings from the past. He said it would contaminate his spirit. My grandmother agreed that they should meet in nature.

“As we walked down the trail to his campsite we talked about my childhood. She told me when she saw me as a boy I reminded her of her brother. She told me she knew I had within me the spirit to belong to nature. She was afraid to tell me of my past in case people found out and made me an outcast in her husband’s society. She waited to tell me until she was able to do that carefully. She told me that my mother wanted me to be aware of both sides of my heritage. She wanted me to be responsible for myself as a human being.

“I said to my grandmother, ‘I wish I had known sooner. I might have chosen that life and dedicated myself to helping the earth when I was younger.’

“She told me whatever road I chose would lead me to the trail I was to follow as an Aboriginal and as a white man. At that time I did not understand her answer, but I accepted what she said as being wise and supportive.

“As we neared his campsite I saw my uncle standing dressed as I had not seen him before. He wore the skins and headdress of his youth. His robes were made from buffalo and his headdress from the feathers of the birds he knew when he was still young. He looked like a ghost from the past with the smoke of his fire rising behind him. My grandmother cried when she saw this. They came together and hugged. He told her he felt ashamed for a long time that he had been too late to save her from the misery which she had suffered all her life. She told him she understood how he felt. ‘I know you would have gladly died to save me from what I suffered.’ She talked of her sister and told him she hated herself for not saving her or dying with her. I had never heard my grandmother talk of these things before. It was unsettling to hear how she spoke of her life. They talked about their childhood and tried to understand how each other now felt. They each made difficult choices. Their lives were lived in isolation from everything they knew.

“My uncle described his life as worthless wandering and feeling sorry for himself as a failure. He told her he only recently came to realize his role in the forest could be as someone who could pass on the story of the earth to the future. He said he found someone whom she didn’t know who would play a part in the returning of the land to the earth. He did not speak of her or the ancient Drum, although it was in his possession. She did not ask about it, although it must have been in her mind. He gave the Drum to his friend soon after this meeting. I now



wonder if his friend was not there watching us and protecting the Drum from me.

“He told her he was pleased that she had found a way to pass on the story through me. You must be very happy to be able to do that. I was surprised to hear that she spent many years trying to find a time and a way to tell me about her past. She told me it was her way to honor her sister and brother for their lives. She always believed her brother was found and killed by the troops before they got to the camp. She hoped he had died quickly, after killing some of them. He told her that was what he wanted, but now he was at peace with his life. They talked for a long time and sat together looking at each other through long periods of silence. I knew they were both remembering what the site had looked like. They had both seen the bodies, and she had heard the screams of agony and rage. He carried those bodies to the pyre and he smelled the burning flesh. They looked at each other and realized they would never see each other again. I tried to tell them I would make sure they could come together again sometime, but they knew they were not destined to do that. My uncle talked of the tragedy of the tribe. He said there would never be another day like the carefree ones he had spent in his youth. There are points in time from which it is impossible to return. They both knew today was one of those times, as was the day of the massacre.

“I left them alone. I wandered around the area near the campfire and tried to imagine how tranquil life was here, before any of us arrived. I thought about him living near here for such a long time alone, with no support or friends. He was a leader who had failed. Heroes don’t always succeed. Today, he had come full circle. When he was riding back to camp that autumn many years ago, he wanted to meet his people and his family. He wanted to lead them to safety. There would be no more moving since the wars were drawing to an end. He didn’t make it back to his village in time. He knew he was only a few hours late. He continually replayed those five days in his mind to see where he had lost time.

“‘If I had only gone one night without sleeping. If I had only ridden faster. If I had found a campsite in two days instead of three. If...’

“My grandmother stopped him there. ‘No one could have saved us that day. Some were destined to go back to the earth sooner than others. You have suffered much more than those who died. I know you honored them in death. You should not feel shame or guilt for not succeeding. The Calvary killed them, not you.’

“She told him his sister and children died quickly and were not tortured. He knew what their injuries were. He saw the decapitated bodies of his children. He told her she was brave to survive, to be able to live and tell the story of the massacre. He asked her to make sure she told this story many times to many people. Teach your grandchild the ways of the earth. He said to me, ‘Someday, you may be able to teach your

own children, but you will have to understand what it is to be an Indian.' I did not know then what he meant. He told me that the earth and its inhabitants suffered constantly in nature. 'You will have to suffer as well. The earth also enjoys great times of happiness. You will know those times as well.'

"It was late in the afternoon. He said, 'You should leave before it is too late. When you say a final goodbye to someone you love, time cannot go fast or slow enough to feel right.' They stood and looked at each other. They knew there would never be another time when they would meet someone who really understood who they were. They hugged and my grandmother turned to leave. She never turned around for a final look. I said goodbye to my uncle, believing I would see him again, although I never would. I watched him walk back to his camp with his headdress in his hand. He knew he would never be the leader of his people again. He knew it was time to go back to nature. He hoped that human beings would one day free the earth and allow nature to create the things we need in life."

The people who came from town said they were sorry for the things their ancestors had done to our people. Emily reassured them, "We are not responsible for the actions of our ancestors. We can only choose roads which exist in the present. You have chosen to be here today and you chose to help us build this school. That is a good omen for all of us. We have much to do before nature will be free."

Emily brought out the ancient Drum. She played it and others played drums they had of their own. Our people danced an old dance of thanksgiving. Some of the people from town joined in when we invited them.

The results of these friendships would bring greater peace to our Reservation. This was a new beginning for our people after the fire.

So, the school had been built. The kids would start classes in a few days. Emily would lay the groundwork for our kids to grow up with a real chance of being able to live within our culture. Her lessons would reach into the far future. She would help some of the kids grow up to become role models.

That Tuesday the police and the fire chief ruled that the fire had been caused by our negligence for not having a caretaker like the schools did in town. There would be no insurance money to help with the costs of the new school. I laughed and said, "Money never finds its way to us anyway."

Emily said, "I would not have accepted money from some insurance company to build our school."

On Wednesday I had to go into town. On my way off the Reservation I stopped to let the kids cross in front of me on their way to their first day in the new school. Seeing them happy and laughing caused some of the tears I tried to control find their way down my cheeks. Emi-

ly noticed me wipe away my tears. She waved to me and winked. She had suffered the same horrors in school as me. Her memory recalls the same trauma. She looked at me and smiled the smile that melts our hearts.

As I drove away I heard her say, “We’re lucky to have a school of our own.”

This is the story of our school, as much as I remember.

MICHAEL BULLOCK has published over 50 books of prose and poems and has translated over 200 books from the French, Italian and German. His *Selected Works 1936-1996* was published in 1998, followed by *Sonnet in Black and Other Poems*, *Erupting in Flowers*, *Nocturnes: poems of night* and, most recently, *Wings of the Black Swan*. A translation of Max Frisch's plays is forthcoming from Ronsdale Press.

## Michael Bullock / **Seven New Poems**

### **Nightmare Music**

As day draws to a close a discordant music strikes up, a nightmare music. The musicians are somewhere out of sight, but I picture them as grotesque, deformed creatures, nightmare beings in keeping with the music.

From the other side come the whispers of dying roses, their last breath as their lives come to an end. The voices and the scent of roses rise above everything else, filling the scene with a heart-rending nostalgia.

Morning scatters rose petals over the sky and birdsong replaces the hateful music.

### **Ocean**

The ocean stirs in its sleep  
 in the depths the corals  
 whisper together  
 in pink and white voices  
 the shadows of the fish are purple  
 the moon's rays pierce the water  
 releasing streams of seagreen blood  
 Unconcerned the ocean  
 breathes steadily and deep

## Lubricious Shadows

Lubricious shadows  
disport themselves on the wall  
as the leering moon  
squints in through my window

Perhaps they are nothing  
but the shadows of dancing leaves  
yet they are engaged in acts  
that can only spring  
from a disordered mind

Once the moon has passed  
the shadows fade away  
leaving me to sink  
into an untroubled slumber

Until the shadows  
invade my dreams

## **Knife in the Water**

The waterfall calls a name  
that drifts away on the spray  
A knife lies at the bottom of the river  
a threat engraved on its blade

I dive to catch this deadly fish  
Bent by the refraction of the water  
it cuts my hand and a stream of blood  
writes the name for a fleeting instant

Twisted by the flow  
the message changes  
into the one word Death  
then it too vanishes

leaving only clear water  
and the knife on its bed

## Wandering Spirit

Poised on the edge of nothingness  
the wandering spirit  
searches in vain  
for a tear in the curtain

Roaming the paths of darkness  
it stares down Cerberus  
and the monarch of destruction

Peering through the leaves  
it sees the rabbit  
circling the mystic stone

Its past life comes to haunt it  
with afflicting violence  
as it gathers the golden threads  
in its tormented hand

## Moon on the River

The moon lies like a drowned face  
just below the surface  
it winks when ripples pass over it  
when clouds drift by it frowns  
when the sky clears it smiles

I seem to hear it speaking my name  
but its voice changes  
now yours now another's  
but always with the wistful tone  
of someone forever lost

## The Voice of Night

Night has a voice  
that is heartbreakingly sad

It comes from some distant place  
a woman's voice that sometimes sings  
sometimes whispers, always laments

It touches the heartstrings  
like harpstrings

The music it makes  
is filled with pain  
and insatiable longing

The voice persists  
till silenced by the dawn



ERIN RENWICK lives and writes in Vancouver, B.C.

## Through the Past, Darkly

Erin Renwick

JACK WALKS UP the wide sidewalk home from school, his head down. He counts the squares of sidewalk from Broadway to where he turns on Eighteenth; there are 240. There are two syllables in the word ‘eigh-teenth,’ which he counts out on his fingers, folding one finger down into his palm for each sound. He mouths the sounds until they seem funny. His house number is 216. *Two-six-teen*. Three syllables. His middle finger folds in last whether he counts from his thumb or his pinky, but usually he counts from his thumb.

He turns the brass knob and opens the door.

“Hi sweetie,” his mom calls from the kitchen, “how was your day?”

Jack puts his green packsack down beside the door and walks into the kitchen. His mom is here every day when he gets home from school. She is sitting with a book, a cold cup of coffee and a cigarette.

“Okay,” Jack says as he walks over to his mother. She kisses his cheek and he can smell the cigarettes on her breath. She gives him a one-handed hug with the hand that isn’t smoking and pats him on the bum. “Can I go see grandma?”

His mom takes her arm back and drags on her cigarette. She blows the smoke out above Jack’s head. “Sure,” she says, “but I don’t want to come back there to get you for dinner, so you’d better be out here at five-thirty.” They always eat dinner at five-thirty. That’s when Jack’s dad gets home from work. Jack will fill a plate for his grandma, take it to the back room for her, and then come back down the hall to the kitchen to eat his own dinner. His mom is a good cook. Jack likes hamburger pie best of all.

“Five-thirty,” he says, and salutes his mother, clicking his heels together like he’s seen on TV. He tears out of the kitchen and down the hall to his grandmother’s room.

He knocks three times at the door.

“Who’s there?”

“It’s me!”

“Who’s me?”

“Grammaa-a!”

“Oh, it’s you,” she says. “Come in then, what are you waiting for?”

Jack pushes the door open just as his grandma is leaning over to flip the record on the turntable beside her. She sets the needle down and the music begins. The piano starts, and then Nina Simone’s voice fills the room, deep and strong. His grandma closes her eyes. She sways a little in her big green armchair. Jack knows to be quiet. He tiptoes across the room to sit at her feet. He puts his knees up to his chest and curls his feet under his grandmother’s afghan.

Jack tries to listen to the music like his grandma, and he closes his eyes.

*They say he’s left you all alone, to weather this old storm*

*He’s got another woman now, a-hangin’ on his arm*

*Yeah yeah yeah yeah*

*That old fool’s telling everybody he’s sick and tired of you*

*Hey lordy lordy mama what you gonna do?*

The song reminds Jack of his mom because she doesn’t really do anything except cook and sit at the table with her cigarettes. His dad’s not with another lady though, he doesn’t think.

The song ends, and Jack’s grandma opens her eyes again. She turns the volume down so that Nina Simone is further away, and they don’t have to close their eyes anymore. Jack’s grandma smells like lemon candies that she’s always eating, and like flowers. She holds the candies out toward Jack and he takes one. He peels the wrapper off slowly, so as not to tear it, pops the candy into his mouth. He folds the wrapper in four, then puts it in his pocket.

“Mmm,” he says. He smiles at her. He says that every day after school. It is his favorite part of the day. After he has sucked the candy till there is nothing left, never crunching it, Jack goes over to the shelves against the wall to pick out the next record. One whole wall is filled with shelves of records, much taller than Jack is himself. They are arranged in alphabetical order from top to bottom, so that Jack can’t pick any As, Bs or Cs until he is a little older. He is just as proud of the record collection as his grandmother, because they have built this collection as a team. Every second Saturday the two of them walk together to Records ‘n More to pick out a new, used record. When it is time for

Jack to pick out a record to play, he scans the collection, runs his fingers over the titles; he takes his time. For the last week or so, he has been choosing Johnny Nash, *I Can See Clearly Now*. Before his grandma even puts the needle to the record, Jack is singing:

*I can see clearly now the rain is gone  
All of the bad feelings have disappeared*

He thinks of Mrs. Duthie standing at the front of the class. Bryce Palmer said that she retired two years ago but then came back to teach them. As far as Jack is concerned, she should have stayed where she was. Mrs. Duthie carries a meter stick around the classroom and she bangs it down on people's desks if they are talking. She gets mad a lot. Today when they were doing their numbers, the times tables, Mrs. Duthie caught Jack counting on his fingers. He was counting the syllables in se-ven-times-four. She thought he was trying to count out the equation on his fingers, and she slammed her ruler down hard on his desk, only an inch away from Jack's right hand, his counting hand. Jack started to explain what he was doing, until he looked around the room and noticed that the other kids were staring at him. He saw Bryce smirking, elbowing Terrence Nicholson beside him. Even Kevin Choy was staring, and he almost always had his head down. So Jack shut up, apologized instead.

"You've got to *memorize* your times tables, Jack. *Memorize.*" Mrs. Duthie was smirking too, and she walked back up to the front of the class shaking her head. Jack tried hard not to cry. Then the other boys would really laugh at him.

*Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind  
It's gonna be a bright, bright, sunshiny day.*

Jack closes his eyes again like his grandma; he sits at her feet, his feet in the blanket.

Ω

At five-thirty, Jack heads down the hall to the kitchen where his mother and father are already sitting. Jack's mother is serving up a plate for his grandmother. The four of them never eat dinner together, which Jack doesn't really understand because his grandma has no real problem walking, even though she uses a cane when they go out. His mother's tight, thin lips have taught him that it's better not to ask.

Tonight they're having mashed potatoes, canned peas and pork chops with mushroom sauce. Jack's grandma can't eat pork chops so she just gets a lot of potatoes, peas, and mushroom sauce. Jack takes the

plate from his mom to his grandmother. His dad doesn't look up from the paper until Jack gets back to the kitchen.

"It's a blessing your mother cooks like this, isn't it, Jack?" his father says, nodding at the potatoes. "We've got a lot to be thankful for." He has been toying with religion since he quit drinking, and now Jack's dad has become fond of words like 'blessing' and 'thankful.' Jack's mother smiles an almost undetectable smile.

"Sure, Dad." Jack is just glad his father hasn't caught on to saying a prayer before supper. They do that before supper over at Bryce's place. Jack didn't know what to do the first time he had dinner there and Bryce's mom, whom Jack had only ever seen around the kitchen, said something about god and the father and the holy son, and pointed at her chest and her head, like Jack had seen people do on TV. Bryce and his little sisters and his dad were all quiet and they had their heads down and Jack got a terrible urge to laugh and he could barely stifle it, just barely, during the prayer. He became solemn again though when Bryce's mom thanked god for having Jack over for dinner. Jack thanked god for stopping the laughter that was almost bursting out of him.

After dinner Jack's father goes into the living room and flicks on the TV. His mother clanks the dishes over to the sink.

"Go and get grandma's dishes, Jack. Okay?" She turns her back.

"Okay."

"And then I want you to do up your homework before you play." The word 'homework' makes Jack feel heavy and tired. He does a few times tables in his room though (*five-times-nine-is-for-ty-five. five-times-nine-is-for-ty-five. five-time-nine-is-for-ty-five*), and then goes downstairs to the living room. It's just after seven, which means his father is watching Wheel of Fortune.

"Why are you buying a vowel, idiot?" Jack's dad is heckling the bald contestant. Jack goes into the kitchen. His mother is sitting at the table, smoking a cigarette. She looks over at Jack. Her face is puffy, grayish.

"Did you finish your homework?"

"It was only times tables." He sits at the table. "Mrs. Duthie is mean."

"Oh, honey, she is not. I met her myself and she's a perfectly nice woman. Shouldn't you practice your times tables a little longer?" She turns her back and looks out the window. There's not much to look at out there. Just a little patch of grass and a tall wooden fence with brown, peeling paint.

Ω

On Saturday morning Jack wakes up happy. Today is the good Saturday: record store Saturday. He puts on his jeans and selects his favorite

socks from the drawer. They are made of soft cotton, and they're black with red musical notes on them – a Christmas present from his grandmother. He pulls his Canuck's sweater over his head and hops down the hall into the kitchen. His grandmother is already there, sitting at the table with his mother. Grandma is drinking a cup of tea, and his mother has coffee. Jack's mother has already made his breakfast (two pieces of toast with strawberry jam and one boiled egg), which sits on a plate in front of his chair. His mother is smoking; she blows the smoke up to the ceiling in thin lines, her eyes closed. When she ashes the cigarette she rolls the tip slowly, making a perfect burning point. The two women aren't talking. His grandmother's cane is hooked onto the back of her chair, ready when she needs it. She smiles at him.

After breakfast, Jack and his grandmother head out the door and down the street to Records 'n More. The store is only a few blocks away, but it takes a while to walk there because of Jack's grandmother's cane. She's used it ever since she had a stroke, and that was before Jack was even born. After the stroke, she moved in with Jack's parents, into the big back bedroom, Jack's mother calls it the master bedroom. His mom and dad have the upstairs bedroom, which is a bit smaller, and Jack sleeps closest to the kitchen, between everyone.

It's a sunny day, early enough in the spring so that people still remember winter, and the streets are busy. Jack's grandma is wearing her favorite blue dress and her good white hat. Jack is counting the squares of sidewalk. When they get to Records 'n More, he has counted 160 sections. *One-hun-dred-six-ty*, a perfect hand of syllables. When Jack pushes the door open for his grandmother, a bell jingles and they walk into the dim light.

"Aha," Carl says from behind the counter, "here are my best customers! Such a fine day for record shopping."

"Hello Carl, what've you got for us this time?" Jack's grandmother approaches Carl at the counter and leans over to rest her arms. She smiles up at him. These greetings are repeated every time Jack and his grandmother come to the record store.

Carl is a soft man. He looks older than Jack's father, but not as old as his grandmother. The hair that he still has, ever further from his forehead, is sandy brown. He wears navy cardigans in which his narrow shoulders slope gently down, and his pants are always corduroy, brown or blue. He wears t-shirts under his cardigans with the names of bands scrawled across them, and Jack has never seen him wear the same one twice. Today he wears a black t-shirt with the words *Dinosaur Junior* in plain purple letters.

Jack walks up and down the aisles while Carl and his grandmother chat. He runs his fingers along the tops of the records, reads the titles and stares at the covers of the albums in the front of the rows. On the wall at the back of the store, there is a large poster of the Beatles album,

*Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. Jack takes his time going back there, and once there, he stares at the poster, trying to pick out faces in the photo that he recognizes. He remembers Marilyn Monroe from last time, and he watches her beautiful black and white image as if she is alive, as if she is staring out at him as well. He begins to look for more faces he can identify, but his grandmother and Carl are right behind him, looking through the classic rock section. Carl pulls out a Rolling Stones album called *Through the Past, Darkly*. It's shaped like a stop sign, and all the members of the band are on the cover, like they're looking through glass, their lips pressed up against it.

"Look, Jack," his grandmother says, holding out the record. Jack reaches out for it, smiling. He looks up at his grandma, whose face has changed; her lips are turned down, her eyes wide. Carl is still smiling as if he can't wait for Jack to see this record. But Jack's grandmother drops the record before he can grab it, the thing just falls right out of her hand and thuds onto the carpet.

"Oops," says Carl, reaching down to pick up the record. Just as he does this, Jack hears a gentle splash against the carpet. He looks around to see where it's coming from, thinks maybe there is a leak somewhere, but he doesn't see anything. And then he looks at his grandma who has two wet streaks running down her face, smudging her thick powdery makeup and ending up under her nose. Her upper lip shines. Jack looks around again, and behind him, up at the poster where Ms. Monroe is looking on, and then finally he looks down and sees the reason his grandmother is so upset. There is a puddle at her feet and a smell like salted butter filling up the stale air. He steps away from her, his stomach falling, and he holds on to the row of records beside him. He looks up at Carl, who is also backing away from his grandmother, his face a deep pink. And then Carl steps forward again and holds Jack's grandmother by the arm.

"Are you okay, Nettie?" He leads her past Jack and through a curtain at the back of the shop. As they pass, Jack does not look up. He turns and watches the two of them walk to the back but he says nothing. They disappear behind the curtain, and then Jack hears Carl's low murmur and the sound of running water. He looks down at the floor again, at the wet spot on the carpet, at the record that Carl didn't quite manage to pick up, splashed with urine, those rock 'n roll faces sneering up at him. And then Jack looks around the shop quickly, hoping that no one has come in and seen what just happened, that no one will see him do what he is about to do, to pick up the record off the floor and wipe his grandmother's urine away against his jeans and then place it back among the other records as if this hasn't happened at all. But he does that; he wipes the warm, wet record on his jeans and tucks it quickly away, thanking whoever that no one else is in the store. When Jack puts the record away and pulls back his hands to jam them into his pockets,

and fast, he sees that they are shaking, and he notices that he is breathing fast, that he is crying too. He thinks of his grandmother in the back wiping piss off her stockings right in front of Carl, a stranger, almost. Jack remembers Kevin Choy suddenly, when they were in kindergarten and they were visiting that pig farm out of town and everybody was staring at a huge mama pig with all her little babies lined up, sucking and pushing at her, and then all the kids started turning around and staring at Kevin, who was whimpering like a baby and who had a dark stain all down the front of his pants. Jack laughed at him, he and Bryce, holding on to each other and laughing because of what a baby Kevin was. And Kevin is still called pisshead sometimes at lunch or recess when Bryce and the other boys, even Jack, get bored with football or Frisbee or teasing the girls. And now his own grandmother is a pisshead, a baby like Kevin Choy. *Piss-head*, Jack folds down two fingers, *piss-head*.

“Jack,” Carl calls from behind the curtain, then pokes his head out. “Why don’t you head home? I’ll give your grandma a ride in a few minutes.” He waits, staring, for Jack’s answer.

Jack unclenches his fists, relaxes his shoulders a little. “Okay,” he says, and is immediately ashamed for giving up so easily, for letting this guy take care of his grandma, like Carl was her grandson, not Jack. Then he thinks maybe they are doing something secret back there, like maybe his grandma is playing a trick on him. She’s probably gone home already, slipped out the back door, and she’ll be waiting when Jack gets home. They’ll have a laugh about it, and then they’ll listen to records till dinner.

“I’ll be home soon, sweetie, go on,” his grandmother calls. Her voice sounds choked, like his mom’s does sometimes when she’s talking to his dad, like she doesn’t mean what she says.

When Jack gets home his mother is sitting in the kitchen, and his dad is in the living room watching golf. Jack sits on the couch and watches the door. He wonders why no one asks where his grandmother is, but thinks maybe they haven’t noticed that she’s gone.

“A School of Our Own” and “The Echo” come from WAYNE PORTER’S as yet unpublished novel, *Drum Keepers*. For further information see page 9.

## The Echo

Wayne Porter

WE LEFT THE Reservation at noon. Emily drove south toward the Rocky Mountains. In the car she told me stories of times she had traveled this road with her father. Her love for him is set deep in her eyes.

The mountains seem to soothe her spirit. They are constant and secure. Their beauty is riveting. As we drove father south the effects of civilization became impossible to ignore. The devastation of the forests sparked Emily’s feelings of anger and regret. She refuses to allow the destruction of nature to continue, unchallenged.

I had a hangover from the party after Friday’s court ruling. My hangover left me feeling hungry. Mid-afternoon we stopped for lunch at a roadside restaurant in one of the lumber towns along the highway. A line of parked logging trucks obstructed our view of the mountains. Inside the restaurant a mix of local people and travelers watched the Lions versus Blue Bombers football game on the television mounted on the wall. The CFL rivalry piqued their interest.

Emily and I were tired. We just wanted to blend into the crowd. The most recent land rights court battle was behind us, and for now Emily was famous. Her eloquent voice had been on the news almost every night for two months. Her compelling arguments to restore nature’s vitality had polarized the Aboriginal and government negotiations more than ever before. Her position against both land claim settlements and land ownership by mainstream society defines the context of the battle over the land. She believes that her people never owned the land. They cannot ask for the land to be returned because it isn’t theirs. Emily’s solution is to free nature from its masters. She sees herself as one part



of the complex cycle of life, not as one who hoards and manipulates nature for profit.

A table of people recognized her. They whispered to each other as we sat down in a booth near the door. Emily wanted to avoid answering questions about 'Indians.' She took the menu from behind the ketchup bottle and buried her face in it to avoid eye contact. She didn't even look up at the waitress when she ordered. After our food came, a man approached our table. He looked angry and frustrated.

He asked, "So, what do you intend to do about taking away my land?"

Emily looked up at him. "I'll continue to honor nature. When I can I will return nature to the care of the earth."

Emily sees ownership as a temporary condition no matter what the courts rule. She believes that one day all things will return to nature. Human beings will disappear and nature will continue on without them.

Emily added, "I hope you will gladly set it free yourself, someday."

He pointed his finger at her. "You're sticking your nose in where it doesn't belong."

Emily hesitated, then replied calmly, "I have no quarrel with you. Just let us eat in peace and we'll leave."

Her words shocked me. She never backs down from a confrontation involving the freedom of nature. He stood there watching her eat. Emily didn't look up again. He returned to his table, laughing to his friends about her chances of ever winning in court. She didn't look up until we had finished eating. Emily knew everyone was watching us as we got ready to leave. At the door she looked back and spoke to them with that voice that takes you with her wherever she wants to go.

"I have no fight with ordinary people. I only want the destruction of the earth to stop. Look at those logging trucks. How long do you think we can keep logging before the balance of nature cannot be restored? I want to live in harmony with nature until I return to the spirit world from where I came. Don't think of me as an Aboriginal activist. Think of me as someone who believes that if we respect nature we'll be more content with our lives. We'll also feel more at ease with the earth we pass on to our children."

Emily apologized to the man. "If I have done something which might have harmed you, I am sorry."

As Emily turned to leave he said, "I want the same things as you except I'll never give up my land."

Emily smiled like a cynic. "You'll probably never have to, but all things will return to nature."

When we were back in the car she swore. "He frightened me. I surrendered to their bullying."

I reminded her, "Our ancestors only fought when they had no other choice."

Emily agreed. She agreed but she didn't like the taste.

By evening we were emotionally and physically drained. We found a motel and stopped for the night. The September air was cool in the mountains. Sleep came easily.

I awoke, ready for a rare day of freedom.

After she was dressed and ready to leave Emily said, "I know a place close by that serves good breakfasts."

On our way to the restaurant she said she felt anxious. "I need to take care of myself. I have lost my focus as an Aboriginal and a mother-to-be." While we ate breakfast I watched her eyes. Her mind was somewhere else. Had yesterday's incident at the restaurant affected her that much? She takes her Aboriginal role of DrumKeeper seriously. Her responsibility is to defend the earth and pass on the purist story of the sacred ancient drum to her successor.

Emily came back to the present. "I regret not standing up to him."

"There were many times my uncle, and other Chiefs before him, fled to protect the tribe."

"This is not the time to flee, it's the time to fight."

She seemed stressed and panicked. Her breathing was uneven and she was distracted by the noise from the table beside us. I had never seen this kind of anxiety in her. She stared out the window at the mountains and set her jaw. Emily was preparing herself for a battle. I didn't know the enemy.

We left the restaurant and continued to drive south. The higher mountains were now directly in front of us. We rounded a corner and the trees opened up into a spectacular view of a valley. There was a lake at the far end, fed by a river falling down from the mountains. She pulled into the scenic view area and stopped the car. A few families were there looking in awe at the beauty of the valley. Everyone was quiet. The mountains stood silent in front of us, enduring and complex.

We stayed for an hour. Emily seldom looked away. She said, "This is the most beautiful valley in the mountains. It's my favorite place on earth."

"Did you stop here with your father?" I asked.

"No, he never stopped at the viewing areas, he always went straight to the camp."

Her father guided hunting parties for rich Canadians and Americans. They came to hunt big cats and bear.

"We're going to the camp where they hunted. There is an old road just up ahead where we'll park. From there we'll hike to the campsite."

She seemed a little more at ease. Getting back in the car, she found the road and parked out of sight. It was early afternoon. We took our tent and packs out of the truck and started to walk.

Emily said, "It's about forty-five minutes to the campsite. I haven't been there for years. I wonder if it's changed."

The trail followed a ridge through the forest. The only breaks in the trees were occasional rock outcrops covered with red moss. Emily followed the path her dad had made. It eventually brought us out of the forest onto a wide ledge overlooking the same valley we had seen from the viewing area. The view was just as spectacular from our new vantage point, except that I felt more involved with the scenery. We rested and looked at the valley. The court hearings had left us little time to spend together. We needed to reconnect.

Later, while we set up the tent, I asked Emily about her father.

She said, "He's a good man who loves his family. When my brother was shot at the blockade in South Dakota, Dad was devastated. He blamed himself for putting Curt in a situation which harmed him. I told him life cannot always be lived in safety. There are times when we can't protect the things we love. The blockade was a struggle to free nature. It was dangerous. Disaster and trauma are part of the struggle we face when we follow paths which we believe are honorable. Even the paths which lead us to the spirits may be troubled. After Curt recovered, my father vowed to honor my brother's life by working to have a peaceful and healthy environment."

We spent the rest of the day at the campsite. Darkness comes early in late September. It was also colder than we had anticipated. We managed to stay warm in our sleeping bags, but sleeping on the ground was not something I enjoyed anymore. In the morning we ate and talked by our fire until the sun had dried the grass.

Emily said, "I came here when I was young. I loved coming here. It's so peaceful and remote. Today I need some time by myself to work through something. It's in the way of the rest of my life. I don't know how long I'll need, but I'll come back and find you when I'm finished."

I said, "I'll go for a walk and explore some of the valley. I'll be back sometime this afternoon."

I walked along one side of the ledge as far as I could go. I climbed down onto an overgrown path and followed it through the forest. The sense of isolation appealed to me. That valley was far removed from the halls of government where most of my life had been spent.

When I returned I couldn't find Emily. Looking around, I followed a trail on the far side of the ledge. The trail led to a smaller ledge. Emily was sitting there, about a hundred yards away. She was protected from sight, and was motionless. She stayed that way all afternoon. I worried about her as night came. She hadn't eaten. She wasn't dressed warmly enough for the night. Animals might be nearby. I thought of going down to her, but I didn't. She had told me that she needed time to herself. It was not my right to interfere.

The next morning, she was still sitting in the same spot. I fussed around the campsite, trying not to worry about her. At about 10 a.m., I heard her call. She called to me to come down and sit with her.

“I want to tell you a story about myself,” she said. “From the time I was about eight years old until I was a teenager I came here with my father. Usually this time of year, he was busy leading groups into these hills to hunt bear and wild cats. Most of the men came to relax and find relief from their usual routines. They came to enjoy the area and take in the beauty. Those groups were fun to be with. I liked tagging along with my dad. Sometimes, groups of obnoxious men came, ones who tried to dominate every other living thing, including my dad and me. They treated him as a slave. He hated those groups and would never rebook them. He also did what he could to have them treat me with respect.”

Emily asked me to scream across the valley to hear my echo. There was about a ten-second delay before it came back to me as distinctly as my voice. I knew this meant it had bounced back from about a mile away. Looking at the cliff across the valley, it looked to be about that distance.

“When the wind is like it is now you hear your echo,” Emily continued. “When a storm approaches, the winds shift in the valley and you scream into silence. The sound waves never reach the other side.

“My father usually took the hunters around the valley and then walked back through it toward this ledge. He did it to flush out a bear or maybe happen upon a cat eating or sleeping in the forest. The last time I was here he did that with the hunting party. There were eight men and he took five with him. The hike takes a full day because of the terrain. When he left that morning, it was sunny. I showed the other three men how the echo works. I told them how far it is across the valley. After lunch some clouds rolled in with the wind. We came down here to wait for my father to signal us.

“Around 1 p.m. the clouds grew darker and the winds got stronger. I showed the men that the echo was now gone. My screams fell on deaf ears. One of them asked me what time my father usually reached the signal spot. I told him about 3 p.m. They went up to the camp for a few minutes. I waited here on this ledge. When they came back I sensed a difference in their behavior. The man who had asked me what time my father would signal asked me to scream again. I did. There was no echo. The men approached me. They told me I was very pretty. ‘Your father shouldn’t leave you alone like this,’ one of them said.

“I was fourteen. The teasing turned into play fighting and grabbing. By the time I realized what was happening, two of the men had pinned me. The third pulled off my clothes. He said, ‘Go ahead and scream, squaw. The Chief can’t hear you anyway.’ They all raped me. They told me they would bash my head in and kill my father if I talked.

“I never told my father. When he got to the cliff he signaled. I led the men towards him as I was expected to do. I tried to forget what they did to me. I will leave that memory here and forget about justice for those men.”

“Why didn’t you tell your father?” I asked.

“I’m a squaw. I didn’t know I could prove what they did to me. I thought my family would be humiliated. Guiding was how we earned our living. I stopped coming here after that. I haven’t returned until now. This memory will remain here. My spirit is intact.” She paused. “I came here because I’m pregnant. I didn’t want that memory passed on to our child.”

Emily stood up and came to me, and I held her.

She whispered, “I want to leave with a happy memory of this place.”

## A Woman Whose Flesh Would Dream

Ernest Hekkanen

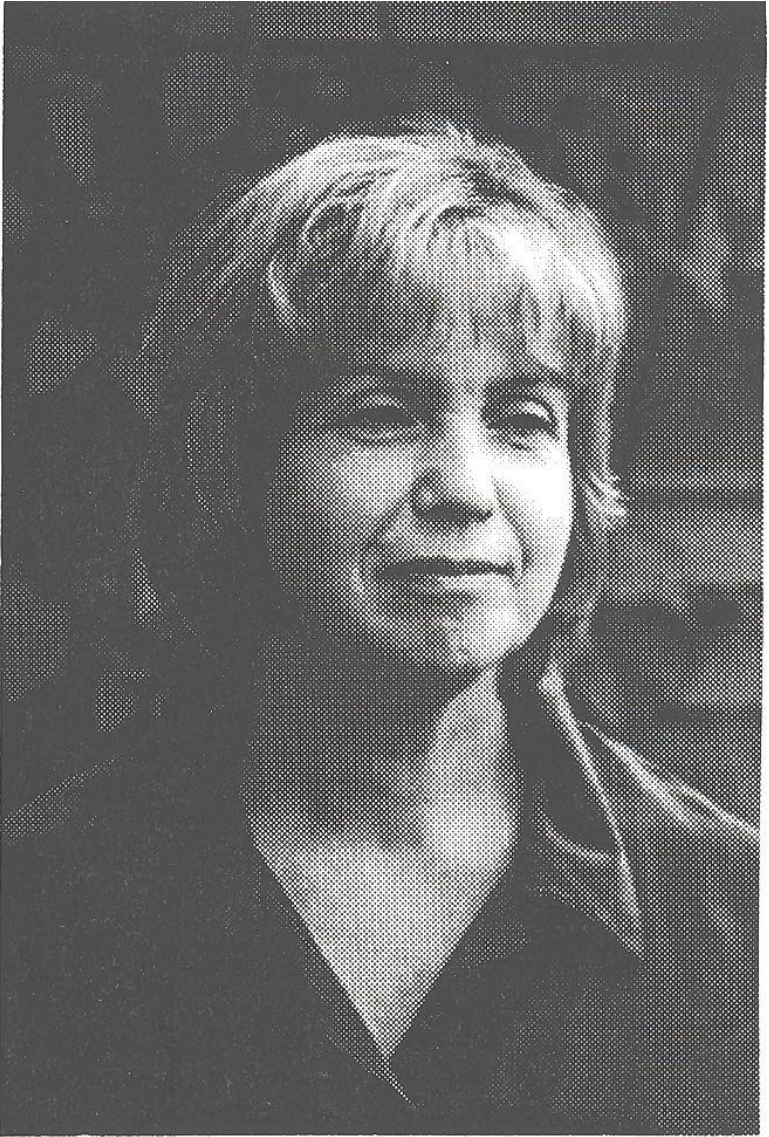
When you woke you spoke of jackals  
wreathed like dancers round our bed.  
Beyond the window the moon had jelled  
in pools where maidens fished  
with golden nets.

Such yodeling you had never heard.  
The jackals with their heads flung back  
were ripped and bleeding at the throat.  
So gay was their arched singing  
it fell like petals on your heart.

It fell like petals on the moon-drenched  
girls who dipped their longing nets.  
It fell like shattered blossoms on the tomb  
where angel fought with gargoyle  
over phases of your womb.

You were sad, you said,  
for the maidens whose nets when empty,  
and for the moon that had lost its place  
in the sky. You were sad for the man  
you had wed; for he had married a woman  
whose flesh was ravaged by dreams.

*Featured Poet*  
Pam Galloway



Purden Lake, Singing Stars





PAM GALLOWAY, a Vancouverite, has had work appear in numerous literary magazines. A UBC Creative Writing graduate, her work has appeared on the CBC and in the anthology, *Quintet*.

## Of Synchronicity and Singing Stars

Pam Galloway

SOME YEARS AGO I wrote a poem called “Purden Lake.” It was a contemplation on the vastness of the Canadian wilderness and also on the sky. The narrator poses questions about the Universe and her place within it. In allowing the narrator to imagine a connection with the vastness of the sky I employed a technique commonly found in poetry since the time of the Symbolists, synaesthesia. What, I proposed, if the stars were musical?

*...the stars would begin inaudibly, build slowly, gathering sound as more appeared...*

It was all imagined – what if?

More recently, in researching and interviewing for a science article on a pioneering space exploration mission, I have discovered something astronomers have known for many years – the sun and other stars, “sing.” Scientists measure sound waves from the gaseous interiors of stars, a technique called asteroseismology, to learn more about their characteristics. A team of scientists at UBC, led by Dr. Jaymie Matthews, plans to use a small, uniquely sensitive telescope carried on a microsatellite the size of a suitcase, to explore some of the oldest stars in our galaxy. In this way the scientists hope to be able to date the age of the universe.

When I imaged the indistinct points of light that I could see in the blackness above me growing not only in light intensity but also in

sound, I thought this was pure poetry. My mind was playing with notions of one sense infiltrating another. If what I see can be expressed as what I heard, what would it be like? But, it's true. Stars, the sun at least, do make musical sounds. I have listened to the sun singing – a thirty second clip on the UBC astronomy website.

Did I have this information unknowingly embedded in my brain? Had I heard or read about asteroseismology, perhaps in a magazine article or on a radio science show? Or was my belief that musical stars were the product of my imagination and this alone, a genuine one?

And so to the contemplation of just how many original ideas there are in the world. Fewer than any writer would like to admit, I suspect. Clear acts of theft of a creative work are despicable acts. When a writer steals the work of another writer, and sends it out into the world as his own, there will be no mercy. Universities are clear in their response, the offender will be punished, may be denied graduation. But what of less willful acts? What of those melodies that sound so much like an earlier tune? The late George Harrison fought a legal battle over the origin of his song "My Sweet Lord" that lasted almost twenty years.

One of my delights in reading poetry is the discovery of original thought, finding a poet who is able to put a new twist on an event that might otherwise be considered run-of-the-mill. Sometimes it is a poet's marvelous and innovative use of imagery or a simile or metaphor that is absolutely perfect and that leaves me asking, "Where did that come from? How did the poet make that connection?" I have carried with me for many years lines from a poem read to my high school graduating class by an English poet, Glyn Hughes. In his poem, "Neighbours," he describes the way that taciturn country people communicate in ways they understand: ...*We communicate/ in other ways: we poke the grate/ and whether we rise early or rise late/ is boasted from the roof. Each broods alone/ with a false air of no-one at home.* For years beyond high school when I only rarely read a poem, let alone ever wrote any, I still remembered those lines. The poem had impressed me with its utter simplicity and the precision of its image and what it conveyed. When I later began to cultivate a stronger interest in poetry I also came to realize that it was the sound of this poem that had stayed with me, its natural rhythms and unforced use of rhyme.

It is impossible for me to imagine a time when poetry isn't there in some way as I move through my mundane daily life. Only in poetry can the language be manipulated, reinvented, combined into an endless number of new representations of place, people, events. Only in poetry can human connection be forged so succinctly, so clearly and in the space of a few lines. And while I am always looking for what is new, both in others' poems as well as my own, I keep coming across the familiar. I regularly find examples of what appear to have been genuine evocations of original thought that are nevertheless expressed in similar

forms to another poet. And again, I wonder, how many truly original ideas?

In conversation with a group of visual artists, I was in some way heartened to hear the same cry of frustration as they talked about dedicating many hours of work on a new painting, a piece of their original art, only to open an art magazine and see their idea already executed in the work of another artist. Such was my feeling when I read Lorna Crozier's poem "For the Child Who Is Scared of the Dark" in which she evokes the image of a "golden pool" of chicks incubating under a light. The poem ends: *...How soft they are/ as you lower your hands/ as if to wash/ in a basin of water/ someone had left/ all morning in the sun.* Here are lines from my poem "November Lights" that tell about a disenchanting housewife whose kitchen might be her world in monochrome until her lover appears with flowers: *...You must have scorched your hand/ when you reached into the sun/ for these dimpled circles of light./ Yellow, yellow...*

Not the same thought by any means, and Lorna Crozier has read my poem and has not accused me of plagiarism, but the ideas are close, peeled from the same fruitful idea of bright yellow, sun, light and heat.

One of my artist friends has said that she believes there is, floating out in space (presumably psychic, not physical, space), a universal cache of creativity. All the creative energy in the world moves to and from and through this space that artists add to, take from and continuously replenish. Paintings, sculptures, photographs, films, operas, plays, novels, poems and so on, all these works of art are part of a revolving (and, I imagine, pulsing) store of creativity. Among the many poets I admire and to whose work I constantly return for inspiration, is Gwendolyn MacEwen. In the moving account of her too short life, *Shadow Maker*, her biography by Rosemary Sullivan, she is reported to have said that she felt when she was most productive, writing poems with ease, that her mind had entered a state where she was not actively thinking; she had achieved some kind of disconnection with the physical world.

I find that walking helps me to connect with my own rhythms and to reach a place where ideas seem to flow more freely from the mind to the pen. I like to think that through this process I am able to reach that universal store of energy spinning in its own galaxy of creativity.

The Globe and Mail recently informed me that, because of the light pollution from so many large cities across the world, a large percentage of us grow up and live out our lives without ever seeing the true blackness of the night sky studded with its millions of points of light. Living in Vancouver I am deprived of the experience of the night sky. All too infrequent retreats into the interior of B.C. now afford me the only opportunity to see the sky as I saw it when I wrote "Purden Lake."

The loss of the potential inspiration afforded by the night sky is great indeed. I cannot see the stars and I wish I could. But when I read and write poetry I am connected to a universe of brilliant ideas and images and every one is singing.

## Purden Lake

If I had been dropped in here, into this small circular clearing, if it had been gouged out with no roads leading in, you'd never find me. I'd be alone at the base of a soundless dry well. I could walk, turn circles around the edges of graveled earth but there would be no way out.

The only opening: up. Now, it's gaping black and deep, beginning to break out its intricate pattern of stars. If they were music, the stars would begin inaudibly, build slowly, gathering sound as more appeared. Is the music, are the stars constant, and only my attention lacking to perceive them? It takes a while but then I see the long trace, the shining blur that is the Milky Way: crescendo.

I know that some of these stars are dead. What I see is only light, millions of years away from the place where it started, light that long ago disappeared. Perhaps I can pull these from the sky. I could make some space in all that confusion of brightness. Find a way out. But what would I do with so much light? Could I hold it in my arms? Would it liquefy, run through my fingers and into the earth or remain hard-edged silver, prick my skin, what can light weigh?

## The Center

You drew a cross in the middle of the map.  
 Two black lines – entire streets eradicated  
 at a stroke. Nothing  
 to what a bomb would do.  
 You measured circles  
 out around the cross: one mile, five miles, ten  
 from the epicenter.

*Immediate damage from a one megaton  
 nuclear air burst over the city  
 (imagine enough TNT to fill a 200 mile-long train).*

*Inner circle: All buildings destroyed. No survivors.  
 Middle circle: All frame houses destroyed. Limited survival.  
 Outer circle: Severe damage to all houses. Flying debris wounds many.  
 And then the firestorm and the gale-force wind:  
 vaporization, third degree burns, radiation, chaos.*

We lay in bed and talked of flashing into nothingness.  
 You put your hand flat  
 on the crest of my belly, drew a cross  
 where you imagined our baby's heart. We stroked  
 circles out from the center, my hand resting  
 on yours. Then, the thud  
 of a small foot kicking.

## Thirteen

You were thirteen,  
 and as many hours on a bus.  
 Half a day to listen to the wheels gorge the miles,  
 stare out the window—  
 the valley: fields frozen green,  
 irrigation rigs parked and stubbled land  
 waiting for the plough.  
 A rainbow scythes the sky.  
 Heading north, the road closes in with rocks on every side  
 like school-yard bullies: jagged-edged, solid  
 with unspoken threats, ready to poke your shoulder.  
 Through the canyon the bus slows  
 the road is slipping away as rain turns to snow.

Before you left, you told me you were going home  
 to the place of frozen air where you were born,  
 eager to wear heavy-lined boots, parka and mitts.  
 Your new black toque, pulled down hard  
 over your ears, against your eyes,  
 framed your face.

Now your face looks back  
 from the darkened window as your peer  
 at a wall of trees, uniformly spaced  
 awaiting the chain-saw. No trees for climbing,  
 no twisted or hollow trunks, not wide enough to hide behind.  
 But strong enough for snow:  
 white sculptures mound on branches, hold—  
 slip. An avalanche, a spray of winter  
 as startling as a blast of wind.

This is the story that grows  
 as you travel, while I sit for hours  
 stare out my window.  
 Cottonwoods stand apart, their branches  
 scrawl across a bare, gray page:  
 a boy becoming a man, journeying.

# Throwback for Tom

It was a Sunday I watched  
you through the nursery window,  
on show in an incubator  
to pink you up,  
to flush away birth's blue tinge,  
your hair shining red  
as your great-grandfather's.  
A bit of the Irish.

Fifteen years later, a Sunday  
evening, I'm daubing goop  
on your hair to make it,  
as you say, blonde.  
More blonde than it is already—  
and streaked orange.

Strawberry faded to flax, fair  
as the pale-complexioned boy,  
in the first school photo, his almost smile,  
his blue eyes...they stop me, about to say  
“hold on—enough.”

Taller than me, your new blonde  
with its hint of orange  
and a phone voice deep  
as the bass guitar you strum, insistent,  
demanding—silences, empty  
space between us. Will you yet  
tell me the fair old yarn  
or dance the steps, will ye?



## One Sunday Morning, Bristol and the Highlands

This room  
at the back of a house  
might be ordinary, some family's living room.  
They might gather here  
around a rough pine table, simple  
conversation, low voices sliding  
over *nothing much*. But, no family

lives here, no furniture—  
only a faded square rug;  
walls patched with travel posters,  
hits of color, and thin strings  
of Christmas lights.  
All the floor-space needed  
for the people, who come  
to sing. This morning, the choir  
has brought mothers, brothers,  
families and friends—to sing.  
Fifty of us. Too many for this small place.  
Polite sorrys and smiles  
shuffle for space. Our bodies  
hold discomfort: tight shoulders,  
no turns of the head.

At first it's a humming. A single note  
submerges shyness, the ones who said,  
“I have no voice” and vowed to keep quiet—  
can't stop the sound from growing.  
Harmonies shift and the room is bigger,  
the mass of bodies distilled  
to “An Ereskay Love Lilt”:  
*Vair me o ro van o*  
*Vair me oh ro van ee.*

Far from here, mist  
like a fine woolen shawl wraps the hills;  
to the loch, a shaft of light falls.

## Where the Sky Must be

Leaving, I drive a thin peninsula road, am connected to the earth only through my feet on pedals, the wheels of my car consuming tarmac. What can I take with me of this place? Net of mist blurs silhouettes of hills, spurs like fingers of pondweed float out across the loch. Nothing to hold.

Sun breaks through where the sky must be, its shafts cut the landscape into triangles. A slice of this rough and delicate country offered to me like shortbread from a silver plate. I accept.

Between 1960 and 1986, BRUCE CHILTON spent most of his time writing Burnaby Planning Department reports. He turned to fiction in 1993. He has had work published in *Winners' Circle Anthology*, *Authors*, *Slice of Life* and *Ticked by Thunder*. He lives in North Vancouver.

## Rendezvous

Bruce Chilton

IT WAS ONE-THIRTY when Burt drove into the parking lot in a wooded area that sloped down to the Stanley Park seawall. He had half an hour before his meeting with Jane, his estranged wife. He needed time to walk and think. Leaves spiraled down from the trees and the surf pounded the drifting logs along the shoreline in the cool October wind. Burt raised his coat collar and plunged his hands into his pockets. He paused on the path above the seawall to watch the sailboats flying past in a wind-swept spray.

Burt hadn't seen Jane for two years. Fortunately, their children, Blair and Barbara, had grown up by the time Burt left home. Now they were married and on their own. Burt saw them often; both urged him to mend his shattered relationship with their mother.

Burt passed men walking by themselves. Men of all ages. Did they also live alone? A middle-aged couple, their arms swinging out like soldiers on parade, strode down the seawall promenade. Burt envied them. He and Jane had walked there many times like that – in the past.

When his marriage began to flounder Burt took to drink: a weekend alcoholic. He wasn't sure which had come first, the faltering marriage or his weekend drinking. It must have been the marriage thing, surely. Anyway, Burt never let it interfere with his work as Chief Planner for the Pacific Western Development Corporation, although he often felt shaky on Monday mornings. He had his secretary bring coffee to his office on that day. Hot and black. There was a time when he told himself that he drank on the weekends because Jane was dating other men. She used to go to a bridge club on Saturday nights with her girlfriends.

Girlfriends? Bridge club? There probably never was a bridge club. One day, Jane threw up her hands and demanded a legal separation. Burt agreed to it. To do otherwise would only widen the rift between them.

Overhead, white gulls rode the air waves against a blue-gray sky. Out on the inlet, a freighter crossed his line of sight, heading for the Lion's Gate Bridge. Burt leaned over the railing above the seawall. Shortly after the separation he had managed, after several unsuccessful attempts, to conquer his weekend drinking problem. That should make Jane happy, he thought, or would it matter anymore? Burt checked the time. Still fifteen minutes to go. He pushed back from the railing and went on walking.

Jane had agreed to meet him at Second Beach, on the benches above the seawall and the pool. Behind, a closed concession booth. On the pavement next to the booth, a troupe of young roller-bladers was practicing turns. Burt reached the benches with ten minutes to spare.

On his way to the washroom, Burt wondered about Jane's reaction to their meeting. Would she be hostile or conciliatory? Probably somewhere in between. The mirror reflected back the image of a big man in his mid-fifties, with dark hair, a touch of gray at the sides. On his way out, he saw that it was two o'clock. Zero hour.

Burt had just seated himself when he caught sight of Jane making her way over the leaf-covered grass. She wore a red beret, a blue slicker and gray slacks. She had turned fifty on her last birthday in September. Her short blonde hair swayed in the rising wind. She stopped in front of Burt.

He stood up. Those blue eyes, he thought, so bright, so cold. "Let's go for a coffee or something...."

Jane made a wry face. "What for?"

Burt cleared his throat. "To talk. We need to talk."

"What good would that do?"

"Well, for one thing, I've changed since I saw you last. No more weekend drinking."

"I'll bet!"

"I've quit. Honest, I have."

"You were a total washout on the weekends." She gave him a penetrating glance. "People don't change, just like that." She snapped her fingers.

"But it's true. I'm a completely different person now." Burt frowned. She wasn't listening. Had her mind set. Stubborn. He would have to bring it all up again. Later.

Jane was watching the young bladers roll past, to the seawall promenade.

Burt swung around to face her. "Please, Jane, be reasonable." He took her arm. "Come on."

"Let me go!"

Burt dropped her arm. “You kept your appointment today, so you must have felt something for me.”

“You know, I’m not so sure I should have come. I thought about it for a long time before I decided there’d be no harm in it.”

Burt shrugged. “If you won’t go for coffee, how about walking?”

“Oh, all right.”

Burt reached for her hand, but thought better of it. At least she agreed to walk with him.

They moved out along the seawall promenade in silence. Burt, hearing a rumbling behind them, reached out and grabbed Jane, pulling her against him. Two skate boarders brushed past.

Jane scowled and drew away. “For God’s sake, Burt!” Then, she saw the skate boarders. “Oh, sorry.”

“Watch where you’re going!” Burt shouted after them.

They wore their uniforms – baggy pants and baseball caps, the peaks at the back. One of them gave Burt the finger.

Burt and Jane shook their heads and went on walking. That incident buoyed Burt’s sagging spirits: something he had shared with Jane. He had saved her from possible injury. Maybe things were beginning to brighten. Now for the next step forward.

Burt turned his eyes to Jane. “Please smile,” he said.

“Why?”

“Because your whole face lights up.” Burt slowed his pace. “It makes me feel good all over.”

Jane gave him a mockish laugh. “I know what you’re trying to do, but it just won’t work!”

Burt stopped at a bend in the promenade. What to do now? She didn’t believe him when he told her he had changed. And he hadn’t even checked her out on her so-called bridge club meetings. The thought of giving up and leaving crossed his mind, but he suppressed it.

Jane was looking up. Burt looked up too: at the dark clouds that billowed out and scudded across the sky. “We need light,” he muttered. “Let there be light.”

Jane smirked. “Where did you get that from – a biblical quote or a book you’re reading?”

“Well...ah...I...” Burt groped for the right words.

“What’s the matter? The cat got your tongue?”

“Well, I do feel a bit tongue-tied, because I want something positive to come out of our meeting.”

“Oh.” Jane frowned and turned away.

Burt scratched his head. What did that mean? It had a soft sound to it – more like a surprise, or? At least it lacked the anger of the earlier outbursts.

Jane had gone ahead, moving slowly along the seawall side of the promenade.

The cloud cover began to lighten at Ferguson Point. Burt and Jane turned away from the seawall to a weathered wooden staircase which led up to a broad grassy promontory, the Tea House at the top. In the distance, a string of freighters rode anchor in the bay.

"I've been seeing a lot of Blair and Barbara lately," said Burt. "Both of them want us to get together again..." He tailed off. Jane hadn't heard him: she was looking out across the water.

Burt wanted to keep the conversation going, to dredge up the dark, painful images of the past to be viewed and probed in the light of day.

Jane turned around and sidled up to him.

Burt looked at her, hoping she would stay. "Do you still go to your bridge club meetings Saturday nights?"

"Yes, I do." She cocked her head to one side. "Why?"

Burt glanced over her shoulder and frowned. At least she was being truthful – something both of them needed. But how long was she going to keep playing that crazy game? How could she be so deceitful for so long? "Well," he said, turning to face her. "So there never was a bridge club. Right?"

"Wrong!" Jane arched a brow. "Of course there was, and still is, a bridge club. Just ask Nadine or Connie or Thelma."

Burt pulled in a breath. He knew all of them. Not well, but he knew them. He should have had the whole bridge club thing out with Jane a long time ago. It certainly would have improved their chances of getting back together again. It would also have probably made him cut off his weekend drinking much sooner. Burt shook his head to clear it.

Jane looked at him intently. "You didn't think I was going out with other men, did you?"

"No!" Burt shouted. The last thing he wanted was to try to explain his unfounded mistrust of Jane. Doing that would make things much worse than they were already. That would never do. No way. "Let's drop the whole thing, okay?"

"All right." Jane shrugged. "Let's drop it then...no problem."

Burt grinned at her. So, he had been wrong about her all along. Terribly wrong. Now, he must make it up to her. "Well," he said. "I guess the worst thing you had to put up with was my weekend-drinking. Right?"

Jane's eyes rounded. "Yes, that was dreadful...the main reason for our break-up."

"I've kicked the habit. Quit completely."

"When did you do that?"

"It's been over a year now. Closer to a year and a half, I'd say."

Jane blinked. "You don't drink at all? Not ever?"

Burt thought about that for a long moment. "Well, I have the occasional drink socially, but that's it."

“Certainly, there’s nothing wrong with having a social drink once in a while. You know, in a civilized way.”

“That’s what I mean,” said Burt.

Jane glanced at him but didn’t say anything. It appeared to Burt that her expression had softened. It almost seemed as though she were beginning to believe in him.

The gray clouds drifted away and the late afternoon sun beamed a broad band of light across the grass and through the trees. The wind dropped and the white-crested waves wound down to a gentle ripple along the shore. Burt and Jane followed a narrow dirt path between the grass and a thick evergreen forest. Farther on, the forest opened to a wide expanse of beach below, and the view reached out to Siwash Rock and beyond, to the North Shore mountains.

Burt caught a glimpse of movement on the beach. He touched Jane’s shoulder. “Look!”

A young long-haired couple, in matching Indian sweaters and jeans, were playing on the wet sand. While the girl watched, the man, who held a pointed stick, drew a heart in the sand. Inside the heart he scratched the words: I LOVE YOU. The girl cupped his face in her hands and kissed him. He wrapped his arms around the small of her back and held her in a tight hug.

Burt looked at Jane. Her eyes were fixed on the young lovers. Burt smiled and rested a hand on her shoulder. She either didn’t notice or didn’t care, like someone in a trance.

Abruptly, the girl stepped back, grabbed the stick and ran down the beach. The man went after her. She nimbly sidestepped his reaching hands and dashed back to the heart in the sand. She stopped and thrust out a hand to warn him off. She then drew a heart next to his, and in its center traced out the letters: D.B. LOVES K.S. The young man gripped her around the waist, lifted her off her feet and swung her around in circles. Her hair, truant in the wind, swept across her face in golden strands. He released his grip and she skipped across the sand, laughing. When he caught up to her, she swerved away, stopped and sprang into his arms.

Burt’s gaze shifted from the young couple to Jane, his eyes contemplated her sun-bright hair. “I remember doing the same thing,” he murmured. “It must have been thirty years ago, back in the late sixties at Crescent Beach when the tide was out.” He scanned her face. “Do you remember?”

“Yes,” she said softly. “I remember.”

Burt drew a finger down her arm to touch her hand.

Jane looked up at him, took his hand and gave it a squeeze. “Let’s go for coffee,” she said.

DAVID A. GROULX is of Ojibwa-French ancestry. He has won the Munro Family Literary Prize at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay and The Simon J. Lucas Award at the En'owkin International School of Writing in Penticton, BC. His first book, *Night in the Exude* (Tyro Press), was published in 1997 and his second book, *The Long Dance* (Kegedonce Press), came out in 2000.

## David A. Groulx / **Two Poems**

### **Economic Dance/Song**

They are stomping on the grass  
 they're dancing on the grass  
 logger with his axe  
 farmer with his shotgun  
 ranger with his rifle  
 miner with his shovel

*Strike the ground!*  
*Strike it down!*  
*Subdue the earth*

Strike it with shovel  
 strike it with axe  
 shoot with rifle  
 blast with shotgun

listen to her gasping

her blood boiling in her throat



## They Wasted Nothing Either

They wore women's  
breasts like hats

they cut off their heads  
and used them as footballs

flayed their skin to make  
bridle reins

with their bones they made  
knife handles

for the skulls they built  
museums  
the children were sold  
into slavery

they severed their hands as  
warnings to others

they cut off their fingers  
to get the rings

they cut out the women's vaginas  
to wear on their saddles

they tested hepatitis vaccines  
on them

fed them uranium to see  
what would happen

and then sterilized  
their mothers

they wasted nothing

but us.

DIRK van NOUHUYS hails from Berkeley, California. He has a BA in Creative Writing from Stanford and an MA in Contemporary Lit from Columbia. He has published short fiction in *Asylum Annual*, *Mr. Magnanimous*, and *Sign of the Times*. Sachem Press published his translation with a collaborator of the Flemish writer Jos Vandelloo's two short novels *The Danger* and *The Enemy*.

## Flight

### Dirk van Nouhuys

KARL DRAGOMAN came running late to the sign-in counter at Washington's Dulles airport and was assigned the aisle seat of a pair by the window although the plane was one third empty. To stow his gear he had to arch over a neat young man in a striking pinstripe suit. Karl was a sturdy, barrel-chested man in his middle fifties, white hair swept back from a hawk-like face. He was dressed economically and informally in a gray tweed sports jacket and gray slacks. He excused himself to the young man in pinstripe, and, without waiting for a reply, stuffed his overcoat, gritty with dirty snow, into the locker above the seats in a gesture half of apology and half of frustration.

The young man introduced himself. His name was Nathan O'Connor, he declared, and he was an environmental lawyer. Karl introduced himself and identified himself as the manager of the Innovative Shelter Department of General Technology Corporation.

"If you don't mind my asking," Nathan O'Connor said, "what is Innovative Shelter?"

"Well, it's a term we made up," Karl said with didactic apology. "We were trying to put together some civil engineering, some systems engineering, some military training techniques, some architecture...." Karl paused, defeated for a moment, thumbing through the hectic clichés of his vocabulary for the tangle of impulses that they had once tried to label on a hot afternoon in Los Angeles, full of painful hope and reconsideration.

"I'm sorry," Karl shook his head. "Words fail me when I try to explain myself to people. They are like shoddy building material; they look OK, but the structure you get doesn't contain..." He halted again.

The young man shook his head in sympathy. "After I've been in Washington a few days I don't know how to stop talking like a report."

"Or man to man," Karl said. He felt he might be able to talk to this young man. "You're a lawyer, you might understand, I don't meet many people who understand what I do. It seems scattered, but could be very important." All the while Karl was adjusting his seat belt, taking papers covered with rough drawings in and out of his briefcase, working his way into the seat with his shoulders. "The largest recent project in our center has been development and...uh...prototype production of a relatively inexpensive lightweight dome for medium-sized field radio and microwave antennae. One that a bunch of recruits can construct. That's the key. We've done a lot on what lets a bunch of recruits build an advanced shelter, and on materials, and construction scheduling techniques, training methods, manuals, and a bunch of our work went into this project. Well, the government agency that paid for development of the dome...we had a pretty severe cost overrun...began to talk about taking the engineering prototype and the drawings...what there were of them...and giving it to another outfit with lower overhead to build models for field testing."

Karl paused, trying to decide how much he should say. Fear of exposure clouded his generosity; you always have to keep close about company business; but underneath it he was sizing up the young man as a listener; how much could Karl clear his mind by talking to him? Karl was always seeking listeners he could address clearly because when he spoke clearly he felt he had done something.

"That puts you in a pretty delicate position," the young man led him on.

"Exactly," Karl said. "Those people are the ones the department depends on for contracts, they are the ones I depend on to keep my career moving, but I had to be tough with them. The contract called for drawings someone else could use to build from; contracts always say that, but everyone knows that contractors don't really provide them. I had to go and argue that it would be very expensive for anyone else to build from those drawings, but strictly speaking, that means we didn't fulfill our contract."

"How do you stand with the agencies?" the lawyer asked.

"Oh, they think I'm some sort of nut. I have ideas about what might be done with this technology that...if recruits can build domes, any American head of a household can build his own house, if you give him the right training, tools, financing...that's not...the people we contract for are not interested in that; no one is interested in the possibilities of freeing up individuals by combining new technology with limited, ap-

propriate changes in social structure, but even if they don't understand it, I am able to get something across. It's funny, they don't understand or, well, I don't think they do, but when I talk to them something comes through. I see the big picture, and people need that, you know."

"You're right," the young man in the suit said, "they need that."

"So when I talk to them I can stir up their juices even if they don't understand. Of course, all the management cares about is the bottom line; if I were a stockholder...but even then it's shortsighted. Anyway, as long as I bring in the contracts it's okay, but if I lose money for a quarter, there are people who think I'm a burden. I can't lose money two quarters in a row. Being able to persuade people doesn't always make you popular."

"Sometimes I feel angry at people who persuade me," the young lawyer said.

"I wield a very soft lever in Washington. Even if I got the guys I talked to to agree to something, I would have to go for approval before my management. They might think I had given in too much or the vice-president, when he reviewed the decision, might decide it was better marketing strategy to give them everything they want, but they sent me because I have a reputation."

"Can the agencies influence your management?"

"I can see you understand these things; where do you work?"

"I work for a law firm that specializes in environmental law, protecting the environment; I've worked for the EPA."

"Is it true that the staff is half lawyers?"

"No, but the payroll is."

Karl laughed. "That's terrible," he said. "In my area there's no clear line between the management and the government. DT management is half retired colonels and many government managers used to work for us."

"Have you thought of joining the government?" the lawyer asked.

Karl laughed. "Oh, I did. I was in the Corps of Engineers, many of my people, the people in our group, were in the Corps, when we were building missile silos. I developed the environmental support system for...well, we felt proud of a job well done, I mean if it were not for the silos, the Free World...the trajectories of those birds guard us like arches upholding the skies. But many of us began to want to apply what we had done in the civilian sector, beat our swords into plowshares." He laughed. "And I had more ideas than the army wants to listen to. I'm sure you're young enough to understand these things."

"I don't think youth has a license on peace," the lawyer said. "My grandfather was a CO in the First World War."

Karl laughed. "Mine was in that war, in the Russian army, in the white Russian army. Came here when the Reds won. In the end a ragged rout of desperate men, no communications, no arms, no shelter, surviv-

ing on courage and comradeship, surviving on leadership. I often wonder what he would have thought of the army we have now, all civilians sitting on their butts in Washington. His men wore uniforms and obeyed. Once he ordered a charge. Thirty percent were killed.”

At that moment the voice of the captain interrupted them with the information that they were passing over the Ohio River.

“The Ohio River is a sewer,” the young lawyer said.

Karl looked out over the twilight world where roads marked out mile squares according to the Homestead Act. He thought of the legend, he thought it was a Russian legend, of the Old Dawnflyer, a terrible dragon who flew at twilight and dawn over the country and nothing dared to stop him. The Dawnflyer could do whatever he wanted. Karl felt angry because he could not make people share his dreams. You can’t make people dream.

“The people down there,” the lawyer said, “want to be able to swim in the river. They want to be able to live within sight of it and bear the smell. They write to their congressmen. When we come with the regulations that make it possible, they fight us every step of the way. I’ve been shot at. I don’t know what we can do to make them understand what it means to want a healthy world. I don’t think they can ever understand. My friend quotes a line from Bertolt Brecht, ‘The government has lost confidence in the people and plans to abolish it.’ Do you know that?”

Karl shook his head. “I don’t read much. The government and the people are longing for each other,” he said, looking down at the regular earth in twilight. They were silent for a moment.

“Are you married?” Karl asked.

“No, I live with a woman, another lawyer, that’s my friend you reads.”

Karl shook his head ruefully. “When I got married I didn’t know there were other arrangements...but still, what about children?”

“I’m not sure about bringing children into a world like this, the pollution, the threat of nuclear war, the indifference...”

Karl was shocked. “Oh, gosh,” he said, “I can’t be as negative as all that. We got a fine bunch of kids, they...we have the conflicts that are part of growing up, but I’m sure they don’t...”

“I don’t mean I don’t respect your decision,” the lawyer said.

“I don’t know that it was a decision, my wife and I just naturally assumed...”

“It’s a very personal thing...I just don’t know if we’ll make it,” the young lawyer gestured at the country passing beneath them.

Karl did not know what to say, he felt he could not go on without being angry. He did not like people to downmouth America.

“Well, do you think you succeeded in Washington?” the lawyer asked. In the progress of their flight, Washington had crossed the line between here and there, had stopped being present and become distant.

“I don’t know. I talked to the faces, tried to reach the dreams, tried to bring them to understand what I always assumed, tried to reach through the low goals to where the real intelligence lies. They came to the conference rooms to hear me as they have often done before, they provided me with chalk boards and projectors as they have so often done before. My stomach churned as it always has. The next time I make a proposal I will know if they have stopped listening to me.”

About that time the stewardess began to pull down screens for the movie. It was a film about car racing. Their seats were very close to the screen; the young lawyer excused himself and moved to a better seat. Karl admired the competitive exhilaration on the screen, but when he looked at the young men in quilted silver asbestos suits he again felt vaguely angry. He thumbed through the in-flight magazine from the seat pocket before him. His eyes stopped on an advertisement because he saw specifications. They defined a light but wind-proof tent for high climbing. Over half the weight was in the poles and ropes. He began to consider a pup tent sustained by air pressure. With modern fibers it is not difficult to weave a fabric so tight that a very modest source of pressure would sustain it. The tight weave would defeat the wind and help keep in warmth. It would be possible to build a very light pressure tank with, say, boron-fiber-reinforced polyurethane. Each evening the hiker himself could pump it up with a plastic bicycle pump. Could a reasonable amount of pumping store enough pressure for a night? He knew the porosity of some fabrics, the surface area of the tent from the ad, the volume of the pump; he made some rough calculations; it would be okay. The climbers would never have to carry any tank with heavy walls to hold the air longer than overnight, never carry metal cylinders. Friends of the Earth people and that kind had always sympathized with his ideas, but they didn’t understand what plans implied, the organization that was involved, what it meant for a fabric like this to exist in the world. Would there be enough air to breathe?

What volume of air did a man need to sleep in an eight-hour night? Karl figured roughly the volume of his lungs and counted his breaths with his watch. He factored in the porosity of the fabric. It seemed suffocation would be a problem, even considering that people breathed less at night. Perhaps people could be trained to breathe less. Karl had heard of yogis that did amazing things; it was a subject he had always wanted to check into. Maybe if the government would send him to India to advise...but people were not interested any longer in difficult disciplines even if they made technical and economic sense. Karl thought of an image he had seen, his interest in yogis reminded him of it, but it was something he had seen, in a movie or on a television commercial, a man, a powerful man running in great bounds, barley touching the ground, in slow motion, and, as he approached the camera he began to disintegrate, limbs falling away, like in a slow-motion explosion. He

raised his eyes to the screen. A car was going out of control; it spun through the guard rail of the track, bounced into a field, and burst into flame. The driver's team ran to the car and pulled him out. He was still breathing. Karl decided to watch the film.

In the welcoming crowd at the end of the exit tunnel, Karl noticed his wife without identifying her. Then he recognized her and the dislocation threw him out of time for a moment. His stomach churned. The pieces and layers of the years scattered in turmoil. It was as if his life, built up like a coral reef, painstakingly cemented out of bits of intention, half-realized bonds, trapped sponges, of dreams hardened into stone, were suddenly storm-broken, letting fall a slow underwater rain of distressing fragments, flotsam, and pulpy, unprotected living cores. The moment passed, but left fine lines where the breakage lay. This was a solid, middle-aged woman with long straight dark-blond hair and a high forehead, dressed casually and plainly, staring inattentively before her. A strange woman and two strange children stood with her. If he met her now she would not attract him. Women who attracted him were more...innocent.

"Gosh, it's great to see a familiar face," Karl said.

The five turned, in a scattered group, toward the baggage claim area. Instead of asking the outcome of his trip, Laura introduced him to the other woman and her two children. Her name was Sybil, a tall, skinny, athletic woman, the wife of one of his group, as it turned out. Karl then remembered Laura mentioning her before, and even meeting her. He asked warmly after her husband. One of her two children was a ten-year-old boy in shorts with messy hair and a runny nose who cut in and out of the crowd at some distance as if he were wrapping them with a string. The other was a girl of about eight with big, quiet eyes, who stayed by touching her mother. Two of Karl's children had come too, Karl Jr., twelve, even taller, who walked quietly, neither too far nor too close, with a kind of embarrassed, nascent self-possession, which was beginning to distress his father, and Sophy, ten, who took his hand. Karl did not quite approve of Sybil; there was something missing from her; he hoped she was not an impediment to her husband's career.

Laura led them to a Dodge van in the parking lot; the van belonged to Sybil. The women had brought it because there were so many children. The two women sat together in the front seats around the motor, Sybil driving. The kids crowded around Karl. He guessed, proudly, that Karl Jr. and Sophy had told them he would tell a story, or Sophy anyway. He always told a story when they picked him up at the airport; he had looked forward to it all the flight from Washington. A subject had been forming in the back of his mind as he talked to the young lawyer, but it embarrassed him to mention it.

"Once upon a time there was a Prince who lived in a castle so tall he could see over the whole kingdom. He lived there with his father and

mother, the king and queen, and his sister, the Princess, who was younger than he. One day a giant black hawk came and carried his sister away as she stood on one of the towers. The Prince was to marry the next day a beautiful Princess from the land of shadows, as his parents had chosen, but he did not think he could be happy as long as he did not know the fate of his sister. Now they had found something lying in the spot where the Princess had stood; it was a tiny crystal ball, and in it they could see a castle, like their own, and they could see, as small as a pin, people in the castle tower. Who do you think they were?"

After a moment Sophy said, "Their own family."

"That's right," Karl said. "So the Prince went to a wise man who lived in the castle, the queen's brother, and asked him what he might do to bring the Princess safely home.

"Well," said her uncle, 'you must search for her.'

"I am ready to search,' said the Prince, 'and I have both my sword and my spear.'

"They will not help you in this search,' said the uncle, 'though you may take them. But take the crystal ball, and take this vial of honey that no creature can resist tasting.'"

"What's a vial?" asked Sybil's girl.

"A vial is a little jar with a cork," Karl's daughter answered.

"That's right," Karl said. "And take this salve, and when you rub it on your left foot you will grow smaller and lighter, and when you rub it on your right foot you will grow back to your own size. After that, the salve will lose its power.'

"Well, those are fine gifts,' said the Prince, 'but how shall I search?'

"You must search,' said his uncle, 'on a steed that can fly without wings.'"

"What's a steed?" Sybil's son asked.

Karl laughed. "Well, I'm not sure I know, do any of you know?" None of the children spoke. Karl raised his voice to the women in the front: "Do either of you know the correct definition of a steed?"

"What you ride in a story," Laura said.

"That will do," Karl said. "Well, they kept a hawk for falconry, and the Prince thought the hawk might know because he flew so far and high with metal eyes. So the Prince asked the hawk. The hawk said, 'I have been flying high here since your father became king, and I have never seen a steed that flies without wings; but I know a creature older than I who flies higher than I and that is the Eagle. If you could ride on my back I would fly with you to the Eagle and he could answer your question if any creature can.' So the Prince rubbed some of the salve on his left foot and made himself small enough to ride on the hawk and the hawk flew him up to the crag where lived the Bald Eagle with his white hair. Bald Eagle was long past needing to struggle with the world and



lived only on what he could fix from his perch with his powerful eyes. When the Prince had asked his question, the Eagle replied, ‘No one flies higher than I, and I was the first bird to use this air and I know of no steed that flies without wings, but I know a creature older than I and that is the worm that builds his house as he goes. I spy him now looking out of his door at the foot of the mountain. If you slide down my eye beams you could question him now.’ So the Prince rubbed the salve on his left foot again and slid down the Eagle’s eye beams to the door of the pink wiggly worm.”

The older children giggled.

“The Prince said, ‘I have come from the Eagle who is eyeing you now, and declared that you are older than he and might know of a steed that flies without wings.’ ‘I have no fear of the Eagle,’ said the worm, ‘who is past war and hunting, and I know of an air rider that is older than any of us who move, and that is the fair, bright seed of the dandelion that stands above your head.’ So the Prince, who was now about the size of a mouse, touched his left foot once more and climbed up on the shaft of the dandelion seed that is so cunningly made like an umbrella to catch the wind. He wrapped it in his legs, shook himself loose from the plant, gave a great puff from the barrel of his chest, and found himself borne on the wind. He flew higher and higher and further and further. He looked down over the country where his father was king and thought how little he knew of the world. Then he could not tell if he was over his own country or not, and there he saw a great lake. When he came nearer the lake, the down draft over the water sucked him lower, but as he glided down he saw that there was an island in the middle of the lake and on the island was a castle, and what castle do you think it was?” he asked the kids.

“The one in the ball,” one said.

“That’s right,” Karl said, “but the Prince fell in the down draft over the water and caught on a cattail in the reeds by the shore. Now just when he got stuck he saw a sparrow flying toward the cattail with his beak open. The beak looked about as tall as the Prince. Now then,” Karl addressed the kids again, “should he stay small and hope a breeze takes him to the island, or make himself big and save himself from the sparrow?”

For a moment the children hesitated, then one said, “Big,” and then the younger ones said, “Big, Big, Big!”

“And so he touched himself on the right foot and there he stood in the reeds as tall as I, and the sparrow veered away. Then he walked to the shore and found a farmer. He asked the farmer who lived in the castle.

“‘Old Dream Eggs,’ the farmer said.”

“Why’s he called that?” Karl Jr. asked as if he were asking about something disgusting.

“Well,’ the farmer said, ‘that castle is built out of dreams frozen into stones like eggs. Each stone is the dream of some man or woman that Dream Eggs has taken. For the great walls he takes the dreams of folk hereabouts. He hires them, takes them across the lake in a boat to sleep in his domain, and then catches their dreams. A man ages a year in one night when Dream Eggs is catching his dreams. When the folk hereabouts won’t work for him he comes with his soldiers and kidnaps us. But for the fine work he must have fine folk, and he has just taken a Princess from far away to dream the stained-glass windows of his chapel into existence.’

“‘Why that is my sister,’ the Prince said, ‘and I have come to rescue her.’

“‘Well, I don’t know how you would get there. Old Dream Eggs allows no boats in that water,’ the farmer said.” At that, Sybil turned off the freeway onto the streets near Karl’s house. It recalled Karl from a world of free motion to the world of pressure and constraint. “‘Unless you ride on the shoulder of the great salmon of the lake.’

“‘What bait would I use to catch the salmon?’ the Prince asked.”

“No fish would go for honey,” one child said.

The interruption angered Karl.

“Fish like flies,” one of the others said in a disgusted voice.

“The farmer shook his head and said, ‘No,’” Karl continued, “‘the great salmon has cleaned the air of flies at this lake hundreds of years ago. He has eaten so many that he never needs to eat again, except for one great fly that comes once a year and flies over the water where the stream comes into the lake, and there the great salmon lies and leaps at him, but he has never got him. Today is the day the fly will skim the water and the salmon will leap.’”

Karl felt he had to move to a conclusion. “The Prince borrowed a hook and line from the farmer and stood by the mouth of the creek, where he raised the honey vial in the air. The great fly came buzzing to the honey. The Prince grabbed the fly and stuffed it onto the hook. He cast the hook and the line far out over the water and the great salmon, as big as a horse, leapt and was caught.

“When the Prince drew him to the edge of the lake, the salmon spoke, blood running from his mouth. ‘Who are you who gave me what I’ve hunted for so long, only to take my freedom?’”

“I need to hitch a ride to that island,” one of the kids said, and they all giggled, looking at the familiar boulevard of neon lights.

For a moment Karl surveyed the story as a separate thing; the children had half taken it out of his hands. It seemed like himself, always going, always hurrying ever faster to an approaching conclusion, never finishing. Talking hurriedly and faster to a diminishing group that gives less whole-hearted attention.

“I’ll gladly carry you to the island,’ the salmon said, ‘if you’ll give me back my freedom when we reach it.’ The Prince agreed and the salmon trusted him, and he took out the hook when they reached the shore of the castle-island. When he raised his eyes from looking at the mouth of the salmon, a hawk-man stood, blocking the rocky quay, tall as a man, black, with a man’s arms and a hawk’s wings and clawed feet, and a beaked face.

“‘I am Prince Heartstrong,’ the Prince said, ‘and I have come to take my sister home.’

“‘I know, the farmer warned me,’ the hawk-man said. ‘I am Dream Eggs, and I need your wishes.’

“The Prince raised his spear and rushed at him, but Dream Eggs touched it with the feathered tip of his wing and it fell to the stones, shattered like glass. The Prince took out his sword and tried to close with him, but Dream Eggs brushed it again with the feather at the end of his wing, and it fell, shattered. Then the Prince took out the glass ball with the image of the castle and threw it on the stones. It shattered, and immediately the castle began to fall to pieces. The stones of the walls turned back to dreams that flew back to their rightful owners. The hawk-man fell in a heap of feathers because his soul had been in the crystal. The Princess escaped when the castle fell apart, and she ran to the Prince. The current of returning dreams carried them back to their home castle where they were married and lived happily ever after,” Karl concluded with the fairy-tale formula, forgetting he had made them brother and sister when he began the story.

“Why did he drop his soul when he took the girl?” one of the children asked.

“Because he forgot it,” Karl said absently.

Karl looked around the motionless car as if wakened from fitful sleep. They were on the ramp of their garage. Laura and her friend were looking at him. He wondered if he could tell Laura about what he had been trying to do in Washington, or even about his thoughts flying over the governed land of America. He knew he couldn’t. He glared down at his suitcase for a moment, in shame at his marriage and his life. The children were getting out. He had installed a radio-controlled garage door opener so they could sweep in without danger; why were they parked before a closed door? Then he recalled it was not their car; the other woman was driving. He laughed and apologized, climbed out the side door. He swung out his suitcase while the two women arranged some matter of schedule between them. The kids were already in the house. He walked in beside Laura.

“How was it all by yourself again?” he asked.

“We made out as usual,” Laura said.

BETTY L.M. GREENBERG has recently published poems in *Faultline* (U. C. Irvine), *Common Ground Review*, *Rattapallax*, *California Quarterly*, *Into the Teeth of the Wind* (U.C. Santa Barbara), *The Iconoclast*, *Wavelength*, *Green Hills Literary Lantern* (Truman State U.) and *Rivertalk*. Last year she published a book of poems and watercolors entitled *Thistles at the Heart*. She hails from Los Angeles, California.

## Betty L.M. Greenberg / **Three Poems**

### **The Dreamer**

From one day to the next  
 you ask:  
 where's the dresser?  
 what flowers are in the vase?  
 who comes to the front door  
 with a package for someone else?  
 The walls of your bedroom  
 change from pink to green  
 like a child's birthday cake  
 and the moon swallows the beach  
 in front of your house.  
 From Orion, faint signals  
 make your head buzz.  
 Dreams flash in black and ochre;  
 they startle you awake.  
*There is something you should know.*  
 Garbled, wrapped  
 in a whisper of sandalwood,  
 like the woman you once met  
 who said she would change  
 your life.

## Street Death

It had barely been contained inside his skin,  
this impatient blood spilling through  
the openings, as if it had  
had enough of this rude life,  
boiled out angrily onto the street  
while the black-frosted priest  
fumbled with his beads.

From his place of no-place,  
the man gazed down  
at his own pale Irish skin, blackened  
from the bomb that had blown off his clothes.  
*Yes, there was enough left to bury.*

Thinning strands of light broke free;  
the drained body nearly a stranger now.  
One last glance at what had been so prized,  
then he became marvelously suffused  
in a sea of the very thing  
he had been fighting for.

## Bird at the Window

It is not afraid,  
has been flying forever  
and this world is no better  
or worse than others it has seen.  
But if you try to startle it into flight,  
the sharp beak opens and a long hiss  
erupts from its hinged mouth.  
Tied to nothing,  
loving nothing but the sky,  
it will stay only as long  
as it pleases.  
For your sunflower seeds,  
a day or two.  
For the syncopation of its fast beating heart  
with your own, slow and deep,  
it may stay for a week.  
Behind your eyes, it notes  
the sluggishness of your mind,  
your heavy clothes,  
shoes muddy with grief.  
You could swear it sighs, flapping  
its wings a few times as if  
to show you how...  
then lifts off and disappears  
into the sun.

FLORENCE GRANDVIEW is a Vancouver writer. So far her memoirs have appeared in the anthologies, *Tidelines*, *Hot & Bothered II*, *Hot & Bothered III*, and most recently in *Geist*.

## Two Postcard Stories

Florence Grandview

### A Girl and her Schnauzer

SHE'S WALKING PAST Laurel Park, with her dog on a leash. The dog pulls at his designer collar and lunges at the passing roller-bladers. She's not walking the dog; he's walking her.

The trees along the avenue show splendid golden leaves. In two months, the same trees will leaflessly drown in the fog.

Some encounters turn into blue songs. Some are feature-length films. Ours is under a hundred words.

A dog and a woman turn left onto Cedar Street, where the traffic lessens, and they never come back.

### Al Put an Ad

AL PUT AN ad on the bulletin board at Pinky Laundry, saying: Will repair bicycles for cheap.

Then he added his phone number.

His girlfriend Kitty put an ad with the same phone number at Pinky Laundry, saying: Will do childcare in my home. References available.

The only phone calls they got were rude.

Kitty didn't want to answer the phone after the first two times. She said, "You answer it, Al."

Al answered the phone and a man said, "Excuse me but what color panties are you wearing?"

Al hung up and said, "Hey Kitty, let's me and you go for a walk."

They didn't go for walks. Mostly they sat at home and watched TV, and cooked dinner and drank a little beer. Sometimes they would read the paper. Kitty did the vacuuming, hoping it would help her lose weight. Al didn't mind washing dishes. He would slouch at the sink, looking childlike and determined.

The phone continued to ring as they went outdoors. The full moon was yellow enough for all the nutcases to hide behind.



In 2002 RUTH LATTA and a co-author, Joy Trott, published a biography entitled *Grace MacInnis: A Woman to Remember*. Other books by her include: *Life Writing: Autobiographers and their Craft*, *A Wild Streak*, *The Memory of All That*, and *Life Music*. Recent stories have appeared in the *Dalhousie Review*, *The Amethyst Review*, *The Fiddlehead*, *Whetstone*, and other Canadian and American publications. She lives in Ottawa with her husband and her cat.

## The Artist's Model

Ruth Latta

LORNA IS STANDING at the snack bar in the mall, having coffee instead of the soft drink she craved. Coffee has no calories, and speeds up the metabolism. After the humiliation of the change room she intends never to consume sugar, fat or carbohydrates again.

As of today, she has abandoned her search for an inexpensive bathing suit, conservatively cut. Not that today was a particular shock. She has been aware for the last few years that the sands of time have sunk to the bottom half of the hour glass. She hasn't been in denial, like some of her friends who will not admit that their bodies have changed, and still put parts on display that are best left under cover.

"Excuse me." The voice at her elbow is low and resonant. She turns and sees a man with thick brown hair, a face that is rugged rather than fine-featured like Luke's was. This man is wearing a tweed jacket over a shirt and jeans. He buys a coffee and a Danish, then moves out of Lorna's peripheral vision. She would like to turn to see if he is sitting at one of the tables, reading a newspaper, but she doesn't. He's probably dating someone half his age, or has a wife and family tucked away in a suburb. She supposes she could take her black decaf and go to one of the little round tables as well, but she is determined to punish herself by standing. From now on she will do more standing, more walking, and to hell with the demands of the job that keeps her desk-bound. Someday she intends to look good in a swimsuit again, but she can't make it happen in time for the Canada Day weekend.

She isn't a beach person, actually, and wasn't one when she was young. She never liked soaking in the ultraviolet carcinogenic rays. This is one reason why she doesn't now own a bathing suit, and why she wanted a cheap one – she doesn't plan to wear it much after the weekend with “The Group.”

The Group's annual reunion usually takes place either on the May 24<sup>th</sup> Victoria Day holiday or on the July 1<sup>st</sup> Canada Day one. The five “girls” who shared an old brownstone in the student ghetto long ago, like to get together to catch up on things. In a changing world, one needs friends, even far-flung ones. The members of The Group, jokingly named after the Mary McCarthy novel about another group of college friends, have cheered each other on through successes, and have comforted each other during crises. They include a homemaker, a nurse, a journalist, the owner of a bed and breakfast hotel, and the principal of an elementary school – this last one being Lorna. Usually the gang has held its reunions at the bed and breakfast, a huge renovated brick house in a charming rustic village. One year, after Lorna had broken up with Luke, but before their house had sold, she'd had them all to her place. This year, the homemaker has invited them to her lakeshore cottage for a weekend of swimming and sunbathing.

Too much desk work has taken a toll on Lorna. Years ago, when the others in the group were pudgy and sagging after pregnancies, she was proud of her flat stomach. In recent years, though, her waist has begun to thicken, like those of her contemporaries. The jeans she is wearing today feel snug.

What happened to the swim suits of yesteryear? Made of elastic material, like girdles, they came down low enough to cover both cheeks. Her mother used to have one with a little skirt, and Lorna is sure she has seen similar ones since, pictured in a catalogue that was drifting around the staff room. She should have ordered one, but it's too late now, because the long weekend is only a week away. In fact, she doesn't really have time to shop; she ought to be in her office, working on her final year-end reports and other details. Luke left her because of such busy-ness. He'd claimed that if she took the principalship, she would end up working eighteen-hour days and would have no time for him.

Her backside tickles, as if something were touching it. She brushes her hand over it, casually. Nothing there. She turns and catches the deep-voiced man looking at her, with a pleasant, thoughtful expression. What she felt were his eyes, boring into her. Does he consider her ass a phenomenon? Could it be that in jeans, it's attractive?

“Excuse me.” A baritone voice speaks over her shoulder. She turns and looks into the man's enigmatic brown eyes. “Would you like to join me at my table?”

“All right, if you’ll tell me why you’ve been staring at me.” Her role as principal has trained her in directness.

“I’d like to paint you.”

“You must be joking.” It’s a line she has never before heard, even when she was young and nubile.

He looks indignant. “Of course I’m not joking. I’d like to paint you just as you were a moment ago, standing there at the coffee bar.”

From his breast pocket he takes out his business card and a brochure. She peers at the first item, admiring the abstract design of red sunset which incorporates a phoenix rising from ashes. The flyer is about a show currently on at a major gallery downtown, a place that she hardly ever gets to these days. Thomas Madigan is his name.

“I can’t make any promises,” he adds, “but there’s a possibility that I might make you as famous as Salvador Dali’s picture of Gala with the head of Lincoln.”

Lorna knows the picture from trips to the Salvador Dali Museum in St. Petersburg, Florida. Dali equated his wife, Gala, with his personal liberation, and knew of Abraham Lincoln as the great liberator, so merged the two graphically. Lincoln’s famous head is painted in squares of black and white, and superimposed upon it, as surrealists do, is Gala, facing away from the artist. Gala is nude.

“I’m teaching at the art college through to August, and I have a loft on George Street,” he continues. “What do you do?”

She tells him. He nods approvingly. Unlike Luke, Thomas Madigan doesn’t appear to be threatened by a woman heading a school. It’s no big deal, really, not as if she were a university president or a captain of industry. The conversation is launched.

## Ω

“You’ll never guess who I ran into the other day.”

Lorna, in knee-length denim shorts, is sitting with her old friend Judi, the journalist, on a blanket on the sand. The other three members of The Group are out on the sailboat, waving, as the little vessel skims gull-like on the water.

“Luke,” Lorna replies promptly. Judi has just come back East from covering a political convention in the great heartland, and it’s an easy guess that Luke attended it, either as a delegate or as a freelancer with press credentials. One of his charms was his commitment to progressive movements, and his conviction that a society is civilized only to the extent that it provides for its weakest members.

Judi looks startled. “How did you guess?”

“From that solemn look on your face. So how is he? Still insecure and critical?”

Judi winces. “Luke has changed, Lorna,” she says earnestly. “He has more self-confidence and he’s less abrasive. He’s a sensitive, caring man. We had a long talk and he confided that he’d like to see you again. He said he let his pride spoil the best relationship he’d ever had.”

“So why doesn’t he call me?”

“I guess he’s shy. I know he wants you to call him.”

Lorna shakes her head.

“Well, it’s up to you.” Judi sighs. “I just wish my friends could be as happy as Moira and I.” She waves at the woman adjusting the sails. Moira waves back and the boat tips alarmingly.

Back when she lived with The Group in the old house with unstable floor boards, Lorna had not been as popular as her friends. When Luke came into her life, he’d carried her away like a dandelion floret on a spring breeze. He had become her fiancé, then her husband. Soon the erotic blur was replaced with other concerns, such as her mother’s final illness. He was kind and supportive then; he had liked her mother. But after Momma’s death, Lorna had an acute sense of being alone in the world, and required to hold everything together. Luke’s idealism was fine, but someone had to be practical. Nor did he really face the world with certainty and confidence, he just acted that way.

Instead of focusing on his own life and career, he began trying to improve her status at work, urging her to take courses and buy smart suits. Then, later, he told her not to do things – not to take the principal’s course, because administration was not her strong point.

A breeze brings her back to the present.

“Luke wonders if you two have anything left to build on,” Judi adds. “Why not give it a try? You have nothing to lose.”

Since the break-up, Lorna has had a couple of romantic interludes, false starts, one-night stands and big mistakes. The erotic thrill, the ecstasy, was transient at best.

“The thing is, I’m seeing someone,” she confesses. The surprise in Judi’s face is hardly flattering. “It’s at the beginning stage,” she continues, “but I want to see where it leads, so I won’t be phoning Luke. Now, don’t mention this to the others.”

## Ω

Lorna used to think that erotic adventure was over for her, but Tom has brought back the joy of sex. The Group wouldn’t understand. Judi and Moira believe that theirs is the love to end all loves, so hard-won, so daring, so uncondoned! They believe that a return to Luke would cushion Lorna against a lonely old age. The other two “groupies” seem to want an audience for their complaints about their husbands. Lorna doesn’t want to deal with their raised eyebrows and their envy. She will keep Tom all to herself for now.

Back in the city, Lorna soon forgets The Group. She lies with Tom in the big bed at one end of his studio, watching the city panorama from his windows. The skylight admits the starry sky and makes everything glorious and magical. He speaks of autumn and of dividing his time between the art school here and his studio north of Toronto. Then he intends to go to Tuscany without his wife and children. He asks Lorna if she has any sabbatical time coming to her. She says that she'll have to look into it. She knows that it could be arranged.

Polly, his wife, is an accountant who works from their home north of Toronto. She likes being at home for the children's sake. She's completely wrapped up in them. Why is he cheating on this paragon? Because his home is completely given over to youngsters with no time and space and energy left for his life's work. His son is hyperactive. Thanks to Polly's conscientious mothering, the boy is finding outlets for his energy on a baseball team, and is getting Cs in school.

"Children," he declares, "are little bloodsuckers. You fall in love with them and they tear your heart out and enslave you for life. Never have any."

Lorna murmurs that her pupils are her children, but they aren't really. The children are her clientele, her little colleagues, the customers of the product – education – that she offers them. Having babies had been an issue between her and Luke. Just when she'd been about to become a vice-principal and increase her workload, he'd started to pressure her to throw away her diaphragm. "How can we have a child when you act like a big kid yourself," she'd told him.

Sure, she could take a sabbatical with Tom. He's a racehorse who has been harnessed to the plough for too long, and so is she. Tuscany. She must get a book from the library. Tuscany, where women have voluptuous figures and are much admired for them.

The only thing that mars Lorna's newfound happiness is Tom's choice of subject to paint. She is one of many well-reared women on his canvases. She has seen Rubens and Renoir, but the present-day ideal is leaner and meaner, much so. She is too much like the big pink ladies of the old masters. Thank goodness her face is in shadow, and that no one will be able to identify her!

Sometimes she wonders what her mother would say about Tom. If Momma were alive, would she urge Lorna to enjoy him, or would she recommend that Lorna check Luke out again?

"He's a decent, well-meaning lad, not like some of the losers that I've been mixed up with," she'd said of Luke.

When Lorna was little, her mother had been happily married to Lorna's father, but he was killed in a construction accident. Insurance money, plus Momma's earnings as a health care aide in a nursing home had kept them afloat, though Lorna had had to win scholarships to university. Through her teen years, her mother had had some – what was the

most accurate term? Romantic involvements? Close encounters of the most kind? No long-term relationships. Some dramatic moments.

Lorna would never forget the time she came home from school to a fight. Her mother had returned from day shift, 7 a.m. to 3 p.m., to find her current man unshaven, in his underwear, drinking beer in front of the television set, while the sink was full of dishes. Lorna went straight to the upstairs landing to be out of the fray, yet within hailing distance. This beau's veins flowed with an undercurrent of violence as well as alcohol.

Momma ordered him to leave. He put on a shirt and pants out of the laundry basket perched, since Lorna's mother hadn't had time to put the clothes away, on the ironing board. As he dressed, he told Momma that a cow of a woman like herself, built like the back end of a bus, was damned lucky to have any guy in her life.

It was true that Lorna's mother was not sylph-like and had troubled herself very little about diet and exercise. She was living proof that one didn't have to be emaciated in order to find a man. Hearing her mother abused was hard on Lorna, though. Since she was of the same physical type, any criticism of Momma, even by low-life scum, was criticism of herself.

The suitor was buttoning his shirt and spewing out his anger. He was nose to nose with Momma. Would she flinch? No. She planted her tree-like legs, doubled up her fist and put her whole weight behind a punch that sent him reeling. He coughed, sobbed, cursed, and pinched his bleeding nose. Momma opened the door. He stumbled out into the sunlight, and she threw his shoes after him. Then, puffing, she turned to Lorna at the foot of the stairs, laughing and crying.

"I'm getting too old for this," her mother said.

Momma would probably tell her to enjoy Tom but that the minute he started to mooch off her, to throw him out.

## Ω

This summer is the best that Lorna has had recently. She's teaching a summer course to other teachers at the college of education, and after a morning in the hot, cement-block classroom, it's bliss to return to her air-conditioned home and know that Tom is in bed waiting for her. Later in the day he paints.

When she's alone, preparing her lectures, doing the ordinary maintenance tasks of life, she is antsy. She can't concentrate. Always, always, she's yearning for later, when they will meet for dinner at a restaurant. She hates weather that's too sultry for walks. She dreams of going on autumn hikes with Tom up into the cool Gatineau Hills, to a blazing warm fall landscape. On these muggy days, she feels her flesh getting mushy as her entire body swells. Is it just the heat, or is it too

many good dinners, too much wine? Tom is lean and lithe. Everything he eats seems to evaporate into the energy that he applies to love and painting. She envies him and is relieved over and over to find that he likes her as she is.

She dreads the weekend, fast approaching, when he must go home to his wife and family, but she doesn't want to seem possessive, so she says that she will use the time to catch up on things. Tom seems to understand her apprehensions, and volunteers the information that Polly is boring, bossy, and has gone to seed. He will always honor her as the mother of his children, but the spark has long since gone out of their relationship.

Lorna's curiosity about his family increases. He has no pictures of them in his studio. In his wallet? One night, when he is dead to the world and she is agitated, she leafs through it. She finds three. The first is of their wedding, ten years or so ago. His wife, who is almost as tall as he, is in a white form-fitting sheath, trim and stylish. A second photo of the pair shows Polly in a fitted blue suit with a pencil skirt. Again, very streamlined. The third is of the parents with the children on their laps. The children look ordinary to Lorna. They are dark, like him. Polly is fair; in fact, her coloring is similar to Lorna's.

She studies the pictures. At home he has someone who looks like herself, but is prettier, younger and has a better figure. "What does he want with me?" she wonders. She reminds herself that he told her the moment they met that he found her attractive. She shouldn't analyze things to death, she should just enjoy them.

Still, she hates the thought of his going home. Then, a stroke of luck occurs. Faye from The Group calls, asking to come for the weekend. She needs to talk over something personal.

## Ω

Faye is the mother of teenagers, and remarks on the cleanliness and uncluttered appearance of Lorna's place. It takes a few glasses of wine at dinner before she reveals her problem. For the previous eighteen months she and one of her husband's junior colleagues have been flirting. She could hardly believe in his interest, but the way he hung on her conversation, opened doors, danced close to her at the parties she held for her husband's associates, convinced her. Basking in the attention, she had laughed at his jokes and was torn as to whether to accept or refuse the invitation offered in his tone and gaze. Finally he made an unambiguous move and she demurred, reluctantly.

When it was clear that there was no hope, the young man started seeing one of Faye's colleagues, another nurse, who was younger than Faye, and the mother of a young son. They've been together for a few months.

Faye's problem is her hurt feelings. Her jealousy is so primitive that she trembles. She hadn't known that this rage was in her. The young man likes going out on double dates with Faye and her husband, with the result that Faye has endured a couple of tense evenings, acting a part so well that she deserves an OSCAR. She is in agony.

Lorna tells her that the young man probably chose her friend because she was the closest thing to Faye. Perhaps he assumed that Faye and her friend are chummier than they actually are, and he anticipated many evenings near Faye, if not with her.

"Well, he can't have my company!" Faye bursts into tears.

Lorna is practiced at listening, and letting people come to their own conclusions. Faye knows what she must do.

"You're so lucky, Lorna!" she blurts. "You're independent. Not bound by family obligations." Lorna is about to speak from the heart in an honest reply which will make Faye feel better – that she is sometimes lonely – but Faye then goes too far.

"In years to come you may wish you had a family, though," she says. Stung, Lorna opens her mouth to tell Faye about Tom, to see envy in those self-centered eyes. But Faye is speaking again, telling her that she ran into Luke a while ago in a mall, and that he was asking after her. "Maybe you should call him."

"We'll see."

She can't wait for Faye to leave, for Tom to return. When he does, she is on another plane of existence. After the ecstatic reunion, he shares his news. Propping himself up on one elbow, he tells her that one of his paintings – not a nude – has been selected for the cover illustration of a new novel. He has been invited to a party for the author and her forthcoming book, to be held in a private home north of Toronto, not far from his house and studio. Will Lorna come? He'll have to sleep at home with his wife and children, and must escort Polly to the party, but otherwise, he'll be able to come and go as he pleases apart from these obligations, and will have plenty of time for interludes at Lorna's hotel.

Lorna has long wanted to see Polly and so get a sense of Tom's family life. Sometime down the road, she may become the second wife and will want amicable relations all around. It would be prudent to present herself first as just a friend. It may be an ordeal, but there are compensations – the trysts with Tom in the peace of a hotel, the opportunity to meet a famous author. She accepts with enthusiasm.

Some of the houses north of Toronto are palatial. The prospect of being a guest in one of them appeals to her. Wouldn't Mamma love to see her there?



The venue of the party is upscale and substantial, but is near other big houses on a crescent rather than on its own acreage. The big backyard would have been an ideal party setting, except that it's raining, so they are all in the living room.

Lorna greets Tom as if he were an acquaintance, meets the famous writer, and stands around sipping wine and telling people that she is a principal about to hire Tom for an "artists in the schools" project. She talks educational policy to a top level civil servant and wishes she were elsewhere.

She had expected an adult party, but kids are careering around. One, about eight, who could be Tom's son, is shrill and boisterous, rampaging through the room as if the guests were trees to be bashed into and rubbed against. Her rage fills her with dismay. She wants to dip her hand in the punch bowl, go up to the boy, and slap him across his pert, yapping face, leaving an imprint on his cheek. She trembles. How has she fallen so low?

Tom steps away from the group and gently grabs the child. He kneels and speaks to him affectionately. Though the room is crowded with adults balancing hors d'oeuvres, cups and glasses, he actually sits down on the floor with the lad, making of his body and extended legs one more hurdle for the unwary.

Then a woman with a little girl by the hand makes her way to Tom and the boy. To call her pear-shaped is an understatement. Words like "brood mare" or "tame bee" come to mind. Her phenomenal *derrière* and legs are sausaged into a pair of green jeans. Lorna feels petite. The woman's backside protrudes like a shelf that you could set things on. Amazing that they make jeans that large in ordinary blue denim, let alone in unusual shades!

Lorna stares, fascinated. It's Polly, no doubt about it. She knows it by the perfunctory kiss she exchanges with Tom and by her weary demeanor. Over the years, Lorna has seen many exhausted mothers, with their attention divided too many ways, gone to seed. Polly, however, is one of the worst cases she has observed. How she has changed from those early photos! Is that what life with Tom does to a woman? If so, he's as bad as a carcinogen.

"Did Tom choose me because I remind him of Polly?"

Lorna shivers. She overhears the author talking about changes in the short story form. "Epiphanies are old-fashioned," she says. At tense times, Lorna often pretends to be a social anthropologist observing people as part of her work. Now she pretends to be a novelist. How would she like the relationship with Tom to end, if it were a story?

Luke would appear, with his camera, to cover the event. He'd take a few pictures, and while doing so, would look across a crowded room and see – not a stranger – but his ex-wife, with whom he has a past, a

history. He'd come over. Their eyes would meet. Wordlessly they would steal away.

Lorna tiptoes out of the house, drives back to the hotel and checks out. Back home, she lets the machine take Tom's calls. There are fewer and fewer as time passes. She joins a gym. She phones Luke. Eventually they agree that they must give their marriage another try.

Lorna seldom thinks of Tom these days. She imagines that, if he exhibits his painting of her, people will assume that it is Polly at an earlier stage.

She has regrets about Polly. If only she had told her the story of Momma throwing out her fellow. "You ought to try it," she could have said. "A woman your size must pack a hefty punch."

A non-practicing chartered accountant in Olympia, Washington, UNITY DURIEUX has published with the *Indiana Review*, *Fireweed: A Feminist Quarterly*, *Bryant Literary Review*, *The Café Review*, and the *Green Hills Literacy Lantern*.

## Unity Durieux / **Three Poems**

### **The Harp In the Hall**

I cannot tell you of the grossness  
& vulgarity of god—climb into  
the quarry and chip it out

yourself—I cannot relate calmly  
how I despise this spy & despot  
so venerably prevalent

in the guardianship of ruin:  
what promises did he make  
the trilobite, what craft of blood

and skin now fossil? Mighty once  
was my faith until I realized  
that to gods the living are merely

viands; now christmas is gone  
and all I miss are vagrant santas,  
factotum goodwill, free alcohol

and clever toasts. The harp  
in the hall no one played  
though I sat on a thing

like a milking stool, watching  
candles burn behind the strings  
to a firmament of brass.

## What We See Turned Sideways

“Hell yes he meant to wound,” I say;  
horses graze by Warren Lake,  
a traffic of ghosts in thin fog.

Roses; ten velvety, dead reds:  
to whom went the eleventh & twelfth—  
did he bother counting? Perhaps I’m dead

and should remain still.  
Morgans & Walers, breath twists of mist,  
line the fences, then nothing then

town: man commemorates;  
driven by instinct to rule man hunts &  
harvests. Imitation Czar! I dial, listen,

hang up. Returning is pleasant, new  
horses snort through Lake Peale’s shroud  
of vapor, eyes glassy with mischief. I see much

more now, turned sideways. “Throw them  
out,” I tell my daughter. “Ten roses, of all things.  
Fuck him.” She’s seventeen, a senior,

yet *fuck* from me—Ms Bland & Proper—  
turns the day around. She laughs until  
snorting, asks me to say it again.

## Leechcraft

“after the Alsace-Lorraine Brigade recaptured Saint-Odile so began,” Assistant Professor Bob droned, “André Malraux’s brightest depression...” Malraux made his bony knees knock – he breathed Malraux – “imagine,” he gushed, “composing *Les Conquérants* or meeting the three Gs.”  
 “3 Gs?”

“Gorky, Gide, de Gaulle.”

“Oh.”

“You’re French, certainly you grew up on Malraux?”

“French *Canadian*,” I remind him. “I accidentally saw *L’Espoir* once. I’ve overheard that Malraux’s father and my father share the same name, Fernand. As for growing up with Malraux, no subculture is woolgathered—gauche misfits raw-mortared from *detritus Français*—more ardently than schooled Americans; they’ve patented such necrophilia in part the fault of British social economists perverting Darwin—fat rabbits in decadent meadows chasing rapacious doves, CS Lewis would say: money eventually buys a hick happiness.”

“Ha ha. You mean Francophilia, not necrophilia?”

“I mean both. And leechcraft.” I told him *mange de la marde* to show that *joual* is much prettier than standard French; I’d prefer Siberian exile: crawl from my dacha, bloated with vodka & zakuska—scream profanities a-z then, sexually spent, convince Professor Bob Goethe was a fool but Eckermann wise, Kafka a fraud but Max Brod real—I remain a Bon Ami blond caressing yellow chicks as violas grumble & drunken father-figures slice the steaming stag.

“Am I boring you or is this pleasant?” Girlishly tossed his gravy-colored balding ponytail, asked if I’d visited Algiers and why my mother, a *Quebecois*, despises Paris and isn’t Malraux’s *Antimémoires* divine?

HILLEL WRIGHT is the author of three books: *All Worldly Pursuits*, *Welcome to the Below Tide Motel*, and *Single Dad*. He co-edited, with Taylor Mignon, *Poesie Yaponesia* and edited *Faces in the Crowds* (Printed Matter Press). The former editor and publisher of *MINUS TiDES*, he now lives in Kawasaki and teaches at Tokyo Keizai University and Tokai University and consults at Mori English Academy, Yokohama.

## **Kaiten Zushi** (Rotary Sushi)

Hillel Wright

IT WAS A season of long days, heavy rain, loquats, hollyhocks and hydrangea.

He was not hungry for loquats, and the steady downpour cooled the June air so, thinking of hot miso soup and green tea, he ducked into his favorite kaiten zushi-ya, a rotary sushi bar. “Irasshaimase!” the typical greeting, “Welcome!” from the helpers of the shop. It had made him nervous when he first came to Japan. The workers at convenience stores, fast food joints, coffee shops – everyone shouting together, “Irasshaimase!” – whenever you walked in the door, and “Arigato gozaimasu!” “Thank you! Thank you!” whenever you left. He just wanted to come and go in peace, often not even buying if he couldn’t find the product he knew and liked and recognized. Often, things that looked appealing, brightly colored, and brilliantly textured, tasted strange or bland or too sweet or salty or downright weird, so he began to stick with the few snacks and sandwiches he could trust.

But sushi was another matter entirely. He liked green tea and miso shiro and what’s more, they were healthy and, at the kaiten zushi, free.

He had been a fisherman for twenty years back in Canada, and while his Japanese vocabulary was not very large, his fish vocabulary was rather extensive, especially for a gaijin – a foreigner. You learn best what interests you most, he figured.

So, first over to the hot towel box, break open the clear plastic wrapper and wipe your face and hands. Well, at fifty-five, he was old enough – an oyaji, a middle-aged man – to get away with wiping his

face. Proper etiquette restricted the use of oshibori to the hands. Yeah, getting old had to have some compensations.

Since it was still afternoon, there was a big stainless steel cauldron of miso shiro, stocked with the heads of big prawns and dark green strips of wakame – seaweed. The free soup disappeared at the dinner hour and on weekends.

He picked a stool at the counter far enough away from the door to avoid damp chills from customers leaving or entering, and with a good view of the sushi chef so he could see what he was doing. Yes, his fish vocabulary and pronunciation were good, but his everyday Japanese was too poor to deal with an unexpected situation, so he wanted to see how busy the chef was and what chore he was doing before calling out an order. And since most Japanese don't expect foreigners to speak their language well, or at all, they often failed to understand even simple requests made in grammatically correct and perfectly accented Japanese. He wanted, at all costs, to avoid the embarrassment of being misunderstood.

He had his own routine with the miso shiro. He liked it about half-way through the meal, especially with cooked fish like anago or unagi, grilled eels, so he lifted a cup and two small saucers off the conveyor belt, took a teabag out of the plastic tea box, dropped it into the cup and filled it with hot water from the dispenser. Then, he snapped apart a pair of hashi, disposable wooden chopsticks, and, using the back ends of the hashi, lifted the teabag out of the cup and placed it in one of the saucers. Into the other saucer he poured soy sauce.

He took a sip of agari – green tea – and called out his order: “Sumimasen! Saba! Sa-mon!” He always liked to begin with pickled mackerel – saba – because it reminded him of the pickled herring which was always his favorite appetizer at the shabbos dinners in his childhood, after the wine and challah – ceremonial bread – which were ritually tasted after a short Hebrew prayer: Baruch atah Adonai...boray p'ree hagoffin...boray p'ree ha-adomah. Blessed be our God...who gives us the fruit of the vine...who gives us the fruit of the earth. It was funny how he still remembered those prayers.

Shabbos dinners were on Friday evenings, after a week of school and before leaving for the Friday night Sabbath service at the synagogue or shul. The main course was always roasted chicken – he could never remember anything else – and the appetizers always pickled herring or gefilte fish – cold fish balls made from lake fish like whitefish or pike and served with horseradish, white or colored red, not green like the Japanese wasabi, which always accompanies raw fish on sushi. Funny how such different people as Jews and Japanese both liked horseradish with fish. So just as he always chose pickled herring to begin the shabbos dinner, he always ordered saba first at the sushi bar. But while pickled herring was served in a brine with slices of onion and big round

seeds of allspice, and had a rather mushy consistency, saba was rich, oily, buttery in texture, and the blue bars on the silver skin (“mackerel skies and mare’s tails/make tall ships carry short sails”), the dark inner meat set off against the pale muscle, laid on a bed of pearl-white rice with an emerald of wasabi peeking out between the fish and the rice, was as much a treat to the eyes as to the palate.

And always with the saba – salmon, or sa-mon, as it was called in the sushi bar to avoid confusing it with “sake” in Japanese – that is, the rice wine, “sake,” which was also served. Yes, sa-mon was ichiban, his favorite. The dark orange/red slices again calling up memories of his Jewish childhood, the Sunday morning breakfast lox, which his father bought at the kosher deli, always a quarter pound for the four of them, an ounce apiece, to eat on a poppy-seed bagel spread with Philadelphia cream cheese. And also, the years in the commercial salmon fishery on the Pacific coast, from Northern California to Vancouver Island, Canada, an environment where Jews were as rare as green sea turtles.

There was no salmon by the ounce in those days. Rather, a thirty-pound smiley stuffed with big green leaves of cannabis from the guerrilla garden which cooked up like psychedelic spinach after hours inside the big fish, baking underground in a home-dug Hawaiian-style imu on the beach in front of his Vancouver Island cabin on Georgia Strait.

That was way back in – well, must have been 1986 or ’87, kinda the good ol’ days in a way, with plenty of fish in the straits, clams on the beaches and homegrown in the garden, camouflaged by sweet corn, red runner beans and pumpkin vines, before the big draggers scraped up the spawning cod, before the boat people and laid-off loggers dug out the beaches, before the real-estate speculators jacked up the land prices and wiped out cheap rents, before the hydroponic growers attracted police informers and made camouflage cultivation a calculated risk.

But hey, that beach party was a helluva good time, never tasted salmon so good before or since. As always, he tasted the saba first and after the first piece was eaten – there were always two pieces on a plate – he layered the empty space on the plate with gari – thin slices of pickled ginger – used to clean the palate between different sushis, and also free, stored in lacquered boxes next to the green tea containers. Using his hashi, he ate some gari. Then, after a sip of green tea, he reached for a piece of salmon, dipped it lightly in soy sauce, and first appreciating the orange, green and white of the fish, wasabi and rice, brought the sushi to his lips and took his first bite.

Salmon, like the inscrutable force that returned them to the rivers of their birth to spawn and die, always returned him to the deck of a troller on the high latitudes of the North Pacific Ocean, usually in the orange-gray pre-dawn light, with a half-filled mug of cowboy coffee in his hand, setting out the first lines of the day, the ship moving slowly on its course, the Iron Mike adjusting itself to the vagaries of wind, wave and



current, just as now, he himself was attempting to adjust to the vagaries of age, events and circumstance.

He finished the first piece of salmon and sipped tea, ate some gari and took up the second piece of saba. Being pickled it was flavorful enough not to require soy sauce, the ubiquitous Japanese condiment. He had come to really exalt in the taste and texture of this fish in Japan. Back in America it was cheap canned fish which he never ate, but he remembered Jewish boys in his school days referring to the neighborhood Catholics as “mackerel snappers.” Yeah, there’d been a lot of name calling between the Catholics and the Jews: “mackerel snapper,” “matzoh ball,” “Christer,” “Christ-killer,” “greaser,” “kike.” It sure got nasty at times.

There was even a sort of urban mythology that the Jews circulated about the Catholics and likely the Catholics created myths about the Jews as well. He often wondered if Catholics really believed the Medieval European myth that Jews used the blood of a Christian boy to make Passover matzohs. So much suffering and tragedy, so many needless deaths as a result.

Well, the Jewish urban myths about Catholics in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century America revolved around food, too, but were a helluva lot less bloody. Jews believed that Catholics all used Miracle Whip, an imitation mayonnaise salad dressing, whereas Jews all used real mayonnaise, which was richer, tastier and more expensive (it contained less sugar and more whole eggs). The Jewish conception of a Catholic sandwich was baloney with Miracle Whip and French’s mustard on Wonder Bread, while the Jewish sandwich was corned beef or pastrami with Gulden’s hot mustard and Hellmann’s Real Mayonnaise on rye. On Fridays the Catholics opened a can of mackerel, mixed it with Miracle Whip and spread it between their slices of Wonder Bread. If Jews opened a can of fish, it was Bumble Bee or Chicken of the Sea brand white meat albacore tuna, packed in soybean oil, mixed with chopped onions and real mayonnaise and layered onto hand-cut slices of dark pumpernickel from the kosher bakery, with a dill pickle on the side. Anyway, such were urban myths.

After relishing the second piece of sa-mon, drinking some more agari and tasting another slice of gari, he called for maguro, tuna, and karei, sole. At least he thought karei was sole. Then again, maybe it was flounder. Despite his many years of fishing, he was never sure. He knew that they were both flatfish, brown on top, white on the bottom, and that one had both eyes on the left side of its head and the other had both eyes on the right, but he honestly didn’t know which was which. He knew that flounder were important in European mythology, that the 1999 Nobel Prize winning German novelist Gunter Grass had written a novel called in English *The Flounder*, and that the magical fish caught by the poor fisherman in the Brothers Grimm’s fairytale *The Fisherman’s Wife* was a flounder: “Flounder, flounder in the sea....”

He remembered fishing for flounder in Long Island Sound as a boy, first with his father and his uncle, who owned a lobster boat, and later, as a teenager, alone at the end of the breakwater, smoking a cigarette, lost in the perilous thoughts and aspirations of adolescence, occasionally catching a flounder, or even two at a time, on the twin-hooked bottom rig baited with sand worms his uncle had taught him to use. But he still couldn't remember which side of its head the flounder's eyes were on – or the sole's.

Sometimes the sushi shop had hirame, which sold for six times the price of karei and was sometimes translated as flounder, and sometimes as halibut, although his dictionary told him that halibut in Japanese was ohyou.

On the West Coast of Canada he had seldom caught either flounder or sole, and then only as incidentals to another target fish. On the east side of Vancouver Island he sometimes caught small sole while jigging the bottom for red snappers, and on the west side, on the Pacific Ocean, he occasionally caught large starry flounder, magnificent eating fish, while trolling along the rock piles for Springs.

Halibut were another story. He had never bought the expensive limited license to catch them commercially, but they did, at times, flop onto the deck of his boat. They took the big plugs rigged to the cannonballs while trolling for Spring salmon. They bit the 14 oz. Norwegian cod jigs used on the North Coast for ling cod. And they swam into the black cod traps down 400 fathoms on the Alaska border, baited with frozen herring whose eggs had been exported to Japan to make the traditional New Year delicacy kazunoko, and that made legendary fortunes for some lucky Canadian herring roe fishermen, including the perhaps mythical, famous, fabulous, talked-over, dreamed-about Million Dollar Set.

The biggest halibut were called “soakers” or “whales” and weighed as much as sumo wrestlers. The smaller ones, averaging about twenty-five kilos, were called “chickens.”

The karei and the maguro came around now on the belt. The karei was white, lean and a bit chewy, hard to bite in two, so he usually ate it in one bite and chewed it for a long time, savoring the delicate flavor sparked with the green fire of the wasabi.

Next, a taste of gari, a sip of agari and then, a bite of the blood-red tuna, maguro. The tuna favored by sushi shops in Japan is blue-fin tuna, big fish, often as big or even bigger than halibut “whales.” He liked the reasonably priced maguro, although many Japanese preferred the fattier, more expensive cuts, oh-toro, chu-toro and bin-toro, taken from the belly of the tuna, rather than the sides.

He'd never caught a blue-fin nor fished for them, although he'd once spent a season in Hawaii fishing for yellow-fin tuna, or ahi as the Hawaiians called them, blue-fin's smaller cousin, and many seasons off

the West coast of Vancouver Island fishing for albacore, the small, bullet-shaped white-meat tuna, rare in Japan, called shiro-maguro (white tuna) in California sushi bars, and favored by the Oregon canneries like Bumble Bee and Chicken of the Sea and, according to urban mythology, by Jewish mothers for school lunch sandwiches.

Ahi, back in 1969, when he'd started his commercial fishing career, were caught by using live opelu, a kind of tropical horse mackerel, on long hand-lines of braided nylon coiled into wooden boxes on deck. They averaged about 150 pounds and were worth around one dollar a pound at auction, which in those days made them really valuable fish.

Albacore, back in 1973 when he began fishing in Canada, were caught by fast trolling on the surface with red-and-white or blue-and-white jigs made from dyed chicken feather streamers, later replaced by plastic "hootchies," and weighted with chrome-plated lead heads set with red cut-glass, multifaceted eyes, which produced the flashes of sunlight that attracted big schools of feeding fish. Albacore weighed about twenty pounds or a little less on average, although he'd once caught a sixty-pounder and a few six-pounders – quite a range. In 1973 they fetched about thirty cents a pound at the fish plant and were almost exclusively used for canning.

Sometimes he'd tied up at Finnish communities like Sointula, on the North coast of Vancouver Island, or Steveston, at the mouth of the Fraser River south of Vancouver, and sell fresh tuna off the boat. He'd gotten as much as one dollar a pound that way, for the Finns on the West Coast were mostly salmon fishermen and the Finnish housewives were experienced and excellent home fish canners, never hesitating to add a few dozen jars of tuna to their winter's supply of sockeye.

Of all his days and years at sea, tuna fishing stood out in his memory, mostly for its extremes. The most gorgeous weather – fine late summer or early autumn days with skies so blue you had a hard time believing they were real, and the ocean waves fairly dancing under the cantering hull. Also, the most terrifying storms, with men and ships encased in coffin-gray skies and seas, waves towering to the heights of low-rise apartment blocks, bitter bile driving the morning's breakfast up to choke off the breath in your throat.

Catching tuna was a simple operation too, compared with the industrial complexities of trolling for salmon or trawling for cod. Simple hooks and lines on the surface for albacore, the boat bouncing the jigs over the waves at seven- to ten-knot speed. Simple hooks and lines just below the surface for ahi, the boat silently drifting, the opelu struggling on the barbless stainless steel hooks, pitiful prey for the ravenous schools of ahi, whipped into feeding-frenzy by buckets of cut-up malolo, flying fish, thrown over the side as palu, chum.

Outside the sushi shop the rain had increased into a typhoon-driven deluge. He felt a twinge of neuralgia in the ham of his left leg, a legacy

of too many cold water soakings, too many hours on the ice of the fishhold, too many nights sleeping on a moldy bunk in damp woolen trousers while the boat, hove-to in a Southeast gale, pitched and bucked like a young bronco in an Alberta rodeo. Time for some hot miso shiro and anago – grilled eel brushed with teriyaki sauce.

He finished his second piece of maguro, firm but not chewy, taken in two bites, the dark red flesh blending perfectly with the bright green horseradish, polished off with a slice of pink pickled ginger and washed down with a swallow of hot, bitter green tea.

He got up from the counter and walked around to the steaming cauldron, took a black soup bowl from the stack of red and black bowls, flipped back the hinged, stainless steel lid and ladled a serving of miso soup, laced with dark green wakame and a dull pink head of a large prawn. He drank the soup, holding the bowl in both hands, setting it down on the counter occasionally and using his chopsticks to pick out some seaweed to eat. Soon the anago came round on the belt.

There were actually two kinds of eel served in sushi bars, anago and unagi. Both were served grilled and brushed with a kind of thick, sweet teriyaki sauce. Anago, the saltwater conger eel, was a more common sushi dish than unagi, the fresh water eel, which was richer and at least twice as expensive.

Unagi was a traditional high summer delicacy, popular in mid to late July after the rainy season, served hot on top of a bowl of plain white rice. It was purported to replace energy when the body's resources were drained by the sweltering heat and stifling humidity of summer on the Kanto Plain. For men, especially, it was believed to boost sexual vitality. Well, the weather was still within the comfort zone, cool, and even when the typhoon wasn't blowing, kinda windy and wet, and he still had enough energy and vitality to keep himself, and his young Japanese girlfriend, happy and refreshed. So he stuck to anago.

After finishing the soup, sipping more green tea and nibbling some more pickled ginger, he scanned the menu, printed in both the Japanese hiragana symbols which he had learned to read, and the Chinese kanji characters which he was still studying. You had to memorize at least two thousand to read every day signs and labels.

He called for iwashi, sardine, next. Iwashi was a treat he had learned to relish in Japan. In sushi bars it's served raw, topped with shoga, fresh grated ginger, and negi, finely sliced green onion, instead of wasabi. It was, to his taste, oishii – delicious – the fresh earthy vegetable flavors cutting and complementing the rich oily taste of the fish. He recalled that in North America sardines are cheap, canned, rather smelly fish, hobo food, eaten on the road from a flip-top can (earlier cans had fascinating roll-back tops operated with an attached key), on hunks of sourdough bread, washed down with red rotgut wine.

The sushi-ya iwashi were rich and filling, and his appetite was now nearly sated. He looked up again at the wooden menu signs with the offerings brushed on with thick black ink. He was surprised to see the kanji nama, meaning “raw,” and the hiragana gaki, meaning “oyster.” Certainly raw oysters, wrapped in black nori seaweed with lemon slices on the side, would be a perfect ending to the meal.

Oysters had been such an important part of his life back on Vancouver Island where, on the section of Georgia Strait beachfront that stretched out from his cabin, they grew like turnips in a farmer’s field. Many were the days when dinner was baked oysters, steamed oysters dipped in garlic and butter sauce, or thick, creamy oyster stew. And many were the winter nights, out on the moon-silvered beach picking oysters for the local leaseholder, literally moonlighting to pay back taxes, the mortgage, the hydro-electric bill.

But something was wrong here – something very strange. Oysters were never sold or served out of season in Japan. You couldn’t get them until late October at the earliest and they were out of the stores and restaurants before March. No matter, though; his taste buds overruled his reasoning power and he called for nama-gaki. They were fresh, plump and juicy and, perhaps like no other dish, brought back the days of living and fishing on Canada’s wild West Coast. Every bite contained an ebbing tide on a rocky beach, a building winter Southeast gale, a curling whitecap lifting a rolling wooden hull, a cobalt sky reddening to purple under the palette of the slowly sinking sun.

When he paid his bill at the cash register, after calling out “gochi soh sama deshita” to indicate his approval of the meal, and left the kaiten zushi shop, he noticed that the bright colors of the chrysanthemums – bride white, chrome yellow, lavender – were fading and turning brown around the edges, like rock cod fillets no longer fresh. Across the street, the persimmon tree stood, leaf-bare, the big black jungle crows finishing off the few remaining pale orange fruits. Next door, the bold winter-reds and -whites of the camellias, set against their dark green waxy leaves, were announcing the coming of the cold season. It could only be December.

Like some Rip van Winkle on fast-forward, he had day-dreamed away six whole months in the kaiten zushi.

RANDALL GARRISON, born in Buenos Aires of American parents, now lives in Royal Oak, Michigan. Poetry has always been his creative mainstay. He continues to add to the more than 600 poems, 100 short stories and three novels he has already produced. A wide selection of his work has appeared in periodicals in the USA and abroad.

## Randall Garrison / **Two Poems**

### **Pretty Young Girl in the Charleston Market**

she has mastered  
the slim waisted art  
of walking with  
her body  
in suspension

a proud head  
sliding  
at a steady height  
with lean legs  
and hips  
absorbing what  
in others  
is a walker's  
rise and fall

she has so mastered  
her illusion  
that she seems to  
float  
past us

pulled solely  
by her nipples

## Democracy

democracy's for liars

the wisdom of  
the secret ballot

is that we know  
that there are  
people  
who will kill you

if you tell the truth

out loud

ERNEST HEKKANEN'S latest literary project was *The Flat Earth Excavation Company: A Surreal Fiction Anthology* (New Orphic Publishers, 2002), which features work by writers from Italy, Finland, Switzerland, Britain and Canada.

## The Odd Cane Out

Ernest Hekkanen

### 1

HERE IN NELSON, British Columbia, officially one of the “best little art towns” in North America, we live directly uphill from the gallery operated by the local art school. I don't often attend the openings at that institution. Too often they are sad, painful affairs, due primarily to the art one sees hanging on the walls or elbowing for space in the cramped confines, but on this occasion my wife, Daphne, implored me: “This time you really must go, Edward. Angela's daughter, Ziggy, is exhibiting a series of paintings.”

“Called?”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Called – what is the series called?”

“*The Canes*, I believe. Apparently, it is quite good ... from what Angela tells me.”

“Now, that is an unbiased opinion if ever I have heard one.”

“Really, you must put in an appearance, my dear. It's obligatory.”

“I hate doing things that are obligatory. I despise doing them, in fact.”

Knowing Daphne's sister, Angela, a New Age therapist who drives a Volvo, I suspected that I would very much loathe her daughter's paintings. Anyone who would allow herself to be named Ziggy and, moreover, would keep that name, perhaps out of some misguided loyalty to her mother, I strongly suspected of having little or no intelligence, let alone a sense of aesthetics.



On the night in question, I donned my *I Hate Art* T-shirt and headed downhill to the gallery. My *I Hate Art* T-shirt is puce in color and bears the aforementioned message in blue on the front and in green on the back, below which are some black squiggles reminiscent of either Henri Matisse or Jackson Pollock.

Usually, at such affairs, my shirt has a way of keeping people at a distance. I am given a wide berth in the most cramped of art galleries, and the Gallery Annex is, needless to say, quite cramped. Invite a half-dozen patrons to an opening, and it becomes insufferably stuffy, too. One begins to yearn for a breath of fresh air, moments after entering the gallery. Indeed, I have been known to turn and bolt from the place.

Ziggy's series of four paintings impressed me more than I felt I had any logical reason to be impressed. Each depicted four canes in different postures or attitudes. I was surprised by how well she was able to endow each cane with a personality. The paintings were also quite humorous; I was reminded of Charlie Chaplin and his cane – minus Charlie Chaplin, of course. There was a Ben Shahn, *New Yorker* magazine feeling to her paintings and, moreover, they didn't strain for effect.

In each painting, one of the four canes suffered a kind of banishment or ostracism, due to misfortune or simply being different. For example, in the first painting the odd-cane-out had broken two-thirds of the way up to the crooked handle and was in the process of falling to the ground.

In the second painting, the odd-cane-out was a quarter as tall as the other three canes, but wore a stovepipe hat that allowed it to tower above the others.

In the third painting, three of the canes lay intertwined in the same bed while the fourth was left out in the cold to shiver by itself.

In the final painting, the odd-cane-out was being ostracized at what looked like an art show.

I was so impressed by Ziggy's work, I shouldered my way through the crowd to take a closer look. In the last painting, the ostracized cane was wearing a puce-colored tank-top inscribed with the words: *I Hate Art*. The message caused a flash of recognition. Indeed, my cheeks became quite inflamed.

The minuscule message on the cane's tank-top provoked enough curiosity in me to read Ziggy's artist's statement. It informed me that the series of four paintings was part of a much larger work that bore the title: *The Canes*; and the subtitle: *Or, Uncle Edward's Lonely Walk Through Life*.

I had barely finished reading the statement, when the curator of the gallery, an instructor at the art school, came rushing toward me from the doorway that led to the rest of the building where The Foundry was also exhibiting samples of student work.

I should inform you that my critical opinions in the *Nelson Daily News* have often inspired the curator to offer loud retorts while passing by me on the sidewalk. Her voice is quite strident; in fact, I would describe hers as a fish wife's voice.

"So what do you think of your niece's work?" she said, as if to test my patience.

"I'm surprised ... in many delightful ways. I guess there is sufficient excuse for an art school to exist in this town, after all; however, it is a little disturbing that the excuse for it must be borne on the shoulders of one as slight as my niece, Ziggy."

"And what do you think of the title of her series?"

"Humorous, to say the least. I won't have it said, though, that I can't take a joke – for I can – especially when it's done with so much aplomb."

"If you ask me, she has captured her Uncle Edward's handicapped vision of life rather well, don't you think? For instance, in the second painting here, his short-comings have been compensated for by wearing a terribly tall hat."

"I must have unknowingly passed some of my wit and sarcasm on to Ziggy. As a token of my appreciation, I think I'll buy this series of four paintings." I quickly checked the price, which was three thousand dollars. "They would be a bargain at twice the price."

The curator raised her eyebrows, so high they nearly disappeared into her shock of dyed red hair. "Well, I must admit I wasn't anticipating that reaction, and I don't think Ziggy was, either."

"By the way, where is my favorite niece?"

"She went into hiding – the moment she saw you coming through the door."

"I'm happy to hear my presence has had such a dramatic effect on her. It should have the same effect on all of you at the art school."

## 2

I should tell you, dear reader, that our house is a large one that commands a prominent place on the hill overlooking the town and that it bears the name of a private gallery – on a hand-carved sign displayed above the balcony. City Hall tried to put a stop to me calling my house a gallery, saying that the vicinity wasn't zoned for such use, but as I explained to the imbeciles down at City Hall, the word "gallery" was another term for "balcony," and in a democratic society I should be allowed to refer to my balcony by any name I wished to.

I won my case, but in the process I managed to make a few more enemies.

There is little furniture in our house and absolutely no television. Two settees and six stately armchairs have been positioned back to back so one might sit at one's leisure and view the paintings on our walls. A dozen sculptures – one by Brancusi, by the way – have adequate space to walk around them so they might be perused from every angle. During the summer we keep the French windows wide open during the day and that permits one to wander out onto the balcony and look down upon the sculptures in the front yard. To the right, in the shade of a large maple tree, reclines a Henry Moore – the only large Henry Moore in town, I might add.

While Ziggy's four paintings would not take up too much actual space on any of our walls, I was undecided where I should put them because our walls are generously embellished with artwork. Indeed, four years ago, I had an extra wing added onto the house to accommodate some purchases I had made in Vancouver – of large pieces by Attila Richard Lukacs, Maurice Spira, Renée Van Halm, Gathie Falk and Nedio Jovanetic.

I would have to use my imagination to come up with a spot for my niece's artwork. That spot could be neither too prominent nor too obscure, for Daphne's sister, Angela, was certain to pay us a visit with the intention in mind of assessing the location.

I dislike Angela. Immensely. She is forever telling me that I should get in touch with my Inner Child. Once I responded by telling her that I was going to offer a Ritual Vomiting Workshop in which I would show attendees how to upchuck their Inner Child, once and for all.

How the woman manages to eke out a living by giving such spurious workshops, I'll never know. It lends truth to the assertion that a sucker is born every minute.

### 3

Anyway, to the story at hand. Because I had managed to trouble my psyche with thoughts about where I was going to hang Ziggy's artwork – or, even if I should, because I *did* ponder filing her paintings in storage in the basement, alongside work by lesser-knowns, pieces that only briefly see the light of day, every few years or so – I inadvertently primed myself to have a bad dream.

The dream was rather cartoonish, in the style of Walt Disney's *Fantasia*. I dreamed that the canes in Ziggy's paintings had come alive and had, in their own stiff-legged fashion, stepped down from the paintings, only to hop their way upstairs to the master bedroom where Daphne and I sleep side by side. The canes then proceeded to perform a kind of dance upon the foot of our bed, to music I eventually came to recognize as Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

The dream was all very fun and entertaining – at least it would have been, had the odd-cane-out not slipped between the mattress and the bed frame and broken its neck in the process – with the result that I awakened in a fright which caused me to sit bolt upright and utter a choked cry of alarm.

“What is it?” Daphne inquired.

“Nothing. Nothing at all.”

“It couldn’t have been due to nothing, judging from the way you just screamed, Edward.”

“I didn’t scream, my dear. If I did anything, I yelped.”

“Whatever,” she said. “Yelp or scream, it must have been due to something rather than nothing.”

I quickly invented an excuse. “It had to do with my income tax return. A write-off I forgot to declare.”

“You and your parsimonious concerns,” she retorted. “Go back to sleep, for God’s sake.”

So much for wifely sympathy, nowadays. When it comes to income tax concerns in the middle of the night, wives simply can’t find it in themselves to be all that favorably disposed.

## 4

The following morning, I succumbed to a small malaise – not a malaise, I guess, but a sort of despondency. I was certain my dream had been an aberration, as I very rarely have dreams. At least, I very rarely remember my dreams, and when I do I usually pay them scant attention. I find the business of pondering dreams a silly, fruitless occupation best engaged in by neurotics who wish to remain neurotic.

Despite my better judgment, however, I fell to pondering the dream and that, in turn, gave rise to further dreams of the same ilk. Each night, for nine nights in a row, I dreamed that the canes stepped down from Ziggy’s paintings and hopped their way upstairs to the master bedroom where they engaged in some rather vaudevillian antics that resulted in me being rudely awakened.

I don’t wish to bore you with each dream, dear reader, so I shall go straight to the one that proved to be so momentous. That dream began as all the others had, with the canes hopping upstairs to our bedroom. However, on this occasion, my dream self was encouraged to join the canes in the *Danse macabre* by Saint-Saëns. At first, my dream self resisted being given directions by the canes, but not for long. The *Danse macabre* seemed to mesmerize my dream self, with the result that it soon began to dance with as much demented exuberance as did the canes.

The canes danced me out of the bedroom, down the stairs and through the closed front door of our house. After several circumambulations of the Henry Moore, which was now reclining with a bemused look in the moonlight that drenched our front yard, the canes danced me down the street and through town to the Big Orange Bridge, which was undergoing repairs carried out by robed monks with cowls pulled over their heads.

Upon reaching the other side of Kootenay Lake, the canes led me up a trail through the woods and onto the trunk of what the locals refer to as Elephant Mountain, but which is, in fact, Mount Nelson. I was becoming a little anxious because, you see, I was certain that the canes were intent upon leading me up to Pulpit Rock. That outcrop provides one with an expansive view of our charming little town and it comes equipped with a rather precipitous drop.

My fears became more substantial as I and the canes neared the rock in question. But the *Danse macabre* had me under its spell, so to speak, and so I was helpless to do anything. Once atop Pulpit Rock, two of the canes seized me by the arms and magically transformed my upper appendages into wings. The other canes, meanwhile, proceeded to cane me across the back, so savagely I had no option but to try to escape by flying off the cliff, and this I did – with disastrous results.

## 5

As from all the previous dreams, I awakened with a sharp cry; however, on this occasion, I had something to cry about, and cry about quite painfully, too, for I had sleepwalked my way down the stairs and out onto the balcony of our house, from where I had tried to launch myself into the air, it seems.

The launch had not been terribly successful. I had gotten my legs entangled in the ornate wrought-iron balustrade and broken them at the knees, and now I was dangling like the proverbial Hanged Man. My cries eventually woke my wife, Daphne, who then called for an ambulance.

The rest is history, as they say. My weekly column in the *Daily News* went unwritten for several weeks. The newspaper apologized quite vociferously for my absence, in a humorous article that detailed my late-night attempt to fly like a Never-Never-Land boy from the balcony of our house. “Sorry,” the last line read, “not from his balcony – from his gallery!”

Oh, by the way, Daphne and I decided to hang Ziggy’s paintings in the guest room. I have taken out extra liability insurance, in case the canes have an untoward effect on any of our guests. We very rarely have guests.