

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

"Grandfather's Camera"

by

Susanne Heinz

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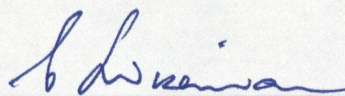
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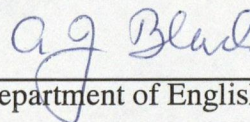
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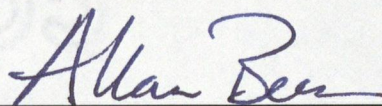
The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Grandfather's Camera" submitted by Susanne Heinz in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



Supervisor, Dr. C. Wiseman, Department of English



Dr. J. Black, Department of English



Dr. A. Bell, Department of Music

24.4.96

Date

ABSTRACT

Although the majority of this work is new, I began by revising a small group of poems from which I derived the major themes of this thesis: my childhood, my family and my reflections on my German identity. In addition to reading the books and articles listed in the bibliography, I prepared for this project in a number of ways: by examining family papers and photo albums; by questioning my mother repeatedly about our family history; by consulting my own memories through journal writing; and by making a research trip to the University of Southern California to examine a collection of work by Lion Feuchtwanger, titled "German Literature in Exile." The essay accompanying these poems deals with my attitudes towards ethnicity and my own writing needs.

The heart of this thesis consists of poems dealing with my mother and my German heritage, although the range of subject matter is much broader than that. This collection includes poems on dating, C-Trains and prostitution, while the tone varies from the very serious ("Omissions") to the humorous ("On Dating Shorter Men") to the macabre ("Vamp").

Technically, I have stayed with the free-verse lyric, and although I do not at this point consider myself competent enough to use meter and rhyme, I have paid much attention to language rhythms and used internal and half rhymes where they seemed effective and not intrusive. I have continued to shape my poems mainly through the development of a sustained central image because I have found this to be the most direct way of my evoking a strong, clear voice within the piece, and of giving more richness of meaning and reference.

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CBC *The Home Stretch*

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GRANDFATHER'S CAMERA

I

My mother was the grand-daughter of an East German land baroness who owned a dairy plantation and orchards in Olau, including a mansion with a gate house, in which my mother, uncle and grandparents lived. Because my grandfather had been disinherited for marrying my grandmother - who was of a lower class, pregnant, and two years older than he - my mother and uncle would have inherited this estate, except that Hitler needed the land to grow potatoes for his army. My mother has filled me with stories about that estate and my great-grandmother - stories that have yet to become poems.

My father was born into a poor farming family in a small West German village called Veitsrodt. He is the second oldest of four brothers. When my grandmother died of cancer, my grandfather married a widow, who brought her son into the Heinz family. His second wife was the grandmother I knew. My father's relative absence from this collection speaks volumes. My feelings for him are mixed at best. Coaxing him onto the page has been difficult. For now, he appears between the lines of numerous poems that surround him. Instead, my father's father was the starting point for the family poems in the collection that follows. Of all my family, my grandfather is the one I know least about and feel most compelled to write about.

I was born in Rüsselsheim, Hessen, West Germany on January 15, 1960. Most of my life there was uneventful. Unless I think about the boy in our neighbourhood (slightly older) who used to intercept me on my way to school each morning to slap me exactly once before sending me on my way. Until the morning he administered what he said would be my last slap. I never saw him again. Then there was the boy downstairs. I remember that he had an older brother with a beard, a guitar and a puppy. I also remembered the I'll-show-you-mine games he and I played. And I remember being the only girl at one of his birthday parties. My mother made me wear a dress - which embarrassed me and confused him.

My father, mother, brother and I emigrated to Canada in April of 1967. And that is where I really want to begin. Only now as an adult do I have an idea of some of the hopes that may have brought my parents to Canada. There are stories, of course: that my parents left Germany to escape a loan-shark; that my father made us leave because my mother was considering politics; that my father was pointed out to my mother as "the guy who's going to Canada" on the night they met; that leaving Germany was all my mother's idea, etc. But I think that my parents' hopes had more to do with the desire for a fresh start, the chance to

reinvent themselves and become more than the sum of their histories.

Although Canada and Canadians believe themselves welcoming to immigrants, we experienced the opposite. My father worked as a draughtsman for an architectural firm in Winnipeg, staffed mostly by German expatriates - all of whom were deeply ashamed of their heritage. My father ridicules these men with thick German accents for claiming to be Swedish, Dutch, even "from the Baltic Sea." My mother spent her days dealing with neighbours who believed that German immigrants in their neighbourhood meant that property values would plummet. I faced a reception committee of grade-six girls on the way to school each morning. My brother received little better treatment.

St. George Elementary School in Winnipeg is also the place where I learned that I am German, from other elementary school children who followed me around asking me how it felt to kill millions of Jews, why I hate Jews, if I liked being a Jew-killer, and so on. My education in the shame of my heritage was thorough and detailed.

We spent six years in our first house in St. Vital, a suburb of Winnipeg. Our second house was in Transcona, another Winnipeg suburb. A new neighbourhood meant a new beginning and a chance to reinvent ourselves. By 1973, my brother and I had lost our German accents and found acceptance in our new schools. However, as school life became calmer, home-life became confusing. My mother is an alcoholic, and by the time I was thirteen, her alcoholism had become pronounced. Reinventing ourselves now also involved keeping secrets from friends and neighbours.

My mother once asked me, when I was seventeen, why I never invited friends over. I didn't know how to respond. So, at the first opportunity, I invited some of the girls from school over. My mother hovered over us, eager to please, fetching us chips, pop, anything she could think of, smiling to herself, anxious. And I was embarrassed by her humility and ashamed of my lack of trust. But then there were so many other incidents, like the night that my mother phoned Cindy's mother at three in the morning to lecture Mrs. Brown on how she treated her daughter. The unpredictable nature of an alcoholic's behaviour means isolation for those who live with them. How else to ensure the secret?

There are levels of distancing in my life: emigration from the country in which I was born; being shamed away from my ethnicity and culture; secrecy and denial within my family around my mother's alcoholism; dishonest relationships with those outside my family, initially to keep the secret, eventually out of habit. For me, poetry began as the bridge between isolation (exile?) and intimacy.

I began writing out of loneliness. Because I was missing a male partner, I thought.

But the more I became involved in the writing process and the more I began trusting my own voice, the more the real source of my isolation came to the surface. Here is the first occasion for thanks to Dr. Wiseman. I began writing poems in High School, wrote occasionally until the break-up of my common-law relationship, and in 1989 began writing more regularly until I had enough of a collection to submit a portfolio for entrance to Dr. Wiseman's 300-level poetry workshop. Most of the poems I submitted dealt with my confused sense of self and my frustrated sex-drive. I will never understand what glimmer of hope Dr. Wiseman saw in those poems, but I am grateful he gave me the opportunity to work through the self-conscious to the subconscious.

The first version of the poem, "Grandfather's Camera," initiated the centre piece of this collection and opened the door to a more honest voice within me. With this small start, I began to venture into the deep shame and guilt I still feel over being German. The first time my father saw the poem, "Grandfather's Camera," he was quite upset that this was all I remembered of his father. It would be interesting to see his reaction to the version included here. And while my father does not understand my need to speculate and write about my grandfather, my mother does not understand my need to "dig around" in my German heritage. I know from our conversations that my mother would rather the world would forget the holocaust and WWII. However, I feel obliged to acknowledge my family's complicity and my own sense of guilt as part of the remembrance owed to the more than six-million who died in the camps. Yet despite my sense of obligation, I must admit that my attempts at obtaining the complete service records of both grandfathers is sporadic and hampered by fear of what I might find. Do I really want the truth, or is it enough that I am apprehensive at the possibilities? I have addresses and names of consulate officials who can help me if and when I am ready for the truth. Until then, I write from speculation and ignorance.

While my mother can't understand my need to apologize for being German, she does understand and condone my writing about her alcoholism. (Well, at least in theory. She has not yet seen any of the poems contained in this collection.) When I discussed my search for poetry topics with Hanna at the beginning of last summer, she said, "you always have my-mother-the-alcoholic to write about." I suggested that some of what I write might not be pretty. She replied, "that's just your perspective." Hanna's willingness to see herself written down - and she will be receiving a copy of this thesis - has been more healing than any therapy. It shows me that both of us are ready to look at a painful part of both our lives as exactly that - a part. While the poems dealing with Hanna and her

alcoholism do contain some of the pain I remember - portrayed with images as strong and honest as I can presently manage - I hope they also reflect the love, admiration and respect I feel for this amazing woman. In the end, we all deal as well as we can with the places our paths lead. I hope my faults are forgivable; those of others must be as well.

II

During the first year of the graduate studies program, students are required to take a research methodology course. One of the assignments was for us to find a collection at some remote location for which we might need to apply for a thesis research travel grant. What started out as an exercise became a reality. I found a collection of work by Lion Feuchtwanger at the University of Southern California, titled "German Literature in Exile," that I thought might be very useful as background to my thesis. My own feelings of isolation within North American culture and alienation from my German heritage seemed to resonate with the subject matter of the Feuchtwanger collection. I hoped to find similar thinking around my ethnicity, or perhaps a way to theorize it. What I actually found was more refreshing.

The collection is part of a larger collection of Lion Feuchtwanger's writings, articles and correspondences, compiled by his widow, Marta Feuchtwanger. The entire collection is comprised of some sixteen boxes of original manuscripts, published works, newspaper articles and clippings, and original copies of letters sent and received by Lion Feuchtwanger.

Lion Feuchtwanger escaped Germany after his property had been confiscated and his doctoral degree revoked (Jackman 185). One of the most poignant pieces I found in his collection was a poem written to whomever was living in his house, in which Feuchtwanger asks him to mind the upstairs pipes because they freeze in winter. Once relocated to Los Angeles, Feuchtwanger became active in bringing Jews into the United States, and in creating a new artistic community in Los Angeles, many of whom were German expatriates for one reason or another. John Ahouse of the University of Southern California Library, supplemented my research with a list of Hollywood luminaries descended from these exiles. I remember John commenting that the ideals that Hollywood espouses on life, liberty and freedom also originate with these German expatriates. (This troubles me when I think of the violence and easy answers presented in current Hollywood films; but that, as they say, is another thesis.)

What I had hoped to find in the Feuchtwanger collection was an answer to my own

sense of alienation from my German heritage. I thought I would find writings that would help me to theorize: a cultural identity taken from two world wars and the Jewish Holocaust; a cultural identity doubly oppressive, first as white and second as fascist; questions around guilt and responsibility in contrast to being able to "pass" for North American once the German accent is lost. What I found were thoughts pertaining to the turning point in German history, not the present day Angst of third-generation Germans like myself.

Feuchtwanger was trying to reconcile in his own mind the contrast between the intellectual German and the German Nazi; his conclusion focused on the difference between the mentality of the individual and the mentality of the mass. The more intelligent the individual, the more primitive his/her behaviour in a mob. Because of his place in time, Feuchtwanger was interested in how and why the Nazis came to power.

On the topic of German writers in exile, Feuchtwanger was concerned with the linguistic and cultural exile of the writer who must content him/her self with functional knowledge of a foreign language, or the abilities of a translator. In Feuchtwanger's considerations, exile is a geographical, cultural and linguistic state, while my own definition of "exile" comes closer to modern notions of marginalization. I must admit that I was a little embarrassed to find myself consulting literature by writers in true exile - consider the obstacles they faced - for insight into my sense of alienation from German culture and history pre-1900s, and my sense of distaste for anything German in the post-1930s.

Then I found in Feuchtwanger's essays other more helpful definitions: that, in exile, one lacks the resonance for one's activities that exists in one's homeland, making exile a form of isolation; that, in contrast to Europe, North America is vast and absorbing, rather than echoing our voices (an approximation of Ernst Krenek's opinion); that in exile, the writer becomes a more entrenched version of him/her self, which to me suggests wearing a culture rather than living it in the same way that some politically minded individuals wear coats of colour and gender (to what extent do I wear my German heritage when it serves my purposes, now that I have no accent and can pass?); that exile is the point of no turning back, of realizing that forward through time is the only direction open in life. In this light, time makes exiles of us all. Time and changing attitudes change the way we view ourselves and eventually change the details our memories contain. Just as the fugitive/exile/emigrant creates a truth or illusion of the abandoned home, so we all create and recreate ourselves. Is it this sense of exile as forward motion through time that makes

the writer write? Is it a search for that resonance in one's own work? Does home become one's writing? Or the reverse?

My examination of Feuchtwanger's work has brought more questions than answers. I have also gained a new perspective of German identity to integrate with my own, one that recognizes differences between German culture, nationality, politics and character, and recombines them in a complex variety of ways. Although I had expected to find alternatives to my way of thinking, I had not expected my research to be an empowering and healing experience. I also had not expected to find articulation for so many of my questions about exile in questions about the nature of writing itself. In addition to this came many discoveries in the collection itself, articles on how exile affects the writer and writing, articles on the German people and the German character - particularly interesting to me because of some of the emotions I struggle with - and articles that informed me more fully of my other German heritage, the one that existed before Hitler and the Holocaust

Feuchtwanger's perspective and arguments helped me to expand my own views of my heritage enough to allow me to embrace the disremembered elements of German culture - German culture is in exile from its own history - rather than ignoring them in favour of guilt and shame. In other words, I no longer feel personally responsible for the Holocaust. The removal of that block has allowed me to expand the breadth of heritage poems in this collection. I hope there are many more heritage/family poems yet to be written; perhaps the flow will continue throughout my life. And the poems directly related to the Feuchtwanger papers have yet to start. So much to look forward to.

III

Having touched on questions around the nature of writing in the section above, I would now like to look to theory. Because of the research into Lion Feuchtwanger and because a number of poems in this collection focus on my German heritage, I had expected my thesis to be somewhat ethnocentric - or at least I thought I would be able to theorize my own ethnicity to some extent. As you can see from the list of readings, I consulted a number of sources for possible directions. The Steiner article, "The Hollow Miracle," promised to explain what it is in the German language that made Nazism inevitable for the German people; instead, the article explains that the German language is tainted forever by its Nazi involvement, not a new thought for those of us living in this Politically Correct, euphemistic time. The Grass, Gellhorn and Monaghan articles come a lot closer to my own

feelings of disgust and alienation. Interestingly, Gellhorn agrees with Feuchtwanger that there is something in the German ability to admire and obey order and orders that made Germany ideal for Nazism. Gellhorn writes:

Obedience is a German sin. Possibly the greatest German sin. Cruelty and bullying are the reverse side of this disciplined obedience. And Germans have been taught obedience systematically, as if it were the highest virtue, for as long as they have been taught anything.... The citizen who says Yes to the state, no matter what, is a traitor to his country; but citizens have to learn how to say No and why to say No.... At their best they are deeply troubled by their state and suspicious of it; at their worst they are indistinguishable from their ancestors--the interests of the state come first--and they are potentially dangerous sheep. (Gellhorn 205)

That slavishness manifests itself further in the feelings of Grass, Gellhorn and myself who are now extreme in our aversion to Germany and Germanness. However, one thing that all the articles I read showed me is that there is no longer one unified, uniform idea of what it is to be German. And if conformity and obedience truly are uniquely German sins, this is for the best; let us invent German identities that look beyond conformity. All Germans somehow represent their heritage, whether we remain silent or actively look for ways to bear witness to who we are. Even those Germans who actively suppress thoughts of Nazism testify to it. This question of what is German after WWII is a complex issue of self-representation.

In Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History, Shoshana Felman examines the need to testify through self-representation. Felman uses Theodor Adorno to argue that it is the artistic voice that lets us render a representation of the wound that could eventually help us come to terms with the damage:

[art] make[s] an unthinkable fate appear to have had some meaning; it is transfigured, something of its horror is removed. (Felman 34)

Creative works break silences that occur around the unspeakable, asserting that the unspeakable is unrepresentable and that any attempt must fall short and trivialize the event. Such silencing leaves Germans like myself defined by painful boundaries. This historical moment is important due to the distance and perspective we have from WWII. We remain too close to theorize WWII's atrocities without emotion or offence, but are close enough to derive value and deconstruct its ideologies without dissipation. Germans of my generation are the ones who have inherited the defamation and responsibility, and can articulate the

experience. We own photographs of parents and grand-parents wearing Nazi uniforms. Unlike Spinoza's "absent cause," our connections are real and current, more than academic.

Theory, concerned with its own internal integrity, consciously qualifies and re-qualifies its own problematics before addressing its theoretical position. Where theories of gender, race, culture, sexuality, etc., must remain distanced from their topics and problematize their positions, the creative can be more subtle. The creative voice can negotiate the painful discursive intersections in society which theory is too institutional to mediate. The creative voice can approach its topic, playing with its own complicity through ambiguity and free-play, thereby softening its politics through an inclusive, public medium. Poetry remains open and ambiguous, raising questions rather than attempting to be comprehensive and airtight.

Where theory fails, it does so by flattering us with the presumption of understanding. Theorists can be historically astute about the events leading up to and comprising the Holocaust. But because of the careful positioning needed, theorists take few risks. In fact, when dealing with a human atrocity as enormous as the Holocaust, theoretical caution easily crosses the line into equivocation. It is the creative voice that takes the risks and attempts to access unspeakable memories and emotions. The creative is where emotion and theory meet. They remain irreconcilable. We theorize to gain distance and control from the pain of life. The creative provides a place for working out that pain. At painful discursive intersections, it is the creative voice that allows us to render, in as raw and uncomfortable a form as necessary, what theory cannot access. Theory gives us distance while the creative brings us close. And so, at this moment of my life anyway, I cannot--will not--pursue theories of ethnicity further. My personal need is to explore my heritage, my family, and my people through the language of lyric. Perhaps theory will one day emerge, but, until this creative process is complete, I must let it take its course and tell me what it can. No theorist can help me with my relationship with Hanna and her problems. No theorist can expunge my bad memories.

To me, writing is self-examination. My examinations and the directions my inquiries take are influenced by how I see myself. It's almost circuitous - I have an understanding of myself that I wish to examine and the results of the examination then feed back into my understanding of myself. In that sense, everything that shapes me is open to this process. Being a traditionalist, I view language as a medium that holds meaning and reflects our thoughts, which in turn reflect the conditions that shape us. We use language

to touch what is out of reach - the past. When I write about something that happened in my personal past, I am appropriating the voice of someone I no longer am and only know in hindsight, and I am accessing an event, the memory of which has been altered with every change in my life since the moment itself. I can only compile an approximate construction. This construction is a combination of its ingredients: the event, my reaction at the time, and my memory of both.

It seems that this process of linguistic constructs creates more distance from the moment/memory I am trying to represent rather than bringing that memory into better focus. However, we achieve understanding through disassociation. The value in an analysis that breaks a structure down into its components is the awareness it facilitates. The weakness is that I am sometimes at a loss as to how these teased-out components can be reintegrated. Done often enough, analysing a moment can change the memory because the analysis and understanding begin to change what I remember. In a sense, all I do in analyzing what I remember is build a new misunderstanding to be analyzed later. In the telling and retelling of a story, some details are lost while others are engrained; what was uncertain becomes firm and what was firm becomes uncertain. In this way, we reinvent our pasts and therefore ourselves.

But the source remains the same. We have ourselves and our memories. No matter how I attempt to theorize my writing or whom I read, I come back to the same place. It is the human aspect that interests me. Images that allow me access to emotions we all share. And among those, most wonderfully, are included humour and silliness and a love of the natural and sexual world.

I have arranged the poems into three loose sections. The first section, "Spring Harvest," consists largely of "people" poems--various personal and social situations are dealt with in poems with various tones. The heart of the thesis is contained in the middle section, "Grandfather's Camera." Here I deal with my mother and my relationship with her, and those poems lead into work exploring my family background and the question of Nazism. The third section, "Mourning Intimacy," contains poems of love, sex and sensuality, approached from different angles, dealing with both serious and lighter experiences. And so I come, finally, to Dr. Wiseman's Creative Writing classes and his editing, where some of this raw and, for me, often difficult experience has taken its shape through some kind of wedding with poetic form, for better or worse.

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PART I
SPRING HARVEST

Harvest

The roads in Fitz Gerald's orchard
link and wrap mazes through trees
lined in fruit-heavy halls.
I stand breathing wood and apples -

but faded music pulls me back
to the grand for failed piano lessons
in your morning-lit studio.

The sun's warmth combs aside twigs
to touch red and yellow on swollen apples,
while I recall fresh fallen flakes, white
silence tucked round root-twists and trunks.

A gust trills leaves on the drive to the house -
how long since this was your home?
And how long since I lied a confession
to answer yours? You stared ice
at my words while I wished them back.

Silent, we sat with tea
watching apple wood, gnarled and shadowed,
dance in a twisting wind.
The sting of that season has softened,
buried in apple-spiced earth.

Clover

Already my tongue dreads her coffee,
tea-weak, or on rare days silt-bitter,
with never a cookie to take off the edge.

There you are, dear! stops me
from escape and my door. Shame
warms my face as I smile.

Her smile wears lipstick
like a child's mouth wears chocolate.
Her raisin-eyes blink
from shadows that bleed into creases
deepened by pleasure - a returning guest.

Submissive, I follow Antique Lilac skin.
Spine and neck fused, her barrel on platforms
leads me into her crazy crammed room.

So amazing to page through her memory,
to find her smudged grin crinkled in photos,
shelves lined with trinkets from Egypt, Australia,
in that small age-scented room.

And the framed photograph
of the young husband who sang to her name
"Roll me over."

Ten years with only the odd thought.
Then for no reason, last night
as I lay in the dark studying street-noise,
I remembered you.

How your lips hold a cigarette,
how your voice sounds from down the hall,
and the slope of your shoulders
when you rest against a door frame.

I couldn't see you then because
your older sister was my friend and
I was being consumed by someone
I wouldn't notice today.

And now you're back east. I think
I'll search for the negatives
of pictures we took in Banff. You,
your sister and I have stopped

for coffee at a hotel. I see you there.
You're sitting across from me,
your arm relaxed around her shoulders
and you're smiling at me. Smiling.

Black Coffee (for Baruch and Chana)

Last night, there was a clown parade
the city shook from its sleeves
and sprinkled into an orange cappuccino
night sky. You missed it.
We trail days like crumbs.

I've sent you a gift - photos,
that take my place, paper squares
to pattern among coffee cups.

The cream in my mug becomes
our white flecked moments
suspended in black
until details are lost,
of what I meant to remember.

The place without you is unchanged.

Briefly in Santa Monica

The eyes
are surprisingly gentle.
The voice apologetic.

His hair needs cutting
and his skin is dry patches.
His sleeping bag lies rolled
beside his belongings.

All around, California affluence,
groomed lawns, buildings and bodies,
tied together under the perpetual sun.

Spare change, lady?
I think he is only a haircut
and suit away
from a briefcase and office.

I wonder if he knows which broken
thread began the unravelling
that left him here.

I give him a dollar.

Garnets for Heidi

My dragons have shifted for an elephant,
gaudy oriental and ashtray-saddled,
from the collection you loved.
My cupboard has accepted
your mocha set and my linen
now includes pillow-slips you embroidered.
I didn't even know you did needlepoint.
Your niece has the garnets and money.

One week dead, and already you have dwindled
to a few items from a garage sale,
small things that blend with mine, and after today
I may not wonder what stories they held for you.
Garnets were our common birthstone.
I wear mine often. I think of you.

The weather's in a hurry
to get somewhere tonight--
clouds in layered curtains
their rubbing amplified,
barrels dropped and rolled round
by my crazy upstairs neighbour

The fireballs blaze and skip,
flashlights held by running children
in constant scattered chaos,
scaring clouds from south to north
trailing breezes below, fingers
that tug strands of my hair,
sky patches and tatters, amber
now red in playtime's glare.

West, where

slate stacks in pages along the highway,
moss writes on pine bound sheets,
and we drive through paintings, canvas to canvas,
past places where animals spill purple against asphalt
and growth erases our signatures.

Drawn into dense witch forest dark,
I'm lost in fog monsters, snow snakes on rock,
on paths cut through wood, going nowhere.

Water ribbons from the dragon's spine, slides rock wet
and open, washes and wraps through my mind
as shards of sun slit clouds to scatter
on mythic green, older than we'll ever be,
or our small hopeful words.

Spring Harvest

Kernels of certainty
roll around the gym floor,
peeling laughter from walls
and applause
from well-groomed parents.

Smooth miniatures, they
exist at the absolute centre
of smiling parental mayhem
between the acts.

A Student Guide to the Food Groups

- Group 1: Starches
 (Read "Pasta")
 Pasta with jam for breakfast
 Skip lunch - you don't need it
 Pasta with mustard for dinner
- Group 2: Dessert
 Jam over pasta
- Group 3: Proteins
 Also known as "No Name Luncheon Meat"
 Also known as "May Contain"
- Group 4: Fruit
 One on-sale box of oranges
 Should last three weeks
 The fermented bottom layer
 Replaces an entertainment budget
- Group 5: Vegetables
 Carrots are cheap
 Make your fridge look full
 Add colour to pasta
 When mustard and jam are gone

They're Trying to Escape

Down parked car corridors,
stopping for passers by,
so no one will see,
one by one they slip through.
They cause confusion in traffic,
struggling to stay just blocks
ahead of bounty hunters
hired to round up fugitives
for return to parking lot chaingangs.

We find them wedged into hedges,
stranded in ditches,
on wrong sides of tracks,
wheels shrieking, misaligned.
Or worse, desperate suicides,
slow rusting in river shallows,
metal frames twisted, broken.

And some solitaires
slip their chains, pop wheelies
to inspire enablers
(those willing to stay bound)
to join the conspiracy
and rattle into freedom.

C-Train Boredom

Something about this route!

C-Train engineers will occasionally
announce, dead-pan:

Brandon, Winnipeg, Flin-Flon,
now ready for departure
leaving track five.

All aboard.

And the train leaps its tracks
travelling the eastbound skyway
to Manitoba, high over Saskatoon,
looping, diving, gliding.

No schedule, no need to arrive.

Calgary: 9:23am

I'm late. No seats
no handrails free.
No hands, balancing,
I'm C-Train surfing.

Among the seated,
a carved-mahogany face
sleeps against glass.
Across the aisle, a surfer reads

calculus while his legs straddle
the train's pitch and roll.
The girl on my left adjusts
her eye-liner, a fascination

for the three year old
lap-lounger across from her.
A baby scream spikes my ear,
and beside me, a woman

has just timed her coffee sip
with the train's lurch forward.
Colombian roast splatters art
on mustard coloured silk.

I ride the wave into 9:26.

Judgement Call

His forty pounds fight three-hundred.
The man's gaze clears the bus shelter.
I drop my glance from his face
which does not resemble the child's
and study his steel-toed work boots,
leather frayed and peeling.

Above the boots, the child's feet
kick out in frenzy.

The man just smiles.

I ask the child his name.

The man answers.

Ask Daniel his age.

The man answers.

Where are they going?

Again, the man.

The boy's fingers pinch faded wool
that sleeves the man's grip
which tightens on his struggling body
as the train glides to the platform
and relieves me of decisions.

The 11:39 train. Northbound
for Lion's Park. On a Wednesday.

Intrusion

C-Train platform,
waiting, bored,
I glance around and see
tears sliding down
the male face expressionless
beside me.
Walkman on, ears plugged,
he is unaware of me.

I should touch his arm,
ask if he's alright. Instead,
I leave his solitude in tact
and wonder at the silent
succession of tears,
the volume of closed-in pain
that can't be contained
behind private walls.

Letter to My Father's Mother

And Grandfather, what was he like?
I avoided him, preferred you
and your kitchen, watching you
slice bread, the loaf wedged under your arm,
telling how you almost lost your left breast
running the blade through the crust,
slices too thin in the middle for your hard butter.

I wonder if you liked
raising another woman's sons.
So much I should have asked.
The neighbours watched you,
almost sleep-walking, they said,
step off the curb
into the grille of an oncoming truck.

So much to live for,
a house free of children
and time to spend with your husband.

Touch

I

lying beside him,
watching the sun
first taint the sky
did you know then?

sitting with him
sipping coffee
drinking the quiet
clatter of leaves,
were you close?

were you there
when a flu signalled
the beginning,
the end?

the mental body check
you do now hoping
while his life's colours
compress into bruising

II

he has stopped to admire
my ring
reaches and takes
my hand
we chatter pleased
he rejoins his friends

I notice

his buttermilk pallor
remember his damp touch
against a tiny cut
in my fingertip

I panic

Traces

Noodles and chicken grease
on her chin and cheeks
but the scalding soup left no trace.

Slapped by the wall,
her shoulder didn't splinter.

Her backside held firm--
wooden spoons broke leaving no dent
or pain.

All disremembered,

as she reaches
for her screaming child.

Her First

How would Nancy Drew,
strawberry blonde, fashionable pumps,
and always in control,
have shown her gratitude
for the mystery novel,
a gift from her mother
the same day as her first
internal exam?

Age ten, and mother sat so proper,
watching her twist and whimper
under the doctor, mint breathing,
gut big, fingers thick
inside places not
yet familiar to Nancy,
almost in grade five.

And what would Nancy have said
to her mother's flyleaf inscription -
*to remind you of a day your behaviour
shamed me.*

Confirmation

Shoes, gloves, purse, all white.
Even her hair blonde white
at age nine.

Under the white dress
a new white garter belt,
and a lace petticoat scratches
the soft bare thigh between
white panties and white stockings.

Wandering home, proud and pleased
after the ritual,
she does not notice the car
that trails her is not
her father's.

In the Cathedral

Confessionals guard one wall,
standing coffins, lids ajar,
menacing invitations to the child
who kneels, waiting her turn.

Scalp and stomach alive with bees,
she rehearses her sins: pride,
her body, her temper, a quarter
taken from her mother's purse.
Under the stone virgin's gaze,
the quarter stings most.

She is nudged towards the red lights.
Statues look away as the coffin opens
wider, the lid becomes an arm
that rounds her shoulders and pulls
her small body into puffy darkness.

Inside the box, the pain
of not breathing, her throat
choking out words
she can't hear over her heart's rushing.

Outside, exhausted, she turns and sees
the open curtain, the half-door latched
on emptiness - no confessor,
no priest, no forgiveness
for all she's gone through.

And suddenly silence frees her.

PART II
GRANDFATHER'S CAMERA

Wind Walking

Evening in the almost dark.

Mom takes my hand and we run

until I feel my feet miss concrete

and the speed scares me into stopping

the wildness that makes my mother laugh.

Early October red, brown and wind blasting,

we have our hands in pockets,

and I want to be my mother,

smiling, laughing, as the wind rushes,

racing us against leaves that curl and skip by,

fragrant crunching, our breath smoking.

Mom says you look better walking into the wind

because it blows hair neat, not forward in twisting rags.

But her hair is spinning around her face,

her hands leave their pockets to drag strands

across pinked lips, then free. Eyes blazing,

mom says the wind's push makes her strong and fast,

lets her ride the gale in control.

My eyes can't leave her face as my hand finds hers

and we run, ready to catch the next wail.

Mother's Room

is private to all
but father.

Their skins and clothes,
her perfume - the scent
affects me still.

Her small intruder
once crept in quietly
to unpack her jewel box
and play with bracelets, chains
and the lapis lazuli ring
father gave her.

There was a letter I could not read,
transparent paper linking lines.
Who wrote these words
that she keeps them this close?

And her baby Picasso
lipsticked murals on her walls
and spent hours unswivelling
Coral Blossoms and Sierra Sunsets,
then re-arranged dust to avoid
suspicion.

Now, remembering liquid liner,
kleenex tucked behind sofa cushions
and faded cigarettes that linger
on perfumed clothes, I listen
to a long-distance ring.
That rings again and again.

Stasis

She reaches for the pack.
Fingers pry its flap
and pose a cigarette.

New smoke curls
drifts
hangs.
She drags a sting to her throat.

The living room.
Her Absolut.

Cap fumbled free,
bottle neck clinks glass
rim as the vodka gulps
into her tumbler.

The nerve-soak poised,
one more pull slides
nicotine across her tongue.
Smoke hairs seep from lips
parting for the glass.

Her eyes sticky blink
snapshots of the room.
More and more, this is her
place, her couch.
She rarely leaves.

The late afternoon sun
cuts at the thick sweet haze.
She reaches for the pack.

Dinner in Exile

Too drunk to eat
one leg crossed over the other
elbows propped on one knee
holding a cigarette
holding her posture
holding her movements
altogether too drunk
her body wavers slightly
still smoking
staring at us and choosing
my brother, father, me, please not me,
trapped in the semi-circle of TV-tables
in our usual places, staring
at the glowing screen
to avoid eye contact,
Hanna's accusing eyes.

Revisiting

I knew she was drunk
because she mentioned my boots.
Called them army boots.
I knew she was going to drink
because she noticed my lipstick -
not her shade.
I hate coral lipstick
as much as I hate
the smell of hairspray,
smells of mother
getting ready to go out,
already drunk
behind square framed sunglasses.
She didn't think the stagger
was a dead give away
like the edge in her voice.
And here I am reading
on the bed, quiet,
not a sound
until the crumple to the floor
rain soft
from down the hall.

Hanna's Eyes

Your upper lip
sucks in and out
where your teeth should be.
Like you, they're under the chair.

You shudder
on the floor, refuse
my help, staring
me away.

The drink never scratches
red in your eyes,
but holds them wide,
white freezing cold blue.

All I can think
is how perfect
your eyeliner
remains.

Leaving Home

Mother bought me the luggage
I packed to leave home,
happy, anticipating
freedom from family dinners.
She cried at my leaving.

Summer visits, Christmas trips,
stopped drinking for my arrival
and I never guessed, never imagined
mother drowning as soon as my bus
left.

Then the Christmas
mother was beyond speech, body
too old for pretence, I
too old to submit, I left again.
She cried on the phone asking why.
We didn't speak for a year.

This November,
two and a-half years sober,
she slipped and fell out of her chair.
My mother, one cat in her lap,
two at her feet, after a life of marriage
and children. God.

Mostly passed out, making eye-contact,
her eyes softened by surrender
and my lack of anger, neither of us
resisting I-love-you goodbyes,
I left her in her quiet exile.
No tears left, only peace, only love,
mother.

In my mother's bathroom cabinet,
tooth paste grows in forests
of Convenient Upright Tubes,
toilet paper rolls in mountains
of Specially Reduced Prices
and eyeliner stacks in sixes
of each colour, none of which
mother wears.

What for, I wonder?

I imagine mother
in some post-Apocalyptic barter
for Kleenex and Q-tips
and smile to myself until I find
the tubes she's tucked into my packing.

I'm in this photo, buried
in your flesh, in black and white.

Your eyes are closed by smiling.
His body spoons yours while his arms
close a possessive circle around your waist.

You're standing in a wheatfield--
there must be gold in your hair,
on your skin, teeth, everywhere
but the dark cave of my father's mouth.

I know too much to love this picture
taken before your first apartment where he
closed the door between the outside world
and rape at eight months pregnant.

I saw Hanna in a dream
sitting across from me
talking gentle happy
and in the dream
I can't hear what she's saying
but think
how beautiful she looks
without the lines and the years

I think this must be
how Hanna looked at my age
humour just beginning
to pucker around the eyes
but I know I'm lucky because
by thirty-six her life
had been decided

and here the dream turns
because suddenly I know
I'm seeing my mother
when she was twenty-three
and I wish

Coming to Canada

I

My father stands
framed large in the hotel window.
Beyond the glass across the alley
stands the ruined brick wall of the next hotel.
Hands on hips, he turns in distaste
from the April snow on filth,
the stumble crash of a drunken man
drifting the dark between the buildings.
His disgust shifts to the room,
its cracked plaster and old shoe smell.

II

I am too tired to understand, and watch
my mother help my brother into sleep.
I am still confused by the change,
my drops of English - yellow, blue, good night -
lost in a wash, worse with each new plane,
each stewardess who speaks less German,
now only a trickle for me to hear.
I am swimming words I cannot understand
and English smiles
can't calm my fear of drowning.
Leaving the last plane in snow-cold April,
we've left warmth, grandmother
and blooming crocuses for this better life
my father wants for us.

III

Our first apartment
was on River Avenue.
Someone had painted
a bright yellow kitchen
that bounced the sun round
until my mother's head hurt.
The livingroom's shocked pink
threw back her paintings -
walls stayed blank
like those in the boy-blue bedroom
I shared with my brother.
He and I loved the paint-pot colours,
except for the polished-black hardwood
floors, walls and ceiling
of the master bedroom
my mother calls her womb,
my mother who is angry
that people here
steal clothes
from our laundry line.

IV

My first day at school
teacher's chalk brush claps
my knuckles when I touch
her coloured chalk.
I follow children
I can't understand,
thinking I'm moving
up a grade
with every new room
because the room numbers change.
A messy blonde boy
sticks out his tongue
because I look
too long.
And a Chinese girl
takes me home
to her chalk board and brush
to help my English
with finger slaps
from her ruler.

Triptych

I

Mum and I are shopping.
Her hand holds mine, tight
so I won't get lost.
The rhythm of bodies
pulls at me, and I look
at mum's face to be sure
she's still there.

All around me, a press
of coats, scarves, legs.
Smell of winter wet
wool, snowy leather,
the sticky pine of sweat,
too-warm indoors, and mum
says these are hundreds of people.

II

Home from school,
I salute my mother my arm
pointing, palm flat-faced down,
thinking it's funny
because the kids laughed
so I laughed too and laugh now
until my mother's palm
hits my face, hard
and I see her angry eyes
are wet because she's crying
and I don't know what to do,
so I cry too until she stops.

And tells me about gas
and ovens and doctors and places
where blonde-haired, blue-eyed
boys and girls like me were sent
to be taught, and to make babies.
Only blonde-haired, blue-eyed ones.
My mother cries terribly,
she says it's not my fault
no matter what the kids say,
and that she was a little girl
who couldn't have stopped them either.

III

(Shabbath Dinner)

Invited intruder,
I sit and watch the candle
being lit in benediction.

Baruch ato adonoi.

I have to break bread
correctly, and laugh nervously
at my faulty sight singing,
guessing at phonetic Hebrew.

I want to do well tonight
and share this gentle privacy.
Instead I twist in braided wax
along a guilt-woven wick, knowing
we are bound in the blood spilled
by my family and will always live
divided by our common wound.

Generations

I learned my German identity
in a school yard
from eight-year-old fists
educated by movies

My mother and grandmother learned the same
as German refugees in Czechoslovakian camps
mother taking beatings, called a Nazi
though the storm-troopers
had destroyed her home
left her fatherless
and grandmother losing teeth
to a Czech-dentist's wrench

My father lived in a village
too small not to know its casualties
and he learned to live
with his father's choices

Yes
everyone knows
Germans are annihilators
and I am left with nothing
nothing but hate for a grandfather
who may have hated
no one

The woman in the shop seems unremarkable
until I spot a gold chain, linked
at her throat's hollow by letters.

"Hebrew, isn't it?"

"Yes, my initials,"

and we pause, waiting
for my next comment.

The pause is our fault
and there is an us.

We are linked by facts
pressed into bricks and walled
as silence between us.

We talk books, weather,
the virtues of European movies.

Knowing our deep complicity,
we hide together
from someone else's memories
of polished black leather
and hooked iron crosses.

Watching Sophie's Choice

From my seat in the theatre I watch,

understanding the litany
that keeps time while she chooses
one of her children. One,

whose screams will follow her
into each silence and private moment.

Of the other she'll know nothing.

A Nazi guard bargains her child's body
for hers, surrounded by rows of onlookers
who witness her shame, his greed
for flesh known only to her husband,
her lover, and soon this swastika.

Leave your luggage...

One more reaches out to take

...your families

reassurance from her limbs,
forgiveness from her lips.
And I know from the book
she will take him as penance
to atone for the sin of choosing
death for her daughter.

*Sie werden jetzt desinfiziert
Gepäck zurück lassen
Das Gepäck kriegen Sie morgen
Ihr werdet Euere Familien später sehen*

You will now be disinfected

Leave your luggage behind

*You'll be given your luggage
tomorrow*

*You will see your families
later*

*see your families
Sie
werden*

*your luggage
leave*

*Sie werden now be disinfected
You will now be desinfiziert*

be disinfected

leave your families

(new stanza)

I add to the film, imagine her
 eyes open, helping him mount,
 pulling him inside, instinctive
 submission as he pushes stabs groans

You will now be

jetzt

...disinfiziert

I watch her choose pain, understanding
 the lie that repeats while his thrusts keep time:

Ihr werdet Euere Familien später sehen

You will see your families later

Gapäck zurück lassen

Omissions

The flesh-toned envelope

One air-mail sheet

Official courtesies

Abbreviations

A man

Thirty years old

Eight months army

Killed

September 21, 1941

Ljuborzy, Ukraine

I feel nothing

The other grandfather

Sanitätskompanie

S. S. Rottenführer

Totenkopf

My stomach crawls

Particulars are missing

Hyphenated

I don't know
where to lay wreaths,
how to claim or deny
the sins of my fathers.

German-born, accent-free,
I'm German like the rich are generous--
for display, when convenient,
now that feet no longer goose-step.
Being Canadian is the lottery ticket
that doesn't win.

Am I ashes smeared
on my grandfather's uniform,
a cipher no one can read?
The language has changed.

I live on the hyphen hanging
between brown-shirts and immigrant-papers,
despising the free-fall
of this new party-line.

My Germany

In these woods, roots clutch at ash
grey earth with bleached bone fingers,
brittle beneath trunks that twist skyward,
crowned by clattering branches, skin-tatter
leaves, windchimes that sing like glass.

Myth has flown the forest, and magic
dried in the absence of green. The bread cottage
has crumbled, its candied ornaments left
for birds that won't fly near the singing glass,
or brave the dark that crawls forsaken paths.

Summer Trip Back

No felt-thick borderlines.
Only crops quilted
in a squabble of colours,
forests like moss clumps,
rivers that trail silver.
Roads don't tear
the orange gold green patchwork
I see from the plane.

On the ground, in the airport,
smiling cousins, estranged
but friendly uncles
bundle us into cars.
Peopled sidewalks are a jumble
of summer florals, denim, linen,
but I watch for the brown
Anne Frank showed me.

We drive past the steeple that climbs
the last hill to greet us as we round the bend
and enter my grandparents' village
where time evaporates and I return
to all the steeple greetings I remember,
the long drives home, isolated winks
of light my mother built into stories
where robbers and witches lived in the woods.

(new stanza)

My grandparents' house has dwindled
but for a strangely modern growth
on its west side that houses one uncle.
We park the cars where the dung-heap once sat.
Grandmother waves us in to coffee, cake
and conversation, eager to push aside years.
The good parlour is still off limits, and I
am still the child who can't resist "no."

The hanging frames now hold photos
with a deeper meaning - grandfather's uniform
bears markings which stain my family, my self.
The blood our soil absorbed whispers
beneath my feet and sighs garden blossoms
into the air at my family's reunion,
as it will one day by grandfather's grave -
the crimson and russet he would call flowers.

Grandfather's Camera

I have no kind words for you,
long dead now. You, the coughing shadow
within the glass-doored master bedroom,
air dank with tobacco and perpetual winter.
I remember your habit of waking past noon,
still drunk, to take you place
at the dining room table.

I feel no gratitude, no thanks
for the Kodak, circa 1910, you gave me,
the one with the cardboard wall inside,
a replacement that lets light spoil film,
a gift to stop little girl questions.
You died with your doubts
before I was old enough to ask.
Zigaretten, Schnapps, voice scraping conversation,
you were dark to my five-year-old eyes.

I keep no photos of you, none
exist of you without your S.S uniform.
They say you killed no one, refused
to carry even a side-arm. But
what snapshots lived in your memory?
What pictures did your Kodak take?
It sits in its leather case, undusted,
broken, worthless, a souvenir of you.
Side-arm or unarmed, for every death
a blind eye. Grandfather,
how often did you blink?

PART III
MOURNING INTIMACY

Mourning Intimacy

Evenings in couple short-hand
Eggshell conversations that crack
Yolks free to slip in unsteady hands

The morning intimacy of uncombed hair
Shared showers and hurried cups of coffee

Silence that murmurs moist across skin
In tongue flicks and fingertip touches
Open-lipped kisses and the sibilance of sex

Last Night

I dreamed you into my arms
And stole a moment with you

Your mouth covered mine
And I tasted your tongue

I know the place where your breath
Woke my skin - it still shivers

I held you
Felt your weight

And with each movement
Felt too the sun slip closer

And you slip away

Peony

not as a rose
with petals wound
introspect
and tightly perfect
for drying

see me as a peony
plump pliant
and tickled to bursting
by tiny bites
that loose a profusion

of flaunting pink feathers
lazy and fragrant
as old fashioned kisses

as if poems
grow on trees
phrase swatches
pucker on twigs
and hang waiting
to be plucked
the
soft
snap
of a
tiny
kiss

Hothouse

Leaves thrust
from turgid stems
and spread like tongues.

Roots work
their hairy nakedness,
tickling in clingy warmth.

I'm surrounded by potted sex.
The push and pull of chlorophyll
cross-pollinates in my living room.

I flex with these moist rhythms
and strain to hear some urgent
sigh to quench my long dark thirst.

Bottom of the second

I watch her climb steps
drizzling tri-breasts
of mounded chocolate
icecream.

Top of the third
she's down to two.
Lips and tongue work
sweet cleavage eagerly
into one perfect peak
slick inside its mate.

I lose track of the score.
The peak gives way
cone dripping faster
as tongue slides home.

Racy Bikes

Coupled they stand
Handlebar to seat
Seat to handlebar

The lamppost holds them
Locked together
At teasing distance

Shy
In my presence they pause
Their caress

Pedal on pedal
Awkward symmetry embraced
Front wheels leaning

A Poem About Breasts

Not mine, of course.
My modest excuses barely
impose on the soft lace
lingerie my fetish buys.

And gravity doesn't affect them,
their pubescent perk preserved.
Perk doesn't rubber
neck men's heads,
but poundage does.

Ah to have nipples that make
eye-contact from orbs and inspire
verses on delicate peach halves.
Or firm ripe cantaloupes
dripping invitations,

not raisins that imagination
and monthly hormones swell
to grapes or cherries
by blouse buttons out strut.

Still, you know what they say.

Cuckoo

Cars travel tracks in clockwise circles,
disappear around buildings, resurface from corners,
synchronized to the mechanical opening
and closing of a fur coat over lingerie.

She brings her hands to her breasts
for each hesitant car,
and kneads - slowly - the flesh
in her overflowing fingers.

Mid-massage she smiles at me
and comments on the January warmth.
I huddle my coat closer in silence
and walk away quickly

from where she stands sentinel
at the clockwork centre of cars,
hands, breasts, life
passing.

6 AM

in the almost light
cars in rivers
between glass towers
flow towards reserved parking

BMW

spreads a passenger door
wide to admit her
hand on suit pants
cutting-edge creased

6:10

Bimmer's back
barely stops
she's pushed out
wipes her mouth -

reaches for kleenex
and lipstick

waits

Good Job

Her absence from the corner
makes me see her on a passenger seat
of an alley-parked car
head down under a coat
smudging lipstick circles,
open zipper ticking, every blow
of her silver hoop earrings.

They Could Be Rosepetals

Blood drops scattered
across Disney-print sheets.
No one will see.

A secret
like his hands.
Insistent and silent,
she'll always see them.

Escape

I dream her
as she dreams herself -
in the dim hallway,
standing nude
by the livingroom door.
She has just come home.
The hallway melts
to leave her
at the room's centre,
its furniture
small in the gloom.
She turns to her husband
who is holding a gun.
The gun has a silencer.
Now she sees
her dog is dead,
stiff in its blood.
Later, still dreaming,
still naked,
she is in a jail cell where
her husband and his gun come back
whenever her dream-eyes close.
She knows the dream
will kill her.

Tin Palace

She is magnificent here -
animal, teeth exposed,
almost friendly, she poses
for the sun-dried suit.
It's primal display, their chatter
clattering on terra cotta tiles.

He circles, composure faltering
as the crowd swells round them.

She is coiled perfection,
eyes steady, mouth opening,
as he edges closer
confident now as her rhythm
pulls him in.

The Date

began this morning
with a nerve swarm
in my belly.

By evening, eight o'clock,
I'm waiting between
the glass double doors
of my building, watching
for the red convertible.

Later, still unsure why
I said yes to dinner,
my fingers fondle
one of his cigarettes.

The candle at the table's centre
sputters in frustration,
its wax base immobile
in a glass throat.

Our nicotine tongues silent.

A single white tear
melts along the taper.
I bring the cigarette
to my mouth and draw
my hand away from his touch.
We are frozen mid-stroke.
No pleasure.

On Dating Shorter Men

Which I don't. And not,
though I wish, out of arrogance,
but rather due to grade three
litanies - be careful, Susanne,
the other children are so small
and you're so big.

And later, intimidated
by junior high girlfriends,
shamed by hands half the size of mine,
shoes four sizes smaller
and dresses doll-size.

I live with horrifying thoughts
of sitting on a man's knee
that cracks like glass
or grinds like gravel under boots
while I scrunch into a kiss.

Or to roll over in bed
hearing snapping bones
and muffled screams for help.

My pillow-weight lover - toe-nails
firmly embedded in my calves -
and I are strictly missionary.
Safe sex first.

Although, at eye-level,
my nipples are appreciated.

In His Dreams

She answers teasing talk
with banter that leaves him
bashful. His eyes, impertinent,
probe her body for openings
that wait between the lines.

He gets as far as her livingroom.
She gets as far as questions
that make him take refuge
in his state of "for better or worse."

Her imagination tempts her
but she knows how it would be -
his kiss of gratitude unwanted,
his tongue
a flaccid penis in her mouth.

Towerless Rapunzel

Hips wading in tree tops,
hair dampened by clouds,
she wanders sunlit silence
until one more person asks

Just how tall are you?

It's the legs - long enough
to willow along
sky smudging city blocks.

She even sings, they say,
lyric bewitchment that lulls
unwary travellers from their paths.
All the signs are there.

She should be hidden by walls,
mazes, spells, exercised on ramps,
but confined, not roaming
where men can snap at her heels,

circle and wait for her hair to uncoil.

A Stew of You

Shroud me in magic
comb gold through my grey
pull crumpled skin smooth
and tweak flaccid nipples
into firm-again breasts
I'm off to cast spells
on one perfect man
one strong minded sceptic
to cage in my house
by the slithering woods

No one to hear you
gasp scream or cry
Your hand through the bars
I take your fingers
test your ripeness
snap slice and dice them
like pale new carrots
with red insides
your blood clotted gravy
for my dumplings and greens

Feed you chicken and beer
your meat fat marbled
rump roast and rib-eye
until my blade glances bones
easy to crack and suck dry
So shroud me in magic
I'm off to cast spells

Eternally Mine

You squat in fellowship with cherubs
Wings cramped by granite cold
And weight that will not fly

For I have carved you into stone
A retching leering gargoyle
To loll among the spires

My hands paid in pain to bring you here
Blood leeches from my fingers
As I clawed your twists into the rock

I would have plucked your eyes
Like pebbles from their rough sockets
But the rasp and scrape tore at my ears

And ground the flesh beneath my nails
Until only bone remained to whistle down
Your flinty cheeks to a throat they cannot bruise

Vamp

Write me a chiller that rolls
ice marbles up my spine
in imprecise rhythms
so I can't lie still in the dark
Include eyes glazed black
rimmed in red
that watch from paper thin faces
strained over bones and dry tendons
Have drops of cold breath
try the curve of my throat
and fingertips trail
spider soft
across my breasts
I'm longing
for the heat and scent
of blood when skin breaks