

## LATE SHOW

You imagine him pausing on a dark upper landing, carefully reassuming the pose of half-person, grateful she's past stirring. Unspent resentment aches across their latest choices as his tacit feet retrace an intimate routine. Walking that untripped wire, another fine line between unfinished and inferred, just left hanging. Does she even sense this ghost who lost her long before unshared shame ignored largesse?

After all, it's only good manners not to ask too much, too often, too soon. So these become the different distances between silence and since? Even when with her, he missed her. Even when with her, he missed you. Even when with you, he missed her. Even when with you, he missed you. And once upon an appetite or two their patterns overlapped, became a tartan of passion. But now that tablecloth is white.

Another crystal weather system sifting softly out there, slowly adding itself up. Shaping, shading, shovelling, shaving, cooling off and smoothing over the drifts, those sheets, their meals, all the plated details of that counterpane pantomime. And each of us probably always has someone else to blame, instead of us.

So now he refuses to make friends with himself because he suspects another betrayal? No way he'll lie after this, even if he's grieving for someone nobody's ever met. Not that you're any distance from anything. Yet you finally choose to believe him as he leaves later than any other offhand explanation, sleepily waving to the security camera at your lobby door.

## L'ÉTRANGER DE NOUVELLE-ÉCOSSE

Six years shy of Expo '67. I'm fifteen  
and a half – half awake in this CNR day coach perched  
on a Lévis siding – two guys joking  
in strange energetic *joual* out there. Sweet July mist,  
just starting to dawn on you, rising off  
the Saint Lawrence River  
for the first time ever – across from all that aspiring  
nonsense. And by now I'm in a period  
of spiritual transition between T.E. and D.H.,  
despite a certain Anglo N.B. in-law  
who won't even stop in Quebec  
to buy their gas. And actually, since this isn't 1759, surely  
I can find someone who'll take me home along that shore  
to meet her family. Including uncles with cakes  
and aunts with fiddles – everyone jostled and joshed enough  
to start me off. But of course,  
I'm only quietly nodding smiling looking wise, hoping  
to tumble with all that gorgeous raven hair  
when she finally gets to let it down. And if you want to  
find out who anybody really is, just close your eyes and listen  
to their laugh. However sloshed or lost you are,  
no matter how sweet your needs or notions,  
whatever nobody's ever told you before,  
in whichever way they can't find words for. And we or *oui*,  
this is the best of every shyness more than pride  
as waves of unshaved voices lift us all  
across our latest singular rivers.

## BOYS WHO GO ALOFT

“Look up. Waaaaaay up!”

– The Friendly Giant

1

Clouds are closer to dreams.

Also crows-nests let you see where  
you’re going much sooner, an important consideration  
when you’re trying to catch up to being  
old enough for anything.

First, of course, you have to  
have some idea what you’re trying to rise above:  
*Chums Annuals* from your Granny in Canterbury  
full of terse tales of storm-tossed rescues  
by ocean-going tugs or enormous Newfoundland dogs  
from icy harbour breakwaters will do the trick nicely.

Especially if you write her polite, punctual  
thank-you letters. Then race each other  
to the post-Christmas mailbox,  
though nothing will be picked up at least until next year,  
next week.

Your breath never seems to outrun you.

2

If they roped your meals up in a bucket,  
you could pretty well live here, except when it stormed.

But then you could hardly be expected to see much anyway.

You hang on for dear life, somehow knowing: once  
you're here there's no coming back down.

3

No crows up here. Tons of herring gulls, a few terns,  
pelicans perhaps, and yes: the odd albatross.  
But absolutely crowless.

If you want, you can imagine that's a cornfield  
down there. And those rows of yellow school buses  
aren't really twenty-pounders.

The same way, when they hoist up someone  
wearing a noose, you can pretend  
he's only made of straw.

4

You are so light you could easily blow away.

However, you can become more determined than the wind.

You could also teach yourself how to fly.

5

Make sail. Take on sail. Keep inventing wings.

Take direction. Know where you're headed.

Keep your head. Don't sell out. Always reply  
when spoken to. Never answer back. Only sleep

when you're not needed. Pretend you're not really here  
helping them kill people.

6

Aloof, aloft, beyond  
your lullaby syllables, the same moon frowns  
on everyone.

Far beneath your stars, your ship bleeds victory...

## PORCUPINE ARCHERY

This was 1957,  
so it was more important  
not to contradict your elders  
than it was to get it right.

A certain homeroom teacher tried  
to tell our class one afternoon that porcupines  
were especially dangerous because they could shoot  
their quills. Perhaps she figured *releasing them* meant they shot  
them off like arrows – instead of simply *letting them go*.  
Apparently, the forests were full of pockmarked maples  
bleeding sap from their target practice.

I stuck my hand up: “Excuse me, but they just don’t.”  
I asked if she’d ever seen this, fully prepared  
to describe my uncles’ bounding Labs forever getting their  
snouts bashed by spiky tails – necessitating  
the gory deployment of pliers.

But she wouldn’t let me continue.  
And she wouldn’t let it go.  
When she strapped my hand for insolence,  
it felt like being stung by jellyfish.  
And I didn’t learn a damn thing.

*Only blonhards use blonguns.*

It wasn’t on the exam.

## MUSQUODOBOIT TO SHEET HARBOUR

So who's the family sneeze-blesser? And who knows when the joke's on you? The one about shooting six pheasants from the new car – then getting a call from a neighbour warning you some nut with a shotgun's on the road tonight.

Hell, in late Fridays from the city, we'd snort: "The more you drink, the straighter the road gets!" But that was only after we got in. Not to mention when you said you'd be coming / how often you've done this stretch / if the wind

goes down with the sun / what extra weight you've got in the trunk / how bald your tires are / and what's playing on the radio past Murphy's Cove. Knowing anyways how things and beings are going and doing, if only

"back there some." Meanwhile, off in those woods, animals whiter than winter completely ignore any engines in their distance – acceptance isn't endorsement. If your driver's still swearing, she's still paying attention:

Dusk moist tonight. Hanging over tomorrow's heads-up before real weather finally decides to arrive. Headlights, pairs of wolves' eyes, waiting us out. Chastened branches blanching, suspended in every curve's suspicious nature.

So look, I just wish I could convince you: minivans don't handle screams or squeals any better than microbuses did. And before this gorgeous vista takes the rest of your breath away, just know – that shoreline's older than any other

argument or answer.

## OLD ENOUGH TO REMEMBER

“C’est magnifique, mais ce n’est pas la guerre.”

– Marshal Pierre Bosquet, Watching the Charge  
of the Light Brigade, Balaclava, 1854

Millennium bells  
tolling another absolute until it catches up  
to everyone else. Measuring rounded zeroes when  
nobody dressed to the nines ever pays  
enough for what they’re trying to leave behind.

Disposed in your townhouse  
between analog nostalgia and digital dread – glimpsing  
consecutive time-zoned capitals pretending  
to blow up the sky – all those stiff jokers pledging peace  
with all that gunpowder exploding behind them.

All around and over. Yet here you still were  
at midnight – toasting yourselves  
in the outrageous effervescence from spidery hydrangeas  
instead of hydrogen mushrooms. Meanwhile,  
real concussions reinforce local barrage flashes bouncing

back from towering clouds you can now experience  
better than if you were actually there, whoever  
you probably are or maybe were. Come daylight, stray  
tanks smash up what’s left of your street  
on their way to other festivities....

## BIRDS ON REVERB

“There are no birds in last year’s nest.”

– Spanish Proverb

Studio 212, Toronto: preparing the latest impulses  
in a cove of possibilities  
with antennas instead of winter trees. Assessing  
how best to express the impression of forests breathing  
before that breakfast woodsmoke, clinging  
to crumbling chimneys, overtakes everything  
we seem to have to leave behind.

Including the world between each pair of ears.  
Three pairs become the audience surrogate, and all we have  
is the mix itself. If we don’t envision it, it’s unlikely  
you will. A conspiracy the bosses can’t begin to imagine  
resumes as soon as we close the door. And so  
we grow into the latest episode, loving this music more  
than anybody ever should.

Something meticulous waiting for the listener to discover  
as the bridging glissando dissolves  
into a wispy synthesizer note. Windless, leafless, the scene  
insists on starlings: their abraded air lifting  
all that familiar flittering since  
you have to be awake enough by now  
to sense they’re there.

And there has to be more to this  
than the latest figured facts. No item in time  
prevents you from inventing everywhere at once. So  
we wet down these invisible sampled wings,  
retuning their singing  
to the memory of a timeless longing – just enough  
to grace this freshly glistening morning.

## DAD'S BOXES

Tentative love on rainy days, spare sheets draped over  
bruised cardboard while you crawled,  
immersed on nimble daughterly knees, around  
hypothetical dolls between them.

Each holding concrete  
evidence of diligence or preoccupied negligence  
and perhaps even a kind of packrat patience, dusty drafts  
stuck together with rusty staples.

Those parts of him  
your mother never understood or stood for, departures  
retained to prove who he might've become but doesn't  
remember enough to look for now.

You noticed them gone  
afterwards, deep indents in the carpet almost longing for  
what was left unspoken on each moment of paper  
instead of just unsaid to you.