

The Heart's Underside

BETTY PONDER

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The Perfect Escape

Indigo

Skewer memories from the indigo of years back.
With precision probe and prick,
spread them for inspection like blobs of paint
circling a palette, slanted for inspection.
Mix and blend with a palette knife as
flat as tomorrow. Then colour with brushes
whose bristles are stout as a baby's stare and as
long-shafted as the years from eighteen.

Fill in the needful spaces of the heart,
the paint-by-numbers drawn with care
by fate and skittish wishes. Stroke brilliance
into spaces shaded grey with hurt
staying well within the lines of possibility.
The history manufactured here be true enough,
perfected by your own invention.

Riding the Chair Lift

In February by near eleven
the sun has clambered up the hill
to cast filamentous circles
around my goggle lenses
to lure me up and up on
chairs strung on silver wire
like some giant's charm bracelet
drawn by an impatient finger.
High we go through trees
heavy with rainbow crystals
as though travelling through
diamond facets, musical with breezes.
Showers of Jack Frost's sketches
swept from someone's window
drift on sunbeams as we pass
on swinging pendants against the sky.
Below, red and blue skiers
leave rhythmic snow carvings
and rooster tails of white as they dance
down and away from our ascent.
A lone voice calls from Florida
telling me it's seventy-five degrees
expecting me to be jealous.

Flies

Some days

I have the wistful inclination
to pluck them from the countertop,
transport them gently-wrapped to air
laced with sweet primordial heat
and the scent of yellow roses.

There they stumble into freedom
with tentative flight to they know not where,
confused by wind and slanting sunbeams.

Some days

I smash them with a lethal swatter,
curse the yellow guts they leave,
flick their black legs and crunchy bodies
into mounds with other corpses.

Their myriad eyes watch me from under
their broken wings, translucent angled.
They'll meet me another place they know
like under the awning at St. Peter's gate.

Brides on the Beach
Jamaica

Clutching bunched roses
in one pale arm outstretched,
they float among the bikini clad
trailing veils their skirts billowing
seaward making them weightless
like angels longing to be seen.

Newly minted husbands
shuffle-toe three steps behind,
hair coiffed to the max,
sure only of the wilting rose
pinned to their heaving lapels.
Eyes front, eyes on the prize.

The bikini girls tan, rub oil
on bodies as sleek as seals,
their bums and breasts like fruit
held together with strings.
Observing their own long legs
they look to the sea. Not yet, they say.

My Friend Says

My friend eats peanut butter sandwiches
while watching CNN's take
on blood running in rivulets
along the cracks in Kirkuk's cobbles,
the crimson never clear enough
to comprehend lest America's mothers
cry foul, and remove their sons
from the slaughter of dark-eyed
children. Babies lost in rubble.

Then my friend's gaze wanders
to the puffed grey squirrel, tail
arching like a feathered fiddlehead
above black polished seeds.
The long-billed nuthatch dines there too,
upside down, happy to gaze
at the squirrel's shell-pink ears between nibbles,
content in the sway of a breeze-nudged feeder.
'They live to be friends,' my friend says.

"Why can't we," she says.

"Because," I say.

The flash of a red squirrel slices air
as he leaps to snatch the morning's
luncheon, his to hide in case of need.
He knows he owns all present goodies
because he's strong and fast and has big guns
like some I know. Those born
to take because they can.

"That's why," I say.

The Reverend Doctor

There is the matter of robes.
The Iroquois Chief wears feathers.
The African Healer wears
animal teeth and nose piercing.
The Coach wears a whistle.
My Minister wears robes
with a black flowing mantle.
He beckons us to attention
calls himself Reverend Doctor
but professes to be an atheist
no longer pushing the divine.
Now he is a Reverend revering
something else, maybe the wind.

Escapes (His and Hers)

He lays down that filament line,
gossamer like spider's web,
stretched on winds to float and bobble
and sink a little with a green-jewelled fly,
feathers dancing to highland eddies.
The easing of fingers drawn in
at the perfect tempo to agitate fish.
Yesterday is gone and there is no tomorrow.
This a perfect hope and a consuming escape.
She heard him say it.

There floats the mountain's white.
Its height dwarfing her as she stands atop
and yet she's a god. Below her
mogulled snow promise her skis
air, as she rides their knife-edges, her
tummy sampling carved turns like a
motorcycle rider hanging the balance,
speed in her throat, the dance of down.
She's found it again, the perfect escape.
He heard her say it.

The Heart's Underside

Lonely

If

lonely descends like a fanged surprise
when you wake alone to your grey plaster walls
still clinging to dreams of lovers and bluebells
that escape like make-believe to the heart's underside.

Then go to the ocean where sandpipers drift,
and your song startles eagles riding the wind.
Leave a string of prints for waves to nibble,
where clams burble when you pass
and bloodworms await a rising tide.
And when your spaniel bounces about your knees
pleading for play, a stick thrown perhaps,
then you can't be lonely. You are tuned
to what lives for one more day.

The Farm's Ballad

My son-in-law thinks he owns this farm,
its haze of blue when berries ripen
in rough patches hedged by pines
whose mossy approaches silence steps
of wary foxes and hungry bears.

But forgotten souls claim the winds
that undulate fields and ripple ponds
that dream of fish, though
claimed by frogs who call for love.

Once, a rock-strewn cavity
held a home as in its hand
before sickness stalked
the souls within, sucked blood,
gutted bodies too smashed
with grief to want to live.

The neighbours burned the house of death,
left a fence that wandered to daisies
where they buried the family
in a circle of graves marked by rocks
around a young oak tree.

Now knobbly roots knit bones,
branches strum a song of ownership
while winds blow over fields of oats,
over frog ponds that dream of fish
and rattle the fence that leads to nowhere.

Grief

Sometimes the sun sits low
behind spaced pines that
mark my way, shooting spears
of light at intervals, orchestrated
by the speed at which my tires take me,
flick and pause, flick and pause,
a tattoo of energy too hurtful
for my eyes to bear. When closed
eyes wait for the reprieve of darkness.

So it is with grief that knives
with points as sharp as any tool.
It's in my heart it strikes, that
place nestled under ribs where
sorrow skewers drawn breath like
popping a pale balloon. My body
wilts searching for some distraction,
devising its own reprieve of twilight
to mark intervals of where I go.

Poppy Day for Some

Her rheumy eyes absorb
the likeness of a boy imaged in a 2x3,
frayed and brown with fingering,
taken some sixty years ago and more
before bombs fell and fire took
her world in one gigantic gulp.
Now, ankles crossed, she rocks,
her hours, seemingly in tune with
the changing swing of moons
and the laughter of someone else's child.

Remembrance Day in Canada
eyes front, aged men march
as strength allows to granite shrines
where etched names immortalize
ghost brothers who with courage
lost their game to poppy fields.
Now paper poppies adorn breasts
as pipers play a remembrance dirge.
Such love, such pride, such celebration.
I heard one veteran say of Normandy,
'It was like the Stanley Cup and Grey
together mixed, and I was there.'
So he won, cheated death
and lived to receive his laurel dues.

She rocks alone, no medals fingered,
no songs of honour sung for her.
Each day ends as it began
the boy's photo beside the flower pot.

Henry

Henry hadn't phoned for a while. I missed his drunken guffaws, always ending the conversation with 'that's the way the cookie crumbles and the mop flops.' We had partied lots, he and his wife and myself, drinking warm scotch while he played the guitar. Myrna wasn't much of a drinker though and she would wander off to some wifely chore like retrieving clothes from the line. They lived behind the small apartment building that I owned and Henry had been its caretaker until he became less than reliable.

The last time I spoke with him was one hellish cold night under a frail moon. The phone call arrived around the time I was about to close down the day.

'My wife left me,' he said, 'left a while ago and I have no car.' I knew she didn't drive so I assumed rightly that he had either misplaced the car or lost his licence. 'My daughter brings frozen stuff for me to eat, and I'm not feeling so good these days, I think I got something.' Yes sure, I thought. Probably the shakes that were in need of a top-up.

'Could you drive me to the gin mill.' Good god, I thought. Did he honestly think I would be happy to drive him through the dark night to get his fix. Yes, he did and he knew I would.

The last time I saw him was with his arms heavy with jugs when I dropped him off on his porch as I said 'good-night, and have a good one.'

There were no more calls. A month slid by. Eventually I contacted one of his neighbours. 'Where is Henry,' I asked. 'It isn't like him not to leave a phone message or little song about how the mop flops.'

'He died,' she said. 'Simple as that,' she said. 'About a month ago. His daughter found him curled up like a baby at the bottom of the stairs. Never made it up to bed. Died of a heart attack they said with the bottle empty in his hand. And his wife, Myrna, she left long ago, not that I blame her, poor dear,

couldn't stand the loneliness of an alcoholic marriage I guess. Maybe it was the shame. I'll give you her address if you like.'

When I found her, Myra was as I remembered, a little vague but smiling. 'I'm sorry about Henry,' I said. 'I didn't know.'

'Yes,' she said. 'It was in the *Gleaner*. It was the night he got all that booze. They didn't find him for a while and I wasn't there. I couldn't let him see me like this. I'll soon be totally blind now so I had to leave him. I couldn't let him be worrying about me stumbling around like I am. I loved him you see and he couldn't take care of me. I know he loved me and I thought the kindest thing was not to tell him. He never knew. He died not knowing.'

My Dying Fish

He is old, his years now spun to twenty.
His body hovers like a freckled moon between
midnight and dawn, the iridescence muted,
the flash lost somewhere through time.
A button eye as black as coal watches as he pivots
sucking and pumping water through gills gone soggy.
Working to live he waits, his stare skewers mine.

Does he understand that plastic plants anchored
in bright pebbles are meant as kelp-like seaweed,
that suffusing life, the air pump spewing bubbles is a
waterfall,
and his buddies huddled nose to tail are his comfort-school,
His flowers now are made of concrete, black with algae.
This abode I give to placate him for walls transparent enough
to engender dreams of some other world.

All this so he can pleasure me with showy splashes against
a painted backdrop when I deliver grubs, pellets that float.
This so I can have his beating heart to tend and therefore
love.

I impose my outline across his world this one last time,
his ebbing life flutters along our connection
moored heavy with his accusation and forgiveness
now that he is too weak to skitter at my shadow.
We wait.

Memories

Once she sought experiences,
peered into corners of dark closets
with remorseless diligence.
Probing at frailties she threaded needs
like coloured beads: red for passion,
purple for weeping, black for loss placed
next to white for breath
and yellow for terror.
But where was anger?
There was none, who could afford it.

She collected memories as jewels
in brain pockets for future scrutiny
when in the winter of old age
she would gloat
and finger them one by one
saying she had missed nothing.

But with racing years, stored treasures
lost their brilliance, became clouded
under the light of conscience,
became fragile with repetition
ground to powder with excuses.
They were lost to the most diligent of recall,
like dust from a feather mop,
leaving only today and today and today.

Little Garden

Body Messages

My ears hear
the wind's sigh that lofts gull's screams
and the shuffle of pebbles nudged by waves.
And when the lake mirrors morning
my ears understand the loon wailing
between hills like loneliness put to music.

But it's my feet that bring me another song.
Laced boots that resonate the child's tune,
the whisper of curled leaves piled so high
a girl could get lost in the love of a sky
seen from under, through a lattice of brown
laced with the fragrance of sweet mould.

My eyes see
the raindrops that wander the windowpane,
in hesitation merging into rivers that speed
to splash on butterfly wings and flower beds
and spider webs and the red worms
that will die on tomorrow's scorching earth.

But it's my feet that splash rainbows.
Yellow boots that stamp waterways
meandering the ditches, and mud dams appear
sure to impede the hurtle of stick boats.
I sample the depth of velvet lined pools
so clear one's foot might sink to China.

My forehead knows
cold that pounds like a fist in wind that snatches
breath from lungs and pastes tears to eyelashes,
sometimes strangling buds in a crystal shell.
And there is snow that muffles street racket
when it falls huge and soft to blanket cedars.

But my feet know the lure of black ice

as a platter to run to where I stride and slide.
And my skis dance the rhythms of down
through troughs and hillocks over squeaking snow
carving my hill into patterns that speak
of a beating heart and pure transparent joy.

The Story of Eyes

My excellent brother says
Surely I didn't morph from apes,
lose my dangling arms and disagreeable bum,
and those yellow teeth anchored in bristly chin.
Not me, he says, I was fashioned by gods
to be as I am to praise deities,
and bear witness to perfection,
to inherit the Universe.

I'll tell you of the workings
of a half billion years,
about the apes and me
and you too, my brother.
When our reptile ancestors
crawled away from the sea
they knew colours to be
of undreamed numbers.
more numerous than those
found in my diamond's flair,
colours that fattened the stripes
of the morning rainbow
and shimmered mud flats
from haze to opulence.

Then some creatures grew huge
to dinosaur dimension
prodigious enough to claim
the sun as their own.

We, our ancestors, hid
in the black niches
shivering in our smallness,

lost perception to monotonous
and moon-splashed grey
but we alone survived
when the great meteor struck
and the air darkened.
The green hills died
and the winds clawed at our shelters
till we learned how to grow fur
and warm blood to pump.
We found the courage to wander
again into sunbeams
to enjoy again the flash
of our now reduced rainbow
but never again the brilliance beyond.

At dusk the birds sing
to those colours we've lost.
Their mates parade pinions
of unimagined hues,
and bright leg bands
and come-hither bills.
We're jealous of course but
are buffered by infallibility.
When the gods said
let there be light
they meant let there be colour
with an additional gift
for birds, and salamanders
and snakes that slither.

The Sea

Toward my beach
ladder rungs of waves barrel roll,
growing in grandeur as they
suck the ocean floor, advancing,
spitting froth from lacy lips
anxious to be lapping at high ground.
Sweeping tongues tear
shuffling gravel in a bristle
of chatter like tiny teeth
sucked back into the next wave
now grown huge and thrashing
with proximity to a promised peace.
Bloodworms burrow deep
and blue muscles clump and cling
to beaded seaweed, rubbery in attachment
to rocks that margin the shore.

And no birds fly.
The air too thick with salt,
and wailing winds undulate
in frequencies that seagulls
understand as well as I.
We wait for the rogue wave
counting in sevens.
I know it's gathering strength
beyond the farthest rung.

The Larva and the Parasite

Exposed while munching a pink petal
the larva works back and around
embroidering into lace the edge of space
with nibbles and kisses, much tuned
to the moist beat of the rose who gives him
perfume knowing well there is enough for all.

A small hinged wasp, black with intent
finds him warmly hunched in succulence
and sweet with promise of a boudoir nursery.
Dancing with determination she finds her spot
and pierces with a spike of ovipositor
a perfect puncture in which to drop her
babe of egg that soon becomes a mouth and more.

The baby parasite feeds working deep
on beating cells, its mandibles studious
in consumption of cringing life until
its black head bulges and its own white
self has grown too gigantic to hide
beneath the larva's parchment skin
now crumpled like a spent balloon.

When all is dry and crinkled brown
the intruder leaves its head as gift of residence
then rolls apart to form a perfect oval
palely waxen, resplendent in simplicity till
it morphs into a folded duplication of
her mother, hoping to unfold before the sun,
her own tarsi and splendidly veined wings.

The Ant and Me in Autumn

In autumn the fireball sun
slants light into shadows
stretched to impossible lengths
anchored by trees resembling
giant club moss black and regular
that shelters my yellow-lined highway
built by others to cross the planet.
Like my brother ant who follows
his own kin's scent-markings through
club moss, we two pause to
scan the sky looking for clouds
and the reason for going.

Requiem

Nose down as though hooked by pebbles, body rigoured.
Death claims him with the first fingers of morning.
And other fish huddle well apart, for comfort fin to fin.
They stare in flat-eyed anxiety, immobile, gills atremble.

His body unexpectedly heavy to my fingertips
gathers my attendance with an eye not yet opaque,
fins spiked into symmetry, perhaps surprise,
demanding to know his final resting place, his bier.

Inching through snow, I could lay him on the fence
for plundering ravens, screaming and flapping
to trail guts in flight to the bare oak tree.
Or a passing bald eagle might be hungry enough.

But no, the snow is too deep and the sun too strong
for stinking fish even for some other creature's delight.
I enclose him in plastic wrap for my freezer,
to await the garbage truck which comes in two weeks.

The Garden

Little garden, you think to sleep
now that frosts have nipped you once.
You'll rest till spring when the sun
rides higher than the arbour vines
that shelter you from busy winds.

This day I bring you gifts of love.
Ashes grey as dusk seep through
my fingers layering a film
of what was once a lop-eared dog
now yours to nurture marigolds
and forget-me-nots and maybe
catnip for a wandering cat.

Illusions

My eyes swing to
what might be brown birds,
that sweep and careen
in a drunken dance
in an effort to settle on
mounds of snow stretched
like a down quilt
laid out after shaking.
There under the noon sun
these birds sink into graves,
transfixed and crucified.
Nothing but leaves shed
by the tenacious oak
who hoards her trove
past the time for giving.

Pheasant Preserve

I see entrails balloon
as polished grapes
rouged and glistening
between the flying stuff
and spikes of feathers
as Owen skins. The dog's
rapt nose probes blood
on skin pulled taut with ripping
towards a head as beautiful
as a Christmas bauble
hanging quivering beyond
the table's edge. Its
crimson eye pasted on
green as dark as cedars.

Before this morning's
work of knives when
freed from his cage,
he flew arrow straight,
dissecting the sky
into halves of blue.
His rasping cackles
announced his joy,
as giddy with hope
he scampered
through grasses
golden with sunlight

not understanding
he was bred only
for the sixteen-gauge
and the hunter's table.

Her Kind

Bread

Flour clings to old cracked palms
as she kneads life into rising dough.
These same hands were surprised
by love when she was young
and sought to educate all who'd listen.

Then she found him who was hungry
for a hearth when winter came
and he was lonely.

Her virgin's bread was heady as
was the promise of his bed.

She married him, rode to his tune
and tossed her dreams of saving natives
from bedevilment through holy words
and redemptive signs. She forgot her books
and bore him a child with raven hair
whom he named after the girl he once loved
as a connection to his own lost dreams.

Janie

Pretty Janie knows
the stranger's outstretched hand
bearing candy will snatch her
should her eyes wander.
She understands her parent's hand that
guides her home from the yellow bus
to a television that splashes
blood on the streets and doles out Viagra,
sometimes shows an African lion, or alligator
nosing in a swamp somewhere.

Does she long for the sweet waft
of blossoms when the wind dances?
Will her mother tell her of her own
long-ago swing in the old apple tree
whose teetered seat could carry toes
into a canopy of green that scattered
sun blobs like petals on knees
when pumping to the rhythm of a song
as old as grandmothers.

*How do you like to go up in the swing
Up in the air so blue
Oh I do think it is the pleasantest thing
that only a child can do.*

Catherine

I remember her, attention held with the intensity
of a puppy, her back stooped, fingers
outstretched seeking to absorb through touch
what her eyes embraced — the all of it —
the flat splashes of brilliant petals nestled in
the fairy fonts of the portulaca, the flower
of her heart found in the shade
of the old elm when summer comes. It's her
flower, hidden unless sought out.
She is love.

She herself was sought when a girl,
lured into a marriage enormous
in its demands for giving
in another woman's house,
another woman's babies,
a man wedded to his life's work.

Her complaints hid behind a smile as
open as the first beams of morning
as she chased each speck of dust,
lined kids up in their Sunday best,
beat rugs on the clothesline,
and yet she had her protest ways.
She was late. Late for the school concert,
late for the doctors' appointments, late for church,
late for the movies on Saturday night.
And while the world waited in annoyance
at what they could not control, she smiled.

Women of Nepal

Women polish what they must
to transfer hours into gold.
She shines brass pots with roadside dust.

Back braced against the wind that gusts,
she picks up gravel round and bold.
Women polish what they must.

When I rinse with water bits of rust,
a drying cloth lets my face unfold.
She shines brass pots with roadside dust

No water hers or soap's cream crust.
She squats, palms red with stones she holds.
Women polish what they must.

Our eyes converge clear with trust.
Her pots reflect the sun she holds.
She shines brass pots with roadside dust.

Our lots in life may seem unjust
as reasons for our lives unfold.
Women polish what they must,
She shines brass pots with roadside dust.

For Maryanne

Would that I could place my palm
against your heart to shield it from
that shaft of hurt for a beat or two
to give you breath.

When the season was ready
you unfolded your petals
like a tulip, eager to believe what
his lips murmured at dawn,
that he would love you forever.

The rains came without thunder.
He witnessed you as tattered,
or so he said as he hurried on
to search for the perfect one.
Crumpled he left you.

Lay out the pain for viewing.
Regard its shape with care.
Let it bring you what it must,
the underside of tomorrow's joy.
It will never leave you.

Casual Funeral

Six yellow roses as requested
with her last breath, wilted,
never to be pressed
in any daughter's bible.
I too was there when the family
gathered in the empty church,
their faces eager for the end of ritual.
The air was void of ragged loss
or happy stories meant to reinvent
what might have been.

My memory sieved through
thirty years hoping to recognize
a kinship for a homage to be proffered
in some bundled words.
One time I sat by her fire,
drank her tea, knew her home
to be anchored in the earth
rich with pine needles,
comfortable in its aloneness,
attended by deer.

Still I mourn a life so distant
that no friend rose to cry a loss.
She planned it this way, I think,
perhaps hoping no one
would notice that she was gone.

*Happenings at Ste Anne's Court,
(gracious retirement living)*

And the band plays on. Actually the band is a high-tech keyboard that produces anything from sonatas to hard rock in the tones of many instruments. The middle-aged operator with a singing voice like an angel is hugely pot bellied and dressed in a round necked undershirt. He manipulates the machine with fat fingers and sings much-loved oldies like Danny Boy and Chattanooga Choo Choo to orchestrated rhythms much to the delight of his aging audience. Gerry has come to entertain the old folks, at least those who might be classified as elderly by anyone younger than seventy years of age. They are positioned in a semicircle in the atrium. The sun pours in from above this being the afternoon. They clap to the beat, some perched on their walkers, some snuggled into the flowered sofas with their feet well raised. Most of the audience have long since relinquished their driving licences so attention to entertainment on the part of management is a necessity.

There are lives brimming with stories here, most of them untold or unheard as memory is dulled and hearing declines. But there is caring.

There is Paula, a little French lady who was once a geneticist. Her understanding of the world has been lost somewhere. She wanders incessantly, inside and out, always dressed in a heavy black sweater clutching a shopping bag. Her few words are delivered with anger. She is mostly avoided though is invariably assisted when disoriented.

But music finds another Paula. Someone reaches for her hand and leads her into the middle of the circle. She is wearing little red dancing shoes with silver buckles, and she dances head back with impossibly intricate steps, laughing in the afternoon sunlight, perhaps remembering herself as a girl who skipped in the park or a with a lover who cared. The beat carries her

round and about through air like the fragile creature she is. The audience breaths with her, absorbing her happiness, knowing they will never forget her as she might have been.

The music weaves memories of phrases once whispered or strummed or danced in all those who sat there in the sun that day: You are so Beautiful, I'll be Seeing You, I'll Hang my Heart on a Weeping Willow Tree, The Camptown Races. More of the audience venture into the centre of the of the circle, some struggling out of their walkers, some holding hands of support, feet often moving a little behind the beat and so they danced. A newly formed pair of lovers try out their new liaison unsure of their steps perhaps remembering bygone partners, curious as to where this one is going.

Then at the last come the Robinsons; she has been ill, quietly weakening. Both are tall and slender. He tucks her head under his chin, their bodies merge as they have always done, his hand flat against her back leads her through the remembered steps. It's a gentle melody. They dance slowly with elegance, their eyes on each other, then closed. They are twenty again, remembering and treasuring all the steps in their long lives. The circle understands. When the song ends the circle weeps for the beauty of it.

The Journey

The curious Child
delights in daisy petals that do-si-do
round a golden button,
and when she finds iridescent pathways
at her feet left by meandering slugs
in search of home, she finds
she can touch rainbows made by
chubby horned creatures
as pale as bread dough.
She knows the death rattle
of June bugs under lights
and the hum of bees when nectar is warm
and time slides on orchestrated
by the rythms of her heart.
She is besotted with being.

When a Girl,
she steps into a world of promises
that cast lines to her like a fisherperson
playing a feathered lure to provoke
pursuit as irresistible to her
as a rubber ball bouncing
ahead of a happy puppy.
And just over the hill playing
in and out of her horizon,
the coloured orange of success
bobs like a wayward sun,
now you see me, now you don't,
catch me if you can.
I'm yours,
perhaps.

When a Woman
she scrambles to ingest her dream,
scratch her route with high heels and fingernails
bloodied with exhaustion. She'll climb
mountains only to see more barrens
where bodies rest covered with burnout.
She'll attend to power as to an idol,
proffering support, well understanding
spinoff, and she'll do crazy things like
take a lover just to paint one more day
red with memories or drive a race car
at high speed
till tires disintegrate.

When Old,
the lady views what remains
with wonder, her worldly space as empty
of ambition as a stringed
cat's cradle, her voice
muffled in the urgent yang of youth.
Yet the heart of a girl as young
as morning beats on with love
for the grass's struggle to seed,
for the hawk moth splayed on her window,
love for the rightness of things
that stretches to clouds
in a sky so blue it could be an ocean.
She again sees daisies with petals
that do-si-do round yellow.

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The artist, Jill Langford, studied art in England and textile design in Norway before settling in Parrsboro, Nova Scotia, where she is a member of an artist's co-operative. Her Dancing Beggar's Studio explores the mystical and the mythical with images that resonate with the art lover, using vibrant colour and pattern. The original paintings reproduced in this book and cover are 14 x 20 inches, mixed media and ink on paper.