

Barefoot
Through the
Pickybushes



K.L. McKay

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Poems.

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Meeting Paul Bunyan

bushcamp, muscadine mansweat
your abundance a breath's width
arboreal abounding we are

harboured ancient hamadryad
I held your hand through planted
husbandry endless falls of pining

together we carve legends into wood
paint fingers lips and tongues
blue as your bull blood red as my

béguin I am axefall the timbre
of your voice clutching
bare the branches

S.O.S.

the squeal of tricycle wheels
and the soft sonar blip
of petals turning towards
the sun

there are satellites in my
backyard searching
signs of spring and
the first flight out of here

I miss e.t. and his
reeses pieces I miss
the tree we hid my brother's
 pornos under

this city knows nothing
of the wilds of my childhood
it has never run
barefoot through the pickybushes

I've filled my bathtub with
blithe gerbera daisies
and all my digits bleed
bright red

We All Sn()fall

*in memory of John Newlove
Manx Pub, Ottawa, Jan. 11, 2004*

i.

tonight we run with the wolves

the wind-swept snow peaks to the
points
where teeth have ground
sharp to the kill

the pack apace

nip with need and razor wire

boil in a chromatic chill
it was the summer before
we were rabid

ii.

my head swells with the petulant
pulse and the night

is numb in the face

muffle snuffed
a candle thumbed
short of breath

even snow
 falls

however muted
this season

iii.

what time can never bring

us back

a room peppered to grey ex-
amorists pharos

fading

can not stand still

it never did

as we cartwheel
through the prairies high on
wooden horses and youth

time stampedes on
though some may drop

before wherefore

to beat

each

other to

a leave and

not be left

Pipère

my grandfather
was a butcher
at the Dominion grocery store
in Kirkland Lake

he lived surrounded by
meat his work hung heavy
as a faith against
his chest

the day after pay day
he would fly his empty billfold
like a bird over the heads
of his children

Mimère

on Sundays
my great-grandmother's kitchen
hummed

a factory
of sung blessings
hands that heeled the dough

from this no man's land
through

clots of children
awestricken and peripheral she

emerged bountiful as
summer fruit bound beneath
pastry quilts
and lattice work

this laborious sabbath
afforded her

plotting ground
for a self she left
unsown

Three Ravens

danced through the air
on the day you were
born

diving wheel-like
their cries put
the midnight shine
in your eyes

when you were taken
just one dark
shadow followed

carrying long ribbons
of wind in your wake

(Bear)

I dreamt of our foetus
a tiny brown
bear
curled
into my stomach

the sun was a
tall star
high above me

and I knew
one day
we would have to
return it home
more north
and wilder
than our love

Basmati Rain

i.

basmati rain
rice strewn at steeple foot
a party long gone

confetti is the memory
of snow
falling
twice removed

when the weather
folds
flashing
back

ii.

gems dangle like drops
of green rain electric and alive
each one holds a journey /or
the name of a lover

iii.

the pebbles in my hand
each hardrock worn by time
is a life I haven't lived

iv.

I've landed
gasping
belly-up

six months after
plans for a new set of wings

This Blood-Pink Towel

i.
this blood-pink towel
hanging magnified
becomes
living
sponge a tongue

ii.
in your absence I
remember licking
dry your body
kissing pearls of
perspiration

Heat

our summer flapped /through
the backseat
like a trapped bird

and out the rear-view mirror

we clung to the heat that hung
/in the air
tangled and urgent /like
sex in small places

as if we could /pry
the crease from
backward glances

with a gesture /split the moment
between furrows
and futures

I held my breath to the hot white beat

my hand flew / backward
out the window
freeing an apple core
releasing the season

Mining

i.
what comes with engagement
down deep

what's yours
what's mine

ii.
with a tongue like time
he could split
diamonds
so delicate / so deliciously refined
and shining

iii.
that's how it is in these northern towns
they'll do anything for a buck

Bury Us

alive
mouths tangled
full of dirt
awkward angled limbs
snuggled into mud

bones
on bones
our closeness
blooms
we shoot up
brighter still
sage
ageless
evergreens

Love Letter to Martin Tielli

dear martin,

do you remember how our bodies mingled
in the back of an orange 69
volkswagen to your voice lulling
a school boy's suicide

do you remember the way my
adolescent body writhed beneath
the time and the tunes an early 90s afternoon
a memory of you has stayed stuck to
the back of my tongue all these years

and did you see me, last week, martin, at your show

how we've changed perhaps both for the worse

though the music never will,
I found 3 grey hairs today
and awoke with a hang over

I fell asleep again to your
20-something machissimo smile
the way you drove a Steinberger pulse
split-collared through me

is this how we are growing, martin
time measured in packs
of smokes my only fan letter
since your felt carnation
folded

dear martin,
beauty on

Dry Longing

tell me
how you miss your home the sea

and the globe that spins around it
dark islands that turn through your dreams
from you and when you're planted

tell me
of the dogwood that gnarl the rock
how they've clutched you like
sheets of dry longing and a constant leaving

tell me
how you ache for the wet lap
of the mist and the wind
coming hard upon you

like this draw me into
your drink and your thirst
with briny abandon overwhelm
the flood-tide that's left me

flotsam forgotten

Agawa Pictographs

There is a sense of complicity the way the lake
flanks this rock face shielding ancient knowledge
in swells of grace and temper

Drawn here the water line is high hallowed
it receives forever the magnetic mineral pull
waves that crash in to sweep me under

I embark canoe teetered on slate tooth teasing
a death cold bath By foot the vantage is blind
I crawl in reverent my presence bartered

The waves' arms cradle stories I seek Remember
traditions founded on a wet bed, the birth of a nation
Bring tobacco, burn sweet grass, sage, and cedar

High walls loom tall planted deeper beneath
(the water glass a base that falls fathoms)

Nestled between ageless cliffs and unyielding sea
are a people's histories Their lines pull the ochre
earth blood on finger tip a frayed animal bone

I am borne upon this lithic dispatch
dialogues hidden for generations

To Sleep in Six Cities

i.

in less than a week

ottawa

sault ste. marie

wawa thunder bay

edmonton jasper

is to fly

your hand

slowly

eyes closed

over the creased

flesh

of my passage

ii.

each town a memory

made or not yet born

my canadian shield

rolling mineral hills

rising waves from

a vastness of lakes

and a taller range lifting

trees I can tell

from their roots

iii.

if you bend to read

this topography

of assembled

dreams

you will hear me

softly, barefoot

singing down my prayers

at the beginning

of my seventh sleep

Cutpaper Dolls

dance me
sing me
deep into sleep
carry me
carry me
carry me deep

floating out
from beneath the net
of childhood song
she comes

a girl
whose hand I held she is
many girls turning
frame by frame a blur

yes many girls now a stream
of cutpaper dolls
repeating repleating through
longsummer nights

dance me
sing me
deep into sleep
carry me
carry me
carry me deep

unfold us now at my side
goodnight
goodnight

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Friday
Circle

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