

LAND OF SILENT SUNDAYS



Chrystia Hnatiw
Gloria Kupchenko Frolick
Lydia Palij

LAND OF SILENT SUNDAYS by Gloria Frolick, Chrystia Hnatiw and Lydia Palij
The "silences" caught in these poems by three Ukrainian-Canadian women speak eloquently of the lives of several generations of their people and their fight for survival.

They sing, these poets, not with answers, but with questions, and it is the questions, ultimately, that matter. In Gloria Frolick's "This Tangled Garden" the voice of a concentration-camp survivor wonders about her father's choice to send his son to England but keep his daughters with him: "Ann and I often wondered / why Father didn't try / to save us too; - / why he didn't send us away." And Lydia Palij, wondering what is left when love is over, thinks of her grandmother who tied her love letters with a pink ribbon and placed them in the attic: "what shall I do, since I have no attic?" The questions are intensely personal, but the gift apparent in this graceful collection is to make the reader feel them hauntingly as her own. Saddened by the Ukrainian famine and the Jewish Holocaust, Chrystia Hnatiw questions the recent tensions between Ukrainians and Jews by asking "Why all this now, when Sabbath candles glow?"

Darlene Madott, formerly associate
literary editor for *Toronto Life*

The "silences" caught in these poems by three Ukrainian-Canadian women speak eloquently of the lives of several generations in our time. This century has suffered war, revolution, imprisonment and resettlement on an epic scale: the emotional power in these poems allow the reader to share in these experiences, while the compelling freshness of the imagery opens new ways of seeing. These new voices demand – and deserve – a hearing.

Patricia Morley, author of
Kurelek. A Biography (1986)

"Each poem in this book has something important to yield."

Anneli Susanne Pekkonen



WILLIAMS-WALLACE PUBLISHERS

LAND OF SILENT SUNDAYS

by

CHRYSTIA HNATIW

GLORIA KUPCHENKO FROLICK

LYDIA PALIJ



WILLIAMS-WALLACE PUBLISHERS

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CHRYSTIA HNATIW

Chrystia Hnatiw was born in Slovakia of Ukraine parents who came to Canada after the Second World War. She majored in Slavic Studies and taught school in Manitoba. *Land Of Silent Sundays* is her first book. She lives in Toronto.



* * *

When in the breadbasket
of Europe
Ukrainian peasants
starved to death
the world was silent
as it was
when your people
perished
in the horrors of Dachau
as Nazi soldiers
drank "to life"
in brassy cabarets

When the King of Aryans
unfurled his Master Plan
we both
were targeted for extinction
and so our parents fled
the haunting sirens
the hideous war
leaving their loved ones
behind
your died in Treblinka
mine lived a hell
in the Siberian snows

Yet now
our communities
wage a paper war
the battle lines are drawn
armed with statistics
briefs
and testimonies
we count
the dead
was it the famine

the holocaust
that had more dead:
whose trauma was greater?

Why all this now
when Sabbath candles glow
and bread is plenty?

YEVHENIA

The Moscow - Montreal
ticket
guaranteed you nothing
after two wars
and three regimes
you packed one suitcase
uprooting yourself
from Sambir
you left your world
to be with children
who by then
were strangers
you feared
that bombs
had killed
your children...
That summer
when you said
so simply
"It's me your
Babunia"*
you weren't
a stranger to me
it was as if
you had been away
on a long vacation

* Grandmother in Ukrainian

* * *

You were
a black-eyed Susan
a butterfly
your mother
longed to heal
your fragile wings
hoping
for warmer days
after the winter's
bitter prairie winds
I didn't know Vera
that when you died -
you'd take away
those lilac bushes
that fragrance
of our childhood

* * *

When a friend's death
brought
an ache
that wouldn't let go
it was a golden fall
in the townships
the autumn mists
the fragrance
of leaves burning
that beckoned me
carrying me through the pain
promising me
that the two of you
would share stories
I hoped
that you would tell him
about his father's death
that
you would stop
long enough
to listen
to his pain
I prayed
that the bottle of gin
would stay closed.

Tugging away
at your shortsleeved shirt
you blushed
as I bombarded you
in my Faculty of Education voice
accusing you of lying
about the reason
for the late assignment
after all
I was the city bred woman
for whom your small town
was then a prison
a town of no horizons
of the lonely whistles
of trains
that never stopped
Yet you
ignored my anger
inviting me
to share your home
a two room shack
six children
a cradle above an old stove
and stacks of wheat
I knew your notes
had not been forged
and yet I was silent
it's I who
placed the daisies
on your grave

KATERYNA
(For My Grandparents)

You stood alone
under a parasol
of weeping willow rain
as migrant trains
set out for promised lands
You were a pioneer woman
left behind
to the mercy of time
wondering
if he would
send for you
worrying
that your shawl
would be
too old
too frayed
for Amerika
I would have
bought you
the brightest
the warmest shawl
for that cold journey
now
in the silence
of Sundays
I weave for you
with words
a wreath of sunlit tears

* * *

On that wintery night
when brandy warmed
our lives
you dragged me
out of my cocoon
saying
that I would
dream again
unravelling my fears
you spun
a web for yourself

* * *

When memories
knocked
on the hotel door
I used
the safety lock -
determined
not to give in
again
to feelings
for you
the next morning
it was your eyes
that I saw
on a mannequin

* * *

When your beloved son
came home
with a small town lady
you smothered me
with sugary words
and gifts
unable to hide
your true feelings
you left your laments
for the night
when the sirens
of shrill police cars
were drowned out
by your staccato voice
what hurt the most
was his silence

* * *

Both of us
were raw
from pain
lashing out
stripped
of gentleness
we said
our tense goodbyes
boarding
the same plane
seated at opposite ends
we became strangers
so quickly

* * *

I eavesdropped
on their love
the subway ride
less lonely
his teasing caressed her
into laughter
when they left
their white canes
seemed so light

* * *

By now
the rest of the world
has thrown away
its Christmas trees
cluttering
the backlanes
of Winnipeg
with silver icicles
by now
it is my Christmas
we bring
the fragrance
of freshly cut pines
in to the Senior citizens home
clean, sanitary floors
a circle of lonely wheelchairs
and as we carol
about happiness
and love
I notice Petro
standing apart
at the phone booth
just as last year
dialing the homes
of his three sons
"you know what kids are like
there must be a reason they're not here
I'm glad it's not long distance"
It's only
a five minutes distance
to the homes
of his three boys
with their good jobs
and nice houses

I walk with Petro
to his room
by now a haven
from the nostalgia
of carols
his hand still moist
his dime still tired
he sits down quietly
placing his dime
into a tin box
overflowing
with other dimes
with other reasons

PSYANKA*

Take me
and in this soft
spring rain
give me
to your grandmother
gently
before the Easter hymns
at dawn
when Nina bathed me
in rainbow's
I whispered to her
that I wanted
the soft tones
of the earth and wheatfields
I've always feared
a future
of glasses cases
in museums
I wanted
so much
to be given

* Ukrainian Easter egg

MYKOLA

"Right here lady
this is where the poor folk
were buried
cardboard boxes
hell who had money
maybe your grandfather's here
who knows!"
he walks
past rows
of pauper's graves
most of them
unmarked
Who knows?
... All right New York
let's make a deal
I won't run
this time
I'll stay
in this jungle
if you give me
a clue
or better still
find him
send him
to me
I'll be there
in the musty archives

MICHAYLO

A Warsaw street
you're in a shabby coat
high boots
that package in your hand
the only photo
that we have of you
has woven stories
about that package
a gift for us
your grandchildren
I dreamed
that you met us
at the train station
we loved you
we soothed
your fear
of dying alone
away from home
somewhere you rest
By now
the grasses on your grave
have touched
the sky
you rest
but not
in peace

* * *

A black chadra
softly draped
around her head
she boards
the last bus
from New York City
crumpled dollar bills
and an address
clutched in her fist
"step up god damn it
correct change only"
the driver barks
as if she understand his language
as if there's more
than three of us -
and when we plunge
into the darkness
the woman smiles
only slightly
understanding nothing
about the anger
or our silence
staring intently
at the New Jersey address
locked into her language
and her culture
Life takes
a gentler turn
at the bus depot
my fellow passenger
gives a taxi driver
ten dollars

the crumpled address
and a simple
"take care of her, eh"
as he goes into
the all night donut shop
to meet his friends
I head for the empty bus
the angry driver
feeling warm
but not alone

* * *

On a bitter
winter night
he sent me
neatly pressed
flowers
framed
in an
artistic script
"I picked them
for you
in my father's fields"
I would give
anything
for the huge bouquet
of prairie wheat
you brought me that summer
I'd trade my
amber for it
because you also
brought me feelings.

GLORIA KUPCHENKO FROLICK

Gloria Kupchenko Frolick was born in Alberta, third of seven children born to the late Dr. Volodymyr and Anne Perich Kupchenko, long time Alberta school teachers. Actress, model, short story writer she began writing when the youngest of her four children left for university. *Land of Silent Sundays* is dedicated to her children and seven grandchildren. She is the Author of *Green Tomato Years*, and her new novel *Chickenman* will be published in 1988.



RUMOURS EXISTED

Smoky Hills, 1942

She was a fidgety woman;
our neighbour, wiry,
with dark, darting eyes,
her husband, a shy, scuttling man;
their two children, solemn,
small for their age,
clinging to one another
on their way to school.

Come Sunday,
rain, snow, or hail,
our neighbour would be in church early,
whisking the dead flies off the altar,
dusting the bouquets of waxed paper roses,
(her own proud handiwork),
and always, with a great to-do,
lighting a candle or two for her dead.

She never skimped on the dinners
she served the young parish priest
after church each Sunday;
plucking her plumpest hen,
adding that last egg
to her spiciest nachynka*,
filling her priest's jigger
with store bought whiskey.

Late one hot July afternoon,
our perfectly silent Sunday
was shattered by shouts and
piteous cries coming through
the screen door
of this neighbour's neat little house.
"Don't, mama, don't,"
a child's voice pleading.

Hard to tell, the boy's voice or the girl's;
so high pitched were these cries.
Then came thumping sounds;
like a head being slammed against a wall;
then loud curses and more screams.
The father, hearing, stopped with his hoeing.
What could the man do, really?
He had no say.

So, rumours were added
to existing rumours, but
was there ever a village
without such rumours?
She was, everyone still agreed,
a "real hard-working", and
a "real devoted, Christian woman."

Luckily for us all,
that parching heat wave soon ended,
windows were again shut tight,
green blinds pulled down low,
and we could, praise God,
take our little siestas undisturbed.
Our Sundays became
ever so silent once again.

*
corn meal dish

SONG OF SORROW - SONG LYRICS

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF
Flying Officer William Osadchy,
Shot down over Hamburg, Germany,
July 1944.

They work together in the fields,
and when their day is done,
slowly they return to an empty house,
and re-read the letters from their son.

**

Golden girl with tear filled eyes -
Go, place a blossom where he lies.
Golden girl who held him close -
Softly sing him a last lullabye.

**

Sun, warm the earth whereon he lies,
Stranger, close his empty eyes,
Rain, fall gently on his sweet face.
He was so young, so full of grace.

**

Barefoot girl with golden skin;
you loved him for his gentle ways.
He was his parents' only child.
Now they've nothing left but empty days.

**

Refrain:

Sleep, sleep, young men sleep
You had this rendezvous to keep
You never asked the reason why
You were all too young to die.

**

OLGA PICKING STONES

Spedden, 1942

Olga's father
hitches the mare
to the stone boat,
hands Olga the reins.
Olga's mother runs out from
the summer kitchen,
hands Olga her lunch pail;
in it are two hard-boiled eggs,
bread, and a small sealer of milk.
"Be careful, child",
her mother cautions her
as Olga, slipping and sliding
behind the stone-boat,
disappears behind
a grove of young poplars.

Three large crows,
garrulous babushkas,
exchange sombre observations
from their perches
atop the harrow
rusting in Mazurenko's pasture.
Somewhere in the distance
a calf bawls in distress;
probably stuck
in Ropchan's slough again.
Jack-in-the-Box gophers;
giddy in the April sun;
survey the prairies.

Olga works diligently.
encumbered by rubber boots too big for her;
she struggles
to heave the larger
stones unto the stone-boat.

When her grumbling stomach
tells her it is time to eat;
Olga unhitches the sweat-darkened mare;
permits it to graze
on the young grass near the fence;
washes her mud-encrusted hands
on the still dewy grass;
dries them against her skirt; retrieves
her lunch from under the sighing tamarack;
climbers atop the now sun-warmed stones;
smooths her soiled skirt
over her bony knees and
dines.
twelve year old Olga,
happy with fatigue,
and the old mare
have earned their keep this day.

UPON SEEING WILLIAM KURELEK'S FIRST SHOW
AT AVRAM ISAAC'S GALLERY

(written on the day of his funeral)

That first small canvas
Such a simple scene:
dry prairie grasses
blowing in the wind.
A small wooden bridge
over a roadside ditch.
That was all.
And yet I wept.
A sudden gust of wind caught at my hair
I was barefoot
I was ten again
I was there!

That afternoon
I laughed aloud with joy
Yes, yes, I knew that boy!
That afternoon
I left Isaac's gallery
Feeling ten feet tall!

Dear God, I have a quarrel with you.
Surely you knew
what this man meant to us.
This saintly man,
this gentle genius.
Why?
He had just begun!

Forgive me, Lord,
but he was ours.
Our own beloved son.

PASSAGE

He enters at Kipling
Sets his bundles down.
Blocks the door
peering into
the hurtling dark;
a man on the brink
of old age;
wrynecked from a life time
of plea bargaining;
his anxiety palpable
in the emptying car.
"Lady, please?"
I ask him where he wants to get off.
"Please, Ossington?"
Motion him to sit.
Tell him it's a way yet.
Still he persists
at his watch;
shading his eyes;
he moves his lips
as in prayer.
Then, succumbing
to an impulse
to double check,
steps out.

"No! Come back in!
Not yet!"

The rude doors close;
stranding an old man,
scorched with surprise,
on the Runnymede platform.
A telltale bedroll,
and a neatly bindertwined carton
journey on into the night.

A SIMPLE MAN

In Memoriam William Kurelek 1927-1977

The artist was a young man,
perhaps thirty or so;
his paintings large,
confident banners,
bearing poster-bright,
mathematically precise
circles, triangles, and squares,
that jingled and jangled
and chimed in the cold empty gallery.
"Had you ever met Kurelek?"
My question,
awkward,
dangled between us.
"Oh yes, once or twice;
he was a simple man,
not someone who would
stand out in a crowd."
"Yes", I allowed;
and smiled.
This simple man;-
this magician
who could paint the rich black prairie soil,
and make it sing;
this alchemist;
who could transform a rude plough
into a shining symbol of a people's
indomitable spirit;
this Good Samaritan
who championed the meek and the helpless;
this valiant;
who charted the dark journey of his mind
so that we might know understanding and compassion,
this prophet
who could sear your heart, and lift up your eyes,
this simple man;
this William Kurelek!

THIS TANGLED GARDEN

"In The Concentration Camp"

*"The window shows the roofs piled high with snow and reeking chimneys
that are dark with soot: from them the puffs of smoke like black birds &*

*Teodosii Osmachka
1895-1962*

Father lost an arm
in the First World War,
and Mother;-
she wasn't too well that year.
They separated us when we arrived.
We never saw
each other again after that first night.
Anne and I were as healthy
as horses;-
so we had it good
making lace for the big-wigs,
tablecloths, dresser runners;
things like that...
Mother saw to it that we were ladies.
Anne and I were being moved
to another camp;
we were in Dresden
when the allied planes came.
It's all in the past.
The babies... the smell...
Anne was fifteen that year...
I should forget.
Anne was beautiful
Did I tell you?
Not like I;- I was a tomboy.
No, no, I was never pretty.
She died, you know, my sister Anne.
typhus;-
just before the Americans came.

After the war
I learned about my brother.
Father worried about things;
sent him to England;
where he joined the R.A.F.;
his plane crashed.
Anne and I often wondered
why Father didn't try
to save us too;-
why he didn't send us away.
Maybe he thought there was time;
that we'd be safe with him.

Years later;
when I received that money;
from the German government
I flew to New York to shop,
bought my baby Anne
37 nightgowns.
The saleswoman must have thought me mad.
It's all right, nurse;-
I'm going back to my room;
I was only talking to my friend here.

In memory of Vera G. K. a beloved friend, whose childhood was spent in
Auschwitz, and who, as a direct consequence ended her life.

THE SURVIVOR

Dedicated to Vera G.K.

"The other times
were only dry runs", she said,
laughing so gaily at her pun,
that people, hearing her,
turned and smiled.
So, on the first green May day,
she again went
to the Bay Street bus terminal,
and bought
a one-way ticket to Niagara Falls.
She had been standing on the brink
for so long,
looking back;
now she stood on the edge,
and looked down.
Summoned up
the cattle cars;
the barbed wire;
her father
 mother
 brother
 sister
dead
and she fourteen,
summoned up
the unspeakable nights,
the scalding rage;
the guilt;
and she,
whom now
the slightest breeze
could turn around;
took one giant step
and was homefree.

AND THEN THERE IS MY MOTHER

I have this picture of my mother
taken in 1915 when she was 8 years old.
That year she was living in a
Presbyterian Home for Boys and Girls in Dauphin, Manitoba
(She was orphaned at three.)
The picture (really an enlarged snapshot) is quite clear.
There are five people in the picture;
a woman, and four children.
The woman, of indeterminate years,
(as my friend Vera liked to say)
is obviously the matron of the mission home.
She is wearing a white pinafore-style apron
over a white dress.
(giving her the appearance of a hospital matron;)
Actually, she is quite a pleasant looking woman.
A fat-cheeked girl of 4 or 5 is seated in front of the matron.
She is bent back under the weight of the very large baby in her lap.
There is a skinny boy.
He, like the matron, is kneeling at attention.
And then there is my mother.
I can see that she was always beautiful.
Her face is almost full in the sun;
her dark hair, tied back loosely in a large bow, shines;
she is wearing a white dress with a raised pattern in it;-
(the fabric could be dimity; it was most often used for bedspreads:);
her dress has creases in it;
(as though it had been folded small in a drawer.)
My mother is kneeling close to the matron's side.
her head and body are inclined towards the matron;
in one hand my mother is holding flowers;
(they look like dandelions);
the hidden hand is probably hovering
behind the matron's back;
she would not be touching the matron.
My mother is almost smiling;
her eyes have her entranced-with-the-moment look;
Now that I know a bit about body language;
I think I can safely assume that my mother
was reasonably happy that year.

MIKHAILO HOLYNSKY SINGS

Radway, Alberta 1939

Tonight is the night!
Can anyone afford to go?
Of course not,
but grab your hats, folks,
we're all going to hear the Great Holynsky!
Mrs. Nastasia Bellegay,
resplendent
in her red velvet coat and matching turban,
fans herself with her purse.
"Someone, please, open a window!"
Eager-beaver Boris Babiuk obliges her.
Aah! We can breathe! A cool fresh breeze!
"Shut that window!"
The Great Holynsky, touching his golden throat,
glares at Boris.
The window is shut.
Now Holynsky sings.
His voice,
rolling like thunder,
shivers the rafters,
lifts off the roof,
escapes the Ukrainian Hall,
rises up, and away
over Snaychuk's grain elevator,
then drifts
in iridescent bubbles
above
Hryhory Sulyma's farm;
settling in a sweet whisper
upon the waters of Myrtle Creek;
dissolves,
then journeys on, and on, and on.

BEREFT UNDER ICY STARS

There was a deep well hereabout
its sweet water so cold
it split teeth.
Amateur diviners,
we move in a single file,
carefully parting
knee-high prairie grass.
Surely they had drunk from our well
before they filled it up?
Stopped in my tracks
by the sounds of May;
I stand stock-still; listen;
follow my brother's grey head
as he stoops
in his continued search.
Frogs croak in counterpoint
in the swampy hollow
where once our house had stood.
That summer of '36
when only grasshoppers sang,
and puff-balls dried to dust
even as they emerged;
I had found, under that ancient Karagana hedge,
a hen's nest; guarded by a neighbour's
renegade Rhode Island Red;
fending her off as best I could:
I quickly gathered up those lovely eggs
into my skirt;
waddled happily back to the house
to please my mother;
to my dismay
that cache of 30 or so eggs infertile,-
useless to the hen, and to us.

The winter following,
snow piled high then higher,
melting freezing melting freezing
until great blinding ice-crusts drifts,
obliterating all boundaries,
supported all but
that rare fat child.

Those two large crows over there,
see-sawing solemnly on the barb-wire fence,
seem just as querulous as they ever were....

There is nothing;
not even a shard to prove
that once we had lived here.

One night, shortly before we had
moved away from here
(the Christmas of '37),

Aurora Borealis
had put on quite a show for us.
Shivering with cold and awe,
we children leapt about,
reaching out to those dancing colours
that shimmered so tantalizingly close to us,
over the little two-room schoolhouse, over
the storage shed; over the school barn,
where our young Holstein cow,
girdled with a red satin quilt,
(supplied by our concerned father),
rested, unaware of miracles.

Then, as suddenly as they had appeared,
those brilliant colours faded and disappeared,
leaving us bereft
under icy stars.

We all head back for our brother's van.
That's it.

Taking one long last look
at the billowing green field
cross hatched by our search;
we drag the heavy gate shut;

wait as our brother latches it;
then, conscientiously pulls through a
crackled men's leather belt
that some latter-day teacher
has added as insurance.
Our "sentimental journey";
planned for years, is nearly over.
Shortly before her death
our mother had spoken lovingly
of our two years here:
calling this place "Eden". Yet
that August afternoon
when the truck unloaded us
and returned to the city we had just left
our young mother
had stood in tears
amidst crates; boxes of broken preserving jars,
and furniture that would never fit
into the little house
just proudly completed
for the long-awaited teacher.

Breathlessly running back and forth
from the school to the house
during lunch and recess,
I would often see our mother's
slender figure silhouetted
against the window;
she would be looking out
past the bleached and stunted barley fields -
not seeing them.
She understood, now with certainty
there would be no marble halls;
there would be no applause.
For two years here lovely singing voice was still,
and the hopeful curtains of frothy white organdy,
intended for this new home,
became limp with
dust atop the dresser.

MAZEPA SCHOOL #3961

Radway, Alberta

Spring 1939

The "For Sale" sign had faded with the years
so the school board got the land cheap.
Draining the slough, they
put up a sturdy flagpole
for the Union Jack,
then built two, two-seater outhouses,
and a four room school;
naming it the Ivan S. Mazepa School.

When, soon after, the building
settled
and started listing,
they shored it up
with two cement buttresses
on the south side
on which we girls
liked to sit
during recess.
Jostling one another as we ran;
we clambered on top;
the winners
grinning triumphantly
on those below;
stomping their feet
on the cold, wet ground.

For fifteen minutes, more or less,
we turned pale faces to the sun
and to Vera Bellegay;
who kept us posted on
wife beatings,
infidelities,
unpaid grocery bills,
(her father owned Mike's Groceries)
as well as to
the births and deaths in our town.

Squinting in the sun,
Vera described
the abortion death
the past winter
of their young neighbour Lesia

Listening,
we worried
strands of winter hair,
chewed ragged finger nails,
and looked yearningly at
the south-west corner
of the school yard
where the big boys
shared a Sweet Cap
in a grove of young poplars
which only partially protected them
from the spiteful wind.

Then, too quickly
the school bell rang.
Everyone ran,
formed two lines,
one for girls,
the other one for boys,
while we, pensive,
lingered for one moment more;
then slipped off our perches
one by one,
loathe to leave
our place in the sun.

I REMEMBER

How long
my father mourned you,
Beloved Ukraine!

How long
he yearned for your
golden wheat fields,
for the pear tree
behind his father's house...
for his green Bukovina!

How his heart
bled for you...
You, who have lain
so long in bondage.

How happily he dreamt
that some day he would return...

But now his bones
are dust,
Mingling with the dust
of his lonely prairie grave...

So now I,
his daughter,
remembering,
mourn you too...
and, remembering well
ask God to
deliver you
from those Satanic chains!

THE EXILED ANGEL

She appeared
out of the blue
just like that,
wheeling and soaring,
as angels often do.

Dipping and diving,
she went into a holding pattern
over the C.N. Tower;
it's aircraft warning lights
her lodestar.

Irresolute,
she hovered there
getting an angel's eye view
of the inhabitants down below,
scurrying about on their profane
business.

Would she,
an exile from her homeland,
a visible minority she,
her angel's wings so conspicuous,
ever be truly welcome here?

The following evening
she appeared once again;
shimmering as brightly as the Evening Star,
then quickly, she faded from view -
A pity! Toronto could have used an Angel or two!

ODE TO A HUMMINGBIRD
FOUND DEAD IN THE ARIZONA DESERT

I found you
beautiful,
gleaming green,
perfect jewel,
dead
on the floor
of the Desert of the Sun.

Last night
a wall of water
hurtled over this wash;
now we skirt shallow pools
that shimmer, then sink
into the gold-sequined sand.

Hummingbird, you lie
amidst the water's other offerings;
sticks and stones,
car parts and chicken bones,
shreds of plastic,
beer cans,
and broken bottles.

Were you asleep, perhaps,
feeling secure
on a branch
of that yellow blooming
brittle bush -
dreaming dreams of a perpetual light
when the sudden waters came?

I left you
beautiful,
impaled
on an uppermost branch
of an ancient thornbush.
Tiny, perfect creature,
nothing will disturb you now.

6 CANADIANS ON A CAMERA SAFARI IN EAST AFRICA

Once again, Elias,
our patient Kikuyu driver,
stopped the bus
to let us get a good look
at our first Masai.
He stood alone
in the scant shade of a Baobab tree
on the rim of a hazy Serengeti,
seeing something
we all tried to see;
he stood on one leg;
the other he
lodged up against
the crook of a reptilian knee.
(That foot lacked a big toe.)
Flies circled and
settled on his head;
his garment,
leprous,
shredded in the fitful wind.
In one ear
a Pepsi can reflected
the noon-day heat.
We craned again
for one last look.
Quickly, Elias leaned over backwards,
rolled the windows up
against the searing heat,
and the red dust,
which already coated
all of us,
squeezed in together
at the back of a Volkswagen bus.

ANOTHER INTREPID CANADIAN!

Temple of the Snakes

Penang, Malaysia

Cloying incense,
sweating bodies,
repel us at the door
Shirley, our resolute
Chinese guide,
encourages us inside.
The altar frieze,
a veritable della Robbia,
moves imperceptibly.
Vipers!
Vipers garlanding pillars, beams, and benches;
Vipers clinging to the underside
of a candlelit altar
overwhelmed with offerings
to these snakes-in-residence.
After thirty,
lose count and composure.
A Medusa-headed temple attendant,
vipers mantling his bare shoulders,
winningly challenges us to emulate him.
A courtyard full of tourists gape
as a fellow Canadian
takes up the gauntlet,
offers his sunburnt neck,
then poses amiably for endless photographs,
vipers snuggling at his throat.
Everyone exclaims
at our intrepid Canadian's sangfroid.
Only those of us, having
just witnessed
his post-prandial libations,
aware
that he
and the vipers almost
equally comatose!

HOUSE OF TEARS

1968

I live in the House of Tears.
There are no doors or windows here.
As I wander through these mirrored rooms,
my footsteps echo in the icy gloom.

Whose lonely voice is that I hear
calling softly, ever near?
"Oh, let me go, please, set me free,
For all I ask is to be me!"

Whose blurring face is that I see
gazing blindly back at me?
Whose voice keeps calling, pleading?
No one is answering, no one is heeding.

LYDIA PALLI

Writer and artist. Born in Ukraine and writes mostly in this language.

Author of two books of short stories: *Wandering in Time and Space* and *Lights on the Water*.

Published short stories, poetry, essays, art criticism in Ukrainian journal "Suchasnist" (New York). In 1987 became member of the editorial board of the above publication.

Participated in public poetry readings in English at the Hart House (Women's Writing Collective), at the Harbourfront and in the Chinese Centre (Ethnic Poets).

Published translations from English to Ukrainian of a short story by Gloria Kupchenko Frolick as well as some lyrical poetry of Irving Layton.

Member of P.E.N. International (The Canadian centre)

Oct 25, 1987

All poems in *Land of Silent Sundays* were translated from Ukrainian by the Author.



My Strange New Home

IT HURTS NO MORE

On stifling nights
this overheated crate
of a flimsy house
rings with mosquitoes.
And because my body
smarts with poison
and sheets burn like flames
I dream of fans.
I move to the window
to drink the breeze
but there is none,
somebody took it
along with time...

Unseen trains wail
with foreign voices
silencing crickets,
which previously rustled
like hot grasses
in the peach orchard.
Beyond the twisted branches
car lights flame up
followed by nightmarish swish of tires.
On the other side of the highway
coloured bulbs wink in dissonance
beckoning to a gas station.
And I walk again
barefoot over the warm asphalt
to carry in sticky hands
my happiness
in a bottle of "Orange Crush".

POLARITIES

(On Canada's Hundredth Birthday in Toronto)

My city lives on the square
by the uneven towers
which turned their backs
on the Presbyterian past
and guard in their palms
a sprout of a new era.
My city lives on the square
where I am very young,
where abstract sculptures grow,
only to wilt later in galleries.
My city lives on the square
where on sunny days
flower children play guitars,
or chant their mantras.
My city lives on the square
where I am very young,
my city lives on the square
where I am eternal...

I have known the city hall
for seven years,
but we have been friends
only seven months.
You are one with the towers
and your back is turned
to the old town.
You are McLuhan's student,
you sense the future
and you are lost...
On the night when fireworks
exploded above the square
and sparkled in your eyes,
we held hands
and wanted to leap into the fountain,
because only on the square
we understand each other,
because only here
the world understands us.

Here I love the city so very much,
here I hate it profoundly.

Before Christmas we escape
the red-green traditions
to the altar of the new city hall,
where on rainy nights
leafless trees, adorned with white lights
float on the pavement.
The clock of the old tower
reminds us of time,
that tumbles headlong
into blackness.
Then I think of the snow
on the Baroque domes
and hear bells of my childhood.
This is my city,
this is a foreign city...

1968

EARLY AUTUMN IN THE CITY

Full moon clocks rise
on fire station towers.
Dark violet clouds
scent the night.
Crickets roll autumn
on small wheels
closer and closer...

CROWS HOLDING A WAKE

On neighbouring trees
crows dressed in black
are holding a wake.

Rain
with blunt nails
crucifies maple leaves
on shiny pavement.

Trees
with rusty clock faces
show only minutes to winter.

MOON

Moon wearing a black mask
like an old raccoon
inches slowly
across the sky.

STRANGE BIRDS

Yesterday strange birds
waddled over wet pavement,
leaving behind flipper tracks
in the shape of maple leaves.

Now acacias cautiously,
dip their bony fingers
in black puddles,
to convince themselves
that the water has turned cold.

FIRST SNOW ON THE HUMBER

Wind shattered
red pots of autumn.
Shards turned
into oak leaves
that scoop first snow
on stone steps.
White roof tops
fly beyond the river
where the sun spins
a luminous cocoon.

ON LAKE ONTARIO

White blotter sky
soaks up water,
leaves no horizon,
no beginning, no end.
Only seagulls
strung unevenly
dot the breakwater
like an unsolved code.
Then a freighter
with black scissors
slices the horizon,
foghorn pierces
dense silence.
Startled seagulls soar,
their wings wipe off
sky borne tears.

WINTER IN BLACK AND WHITE

Parachutes of black snow
descend from white skies.
Wind sounds its sinister trumpets
and I am frightened.

I run
run
run down the street.

Trees fence fiercely
with bared branches.
Startled crows caw,
fly up and beat
against low clouds
trying to break out.
I look behind me
and see black hydrants
wearing white helmets.

They march
march
march in formation.

I shudder, knowing
that I've lost my war with winter.

SPRING CARNIVAL

- Maple blossoms
exhale scents
• in high pitched tones.
Intoxicated birds trill
in yellow-orange hues.

NOSTALGIA

Clouds weigh down lilac bushes
revealing heavy leaden fragrance.
I carry their firm clusters on my back
along with memories of strange orchards
from the primeval mists of my childhood.

Alone Again

SEED OF PAIN

I shouldn't have imprisoned you
in rosy apple of my happiness.
Now when it fell and split,
a white moth
fluttered from its core.
On the bare ground
remained a hard seed of pain,
which will never sprout.
I rolled it away
like a heavy stone.
Only emptiness left behind.
Nothing.

ABANDONED

Sunray and Moonbeam
entered my house.
In anticipation
I foolishly lit a candle
and incense sticks.
But it was in vain...
As soon as Sunray
touched my cheeks
and Moonbeam kissed my lips,
they began to depart.
I plunged after them
like fish into the sea of time,
but they outran me.
I was alone again
desperately searching
those brown eyes
and the sorcerer
with his hashish pipe.
It was not wise
because only in fables
do sun and moon
shine simultaneously.

SADNESS

We walked the night streets,
sadness silently stalking us,
but only I saw it.
You cheerfully broke off
a piece of the moon
and put it in your pocket.
And now I grieve, knowing
I will never see
the full moon again.

BLUE-EYED CAT

Sun wipes off
early frost
from apple trees
under the window.
Blue-eyed cat,
curled in my lap,
breathes evenly
like human being.
But I hold my breath
for a moment
to listen to your steps.
Will entangled pathways
bring you to me?

COLD SUN

While your eyes radiate sunniness
why do I see clouds
heavy with sorrow of separation?
Beyond our window
a spider spins silence
above the deserted city.
Buildings unfurl
their purple shadows
over the wind-swept pavement.
Cold sun
clings to blank walls
as in a dream.
Somewhere
Salvation Army Band strikes up
urging us to atone for our sin on Sunday.

AUTUMN LETTERS I

I sought you
for a long time,
only to find you
under dry autumn leaves.
In that forest
I stumbled upon myself,
not knowing,
that I was missing.

* * *

When you cut off
a strand of my hair,
I did not understand,
that it will give you power
to cast a spell over me.

* * *

We have no past
and no future.
We appeared to one another
in a dream,
only to wake up alone
with an overturned,
empty wine glass.

* * *

You left the sorrow of your eyes
suspended in the mirror-covered house
where we parted for the last time.
I go there on a daily pilgrimage
to see your eyes turning blue,
while mine are slowly fading.

* * *

I search for your foot prints on the path,
but the snow has covered them up.
I look for your face in the pond,
but surface grew cloudy with ice.
I listen to your whispers in the woods,
but only branches crackle in the frosty wind.

* * *

I will walk to you barefoot
when the Ocean freezes over.

* * *

All we have left
are our feelings
written in blue ink
and folded in four.
Let us hire carrier pigeons
to exchange illusions.
Or perhaps we ourselves
should fold in four
and fly with the wind?

* * *

My grandmother
tied her love letters
with a pink ribbon
and placed them in the attic.
What shall I do,
since I have no attic?

AUTUMN LETTERS II

Under the geranium scented sun
parasols leaning on their elbows
over deserted tables
mourned for summer.

At night
you entered my room
through silent white walls.

Putting out
flickering light of reality
not asking about tomorrow,
searching for lost days,
months, years,
we escaped through the mirror
into our own world.

At first

the moon looked askance
through the window,
but then
she slid into the room
and put her head peacefully
on our pillow.

I lost you unexpectedly
In the great casino of reality
when you gambled your life away,
by putting all the chips
on one number.

Then a black crow settled among geraniums
on my window sill.

Left alone,
I saw trees congregate,
pointing their bony fingers
at me.

I saw owl's eyes
accusing me -
I pulled a hair shirt
over my heart.

That night
the moon shed tears
of poisonous mercury.

* * *

Again
we just touched in passing,
leaving our lips,
luminous pollen,
which gradually turned to dust.

Now,
surrounded by white walls
I see only myself
reflected in mirrors
endlessly...