



## *First Death in Nova Scotia*

In the cold, cold parlor  
my mother laid out Arthur  
beneath the chromographs:  
Edward, Prince of Wales,  
with Princess Alexandra,  
and King George with Queen Mary.  
Below them on the table  
stood a stuffed loon  
shot and stuffed by Uncle  
Arthur, Arthur's father.  
Since Uncle Arthur fired  
a bullet into him,  
he hadn't said a word.  
He kept his own counsel  
on his white, frozen lake,  
the marble-topped table.  
His breast was deep and white,  
cold and caressable;  
his eyes were red glass,  
much to be desired.  
"Come," said my mother,  
"Come and say good-bye  
to your little cousin Arthur."  
I was lifted up and given  
one lily of the valley  
to put in Arthur's hand.  
Arthur's coffin was  
a little frosted cake,  
and the red-eyed loon eyed it  
from his white, frozen lake.



Image courtesy of Library of America

Arthur was very small.  
He was all white, like a doll  
that hadn't been painted yet.  
Jack Frost had started to paint him  
the way he always painted  
the Maple Leaf (Forever).  
He had just begun on his hair,  
a few red strokes, and then  
Jack Frost had dropped the brush  
and left him white, forever.  
The gracious royal couples  
were warm in red and ermine;  
their feet were well wrapped up  
in the ladies' ermine trains.  
They invited Arthur to be  
the smallest page at court.  
But how could Arthur go,  
clutching his tiny lily,  
with his eyes shut up so tight  
and the roads deep in snow?

**Elizabeth Bishop**



## ***An Irish Airman Foresees His Death***

I know that I shall meet my fate  
Somewhere among the clouds above;  
Those that I fight I do not hate,  
Those that I guard I do not love;  
My country is Kiltartan Cross,  
My countrymen Kiltartan's poor,  
No likely end could bring them loss  
Or leave them happier than before.  
Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,  
Nor public men, nor cheering crowds,  
A lonely impulse of delight  
Drove to this tumult in the clouds;  
I balanced all, brought all to mind,  
The years to come seemed waste of breath,  
A waste of breath the years behind  
In balance with this life, this death.

**William Butler Yeats**



Image courtesy of *Britannica*



## ***The Searchers***

*after the film by John Ford*

He wants to kill her for surviving,  
For the language she spits,  
The way she runs, clutching  
Her skirt as if life pools there.

Instead he grabs her, puts her  
On his saddle, rides back  
Into town where faces  
She barely remembers

Smile into her fear  
With questions and the wish,  
The impossible wish, to forget.  
What does living do to any of us?

And why do we grip it, hang on  
As if it's the ribs of a horse  
Past commanding? A beast  
That big could wreck us easily,

Could rise up on two legs,  
Or kick its back end up  
And send us soaring.  
We might land, any moment,



Image courtesy of Britannica

Like cheap toys. There's always  
A chimney burning in the mind,  
A porch where the rocker still rocks,  
Though empty. Why

Do we insist our lives are ours?  
Look at the frontier. It didn't resist.  
Gave anyone the chance  
To plant shrubs, dig wells.

Watched, not really concerned  
With whether it belonged  
To him or to him. Either way,  
The land went on living,

Dying. What else could it choose?

**Tracy K. Smith**





## ***Buying Winkles***

My mother would spare me sixpence and say,  
'Hurry up now and don't be talking to strange  
men on the way.' I'd dash from the ghosts  
on the stairs where the bulb had blown  
out into Gardiner Street, all relief.  
A bonus if the moon was in the strip of sky  
between the tall houses, or stars out,  
but even in rain I was happy – the winkles  
would be wet and glisten blue like little  
night skies themselves. I'd hold the tanner tight  
and jump every crack in the pavement,  
I'd wave up to women at sills or those  
lingering in doorways and weave a glad path through  
men heading out for the night.

She'd be sitting outside the Rosebowl Bar  
on an orange-crate, a pram loaded  
with pails of winkles before her.  
When the bar doors swung open they'd leak  
the smell of men together with drink  
and I'd see light in golden mirrors.  
I envied each soul in the hot interior.

I'd ask her again to show me the right way  
to do it. She'd take a pin from her shawl –  
'Open the eyelid. So. Stick it in  
till you feel a grip, then slither him out.  
Gently, mind.' The sweetest extra wrinkle  
that brought the sea to me.  
'Tell yer Ma I picked them fresh this morning.'

I'd bear the newspaper twists  
bulging fat with winkles  
proudly home, like torches.



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