

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 her 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?

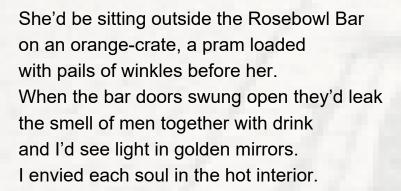
Tracy K. Smith



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.



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 winkle 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.



Image courtesy of Near fm

