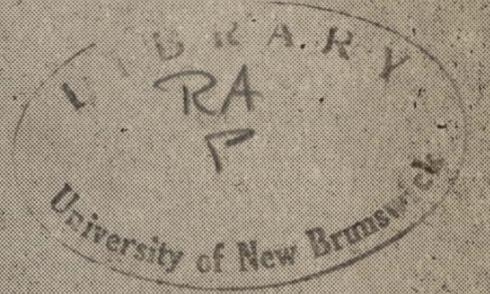


PREVIEW



20

P. K. PAGE B. RUDDICK P. ANDERSON F. R. SCOTT A. M. KLEIN

A STORYBY BRUCE RUDDICK

*** OLD MINKA'S WEATHER ***

We got off the bus and watched it turn round and head back to the city up the quiet and empty street lined by redundant balconied houses. And then we stood, transfers in hand waiting for the Riverside bus to come along.

"Progress is illusory," said Phil. "One is one, and one and one are two. And two is the square root of four and the cube root of eight and so on ad infinitum."

"We are here with the result that we are about to go somewhere else," I said. "The solution of one problem immediately posits a new one. Increasingly intricate. Quit, and you become static in a dynamic process."

Phil bowed his head. "In Dynamo Confido," he said.

We stood and waited on the corner and a cold wind came off the frozen river and spattered our faces with small hard specks of snow. And the sun came out for a moment and then was blocked again by the rolling grey clouds.

"Let's go into Andy's and get warm," said Phil.

Inside it was dull with green walls and rows of tables stained and scratched, and bare brown cubicles along the sides. Through an open door in the rear we could see Andy standing by a stove and rubbing his hands on his fat aproned belly. The smell of fried eggs filled the place and we leaned on the streaked marble counter and tried to read the upside-down names of the flavours on the row of knobs. One knob was bigger than the rest and Phil pointed to it and said, "I'll bet that one's chocolate."

We heard the front door open and a driver came in, winked at us and called out to the man in the kitchen, "How about that egg sandwich?"

"Comin' hup," said Andy and we went out and climbed into the bus.

"It was chocolate," I said.

And we sat there looking out of the windows at the river stiff with ice and the smoke-stained snow covering it and about midstream there was a hard and shining strip of dark green. And slowly over the river the great grey shadows of clouds slid like flat sleepy fish.

A young plump woman got on lifting a child by the armpits. She set him on a seat beside us.

"Now stay there and be good," she said and left and went into the restaurant.

The child turned on the seat and knelt and pressed his small face against the window, his forehead flat and his nose squashed out on the pane. He stuck out his warm red tongue and licked the glass slowly.

"Unhealthy habit," said Phil. "Should we stop him?"

"Might frighten him," I said.

"If we told his mother she might slap him down."

"Or worse. Threaten him. Like the mother in Guilloux's sketch--I'm going to lock you up in the hot black cupboard all day. And later: Not really though Mummy! Yes, really. When Mummy? When we get home. You aren't really though Mummy are you? Yes. Why Mummy? Because you are bad. Now be quiet-- And the kid would sit there wetting his pants and cold and sick with a fear worse than any influenza."

"She's on to the refinements of sadism," said Phil.

"She's a bitter bitch."

"Spawned by a bitter bitch out of a roaring brute."

"Spawned by the whore world mother of us all."

"You know," said Phil, "though we are less obviously cruel we have our own style. It is too much to ask anyone for complete understanding and control."

"Oh, ours are more exquisite cruelties," I said, "refined and very terrible."

"Like our silences sometimes."

And then the woman came back and lifted the child tenderly from the seat. She sat down and wiped his small cold face and set him on her lap, her plump red hands gently locked around his chest.

"Forgive us our misprognosis," said Phil. "We must love one another or die," he quoted.

The driver came out of the restaurant, a sandwich in one hand. He climbed in, closed the door and started the bus. He drove along the icy road steering with one hand and eating the sandwich. And we sat directly behind him and looked out at the passing winter river.

"Would be wonderful to start out there below the rapids," said Phil, "and skate easily down the thousand miles to the sea."

"Yeah. Down past the cities and the towns and the small French villages; Sorel, Berthierville and Lavaltrie, Three Rivers and Quebec and the Gaspé down to the great wide Gulf."

The driver turned, his mouth wet and full of bread and fried egg, and said, "Doc., you're nuts. The river don't freeze that far down."

"Well," said Phil, "we could go as far as it does."

"Naw. You can't skate on it. It's covered with snow. And the break-up's coming."

"Well right after freeze up and before the snow covers it," I said.

"Nah. Too thin, and anyway the wind would pile it up and block you before you got very far."

"Very well then," said Phil, "we'll get a tent and camp by the river every Fall till conditions are just right. Then we'll do it."

"That's nuts," said the driver, his little finger scraping bread from his molars. "Where's it goin' to get you."

"Ah you're a realist," said Phil. "You think of everything don't you."

He laughed and pulled the bus up at the asylum gates and opened the door saying, "Sometimes I think you're all of a bunch up there and if you'd ever examine yourselves one day, you'd lock yourselves in."

And we all laughed, even the plump lady with the child asleep on her lap.

We got down and waved at the plump lady as the bus pulled away and we started up the long tree-lined road to the main building, slipping in the icy ruts as we walked.

"Even if he didn't get the sarcasm in your last remark it was still cruel," I said.

"I guess it was. I was defending an illusion."

"Illusion is self and not a universal. And loving with illusion is an image seen in a mirror say. Someone actual and alive beside you whom you love with the mind's fallibility--illusion created out of desire. As you approach the mirror image you always get farther away from the real."

"At most you can only get half way to the image."

"Sure. And finally your own reflection grows and shuts out the rest and you are left there loving a cold and silvered glass and staring into your pained

and wild eyes."

Phil laughed. "All I can manage is one eye at a time."

"Then loving truth you must love all of it. The coming to you and the turning away and the pain and the pity and terror as well as the rest. All of it."

"And the only way you can do that is to understand it and why it is the way it is."

"We must understand one another or die."

"All this is abstraction, mentation," said Phil. "I think we are all of us really mad," he whispered putting his arm through mine and we laughed aloud walking and sliding on the icy road.

We went on till we came to men, inmates all, cleaning the snow from the roadside and tossing it in dry blowing shovelfull into the fields. And some of them worked quietly, automatically, and some straightened up as we passed and stared at us with still faces or smiled timidly and one called out, "Hello. Hello doctors. Hello."

And we answered him and waved and went on with winter hard in March about us and we came to the main building.

And then we heard music high and wild and the fury of it stung us and we walked around to the side of the building till we came to the caged windows of the isolation rooms in the basement. And there, with thin and tattooed arms twisted through the bars and face pressed close to the cold iron was a man blowing furiously on the harmonica. He would play a few bars we had never heard before, loud and fast, but without discord. And then he would repeat them, not monotonously but with a tortured inevitability. And we walked up to him, there, writhing and playing in a terrible manic excitement.

"It's Minka," said Phil.

And we went closer till we could see his wide blue eyes, bright and turned up to the sky. And the wild music poured over me and filled me till I felt that I must weep and I looked up.

And Phil said, "Mergansers in echelon." And I looked and high above were the northbound geese with long outstretched necks, seven of them, flying swiftly and strongly and the sky was filled with the blue of Minka's eyes.

And suddenly the music stopped.

And suddenly, too, there was a shiny black starling crackling and teetering in a tree. And I thought I felt the snow about me slump as if the anarchic and individual flakes, conceding the victory, had turned back to the sea. And in the distance I thought I heard a booming, as of guns.

And Phil said, "The river."

"Resonating," I said, "and split like a crystal bowl."

"Minka," I asked gently, "bist du glücklich?"

"Der Fruhling, der Fruhling," he said. "Spring goms," and started to play again.

And we turned back towards the main entrance and when we got inside our eyes were still so filled with the light of the sun and sky and snow that we could see very little in the quiet hall.

"Old Minka the manic," said Phil.

"Minka the manic, the mouth-organ man," I embellished.

"Magnificent Minka the manic, the melodious mouth-organ man."

"And Minka so loved the world that he gave it his only begotten song."

"O magic Minka," cried Phil

And someone said, "What the hell is all the noise. Are you drunk?" And I could see very little, but I made out a white staff-coat and I knew it was Wiley the Resident in psychiatry.

And I said quietly, "No you crazy bastard."

He didn't hear me and said, "What?"

But Phil nudged me hard in the ribs and said, "No it is Spring and we are deluded.

"Grandiosely," I said.

And we moved off silently down the dim and echoless hall.

Editors' Note: Since the last issue James Wreford has become a contributing editor of Preview. He lives in Hamilton, Ontario, where he works on the staff of McMaster University as geographer, which, he tells us, is a sociologist-cum-anthropologist tainted with meteorology. His work has previously appeared in the Canadian Forum, Contemporary Verse, First Statement and the Smith Anthology. We are presenting the following poems, some of which have been published before.

COMRADE, LOOK NOT TO THE HILL

Comrade, look not to the hill
 help is in your iron will,
 heaven affords no higher aid
 than experiment and spade,
 till the world entirely yours
 imperishable from your wars
 shall in your soaring spirit find
 the larger landscape of the mind.
 Creator of the mental earth
 your help is in the common birth
 of high revolt and firm intent,
 the thirst and hunger you have sent:
 therefore, wanting, wasting, worn,
 let the new messiah be born
 the spiked hands and the bloody brow
 of your faith, my friend, that now
 torn upon the barricade
 redeems my fear, too long afraid,
 and finds beyond the final rope
 the electric deity of hope.
 These shall slumber not nor sleep
 but their steady watches keep
 in what ocean, what far land
 you take your daily, dangerous stand;
 these, the troubling want, the will
 towers above the towering ill,
 the human question quarreling
 with, like yours, a stubborn wing--
 these shall see, no moon by night
 nor daily sun betray your flight,
 but shall guard and guide your way
 and beam you to your destiny.
 Then faint not friend, but falterless
 set your needle to redress
 the everlasting wrong and find
 your high objective in mankind;
 and, writing in your broken youth
 the last new testament of truth,
 tireless, never turn until
 triumphs in you the common will,
 for God shall keep your soul at last
 who have kept His heavens fast.

JAMES WREFORD.

IDENTITY.

The steep hill runs against the tree
 shadows are branches and the light
 a bunch of needles in the leaves
 sharpened and polished by the night.

Around the corner Freud can tell
 the murder meets the murderer
 going to hell who holds the helm
 along the chart their longings were.

His eyes no further than the bone
 he limns his lover and lies over
 lost to all but limb and lip--
 her limbs his image rediscover.

This is himself, not what he seems,
 and this the darkness, not the night,
 the love which like a blackout screams
 the silver sliver of a light:

the sallow, swallow the fat cows up,
 supply and demand can never tally,
 the river shrinks, and in between
 her flaccid breasts there is no valley,

and yet the ribs more real for that
 pant with undismayed desire,
 and as the blossom dies, the seed
 licks up her tinder in his fire;

the skeleton their graticule
 measures a base-line for their hope,
 they through death's darkness surely walk
 and only where no shades are, grope.

So all his geography projects
 on the mollweide of her hips
 and yet there is no map can trace
 the well known frontier of those lips

that war-torn boundary and bridge
 O both their eagle is and dove
 themselves on this side, but on that
 a greater than themselves they prove

and find in their platonic cave
 the shadow silhouette the flame
 upon the wall her body scrawl
 the splendid profile of her name:

and like a forest whose strength is
 known in the stripping of its leaves,
 their love against the roaring winds
 is truest where it mostly grieves,

swings round its pole through midnight snows
 to fill their eyes with tropic sight,
 or with a glory like to stars
 waits on the darkness for its light.

THE MENTAL BUTTERFLY

For fear of loving let us love
 against the teeth the iron talk
 of the exalted aeroplane:
 this mouse our happiness that hawk--

this hope in that aerial view
 divided by the bomb sights at
 the crossed hairs of the 'bursting rose'
 that blooms on the defenceless flat

with petals of eternal blood;
 O who shall count the moment, prove
 how high this on the beam give joy
 when they have got the range of love

and in Lidice, Guernica
 raze all our small town dreams and strip
 kisses apart in kissing with
 the skeleton beneath the lip.

And yet in love the moment lives
 as with that hour upon the tree
 impaling him with equal wrong
 that made of Christ, eternity:

shall live beyond the hour of love
 virginian kisses and the glow
 of earth that in the inner eye
 perceives the summer through the snow;

as when beyond the frozen field,
 the bare, sheeted-in-ice bleak bough,
 the silenced stream, the clouded sky,
 the wooded hills denuded now,

the singing heart goes through the woods
 as if they had not ceased to sing,
 and in the mind the butterfly
 floats on in an eternal spring.

JAMES WREFORD.

FIRST DAY OF SPRING 1944

1.

Pulled up the inner window with one scream
 and pressed the rusty other, dust and catch,
 until it forced and flew. Then we looked out
 from our long winter, and the wings latched back
 against the wall. There in the ragged lane
 the volatile blue air was dust in gaps,
 ice burned away before the shouts of children.

And now our muslin curtains stir and swell
 with ballet breaking in, rustle to volley,
 a bell-shape in the room. We have given entrance
 to all the news that nestles in the wind
 and all the looks unloosed and staring out
 from fire-escapes and balconies. And we
 are moved, are strangely moved. Our winter scope
 immensely widened, till a noisy fear
 stands neighborly beside each boundless hope.

2.

Down on Lagauchetiere street
 the Chinese serve
 dishes like water-colours.

You eat with your slender
 pale brown chopsticks
 one green stalk, another green stalk,

a bean sprout, a pale
 slice of mushroom
 and dawdle your rice,

and outside it is already beginning to be spring
 with casual quantities
 of green minuteness,

and you drink pale tea
 and you eat and eat
 and you have dined well

but soon again you'll be
 a little hungry.

3.

Easter at this point
I do not know what this is about
except that it is about festivals

Just when one is beginning to live
with a certain quietude of day upon day
one comes upon the carnival and occasion

and blows a day up like a bladder

puts glory or even a synthetic passion
into a termination by midnight
and after, it cannot be helped, dies a little.

PATRICK ANDERSON.

EYES

His eyes--blue--did not change,
retained their laughter or the dull of sleep,
turned with a glitter upon certain things,
were tired more often.

Not corpses stuffed them although corpses there were
slid under his lovelock, worked
a curious manhood:

there were no hanged men high upon gallows
observable behind the eyelash curtseys,
and all the roads that run up into them
pressed them open, maybe, but left no sign.

You couldn't have told at all
to what fire frontier and firework fit
those eyes were railroaded:

they held no dapple of geographies,
and beamed without hint of a long dangerous sea,
had no salt in them and little thought.

And only on that day finals came round
and fate reached out for him
the sky being God what a forget-me-not
or other etcetera and angelic blue
those eyes were rotted black as though
the boy came out and looked.

PATRICK ANDERSON

M I R A C L E S

(An extract from a story not yet finished in which an English-speaking husband and wife visit a French-Canadian village.)

That evening after supper while Madame rocked on the gallery in the slowly settling darkness Annette took us to see her friends. Lights blazed in the windows as we walked with dust muffled steps along the village street and the air was flooded with green as though chlorophyll lit the evening.

Small groups of youths walked by, serious and stolid as moose in their pin striped suits. "Salud", "Bon soir", -- the greetings rang out as they passed. Annette was proud in her acknowledgements, walking with a strange stiff legged self-consciousness. Watching them I was amazed that there were no girls with them -- no girls with their heavily powdered faces, extraordinary amateur curls and the stifling smell of cheap perfume.

"They have no girls?" I asked.

Annette was quick to assure me they had.

"But on an evening like this?"

"They are on their way to call," Annette said.

"But they don't go out together?"

Annette swung horrified eyes to God at the suggestion. The cure did not allow it. The cure knew what was right for them and what was wrong. The cure knew everything and looked after them. The cure said it was wicked.

Luke walked, his hands in his pockets, his head back, saying nothing. At first I dragged him in to the conversation but when Annette began to talk of the cure I forgot. Besides, I needed all my energy to keep up with her, to follow the acrobatics of her speech.

"He is a very great and good man," said Annette and her words sounded staccato on the long quiet street. "He performs miracles." The speed and extravagance of Annette's language made me feel that I was in some way inside a catherine wheel.

Her face grew long and full of wonder as she recounted her miracle. "Until I was twenty-one," she said, "I was not like other girls. I had not been unwell and I was very weak. Mamma was worried about me. All my sisters were strong, they were getting married, but I was not and each month we waited and I was not unwell. Mamma got the horse and cart from the Paget's and we drove to the town. It was a long way. And it is very expensive to see the doctor. Mamma had the money in her hand and I was afraid when we arrived. It was hot and my head was full and I was ashamed. We waited for him to come and then we told him. He took the money Mamma had in her hand and gave me some medicine and we drove back home again. All that way, all that money, all that way home again. I took the medicine he gave and waited. Each month I waited. Each morning I went to early Mass and prayed but nothing happened. And all the time I got sicker and sicker. Mamma went to the cure then and he came. He said he would perform a miracle. He got a big glass and a bottle of porter and he poured the porter into the glass. Then he added two teaspoons of mustard and he stirred and stirred until it was frothing. He handed me the glass. "Drink it down while it is still frothing," he said. But I couldn't. I shook my head. I could not drink that drink. "Drink it down while it is frothing and you will be cured within five minutes." I saw the big glass. Mamma was crying. "Drink it down," said Mamma and she held her head in her hands and rocked from side to side. "Drink it down, Annette." Then I didn't care any more. I took the big glass and I thought of the face of the Virgin Mary and I made the sign of the Cross and prayed inside me and I drank it down. It was bad, that drink. It tasted bad. I wanted to be sick to my stomach." Annette paused and gave a great sigh as if she had lived the whole experience over again.

"And it worked?" I asked.

The story finished Annette nodded her head sagely, smugly. "Ah, yes.

It was a miracle. A miracle in the name of God."

"And you've been alright ever since?" The tale shocked me. In my own head I saw a blackrobed cure -- Mamma, great fat Mamma, shaking her head and crying and Annette drinking down a devil's brew with its smoking sulphur coloured fumes that changed her from a child into a woman in five minutes.

"Ever since you have been alright?"

"Ah, but yes, it was a miracle."

Had the cure performed other miracles, I wanted to know. What else had he done?"

Annette pursed her lips and shrugged. "Ah, yes."

"Tell me," I said. But we had already arrived at the Simone's. Another time she would tell me. Now her mind was on her friends. They were especially beautiful, Annette informed us, for they were blonde. And that was rare. They were the only people in the village who were blonde.

On the gallery sat Mme. Simone, frail as a Marie Laurencin painting, her high cheek bones dotted with excited crimson, her hair permanented like the fizz on ginger beer. She rocked more slowly as she greeted Annette and was introduced, insisted that we all sit down, brought forward chairs, smiled nervously and moved her white hands across her apron. Noiselessly, as wherever we went, the children collected -- stood in silence, pale, alarmingly pale; each with the dot of tubercular rouge on their cheek bones, their uncurled hair smooth on their heads as butter, their legs and arms motionless.

The ground sloped up from the house beside us -- grass and apple trees with yellow apples luminous in the leaves, lying in the grass pale as the children's hair -- and everything tinged with the green light, washed in it.

While Mme. Simone and Annette gossiped I felt bathed in the blonde and green incandescence of this family and its garden, and was fascinated and appalled by the still life of the children, the shyness that held them fixed and their flax blue eyes that looked as shallow and delicate as petals.

"Andre has bought a truck," Annette said and her pride sat upon her fat and sleek as mercury, before it broke and scattered in excited description. "It is big," she said, her arms enclosing it. "The whole village could ride in it, it is so big. And it is red."

"Agathe told me," said Mme. Simone. Her eyelids lifted to hoods and she pursed her mouth to judgment. "He gets a truck instead of a wife," she said. "It is not good."

"It makes a beautiful noise," said Annette, like a child. She turned to us. "It makes a better noise than your car."

"Where is it?" I asked. "Why haven't we seen it?"

"Andre has gone to the city already."

Madame nodded sagely. "Soon Andre will live in the city," she announced.

Luke knocked the ashes from his pipe, blew through it a couple of times and put it in his pocket.

The greenness grew deeper as we talked -- came up and swamped us until it seemed as if we were under the sea. Mme. Simone became nervous, rocked rapidly and suddenly her harsh voice commanded the children: "Get apples from the English." But the children hardly moved. A slight tremor of increased shyness ripples them and froze them. Raising her voice to an alarming volume the mother repeated her command and they scuttled then, uncannily green, into the deep grass, picking the globes of fruit from the ground, reaching to the lower branches of the trees, moving with their eyes still on Luke and myself; shy, offering their harvest with white-green fingers, smiles making masks of their small faces.

I held out my hand to receive the clusters of fruit with the leaves attached.

"They are flower apples," the mother said, and Annette nibbling, explained that they didn't last, but faded like flowers in a few days.

The giant illuminated cross on the hillside sharpened and brightened as the darkness fell. Proudly they nodded at it, Annette and Mme. Simone,

drew down the corners of their mouths, told how it burned day and night, day and night and how it was their cross, how each family paid for a light and that light never went out.

In Annette's charge we left when she gave the sign. The green light was deeper now, the children behind their mother seemed no longer strange, but terrible -- tiny and fair and lifeless while Madame rocked unceasingly back and forth in her chair, and beside them, on the hillside, the vegetation crept in closer and closer like a wave.

Leaving, our apples still in our hands Annette said, "Eat them. They are good." But I shook my head, feeling the perfectly formed and infected fruit against my palms -- pale apple-green and deadly.

"Are they not beautiful, the Simones?" Annette was anxious to know. "Are they not the most beautiful people you have seen here?"

"But surely," I said, sick with alarm, "Surely they are ill. Consumptive?"

"Ah yes," said Annette in easy agreement but bored.

"But Annette it is a dangerous disease. It is catching. It will spread."

"No!" Annette's voice was incredulous. "You joke," she said and laughed.

I felt desperate. I wanted to convince Annette. "In the city," I said, "Those people would go away for treatment. Doesn't the doctor see them, Annette?"

Annette was not interested. "It is nothing," she said. "The Bouchards have it and the Pagets and the...." she listed the family names. "It is nothing. The cure goes and he prays. Sometimes it gets bad and someone dies. Often that happens."

I wanted to cry out at Annette's stupidity. I grabbed Luke's arm. "Say something to her," I said. "Tell her, Luke."

"It is a dangerous illness," Luke said. And the subject was finished. But something violent and terrible was happening inside me. An anger I had not known before, a fury at the ignorance and pitifulness of people. I had hoped for some affirmation of a similar feeling in Luke. But his voice had been factual and indifferent. I let go his arm quickly, and when he felt for my hand in the darkness and tried to hold it I pulled away, even knowing that he too, needed affirming at that moment.

We stumbled a little in the darkness on the dusty road. A smell of salt blew up from the river and the houses were quiet as though deserted. It was as if all the inhabitants were dead -- and the faces of the Simone children arranged themselves before my eyes, lying like wax and butter in a row of green wood coffins.

The cure goes and he prays. The cure is a great and good man. The cure performs miracles. But here are no miracles in the consumptive houses, I thought. No miracles there and I was bitter with Annette for her dreadful acceptance of death. Bitter with Annette and furious with Luke.

DENTIST

The planetary motion of the blood,
 Also the peregrinations of routine,
 And the bright pendulum of dialectic,
 All go awry,
 Lose their direction and their polarhood
 Before the keen
 Weltshmerz residing in a cavity!

Sometimes, in such a dire case, this man -
 He of the aloe'd pellets against pain -
 Has been to my anguish - antiseptic Hero!
 But now, to-day,
 I know him different, clumsy Caliban,
 Narcoticized brain,
 Gloating with pincers over my dismay!

The panic of his nightmare's still with me:
 This ogre of the hypodermic claws,
 Smelling of novocaine and drugged mayhem,
 Knee on my chest,
 Still runs amok among the ivory,
 Distorts my jaws,
 Still keeps my gurgled havoc unexpressed!

May thirty-two curses blight that torturer!
 May his gums soften! May he lose his friends
 Turning in silence from his exhalations!
 His tinsel wreath
 Fall from his mouth, abscessed, with clotted gore
 At its forked ends!
 Thirty-two curses on his thirty-two teeth!

Pity he cries? May only thirty-one
 Of those foul nibs slip from their gummy curves,
 Leaving his food in lumps, uncut, unmolar'd
 For belly's sake -
 And may one canine, comic and alone,
 And quick with nerves,
 Remain - his weltshmerz and his livelong ache!

A. M. Klein

--- N O T E ---

Please send all donations, literary contributions and criticism (of which we wish there were more) to Bruce Ruddick, 1491 Crescent St., Montreal.

