

On July 12th the fog like soil over the city. That morning we buried my father. Dear old Da, he used to beat us with a plastic sabre Tommy won at the fair, singing:

Fee Fie Foe Fum
Fee Fie Foe Fum

So drunk his eyes were bloody pools with olives in them. And a broken troll's nose with broken capillaries. A little man under a little bridge. Dear Dead Dad.

All the best dirges are overbearing. You feel the weight of the church pressing down on your forehead. The notes float up to the rounded, buttressed ceiling like trapped birds wheeling over a frozen pond. Nancy puts her hand in my lap at the funeral. –That's us, I say, looking up at the beautiful music.

Get out get out get out.

Grandfather Henry Murphy dominated us from beyond the grave. In sombre portraits he stared accusingly at his son-in-law. Black eyes and slicked black hair and black flowers in a black vase at his side. A backbone straight with ice and a bloodless heart like a carpenter's cold spike. Drunk, Dad would avert his eyes from Grandfather's picture, touch his temple, almost genuflect.

July 12th. Orangeman's Day. –On July 12th no one says a word around here. On July 12th you don't hear the words "Culture" or "Our Cultural Heritage" in Newfoundland. No one mentions Ireland. It's the silence of an immaculate conception around here. But what do you expect from a group of people whose greatest moment in history was a riot

and punch-up outside Government House? A people who revel in their own backwardness.

Father, I have sinned, I have sinned. Once I Lived A Life Of Wine And Roses. Dad listening to country music with a glass of bourbon in his hand and talking with his Big Voice about History.

Education and alcoholism don't mix. You begin to romanticize your own life. You think about this long lineage of poets before you like a roll call of flawed geniuses: Dylan Thomas. Jack Keruoac. Francis Ford.

Poetry.

Poor me.

Poor Francis Ford. Named after my great Aunt who died on Victoria Street. Struck by a dump truck that lost its brakes and dragged her, trapped, through the wall of someone's home and right into their dining room. The driver flicking the ash from his cigarette and poor Auntie Frances under the front bumper like a dieing animal.

The thick fog like soil over St. John's. Nancy and I drive up to Signal Hill to look out at the sea. July 12th. Orangeman's Day. –Well, he's in a better place now, she says. My Nancy. My darling Nancy I love you I love you. We can hear the ocean over there, and down there it crushes the rocks, but the fog's too thick, and even Cabot Tower in the mist is a huddled silhouette; or a fist.

Her Eyes They Shone Like Diamonds. My Nancy I love you, I'm sorry, I love you, I'm sorry. I am Thy Rod and Thy Staff. Your sceptre and shaft. And The Gentleman Passes Us By.

Dad was a trapper. He snared rabbits in the snow in the big dark woods. In winter he'd show me the soft little tracks in the snow: two small circles and one big one. He showed me where the boughs at the foot of the trees stopped growing because of the many rabbits scurrying through. The dark rabbit buttons that fell, he said, from the rabbits' white winter coats. –Rabbits keep tailors in business, you know. And then he would show me the sharp shiny wire and how to set it properly. And the little white thing would struggle and curse and weep and die of exhaustion while at home Dear Dad and I watched the hockey game.

Tommy couldn't make the funeral from Calgary. My father's youngest son. The one who did not return. Tommy who was born with a head full of blonde hair and voices. A morbid fascination. –I can read your mind, I can read your mind. O Little Town Of Bethlehem. At the age of five he claimed to hear little Baby Jesus behind the wall of his bedroom. Long dead, Grandfather Henry Murphy sang Christmas hymns at his bedside. Dad called it The Village of the Damned. I wondered what tracks my younger brother would leave in the snow.

Silent Night.

July 12th. Orangeman's Day. Nancy and I make love by the narrow window over the narrow streets of downtown. This is my body and blood. Inside of you I don't feel as lonely. She puts her tongue gently between my lips.

I say:

We'll always be together, won't we?

Life Everlasting.