

THY HARRY'S COMPANY



Allen Bell

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JACK FALSTAFF

I asked him not to banish
I'm old I said
Banish the others
Banish Peto
Banish Bardolph
Banish Poins
But banish old Jack Falstaff
And banish the world
You will banish the world I said
All the old Jack Falstaffs
I do. I will.
And he did

IRVING LAYTON

I used to read under the bed
Because that was the safest place
In the house
And my mother got mad
If I stayed too long
In the bathroom
And on fseveral occasions
I endeavoured
To talk
To my father
But to no avail
Because there was reticence
(Albeit noise)
And finally I left Winnipeg
And for years I taught at universities
And ended up at a college
But was still under the bed
Or in the bathroom
And gradually I realized
I was not enamoured
Of the 20th
Which is arguably the penultimate
Or last
And is not even safe
And I wrote four books
And they languish unread
And I stopped writing
And became a specialist
In an area of investment
And that pays the bills
And enables me to put money aside
For a radioactive day
Since one never knows what will happen

And there is no guarantee
That one will be immediately vaporized
And on the whole
Things have been awkward
And on several occasions
I almost threw in the towel
And suddenly I met you
And there has been an outpouring
Including five poems
Re A Motley To The View
And I regret they were not included
When I mailed you the manuscript
And I want you to know
That meeting you was my camelot
And that whatever happens
To The Simon Poems
And A Motley To The View
I once met a great poet
With whom I could talk
Without words
And there was a rapport
And an understanding
And a quality
Of mind
And a generosity
Of spirit
That went against the grain
Of the century
And I want you to know
That our meeting
Engendered poems
But this is my private poem

My thank you

DANTE ALIGHIERI

When you met her you were nine
And when she died you were twenty
And you were distraught
And your voice has reverberated
And transcends planets moons stars solar systems galaxies
And all comparisons are invidious
And Goethe is a bad joke
And Shakespeare
Even Shakespeare
Is made of straw
And the universe
Is a cramped room
Adjacent to a gorgeous palace
And Bach Mozart Brahms and Beethoven
Are gesticulating pebbles
Vis-à-vis the Mount Everest
Of your music
And when I saw Guido
We talked about good old Bice
Old Bice Portinari
And her vaginal characteristics
And smooth thighs
And somewhat stocky bum
And how we used to take turns
And she was always forthcoming
But I wanted to talk about hubris
And the rationale
And why did she Beatrice a Dante
But the subject
Was beyond our scope
And our flames wagged aimlessly
And we could only exchange pleasantries
And reminisce

And talk about the weather
Which in the circumstances was of no climatic importance
Whatsoever
And is the most boring subject
Imaginable
And I told Guido
I would miss him
But this was the last visitation
And insofar as I could see
And the flames notwithstanding
There was darkness
And your voice
Which has reverberated
Since the 14th
Has encountered
The 20th
And even you Dante Alighieri
Even you
Even you

'BICE BELL'

I think about acid rain
And ecological destruction
And thirst
And famine
And the nuclear holocaust
And America's infantile lunacy
And that crazy country's technology
Which will obliterate
Our species
And we were here
For a few
Geological
Milliseconds
And as I watch the planet recede
Memories obtrude
And one thinks of one's mother
And so many familial contretemps
And a domesticity
That was relatively merciless
And the sundry violence to which one was so casually subjected
Almost ameliorated anguish
At least that is my spiel
In any event
Two incidents
Were prominent
The first was a garage
And a girl who was also six
And was showing me her body
Now you
I don't have that
Where do you pee then
Here

Playing
Garage
Back of house
Curious about bodies
I will if you do
You first
Dress panties pants shorts
Bodies
I don't have that
Why
Because that's why I'm a girl
Where do you pee then
Here
Let me see you make a pooh-pooh
I can't now
Try
Squats
I can't
Then pee
Now you
Okay
Laughing
Lots of fun
Door opens
Hi Mommy
Look at me and Marjie
Yells
Hits me
Put your clothes on and go home
Drags me out of the garage into the house hitting me and scratching me
Why did you do that
Such a dirty girl

Kitchen
Phoned Marjie's mother
Bedroom
Hitting pillow
Hard to breathe
Get off bed
Pencil
Scribbler
I don't like Mommy anymore and girls
And I am not going to play with them
And the second was being spat upon
By my grandmother
And I was four
And hadn't expected to see her
At suppertime
And I said Hi Grandma
What are you doing here
And she spat in my face
And her spittle was corrosive
And she did not stint re same
And my face was soaked
And I looked like I was crying
And Mother threw food and dishes
And chased Grandma out of the house with a broom
And Father threw Mother against the wall
And punched her
And threw her onto the floor
And kicked her
And she was pregnant
And Dr. Levant
And an ambulance
And I wanted a sister
And never forgave her

Because she couldn't have more babies
And she said afterwards she was glad she would not have to bring up another one
And when I was a teenager
She died
And I was especially angry
And I still miss my sister
And sometimes
At night
I fantasize
And we talk
And I am very happy
And a lot of stress
And tension
Dissipates
And America seems sane
And bearable
And even benign
And during one conversation Marjie materialized
And I did the honours
'Bice' this is my friend Marjie
Marjie this is my sister 'Bice'
And they embraced
And held hands
And I made tea
And then Mother and Father materialized
And they were holding hands
And Grandma materialized
And she poured tea
And everyone was smiling
And talking
And happiness overflowed
And I did not want to leave the primacy of my dream
And reenter the wakefulness of that ephemeral world

PININA PININA

My grandfather called my grandmother Pinina
And when he was especially endearing
He said Pinina Pinina
And even in his eighties he was amorous
And she said she worried he would tire himself out
Have a heart attack
And she would be alone
Pinina Pinina

In Russia
She loved a revolutionary
And he wanted her to go with him
And she smiled and said he wanted me to leave my family
And then I met Viktor
And he changed his shirt three times a day
They were together for sixty years
And always were in love
Pinina Pinina

In Russia
Dad and his younger brother Daniel
Contracted typhoid
And she moved out of the house
And grandfather looked after the children
And barely survived
She said I did not know I would have to be out of the house for so long
Pinina Pinina

In Canada
I had a special record
The great cantor Pierre Pinchik
Singing Roza D'Shabbos
And grandfather took my record

And she said we'll get you another
And I said give me my record
She threw
Dad stepped on
And I said Dad you broke my record
Pinina Pinina

She offered Mom money
And Mom said I was tempted
Because Dad was a miser
And Mom said I knew I could get pregnant later
Well why did you have me
Mom looked at me
And didn't answer
Pinina Pinina

There was always Pinina
There would have to be Pinina
And when my Mom and Dad went to a party
Or for a drive
Or to a movie
Or whatever
There would have to be Pinina
And when she and grandfather went on a holiday
Dad went with them
And drove them
And once Mom went to a reception
And forgot about her
Grandfather came to the house
And talked for several hours
And my Dad hit Mom's face
Pinina Pinina

She did not like Daniel's Ruth
And once said you're just like your mother
And I'm glad your mother is dead
And Ruth tore my grandmother's face
Grandfather phoned Daniel at work
And they all went to the police
And the police said go to a lawyer
The lawyer said you could be put away and Daniel could be sued
And she sent Daniel back to his house
Pinina Pinina

Mom had cancer
And wanted to go to Houston
And she said give her money
She's toit
But we still have to spend
Pinina Pinina

When my Mom died
Dad cried
And Dad said she will never be the same
Without your mother
And when I left Winnipeg
She and Dad sat on the sofa
And looked at me
And she said why are they giving you so much money
I said goodbye
And no one spoke
Pinina Pinina

She yelled at me
She laughed at me

She talked about me
She made my Mom miscarry
She *killed* my *sister*
And once I said you are a witch
You are like the pawnbroker in Crime And Punishment
And grandfather said be a mensch
And Dad took off his belt
I got under the bed in time
But Dad pulled the mattress off
And used the end with the buckle
She screamed through the house
Pinina Pinina

After Mom
My grandfather
And Dad left our house
To live with her
He said you have to take care of yourselves
And I have to take care of her
And the refrigerator was empty
But sometimes Dad brought us food
And sometimes we went to her house
And Dad made supper
She said I never believed your father would do so much for you
Pinina Pinina

When she was ninety
She began to die
And there was an air strike
And my brother lived in California
But he went to the funeral
And I said was Dad upset

He said I've never seen him happier
And I said why did you go
Pinina Pinina

In the hospital
She phoned Ruth
And said I'm sorry
And said I'll see your mother in heaven
She said forgive me
Both women cried
And Pinina died

SIMON CORMAN

You keep showing me
Your unfinished novel
About a ship
In Africa
And each time I see you
I have to hear about the new chapter
And read same
And tell you that it's good
And not talk about the other unfinished novel
And how one eventually stops reading
Though the novel continues
And there are chapters
At least that was the heretofore
The other centuries
Is it good Daddy
Well I've never read anything like it
When I was seven I couldn't write like this
I couldn't even write
Do you want to know what happens next
Certainly
But you have to promise not to tell Mom!
Well maybe you should whisper
Promise Daddy!
I promise
Because she has to be surprised
Okay I promise -- what happens
They think they are on an island
But they are really in Africa
Oh no
Yes! Cannibals!!

MICHAEL DRAYTON

Your mother and I have had a falling out
And no longer thrive on each other's company
Because adults like to vitiate
And circumvent
But you are five years old
And a one-child fan club
And in you
Her selfishness
And sorrow
Are endearing
And when you see me
You shout
And take my hand
And drag me off to your playroom
For records
And books
And machines
And explanations
And you play with colour-coded wire
And batteries
And flashlights
And tape recorders
And radios
And record players
And cords
And plugs
And sockets
And wrenches
And pliers
And screwdrivers
And wire
And more wire

And your ingenuity
Is infinite
And no matter how well something works
You are able to fix it
And as nonstop volubility
Pours forth
From your little body
You explain
With operatic intensity
And all-inclusive detail
How everything is accomplished
And how each wire has to be placed
In the exact aperture
No matter how infinitesimal
And notwithstanding manual dexterity
And the innards
Of every machine
Wrenched
And removed
And replaced
And then again removed
And substituted
And -- as you point out -- this mechanical transplanting is imperative
Or the whole human enterprise would collapse
And many eviscerated flashlights
That might otherwise have expired
Bear testament
To your scrupulous ministrations
And your room is inundated
With machines
You have repaired
And once

Your mother and I
Were watching you eat honey
And that was a precious moment
And you were the big bear
And your marvellous brother
Who is three years old
And moves through the house like an earthquake
Was the little bear
And you were both eating honey
And, fortunately, you are five years old
And your life was that moment
And your present was your past and future

NORAH DRAYTON

During orgasm you dug your nails into my back
And told me not to stop
And I wondered what the hell was going on
And whether all your men were premature
But after the second or third
You were less insistent
And eventually the plangent nails were calm
And eventually even I was calm
But I worried
Because things were going well
And I was too happy
So I had a foreshadowing
So when you suddenly dumped me
There were only deep scratches

ARNOLD STENNER

We were both horny womanizers
But you always found fault
And vice versa
And when I hear your wife's voice
I still cringe
And philosophy is still not your forte
And you talk about medical ethics
And are riding that hobby-horse
And prestige
And speaking engagements
And money
And your alternate income competes with your sinecure
His purchas was wel better than his rente
And articles for magazines
And The Globe and Mail
And you said they pay well
And several interviews
With one P. Gzowski
For the radio program
Morningside
Which pay well
And transmit one's reputation
And Director of Medical Ethics
And the Philosophy Department
Etc
And you said you had committed your aunt
And P. Gzowski was doing very well
That was a subtle point Peter
That is very profound Peter
I am glad you asked that question Peter
And I remember the old Arnold Stenner
And how you railed against the injustices of the society of which you are an integral part
And the mediocrity of the university at which you are happy to be a tenured employee

And which is an expanding focal point
For your sundry other
Profitable activities
And you told me you were happy
But we would be lucky if we managed the decade
But in the interim
This was the best of all possible worlds
And you were shocked
And said I was crazy
And had relinquished my birthright
And would need four hundred thousand dollars
To receive the equivalent salary in interest
You've always been destructive
But this time you've really done it
Someone like you was so lucky to have a job
And now you've thrown that away too
And you went out of your way to tell me
I was doomed
And you are a pimp
And your writing is constipated
And there never was feeling
And during an anal foray
She said why don't you put your big penis into Arnold Stenner's hole
Because when she was hurt she wanted to hurt
And she knew we were friends
And you were the best friend
And during the weekly get-together
At Kelekes
And our ritual hamburger
And fries
I was regaling the company
With the latest crisis
And announced my decision

And was through with university
And this fucking fiasco
And would get some pills
And choke on my vomit
And we both laughed
Though the others were agitated
And at your instigation
I wrote the Dean Groberson letter
An all-time sob story
And we laughed hysterically
And that letter was read
And professors congregated
And *pace* my grades
An assistantship
And academically
I never looked back
And my father's prediction
Re skid row
Was held in abeyance
And while we were laughing
And before I crumpled the paper
You purloined
And ran
And I was incensed
And wanted to smash you
And we were young
And ran and ran and ran
And ran
And though I lost sight of you
I saw you forever

REGAN GONERIL

I went one better than my sister
And proffered the precious square of sense
My sister is not accurate
Because eyesight sufficed

We both knew he had but slenderly known himself
That the best and soundest of his time had been rash
But in this scene the destructiveness is apparent to everyone
And we
The inheritors
Were destroyed

I loved Edmund
Because he was appropriate
My husband was milk-livered
And Edmund knew that two plus two equals one

Even with the power pre-eminence and all the large effects that troop with majesty
Cordelia was his tenuous hope
But he relinquished
And realized
After the facts
And possibility

UNION CARBIDE

The gas that sequestered the sleeping city
Was your toy
And the dead multitudes
Were just human

MARILYN MONROE

And then there was Jack
And then there was Bobby
And then there was me
And my first was The Asphalt Jungle

And if I read poetry
I would paraphrase Donne
Because when everyone is murdered
Death will die

MARY MOON

Where is the Nazi I said
Where is Klaus Barbie
Where is Klaus Altman
Where are you hiding him
How is he helping you
Where are the documents
Freedom of Information I said
Article 2+2=4
And the Central Intelligence Agency
And the Federal Bureau of Investigation
Responded
(March 13)
And temporized
And I wrote again
Freedom of Information I said
And I wrote again
And, finally, a reply
And large men brought me an envelope

THEODORE REICH

I was not Klaus Barbie
Or Wernher von Braun
I was Theodore Reich
And abhorred Nazis
And wrote
So there were no funds
And there was no safekeeping
But after much tumult
And a lot of travail
I, finally, escaped
And reached Fort Leavenworth

SALVADOR ALLENDE

Augusto Pinochet

EUGENE KOLBE

Nazis are our friends
Because
They help us
And Klaus Barbie
Bathed Jean Moulin
And so forth
And post-war assistance
And look what Wernher von Braun did for us
And they need not be Germans
Because
We are not racists
Luis and Anastasio
Fulgencio and Augusto
And that is our area
And the Gestapo run our show
And George Papadopoulos spearheaded a coup
And established
The first fascist regime
In Europe
After WW II
And he was our friend
And employee
And liquidated
Parliament and constitution
And instituted
Latin American style state terrorism
And we were fraternal
And prodigal
Because
Nazis are our friends

HUMPTY DUMPTY

Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall
And had a great fall
And busted his arse
And all the king's horses
And all the king's men
Helped him climb the wall again
And fall again

JEAN MULTON

I was apprehended
And things were done to my body
And to make a long story short
I was broken
And betrayed many colleagues
And post-WW II
My compatriots called me a traitor
And I was convicted
And killed

ASSIM SARTAWI

We are offered annihilation
And have nothing
And from nothing
Must try
To create
Options

KING LEAR

You rubbed my nose
In shit
You plugged my nostrils
You stuffed my mouth
Then you took Cordelia
And made me the cause
You son of a bitch
I killed the slave that was a-hanging thee

Not what I did
How I perceive
A wretch whom nature is ashamed almost to acknowledge hers
I am ashamed to acknowledge Cordelia
I identify with nature
There is no discrepancy
My enraged responses are natural
Of course it is worse now that I am old
But that is all
So I am not just making a mistake
The scene brings out a fundamental dichotomy
That I have never seen
For you, great king,
I would not have your love make such a stray
To match you where I hate; therefore beseech you
To avert your liking a more worthier way
Than on a wretch whom nature is ashamed
Almost to acknowledge hers

My rage violates my intention
And drives out the middle
And Cordelia is the middle
And what should be a three-fold split
Becomes a two-fold split

And so for the first time
And therefore symbolically
I wiped out
That middle realm
That sustained me
We have no such daughter
Nor shall ever see that face of hers again

My rage and authority
Are inseparable
But split
And when a role is transformed
Then rage is transformed
Greater
More impressive
But impotent
I do invest you jointly with my power
Cordelia's love
Apart from her role
Can't avail
I throw her into the storm
We have no such daughter
Nor shall ever see that face of hers again
Therefore be gone

Her love remains intact
But impotent
My rage remains intact
But impotent
They throw me into the storm
I will have such revenges on you both
That all the world shall -- I will do such things --

What they are yet I know not, but they shall be
The terrors of the earth

I discarded my role
And prevented Cordelia's
And when I disowned her
I was disowned
And could not encounter Regan and Goneril
On an objective battlefield
So I can't remember whether I was shocked
At the end
By what happened
To Cordelia
We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage;
When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down
And ask of thee forgiveness

But in the other endings
The bad are punished
And the good rewarded
And in V. iii
I thought the ending would be the ending
Albany would make the speech
And wrap things up
All friends shall taste the wages of their virtue
All foes the cup of their deservings
So why am I on stage
O see see
Holding the body
He is making his speech
Wrapping things up
Good guys and bad guys

The highest ranking character
The ceremonial language
Hamlet etc
Wrapping
And I hold the body
I know when one is dead and when one lives
And Edgar
Who played parts
Whom we have seldom seen
Makes the speech
The weight of this sad time we must obey,
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say

The ending is not formal
Northrop Frye said that once I was annihilated
By time
Then the order would return
And lesser men would go on with their business
As usual
And the order would survive
Because the order does not survive
And for Edgar the schism is too huge
I was the legitimate son
I loved my father
And I got screwed
And unlike me
His own rage did not do him in
His brother's rage does him in
And exposes
The balance
That he took for granted
He childed as I fathered

Having been shattered
He makes the final speech
Instead of Albany
And the speech talks about
A shattering
That is irremediable
And roles
That were easy to assume
Are impossible to assume
And he can't say
What has been said
And he can't see
As I saw
The oldest hath borne most: we that are young
Shall never see so much, nor live so long

And he knows
That a global occurrence lasts half an hour
And longevity is passé
And to see so much
Is to experience
Elliptically
The limits
And if one lives long enough
The square of sense
That seems so foolproof
Will be especially fragile
The worst is not
So long as we can say 'This is the worst'

So he is the criterion
Because he was also screwed

But by an external force
So he can externalize the whole process
And retreat
Into another mode
And turn his back
And recognize
That my path
Is self-destruction
And my retreat
Is madness
Pray you, undo this button. Thank you, sir

Straight into madness
If you had left it at never never never never never
And had me Othello
Or whatever
Then life would be unbearable
My fate would be unbearable
And my existential response would be suicide
I would gladly kill myself
A renunciation
Of life
Cordelia's death
Or some other reason
But by opting for madness
You made me renounce
The categories
Insanity is so specific
An intellectual rejection
The categories
Of my development
Were renounced

Conceptually
Never, never, never, never, never!
Pray you, undo this button. Thank you, sir

So, at the end, there is no end
And I am alone
And very old
And non compos mentis
And dead
And, finally, filled
And the stench is distracting
And I can barely discern
Your behind
As you surreptitiously decamp
And hightail it to Stratford-on-Avon
With your money
And build your house
And live happily ever after

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

The notes suffer
But flourish
And in a silence
Are clear

RACHEL FELDMAN

When my marriage went down the tube
I went to London
And rode the subway for hours
And eventually something would stick
Usually a tourist
And once I picked up or was picked up by an Italian woman
Sophia Borghese
Who may have been twenty
And she studied languages
And spoke English
And several days later she wanted to go to Greece
And we visited Delphi
And met Larpos
And went to a tavern
In which everyone appeared to be screaming
And which was packed to the brim
And she was the only woman
And drinks were conveyed to our table
From all over the tavern
Because we were guests
And one couldn't refuse
And soon I didn't know where I was
And then someone was nudging my chair
And I was sitting next to an old man
Who exuded ferocity
And was grinning
Or leering
And I saw his teeth
And tried to smile
And Larpos said this man is my uncle
You are looking at a legend
This is the man who killed more Germans than any man

In our village
And the old man grinned
And they said some words to each other
In Greek
And Larpos said his uncle was having a special drink prepared for us
And eventually we were handed tall glasses
And I had never tasted anything so vile
And I said do you mind if I sip this because I have already had a lot to drink
And Larpos said that would be okay
And I pretended to sip
And Larpos said my uncle told me not to tell you about him
And the old man grinned
And Larpos said I told my uncle I told you about him
And I looked at the ferocious old man
And the same leer or grin
And though the noise level appeared to have increased
And was rattling my mind
And breaking my eardrums
At our table there was silence
And I realized that something was expected
And that a gesture was mandatory
And stood up
And was hit
With a crescendo
Of silence
And staggered
Because the tavern had been exploding
And now this clamorous silence
And I hesitated
And then I raised my tall glass to the old man
And gulped the contents
And collapsed

And everyone in the tavern stood up
And clapped
And stomped
And shouted
For ten minutes
And Larpos was in his glory
And the old man had me in an iron bear hug
And his expression did not change
And I knew that one was a goner
And could never be extricated
And the naked men
Swimming
In the Aegean
Were pulled under the water
And Larpos said there was never a mark
On a body
And my Italian girl friend
Of whom I had become fond
But with whom things were not going well
Rejoiced
And was radiant
And several weeks later
In Crete
She met a Greek
And our lives diverged
But I hope she remembers

MARTHA BLACK

I left America
And came to Canada
For the Klondyke gold rush
And my husband and I made arrangements
To walk the Chilkoot Pass
But he chickened out
And talked about hardship
And said I was pregnant
And wrote me a letter
And I said I don't give a hoot
You're unreliable
And make me unhappy
And the ten years have been an ordeal
And I will never see you again
And years later I heard that he died
In Hawaii
And I walked the 42 miles
Of the Chilkoot Pass
First to Sheep Camp
At the foot of the Pass
Then to the summit
And down to Lake Lindeman
And, finally, the little village
Of Bennett
And there were humans and animals
Pushing and straining
And every man toted an eighty-pound backpack
And drove dogs and horses
And herded pack ponies
And for five miles the road was good
And the woods cool and shady
And we forded mountain streams

And stepped stone to stone
And the Pass became rockier
And tons and tons of stones and boulders
And four miles of valley without vegetation
And my clothes were too bulky
And the walking was hard
Then finally a wayside cabin
Strong tea
And ham sandwiches
So refreshed
We continued
And reached Canyon City
Striking the mountain trail
That led to Sheep Camp
A trail of heartbreaks
A trail of broken hopes
A trail of mute clamour
Horses slipping and falling and carcasses visible
Caches of outfits
A deserted shanty
Mildewed clothes
I was glad
To be able
To call it a day
At Sheep Camp
The one street shack and tent village
Huddled
Among mountains
And an isolated glacier
And the debris
Of a snowslide
And thirty adventurers

Such as we
Underneath
And I saw the large cairn
Of stones
And looked up
And can still see the Pass
That upward trail
A perpendicular wall
Of ice-covered rock
Clinging humans
And animals
Slowly mounting
Single file
To the summit
But at Sheep Camp
Fatigued and footsore
The Grand Pacific Hotel
Which resembled a woodshed
And grateful to the elderly couple
Who gave me hay
And two army blankets
And a feather pillow
Then a wonderful sleep
And a hearty breakfast
Corn meal mush
Cold-storage eggs
Condensed milk
Prunes
And a whole orange
And we started to climb
That three thousand feet
That steep narrow icy mountain trail

And before we climbed we were told the summer was cursed
Because sun melted snow
And avalanches crashed down
And crushed
And already 100 lives
And during the first hour
I walked on melting snow
And saw blue ribbon
And bent down
And tugged
And a baby's bootee
And the snow melted and melted
And the tumbling torrents
And the dangerously thin ice
And the treachery underfoot
And streams
And ledges
And precipices
The trail steeper
The air warmer
Footholds impossible
My sealskin jacket
My hot high buckram collar
My boned corsets
My long corduroy skirt
My full bloomers
I curse
And cling
To stunted pines
To spruce roots
To jutting rocks
And in some places the path too narrow

And feet tandem fashion
And the upward climb
Sweating panting pounding
Stumbling staggering crawling
And the cursing procession
Men shouting and swearing
Too heavily loaded horses
Losing their footing and screaming
And falling on rocks
The sheer wall
The wall
Of rock
The granite wall
I am pulled
I am turned
I am twisted
I am wracked
My joints creak
My foot slips
My balance lost
I am the falling horse
But a crevice
Within the rocks
Saves me
My boot is split
The leg's flesh
Weight
Weight heavier
Legs shakier
Sharp rocks
Snake-like roots
Scrub pine forests

Tree roots curling over rocks and boulders
Rocks rocks rocks rocks rocks
Boots torn
Hands bleeding
Finally the broker's tent
The canvas structure
On the summit
The wind blowing between spheres
Wounded body
Soaking sock
Iodine
Tea
Then through customs
The shivering wind
Canada
North West Mounted Police
The finest sturdiest men
And then the descent
And overflowing anguish
But I can't remember
But the summit was easier
But somehow Lindeman
And Bennett
The Tacoma Hotel
Stretched canvas
On four logs
A straw shakedown
But in reality
A down comforter
A queen's palace
And as I slept the exhausted sleep
I knew I had walked the 42 miles

And the Yukon was my home
And the Chilkoot Pass was my memory
I had already found
My Klondyke gold

JERRY FALWELL

40,000,000 Born Again Christians
Are against abortion
But endeavour
To precipitate
The great abortion
But apropos your television commercial
When your archetypal couple
Were driving the automobile
And heard
The radio
And salvation
Was impending
In the guise
Of intercontinental ballistic missiles
And summarily vacated that automobile
Via the window
And jettisoned everything corporeal
And began the long ascent
Accompanied
By Jesus
And angels
And 'music'
And children
Should I have smashed Simon's television set
Thereby alienating him forever
And two days
Or had things gone too far by then
I.e., was the commercial prepaid

ALEC GUINNESS

You are incomparable
But of all your creations
The priest in The Prisoner
Was the alpha plus
And at the beginning
Notwithstanding everything they did to you
You easily parried
Because the man in charge was concerned with your public appearance
Because the trial was not in camera
But he said he would work on you another way
And that would be more interesting
And more of a challenge
And eventually you recanted
And signed the confession
And at one point in the proceedings
You finally went to the cell
And it had been a long evening
And his aid said you were a tough nut to crack
And the man in charge stared at the window
And smiled
Look at the city
Each of those lights is a human being
That can be broken
That is the fascination
And the pity
And at the trial you said you were very very guilty

JIMMY STEWART

I can't remember the name of the movie
But you were talking to your son
About kindness
And he was my age
And your words were so true
And the deviation so false
That even though I've grown up
I remember
And you said it was nice to be smart
And rich
And successful
But it was more important
To be kind
That was far more important
And you seemed to suggest that in comparison the rest is superfluous
And you seemed to believe that the essence of kindness is powerlessness
And later I visited Simon
And as usual he was watching television
And suddenly you materialized
And were being honoured
And interviewed
And I discovered that you are a soldier
I think a brigadier general
And a patriot
And your son went to Vietnam
Because he loved America
And I listened to jingoistic incantations
And there was another question
And there was a pause
And then you began to reply
And suddenly you broke down
And you said a day doesn't go by when I don't think of him

He was so good
And wanted to help his country
And you looked bewildered

VLADIMIR DANCHEV

For six days
On Moscow English Language World Service
You shot your mouth off
And told your countrymen
To lay down their arms
And get the hell out
Of Afghanistan
And on the seventh day
You ceased from work
And rested
And a spokesperson
For the ministry of truth
Said you were not a criminal
Because a sick man was not responsible
And there was psychiatric refurbishing
And, finally, you were functional
And employable
But your American counterparts
Cronkite
And Rather
And Reasoner
And Chancellor
And Walters
And Wallace
And Brinkley
And Severeid
And so on
And so forth
Ad infinitum
Talk
In unison
And did not shoot their respective mouths off

And tell their countrymen
To get the hell out
Of Vietnam
Or blow the whistle
Re Cambodia
And they will never be sick
Because the propaganda systems
Are not compatible
Because one is crude
And the other ultra-sophisticated
And one enforces
And the other co-opts
And you do not shoot your mouth off
And jeopardize a very lucrative job
When you
Are part
Of the process

JIMMY MING

Among all the variables
Of a trip
To Vancouver
There are two constants
The Sylvia Hotel
And the Yangtze Restaurant
They are focal points
And purveyors
Of stability
And equilibrium
And as long as all is well
With the Yangtze
And Sylvia
Then all is well with the world
And one is able to function
And eat well
And sleep well
And as regards the former
Whenever I am in Vancouver
I look forward to the incomparable Mandarin food
Of the Yangtze
And one dish in particular
Hot cashew chicken
With snow peas
And Jimmy always finds me a table
And we chat
And he seems genuinely interested
In the comings and goings
Of A. Bell
And afterwards he goes into the kitchen
With specific instructions re my hot cashew chicken
Because he knows I like snow peas

Rather than beans
And for some inexplicable reason
He always charges me less than the going rate
And if I go to the Yangtze for lunch
His elegant wife comes to my table
And once she said in French who is your girl-friend
And I said Je t'aime
And she blushed
And she said I am married to Jimmy
And Jimmy Ming and his wife are industrious
And they worked 18-hour days
To create
The Yangtze
And several weeks ago
I was reading the business section
Of The Globe and Mail
And glanced at the front page
And apparently Vietnamese youth gangs
Viet Ching
Red Eagles
Lotus
Et al
Are terrorizing Vancouver
With special emphasis
On the East Side
And the Chinese
And Vietnamese
Communities
And sometimes 80 members per gang
And knives
And baseball bats
And iron bars

And machetes
And cleavers
And guns
And that USA
Invaded
And contaminated
And Canada sold
And made money
And Jimmy was kidnapped
And his strangled and butchered
Remains
And those of his wife
Were beside an embankment
In sacks
And for more than a week
I have stayed in my room
At the Sylvia
Drinking tap water
And writing this poem
And I am apprehensive
Because the Yangtze is closed
And may not open
Under new management
Because Jimmy's father is the owner
And I am worried
I'm very worried
That my hot cashew chicken
Will not be extant

HECTOR CRÈVECOEUR

I travelled throughout America
And was treated hospitably
And in Carolina
I was invited
To dine
With a planter
And on my way to the large white house
I walked through a pleasant wood
And heard sounds
And saw a cage
In a tree
And branches covered with birds
And I perceived a negro
Suspended therein
And his eyes were holes
And his body was covered with wounds
And swarms
Of insects
Ingested
And imbibed
And he kept repeating O dem birds O dem birds
And I heard the word water
And he had of course to function in the cage
And there was a distinct odour
And when I diplomatically mentioned the aforementioned
To my host
He said they have to be disciplined
And occasionally taught a lesson
And in this particular instance
An overseer had been insulted
And afterwards I thanked my host for his hospitality
And I said adieu

And one or two centuries later
I travelled throughout Central and South
America
And saw poverty
And people were endeavouring to subsist
And I visited Guatemala
And I visited Peru
And I visited Brazil
And I visited Chile
And I visited Argentina
And I visited Honduras
And I travelled and I travelled and I travelled and I travelled and
And, finally, I visited
El Salvador
And Alejandro took me to a private athletic club
Which was inundated with soldiers
And secret police
As were all the private athletic clubs
And there were all sorts of implements
And many rooms
Some of which contained 'prisoners'
And in my particular athletic club
Alejandro bought me a Coke
And said hold this to your nose
And he pointed to a door
And I opened same
And went in with the Coke next to my nose
And there was a reminiscent odour
But more pungent
And even with the Coke
Overwhelming
And my eyes became accustomed to the light

And I, finally, saw
And on each side of the room
Were barbed wire cages
One metre high
And perhaps one-half metre wide
Altogether at least two hundred cages
Cage piled upon cage
And the sight was worse than the smell
And
And I left the room with the Coke next to my nose
And Alejandro said hold the Coke
And don't look right or left
And don't say anything
And we walked to his jeep
And I held the Coke next to my nose
And soldiers
Surrounded
And I believed this was finito
And that I had come full circle to the end of my centuries
But apparently money had changed hands
And we drove away
But after a few kilometres
I put down the Coke
And Alejandro stopped the car
And I barfed
On my clothes
And my body
And Alejandro said
You have seen how my people are suffering

BOBBY ORR

When gods cease
Scavengers congregate
And one such was Earl
And Earl wrote an article
For Quest
Re the greatest defenceman
In hockey
Robert Gordon Orr
More precisely
Bobby Orr

And Earl entitled his article
POOR BOBBY

What is the sound of no fans clapping
And the god was no longer a vision of beauty
To be worshipped
But was now fair game

And Earl said Bobby I want to go to Boston
And I want to go to your house
And I want to travel with you
And Bobby Orr said you can't come to my home
And you can't travel with me
And Earl said Bobby Orr's face reddened
And his voice seethed
And loaded verbiage is part of a journalist's arsenal
And seethed and reddened characterize a voice and a face
And not a journalist's intelligence and sensibility
And Bobby Orr said what is it you're after
What is this
There's no story
I'm working for Nabisco
I'm a businessman

And the god
Who excelled
But whose forte was not language
Endeavoured to convey
To the journalist
That the story was finished
That he wanted to live
Without a story

And Earl initiated his quest
With Bobby Orr's lawyer
And the lawyer said no shots Earl
Shots?
Nothing negative Earl
And Earl
Who had lived on the periphery
For 22 years
And wrote articles
For magazines
And newspapers
And was a man of the media
Did not know what shots were

And Earl talked about Bobby Orr's new job
For Nabisco
And Bobby Orr's film
About violence
That was funded
By Nabisco
And Earl says the film shows Bobby Orr talking
To children
And the children say hockey isn't fun

Because parents and coaches yell
And there is too much hurting
And the god says hockey should be fun
For children
And that violence is foolishness
The goon stuff
We have to get rid of it
I call it foolishness
And the god says hockey is a game
And should be fun
But for kids
It is not fun
And that's a mistake
And Bobby Orr talks about the rot
In minor hockey
The penchant
For violence
And the all-inclusive emphasis
On winning
And parents
Pushing children
And Earl points out that Bobby Orr was a natural star
And never had to be pushed
And Earl italicizes had
And Earl says that Bobby Orr fails to mention
That his own team
In the National Hockey League
The Boston Bruins
Were known for bully tactics and fistic prowess
Hence their sobriquet
The Big Bad Bruins

And Earl is not preoccupied
With the god's idiosyncratic obsession
With violence
Though Bobby Orr's equivalent at left wing
The post-lapsarian Bobby Hull
Alluded to same
Re his Swedish team-mate
Bent Nielsen
And Bobby Hull said the destruction of Nielsen
Was purposeful
Because owners permitted
And coaches instructed
And players acquiesced
And referees turned the other cheek
And once Bobby Hull refused to play hockey
For three days
And everyone said he was a jerk
And Bobby Hull said Nielsen played with such joy
He had never met a comparable player
No one else had his joy
And he was exalted
And there was grace
And artistry
And Bobby Hull said he was ashamed to be a Canadian
And Bobby Hull said
He was ashamed
To be human
And Bobby Hull's article
About violence
Was not taken up
By the media

And the goaltender
Ken Dryden
Wrote a book
About hockey
That he entitled
The Game
And the long chapter in which he discussed
The media
Was deleted
Because Ken Dryden and his publisher
Are not fools
And they know that you do not criticize
The media
If you want to be praised
I.e., if you want your book to be commercially viable
I.e., a best seller

And Bobby Orr's equivalent at centre
The pre-lapsarian Wayne Gretzky
Cries on aeroplanes
And on Canadian flights stays in the cockpit
To simulate control
But this is not talked about
In the media
Because superstars
Are flawless
And Wayne Gretzky says he'll retire at thirty
And he has a special bodyguard
The enforcer Semenko
The doyen
Of goons

But Earl knows that there are no bodyguards
When the clapping stops
And Earl knows that gods can be talked about
In the media
When the clapping stops
And Earl says the qualities
That made Bobby Orr
The world's finest
In the arena
Hurt Bobby Orr
In business
And Earl says the state of the art
In business
Is procrastination
And compromise
Is adjustment
And compromise
And Earl does not mince words
And Earl says that unlike the other denizens
Of our society
Bobby Orr has problems
And is maladjusted
And Earl speculates that Bobby Orr is having problems with his wife
And Earl suggests that Bobby Orr's wife is probably having a hard time
And Earl talks about an occurrence
In Chicago
That purportedly illustrates
Bobby Orr's surliness
And spoiled brattishness
And deepening trauma
And the holes in his character
And the extent to which the god had deteriorated

When the clapping stopped
And Bobby Orr baited a journeyman hockey player
Hilliard Graves
In the Rusty Scupper bar
And Hilliard Graves said I'm not Bobby Orr
I have to play this way to make it in the National Hockey League
And Bobby Orr said if you hip-check guys it damages their knees
And Bobby Orr told Hilliard Graves what he would like to do to him
And Hilliard Graves said I'll take your other knee off
And there was a brawl
And afterwards Bobby Orr went to the Men's
And the god said I'm frustrated
And apologized
Because Hilliard Graves per se was not the issue
But there had been so many Hilliard Graves
And all the residual Hilliard Graves
And hip-checks etc
And thuggery etc
Had sullied the vision
And stopped all the beauty
And the god apologized
And shook hands with the journeyman
Who knew without knowing
But Earl is oblivious
And continues to dish it out
And to Bobby Orr Earl McRae is a yahoo
And a pain in the bum
Because of the greater pain

LORRAINE CARTER

You put up with my moods

my temperament

my manners

my craziness

my irascibility

my mind

But in the interim

You met someone else

And you said you loved me but you could not go on like this indefinitely

And if you had to leave me you needed someone to go to

And he was there

And I had never been there

And he was overwhelmed by you

And devoted to you

And you needed his emotional largesse

All the feelings you said you were not getting from me

And hikes

And movies

And dinners

And love letters

And a lot of pseudo sex

And I encouraged you

Because for more than a year I resented your love

And I thought this was a way of jettisoning you altogether

Because on my own I didn't have the strength

And I was grateful to the guy for helping me out

And I was glad when you gave me your ultimatum

And I said let me have two weeks

And you said until then you would put everything on hold

And a few days afterwards I felt like calling you and wishing you good luck

But didn't

And eventually we met

And I told you of the dangers I had passed
And you said I know
And we talked
And I knew there would be you
But you said you had grown to care about
And had become attached to
And would continue to see
So when you finally slept with him
I lay awake
And when you came to the flat and told me you loved me
I cried

ARTHUR BELL

After I wrote Thy Harry's Company
I was drained
And eviscerated
But finished
But I thought about you
(Dad)
And the poem I never wanted to write
All my life . . .