


For Lucy
1966–2015



by

Peter-John Robertson



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Upstream

I

What dread demon drives you
Through what dark tunnel
Past what inexorable reeds
To what distant shore?
We watch and cheer you
Fighting, fighting
And you do
With every last
Breath

II

Salmon know
What joy in their glittering
Leaps for life!
Do you know too
Puffing your cheeks
As we watch
Your final run?

At Goose Rocks
“Race you!” you said
And were off like a flash
Leaving me scabbling
In your wake

III

When Reverend Dovey gentled
Your brow with his palm and a prayer
What sun-stippled shallows
Did you slip through to?
Beside what bright shore?
What welcoming trees
Merry with birdsong?
What flower-filled meadows?
It needs a Homer or a Keats
To tell

Now that you are not here
I see and hear you everywhere

As we step out of the hospital glare
Into the amber dark of early morning
A redbreast whistles nearby
And my heart lifts
Surely you are with us still
Somewhere close

God bless you
Brave, wonderful, free-spirited girl
For giving and caring so much
Who are you gladdening now
With your joy in life
And rippling laughter?

March 2016

Report from 43 Lakeshore

From his vantage point on the west wall
The Tailor of Gloucester
Looks over his glasses
Over his newspaper
Supervising all's well in the room that's filled
with you.

Below, your little Gaspé schooner,
(Chosen at an artisanat when you were three)
Makes sail over a bookcase of favourites—
Len Deighton, Dick Francis, le Carré, P.D. James—
Pointing for the little ochre pot you fashioned
In the shape of an inkwell not many years later
Still holding a spray of dried grasses, gathered then.

On a low table by the window
The prayer plant you asked me
To take special care of. Ever yours.
As the yellowing leaves flop
Over its pot's rim,
A new shoot spirals up
In a funnel of dark green,
Like an uncured cheroot,
And unfurls fresh leaves,
Newly minted folios with fossil imprints,
As if telegraphing you are well where you are.

On the opposite wall over the bed,
(Yours if you were staying)

Brilliant prints from the time
Philosophy drew you to Montreal—
Los with his hammer after forging the Sun,
Glad Day on top of the world,
Arms outspread in wondrous joy.

All these give me heart, while you're away.

March 24, 2016
Lucy's Birthday

Gentleness

The gentleness, you wonder,
Where does it come from?
From Lucy maybe
Now that I think of it.
Oh yes, and rage too,
Mostly at injustices,
Cleansing not corrosive
Wouldn't you say?
As when spring showers
Rinse the rusty relics
Of snow off the sidewalks,
Raindrops run along overwintering twigs,
And the relaxing earth smells good again.

March 28, 2016

Poetry Watch

More poetry to fill the eye
In Roger Federer in full flight
Than any of his champion rivals,
However much their double
Backhands paint the lines.

More poetry of pure delight
In the lilting flight and antics
Of a black-capped chickadee
Than any amount of poetizing
In upscale magazines.

Poetry sublime in the sighting
Of the White Whale's gliding majesty.
Wonder, awe—reverence
For the divine in creation,
And prologue to mankind's
Mad rush into
Cataclysm.

April 2, 2016

May Day

It happens to be May Day,
And about the first thing you
Said (thinking of Lucy) was
“I wonder what they’re
Doing in Heaven today. Here we
Are, and it’s extraordinary.
We don’t know where we came
From or where we’re going to.”
Through the window we see
Spring rain, the grass greening
Almost as we look, the scilla
Sprinkled everywhere
An even more vividly blue
Than yesterday, daffodils
And forsythia more richly yellow.
And birds busy flying errands
For nesting. Do you imagine
Heaven could be like this, with
A promise of more to come?

May 1, 2016

Parsons Beach, Maine 2016

Oh Lucy, to have you here with us,
As in '87, to drive along the 9
Turning left to Parsons Beach
Along the tree-lined avenue
Of American oaks, with horses
In the meadows either side,
Crossing with a brief rumble
The little wooden bridge over
The tidal inlet either side,
Looking for a parking space
Among cars from all over
Lining the rough shoulder
Of the roadway at a tilt,
Navigating families with children
And dogs, fishermen and all their gear
To the single-file path through roses,
All of us pulled by the ocean's boom
And the threshing of the surf. . .

Oh to have you here with us
To scoop the soft sand with our toes,
To breathe the fresh sea breezes
And feel the joy of children at play,
To follow sandpipers scurrying
Hither and thither along the tide's

Edge looking for tidbits
Like bargain shoppers on a spree.

To stand, still as a heron,
Staring down in wonder
At mini worlds in rock pools
As the tide spills in and
Slips out leaving a line
Of glistening bubbles, an
Infant crab scuttles for
Shelter under dreadlocks
Of seaweed, and a snail
Leaves its wormlike track
In the sand, while a lone
Gull keeps watch at its
Post on an outer rock,
Way beyond a tiny sail glints
On the purple-streaming ocean
While far overhead snowy wisps
And contrails fleck the endless sky.

To feel fabulously free for once.
Oh, but to share all this with you.

September/November 2016

Dark before Light, a Year Later

As I walk along the riverbank
Downstream, towards dusk,
My heart catches with dark
Imaginings—what were you
Seeing, thinking, braving
Five hours ahead in the thick
Of night, last year, as the final
Threshold drew near?—half
Glad at the same time to know
That you are now somehow free.
It's cold here. Beside me
The skin of the great river
Shivers. The cold seeps into my gloves
As it would yours. I turn upstream
For home. The low sun stares
Glassily over the waters. No geese,
No gulls. Two shapes silhouetted
On the dock, facing upriver,
Immobile, as though carved there.
The freezing stillness promises snow
Tomorrow or the day after.
After, the sun will rise again and,
I must hope, shine again on you.

December 15, 2016

Job, I have an Inkling

Our elder daughter taken too early
Our younger now nearly a stranger
My wife racked by murderous migraines
What-if voices buzzing in my head
I burn with guilt and regret
The freezing darkness of another
Canadian winter coming on—
Not to mention a tweeting lout
Swaggers towards the White House,
The planet perilous with wars,
Drought, disease, and rising seas
Children trapped in Aleppo
And a myriad makeshift camps—
Keep going how? How not despair?


All at once the sun breaks through
Chickadees fly in dipping
Relays to the feeders
A nuthatch nag-nags from the tall maple
And there's breakfast to clear away.

December 25, 2016

Heavenly Harmonies

Heavenly sounds from the kitchen radio
Pull me from my computer and I am
Transported back to that day in '87
And our long drive from Maine to
Your little apartment in Montreal,
Where you settled us with tea
And biscuits and urged me to
Lie down and close my eyes. I drifted
Off to the soft murmur of voices,
You and your mother, waking a little later
To heavenly harmonies—your LP
Of Beethoven's Triple Concerto.
Years later, mere months ago,
At your service in Croydon,
After all the lovely words sung and spoken,
After your sister's loving goodbye
(Moving beyond words) and you'd
Gone with Andy Dovey's blessings,
We left to the joyous dancing finale
Of Beethoven's Concerto for Violin
Flora's choice
Inspired

March 10, 2017



*The author and his wife Rosalind live in
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