

Raymond Souster / FOUR POEMS

HANLAN'S POINT HOLIDAY

Those two summer weeks of my boyhood
at Hanlan's Point, western gem of our islands,
flew by swift as seagulls, with that thin strip of sand
becoming my stamping ground, my personal kingdom,
each square yard of it known to me, it seemed,
like no-one else had known it or ever would,
all mine, all mine.

In my adaptable cruise-ship,
a flat-bottomed punt powered by two ancient oars
and my firming back-muscles,
I rowed alone or took along my mother
up the wide channels, then turning off continued
my dead-end wanderings down lagoons
bird-noisy, choked with weeds and water lilies,
each a mysterious stretch of green light and sunshine,
and once overbold I even ventured out
around the ferry docks (and was almost caught
when the *Primrose* appeared from out of nowhere,
its wash bobbing us like a cork, almost doing us in)...

Each day seemed to have its new sights, sounds, surprises.
Among the most strange the first time I heard the coughing
chug-chug
in the lagoon hard behind the house, ran back to see in
amazement
that low strange shape of the weed-cutter moving into view,
its miniature paddle-wheels churning jewels on the morning
water.

All day it floated out there with its twin hidden knives
hard at work, all the shining weed-mass floating on the
surface
to prove it by mid-afternoon, when a small scow appeared
with men wielding long-handled rakes to haul it in.

Every morning an hour before breakfast
my father, brother and myself,
dressed in our bathing-suits crossed the sidewalk running
south
along the western beach, our feet sinking instantly
in sand not fully cooled by the night. Then lake water,
with only a few small stones before it turned
all sandy bottom, still almost luke-warm
from yesterday, as warm as it would get that summer.
Then, after we'd cooled ourselves off,
it was back to the cottage to change from our bathing-suits,
and our morning walk began. That walk led us
down the concrete sidewalk past cottage after cottage,
to finally skirt the Lakeshore Home For Little Children,
which we were told opened up every June with patients
from the Sick Kid's Hospital, though we saw very few of them
at any time around the grounds; then a change of direction
and due east along the boardwalk, still close to the lake
till we reached the Gibraltar Point lighthouse
(supposed to be haunted yet by the ghost
of its first keeper murdered by some drunken soldiers),
which at least in daylight didn't look very spooky.

With the Light reached it was time to turn back,
leaving the boardwalk now for the hard sand
close to the water's edge, then following the lake's
curve-and-straighten game with the shore all the way back
to the cottage, where it was usually stick my nose
in a book until lunch-time. After which there was the punt,
always more lagoons to explore, ending sometimes in a walk
after supper to the amusement park,
where there were a few rides left—Drive Yourself, The Whip—
and of course the roller rink, some games of chance
under the deserted Stadium, where floss candy also came
in a giant ball big as your head on its cardboard stick,
and the smell of mustard and hot-dogs incensed the air.

Then when darkness slipped down, when a thousand twinkling
lights
blinked from above the amusement park, it became my magic,
my fairyland world, unreal, glittering, loud,
and I hated to be told it was time to go home,
to have to leave all those noises, lights and laughter,
for the walk through the darkness (streetlights hung
with seething swarms of insects not too much help
in guiding our footsteps), crickets loud all around us,
and at last the front gate, in a short time bed,
with always the promise of a yet more beautiful morning
waiting to wake up along with us
when we came back again from dreaming.

THE HOUSE AROUND THE CORNER

The house around the corner
and halfway down the block—what has possessed it
to turn its back on the world,
to retreat among the darkest shadows,
to sit mourning like a grief-stricken widow?

For it's covered its whole front with weeds,
fouled its porch and steps with at least a year's
faded newspapers, rain-smeared handbills,
allowed its wood to rot, its gutters
to leak and spill over.

Standing outside it right now
I feel eyes behind dusty windows
staring out at me.

How could anyone live inside?
Unless, as it sometimes happens,
a stray ghost has taken possession,

so my brief, imagined glimpse
of a hand quickly ruffling the curtain
could be real, could be ghost-fingered,
icy-cold as death.

PLAIN FACT

My arms have never
been clever enough, wise enough
to know how to grab off
half your love for me.

DECLARATION

Although I've already got it written
in the largest of squeaky chalk capitals
on the freshly-brushed blackboard of my heart,

some night I'm going to gather all my guts together,
take my paint spray-gun down to a certain large city wall,
and by some miracle will have no trouble at all
with what my brain is telling my hands to do
as I work away in the bat-dark shadows.

Then, in the morning, the first subway passengers
riding east for the short two hundred yards
of the open cut west of Keele Station will see
so plain on that impossible-to-miss, familiar showcase
of a hundred love messages a fresh one staring out
in gleaming-bright colours at least two feet high:
RAYMOND LOVES ROSALIA FOREVER AND FOREVER,

and no doubt some will still be shaking their heads
at the strange, show-off antics of young lovers
as their train passes on from light into that flashing
darkness
where no time shall ever measure how long or how short
forever is.