

## RACHEL ZOLF / The Red River Twang

Chistikat, I forgot my clé  
I called back to him, Come across you  
I can't, me, I'm got no boat  
Awe, Willie, I'm just slocked by the light, can't you die  
in the daark? I used to dance till I was soak sweatin  
See wuz alwuz waring a red cot like a capote  
One of these kind what has a mid-place for to put in a ramrod  
So she says, Kawiinachini, boy, chuckling same time  
That's not me, my louse—that's you, your louse  
Not like the people what lives close along the river  
Some of them what fishes all the time  
And stab a few with my spear that I made spin  
To learn them to shoo  
What do you call that cream, now?  
His name is Mrs. Bear  
He's a widow-woman too  
He goes by himself and she goes by himself  
I guess I talk like a Bungee, yes  
Oh don't write that down now, you  
That's my knockabout coat, you  
He's a Jew doctor, you  
She wasn't havin to pay a cent, you!  
I can't wait to get home, you  
Times is changed, my girl  
I never got married in the church, my girl  
You're a bad girl to tease me, yes  
But when we were a kid, no  
Shooting out the lips on occasion, yes  
If I dust them, yes  
When things settle down, but

I'm dying for a cigarette, but  
A bugger to work and clean things, but  
You'll take wheat you get, look!  
We were just—not far to go, like  
Yeh, that was part of the way they used to talk, yes  
There'd be first, second and third, you know, sets, like  
They must be got a different way of punchin it down, must be  
He'll home me now for sure to kipits around  
I'm got a creamy colour home  
I'm got money home  
I love listenin er  
I wonder whatever happened her  
If anything happened me  
Listen me, now!  
Girl keeya, you take my neechimos I'll get me another whaefer!  
You sould never shtop when you are goin on a messidze  
The canoe went apeechequanee and they went chimmuck  
I was settin along the stove havin a warm  
He stood in the door and wave us  
And he taked his woman to home with him  
Over the ocean away there where  
I'm sure that wives won't like it when they gets away there  
Dressed up like that in a shroud  
You're not got your fine boyish figure  
I'm not got a hand like my father  
What if they're not got no dolly, what then?  
And that's the way he never got drowneded  
Bye me, I kayakatch killed it two ducks with wan sot  
What kind of a sins can a little girl like Mary got?  
I'm not wanting a shabby looking purse, my dear  
Oh was she ever hopeless, my dear  
Was she ever wicked to me  
He was ever the first to strip to the waist  
Oh, it's ever pretty, my dear

Ever makes you sick, yes  
I just never had enough examples  
That's the second time that yoke cracked  
Oh girl, yes, What we'd ever used to do, eh, Doris?  
Ahhh, you'd fade when I tell you  
It's about time she was a-comin  
Hark at the birds a-singin  
The wind's a-whistlin  
Big black fellers a-crawlin  
Left the lamp a-burnin  
Unless it starts a-rainin or something  
Men a-diggin  
Myself a-makin  
Two a-cuttin  
Joan been phonin Brian  
Somebody been takin it off  
An old lady at Red River Manor's been dyin  
The old man's been passin away  
Oh, somebody been givin my name  
I been put it in my purse  
The jugs are been gettin mixed  
And he took a big swig of the lamp oil  
Red Ridin Hood's bin wackin up  
But now Jamesie's been tellin me she died  
So Red Ridin Hood's mother bin puttin a bannock  
and two shmocked gold ayes in a rogan  
When I go, I'll go chimmuck  
You don't know the rights about it  
You're been at that crust, I see  
The wolf gave the shtring a haird pull, dahrs bin flyin oppen  
They're only got ten minutes left to play  
He sure could made that old fiddle talk, ye-naw-see, like  
I remember when you used to say apichekwani, Mom

It's got a grip of my tongue, but  
We're not got no time, but  
That's a new fence they're got  
Ponassin to roast on a stick, but  
I'm got on Sophie's bodie and it's too tight  
That's the only thing I like Winnipeg about  
Two more days workin at that ditch I put in  
And din't I see Lucy and Dora!  
And din't I go the cupboard now, and din't I pull out this bottle, girl  
And din't the trap go off and catch him by the nose  
And din't the corpse thaw out and fall offen the bench BANG  
Din't they get such a start their hair was standing straight up, mind  
And they never hit nothing to kill them, only wound a duck  
Hello, nishtaw! I wonder, who's this  
He's so knowing, a very knowing cat  
He took me everywhere, everywhere he took me  
That's what he said when he said that to me  
She never wasted nothing, not a thing did she waste  
Now's the time it comes is in the springtime  
And that's about the size of all what happened around here, my girl  
I guess that's all I can remember just now to say  
That's all I can tell you about that  
This much I, too, will say for now  
The baskets start coming up—and, he says  
I clean forgot, he says  
I din't know, he says  
Well, he says  
A forget-me-not flower, he says  
From a buttercup, he says  
Suddenly he feels something on his knee, he says  
Something is touching him—and when he looks there, here  
It was the same snake, he says  
With another frog in his mouth, he says

The Red River Twang (also known as Bungee) was the dialect (now “dead”) used primarily by English speakers in the Red River Settlement. French was also spoken at Red River, and some Métis people of the area still speak Michif. The Twang was a “polyglot jabber” of Scots English and Cree, with vestiges of Gaelic and French. The Red River Colony was the first white settlement sanctioned by the Hudson’s Bay Company in the area then known as Rupert’s Land. The Colony was paid for by Thomas Douglas, 5th Earl of Selkirk, and established in 1811 near the forks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers, where Winnipeg now sits. Due to the intermixing of languages and cultures in the area, Cree eventually became the *lingua franca* at the Red River Colony. As Red River settler J.J. Hargrove wrote in 1871, “A man whose language is English, and one who speaks French alone, are enabled to render themselves mutually intelligible by means of Cree, their Indian mother tongue, though each is totally ignorant of the...language ordinarily used by the other.” The Twang here is taken from “The Bungee Dialect of The Red River Settlement,” M.A. Thesis by Eleanor M. Blain, University of Manitoba, 1989.