

THE IMMIGRANT

It's ever so cold in northern climes
in wintertime, in wintertime
with icy winds and snow-filled skies,
faces masked except the eyes,
hearts buried deep inside
in wintertime.

It's ever so cold in northern climes
in summertime, in summertime
with puddly streets on drizzly days,
passersby with downcast gaze
and hearts no clearer through the haze
in summertime.

It's ever so cold in northern climes
in spring and fall, in spring and fall
with upright posture of the earth,
frequent thoughts of death and birth,
and yet no warmth, no friend of worth
in Montreal.

CHEMISTRY

Nothing in life can quite compare
to the plumbing of depths of a human soul.
Perfunctory phrases once dispatched,
the testing and probing as quickly begins
with punching and poking at strong-held beliefs
and tugging toward views unexamined 'til now
or views once perused but rejected instead
for others of comfort in times of distress.

If humor be lacking or minds be too shallow
resulting in pauses of deafening silence
and after much effort to find common footing
in pastimes or people or current events,
attentions soon wander and gazes go rampant
in search of some touchstone to reassure egos.
Inevitable exits may follow immediately,
smoothly and deftly to leave no bad feeling
or may come about after much mental writhing,
sharply and clumsily leaving embarrassment.
Yet follow they must like preplanned experiments,
leading to wonder at one's own free will.

But if humor be good and small chidings accepted,
the discourse continues with both persons giving
vent to emotions generally concealed
to spare feelings of comrades on different planes,
or ear to the other's original ideas
which kindle in turn simultaneously
a light in the eye for a mutual thought
transcending the gap defiant of words.

CALM YOUR CAMELS, GRANDMA

He has autism. I had a stroke.

He speaks too fast. I can't decipher.

Stress makes me stutter,

forget many words.

Sometimes my sentences end

with "thing-a-ma-bob" or "thingee".

He smiles and tries to help,

guesses what I'm trying to say.

When he succeeds, we both relax.

We laugh and struggle together.

Sometimes he forgets his meds.

I forget mine too.

We know they help to keep us calm.

We help remind each other.

We both have constant anxiety,

partly from our DNA

rooted in 12th Century Scotland where

our family motto was "I cannae stay calm."

We're proof our epigenetic anxiety

has survived 900 years.

When one of us gets anxious,
the other gets anxious too.

It spreads like a transmission
of communicable disease.

He reads my face and claims
that he can hear it in my voice.

He says “Calm your camels, Grandma.”

We smile and breathe together.

He asks for hugs 12 times a day,
and yearns for reassurance
that love is still in easy reach
to calm anxiety.

I step into his moccasins,
give hugs upon request.

The hugs he asks for help me too.

We each then carry on.

Trying new things can be a challenge.

He often responds with “no”.

He can't predict what waits to pounce
if he answers “yes”,

that he'll be lost on an empty sea
not knowing what awaits.

He needs some extra time and space
to calm his camels too.

In contrast I fear the telephone,
cold calls to faceless persons,
that I'll get lost explaining
when words begin to fail.

Procrastinating 'til the end,
breathe deeply, start to sigh.

Then I force myself to dial
once my camels have calmed down.

From kindergarten to Grade 6
he read and wrote Chinese.

His characters were perfect.

He knew how to converse.

But Chinese teachers with short-term visas
from a culture of rigid rules
(where no dogs ever eat homework!),

failed him for late assignments.

No excuses were allowed.

Then he switched to public school

where rules were more relaxed.

Willing teachers offered help,

despite their many other duties.

Instead he cloaked himself in pride,

pretending to know it all.

Sometimes he'd interrupt in class

to prove he knew the answers,

or tried instead to play class clown

to distract from being different.

Now he is in high school,

teenaged boy with hidden talents.

He thinks and draws in 3 dimensions.

His artwork is a gift.

He wishes for an autism vaccine.

He says it makes him sad.

I wish we had brain transplants,

free donations of fresh neurons,

so we could forge new pathways

in our less than perfect brains.

Wittgenstein the philosopher once said that

“the purpose of life is to get through it.”

It sounds a little dark.

I prefer to add the trailer

“with a modicum of style and grace.”

When put like that we carry on

with talents we can muster,

take time for humor, breathe in deeply,

calm our hyper-ungulates.

WITH APOLOGIES TO MOTHER GOOSE

There's many a woman who lives in confusion.

The next generation she fears of abusin'.

Are there too many pills? Is there too much TV?

What of surrogate moms and the meaning of "free"?

Perhaps communal parents? Ought there be Kiddies Lib?

Need we tutors for junior who's still in his crib?

Do we know when to say just what's wrong and what's right?

Should we give them a God they can speak to at night?

Are we smoth'ring their sparks of creative endeavor?

Are habits the things they'll keep with them forever?

Will they cope with the big ones 'spite tinsel and glitter,

Wars, famines, viruses, wildlife, our litter?

Unlike the old woman with soup but no bread

who whipped her kids soundly and sent them to bed,

a mod mom makes smoothies ere her brood goes to rest.

She kisses them fondly and hopes for the best.

THE PERFORMANCE

What thoughts flash through performers' minds?

Will they like me? How do I relax?

Am I making them uncomfortable, embarrassed for me?

Will they be bored?

Maybe they would just as soon be up here themselves.

If so, would they do as well? Better? Worse?

Perhaps I can gaze above their heads,

or escape their eyes by closing mine

and warble on oblivious.

Better yet be blinded by lights and

sing to a blank and empty world

alone upon my lofty stool.

Oh, what care I for praise of men?

(They'd better applaud, damn it!)