Seven Deer Dancing.

Rolland Nadjiwon

University of Windsor

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SEVEN DEER DANCING

by

Rolland Nadjiwon

A Thesis
Submitted to the College of Graduate Studies and Research
English Language, Literature and Creative Writing
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts at the
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada
2000
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wahjeh
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oscillations

you must sleep
you must dream

your dreaming
must dream me
or i cannot dream you
into my dream

breathing--

in and out

motionless
under archaic lapis

in and out

like a bronze man breathing

his azury breath
at the azury centre of time
released from all destructions—
the old ones

they are gone now--physically
most of the old faces
from the reservations
letting go of our language
too foreign for our colonizers

you are not really gone
the old ones

seattle i think it was said
"death, there is no death
just a changing of worlds"
or something like that

that is where old ones they go to
changing world
where it is always

anyone cannot just go there
the old ones tell us
you must come from there first
where all your relatives are relative
for always

some still rememberers
ride otter far beyond bounded horizons
far beyond where science
renamed the grandmother earth
renamed all our generations
renamed the northern lights
shimmering and dancing
where turtle whispers
in small butterfly voices
into our shaking tent
renamed a still beyond
to an event beyond that event
where binaries cannot go
where time itself bends itself
into the curved roof
of a sweat lodge
spirits enter and sing
in small butterfly voices
if we ask those who still can
they will tell us about this journey
a journey of not going anywhere
a journey of changing

if we bring them tobacco
and ask them
they will still tell
of jihjahkonce
and spirit that has no ending

the gone ones still laughing tell us
uncertainties are not problems
they laugh and say
an indian's favorite word is maybe
so they say
maybe i will go to town tomorrow
maybe not
and drift off to important matters
they can be sure of
like those dogs over there--he keeps eating grass
maybe it will rain today
maybe not
beforenow

before the now
before people
earth
sky
there was only medicine
medicine stood alone
at the centre of nothing

reaching out his hand
she touched a mystery
nothing was there
only an illusion

grasping illusion
he began to drum
an unfinished song
an unfinished earth
sound of heartbeat
upon watersound
of rattle upon water
where they touched
the earth
the water
the darkness
against each other
was the sound of soft
of dancing
of wind

medicine took
a small soft of the sound
made a cradle board
made a song wind could not blow away

gave tobacco
made smoke to the wind

thunder flashed lightning

in unfinished light
illusion took shadow
once
twice
three times took shadow
wind song flashed lightning
fourth illusion took shadow
took shadow into nahba

dancing

this one medicine said
is thunder and son of thunder
she danced there where
the earth
the water
the darkness
they touch softly each other
a medicine song
with thunder
with lightning
with dancing
and
wind in tikinagan

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the songs they sing

this at the centre
is my song
at the centre
is where i am from

when the water is calm
and the fog is just drifting
that's when i show up
now and then

water is flowing
its sound
toward my house

when i show up
the waters cast up men

i am a spirit
yes, i am a spirit
see me becoming visible

9
in the middle of the sea
long long room of the sea
in which i am sitting

at the centre
is where i am from
from the center of medicine

from the way over there
out of illusion
he sings medicine
to the fire

from the way over there
out of illusion
she sings medicine
to the fire

drum
singing out of a blue wilderness
rattle
singing out of a blue wilderness
out of medicine
out of illusion
blue earth singing
a red dawn song
at the center of fire
it is i who sing
at the centre of fire
at the center of song
it is i singing out of illusion
crystal thoughts

stilled

or in motion

the limits of our own

mechanical thought rolling

across the laboratory

newton's flat table

or a flat earth

abstracting us from our emotional content

to prove our logical analysis

prototypes of causal propagation

enclosed in crystalline sphere

of lightdreaming that we

crystal thoughts

this prototype

is everything

breathing in and out

our new possibilities

of a multiverse in which

i/we move--at once
in every possible directions
in every possible times
where i/we can not even hope
to tear back the
universe's curtained stage
and reveal its pretty scenery

our selves
the rulers of our measurements
extending yet beyond
another of our own measured horizons
another curtained stage
in crystalline sphere
of lightdreaming that we
this prototype
is everything
breathing in and out
our own causal propagations
of yet other crystalline spheres
rolling across a flat earth
no, god does not play at dice
with the universe--he plays pool
and we--this new blue earth
we only dream ourselves to be the 8 ball
first woman

on cotton thread
first woman
softly
like feather
touches
like warm
passing
through me
like lightning

like thunder
i shudder
feeble as an old warrior
trembling
at the centre
of her dream shirt
they dance alone

they dance alone
for a long time now

it was not always
this way
turning
turning
turning
turning the empty
embracing the empty
where once
standing
smiling
touching
were all his
our small breaths
wiped sleep
from our lastnight eyes
into an oleander morning
into a vision
into a dreaming
into a remembering that
this was the today
the soldiers came
for a long time now
only nightmares dance me awake
with tears that try to
wash his memory
from my morning eyes
each day
not one tear drop less
and still
i cannot weep away death
yes we are old
yes we dance alone
yes we are tired
yes our arms
our hearts
are filled with shadows
shadows the soldiers left

we dance alone now

always with tears

and for a long time now
before

before the world was
before the children of the four hundred
who were one and four hundred
before the seven macaw
who were one and seven macaw
before the two twins
who were one and two twin
there was nothing
calm and silence were the great
nothing existed
nothing had been drawn together
the face of earth was unseen
the song of earth was unheard
softly the nothing began to hum
slowly the nothing began to dance
faster and faster
round and round with arms spinning
like dervish the nothing
broke into small swirling dreams
into a shirt of woven dreams
first woman put on the dreamshirt

emerging at the

centre

swirling and dancing

until

the children of the four hundred

who were one and four hundred

became the milky way

swirling and dancing

until

the seven macaw

who were one and seven macaw

became the big sky dipper

swirling and dancing

until

the two twins

who were one twin

became the sun and the moon

until

on cotton thread from her dreamshirt

first woman lowered herself

into the dreaming

21
emerging at the

centre

of our ancient song
blue moon

many circles we walk

but tonight

ahhh...the dream magic

of this full moon walking
the birthing

blood red and wet
across a morning sky
into a dark wilderness
of light dancing
dreamed stories of stars
in a blue wilderness
dropping dropping dropping
head first feet first into
what is already known
about fire in sky
where the pistis sophia
on the thirteenth day
winging on thirteen angels
raided the ciborium of eden
escaped with adam’s white soul
and pointed accusing finger
and eye of death through adam’s soul
onto the twelve aeons
who broke the thirteenth sphere
to release the whore
who birthed the son of god

blood red and wet

across a morning sky

smiling twice toward bethlehem
white christmas

o holy night
the stars were brightly shining
with neon lights
and people
rushing down
slippery streets
sloppy floor mats
at k-mart
check out counters
laughter of children
with christmas trees
plastic bulbs
little flashing lights
paper and ribbon
and endless
mechanical ingenuity
bionic man
star wars
wonder woman
happy hearts
for the moment
going from door to door
midnight mass
christmas hymns
a piece of bread
this is his body
a shot of wine
this is his blood
amen
outside
greetings and handshakes
christmas kisses
and
a mickey of cc
in the hip pocket
to add a little
kick to christmas spirit
it is the night
of our dear saviour's birth
amber phantasy

wanted you so much
to be real

thought i needed that
to touch
the way we did
that time
so long ago in Eden

you did not come

i looked for you
in coffee shops
smoky bar rooms
bus stations
small dried up towns
with dried up roads
dried up people
waiting from cigarette to cigarette
every place too familiar

every moment

a tired reincarnation

you did not come

i don't need you now

reflecting into my stale beer

and second hand smoke

we are only amber phantasies

i dreamed forever
deer dancing

when i sleep
    i dream a deer
when i walk
    a flower
when i walk
    a flower
when i touch
    a flower
when i touch
    a flower
when i dream
    i sleep a deer
deer with flowers
    in horns
walking with flowers
    in his horns
desert thoughts

talk of deserts

desert smell

of rain fresh

miles away

ancient

desert

rain

many miles away  woman

you stand

born

a moisture wind

rattling palm trees

like dried bones
darkness

desertness

memories

of there

coming ancient

to life

i would like to be there

now

again

beneath

the moonlight rincon mountains

I think
fast horses

we rode fast horses in them days
told stories in the silent sharing of power
in firelight dancing eye of
our women - old people - children
of counting coup and stealing horses

recounting the time
of young men raiding
the untended night time
moving like smoke of fires
into morning grey dawn
edge of camp
edge of horse corral

on stolen horses
riding thunder
through enemy village
through enemy sleeping
shaking dreams awake
into the magic
of our medicine dream
of our medicine ride

women - old people - children
wide eye
gawking
their morning dreaming
the dancing beauty
of our morning power riding
through their village

invisible
in their circles
in their half sleep morning dreaming

many coup - five horses
out from that day's morning mist
and

riding

riding from horse
to horse
to horse
until nightfall
silent in the sharing power
of that day when we rode fast horses
fasting

catcher of dreams
walking so far
here
where there is
no water
i hear your
dream catch songs

catcher of dreams
where do you make
your dream catch songs
over here in the centre
of this enchanted wilderness

catcher of dreams
walking so far
over here in the centre
of this enchanted wilderness
where do you make
your dream catch songs
catcher of dreams
walking so far
a flower covered centre
now where there is
no water
i live alone now

wasn't always this way

all my forever lovers
long gone words
faded into neon vacancies
wind blown nothings between forevers
as far as the eye can remember

i no longer feel
soft rustlings in the darkness
or the not long gone whisperings
that once lingered in my room

how dark
how long
one single night can be

the endless sound of silence

too long i think it has been
i stand here dark without you
and feel the first frost
of a new winter
touching oh so cold
two year old news twelve years later

( Ernest Ottertail was killed in an accident
the same day his son was born)

still--after all these years
and you're even dead now
you reach back to the day
when I gave you hell in class
for some now forgotten reason
injuring the patience of trusts
and friendships
"kinomahgay ininih--you hurt me
when you yell at me" you said
in such a soft voice

you were not too young to know
teachers screw-up

looking into your eyes
tear filled eyes
staining down your so young face
i felt a same kind of pain
my conditioning wouldn't
allow me to express
to tell you i was sorry

the rememberings of each tear
reflects again and again
the last day i saw you as a child
you were playing at going to town
"lets play irwin hotel"
you shouted to the other kids
drinking heavily from a can of coke
and imitating your father's stagger

years later and last time i saw you
you weren't pretending
"kino mah ga inih" you smiled "umbeh neemin"
you took my hand and we danced
like time had not cooled the remembering
of our lac la croix weekend at the school pow-wows

picked you up early next morning
you were walking back into fort francis
i think you had been partying all night
"kino mah ga ininih" you smiled
"lend me $5"
i gave you what i had in my pockets
"kino mah ga ininih" you smiled
"i don't need all that...just $5"
dropped you off at the irwin hotel

there is no word in indian
for lending and borrowing
that was the last time i ever saw you
and you weren't pretending

heard the other day
you and your woman had a little boy
heard you didn't have time to name him
heard you smashed your truck
and your life
heading for the irwin hotel
to celebrate his
that last day of school so long ago
the last day i saw you as a child
when you played irwin hotel
at the school picnic i felt
the shadow pass
so close beside us
crucifying itself into me

your son two years old now and you
ernest are two year old news

i wonder what his
mother named him
jeeske inini asked to strike

shaking tent man
spirit rider
night traveller

we who choose vengeance
you cannot refuse our

of black cloth and tobacco
you cannot refuse us this
drum singing
soul catching
song dance

ho! ho! ho! ho!
enter your tent shaking
spirit rider
tell them we will pay with life
perhaps our children
the blood color of our tomorrows
if you are struck
from the back of otter
light dancer
you cannot return
from your spirit tent

mikinak - turtle

will not find you

and wahbun - morning

will close the small hole

back to your village
jungle thoughts

imagine

the magic of jungle hum

trees from which

like bat dung

we fell to earth

almost upright

to search for souls

in forbidden fruit

centred

at the centre

of forbidden gardens

where snakes imagined gods

throwing thunder voices

from jungle canopies

onto offenders

cast into tomorrow

into factories of penitents

built on obliterating

the garden of origins
obliterating
the path of returning
but not
the dreamtime memory
of having been there
last nite

the rain last night
soft
gentle
touching
spring
to woman
to giving
to sharing

thunder
flashed
lightning
eyes
smiling

i thought about you
in a blue dress
and gave tobacco
leaving

standing in the warm

the wind singing

watching as you crossed the street

the way you walked

the way you looked back over your shoulder

with a wave and a smile

i tried so hard to memorize you for that last time

knowing it would be important

often that time of your going would return to me

on sun grey days

odaemene keezis maage penaque keezis

it would be the same

i would hear singing in the wind

and that day's sing would come back

for years to come
i live alone now

but not without the kind of thoughts

that let me sleep without your memory

or erase the excitement of your hands

i am not sure what it means to lie in darkness

listening to the heart beat

listening to the warm

and remembering
loon — he is singing thunder

i put beads on the lake to ask his song
i put tobacco on the lake to ask his song
he placed the beads upon my back
he brought me to a thunder dream
he smoked with me a thunder pipe
and sang for me a thunder song
may-may-quay-zho inninwug (butterfly people)

may-may-quay-zho innini

landed on my morning shoulder

touching me

singing me a wabeno song

from his people his mourning thoughts

on a sunshine superior morning

four thunderloons calling

   for thunder

       for thunder

        four thunder
memories

i remember you
    each time a little less
each sunrise morning
or greying dawn
tidelike
over the remembering
of another so quiet
so still last night

without you

each dreaming
awakens
trembling the thin veil
we have imagined
between our realities

of absences that are not

each dreaming
tracing in detail
your features
your being
until morning

i see your photograph
realizing i have redrawn you
and i am not remembering you
but forgetting
mishi-bijou sleeping

great serpent
awakening into our dreams
into our visions

a chimera of power
tempting our ancient greed

grandfather
your beauty magic songs of creation
your sacred arrow songs
silently holding the seventh arrow
into his seventh coil
until we sing your song again
to keep his sleeping

or it is forgotten
and the arrow falls

empty
each morning
each desert sunrise

four times
i remember
sand
mesquite
palo verde
caucus shadow

i am a desert stranger

my grandfather
is buried
in rich dark earth
under trees
maple
oak
elm
hickory
soft fern
near limestone sweet springs
too far from here

i am so far from grandfather
from his earth spirit
the songs are silent
the drum is cracked
his tracks dusted under
sometimes
at night
he speaks to me in the thunder
or weeps tears of acid rain

mishi-bijou moves
the sacred song arrow trembles
moon

fire night-time
out on the lake

  a crackling loon

good-night grandmother
noise

i speak for you
the silence between worlds
thought in bush camps
traplines
guiding fat tourists
scratching and yawning
into the lake rippling of morning
painting us across
a nightblack horizon
only owls and wolves can hear
and a loon
laughing its critical loonsong
leaving me trembling
in thundersilence
where i have peered
out at you occasionally
through this vague and noisy language
pale orchids

mandeo

stranger

i dream you

you exist

pale rider

one night at a time

you who are

out of reach

drifting

one thought away from touching

you speak my name

i feel universes between us

so softly whispering

shaking me like thunders

leaving me trembling
again and again

so lonely without you

i awake
penetangushene-east side

wandering night time
reflections of an
across the bay yesterday
remembering aimlessly
y/our memory
of that one time singing song ago
along the penetangushene

that one time ancient drum ago
out of sunsetting fires
to touch across
the water of your now
unforming shadow memory
of your ancient chanting
waveskipping
in
to me
from the bay

sometimes blue shirted

62
ancient boatman
you are there
waiting

i feel your up and down
against the spiles
just over there in the shadows
where one can feel on sometimes nights
braids of sweetgrass growing
rain stick

rain stick
flower stick
lying here
in this enchanted water
talking

who is this
lying in
the enchanted water
talking to me

over here from
the flower covered dawn
it is i who is talking
it is i who is walking
out of an enchanted
light blue earth

i am a person
rain stick
flower stick
lying in
enchanted water
talking
walking
singing
humming enchantments
out of an enchanted
light blue earth
rain

desert rain
desert thunders
trembling
trembling
trembling
trembling
trembling
trembling

the memories
of your touch
rock paintings

in dreamtime
a whisper wind
like butterfly wings
not violent yet
blowing softly
through me

a whisper voice
soft
familiar as the wind
tells me to remember

remember what
i shout
my shout forming
into a spiral vortex
stretching me beyond
my own horizon
compressing me
into its own event
at last
encased in clear amber
i float on someone else's dreamtime
until it is too familiar

i am tiredness
i wish only to flex
my petrified joints

the butterfly vortex
spiralling
will not end
and there is no
friendly voice
in this dark wilderness

unseeing
mindless science
pulls in every direction
until i am spread and pinned
like luna moth specimen
hot sticky blood

68
drips through my fingers
slivers of dogwood
pierce me

my butterfly eyes
lose to the opacity
of all deaths
that last forever
in a single moment
when small familiar voices
of butterfly people
whisper in crescendo
at the eye of our storms

fathers forgive them

where i die
with my butterfly eyes
opened wide
because no one remembers
how to close them
my last blood falls

ochre red

in random drops

onto precambrian rock

telling dreamtime stories

of a far off

amber dreamtime
small spotted fawn

small
spotted
crying
in the centre of enchanted forest
why are you here where coyote lives
where you walk

red dawn humming
blue earth humming

ribbons
flowers
of enchanted forest where coyote
uses you up like flowers in blue wilderness

i am going into this light blue wilderness
dancing

ribbons
flowers

71
into a red dawn humming blue earth
out of a light blue wilderness

over there in the middle
where i am going
coyote will use me up
in the wilderness where i went
solitudes 2

in the oneness of oneness
i sit through

sunrise

sunset

sweetgrass
days gone by
time
between the circles

morning

passing to evening
to stillness
to night
to morning
to day

with fear sometimes

i conjure--with sweetgrass

old tobacco

old photographs

old memories

old magics

73
dancing rhythm
to stillnesses
of
drifting
on sweet scented
wisps of smoke
through
restless
dreams
through
restless
time
wisps of smoke
sweet
into morning
talking trees

sometime long ago
when a blue earth
was forming
out of the thoughts
of a red dawn humming
all the trees
and plants
and animals
talked

when the new world
was becoming
here
out of thought songs
of the red dawn humming
there were ones
who could hear
the sounds
of the trees
and the plants
and the animals

these ones
who could hear them
told about it
because
they were old
and from so long ago
they knew how to listen
they were the ones
who could hear
that time of talking

when this earth
was becoming new
to here
when the buh-gwudg-innini-sug
the little people
when they lived here
that is when
the trees talked
and the plants
and the animals
and when they talked
it was a song
now on this blue earth
only the one
is standing
singing
  singing
  singing
  singing
of a blue earth
out of a red dawn humming
buh-gwudg-innini-sug

"the little people,"
they said
"came to the fire last night"
they sounded like
maybe
maybe they almost
believe in them

born again indians
thunders

in the wind
today
i thought i heard a voice
did you
my brother
hear thunder
and welcome him
with your thunder pipe

in the wind
today
i thought i heard a voice
on sometimes nights

on sometimes nights
in an enchanted
light blue outside
you hear the spirits move

like a soft
they move
like a warm
they touch

from that side
into blue forest
the spirit will walk to you
look out
look out into the light blue
he is walking to us

on sometimes nights
from that side
you feel the spirits move
the pronoun of the second person singular or plural in any grammatical relation except that of a possessive

you
always so familiar
again and again

maybe i feel you
touching this madness

a touching feeling
always recreating new form
out of me feeling you

why will you
not let me name you

speaking you disappears
always no echo
always no reflection
always no tracing

i write you desperately
i want to see you
to give you form

you on this page
this very page
i locate you
a place for the tears
of my privation to fall
to be absorbed into you

we cannot
we must not remain
breathless circuitous pronouns
reenacting the possessive
and forever violence
of an anonymous dying
and yet you disappear
even as i speak you
wahbun — first light

you who choose to fractionate
to understand everything
your way

we are
what is ours

you understand
you say

you cannot understand
without us

we are of this earth
we are life
we are death

we are all the legends

this you must understand
or there is no "more"

moving from shadow to shadow
you will not have to stand
in the light of our sun
the light of our generations
see darkness
in your shadow

walking on this earth
you are not earth keepers

from shadows
you watch us moving
—moving
in the light of ancestors

for a moment
maybe
a quick moment
you feel good
you imagine knowing
quickly
it moves one way
drum
dance
chant
heart beat
ancient
we fade
fade
back
back
into light of sondance
our generations
life
unsacred
turning into shadow
shadows of almost knowing
we who are deemed powerless
cannot be
or

be otherwise

we who are powerless
cannot command
shadows
meneseno (old warrior)

old warrior
turtle
fire keeper
anishinabek
a new thought
spoken from a new dawn
touching onto a blue earth
circle circle circle

our village is circle
blue earth is circle
who is standing in this circle
meneseno--old warrior

it is i am the stander
it is i am the centre
breathing in and out

when this one dies
old warrior will slide
silent as a spoken word

down a new dawn

touching onto a blue earth

at the centre of the time

he will be old

he will be young

grandson—grandfather

one will say

who is humming a song

i almost remember

ah yes—it is the old warrior—one will say

it is he who hums the ancient blue earth song

again he must be standing at the centre
when the film breaks

to be indian
any kind of indian
is like to wake every day
a little more dead

not less alive
just a little more dead

culture
someone said
is a weapon
that does not rust

why would we want it to be

rust—simple erosion
culture erodes
like weapons
like books
like films

89
it will be lost
not used
not read
not watched

my grandmother/grandfather
each day
each morning
faced east
with thoughts
not of hollywood

the sun of frost
drawing moisture/essence
from the small bits of
tobacco prayers

all their/our stories
left for some tomorrow
in snow
earth
grass
water
rocks

i was there

indian
aboriginal
indigenous
first nation
native american
which politically correct
word will we utter
as our film breaks
as our page tears
with our last breath

what uptown/downtown
library/theatre
will i be curled up in
drawing my knees closer
to the memory of my
grandmother/grandfather
telling/laughing
until the tobacco
was all gone

while
in my too late useless
tears kevin costner
and pocahontas
dance with wolves
across an empty screen
and the broken film
slaps uselessly
around

    and around

    and around

an untended wheel
as the curtain drops
Damn The Storm!

Froth spitting waves crashing, melting into shadows of cedar darkness on the distant shoreline across the harbor. In the half light of almost, nothing is separate from the monochrome howling of this storm. Water, earth, sky melt. Dressed in useless black oilskins mom and dad struggle to get their boat across the foaming breakers into an even darker wave beyond. Waves, wind throwing them violently backward again and again out of white capped waves. Their boat does not break up into storm tossed tomorrow kindling lying weathered and smooth on the rough rocks.

The shoreline of our village is littered with remains of boats that didn’t make it. Many times, cupping our hands to shadow our gaze through the crystal clear wind swept first ice of winter, we kids played at counting remains of boats on harbor bottom. Boats that did not make it back to shore or were ripped loose from their moorings and swept out to founder alone in the dark spinning eye of storm. I found the rusted drive shaft of my grandfather’s forty footer one long summer time ago. Skipping stones and suddenly it was
lying there, right in front of me on the white sandstones—
a few broken ribs naked like an old carp skeleton.

I heard the stories about that one a few times.

How my grandfather built himself into the hand hewed timbers

Two Model T engines hooked up in series an old stick shift transmission

with no clutch jamming and grinding into gear. She was a beauty

everyone at the store agreed over a coke and a cigarette after

the fish were put on ice and time was visiting for the evening.

Yep, she must have been a beauty.

Outsiders would say, “Oh, look at all the nice driftwood. Maybe

we can have a bonfire tonight on the shore.” That always kinda bothered us.

We could see small patches of green, or red, or white paint that

told us it was our uncle’s boat, or our cousin’s, or our grandfather’s.

Nothing in our community was a disconnected something.

Everything had a name and a belonging.

Standing on that grey, wet shoreline so long ago, watching

my parents bobbing up and down on those black and stormy waters

fighting for our life and our nets. Tears melting into rain

filling my eyes and blurring vision. So hard to see—so hard to see them.

I keep moving, moving, moving, jumping up and down trying
to hold onto a small glimpse of them disappearing again
and again below the white capped crest of another dark wave.

I am afraid—a afraid their boat will not ride the trough or crest of the next wave.
Afraid I will be left staring into the howling empty wave after wave of no boat.

“No! No...(more softly) you can’t come with us. Its too dangerous,“

Seemed like that is all I ever hear. I follow down to the water.

I need to be there with them—close by where I can hold their hands and keep them safe.

There, alone on the shore, where the distance, they tell me, is no danger
I feel their warm softness through cold darkness of storm. I cannot let go.
Nothing can ever be so fearful as being without them.

Deflty my dad jumps into the boat, my mother pushes steadying
it into the waves until my dad can lock in the oars and get
a bite into that damned storm. I am so afraid. I yell again and again
pushing my words back into the face of the shrieking wind, “Mom, dad!
Come back. Come back. We don’t need to eat.”

Sometimes, like on this day, all we have is the fish.

I hear my dad clearly as if those fifty years that slipped by so quickly
are still, somehow, yet to happen. “East wind today, mom,” he’d say
with a little shake twist of his head to the sound of window panes rattling.

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“Guess we gotta get the nets out.”

“It’s too dangerous out there today...”

“Fish ain’t gonna wait for a good day.”

And I’d slip out the door behind them into a terrifying nightmare.

Jubilation—their boat scraping and grinding across the flat rocks coming to rest tilted at strange angles. Dark cheated waves rolling and crashing, rolling and crashing against time.

The silvered floor inside the boat alive with the moving harvest.

Gulls dipping and bobbing on the wind crying for the fish, crying for their share. Excitement—the red smell of life and death eddying, spinning dizzily like gulls on the wind around us. Silence spilling from the mouths of fish opening and closing, opening and closing—sucking in more and more of their own death.

Rain washing popped air bladders off wet rocks back into the life and death harbor.

A too swift fifty years later today I write for you this quick snapping of a memory, knowing only too well my mom and dad never did get off that boat that day, or any other day.

They are on it, now, across the dark waves and back out into the harbor, together. Every time, every wave a bit rougher. Greying shapeless pulling at them, pulling them into its own eternal shapeless. Slowly, for they are older now, they sew and string a new net—a spirit net to a calm on another side of the storm.
I am sad. I cannot mend the tears in the webs of their lives that come with age, with living. I cannot lift their net or scull their boat around toward the safety of my shore. They are not coming back with a boat load of breakfast. Not this time.

Damn the storm!

And again they are not letting me go with them.

"No...you can't come with us. It's too dangerous..." they still say so gently.

I want so much to take their time, their worn old fishing hands in mine and hold in the warmth—only for another too swift fifty years...

Damn!

Damn the storm....
tuhgwahgun

tuhgwahgun—autumn
how long we have known
one another
each time—each autumn
and still i cannot stop your
cyclical grounding
or stay you
for one moment longer
into the beauty
the incredible beauty
of your earth changing

ah nokomisas—little grandmother
i will miss you
until seegwun—until spring
when your waters break
and you are reborn again
kisheh minido—old spirit
laughing and giggling
into the rivers that flow
beside where i live
and into our lake below the hills

you and i tuhg wahgun
child parent grandparent
until the time of some
still and spirit moon
when my now breath
is the same color of your passing
into peboon—the long winter
of our going home sleeping
where together we will fall
each fall into the memory
of our having been
together for a summer
VITA AUCTORIS

Rolland Nadjiwon, a member of the Potowatomi Tribe and a member of the Turtle Clan, was born in 1945 on the Cape Croker Indian Reservation on the Bruce Peninsula. After graduating from High School, he worked for many years for Native Organizations before attending Algoma University College in Sault Ste. Marie where he obtained a Bachelor of Arts in English and Political Science. He is presently a candidate for a Master’s Degree in English and Creative Writing at the University of Windsor where he will graduate in the Spring of 2000.