



Frog Lake¹

I.
Was it the shape of the lake,
watery legs spread,
or the inhabitants of its shores
that croaked and gave this place its name?
She came too late to know.
Frog Lake was dust, and hot sun,
and the rhythm of kneading bread
as the days passed.
She counted them, in the summer
by the height of the wheat; in the winter
by the depth of the snow.

II.
Sharp edges of blue glass,
and the daylight shining through
like a disfigured star.
The leaded lines between stained
shards held her strong:
the blue folds of the Virgin's
robe, reaching up to the rafters
of the church, the bullet hole
only a tiny tear.

As they led her to the Indian camp,
she thought of brushing her hair
a hundred strokes, and plaiting it
tight. Her stomach knotted
and she wondered if Indians
made bread, or where they would find
flour. In their faces, she saw lines
like the furrows of her fields.

III.
She used to walk in the furrows,
her gold braid disappearing
in the blonde of the field.
She stayed inside through the harvest;
never saw the wheat fall,
only the barren field, after,
just before the snow.

She thought of that snow
as the men pulled earth
over the grave of her husband, raking it
into smooth drifts. She wondered
how it felt to be underneath, perhaps
like those Indian houses, built out of snow
that somehow, still, were warm.

IV.
A gunshot with a puff of smoke
like the cloud of flour that rises
from bread dough as you pound it out
flat, along the table,
flat as the land it came from,
where the wheat grew long with the summer days.

¹ The Frog Lake Massacre (as it's most often called) took place April 2, 1885, in Frog Lake in the District of Saskatchewan (now a part of Alberta). Among the reasons cited for the attack were unfair treaty agreements between the Cree and settlers, and the near-starvation conditions enforced upon the Cree by inadequate government rations. The Frog Lake Massacre was part of the Cree resistance in the North-West Rebellion.