

COLD WAR

Anna dove, cutting the surface, enjoying the thrill that came when she knifed into the water, the liquid freedom. She sighed with relief.

LYNNE M. MACLEAN

Beyond the shadow of the ship,
I watched the water-snakes:
They moved in tracks of shining white,
And when they reared, the elfish light
Fell off in hoary flakes.

Within the shadow of the ship
I watched their rich attire:
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,
They coiled and swam; and every track
Was a flash of golden fire.

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1798),

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.

The July air was clean, and the sun was high. Breezes danced in off the northern lake and whispered promises of a day's good fishing. The scene was perfect, Anna thought, loading up the boat. Except for the old man spouting nonsense on the beach.

"Roy," said Anna, "should you do something about him?" She pointed to the old man. Her nerves already thrummed like taut wires, and this wasn't helping.

The man had inserted himself into the middle of a beachside

wedding. He stood, yelling hoarsely, on a wooden Muskoka chair festooned with magenta paper flowers. The crowd ignored him.

“All in a hot and copper sky, the bloody Sun at noon...” The breeze whisked his voice away, and then tossed it back:

“The very deep did rot: O Christ!

That ever this should be!

Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs

Upon the slimy sea.”

Roy paused his tinkering with the skiff’s outboard motor and turned, shading his eyes.

“No. They’re moving the coolers farther down the beach and he’s not following.” Like a reluctant herd of cattle, the festive crowd shuffled after the liquor. “He’s harmless. Normal other than the rhyming thing.” Roy tucked in the fishing gear. “Besides, I’m off duty. Joe’s at the detachment. I’ve got the radio if there’s an emergency.”

She watched the old man. He turned to face her. His long grey hair and beard snagged the breeze. He waved his skeletal arms, still shouting, tears streaming down his face.

“For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky,

Lay like a load on my weary eye, And the dead were at my feet...”

A hollow-eyed image, white and wispy, like a jellyfish with a gelatinous torso and human skull, floated up in her mind. *Sophie. Leave me alone.* Anna slammed the image away.

The old man hopped off the chair and bolted towards the dock, stumbling in the sand.

“Time to go,” said Roy, unhitching the rope. Anna jumped in.

“Past time,” she said, as Roy started the motor. They sped off, leaving the old man at the dock, still shouting.

The nightmares had mostly stopped, but not the flashbacks or guilt. But even those had waned, and, on the bright side, Anna could enter the water again. She was on medical leave after the violent death of her best friend a few weeks ago, and was trying to regain some equilibrium. She had arrived home in Canada’s Northwest Territories

last night. Anna hoped that by leaving the south, the dread would dissipate. Her plan: to catch as much of the almost-midnight sun as she could.

“Does he always speak in poetry, the old guy?” said Anna. She cast her line, aiming at a spot shadowing the high reeds at shore.

“Yeah, nothing but. Nurse thinks he had a stroke.”

“We learned that poem in school—*Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.”

“Guess he must’ve, too. Sometimes, with brain damage, old knowledge sticks with you, even when other things go.”

“Spooky stuff, that poem.”

“Just a story, though.” Roy met her gaze. “Don’t let it get to you, Anna.”

The cousins considered this in silence, reeling in line and then casting again. The boat rocked gently.

“I don’t even know the old guy’s actual name.” Roy cocked his head. “Funny, in a town this size. He’s been here for at least a month. He’s American, Alaskan. Worked crew on that Russian tanker that hit the iceberg off Igloolik.”

“The big fuel spill a few years ago? People died in that.”

“Yeah. Blames himself for it. Claims he shot an eider duck, and the shot set off an avalanche.”

“I thought the captain was the problem, drunk or high or something?”

Roy shrugged. “Anyway, the old fella’s been roaming the north since then, from Nunavut to Alaska, up and down to the northern provinces, telling his story.” Roy shrugged again. “He... whoa!”

Anna’s reel whirred.

The fish leapt once, a burst so fast she almost missed it. There was a small snake-like head on a huge body. And the colours: mostly dull pewter and olive, but when it shot from the spray into the crystalline sunlight, its dorsal fin flashed, scattering the spectrum, dazzling her. It hit the water and the rod went slack. Anna reeled in the broken line.

“Holy shit, Roy. It really was that big!” Anna spread her arms.

“Yeah, and now it’s officially the one that got away.” Roy spat over the side, his old boat still rocking from the battle with Anna’s rod. “The colours on that top fin, like the goddamn Northern Lights. Never seen anything like it.”

Roy picked up the rod and pulled the end towards him, sharp brown eyes narrowing. He frowned, adding another crease to his leathery face, and then handed it back to Anna. The wind whipped Anna's long, dark hair around her eyes. She tucked the strands behind her ear with one hand, then reached for the line with the other.

"What do you make of this?" said Anna.

"Cut, not snapped," said Roy. "No twirl on the end."

"Teeth."

"Unpleasant teeth."

"Can't be. Only things around here that big are sturgeon. Sturgeon don't have teeth like that. They're bottom feeders."

"You're the ichthyologist. What do you think it is?" said Roy. "Not a goddamn sturgeon, that's for sure. Maybe a mutant jack?"

"There's no northern pike around here that big. Other places, yes, but not here. Plus, it didn't have that pointy jackfish snout. And what about the rainbow on its fin?"

"That's why it's a mutant."

Anna stripped off her life jacket, shirt, shoes, and jeans, down to the half wetsuit beneath. "I'm taking a closer look."

"Yeah, well..." Roy didn't swim. He'd said if he fell in, he'd die from hypothermia and drowning was faster. "What's the point, Anna? The fish is long gone and the fish finder's busted."

"Over there." Six metres off the side, a dorsal fin broke the surface, shimmering like a rainbow, then sank below the ripples. "That's gotta be it." She watched the dorsal fin reappear.

Anna dove, cutting the surface, enjoying the thrill that came when she knifed into the water, the liquid freedom. She sighed with relief. The fearless pleasure was back, up here at least. God, she'd missed the feeling. Maybe she was returning to herself. She surfaced and swam, moving forward with clean, efficient strokes in the direction of the fish. Mounds of dark Precambrian rock, with their sparse crowns of short, scrubby pines, rose from the silver lake and stretched out to the far horizons. She hung there, suspended, under the sky's blue dome, waiting.

"There! To your left!" Roy's shout bounced off the stone hills. Anna tracked the slight crest, and then dove, coming face to face with the fish.

It spread its gills and fins in a defensive display, undulating. A metre in length. She'd overestimated it during its leap. Its mottled flanks first blended with the depths below it, then were flashed into clarity by a sunbeam. Anna was glad she was bigger than the fish. Her heart began a slow thud in her ears.

This was no overgrown jack. More like a differently coloured, overgrown snakehead, a version of the invasive tropical *Channa marulius* causing such concern to their American neighbours. But how was that possible? They couldn't survive a Northern Canadian winter. There had never been a confirmed sighting of the voracious Asian import north of the US border. And what about that freakish dorsal fin?

The fish backed off, swimming into a nearby pool of light, and spread its dorsal fin again. The movement created an aqueous stained-glass window—waves of crimson, emerald, gold and violet that shimmered then vanished. Anna held still. The fish circled her, keeping eye contact, and revealed a mouthful of tiny, serrated teeth. Her stomach clenched. Like the piranhas and Sophie, it heralded floating tendrils of flesh and lost souls. The fish flicked its tail and was gone, torpedoing ahead.

Anna watched its passage until she had to surface. By the time she had grabbed a fresh lungful and brought her head back under, the fish was gone. She was no longer a researcher who swam daily with sharks, studied barracuda, and waded into piranha-filled pools. Sophie's death had made sure of that. Anna had been powerless to stop it. Hadn't she? Right? With shuddering effort, she wrenched the memory away, and returned to the present. No, she liked her fish respectful. Up here, even the big pike fled her. And her favourite, the sturgeon, made her feel she had come home. In fact, she was near the Old Mother's territory.

She waited until her pulse quieted, took the police whistle hung around her neck, and ducked underwater, sounding the whistle in short blasts. She continued signalling in shallow dives as she swam. Eventually, she saw the Old Mother emerge from the bottom. Four metres in length, the sturgeon was ancient, covered in lines of white plates, her snout long and downturned, her mouth in a melancholy smile.

Anna had known the big fish all her life. The sturgeon was at least

a hundred years old. Freshwater sturgeon were not naturally found at these high latitudes. But Old Mother and her family were the result of an ambitious breeding experiment between Canadian and Russian scientists, started in the early 1900's. The program somehow survived the Russian Revolution and world wars, and only ended with the Cold War of the 1950's. Results had shown some promise, but not the boom in caviar production projected. When they shut down the fishery, they released all the sturgeon into the wild. Some survived. Most had not. The few who had survived seemed much smarter than your average sturgeon, she thought. Survival of the fittest.

Evolution was a wondrous thing. She loved watching it from afar, observant, non-interfering. Sometimes humanity tipped a little something extra into the evolutionary pond, trying to make things better, for somebody somewhere—sustainable food sources, cures for diseases, a new industry, enhancing eco-tourism. Sometimes you got Old Mother. Other times, something regrettable. Still, when life hands you lemons... She smiled at Old Mother.

With the Cold War itself now ended, the fishery was starting up again, a joint Canadian-Russian program once more, but it wouldn't be running at full capacity for a year or two, assuming relations remained cordial. Now the Americans were making interested partnership noises. The times, they are a-changing, thought Anna.

But Old Mother did not. She rose with eternal dignity, allowed Anna to grip her top, and pulled Anna to the surface. Anna caught her breath, then swam with the prehistoric fish. No ragged poached egg death visions this time. Calm descended and filled Anna.

Until she noticed the wounds. Gashes sliced along Old Mother's flank, and bite marks marred the plates. The sturgeon dove suddenly, pulling Anna with her to a shallow-bottomed ridge. There lay mangled corpses of younger sturgeon, bitten viciously, partially eaten, left to die. Here lay scattered dog remains. With a jolt, Anna's heart resumed its drumming. Old Mother pulled Anna up again, swam around her once, and melted into the depths. Despite the cold water, a clammy heat broke out over Anna's forehead, while her extremities froze. She swam back to Roy.

"Nice visit? Catch up on all the news?" said Roy, hauling her into the boat. Anna told him what she had seen.

“And the snakehead’s heading to Sturgeon Creek,” said Anna, as warmth crept back into her limbs.

“Towards the Morosov Fishery?”

“Yes. We need to warn them if it’s attacking the wild sturgeon.” There was a lump in her throat. Roy squinted at her, patting her arm.

“It’ll have to wait. Joe called and he needs help. A big fight broke out at the wedding and a lot of drunks need attention. Also, a guy from Department of Fisheries and Oceans wants to talk to you.”

“Me?” Anna wrapped a beach towel around herself.

Roy nodded, started the boat, and headed back, with motor roaring and spray in their faces.

When they finally approached the communal dock, Anna saw two figures. One was a man of average build. And, scuttling down the higher ground of the path towards the dock, came the second—spiny and short, with weedy grey hair.

Once disembarked, Roy nodded towards the man in the ill-fitting shiny suit.

“This is Peter Smith, from DFO.” Peter had a soft face, a large mouth and bright, watchful eyes peering from behind thick lenses.

Anna shook his hand. “I thought I knew everyone here from Fisheries and Oceans.”

“I’m from Ottawa. Up for the wedding.” His voice was smooth, gliding around the words, supple but not warm.

Running steps rang on the wooden dock. They glanced over and saw the old man rushing towards them.

“Just don’t look at him,” muttered Roy out of the corner of his mouth. They turned their backs, forming a barrier.

The steps stopped. They hunched their shoulders and waited, eyes averted.

The old man thrust himself into their midst. He searched their faces, his pale eyes glittering. Then his eyes locked on Peter and he grabbed him with a skinny, claw-like hand.

“*There was a ship...*” he began.

“Let go of me, please,” said Peter. He tried to pull away, but the old man gripped all the tighter. Roy stepped in and gently pried the

man off.

The old man dropped his hand but not his gaze, skewering Peter.

“The ice was here, the ice was there;

The ice was all around:

It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,

Like noises in a swound!”

A swound?

Peter slipped around sideways, inserting Roy between himself and the greybeard.

Roy put his arm around the old man’s shoulders. “We know, old timer. Let’s get you a meal and you can tell someone about it.” Roy started to lead him away. “I’ll be back.”

“So, Peter, what can I do for you?” said Anna, wanting nothing more than to go home to a hot shower and dinner.

“A couple of DFO people disappeared over a month ago, up near McCann Bay, checking out anglers’ reports of unusual fish activity.”

“I heard,” said Anna. “Roy joined in the search. They found the DFO boat, but not the guys. They figured the thunderstorm washed them over. Quite a tempest, I understand.”

“We think there’s more to it than that. And we were wondering if you’ve seen anything unusual out...”

The sound of running steps again interrupted Peter. He wheeled in annoyance. The old man lurched forward, and clutched Peter’s lapels. He clung like a mussel to the wriggling bureaucrat.

“And the coming wind did roar more loud,

And the sails did sigh like sedge;

And the rain poured down from one black cloud;

The moon was at its edge.”

“What?” Peter stopped moving, comprehension lighting his face. “Hey, buddy, are you talking about our people? Do you know something about this?”

Relief crossed the old man’s face. He nodded and dropped his hands.

“Under the water it rumbled on,

Still louder and more dread:

*It reached the ship, it split the bay;
The ship went down like lead."*

"It? The storm?"

The old man shook his head.

"Were you up there? Did you see what happened?"

The old man nodded.

"Why didn't you tell someone before?"

The old man rolled his eyes.

Roy reached them, huffing, and then grimaced and opened his mouth to speak. Peter cut him off. "Let's all go to the detachment and hear what this gentleman has to say."

"Fine," said Roy. "I've got drunks to process anyway."

Peter and the old man were already deep in torturous, cadenced conversation, heading towards the patrol car.

Anna treaded water, lifting her fingers to make little drops fall, spreading into ripples. She looked up at the evening sky. It was forecast to be a big night for the Aurora borealis, but not yet—the sun was still up and would be for hours. She waved at Roy in the boat, steeling herself, and then slipped under the surface of the water. She smiled at her sense of ease. Better all the time.

The DFO thought there was some connection between the disappearance of their team and the giant snakehead. Their people had been tracking it through the interconnected waterways. Would Anna, Peter had asked, be willing to look around a bit? Give her professional opinion; you know, look for a few clues, since Anna knew fish and how fish scientists thought?

Oh, and now, she also had to keep a look out for Peter and the old man. They took off while Roy and Joe had finished putting the wedding combatants to bed and Anna had grabbed dinner. The mayor's boat was absent from the public dock. The mayor was not pleased.

"So, Peter said the DFO doesn't think it was just the storm," Anna had told Roy before heading back to the dock. She remembered the dog carcasses and reconsidered going out into the carnage again. But, no. This was her job and the snakeheads were just fish. Big fish with

evil teeth, but still just fish. She was the best diver in this region, and now, the only ichthyologist. She had to investigate. Down there. In the deep.

“Do you have anything I can use underwater? For protection?”

Roy had grinned, taken her to the arms locker and hauled out a spear gun. “I confiscated this from a tourist. He didn’t ask for it back.”

It was almost nine pm. Plenty of time for another dive, this one with scuba gear. And she’d be up in time for the sky show. She should have a diving buddy, but she never did, not out here where she felt like part of the lake. Roy was with her, though, in the boat anchored in the mouth of the inlet facing the fishery. After Peter’s further news, she wasn’t going to go calling at the fishery’s front door.

Without warning, white hot memories of Sophie snatched at her brain with thorny hooks. Anna shook her head hard, loosening their grip. Yes. She could do this.

She set her jaw and dropped below the water, descending with dolphin-like undulations, melting into habitual rhythms. She glided down in stages, looking for signs of the snakehead, hoping she wouldn’t find any.

Apparently, Peter’s US counterpart had let it slip, on one extremely friendly evening, that the snakeheads weren’t a natural accident. Both the US and the Russians were in on this. According to Peter, espionage and pillow talk were not a thing of the past. Pass the truth serum.

Swimming through the clear water, with familiar rock formations rising on either side, weeds twisting in the slight current around her like mermaid tresses, and the schools of small silver fish darting by on their evening feed, it all seemed impossible.

“It’s the polar sovereignty thing,” Peter had said, his gimlet eyes boring into her. How Peter had gotten the pillow talk going in the first place with the American agent was beyond her, but more power to him. She kicked her fins and went deeper.

“So, using Russian know-how and American bucks, they’re breeding killer fish in the old fishery? Without our permission?” So much for US-Russian tensions.

He had nodded. “Yes, a modified snakehead that can move over

land and drag things in like a crocodile.”

“Why? How would that help with a border dispute?”

“It’s just an experiment at this point, a very hush-hush one. But a few scenarios come to mind. The population is small up here, and it wouldn’t require many to take out the people holding the territory, maybe even before anyone knew what was wrong. Pretend it was a natural event and look good in international eyes. Or, create a super predator that depletes the indigenous wildlife, and so tourism stops, people move away, mines and oil companies get antsy, thus reducing the viability of claiming ownership of the land. Maybe it’s just part of a terror-inducing strategy. Or, perhaps, simple curiosity is behind its development. Curiosity and fear, my dear. Good old-fashioned fear.”

That was all he would say, making an annoying zipped-lip gesture.

None of that seemed very practical to Anna. After all, both the US and Russia outgunned Canada. Why would they need the fish? No, not very feasible, she thought, but when had that ever stopped anyone from pursuing a stupid idea, especially a dangerous one?

Anna kicked again, watching the dappled underwater light on the lake bed, and descended further. She knew the aggressive reputation of the tropical snakeheads. She hugged her gun closer, feeling her pulse accelerate, willing it to slow.

This dive was just going to be a little look-see, take a few photos, and make a few observations. Near the bottom now, she headed further up the inlet toward the plant. She saw the first corpse. First one big jack, and then another, then walleye and grayling, chunks missing, flesh torn by sharp teeth. Recently, too. No signs of scavenging. And there was the reason why: Old Mother and a few other large sturgeon were circling an area up ahead.

Anna pushed forward, now with caution, alert for any signs of the snakehead in her peripheral vision. She insinuated herself through the vortex of wounded sturgeon elders, straining to see. She pulled up short. Small sturgeon corpses swirled at the vortex’s centre, graceful strings of flesh seeking to twine themselves around her fins. Softly, gently, she kicked herself free, returning to the perimeter of mourning adults.

Old Mother came close, brushing Anna’s sides repeatedly, bumping her towards the inlet. Absentmindedly, Anna caressed her fin. Sturgeon reproduced with difficulty, replacing their numbers slowly

over decades. If the young were all being killed off, it could mean the end of the sturgeon. Old Mother bumped her harder, swimming faster, and knocking her further along.

Anna bumped back, then looked below to see the pale, ravaged bodies of two people, jack-knifed on the bottom, buttocks high, heads down. Their flesh and clothing were ribboned, their luminescent faces unrecognizable. Her gorge rose. She stopped herself from vomiting into her mask, the old sturgeon steadying her.

Old Mother looked her in the eye, and then took off, keeping to the weeds and shadowed bottom matter, only her rows of white plates marking her presence. Anna followed. They stopped in a clump of weeds, and Old Mother sank to the bottom, vanishing. Looking up, Anna saw the tell-tale rainbow flash. She waited, hovering in the vegetation forest, her spear gun readied.

The snakehead swam closer, passed her thicket, and then stopped at the rising column of bubbles. She'd been discovered.

This was not the metre-long fish she had seen before. It was twice that size. It shimmered and swirled through the weeds, first towards her, then around, studying her, finally darting away into the blackness. She should leave and return with traps. Assuming she could—a strike was coming.

Anna moved into the open, away from the weeds, to watch for the strike. And, here it came, not one, but two of the two-metre predators bulleting towards her. *A mated pair. Great.* At the last minute, she twisted and fired at the nearest fish. A jerk on her gun after she triggered the spear and the blossoming of a red cloud ahead meant success. The second fish rocketed away. She'd earned a temporary breather. The cloud cleared from the wounded snakehead, ruby filaments drifting away. A clean shot, she saw, right through the eye and into the brain.

She jerked the line towards her, thinking to remove the spear and reload. The snakehead was too big, an ungainly weight. Instead, she released the riding rig rope, freeing both the spear and the dying fish.

Her neck skin prickled a warning. She whirled to face the charging mate. It was too close and too fast to escape. She only had time to bring up her gun as a shield. She could see the tiny, vicious mouth gaping, inches from her, seconds away. She turned her head and braced herself for the bite.

The bite never came. An olive-and-white-striped freight train of a blur launched in front of her, knocking the snakehead flying into a large rock. The snakehead lay stunned, with Old Mother circling it. Anna shot to the surface. Roy hauled her in, out of the blackening waters. She spasmed with leftover adrenaline. Flashbacks fired through her: of Sophie's white, bleeding hands reaching up to her as the piranhas savaged her, Sophie's open-mouthed screams, of Anna's terrified paralysis, of the inevitable drowning. Roy wrapped a towel around her, forcing eye contact.

"Just breathe, Anna."

"I found the missing team. It's not pretty." Something white skirted her consciousness.

"Hold on. Isn't that the mayor's boat?"

Sure enough, a vessel bobbed some distance off, a figure hailing them.

"Thank heavens," said Peter. "Motor's dead. Still plenty of gas, though. We've been stuck here for hours."

The old man was there, huddled under a blanket. Roy clambered over and tinkered with the engine, to no avail.

"We'd better tow you. Here, take this." Roy handed his life jacket to the unprotected Peter. "I insist."

The sky was darkening now, matching the waters below. Anna told them about the snakeheads.

"I thought as much," said Peter. "A little premature eco-terrorism." The wind picked up a notch, the boats rocking more. "But you know... Hey! Is that one?" It breached the surface, catching a crimson ray of sunset. Peter's eyes widened. "They're so beautiful. I didn't realize... Extraordinary."

He stood silent, then said "Maybe it's not all bad. We could get rid of them, or we could turn this around, make use of them. In other places in the world, people live around crocodiles. We could adapt. They farm snakeheads in Asia because they taste delicious. We could do that." Peter was attaching the tow rope while Roy handed the old man into his boat with Anna. "And, the angling tourism. They'd be a great tournament species."

“Are you crazy?” said Anna. “Your team was butchered. It wasn’t a pleasant afternoon out with the kiddies followed by a tasty shore lunch.”

The rocking picked up. She wasn’t sure which was more nauseating, this line of conversation or the boat motion.

*“O happy living things! No tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware.”*

They all turned to the old man, who was staring at the back of the tethered boat, empty now except for Peter, who was gathering his belongings. The foaming waters erupted as three immense snakeheads breached, knocking Peter into the water between the two boats. Roy grabbed him by the life jacket and tried to drag him back in. Peter thrashed and screamed, a horrible high-pitched sound. The water churned with blood. One of the fish leapt again and fastened to Roy’s arm, dragging him down. Anna jumped to Roy’s aid but he slipped from her grasp. He was pulled under, still clutching Peter. The old man was whooping and trying to dive over the edge. By the time Anna shoved him down and aside, Roy was nowhere to be seen.

Her limbs refused to budge. She was flooded by superimposed images of Sophie’s and Roy’s terrified eyes. She couldn’t let this happen again. She would never be able to live with it. She shook herself, and dove.

Below, the frenzied snakeheads whirled in and out, pulling bloody tatters from a bobbing lump in a life jacket. She caught sight of Roy some distance away. He’d broken free, flailing uselessly, sinking fast. She dove deeper, grabbed him, and dragged him to the surface. He was still conscious, coughing and sputtering. The old man, silent for once, helped them into the boat.

With shaking fingers, she bound Roy’s arm.

“We’d better radio this in and get you two to the nursing station,” Anna said. Experience told her it would be easy to collapse on the boat’s floor and scream until hoarse. Instead, she swallowed hard and looked out over the still water, breathing slowly, willing calmness. Above the surface, the dusky sky was vibrant with shimmering waves

of colour: crimson, emerald, gold and silver. The streams of radiance arced and danced, rising and falling to an eerie overhead hum.

From the back of the boat, the old man's speech rose gravelly and jubilant:

*“About, about, in reel and rout
The death-fires danced at night;
The water, like a witch's oils,
Burnt green, and blue and white.”*

“Old coot's lost it,” said Roy, hugging his lacerated arm to his body. His teeth chattered. “Goddamn. S-s-see that?” he whispered. Anna twisted around, dread turning her stomach to stone.

Beneath the aurora borealis, echoing their dance, were the raised dorsal fins of a great school of small snakeheads. Scores of them flashed in a final salute to the day, filling the water with turmoil, glimmering, leaping and shooting incandescent rays into the dusk.

The old man rose, rocking the boat as he moved towards the bow. Anna readied herself to catch him. But he made his way on sure sea legs. He stood, his arms outstretched, his eyes gleaming. His voice boomed out over the water:

*“He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.”*

Before he could say anything more, Anna clubbed him from behind with the spare gas can, while Roy caught the back of the man's pants and pulled him unconscious to the bottom of the boat. Anna took his blanket and covered Roy with it.

“Let's get out of here.”

“Look down there, Anna.”

A pale and shredded spectre with bottomless eyes slipped beneath the boat's stern. It wasn't what Roy was looking at.

He pointed to the front. “There. See?”

By the bow, Anna saw the pale, murky glow of Old Mother, surrounded by relatives. They hovered, facing the inlet, then sank back to the shadowy depths.

“The Cold War’s begun,” said Anna.

The shudders seized her then. They did not surrender until dawn had slashed its own carnelian fingers through the sky and glacial waters.

*The many men, so beautiful!
And they all dead did lie:
And a thousand thousand slimy things
Lived on; and so did I.*
— Coleridge ▪

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FOR THE SKY AND THE SEA: AN INTERVIEW WITH LYNNE M. MACLEAN

AUTHOR INTERVIEW BY ROBERTA LAURIE

Lynne has a PhD in Psychology. For most of her life, she has worked as a mental health practitioner and a government and university researcher. These days, when she is not writing speculative fiction, she acts as a community and mental health research consultant. Lynne lives in Ottawa, Ontario, with her husband and two kids, none of whom read what she writes “unless begged — or bribed.”

Why do you write?

I enjoy the opportunity to create and to think about things without boundaries. I've always been a big reader, and fiction has always been a marvelous escape and recreation, so writing it is an extension of that. The last couple of decades, my work life has been in applied research where you have to be systematic and rigorous and justify everything and be very logical because real-life decisions are being made on what you do, so that's very different from my fiction writing where I can be as subjective as hell. I can pretty much go anywhere that I want, and I just love that.

How long have you been writing fiction?

I had wanted to write a novel when I was 25, but that fell through for financial reasons. I had to go back to work. And I didn't consider writing fiction again for a long time, but my oldest kid wanted to learn about writing when she was about eleven. She inspired me. I thought, "Yeah. I really wanted to do that at one time." Around that time I was only working four days a week, and my youngest was going to kindergarten, so I had half a day free. That's when I started fiction writing, and it was quite a learning curve. Some days I still wrestle with that.

What draws you to speculative fiction specifically?

When I read fiction, it's for escape. Meeting people with different powers and being in magical places is different than reading about people struggling with suicide or dealing with social issues and those kinds of things that people on the front lines are dealing with every day.

Why dark fiction?

I just always enjoyed dark stuff. I enjoyed horror stories and horror movies. When things are a little grim, there's a sense of conflict as well. The thing with horror and dark fantasy is the protagonist doesn't always have to learn something. Sometimes random things happen to people, and they have to cope with it, and things don't always turn out.

Are there writers or stories that have affected your writing?

In terms of writers, on the one hand, there's Kelly Armstrong, whose books I just love. They are sharp and clean, and right away you're into them. There's that dark undertone. I love her stuff. At the other end, there's Guy Gavriel Kay. I love the beauty of his work, and I love the complexity of his plots. I think they're magnificent. I've been enjoying the graphic novel series *Monstress* partly because it's