



som e thing  
to hide

poems  
by  
Valerie Poulin

Copyright © 2002 by Valerie Poulin

published by BeanStock Publishing  
[beanstock@sympatico.ca](mailto:beanstock@sympatico.ca)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, in any form or by any means, without the prior written consent of the publisher, or in the case of photocopying or other reprographic copying, a licence from The Canadian Copyright Licensing Agency (Access Copyright), One Yonge Street, Suite 1900, Toronto, Ontario, M5E 1E5.

Printed and bound in Canada

*to my family  
for your gift of stillness*

Speechless

tongue grinds words to render meaning

## Spring on God's Little Acre

water puddles at ankles of life-sized amethyst  
squirrels the colour of autumn  
steal away  
their pockets stuffed with sunflower seeds  
yellow bellies of black-capped goldfinches  
punctuate naked branches

crabapple trees give birth to pale pink blossoms  
innkeeper to robins sparrows  
evening grosbeaks whiskey jacks bluebirds

spruce trees call their needles to life

roto-tiller churns brown earth black caresses vegetable  
garden callused hands callused heart leafy mulch  
autumn's leftovers mosquito buzz

beyond cedars a river runs beneath a beaver dam shoulders  
flotsam and jetsam to sloping edge where  
the current bends then breaks  
patiently waiting  
to  
cool  
warm  
summer skin

## Ishkibibble

knees push-count fourteen toe-pleasing sandbars sip  
milky tea from China cups dainty finger sandwiches damp  
towels slouch across a picnic table sun-drenched thighs  
waterlogged shorts ivy grey a musty poetry book where  
strange things are done in the midnight sun there is an incident  
at a French camp and athletes die young

Bare bones

A gold bracelet, a diamond heart      sweetheart gifts  
slip through unsteady fingers      he  
on the cusp of middle-age crisis      twice her eighteen years  
drops by unexpectedly      stands in shadows of last call.

Chivas Regal fills a crystal tumbler      patience pours into his  
eyes      mahogany buffs a cheekbone      she swallows  
disposable kisses      runs barefoot in the June rain      his  
bed sheets hold false proof.

Another solitary game of I spy      a pig-dog smile laid bare  
he dusts himself off      proclaims a winner      whispers gather  
to howls      wolverine tearing flesh      beneath  
the full moon of December.

A standing ovation      hangs over a midnight balcony      toasts  
his bravado      turns her face gently to his      laughter  
rises with the sun      an engine's rumble and hum      rouses  
her      a polished door handle dents her kidney.

30 Apr 1995

Asleep in the crease  
of my lifeline  
cradled in flesh bloodless  
against rosy  
palm she slipped  
away taking  
my breath  
with her

Dented memory

Rocks collide inside her skull  
souvenirs of Lac des Mille Lacs

music pushes through tweeters and woofers  
as blunt and metallic as her lover's passion

a careless hatchback  
answers her throaty call of desire

tosses a handful of stones  
at the thrum of his anger

coupled in a slow dance with hillside scrub

uproots thistle, ragweed  
mounts a boulder

furrows deeper

shattered bits of windshield bleed  
her third eye blind

nerves like Inca bracelets  
jangle against her skin

he awaits the rising of the moon  
rolls up his sleeves hits the road

denying lips kiss clods of earth  
she pulls weeds from her teeth

## Seventeen Stitches

Icy toes float  
sunny thighs slouch  
over black rubber the freedom  
of being pulled by  
the current

laughter cascades  
over rocks along river's  
bend echoes in shallow  
whirlpools climbs  
the riverbank and  
sneaks into the forest

above me thigh high  
weeds stroke biting  
metal splits  
thigh like a

grapefruit  
sliced exposes pulpy  
pink flesh water  
droplets marry beads  
of blood it took

seventeen stitches to  
repair the gash when someone  
asks I make up  
interesting stories exotic  
car crashes angry  
boyfriends he  
traces the faded  
pink line counts  
the dots by twos sympathetic  
lips bend to kiss the scar's  
length

16 Jul 1980

I tug threadbare cotton sheets  
up over my legs

to my throat. Later,  
the doctor on call

feeds me the answer  
to a nurse's question.

He scribbles the word  
"Min-Ovral" in black ink

on a white square.  
Shame pushes its way

through scratchy sheets.  
An egg stitched

itself to my cervix.  
Unearthed it washed

downstream. Girlfriends  
call me brave. Mother

calls me stupid. Father  
remains silent. An

eroded birth canal  
bears her epitaph.

Word-of-mouth

I don't want to die

this fat

or

this ugly.

Idon'twanttodiethisfatorthisugly.

I asked. I pleaded. I begged

youtotakemetothedoctor.

My stomach has grown.

First,

slap

then,

you

eagle-eyeing his every move.

"She's a virgin," the doctor whispered.

A backhand outside the clinic doors, for

1. Making you look like a fool.

A cuff, for

2. Being stupid.

Mary had a baby.

She was a virgin.

A swift kick, for

3. Being an idiot.

Law enforcing

later two uniforms step up mother  
shakes me awake her stuttering hands

nervous butterflies my shoulders escorted to parked  
cruiser in navy blue silence handcuffs

glimmer in the mid-afternoon sun jangle  
in 2/4 time gravel crunches beneath my

feet over my tongue their front-seat  
pleasure to protect and serve a

round of good cop bad cop out  
ranks my backseat bottle fatigue

inky scribbles sever his and hers liquid  
fingerprints smudge order Gentlemanly

Manners holds open the door Official  
Business snatches his clipboard I rub

guilt-stained palms over unsteady thighs stand  
barefoot casting shallow graves

of stone their prize safeguarded  
in their holsters under their hats

## Rationed Oranges

Braided hands study  
pock-marked skin rub it silent  
cast off ginger husks

my tongue, muddy and swollen

vellum fingers tug at seams  
unthread white netting  
before her daughter's crowded  
eyes

blue veins measure  
the curve of each spine

cold lips suckle warm pulp

upturned shells  
lay rind to flesh hollowed  
of life

our  
conversation cobbled between bowls  
of porridge, loads of laundry

close-fisted shadows  
slide across  
linoleum I turn in the opposite

direction escape the shifting  
light she gathers  
Roman numerals stows them  
like stones in her apron pocket

their weight  
like rationed oranges  
or coal for warmth

## Silver Islet

Nanabijou  
in his eternal sleep lies  
beneath the rocky sky betrayed  
by an impostor  
double-crossed you stand  
on the November shore wearing  
earrings made of fisheyes staring  
at the Spirit of the Deep Sea Water your feet  
press scrub flat the wind wraps  
your shoulders in a shawl you crush  
his ring in your fist its ruby stone bleeds  
you think of treachery lift your hands  
in offering ashes tumble  
from your palms  
dust blows heralds a family  
reunion.

1987

On your trip to our apartment in the city  
the one time you dared fly, braved the skies  
you asked my sister why  
there were no photographs  
of you none of her she shrugged  
after your funeral  
she poured snapshots  
across my mother's bed shaping a quilt of black  
and white shadows  
hummed a cantata that tasted of salt  
palmed her favourite photo  
turned it over  
showed me  
a young man of nineteen  
his back  
to the camera lens

Boston, 1977

N's silver, platform boots, D choking  
g. G + D – scratch that! G + M. The Reds.  
A pogeey cheque buys 24 bottles  
of beer on the wall. Mom kicking your ass  
down Strouds Ave. Cruising in Keith's  
Monte Carlo. Getting pulled over, faultless  
but ticketed. Sport combat with toys until  
they spilled their stuffed guts. Lighting g's  
bed on fire. Talking on the big white  
telephone. An old banger in a field,  
somewhere, lost, one Friday night. Smoking  
two cigarettes in a row to impress some guy  
from down the way with pot-soaked eyes  
and a bargain-basement crush. UGDB.  
UGDBA. 25 bones a week.  
Bab's dirty mags . . . everywhere.  
Expired condoms  
abandoned  
in a China tea pot. Baloney sandwiches  
every day for a fucken month. DuMaurier  
cigarettes small regular \$1.25/pack. Your  
green polyester uniform. My crayon-yellow  
pants. Ma's illiterate cook barks his way  
through your every shift. Bells and whistles,  
dime store  
loot – a shoplifter's narrow miss cracked  
and bleeding.

## The Beauty of Dandelions

Splayed hands of evergreen trees  
encourage wind  
across an acre of rural land  
land marked by a phrase, unknowingly borrowed

## God's Little Acre

The land left handprints on her body  
in ways she had not counted on  
  
a place to turn when life pulls a fast one



Beyond Great Lakes basin  
past remote borders of northwestern towns

to  
a place where high-rises spy on tricky  
sidewalks lovers and artists drunk on myths  
hemmed in by concrete and shadows  
of office towers hungry for exact change

to a brick home where steel  
scarecrows stand knee-high  
in grassland where carbon-copy homes nudge  
one another for elbow room and  
garages rush to greet pedestrians

a day's work crumbles falls away

She has long forgotten the pleasure of snapping  
peas from a vine cracking open a pre-dinner sweet

long forgotten the feel of  
her palm against her father's  
dusty work boots rubbing leather to a dull shine  
boots dropped on the doorstep of the Salvation Army  
thrift shop the day  
he left town

Jack pines stand at attention  
brave the sharp edges of love



A welcome mat second-guesses her footsteps  
she plucks a handful of stars slings them  
to the ground

they chime shuffle become  
stepping stones alongside a highway

where  
bulrushes, as tall as children fall in line  
their reeds like limbs quelled  
in marshy ditches as brown as her memory



Imagination tangled with yellow sunlight  
in the bough of a spruce tree



She wanders the property line  
catches answers mid-air they  
glow like fireflies lured into a glass at dusk

left under the sun, they lose light  
suffocate

a footpath through cedars to

a gnarled pear tree barren  
untended raspberry bushes  
a lively strawberry patch

where  
her mother's knees bent before a flower garden  
workshop hands planting  
prayers alongside rows of portulaca  
nursing trumpeted petunias in soil unable  
to nourish

she curses  
the beauty of dandelions

### **About the Author**

Valerie Poulin has written for community newspapers and magazines, but often disguises herself as a technical writer to nab work in the financial services industry. She also self-published a how-to book for aspiring performers. The book enjoyed an extended, five-year run at Toronto's TheatreBooks.

When not churning out overpriced verbs and corporate jargon, Valerie tends to her creative writing needs.



*Something to Hide* was short-listed for the Canadian Poetry Association's 2003 Shaunt Basmajian Chapbook Award.