

# The Origin Of The Family

*Dorothy Livesay*

Where my parents canoed  
on the Red River  
on Sunday afternoons  
before coitus  
before I was conceived

the river flows on  
seventy years after  
without a trace  
of his paddle's grace  
or her low laughter

It's all in my head  
their conversation  
their efforts at  
conciliation —  
the nagging question:  
are we in love  
or not?

Because, at long last  
September 1, 1908  
they went to church, took the train  
to Whytewold on the lake  
to a borrowed honeymoon cottage  
mice scuttling over their faces  
and in the morning  
he cooked the eggs and bacon  
he swearing like a trooper  
('I'd never heard him swear before —  
and I've never got used to it')

Was it because  
he had decided she wasn't a virgin?  
She never knew till twenty years later  
why he resented her body and her ways  
and how she had no chance  
ever to prove to him  
her essential innocence.

Now that I am here,  
a life they joined in making  
I bear their burdens:  
her guilelessness, his guilt.  
I am the wishbone's centre  
made of their two-pronged  
rivalries.  
To be free I must push out  
into a new world's proffering  
I must go down and enter  
that darker cave  
with only my burnt hands  
as offering.