

## The Origin of the Family

Where my parents canoed  
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 the lake and  
a borrowed honeymoon cottage  
mice scuttling over their faces  
and in the morning  
as he cooked the eggs and bacon  
he swearing like a trooper  
(because he had decided she wasn't a virgin  
she never knowing till twenty years later  
why he resented  
her body and her ways  
and how she had no chance  
ever to declare 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 wishbones'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.

Dorothy Livesay

This poem originally appeared in *Fiddlehead*.

equal responsibility in child rearing. It is no longer sufficient for the male to simply help out with child and domestic responsibilities. This attitude implies that the main responsibility for children remains with the woman. Fathers too are capable of nurturing and warm behaviour, just as mothers are capable of independence, strength and achievement in the outside world. Rather than dividing personality traits into two parts and assigning half to women and the other half to men, the tendency today is for each to combine both kinds of characteristics. Only in this way will it be possible for women to have the opportunity for real fulfillment of all facets of their personalities. We tend to hear how difficult these times are for women — they are difficult for men too. We've seen how women are capable of developing their independence — the question we may raise now is, do men have the strength to cultivate their potential for warmth and nurturance?

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