ELISAVIETTA RITCHIE

Like My Aunts

Like Aunt Maria outside Leningrad, at eighty-four I shall live on a heel of black bread and cucumber slices, intending to haul myself up to boil the kettle for tea, while I wait

for pastries with poppy seeds, my murky eyes seeing gold onion domes against indigo skies, instead of burnt barracks across the lane through blizzards of snow or bullets,

and, humming Tchaikovsky, I'll rarely allude to deportations, the Siege, or children and dogs lost to artillery shells, famine, the stew pots of neighbours...

Like Aunt Jean who died at sixteen, overdosed with morphine when she fell from her horse, (and she "the beautiful one, the talented one," while my fat younger mother clung to her fugues),

I too dream: center stage, when I've memorized every part in every Shakespeare play (Aunt Jean did).

with Sarah Bernhardt (who attended her school performance

in Kansas City, Missouri) out there clapping, clapping...

Like the aunt I invented, I'll spend old age painting medieval murals on crumbling walls, while twenty-five cats mill around and social workers bang and bang at my door.

You powerhouse aunts, unaware of your legacies, all you asked of slippery fate was to live to the hilt. I drink to aunts who will drop their knitting, kick off galoshes, slip on dancing shoes or hiking boots,

perhaps use too much rouge, black lace trailing beneath the hem, a cigarillo thrust in their lips, and a slug of blackberry brandy poured in our tea — Oh, aunties!

Elisavietta Ritchie is a writer, photographer, editor, and translator. In addition to seven collections of poetry, she has published Flying Times: Stories & Half Stories (Signal Press, 1992).

SHEILA PETERS

Photograph

If only I could photograph your pain give you a print to carry in your wallet

whenever you felt the urge
you could reach into your hip pocket
and pull out a worn creased
snapshot
and feel the pain
feel it
feel it until the desire waned

this could catch on

photograph
a beaten woman in her hospital bed
or better yet
crumpled in the corner
trap her pain anger bitterness
and determination
determination to gather up the fragments
bundle them into an old pillowcase
and slink out the back door

whenever the welfare cheque wouldn't stretch
the kids were pukes
and her thighs softened in
disremembering
her oldest daughter
could bring out the yellowed picture
and pin it up beside the phone
before
defeated fingers forgot
and dialed home.

Sheila Peters teaches writing for Northwest Community College in British Columbia. Her background as a writer includes journalism, poetry, and short stories. Her play, A Height of Lane, was produced in Smithers, B.C. in 1991.