

## Poems by Kathleen McCracken

### 'For Us To Live A Star Must Die'

He might be right, the English physicist.  
So much luminous intelligence  
such exuberant good looks  
seem hard to argue with  
but what if he's missed the point  
of time's arrow and its tendency to chaos,  
all that down to the ground sound  
evidence the planet's earthworks  
are bent on listing, tilting  
drifting westward into sandflats?

What if none of it's about  
straight lines  
and my father who died last year  
on the cusp of summer  
the brightest solstice day in history  
(who we buried under lilies  
his breast pocket a small nest  
where our cut hair  
brushes one last talisman  
a pewter biplane, circa 1929)  
could it be that he's not dead at all  
but moving through me faster  
than the measured light that's said  
to travel ever outbound?

And when you kiss the crush  
of strawberries from my lips  
is it something more than carbon  
something closer to the circulating  
fleet and living heat of stars  
you taste?

## **The Fast Healer**

Because this wind holds ice inside  
-omega discs, shrapnel chaff-  
and I have given you to wear  
my hood and sash and felted gloves  
I shield your eyes with my bare hands  
then turn against the isobars  
and lay my body in its skins  
loose along your showing bones,  
here on the outer Mongolian steppe  
the plumbless Northwest Passages  
of our lost battles pass to you  
a dream of honey, wax and oils  
tungsten glow, antimony  
to sup and savour as you go.

## **Calmly and With Animal Grace**

Calmy and with animal grace  
you put on the ochred cedar  
mask, the robe of feathers.  
There was to be a ceremony  
and you knew it.  
When the physicians scryed  
they gave you four lean months  
on the outside maybe six.  
You noted their predictions  
then in the acid light of winter  
chose instead to shift  
into Saint Francis standing shoeless  
in the river's icy flow,  
arms outspread and tendering  
succour to the creatures,  
let them settle in a sibilance  
of wings and paws and furrowed horns.  
Blessing them you came to be  
the father of your own infant death,  
nursed it up with blood and bone  
and an elemental humour

until, freestanding, it outgrew you  
and you left it, hoodwinked, isolate  
bleached figure scouring  
one bleached cell  
from which you, bowing kindly out,  
had long since withheld the light.

### **Moon with Contrail**

We were talking about Wyoming  
or maybe it was Wichita

when you pulled the pickup  
leftways down a dirt track

scored through aspens  
spilling into snowfields

braked sharp and cut the engine  
under a shock of borealis.

*Look up, you said, north east  
of where that trapper's moon*

*is set on riding shotgun  
to the bear.*

Your hands in yellow roping gloves  
were raised

a cowman's bleak, deliberate surrender  
to the spinning cyan skies.

Here was eucharist  
for outlaws:

I swallowed down the galaxies  
came streaming from your mouth

and yes I saw the frosted contrail  
(a 747 out of Denver for LA)

a rend, a rib, a stitch, a scar  
at odds yet plainly wedded to the moon.

### **Fire Tornado**

Yesterday a fire tornado cut through Sao Paulo state  
upshot, the meteorologists say, of three months  
drought, brush fires and fast winds.

On Aracatuba roadsides parched drivers  
parked to watch that devil's tail  
score alchemical insignia into the charred plateau.

I thought of you holed up in Chos Malal  
deciphering how the ratio  
of temperature to current  
might summon that rotating column of flame  
but at the same time half remembering  
something about Kyoto in 1923, an earthquake  
and a whiplash twister that outstripped itself and grew  
the size of a large city then departed  
like this one, in a flash.

In the not quite dark you're wondering  
what to make of all that's been laid out, a soldier's  
tin plate meal, right there in front of you:  
the knucklebones, the ash, a wedding ring engraved  
with initials not your own – litter of signs arranged  
without a care for measurement, or so it seems.