

LAUCHIE MACDOUGALL'S WIFE

"The moody Table Mountain sometimes raises gusts exceeding 100mph which disrupt highway traffic and derail freight trains. This area was once the home of Lauchie MacDougall, who lived in the mountain valley and was under contract to the railway because of his skill at assessing, without instruments, the wind factors determining whether the area was passable for trains on any given day. After his death in 1965, his wife continued his work until 1972."

Newfoundland travel brochure

it was a jeezus cold morning when Lauchie died
me caught up with arthritis or some such thing as well
and in love with the poor man morethanever
I sat by the weak fire in the cookstove
and cried
until the stove she was cold and my tears
were freezin up on the floor
but after a while the sun was hittin high on the mountain
and I knew the railroad was gonna call
askin about the wind
what would I tell them?
with Lauchie stone stiff a sad retirement
and sure the wind is howlin like the madmen
but I don't know how fast!
still I threw some softwood in the stove
and I could see what Lauchie was tellin me
despite the fact that he was the only man alive
could of done the guesswork on the devil wind
but livin with a man all these years
you get to know more than a thing or two about his thoughts
and what makes him tick
and jeezus when the railroad calls
and says hows the wind?
can the train get by
without gettin blown to kingdom come?

I'll watch the wind carryin off the best parts
of the old man
then talk to the railroad men
and tell em
Lord I'll tell em.

INSURANCE

Last week some man
drove his Cadillac into the side
of my grandfather's house
where it ended up in the basement
severing the water pipes, shorting out the electricity
and demolishing the basement refrigerator.

It was late at night
and my grandfather was sound asleep
with the dog in his lap
in front of the 11 o'clock news.

Abruptly awakened during a chewing gum commercial
he called up my father to come have a look
and together they found the Cadillac
in the basement, its driver unhurt
and claiming he had no idea what happened
and that, yes, he had insurance
but it had run out that afternoon.

Everyone agreed that the Cadillac had no business
there in the basement and that the refrigerator
was a write off,
that some things are unexplainable
and defined as acts of God
even by the insurance people
who must have known about the vehicle's
attraction for basement walls
and the rising costs
of masonry repairs.