

Running Thru' the Dead

Mountain View Cemetery, 1999

I run through M's - Margaret. Mabel. Mathilda. MacGillvary. Malahan. Stones opaque and high gloss, pot of hyssop, purple iris; white satin ribbons shift in the wind. I run past the caretaker - dark skin and white whiskers, waves en route to his suite by the crematorium, basketball net among chimneys, discreet, shrouded by holly in ellipses.

I run through flat, black marble pieces, stones of Japanese Canadians, squint to remember those camps we are tempted to deny, those immaculate horse stalls decked with red satin ribbons, our beloved PNE that in the 40's was hell -- sick elders coughed in tubercular Japanese; women birthed in old straw as war torn Madonnas. Today, three men - one short, one tall, one fat, stand in semi-circle to watch their three Dobermans in menage à trois over graves of Wilcox and Matthews.

I run through wafting incense, the red and gold pagoda: mother, father, brother, sister in black cardigans, blowing. Another mother teaches her daughter to ride a bike in an oversized helmet on the path of white hearse. Amid ghosts of my own -- ghosts with no stones, whom I run with, and away from, both at once -- grandfathers, grandmothers, my father, aunts, uncles myriad divorces, exes, vanquished dreams and other sundry. I sip water and run back through the dead to 41st Avenue, where I find myself different somehow; brow drips with sweat; yet there is a place for me among them. Tomorrow, my tiny, swelled feet. And they will return to step quickly on this mown earth.

Heather Duff