

EQUALS

The least popular Canadian Prime Minister
my father's second cousin
(so my father called him, I don't know
the family tree)
went to school with him
in the Hopewell Cape School,
Dick Bennett one of the big boys,
my father seven years younger.

I saw old R.B.
in Sussex, New Brunswick
in the late thirties, on his last trip
across the country before he left it for good

and I remember
the two men standing together,
my father stooped with failure
in his shabby suit
trying to maintain
some dignity with the great man
(after all, he could still call him Dick)

and the portly, erect, balding
rich man
ex-Calgary lawyer
ex-Prime Minister
warily polite
to a poor relation
in case he might be asked for a loan
not needing votes any longer
but wishing to be agreeable
to say yes yes he remembered
those were great days
when we were boys
and this is your little girl

and I compared the two men painfully
thinking the only likeness
was the blue
sea-gazing eyes
of their Fundy boyhood

but now I realize
they were more alike than I thought
both mothers' boys
yearning for a home they could not return to
both failed men, bitter,
overcome by circumstance,
remembering their enemies
turning over their failure
in their minds

but the bigger failure
that of the man
who had travelled farther.

Maybe more to be pitied, that old man
stubbornly moving to a home not really home,
his last years filled with unimportant work
time-filling
or spent going from one movie to another
in wartime London
his best-loved kinsfolk dead.

Both of those men dead now for years.
Asleep.

Dreaming, maybe
of the shore at the Cape
still the way they remembered it,
projecting rocks
shaped by the stroke of waves,
blue-and-cream water,
the marvellous caves, hidden
from easy sight

the Bay deep enough
to drown any failure.

Elizabeth Brewster



Sarah Jackson 75