

THAT LOVE THING



ROBIN PACIFIC

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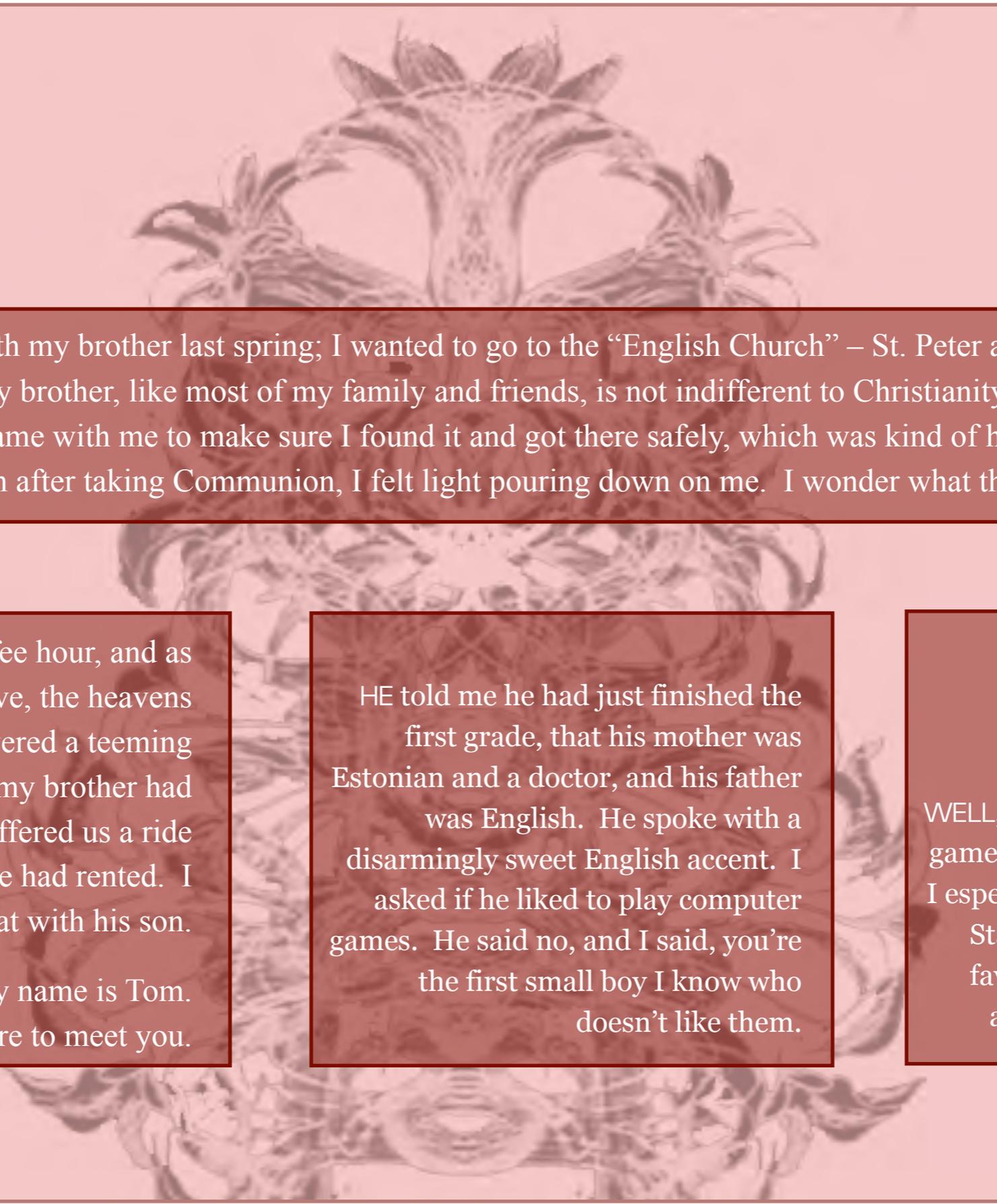
ROBIN PACIFIC



All love ends in loss:

I leave. You leave.

You die. I die.



I WAS in Stockholm with my brother last spring; I wanted to go to the “English Church” – St. Peter and St. Sigrid’s Anglican Episcopal. My brother, like most of my family and friends, is not indifferent to Christianity. He finds it more than useless. However, he came with me to make sure I found it and got there safely, which was kind of him. The service was lovely, and as I sat down after taking Communion, I felt light pouring down on me. I wonder what that’s about, I thought.

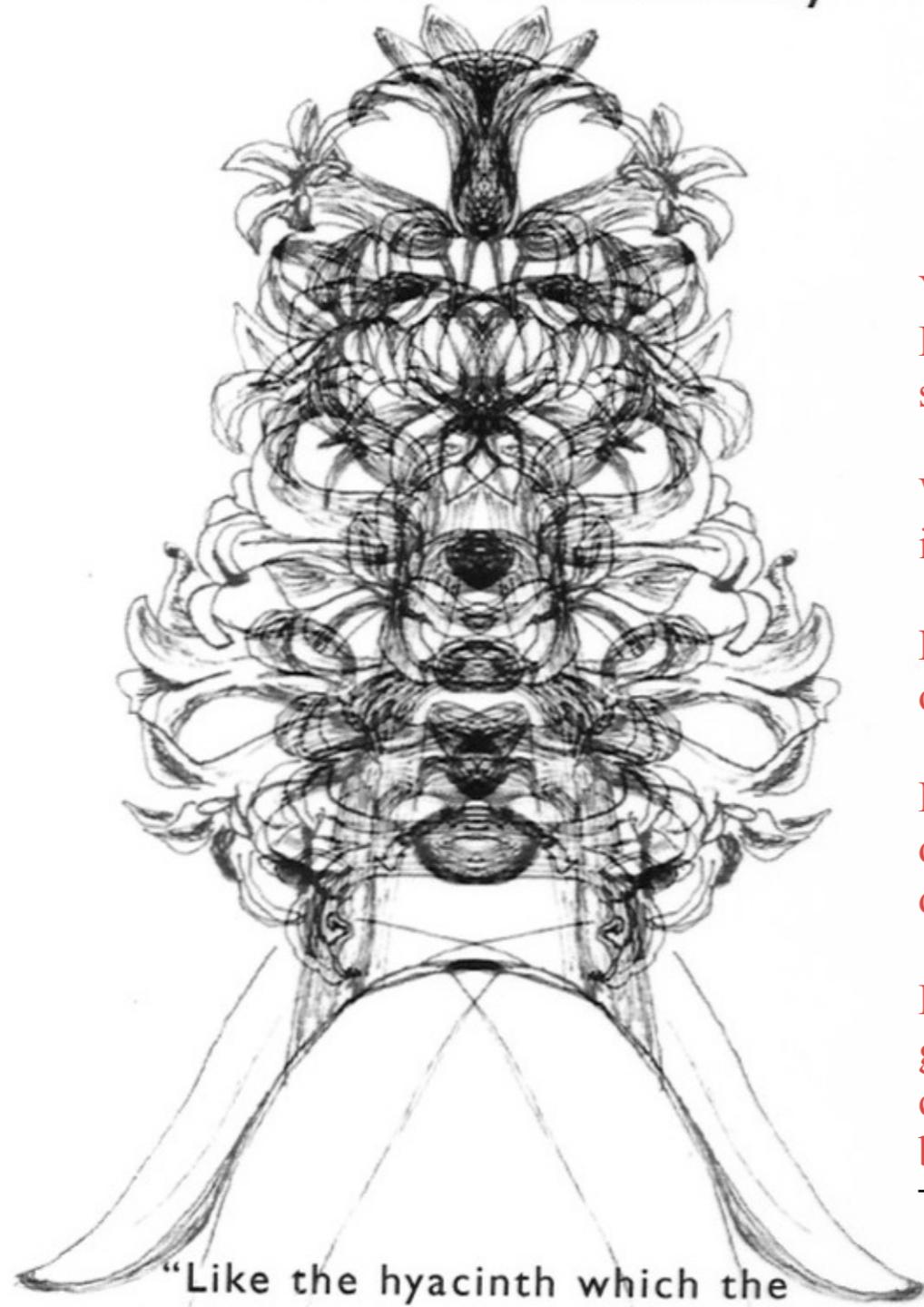
WE stayed for the coffee hour, and as we got ready to leave, the heavens opened up and delivered a teeming rainstorm. The man my brother had been chatting with offered us a ride back to the apartment we had rented. I climbed into the back seat with his son.

Hello, the boy said, my name is Tom.
It’s a pleasure to meet you.

HE told me he had just finished the first grade, that his mother was Estonian and a doctor, and his father was English. He spoke with a disarmingly sweet English accent. I asked if he liked to play computer games. He said no, and I said, you’re the first small boy I know who doesn’t like them.

WELL, he said, I do like to play games on my mother’s phone. I especially like Ahngry Buhds Stah Wahs. Why that’s my favourite game also, I said, and our bond was sealed.

Resistance to Adversity



“Like the hyacinth which the shepherd tramples underfoot on the mountain, and it still blooms purple on the ground.” Sappho

YOU have an excellent vocabulary for a six year old, I said. Excuse me, he replied with sombre dignity, I am not six, I am seven. My birthday was last week.

WHAT presents did you get, I asked. Many, many PlayMobil items were listed.

MY room actually looks like a toy store. That’s the advantage of being an only child.

MY birthday is in June as well, I said. I got him to guess the day, by moving my hand up or down as he tried out different days. When he guessed correctly, the 26th, he was delighted.

BUT I won’t see you on your birthday, will I, as you will be going back to Canada? His face fell a little, and then he cheered up again. Well, I would like to wish you a very happy birthday in advance. And I hope you have a very pleasant day.



I HAD fallen well and truly in love. And here we were, at our destination.
I said goodbye to Tom. It was very nice talking with you, he said, in his dignified little voice.

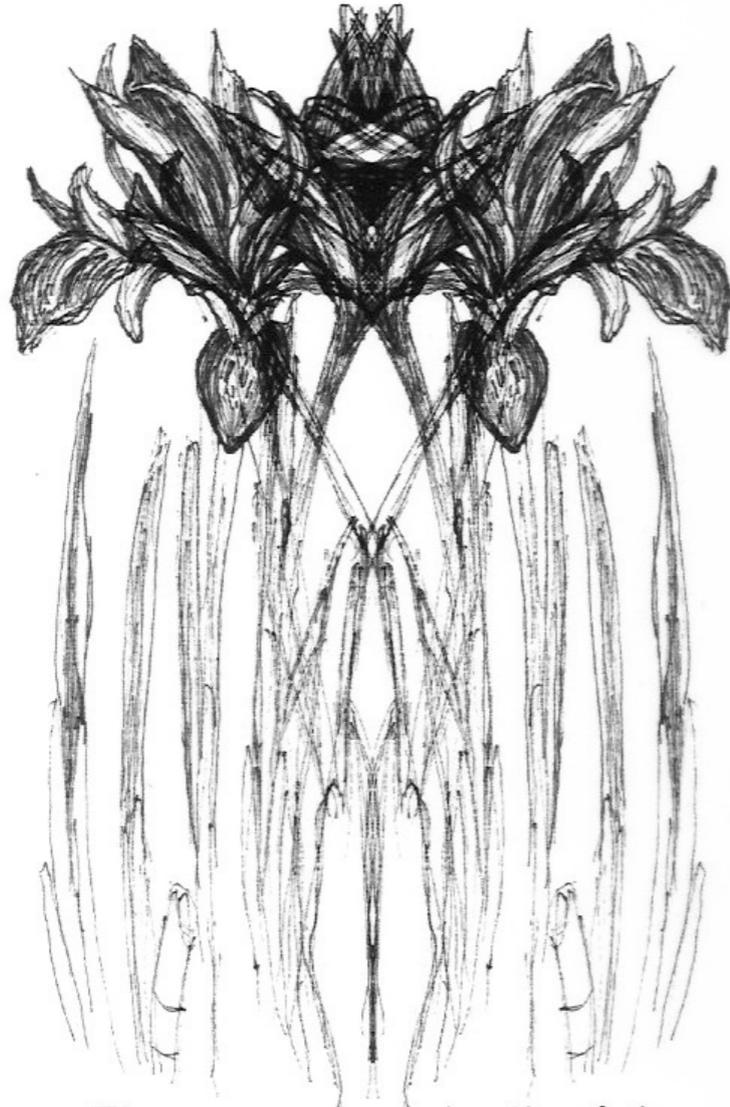
I WAS heartbroken. I spent a good while fantasizing about moving to Stockholm, joining the English Church and babysitting Tom, becoming his doting auntie Robin.

I REMEMBERED the sensation of light pouring over me during the service, and I thought, here's the message: people we love come into our lives for decades, for years, for months or for half an hour, and we will lose all of them. Either, as we get old, they will die one by one, or we will die and lose everyone we love all at once.

YET like that adorable little boy, each person we are given to love is a sheer gift.

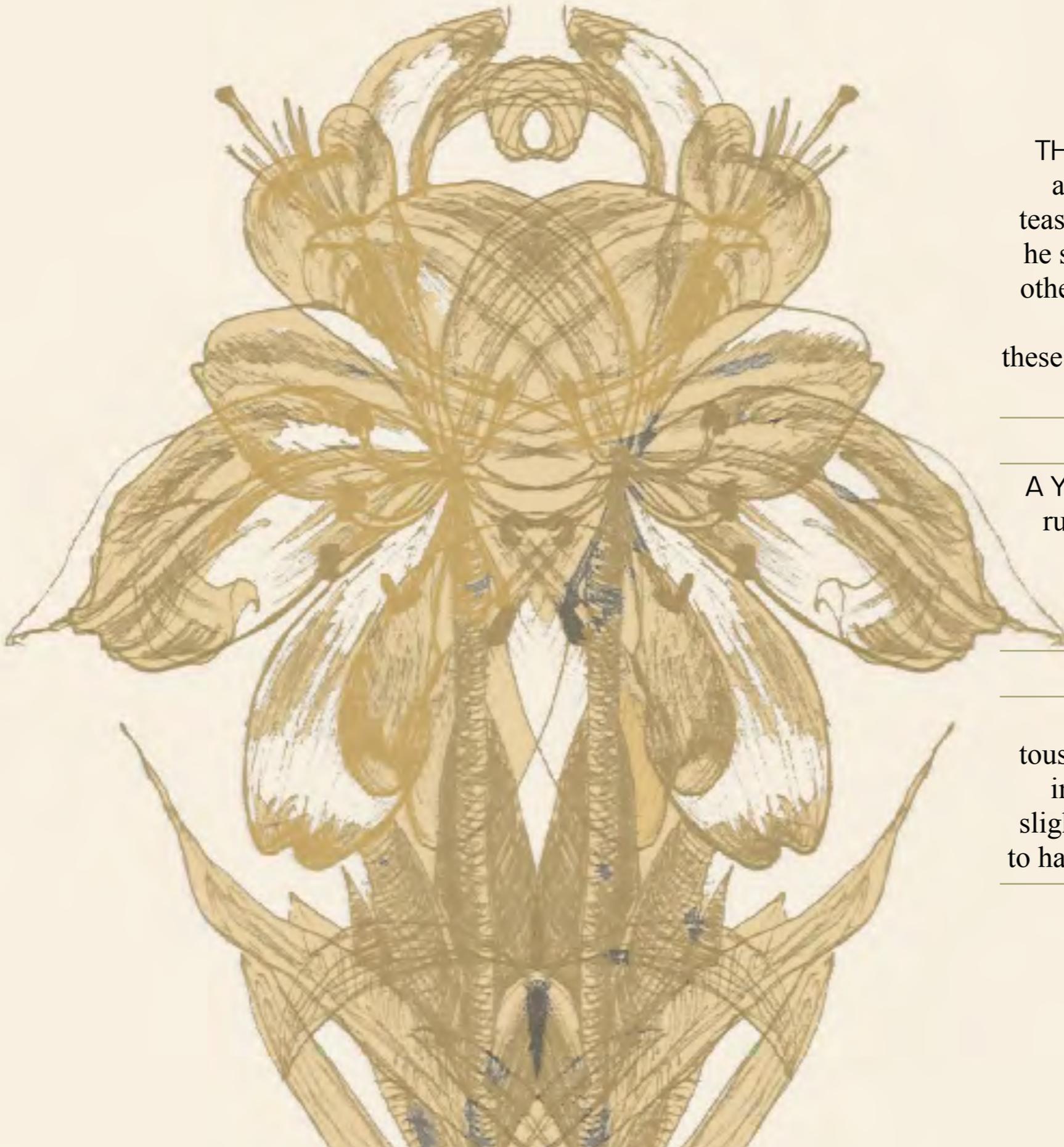
I WILL never see Tom again, but I will always be grateful I got to know him, for half an hour, in Stockholm, in the rain.

Something Bent or Curved



The many-coloured veils of the world's appearances, behind which Iris, Goddess of the rainbow, works unseen.

ON the ferry from Vancouver to Victoria to visit a friend. It's a bright, clear sunny August afternoon. I sit down beside a window, and a young woman with a mop of red curly hair greets me in a friendly fashion, so unfamiliar to us in Toronto. After a while, I decide to go up to the sundeck. It's crowded with sun seekers like me. I notice a woman on the next banquette, lying on her back, soaking up the rays. That same young red-haired woman comes up to her, and I realize she's the sleeping woman's daughter. Red Hair and a man, presumably the husband, start to fan her, and then gently stroke her face. She sits up, smiling. They're both grinning at her, and they all three start to laugh. It's an astonishingly tender scene.



THEN I notice two men, one of them also lying on his back. His lover is teasing him, they're laughing too, and he starts tickling him. They hug each other, and hold hands. I thought, what changes we have all wrought, that these two people can embrace in public so freely, so casually!

A YOUNG boy of about eleven comes running up to his large family, mom and dad and grandparents. Where were you, the dad says, we were starting to worry about you.

ALL four adults gently caress him, tousle his hair. I see that he's encased in a web of familial love. He looks slightly chagrined, but clearly pleased to have found his way back to the fold.

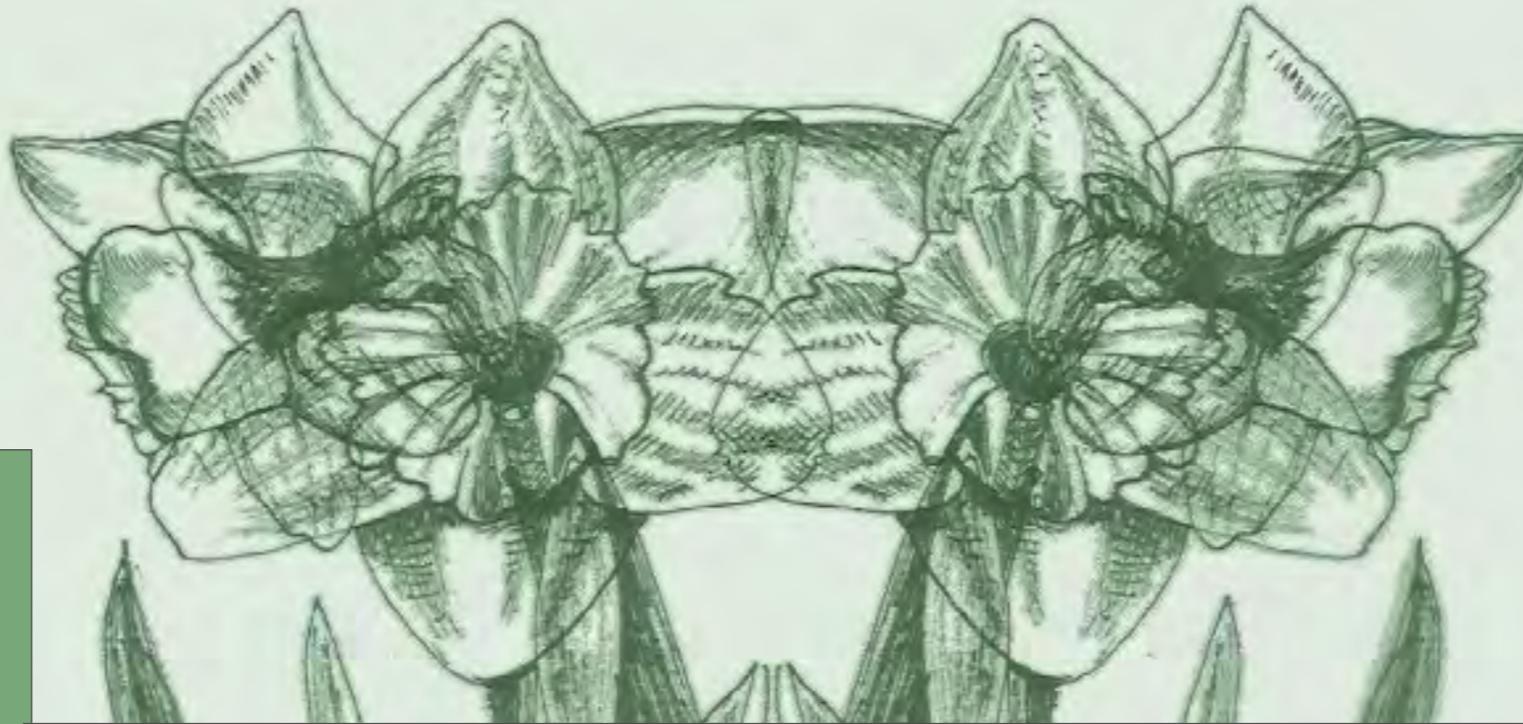
Queenly Beauty and Grace



IT FELT as if love was literally in the air -- some kind of supra-human love, which both penetrates us and emanates from us. Love at once human and divine.

THE SUN DECK OF THE B.C. FERRY
WAS A TABLEAU VIVANT OF A
PAINTING BY GOD CALLED **LOVE**.

When Hera's milk spurted from her breasts to form the Milky Way, the drops that fell to the ground became lilies.



FROM what waters
do you come?

WHERE is your
bone country?

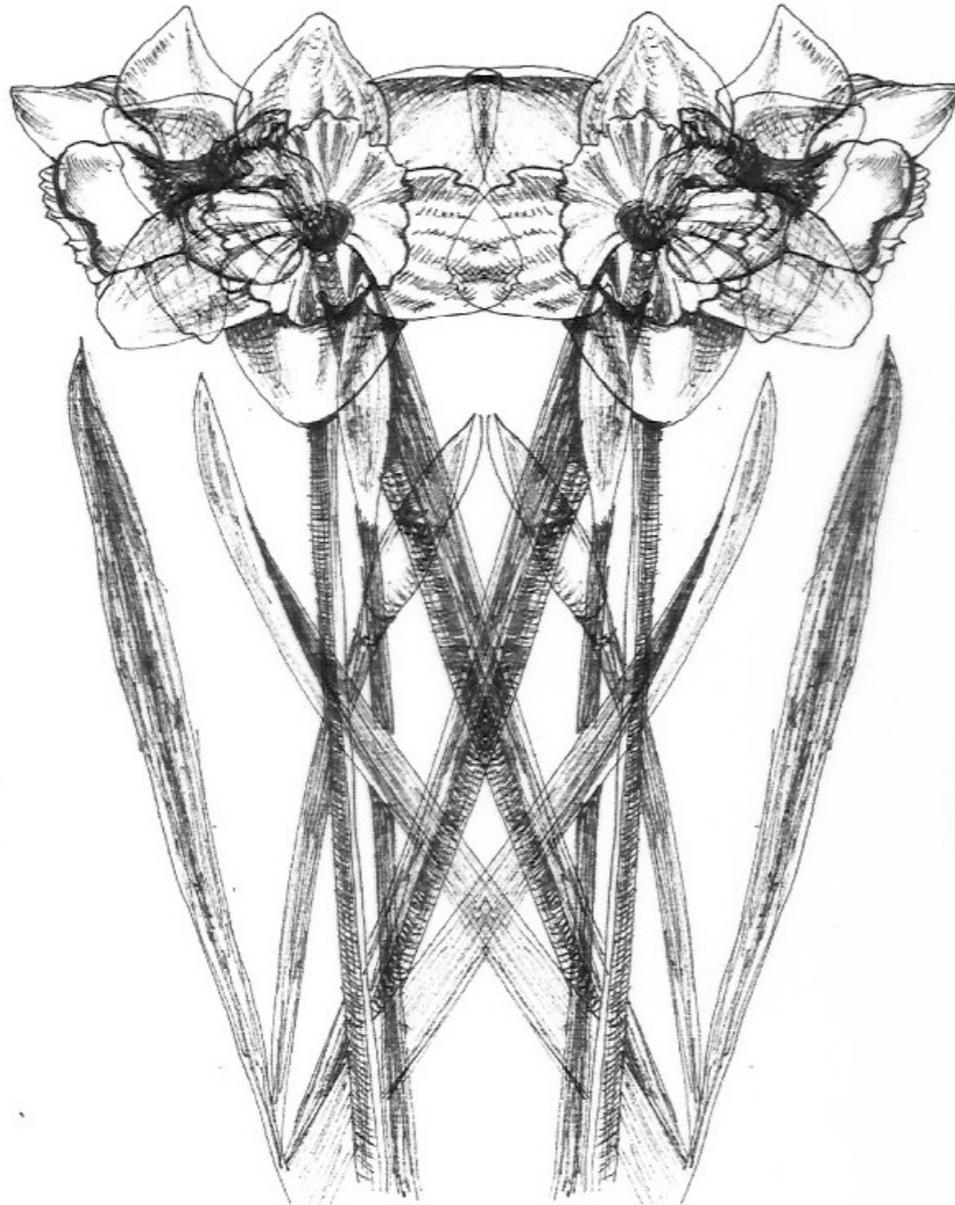
MAORI GREETING

I ONCE mapped out a series of three half-hour radio programs on the subject of love. The love between a man and a woman, using the letters of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin; the love of a mother and daughter, based on Mary Catherine Bateson's memoir of Margaret Mead; and the love of humanity for freedom, based on Paul Eluard's poem, *Liberté*.

IF I were to do it today, I would add one on the love of place. Everyone comes from water somewhere, even if it's a mirage on the prairies; and everyone has a place they love in their very bones. Or more than one place. It took me decades to forgive the southern Ontario landscape for not being the Pacific Northwest.

BUT I have come to love also the softer, less foreboding woods and lakes of my adopted province, and as I write this, I can look out of my cottage window to the grey blue waters of Georgian Bay.

Self-Sufficiency



“The world is an immense narcissus in the act of contemplating itself.” Joaquim Gasquet

OPENING myself up to the love of place brings inevitable sorrow for what we are doing to this land and these waters, for the muck and stink of pollution, the clear cutting, the ever-growing deserts, and the human devastation that results.

ECOCIDE IS GENOCIDE, IS DEICIDE.

LOVE isn't just a feeling. Love is action.

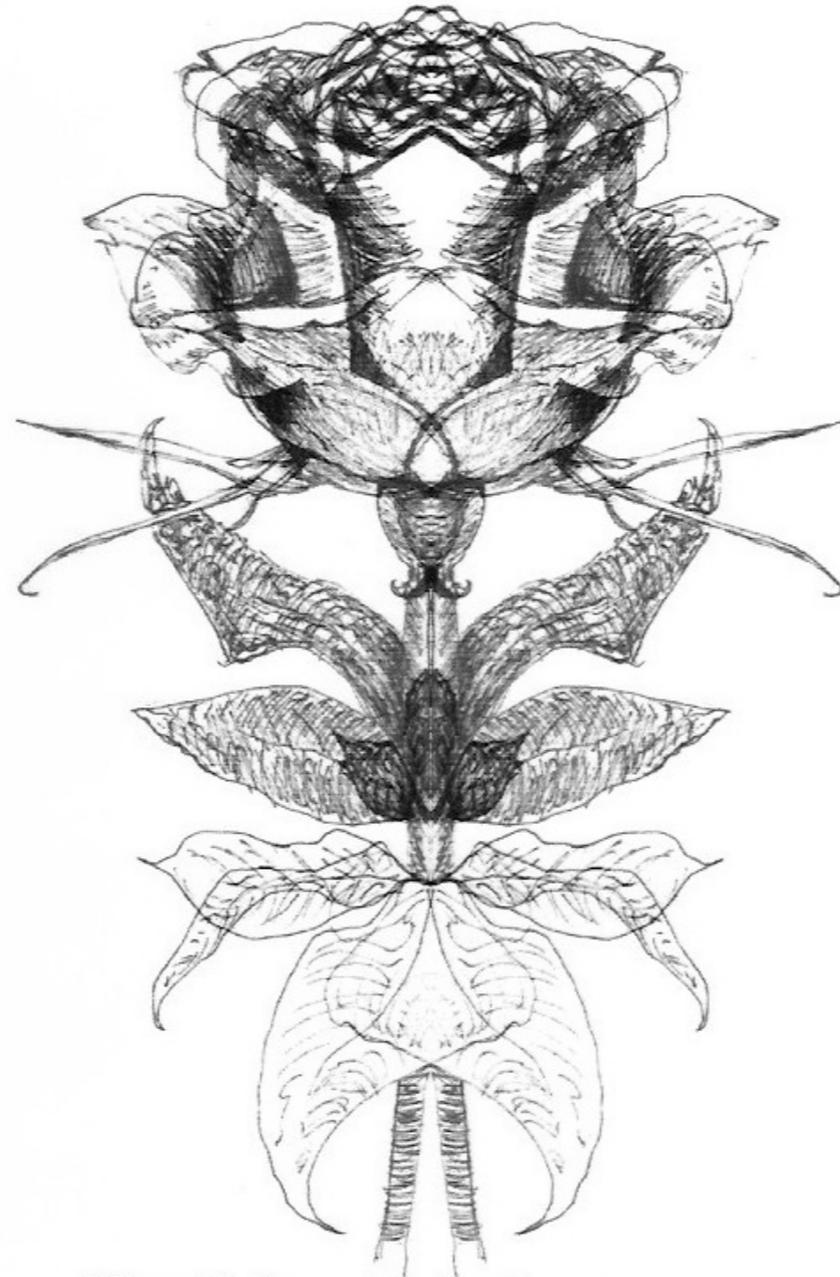
LOVE is what we do to protect and cherish and preserve all that we hold sacred.



Love isn't some diamond you dig up. It's a flame, and you have to work to keep it burning.

Terry McAuliffe, 1936-2003.

Consummate Achievement

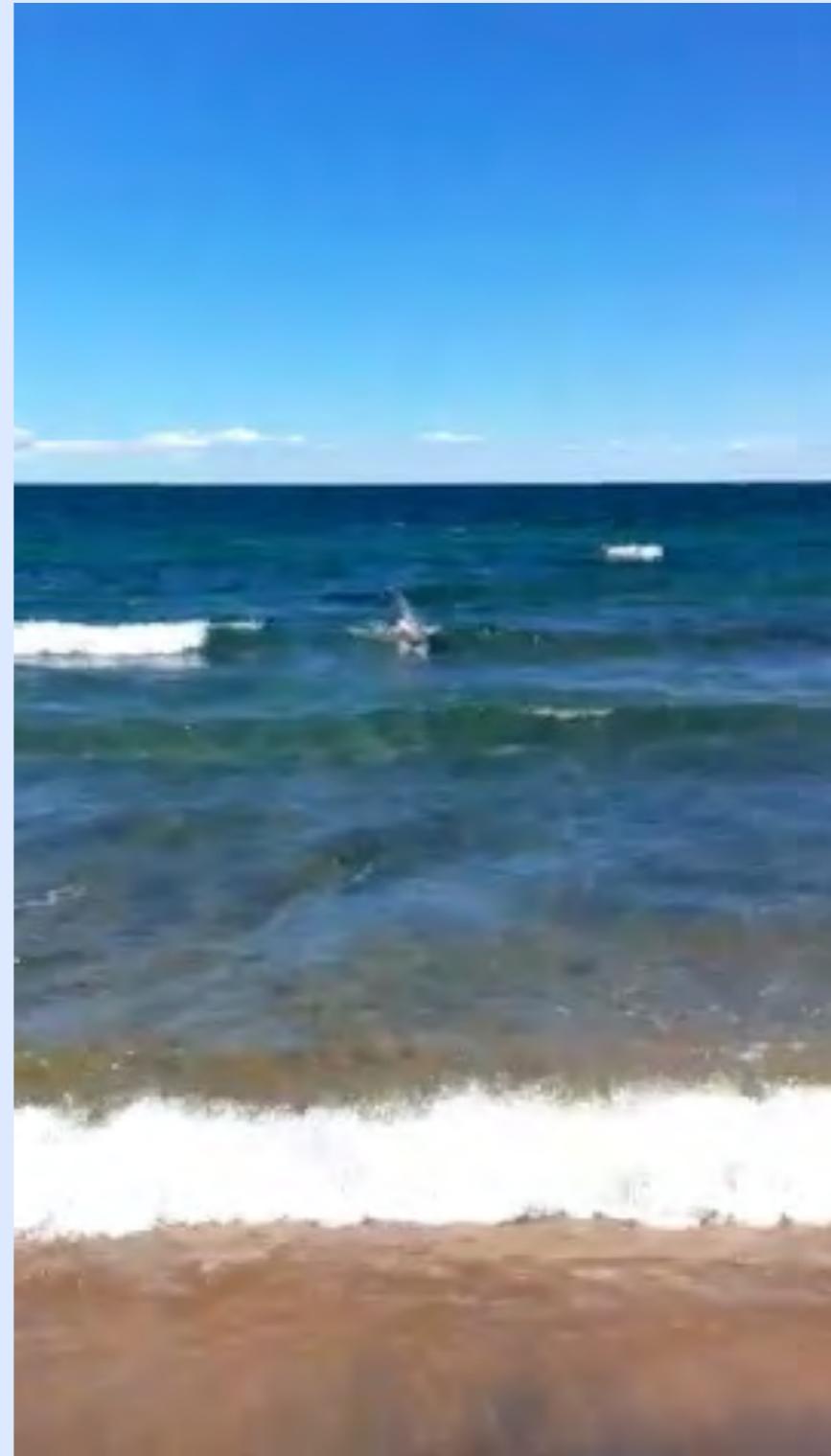


“Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden.” T. S. Eliot

This is my letter to the World
That never wrote to Me --
The simple News that Nature told --
With tender Majesty

Her Message is committed
To Hands I cannot see --
For love of Her -- Sweet -- countrymen ---
Judge tenderly -- of Me

Emily Dickinson (1862)



THE END