

ENG4U Poems & Short Stories

Table of Contents

Title	Page
Poems	
Margaret Atwood - "This is a Photograph of Me"	3
Earle Birney - "David"	4
Rita Joe - "I Lost My Talk"	9
Michael Ondaatje - "The Cinnamon Peeler"	10
Short Stories	
Morley Callaghan - "The Snob"	12
Rudy Thauberger - "The Goalie"	16

Margaret Atwood - "This Is a Photograph of Me"

It was taken some time ago.
At first it seems to be
a smeared
print: blurred lines and grey flecks
blended with the paper;

then, as you scan
it, you see in the left-hand corner
a thing that is like a branch: part of a tree
(balsam or spruce) emerging
and, to the right, halfway up
what ought to be a gentle
slope, a small frame house.

In the background there is a lake,
and beyond that, some low hills.

(The photograph was taken
the day after I drowned.

I am in the lake, in the center
of the picture, just under the surface.

It is difficult to say where
precisely, or to say
how large or small I am:
the effect of water
on light is a distortion

but if you look long enough,
eventually
you will be able to see me.)

Earle Birney - "David"

(You can click on hyperlinks for more information)

I

1 [David and I that summer cut trails on the Survey.](#)
2 All week in the valley for wages, in air that was steeped
3 In the wail of mosquitoes, but over the sunalive weekends
4 [We climbed, to get from the ruck of the camp, the surly](#)
5 Poker, the wrangling, the snoring under the fetid
6 Tents, and because we had joy in our lengthening coltish
7 Muscles, and mountains for David were made to see over,
8 Stairs from the valleys and steps to the sun's retreats.

II

9 [Our first was Mount Gleam. We hiked in the long afternoon](#)
10 To a curling lake and lost the lure of the faceted
11 Cone in the swell of its sprawling shoulders. Past
12 The inlet we grilled our bacon, the strips festooned
13 On a poplar prong, in the hurrying slant of the sunset.
14 Then the two of us rolled in the blanket while round us the cold
15 Pines thrust at the stars. The dawn was a floating
16 [Of mists till we reached to the slopes above timber, and won](#)
17 To snow like fire in the sunlight. The peak was upthrust
18 Like a fist in a frozen ocean of rock that swirled
19 Into valleys the moon could be rolled in. Remotely unfurling
20 Eastward the alien prairie glittered. Down through the dusty
21 [Skree on the west we descended, and David showed me](#)
22 [How to use the give of shale for giant incredible](#)
23 Strides. I remember, before the larches' edge,
24 That I jumped a long green surf of juniper flowing
25 [Away from the wind, and landed in gentian and saxifrage](#)
26 Spilled on the moss. Then the darkening firs
27 And the sudden whirring of water that knifed down a fern-hidden
28 Cliff and splashed unseen into mist in the shadows.

III

29 [One Sunday on Rampart's arête a rainsquall caught us.](#)
30 [And passed, and we clung by our blueing fingers and bootnails](#)
31 An endless hour in the sun, not daring to move
32 Till the ice had steamed from the slate. And David taught me

33 How time on a knife-edge can pass with the guessing of fragments
34 Remembered from poets, the naming of strata beside one,
35 And matching of stories from schooldays. ... We crawled astride
36 The peak to feast on the marching ranges flagged
37 By the fading shreds of the shattered stormcloud. Linger
38 There it was David who spied to the south, remote,
39 [And unmapped, a sunlit spire on Sawback, an overhang](#)
40 [Crooked like a talon. David named it the Finger.](#)
41 That day we chanced on the skull and the splayed white ribs
42 Of a mountain goat underneath a cliff-face, caught tight
43 [On a rock. Around were the silken feathers of kites.](#)
44 And that was the first I knew that a goat could slip.

IV

45 [And then Inglismaldie. Now I remember only](#)
46 The long ascent of the lonely valley, the live
47 Pine spirally scarred by lightning, the slicing pipe
48 [Of invisible pika, and great prints, by the lowest](#)
49 [Snow, of a grizzly. There it was too that David](#)
50 Taught me to read the scroll of coral in limestone
51 [And the beetle-seal in the shale of ghostly trilobites.](#)
52 [Letters delivered to man from the Cambrian waves.](#)

V

53 [On Sundance we tried from the col and the going was hard.](#)
54 The air howled from our feet to the smudged rocks
55 [And the papery lake below. At an outthrust we balked](#)
56 [Till David clung with his left to a dint in the scarp.](#)
57 Lobbed the iceaxe over the rocky lip,
58 Slipped from his holds and hung by the quivering pick,
59 Twisted his long legs up into space and kicked
60 To the crest. Then, grinning, he reached with his freckled wrist
61 And drew me up after. We set a new time for that climb.
62 That day returning we found a robin gyrating
63 In grass, wing-broken. I caught it to tame but David
64 Took and killed it, and said, "Could you teach it to fly?"

VI

65 [In August, the second attempt, we ascended The Fortress.](#)
66 [By the forks of the Spray we caught five trout and fried them](#)
67 Over a balsam fire. The woods were alive
68 With the vaulting of mule-deer and drenched with clouds all the morning,
69 Till we burst at noon to the flashing and floating round

70 Of the peaks. Coming down we picked in our hats the bright
71 And sunhot raspberries, eating them under a mighty
72 [Spruce, while a marten moving like quicksilver scouted us.](#)

VII

73 [But always we talked of the Finger on Sawback, unknown](#)
74 And hooked, till the first afternoon in September we slogged
75 Through the musky woods, past a swamp that quivered with frog-song,
76 And camped by a bottle-green lake. But under the cold
77 Breath of the glacier sleep would not come, the moon-light
78 Etching the Finger. We rose and trod past the feathery
79 Larch, while the stars went out, and the quiet heather
80 Flushed, and the skyline pulsed with the surging bloom
81 Of incredible dawn in the Rockies. David spotted
82 [Bighorns across the moraine and sent them leaping](#)
83 With yodels the ramparts redoubled and rolled to the peaks,
84 And the peaks to the sun. The ice in the morning thaw
85 Was a gurgling world of crystal and cold blue chasms,
86 [And seracs that shone like frozen saltgreen waves.](#)
87 At the base of the Finger we tried once and failed. Then David
88 [Edged to the west and discovered the chimney; the last](#)
89 Hundred feet we fought the rock and shouldered and kneed
90 Our way for an hour and made it. Unroping we formed
91 [A cairn on the rotting tip. Then I turned to look north](#)
92 [At the glistening wedge of giant Assiniboine, heedless](#)
93 Of handhold. And one foot gave. I swayed and shouted.
94 David turned sharp and reached out his arm and steadied me
95 Turning again with a grin and his lips ready
96 To jest. But the strain crumbled his foothold. Without
97 A gasp he was gone. I froze to the sound of grating
98 Edge-nails and fingers, the slither of stones, the lone
99 Second of silence, the nightmare thud. Then only
100 [The wind and the muted beat of unknowing cascades.](#)

VIII

101 Somehow I worked down the fifty impossible feet
102 To the ledge, calling and getting no answer but echoes
103 [Released in the cirque, and trying not to reflect](#)
104 What an answer would mean. He lay still, with his lean
105 Young face upturned and strangely unmarred, but his legs
106 Splayed beneath him, beside the final drop,
107 Six hundred feet sheer to the ice. My throat stopped
108 When I reached him, for he was alive. He opened his grey
109 Straight eyes and brokenly murmured, "Over ... over."

110 And I, feeling beneath him a cruel fang
111 Of the ledge thrust in his back, but not understanding,
112 Mumbled stupidly, "Best not to move," and spoke
113 Of his pain. But he said, "I can't move. ... If only I felt
114 Some pain." Then my shame stung the tears to my eyes
115 As I crouched, and I cursed myself, but he cried,
116 Louder, "No, Bobbie! Don't ever blame yourself.
117 I didn't test my foothold." He shut the lids
118 Of his eyes to the stare of the sky, while I moistened his lips
119 From our water flask and tearing my shirt into strips
120 I swabbed the shredded hands. But the blood slid
121 From his side and stained the stone and the thirsting lichens,
122 And yet I dared not lift him up from the gore
123 Of the rock. Then he whispered, "Bob, I want to go over!"
124 This time I knew what he meant and I grasped for a lie
125 And said, "I'll be back here by midnight with ropes
126 And men from the camp and we'll cradle you out." But I knew
127 That the day and the night must pass and the cold dews
128 Of another morning before such men unknowing
129 The ways of mountains could win to the chimney's top.
130 And then, how long? And he knew ... and the hell of hours
131 After that, if he lived till we came, roping him out.
132 But I curled beside him and whispered, "The bleeding will stop.
133 You can last. " He said only, "Perhaps ... For what? A wheelchair,
134 Bob?" His eyes brightening with fever upbraided me.
135 I could not look at him more and said, "Then I'll stay
136 With you." But he did not speak, for the clouding fever.
137 I lay dazed and stared at the long valley,
138 The glistening hair of a creek on the rug stretched
139 By the firs, while the sun leaned round and flooded the ledge,
140 The moss, and David still as a broken doll.
141 I hunched to my knees to leave, but he called and his voice
142 Now was sharpened with fear. "For Christ's sake push me over!
143 If I could move ... Or die. ..." The sweat ran from his forehead,
144 But only his hair moved. A kite was buoying
145 Blackly its wings over the wrinkled ice.
146 The purr of a waterfall rose and sank with the wind.
147 Above us climbed the last joint of the Finger
148 Beckoning bleakly the wide indifferent sky.
149 Even then in the sun it grew cold lying there. ... And I knew
150 He had tested his holds. It was I who had not. ... I looked
151 At the blood on the ledge, and the far valley. I looked
152 At last in his eyes. He breathed, "I'd do it for you, Bob."

IX

153 I will not remember how nor why I could twist

154 [Up the wind-devilled peak, and down through the chimney's empty](#)
155 [Horror, and over the traverse alone. I remember](#)
156 [Only the pounding fear I would stumble on It](#)
157 [When I came to the grave-cold maw of the bergschrund ... reeling](#)
158 Over the sun-cankered snowbridge, shying the caves
159 [In the nêvé ... the fear, and the need to make sure It was there](#)
160 On the ice, the running and falling and running, leaping
161 Of gaping greenthroated crevasses, alone and pursued
162 By the Finger's lengthening shadow. At last through the fanged
163 And blinding seracs I slid to the milky wrangling
164 Falls at the glacier's snout, through the rocks piled huge
165 On the humped moraine, and into the spectral larches,
166 Alone. By the glooming lake I sank and chilled
167 My mouth but I could not rest and stumbled still
168 To the valley, losing my way in the ragged marsh.
169 I was glad of the mire that covered the stains, on my ripped
170 Boots, of his blood, but panic was on me, the reek
171 Of the bog, the purple glimmer of toadstools obscene
172 [In the twilight. I staggered clear to a firewaste, tripped](#)
173 And fell with a shriek on my shoulder. It somehow eased
174 My heart to know I was hurt, but I did not faint
175 And I could not stop while over me hung the range
176 Of the Sawback. In blackness I searched for the trail by the creek
177 And found it. ... My feet squelched a slug and horror
178 Rose again in my nostrils. I hurled myself
179 Down the path. In the woods behind some animal yelped.
180 Then I saw the glimmer of tents and babbled my story.
181 I said that he fell straight to the ice where they found him,
182 And none but the sun and incurious clouds have lingered
183 [Around the marks of that day on the ledge of the Finger.](#)
184 [That day, the last of my youth, on the last of our mountains.](#)

Rita Joe - "I Lost My Talk"

I lost my talk
The talk you took away.
When I was a little girl
At Shubenacadie school.

You snatched it away:
I speak like you
I think like you
I create like you
The scrambled ballad, about my word.

Two ways I talk
Both ways I say,
Your way is more powerful.

So gently I offer my hand and ask,
Let me find my talk
So I can teach you about me.

Michael Ondaatje - "The Cinnamon Peeler"

If I were a cinnamon peeler
I would ride your bed
and leave the yellow bark dust
on your pillow.

Your breasts and shoulders would reek
you could never walk through markets
without the profession of my fingers
floating over you. The blind would
stumble certain of whom they approached
though you might bathe
under rain gutters, monsoon.

Here on the upper thigh
at this smooth pasture
neighbour to your hair
or the crease
that cuts your back. This ankle.
You will be known among strangers
as the cinnamon peeler's wife.

I could hardly glance at you
before marriage
never touch you
- your keen nosed mother, your rough brothers.
I buried my hands
in saffron, disguised them
over smoking tar,
helped the honey gatherers . . .

When we swam once
I touched you in water
and our bodies remained free,
you could hold me and be blind of smell.
You climbed the bank and said

this is how you touch other women
the grass cutter's wife, the lime burner's daughter.
And you searched your arms
for the missing perfume

and knew

what good is it
to be the lime burner's daughter
left with no trace
as if not spoken to in the act of love
as if wounded without the pleasure of a scar.

You touched
your belly to my hands
in the dry air and said
I am the cinnamon
peeler's wife. Smell me.

Morley Callaghan - "The Snob"

It was at the book counter in the department store that John Harcourt, the student, caught a glimpse of his father. At first he could not be sure in the crowd that pushed along the aisle, but there was something about the color of the back of the elderly man's neck, something about the faded felt hat, that he knew very well. Harcourt was standing with the girl he loved, buying a book for her. All afternoon he had been talking to her, eagerly, but with an anxious diffidence, as if there still remained in him an innocent wonder that she should be delighted to be with him. From underneath her wide-brimmed straw hat, her face, so fair and beautifully strong with its expression of cool independence, kept turning up to him and sometimes smiled at what he said. That was the way they always talked, never daring to show much full, strong feeling. Harcourt had just bought the book, and had reached into his pocket for the money with a free, ready gesture to make it appear that he was accustomed to buying books for young ladies, when the white-haired man in the faded felt hat, at the other end of the counter, turned half-toward him, and Harcourt knew he was standing only a few feet away from his father.

The young man's easy words trailed away and his voice became little more than a whisper, as if he were afraid that everyone in the store might recognize it. There was rising in him a dreadful uneasiness; something very precious that he wanted to hold seemed close to destruction. His father, standing at the end of the bargain counter, was planted squarely on his two feet, turning a book over thoughtfully in his hands. Then he took out his glasses from an old, worn leather case and adjusted them on the end of his nose, looking down over them at the book. His coat was thrown open, two buttons on his vest were undone, his hair was too long, and in his rather shabby clothes he looked very much like a workingman, a carpenter perhaps. Such a resentment rose in young Harcourt that he wanted to cry out bitterly, "Why does he dress as if he never owned a decent suit in his life? He doesn't care what the whole world thinks of him. He never did. I've told him a hundred times he ought to wear his good clothes when he goes out. Mother's told him the same thing. He just laughs. And now Grace may see him. Grace will meet him."

So young Harcourt stood still, with his head down, feeling that something very painful was impending. Once he looked anxiously at Grace, who had turned to the bargain counter. Among those people drifting aimlessly by with hot red faces, getting in each other's way, using their elbows but keeping their faces detached and wooden, she looked tall and splendidly alone. She was so sure of herself, her relation to the people in the aisles, the clerks behind the counters, the books on the shelves, and everything around her. Still keeping his head down and moving close, he whispered uneasily, "Let's go and have tea somewhere, Grace."

"In a minute, dear," she said.

"Let's go now."

"In just a minute, dear," she repeated absently.

"There's not a breath of air in here. Let's go now."

“What makes you so impatient?”

“There’s nothing but old books on that counter.”

“There may be something here I’ve wanted all my life,” she said, smiling at him brightly and not noticing the uneasiness in his face.

So Harcourt had to move slowly behind her, getting closer to his father all the time. He could feel the space that separated them narrowing. Once he looked up with a vague, sidelong glance. But his father, red-faced and happy, was still reading the book, only now there was a meditative expression on his face, as if something in the book had stirred him and he intended to stay there reading for some time.

Old Harcourt had lots of time to amuse himself, because he was on a pension after working hard all his life. He had sent John to the university and he was eager to have him distinguish himself. Every night when John came home, whether it was early or late, he used to go into his father and mother’s bedroom and turn on the light and talk to them about the interesting things that had happened to him during the day. They listened and shared this new world with him. They both sat up in their night clothes and, while his mother asked all the questions, his father listened attentively with his head cocked on one side and a smile or a frown on his face. The memory of all this was in John now, and there was also a desperate longing and a pain within him growing harder to bear as he glanced fearfully at his father, but he thought stubbornly, “I can’t introduce him. It’ll be easier for everybody if he doesn’t see us. I’m not ashamed. But it will be easier. It’ll be more sensible. It’ll only embarrass him to see Grace.” By this time he knew he was ashamed, but he felt that his shame was justified, for Grace’s father had the smooth, confident manner of a man who had lived all his life among people who were rich and sure of themselves. Often when he had been in Grace’s home talking politely to her mother, John had kept on thinking of the plainness of his own home and of his parents’ laughing, good-natured untidiness, and he resolved desperately that he must make Grace’s people admire him.

He looked up cautiously, for they were about eight feet away from his father, but at that moment his father, too, looked up and John’s glance shifted swiftly far over the aisle, over the counters, seeing nothing. As his father’s blue, calm eyes stared steadily over the glasses, there was an instant when their glances might have met. Neither one could have been certain, yet John, as he turned away and began to talk hurriedly to Grace, knew surely that his father had seen him. He knew it by the steady calmness in his father’s blue eyes. John’s shame grew, and then humiliation sickened him as he waited and did nothing.

His father turned away, going down the aisle, walking erectly in his shabby clothes, his shoulders very straight, never once looking back. His father would walk slowly down the street, he knew, with that meditative expression deepening and becoming grave.

Young Harcourt stood beside Grace, brushing against her soft shoulder, and made faintly aware again of the delicate scent she used. There, so close beside him, she was holding within her everything he wanted to reach out for, only now he felt a sharp hostility that made him sullen and silent.

"You were right, John," she was drawling in her soft voice. "It does get unbearable in here on a hot day. Do let's go now. Have you ever noticed that department stores after a time can make you really hate people?" But she smiled when she spoke, so he might see that she really hated no one.

"You don't like people, do you?" he said sharply.

"People? What people? What do you mean?"

"I mean," he went on irritably, "you don't like the kind of people you bump into here, for example."

"Not especially. Who does? What are you talking about?"

"Anybody could see you don't," he said recklessly, full of a savage eagerness to hurt her. "I say you don't like simple, honest people, the kind of people you meet all over the city." He blurted the words out as if he wanted to shake her, but he was longing to say, "You wouldn't like my family. Why couldn't I take you home to have dinner with them? You'd turn up your nose at them, because they've no pretensions. As soon as my father saw you, he knew you wouldn't want to meet him. I could tell by the way he turned."

His father was on his way home now, he knew, and that evening at dinner they would meet. His mother and sister would talk rapidly, but his father would say nothing to him, or to anyone. There would only be Harcourt's memory of the level look in the blue eyes, and the knowledge of his father's pain as he walked away.

Grace watched John's gloomy face as they walked through the store, and she knew he was nursing some private rage, and so her own resentment and exasperation kept growing, and she said crisply, "You're entitled to your moods on a hot afternoon, I suppose, but if I feel I don't like it here, then I don't like it. You wanted to go yourself. Who likes to spend very much time in a department store on a hot afternoon? I begin to hate every stupid person that bangs into me, everybody near me. What does that make me?"

"It makes you a snob."

"So I'm a snob now?" she asked angrily.

"Certainly you're a snob," he said. They were at the door and going out to the street. As they walked in the sunlight, in the crowd moving slowly down the street, he was groping for words to describe the secret thoughts he had always had about her. "I've always known how you'd feel about people I like who didn't fit into your private world," he said.

"You're a very stupid person," she said. Her face was flushed now, and it was hard for her to express her indignation, so she stared straight ahead as she walked along.

They had never talked in this way, and now they were both quickly eager to hurt each other. With a flow of words, she started to argue with him, then she checked herself and said calmly, "Listen, John, I imagine you're tired of my company. There's no sense in having tea together. I think I'd better leave you right here."

"That's fine," he said. "Good afternoon." "Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

She started to go, she had gone two paces, but he reached out desperately and held her arm, and he was frightened, and pleading, "Please don't go, Grace."

All the anger and irritation had left him; there was just a desperate anxiety in his voice as he pleaded, "Please forgive me. I've no right to talk to you like that. I don't know why I'm so rude or what's the matter. I'm ridiculous. I'm very, very ridiculous. Please, you must forgive me. Don't leave me."

He had never talked to her so brokenly, and his sincerity, the depth of his feeling, began to stir her. While she listened, feeling all the yearning in him, they seemed to have been brought closer together, by opposing each other, than ever before, and she began to feel almost shy. "I don't know what's the matter. I suppose we're both irritable. It must be the weather," she said. "But I'm not angry, John."

He nodded his head miserably. He longed to tell her that he was sure she would have been charming to his father, but he had never felt so wretched in his life. He held her arm tight, as if he must hold it or what he wanted most in the world would slip away from him, yet he kept thinking, as he would ever think, of his father walking away quietly with his head never turning.

Rudy Thauberger - "The Goalie"

Nothing pleases him. Win or lose, he comes home angry, dragging his equipment bag up the driveway, sullen eyes staring down, seeing nothing, refusing to see. He throws the bag against the door. You hear him, fumbling with his keys, his hands sore, swollen and cold. He drops the key. He kicks the door. You open it and he enters, glaring, not at you, not at the keys, but at everything, the bag, the walls, the house, the air, the sky.

His clothes are heavy with sweat. There are spots of blood on his jersey and on his pads. He moves past you. Wordless, pulling his equipment inside, into the laundry room and then into the garage. You listen to him tearing the equipment from the bag, throwing it. You hear the thump of the heavy leather, the clatter of plastic, the heavy whisper of damp cloth. He leaves and you enter. The equipment is everywhere, scattered, draped over chairs, hung on hooks, thrown on the floor.

You imagine him on the ice: compact, alert, impossibly agile and quick. Then you stare at the equipment: helmet and throat protector, hockey pants, jersey, chest and arm protectors, athletic supporter, knee pads and leg pads, blocker, catching glove and skates. In the centre of the floor are three sticks, scattered, their broad blades chipped and worn. The clutter is deliberate, perhaps even necessary. His room is the same, pure chaos, clothes and magazines everywhere, spilling out of dresser drawers, into the closet. He says he knows where everything is. You imagine him on the ice, focused, intense, single-minded. You understand the need for clutter.

When he isn't playing, he hates the equipment. It's heavy and awkward and bulky. It smells. He avoids it, scorns it. It disgusts him. Before a game, he gathers it together on the floor and stares at it. He lays each piece out carefully, obsessively, growling and snarling at anyone who comes too close. His mother calls him a gladiator, a bullfighter. But you know the truth, that gathering the equipment is a ritual of hatred, that every piece represents, to him, a particular variety of pain.

There are black marks scattered on the white plastic of his skates. He treats them like scars, reminders of pain. His glove hand is always swollen. His chest, his knees, and his biceps are always bruised. After a hard game, he can barely move. "Do you enjoy the game at least? Do you like playing?" He shrugs. "I love it," he says.

Without the game, he is miserable. He spends the summers relentless and morose, skating every morning, lifting weights at night. He juggles absent-mindedly; tennis balls, coins and apples, tossing them behind his back and under his leg, see-sawing two in one hand as he talks on the phone, bouncing them off walls and knees and feet. He plays golf and tennis with great fervour, but you suspect, underneath, he is indifferent to these games.

As fall approaches, you begin to find him in the basement, cleaning his skates, oiling his glove, taping his sticks. His hands move with precision and care. You sit with him and talk. He tells you stories. This save. That goal. Funny stories. He laughs. The funniest stories are about failure: the goal scored through a shattered stick. There is always a moral, the same moral every time. "You try your best and you lose."

He starts wearing the leg pads in September. Every evening, he wanders the house in them, wearing them with shorts and a T-shirt. He hops in them, does leg lifts and jumping jacks. He takes them off and sits on them, folding them into a squat pile to limber them up. He starts to shoot a tennis ball against the fence with his stick.

As practices begin, he comes home overwhelmed by despair. His skill is an illusion, a lie, a magic trick. Nothing you say reassures him. You're his father. Your praise is empty, invalid.

The injuries begin. Bruises. Sprains. His body betrays him. Too slow. Too clumsy. His ankles are weak, buckling under him. His muscles cramp. His nose bleeds. A nerve in his chest begins to knot and fray. No one understands. They believe he's invulnerable, the fans, his teammates. They stare at him while he lies on the ice, white-blind, paralyzed, as his knee or his toe or his hand or his chest or his throat burns.

To be a goalie, you realize, is to be an adult too soon, to have too soon an intimate understanding of the inevitability of pain and failure. In the backyard, next to the garage, is an old garbage can filled with broken hockey sticks. The blades have shattered. The shafts are cracked. He keeps them all, adding a new one every two weeks. You imagine him, at the end of the season, burning them, purging his failure with a bonfire. But that doesn't happen. At the end of the season, he forgets them and you throw them away.

You watch him play. You sit in the stands with his mother, freezing, in an arena filled with echoes. He comes out without his helmet and stick, skating slowly around the rink. Others move around him deftly. He stares past them, disconnected, barely awake. They talk to him, call his name, hit his pads lightly with their sticks. He nods, smiles. You know he's had at least four cups of coffee. You've seen him, drinking, prowling the house frantically.

As the warm-up drills begin, he gets into the goal casually. Pucks fly over the ice, crashing into the boards, cluttering the net. He skates into the goal, pulling on his glove and blocker. He raps the post with his stick. No one seems to notice, even when he starts deflecting shots. They come around him slowly, firing easy shots at his pads. He scoops the pucks out of the net with his stick. He seems bored.

You shiver as you sit, watching him, You hardly speak. He ignores you. You think the cost of his equipment. Sticks, forty dollars. Glove, one hundred and twenty. Leg pads, thirteen hundred dollars. The pads have patches. The glove is soft, the leather eaten away by his sweat.

The game begins, casually without ceremony. The scoreboard lights up. The ice is cleared of pucks. Whistles blow. After the stillness of the face-off, you hardly notice the change, until you see him in the goal, crouched over, staring.

You remember him in the backyard, six years old, standing in a ragged net, wearing a parka and a baseball glove, holding an ordinary hockey stick, sawed off at the top. The puck is a tennis ball. The ice is cement. He falls down every time you shoot, ignoring the ball,

trying to look like other goalies on TV. You score. Even when you don't want to. He's too busy play-acting. He smiles, laughs, shouts.

You buy him a mask. He paints it. Yellow and black. Blue and White. Red and blue. It changes every month, as his heroes change. You make him a blocker out of cardboard and leg pads out of foam rubber. His mother makes him a chest protector. You play in the backyard, every evening taking shot after shot, all winter.

It's hard to recall when you realize he's good. You come to a point where he starts to surprise you snatching the ball out of the air with his glove, kicking it away with his shoe. You watch him one Saturday, playing with his friends. He humiliates them, stopping everything. They shout and curse. He comes in frozen, tired, and spellbound. "Did you see?" he says.

He learns to skate, moving off of the street and onto the ice. The pain begins. A shot to the shoulder paralyzes his arm for ten minutes. You buy him pads, protectors, thinking it will stop the pain. He begins to lose. Game after game. Fast reflexes are no longer enough. He is suddenly alone, separate from you, miserable. Nothing you say helps him. Keep trying. Stop. Concentrate. Hold your stick blade flat on the ice.

He begins to practice. He begins to realize that he is alone. You can't help him. His mother can't help him. That part of his life detaches from you, becoming independent, free. You fool yourself, going to his games, cheering, being supportive, refusing to understand that here, in the rink, you're irrelevant. When you're happy for him, he's angry. When you're sad for him, he's indifferent. He begins to collect trophies.

You watch the game fascinated. You try to see it through his eyes. You watch him. His head moves rhythmically. His stick sweeps the ice and chops at it. When the shots come, he stands frozen in a crouch. Position is everything, he tells you. He moves, the movement so swift it seems to strike you physically. How does he do it? How? You don't see the puck, only his movement. Save or goal, it's all the same.

You try to see the game through his eyes, aware of everything, constantly alert. It's not enough to follow the puck. The position of the puck is old news. The game. You try to understand the game. You fail.

He seems unearthly, moving to cut down the angle, chopping the puck with his stick. Nothing is wasted. You can almost feel his mind at work, watching, calculating. Where does it come from, you wonder, this strange mind? You try to move with him, watching his eyes through his cage, and his hands. You remember the way he watches games on television, cross-legged, hand fluttering, eyes seeing everything.

Suddenly you succeed, or you think you do. Suddenly, you see the game, not as a series of events, but as a state, with every moment in time potentially a goal. Potentially. Probability. These are words you think of afterwards. As you watch, there is only the game, pressing against you, soft now, then sharp, then rough, biting, shocking, burning, dull, cold, the echo, all joined. A shot crashes into his helmet. He falls to his knees. You cry out.

He stands slowly, shaking his head, hacking at the ice furiously with his stick.

They scored. You never noticed. Seeing the game is not enough. Feeling is not enough. He wants more, to understand completely, to control. You look out at the ice. The game is chaos again.

He comes home, angry, limping up the driveway, victorious. You watch him, dragging his bag, sticks in his hand, leg pads over his shoulder. You wonder when it happened, when he became this sullen, driven young man. You hear whispers about scouts, rumours. Everyone adores him, adores his skill. But when you see his stiff swollen hands, when he walks slowly into the kitchen in the mornings, every movement agony, you want to ask him why. Why does he do it? Why does he go on?

But you don't ask. Because you think you know the answer. You imagine him looking at you and saying quietly, "What choice do I have? What else have I ever wanted to do?"