

# *Summer Rhapsody*

REBECCA LUCE-KAPLER

*Queen's University*

1.

Something about the air in summer invites you  
to unfold like a tightly cupped flower bud  
warmth teases open your shirt  
bumps the flesh  
loosens dark cries  
drifts them over the lake rocking  
to the wap wap of water following  
the crick song of the red-winged blackbird  
and the elegant ballet of the blue heron  
ginger-stepping along the marsh shore

No matter how long you shut your eyes  
listen to the waves, imagine ocean  
this is still prairie slough, wetland  
water that spawned you.

2.

The plane flew over our farm seven or eight times one morning  
swooping low, floating on warm air  
still unusual enough to cause notice.

Later a man in tan slacks and a straw fedora  
offered glossy aerial prints hoping to sell a view.

I pushed between my parents' arms  
to peek at patches of field, a twist of creek  
the house languishing beside the garden.

When the portrait arrived, someone had coloured it  
and now I could see my sister beside the two ton truck  
with my father, looking up at the sky  
and underneath the lilac bushes in the garden  
were the tips of my sandals where I lay  
reading *Gone with the Wind*  
for the third time  
that summer.

3.

When one of the new kittens died  
we wrapped her in a rip of flannelette  
from our old bedsheet  
swathed the stiff body  
that fit into a Campbell's tomato soup tin  
only the bump of her shrouded head  
above the rim.

I handed the can to my sisters  
to pose for a funereal photo  
Look sad, I told them. Look really sad.  
There they are in the picture  
Karen holding the tiny coffin  
Shawna at her elbow

their lips stuck out in exaggerated sorrow.

We had never been to a funeral  
not something you took the kids to then  
and could only imagine

but not a month went by  
that a baby pig or kitten  
a mouse or bird  
didn't die on the farm.

The ceremony was the mystery  
not the stiffened body  
or the absence of breath.

4.

Down the field, the baler shovelled strands of alfalfa and clover  
deep into its maw, compacting, tying, spitting out  
tight squares of hay as thunder rumbled.  
The tractor whined  
white flecks  
of rain  
cut our cheeks  
we pitched bales  
onto stacks  
binder twine  
cut through  
leather gloves  
one strong flash  
of lightning  
drove us  
inside to watch the summer crop soaking  
madness settling into later afternoon wonder time.

5.

Getting up late on a summer morning, the sun already six hours old,  
You munch toast and jam and cheddar cheese  
    the same breakfast you've eaten since last winter,  
You check the garden out the window, long straight rows of green and  
    the perimeter of blooming flowers African daisies, portulaca, tiger  
    lilies  
Your mother's back up and down, the short-handled hoe slicing before  
    she reaches to pull out the stubborn stinkweed.  
Somehow she senses your late rising, has some kind of radar where  
    you're concerned  
And comes into the house demanding that it's your turn, there is no time  
    for idleness in the summer on a working farm  
She wants you to weed the carrots, an endless row of sorting without the  
    hoe, only your fingers  
The sun is hot, your back hurts, the dirt grinds into your knees, there has  
    to be a better way to get a suntan  
When she calls you in for dinner the house is cool, the heat from your  
    sunwarmed skin dissolving in shade  
She's made new potatoes steamed and served with butter and dill, fresh  
    peas, cold beef, a large meal when you still need the energy to work  
As your parents, sisters and you sit around the warm food in the cool  
    house, a settling calm stops the hottest part of the day  
You realize how quickly summer is leaving and resolve that tomorrow  
    you'll rise at seven even if the sun is hot and even if you have weed  
    the garden.