

## HEATHER SPEARS

### Poem for Dee

Dear Dee how will it be?  
tell me in time this time, I've been with you  
so seldom and so seldom free—  
if ever free! clashes that surfaced only  
on your side and me continuously  
stubborn with rue.  
Your fingers lately  
fierce into my upper arms when I came for tea  
in that Victorian basement, scolding me  
soundly for taking "good Canadian money"  
and living away—

We were never together long—  
at Chicken Haven  
and the house against the salty cemetery  
you rented for a song  
end of the road in  
more ways than one

When you are gone  
all the little poets of Canada will be  
writing with feeling, feelingly,  
pressing their lives up against your long  
unquiet one, poems you won't see.  
But I want returns and rude advice,  
your real and accurate voice  
rebuking me.  
Once on a Galiano road among  
salmonberry and blackberry  
and me bemoaning some old misery  
you said, "It's time  
for you to love a woman."  
I did not heed, not then or now.

Long ago you were lovely  
in the photos, dark as Marcia (who may be gray)  
dark then as her daughter—  
estranged! At 50, 60, 70  
you bullied us for our best, the prow  
of your jutting chin and breasts—you alter  
suddenly into age, the abashment of even greater  
beauty.  
The soul is nothing but the visible, I should know.

I want to ask you how to be  
what I now swiftly  
become, impoverished, aphasic, to see  
with that cloudshot downglance

back into the century  
quarrel with secretary after secretary  
find out how words once uttered fairly  
innocently get twisted into articles that lie  
visited, hung on, little twisty  
threads of you pulled loose—dispersed!

Tell me how you lift down and put away  
over and over those first  
angers of absence  
resentful family who actually  
think it is you they heave and carry?  
On the beach at Active Pass, your clever son  
turns up native flints and worked jade traded from  
Japan  
and cannot interest his sullen  
child, your nervy  
girl has found a harsh creed  
and kept her brood  
from your improvidence—  
how will I learn  
when my sons grow bashful as they turn,  
is your crafty song  
worth this, is mine?

Your balance has gone off, you say,  
your inner ear—what irony.  
You who turned moral outrage and untimely  
power into a narrow, pleasing lay  
garlands of artifice with no surprises  
you never risked the pattern's disarray  
or even touched the edges  
it's of a piece  
the asp within the lace

Maybe this time, I'll parry  
a querulous embrace  
and be less shy—  
and ask about what matters, finally—  
the formal harmony  
outlives, out-fabricates the story:  
the stanced and seemly  
lances of Uccello, the bearable purity  
of Bellini's Crucifixion sky,  
and now your blithe, well written face—  
the woman you are, Dee,  
the woman I'll see.

*Heather Spears is currently living in Denmark.*