

JANICE LARSON

First Cut

*We write to heighten our own awareness
of life... we write to taste life twice,
in the moment, and in retrospection.*

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One of the first things I remember
is when I was about three
I think I must have been about three
my little brother wasn't born yet
and we still lived in the old house
with the treacherous stairs
(which I tumbled down when I was six
boy do I remember that)
Jamie (my big brother) and I
were playing with his yellow Tonka-toy
dumpruck
in the dusty, gravel-baked driveway
when Mom called us in
to wash up for supper.
We dilly-dallied our way in
and probably pretended to wash
then scurried into the living room
to play with some more toys
in some frenzied way
before being forced to SIT UP AND SIT STILL
at the supper table
But then we heard Dad's heavy boots
stomp stomping up the steps
and his voice
"Maureen get some soap and water will ya?"
and his voice
weaving with that of another man...a STRANGER!
Terrified of strangers
I stared in saucer-eyed horror
at Jamie
(who was only slightly less terrified)
and scanned the room
for the best hiding place
which was of course
the small space behind
the squarish brown chair in the corner
WAY OVER THERE!
Jamie ran
I ran
but he beat me

and scrambled into position, hissing
"find your own!"
the STRANGER
was/coming/in/and/I/had/nowhere/to/hide
...eyes darting desperate...DOOR!
BEHIND THE DOOR!
Making myself into a broomstick to fit
breathing through my nose now
Hey, I can see them through the crack
above the door hinge ... the STRANGER
his hand is cut
his left hand
a gash between his thumb and index finger
he's unwrapping the hanky around it
the white polka dots on his red hanky are
blotted by BLUH-UD
but it's not bleeding much anymore
it's all blackish and crusty around the cut
Mom's put water in the aluminum basin
on the table
and ZEST soap.
He picks up the sleek aqua soap bar
and his hands dive into the water
He and Dad are laughing kind of tough
as pinkish soap suds splash out here and there
They were branding calves
castrating bull calves
"and one little bugger squirmed just as I was
gonna cut"
the stranger explains to Mom
his shirt sleeves unrolling a bit
and dipping into the water
...he looks OK...
"Hey you kids, get in here and sit up for supper"
laughs Dad, knowing we're hiding
I emerge
Jamie squirts out of the corner behind the chair,
whispers "whadja see?"
my smug smirk says I'M NOT TELL-ING
and as I step into the kitchen
(the stranger's drying his hands in the porch)
I see on the table
the blue green bar of soap
the ZEST obscured by drying pinkish bubbles...

Janice Larson currently works in law (as an estate administrator with the Office of the Public Trustee/Attorney General of British Columbia) and as a private tutor to university/college level English students. She has published poetry in Canadian Forum (January 1988 issue).