

Minnie Pearl sang off-key on purpose. I had no alternative. Some rude lout shouted up at me, "Keep singing like that, honey, and you never will get out alive."

As I rushed off stage, I tripped on the stairs. But for the stabilizing effect of my Docs, I would have fallen flat on my face.

Eddy, my mother's latest Hoochie Coochie man, unglued himself from my outraged mother to introduce himself. "Maybe you'd have more luck singing the blues," he consoled me. His clear eyes crinkled humorously.

Turned out he was from the Mississippi Delta. He told Michael and me that he had migrated north in Muddy Waters' tracks for the Chicago blues scene. Even though his back was a bit stooped, he still measured in at about six feet, four inches. Good-looking and a sweet man. Hope for his own sake that he isn't in love with Etta, who doesn't consider any boyfriend, except mine, a keeper.

Silver helped the crowd forget my performance by jumping up and belting out an old Sons of the Pioneers classic, "A Cowboy Has To Sing." She was dressed up like the other Minnie—Haw-Haw. "Hey, I'll do anything I can to improve race relations," she squealed. When she trilled a few bars of "This Land Is Your Land," I was sure she'd get pelted with beer bottles. But most folks took it as proof of her patriotism. Its perpetrator left the stage in stitches. Fortunately, she chose not to tell the joke about the Lone Ranger and Tonto.

Over the protestations of her guests, Etta declined to return to the stage. Kenny told me she didn't want to make

herself an easy target for Nikos' wife, who had staggered in from next door with a half-empty quart of *ouzo* in her paw.

Michael took me home in a cab. I fell asleep with my boots on.

*Liz Brady is the author of Sudden Blow: A Jane Yeats Mystery (Second Story Press, 1998), which received the Arthur Ellis Award for Best First Novel from Crime Writers of Canada.*

## SUSAN SWAN

### Goddess Oil

On a Molivos evening,  
when Karolina hoses her garden  
in the little square of town land,  
like a big kid,  
standing barefoot in the public mud,  
knees bent, arms akimbo,  
mouth open in girly surprise.  
See! she grins, the silvery arc  
that shoots from my right hip—  
is goddess oil!

*Susan Swan's poetry appears earlier in this volume.*



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