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## Poems

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## Poems

### **Abstract**

A FINE NIGHT IN THE CITY, TAKING DOWN CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS, POSITIONING, THE SEVENTH DECADE, SHE, AUTUMN IN CANADA

## Lauris Edmond

### A FINE NIGHT IN THE CITY

At midnight in the breathing dark  
I walk through my house: it is  
lit from beyond itself by the light

of the city, translucence of  
moonlight, white stars asleep on  
the harbour water. This is home,

I whisper, amazed; this is where  
I live. If anything is mine it is this  
vision, this luminous gift held out

to the unknowing dark. Last week  
I was busy about the world's airports  
pursuing the traveller's ridiculous

industry of survival, each moment  
bursting with trifles like over-stuffed  
luggage. In this stillness I neither

lift nor handle, I stand at the window,  
weighing nothing, carrying nothing.  
I breathe, and the light grows

within me. Home is where your life  
holds you in its hand and, when  
it is ready, puts you quietly down.

### TAKING DOWN CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS

I was first in this room twenty years ago,  
alone - I crouched over there on a bare floor  
and leaned on the low window sill;

without knowing it, I was looking for signs -

the future. Any future, I wanted.  
Time that would know how to pass, how to take on  
one by one the difficult days  
at the end put each one  
carefully, steadfastly to rest.

A place too. A new place, where the death which had made  
vagrants of us in our own house, and now followed us  
everywhere, might sit down and speak at last  
with a low-toned, trusting sorrow:

I looked out on this lumpy hillside garden,  
the shifting sea, felt the October sun  
strike coolly across the empty floor  
and I made some kind of wordless affirmation  
to weather and water, the harsh and tangled growth  
of hillside plants. A small wind came up, I remember.

This Christmas children were here, perched on  
the furniture, tacking up cardboard stars and trees,  
reaching up to tie shiny things  
to the tree's bristled branches, its piney smell  
fresh and sharp. This morning as I drag it over the floor  
the smell still hangs within its spikey niches.

Always after celebration there are small griefs,  
a coming down, the old apprehensions still waiting about  
unchanged. Yet I am glad to be here. We have  
neither solved nor relieved our loss; rather  
it has come with us,  
we live in its constant knowledge. Each Christmas is now,  
or the last one she spent with us,  
or perhaps next year -

and hills are instructive: whatever grows here,  
each green cell, each pinprick of sap,  
knows in its very fibre that to live and breathe at all  
is to act provisionally.

At the door I look out to pohutukawas  
burgeoning all over the hillside,  
their lavish blooms so lightly held  
that even by tomorrow  
those imperial crimson threads  
will already have begun to blow away.

## POSITIONING

In a rainy spring my house is often dark;  
I stand at a window watching it drift past,  
the grey and silver weather; closer in,  
there's a box of curled impatiens flowers  
holding up minute green saucers to the rain  
on my bedraggled but luxuriant balcony.

Here is the action, of course I stand and stare.  
It's beautiful, this expanse of growth and  
seasons, nights and rainy days – and it is mine,  
which is to say I am enclosed within it.  
An imprisonment benign, magnificent, and no less  
ruthless for being what I exactly chose.

Downhill, in the bus shelter at Courtenay Place,  
the old man will be staring outwards too, his  
ancient tweed unkempt, his yellow beard  
tattered at the edges. He'll watch the rain,  
its gentle remorseless wetting of his entrances  
and exits – he who has so many, and so few.

His eyes are watery, blue-white, alight with  
calculation, his wits continually at work  
pursuing restless appetites – a roof, a drink,  
a word. I shiver at his journeys in the rain  
and frost, the thirst that drives him over gritty  
asphalt, his only gardens City Council plots –

and turn back to my dim interior: it seems  
that I, directing my wayward years towards  
this privacy - and dryness in the rain - now have  
what he must struggle for. Yet each of us  
has chosen our servitude. Like rain, our  
inward seasons drive, confine us, equally.

## THE SEVENTH DECADE

I am not a battery hen  
 I am free range.  
 Distance opens around me  
 filled with the cloudy weather  
 of other peoples' lives.

Their sharp rain chills me too  
 of course, but they  
 do not know  
 of my nesting.  
 It is in the deep hillside

it changes  
 and draws me further and further  
 away. It is not  
 one place. It is unknown  
 even to me.

## SHE

It's late, she's got time at last to sit still  
 with a cup of tea – or rosehip syrup perhaps,  
 or flower water, or a mud-and-parsnip-leaf

concoction left out by children now mercifully  
 asleep; her feet stir a coloured mosaic of  
 Lego pieces to find a place, and her eyes fall

on a blue hem still to be stitched, as she  
 fingers her way through more mystifying  
 fragments the day has left lying about,

unseen now but alive as a nest of spiders  
 (those fierce tears, the kicking, a fainting ...)  
 She's tired, and beautiful in her tiredness,

not in the allowed way (a mother's such a servant  
 for decency's sake you say she's pretty), but  
 because pieces of the life she cares for remain

in her, on her, a crystalline magnetic collage,

reflecting not only children picking their noses  
and discovering God peering out of their belly-

buttons, but the presence of the oldest goddess,  
her peasant spirit waiting still in this warm  
crumpled kitchen, with a capacious wisdom that daily

connects danger and dirt with the songs of the stars  
- waiting, I say, for the homage long, long due  
from her race, and never sufficiently given.

## AUTUMN IN CANADA

Naturally, it's the fall - what else could it be,  
this loosening, letting go, these faint purposeful  
dry showers, the crushed mosaic under my feet?  
The fall. It passes through me with an airy rustle,

as though I too relinquish a burden - all that earlier  
bursting out and youthful fullness, the imperceptible  
change to a more attenuated quality, a leaning or  
slackening, the occasional quick-smothered yawn

that tells you (or would if you listened) that a seasonal  
wind will one day take from you what you have already  
long been losing. Beside me on the grass are hundreds  
of big dark birds: 'Canada geese' says an old woman

on a bench, 'they come every year.' I stand close but  
they don't care, sea birds awkward on land, yet not wild,  
carrying within their oddly asymmetrical bodies a map  
of the seasons they too know by watching for signs.