

## SOMEONE OF THE OPEN AIR

Tanya Beyer

Our canoe guide was a girl as strong, I imagine, as a similarly-sized boy. She was twenty-one and twenty-two the summers when I knew her—Mary Lea Buchan, or Buck, or Squaw. No one in either canoe party could so briskly tote packs and canoes over a portage trail, or so determinedly heave a tipped spar out of our channel.

Red-skinned and with short hair of taffy-brown, she was a round-faced chunk, a citizen of the Soo, Ontario, and a winter student majoring in physical education and sociology at Windsor University. She could sleep at will in canoe or tent, or be as energetic as a CPR locomotive. Once her sleeping bag lay spilled on the shoulder of our granite-island camp in Wenebegan Lake, and at mid-morning it was a comical surprise as the wadded, supposedly uninhabited sack unbent and hatched Mary Lea. Twelve hours ago in the midnight gloom of this first camp, she had pattered around from cook-fire to every tent, courteously helping out at each of these construction sites.

Songs by the book-full she led on rivers and on windy lakes where the canoes skimmed with tent flies on paddles for sails. The songs were old, hilarious, and at their best—sexual. Sometimes she slouched, with the canoe at the will of the river current, and herself without motion except to breathe and to change the intensity of her silent scowl. This would be interrupted with a curt bit of advice to a paddler, or a startling compliment to a girl: "You have a beautiful skin;" or to soughing pines, or, at late day, to a white-throated sparrow in sorrowful song. About the sparrow she kept having to ask: "What's he called again?"

She boasted probably truthfully about successful pranks, her fixing of bullies, and her victories in games. In camps she dramatized while helping cook, striking mad athletic poses while narrating: "It's all in the neck . . . the shoulders . . ." and telling yarns of college revelry.

Down a rapids she paddled with vim, maybe like a voyageur, and counseled the bowman: "Draw! Paddle hard! 'Atta girl—see that? Left, okay?—see those vees? Okay, out you get, on the double!" Out of the rapids, as we rushed over the haystacks, she crowed: "I love that whitewater, don't you?" Before a log jam she chose whether to potage or to drag and float our canoes over, and directed us through the best

When tenting with her, I remember her sombreness. In 1975 I'd met her family—mother, unsmiling father, unwedded sister with her baby. Before we slept one night on the Goulais trip, Mary Lea talked about quarrels between her parents and grandparents, and about how it hurt to lose Grandfather. She also described wounds that she, a rather frank rebel, had had from her fellow-citizens. We compared our behavior and aspirations, and Mary Lea argued against a couple of my statements which were not beliefs, but a fifteen-year-old's wishy-washy proposals about humanity. "Everybody has something good," she avowed, "nobody is all evil." One can sometimes feel that the wickedest criminals are exceptions, but I remember Mary Lea partly for her firm opinion that we all come with our merits. From a person so earthy, so hearty and practical, but reserved and pensive too, the declaration seems especially believable.

## CANDY STORE

Emmy Leeman

The second graders got to go uptown by themselves. This didn't mean much to the town kids, of course, but it sure made us country kids eager.

I got me a penny from my dad for picking potato bugs. I didn't want it tied in the corner of my handkerchief because I liked feeling it in the soft part of my hand, even if it did make my hand sweat.

Noon recess, which was a long time coming that day, was time enough for me to go. I breathed in the sweet-smelling air before I could see the store. The brick building had used to be a barber shop. It was whitewashed, with one big window. The floor was dark, oiled boards and one sneaked when I stepped across the doorway.