

TEA AND A WARM SWEATER

MIKE LECKY

There is talk of snow out here in the West. "Got some last night, in the higher elevations," They say as I sit quietly listening, wrapped up in my new (used) winter coat. A man rushes by, sitting down beside my paper bag overstuffed with groceries and They turn to him and say, "Cold one, eh?"

"Nah," he smiles, "Not compared to Back East. Compared to that, this is nice. This is a gift." Turning my head, I nod in agreement, but not so much as to pull my face out of my scarf.

They nod too, in silence, as if some psychic agreement has been reached in this bus stop, that yes, things were worse Back East. Still, the conversation moves quickly to when the bus is going to get here and, "How long do we have to wait in the cold before we get picked up?" They are old and fragile, and have been through too many years of this, too many years of worse in the East, to have any patience for a late number four bus that will no doubt be crowded with students who don't give up their seats to old ladies just in from the cold.

"It's those damn Liberals. They don't know what they're doing," the man offers. "And they don't create any new jobs, either. I moved from my hometown of Thunderbay because a man between the ages of twenty and thirty couldn't get a job there. Could not get a job." They nod, and he goes on. "All these cuts to public services to pay

off the debt, and the deficit is higher when they're finished. They fucked us out there, and now here I am here, and they're fucking us again." I smile to myself; they fucked us back on PEI in the early Nineties, too.

"You just can't win," he says, and again, they nod in agreement.

Home in my apartment with the groceries put away, an aluminum pot groans and whistles as I boil water for a cup of tea. The wind blows hard, rattling my windows and front door. I sit comfortably by the hot stove remembering back to last winter.

They're right - Back East is worse, there is probably already snow on the ground. And with January will come the blizzards, the school cancellations and the six-foot snowdrifts. Huddled close through candle lit storm nights, talking through the quiet because even if you have batteries for your radio it doesn't matter, the radio people are home huddling too. In the morning, if you're lucky enough to live close to the city you'll have a hot shower before setting out to the day's work of shoveling (if you live in the country you'll do the same shoveling, just without the running water for showers).

Back here in Victoria with my tea and my warmest sweater, all of that is so far away it seems as if I'd only dreamt it. Still though, the wind is howling, and I am inside, warm, hoping that They are wrong.