

Cyril Dabydeen

Cyril Dabydeen is a short story writer, novelist, and anthologist. His books include: *My Undiscovered Country/Stories*; *God's Spider*; *My Multi-Ethnic Friends/ Stories*; and *Imaginary Origins: New and Selected Poems*. His novel, *Drums of My Flesh*, is a Guyana Prize winner and was nominated for the IMPAC Dublin Prize. Cyril's work has appeared in more than 60 literary anthologies, such as *Poetry*; *The Critical Quarterly*; *Canadian Literature*; the Oxford, Penguin, and Heinemann *Books of Caribbean Verse*; and *Singing in the Dark: An Anthology of Lockdown Poems* (Penguin/Random House, 2020). He edited *A Shapely Fire: Changing the Literary Landscape* (Mosaic Press); *Another Way to Dance: Contemporary Asian Poetry in Canada and the USA* (Mawenzie House); and *Beyond Sangre Grande: Caribbean Writing Today* (Mawenzie House). He was a jury member for Canada's Governor General's Literary Awards (poetry) and the Neustadt International Prize for Literature (U/Oklahoma). He taught writing at the University of Ottawa for many years. He is Ottawa Poet Laureate Emeritus.

CIRCUMPOLAR DAYS

--for Rosemarie Kuptana*

1

Return to the north/not the south/
the Arctic no less/going there to be
with an ailing mother/you say/
biding your time in the sun/
cod-fishing/then hunting with
a dogsled team/storing food
for the winter--

What winter?

Spring you go up north again/
far from the big ugly city/you tell me/
& thinking about a bad marriage/
having been born in an igloo/
"a white palace"/I must know/
& your father had gone caribou-hunting/
which they do nowadays with
high-powered rifles/the motor
going full throttle.

2

Your mother talking about
the olden days/how she'd been
given up by her own father/when

she was a baby/then adopted by
an aunt & uncle/who were childless/
later your mother became a hunter/
just like the men/hats off
to women's lib/& she'd go after
the caribou/running sideways/
like the men do/so fleet-footed.

Cold deep in your bones//there's
no escape/ice-fishing/even when
it's warm/what else do you insist
I must know/really know.

3

And is it true the sun's brighter/in the
South/where you come from, you ask?
What I will not talk about/if discovering
myself again/going north/not south
with you/a long winter ahead/words
I will remember/images you bring
to me/letting me really know.

(* former President of the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada)

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