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LILLIAN ALLEN

I SAW A PERFECT TREE TODAY

I saw a perfect tree today
From my cabin bed on a Via Rail train
Through the North of Ontario
I saw a perfect tree today
It was tall and thin and scraggly and prim
Then I saw another just as perfect
Short and sturdy with branches and brambles
And then another with a rugged fat trunk
Older than the rest, but just as perfect
I saw a dozen trees in a clump sharing the light
So their growth was stunted
But regal they were, plumped and perfect
And then a small twisted tree
with leaves fallen, trunk slanted
all the more perfect
I saw tens and hundreds, and thousands
And hundreds of thousands of trees
Not one single tree exactly like another
And yet they were all perfect, all perfect trees
A man-child from Mississauga heading to bend steel
To make his fortunes in the Alberta oil fields;
“I’ve never seen so many trees in my whole life”
A balding dude 30 years a social worker
Retiring home to Winnipeg, calms;
“Where I come from they cut them all down,
long, long, long before I was born.”
And I am reminded—This land, this land
Where cities have sprouted,
Blooming glistening skyscrapers at night
T’was all covered with trees once
One big forest we were once
All perfect trees.