

—† **SHERRY MACDONALD** | Don't Ask My Grandmother
For Advice

She'll just tell you a dirty joke instead
involving Protestants, Catholics,
(a nun is best, but a priest is good too)
a sexual act, and sometimes a bedpan.

She could never be relied on to support
my claims of adolescent torture
except to say I had big shoulders
which I always took to mean she thought me fat.

When I told her that my father was a cruel man
because he wouldn't let me go to a party
she recited a poem she'd learned in Banff
about a man with feverish lips.

Don't rely on your grandmother
to show you pity. Remember, she raised three boys
on a farm during the depression
an alcoholic for a husband.

Her chronic need to tell jokes
is a personality trait.
But that was before my grandmother announced
to a table full of dinner guests
that my mother wore a padded bra.
After that it was called a disorder.

I was a little girl
working on a big mountain
and you were a giant.
I expected a towering figure in a black cape
a rose between the teeth.
Not a little man in a beige ski suit.

At the ticket wicket, Susie Zurchikoff said
I don't think you have to pay and nearly fainted.
Blackcomb President Lorne Vogel
and Olympic gold medallist Nancy Greene
scrambled to find their skis.

At the lift you waited patiently
for my instructions.
When an errant chair rounded the bow wheel
hurtling toward Prime Ministerial assassination
with outstretched arm I called out hold on.

Not one to be upstaged, you said hold on? All right.
Then you took me in your arms and kissed me.
It was a rare moment in Canadian History
combining patriotism and romanticism
with the great outdoors.

You rode off into the mist
Lorne and Nancy hot on your trail.
The rest of us left at the bottom
a chill setting into our bones.

I cried at the news of your death.
I cried harder than I did at the news of any other death
including my own father.
Because it's not the dead that I mourn,
it's the days
lost in the snow.

The days that,
unlike ski poles and glasses and mitts
during spring thaw,
never resurface.