

SUSAN L. HELWIG

Poetry Makes My Living

The Paint Factory: my first job
where I named the colours
Watermelon Falls
Blueberry Smoke
those two were mine
bet you never knew that!

Then it was stand-up at Yuk Yuks
didn't last long
—excuse me if you've already heard this one—
There's this surrealist writer, see, you wind him up
and the sales pitch goes
He walks, he talks, he says dada!
Not that funny, eh?
Well, like I said, I didn't last past Christmas

Then it was piano lessons
or more specifically,
new versions of mnemonics for the notes
re-doing that old chestnut "every good boy deserves favour"
so I came up with
Easter gods bring dark Fridays
and
English goofs buy Danish fritters
there was only so much of that that needed doing
so the job dried up, as it were

Then finally—and I'm still at this gig—
funeral orisons
I already had the black suit and beret
so the uniform wasn't a problem
also, quite used to begging (Canada Council and all that)
and I can put a good spin on just about any corpse
you wouldn't call it lying, exactly
at least I wouldn't
but then
it's my living, isn't it?