

Ilze Klavina Mueller

UNCLES

O my uncles, come to visit from long ago
Across wild seas, endless plains.

One in field gray
Your skin flabby from hunger, teeth loose
In their sockets. Eyes sunk into your skull
Hair slicked back as though you had stood
In front of the mirror still vain
About your looks before death took you

The oldest
A brother of the forest, with a hole in the stubble
Above your ear. You laugh. You always did blow off
Pain, like the time you shattered your toe
Limped home, went about your work with the horses.
Like a wolf you laugh, a wolf under a spruce
Or a fox trotting through morning dew.

The last, my dearest uncle
Brings stories, the scent of apple cake
Whistles a forties hit tune, rides his ghost
Of a motorcycle through clouds of blinding dust.
His brown eyes smile

Arrested in time
Doomed to repeat, O my uncles, eaten
By war, eaten by tyrants. You watch me
From a forest dugout, through barbed wire
In a camp in Karelia, beyond borders
We could not cross. You haunt me, you
Are trying to tell me something. I cannot
Hear you across the seas, the plains.