

Sailing *to* Dalmatia



Poems by
Don Gralen

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ISBN-13: 978-0-9760896-7-4

ISBN-10: 0-9760896-7-X

Library of Congress Control Number: 2006936639

Designed and composed in Fournier MT at Hobblebush Books,
Brookline, New Hampshire

Printed in the United States of America

Published by:

Hobblebush Books

17-A Old Milford Road
Brookline, New Hampshire 03033

www.hobblebush.com

Contents

I. VINCENT'S DRAWBRIDGE

Dalmatia	3
A Beautiful World	4
Machu Picchu	5
Caviar and Smoked Salmon	6
Vincent's Drawbridge	7
Armageddon	8
Peace-Keepers	9
The Glories of War	10
Travel	11
Necessities	12
The Low Countries	14
The Night Watch	15

II. TWO GODS

Certainty	19
My Grandson	20
A Poem for the Impatient	21
Perplexed	22
Steven	23
Things I Don't Know	24
Untidy War	26
The Lament	27
Seamus Is Sad	28
Mother	29
It's All Relative	30
A Jewel in the Rubble	31
The Big Bang	32
The Storm	33
Summer House	34

III. WILL IT MATTER?

My Friends	37
The Heron	38

Spring	39
The Front Room	40
I'm Lost	41
Gurus	42
Beauty and Grace	43
Poetry	44
Dinner Party	45
Morning Worship	46
Talisman	47
Dark Closets	48
Will It Matter?	49
Birthday	50
Time Passes	51
The Polyp	52
Iris to Iris	53
Resurrection	54
Empty Spaces	55
Swoosh	56
The Train Station	57
Far and Away	58
Immortal	59

SAILING TO DALMATIA

I

Vincent's Drawbridge

Dalmatia

That is no country for old men.

—W.B. Yeats, “Sailing to Byzantium”

The lion of Venice behind me,
I sail the coast of Dalmatia,
to a country where babies
were once bayoneted,
women violated, men emasculated,
in sight of churches, icons
and watchful-eyed clergy.
Righteously in the name of God,
the God of tribes, religions
and countries. Barbarous
acts committed in peaceful,
bucolic, cities, hamlets, and ports.

And to Dubrovnik, the Venice
of the South, repelling invaders
from land and sea for centuries
with its massive walls and belligerent fort.
A serene harbor fronts a city climbing
the slopes of the hills beyond.
Inside, churches, monasteries,
relics and icons of a live
and vibrant faith. An ancient city
of charm and beauty, bombed
in the name of ethnic cleansing.

East against West, Constantinople
against Rome, Ottoman against
Christian—the ultimate conflict
smoldering still in the countryside
and in the courtrooms of the Hague.
The hatred lurking for generations
in the hearts of these people
may take generations to overcome.
I hope they can wait.

A Beautiful World

Mid-morning my radio breathlessly
reports new cases of CEO greed,
priests guilty of altar-boy sex
and religious zealots blowing up
the world they dislike.

These human cancers are
a dreadful part of the world,
the part I must suppress,
the part I will try and fail to keep
from my granddaughter who dances
now an exuberant jig on the sidewalk,
red hair flying. My effort will be
foolish. In time she will know.
And now I lack the courage to tell her.

Machu Picchu

The stones shiver when
the spirits move from
the vanished bastion
into the mist and clouds,
seeking those gone before,
asking with sacred voices
for justice and compassion,
burdened no longer
by brutal invaders
and tyrant's shackles,
freed to reach the sun-god,
safe at last and forever
in the arc of heaven.