

## To my dear friend Rubin in Bucharest, 1937

You will notice first the stamp,  
I hope you keep it safe;  
I had to pry it from my stockbook.  
Krystyna would know three cents were missing  
and she would be displeased.

As I have said in letters previous,  
you would like Krystyna.  
She is thrifty and Polish  
and Jewish, despite her name.  
My last name is different now

and you will laugh when I tell you  
(I do so miss your laugh,  
please tell me if you laugh)  
that my name is Ernest Ernest.  
So you can call me Ernie still

but Ernzweig was hard for the goyim,  
and for me,  
and my boss decided I should just double up.  
You would not like my boss,  
although he is Jewish

but born here, in Montreal.  
He does not think I am a very good salesman  
and neither do I,  
and neither does Krystyna,  
and neither would you,

although I did manage to sell you  
on my companionship, didn't I, Rubin?  
I do so miss your companionship.  
I sell table linens door-to-door  
and I do not sell very many.

Do you remember  
when we danced  
the pas de deux from *Swan Lake*  
after the others had left the studio?  
Last week,

I danced it with a large tablecloth  
and woke Krystyna from bed when I knocked  
a candlestick from the table.  
I told her I was trying to fold the schmatta  
and she just shook her head.

But you would like her!  
She dyes her hair a fiery red  
and she has the best taste  
in clothes. She wants to open up a dress shop  
after we have children and they grow.

Rubin, come meet Krystyna.  
You must try to leave, Rubin.  
I hope the company is touring  
and that is why you have not answered.  
The papers do not talk much of Romania

but what they do say sounds frightful.  
Come meet my wife, Rubin.  
She would love to see you dance.  
I have told her how much better  
a dancer you are than I am.

I hope you have found a girl, Rubin.  
I hope you come here  
with your girl  
and she and Krystyna could be such great friends  
and you would sell so many more linens

than I do.  
Come sell linens with me, Rubin.  
There are mostly fine people here  
and our children could be such great friends  
and I worry

that my letters are not reaching you.  
Save the stamp, please, Rubin.  
I did not use a sponge,  
though that would surely have been safer.  
I wet it with my own mouth.

## Dog Star

In French, a heatwave is a canicule,  
same origin as our dog days,

something about Sirius,  
the brightest star in the sky.

To talk about the star's rising  
is talk of the cynic cycle,

to talk about a facial tic resembling  
a snarl is talk of a cynic spasm,

to doubt the relevance of all this  
to your own life is to be

cynical, in a sense. This was,  
in a sense, the punchline, in

the sense a poem has a punchline, or  
this poem has a punchline. Smoke

is a solid, in the same way, in a  
sense, that a tomato is a

fruit. Knowledge is knowing  
a tomato is a fruit; wisdom

is not trying to grab a handful  
of smoke. A fun game for a gnat

would be to catch smoke in  
a tiny net. When you were

a child did you catch butterflies?  
Did you stare up at the stars?

Did you know your dreams would  
float away, neither solid nor liquid

nor gas? Did you know your dreams  
were for naught? Once, after drunkenly

buying fries at Pommes Frites in  
the West Village, my friends and

I huddled under the balcony of  
some older twentysomethings

who ashed their cigarettes on us.  
As my friends protested, I yelled

up “have fun realizing your dreams  
are for naught.” This was the wisest

I have ever been. They probably  
didn’t hear me. And back then I hadn’t

even read up on the Dog Star. When  
you were a child, did you have dreams?