

## Deli

Each year, as winter starts to cut its teeth,  
I get a taste for cold cuts and gorkis.  
I can't explain, it's a seasonal urge.  
I'll comb the city for a decent place,  
on foot if possible; the more off-beat  
and inconspicuous, the more likely  
to capture "that elusive, quaint flavour  
of Europe." (I've always been a sucker  
for slick ads.) One on Chapel had promise:  
skin tubes of cured flesh hung in steamed windows,  
jars of hot peppers were stacked on long plank shelves,  
and behind that, pyramids of fresh dark loaves.  
*A. Klein's Delicatessen—Old World Foods:*  
the name rang true to form. I expected  
to find an old crank behind the counter,  
wiping hands on blood-stained apron, cursing  
his rotten luck, each word thick with umlauts,  
eyes crusty with years of tearless complaint,  
but got instead an athletic-looking  
woman, hair knotted into a hard bun.  
"Can I help you?" (No trace of an accent.)  
I took some keilbasa and dill pickles.  
As she fiddled with the scales, I asked her

what the owner was like. "I'm Alma Klein. Surprised? Most people are. No one believes a woman knows enough business to keep this place afloat. Independents have it tougher than most. The supermarkets steal our customers, except the loyal few, and they pay through the nose for *that authentic Montreal smoked-meat taste*, or whatever. Last year I bought out a Jewish couple who wanted to retire to Florida. My husband's dead. Sausage sales are booming." I nodded, smiled and paid her. The cash-box rattled like loose fillings. My Polish coil and pickles in hand, I paused at the door. The weather had taken a sudden cold turn. Snowflakes like dried breadcrumbs spilled from the clouds.

KEVIN MCNEILLY