

## ALDEN NOWLAN

# VAMPIRES

Alden Nowlan (1933-1983) was born in Stanley, Nova Scotia. He was forced to leave school after the fourth grade, and he then worked as a pulp cutter, farmhand, sawmill worker, night watchman, ditchdigger, and logger. In 1952 he became a reporter at the *Observer* in Hartland, New Brunswick, and in 1963 he joined the staff of the *Telegraph-Journal* in Saint John. He also published a series of poetry collections, for which he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship and a Governor General's Award in 1967. In 1968 he became a writer-in-residence at the University of New Brunswick, where he remained for the rest of his career. The following poem was published in the summer 1980 issue and included in the collections *I Might Not Tell Everybody This* (1982) and *An Exchange of Gifts: Poems New and Selected* (1985).

I've known several vampires.  
They're hospitable folk.  
A vampire will give you  
his bed and sleep on the floor.

They make superior guests,  
the kind that get up at six,  
go to the farmers' market  
for fresh eggs and mushrooms,  
then make omelettes for  
everybody's breakfast.

Use your commonsense:  
their survival depends  
upon their invitations  
being accepted.

The old myths  
are explicit about that.

Moreover, a vampire  
can't simply walk in;  
he has to be asked.

So they talk very well  
and listen better  
than almost anybody else.

You can't make them angry  
and if one of them angers you  
it is like this:

    You wake up.  
He is bending over you.  
There is blood on his lips.  
You fight back.

    The other  
picnickers say:  
    "Don't you remember?  
You must remember.  
There was a snake  
and you might have died  
except he sucked out the poison."

There is blood on his lips.  
You fight back.  
It is you they blame.