

CHAPTER 19

Nine Poems

Mary Hanford Bruce

Crunching Pears

The mountains" green mist hovers long and low.
As llamas hum their evening airs,
I breathe in peace and let the other go.

An infant yak considers darkening pools;
mountain mist hovers long and low.

Dogs beside me wave their canine grace
of lolling tongues and wispy shedding hair.
I breathe in peace and let the other go.

Old Heisenberg's theories cannot hold
the cadence of a camel crunching pears,
as mountain mist hovers long and low.

Explanations never fully stretch
to quilt the grass, or clouds or trees, blown bare.
The mountain green mist hovers long and low;
I breathe in peace and let all others go

Anna's Voice

So tremulous, her failing German
Is staticky across the Atlantic.
We are connected only
By a signal
Costly and cumbersome.

Anna may not recognize my voice
says anyway she is too deaf to understand a word.
I know she knows it's too late.
Still she's a sensible woman who hangs up,
Leaving only the phone's lonely buzz.

Down Home

In an ivied antebellum mansion, Mother ate artichokes while a poet fell in love.
 There Mama met Maud, servant for thirty-eight years, who sang "Praise Jesus"
 as she passed the greens. The owner, a widow in grey moiré,
 left twenty-dollar bills in envelopes in the dog's bed, on the back stoop
 and in the toilet tank. She filled in the missing dogwood blossoms
 on wallpaper imported from Japan with a #5 paintbrush

while the poet confessed, he was an angel in disguise, that next to poetry,
 women were his obsession, so he hopped bars with Mother who tried
 breaking up a fight between whores on the Mississippi waterfront.
 But the angel tossed her by the earring into a bus, and they did a giddyap
 towards Nashville but ended at "Sweet Willie's" barbecue.

Eating artichokes in columned splendor, Mama served frog flowers
 in finger bowls from the Pink Palace because Charles was coming,
 Old South historian, protector of Ivory Flakes, (namely Mother)
 Sue, a swank Dolly Parton, pregnant after her uncle's autopsy,
 declared Mama "Welcome" and swore there was no other man in her divorce.
 Sue's husband, ex-director of documentaries on UFO's barely made conversation,
 His auburn strands kept falling into butter. Widow Jones believed Memphis
 did not support the arts, that she could paint whole walls if she procured a grant.
 "Waaaaaaaaaaaal..."crooned Sue to Mama. "You'll like our Southern male poets.
 they're almost passionate." And the angel flew off

while Mama calmly cut out the heart with a pickle fork.

Resurrection

I

Ferns salute this stone path.
 flanked by full leaved oaks and birches.
 I move cheerfully as those young rabbits
 chasing in and out of tall grasses.

Long ago, a dream-- a poplar lined path, my path
 from which I'd stray
 yet now land back on accidentally.

II

In a shed, young bulls lie beside a shaggy mother and calf.
 Despite the calm they sense that grey clouds may collapse
 into rain, as all have taken shelter except me.
 Soft snorts of alarm and the scent of fresh grass
 show me that what I thought was plowed under
 still sprouts, fragile and green.
 under the massive bovines' holy stares.

III

In a basement bedroom I huddle against drafts from slightly open casement windows
 which I'm not strong enough to shut.
 I pour over poems on turning seventy
 by someone famous and younger,
 words about wasted time, cancer, loss and crying rooms,
 all of which I have of late experienced.

Yet despite the pain, mortality, the wasted time,
 there's nowhere I'd rather be than here in solitude,

moved by rains' clatter on tin
 and how those black, white winged, orange headed geese
 face the gusts with feathers slicked back.
 Grace across them.

IV

When the rain lets up, a bird from under the tin shed
 flutters wet wings then soars out
 to greet whatever comes....

V

Why weren't we told that age brings not only frailty and death,
but release and a faint green bud
of reinvention and surprising joy?

VI

As I move again though those arching trees
the light of them is a youngster's green.
I want to call it "Light in Trees," "Trees Light," or "Lit Trees,"

The path's so long I'm breathless,
The farm only yards away.
Soon the white Great Pyrenees and the border collie will bark
followed by a terrier's yelp, parrots' squawk, and yaks' low mumble.
Llamas will lift their long lashes and necks in alarm
and geese honk intrusion as I tramp on home.

Through the kitchen window I see a woman washing dishes.
Bordering grasses glimmer like trees.
But it's not light in trees, or through them, but a light
within trees, ferns and grasses,
within dogs, geese, parrots, yaks, llamas--
within the house's crippled sailor, harried poet, and silvered matriarch.
All, all are infused with light and light and light-- heavy, dripping light,

and I am resurrected.

Late Afternoon

meanders towards night, dandelion clocks blowing from her hair.
Wrapped in the mauve scarf of dusk she wards off the chill.
then, hands gloved in clouds, scatters lilac sachet
over the fence, mixes marigolds with sunsets,
before suddenly summoning darkness, infusing us
with an unexpected Silence.

The Long View

Bravo, the white Maremma, sticks his snout
into my face demanding love, intruding on the conversation
about the latest from Robert Wilson, Marina Abramovich,
psychedelic posters and *Einstein on the Beach*.
Around us wind flickers torn prayer flags
strung from the Stupa to a pole
on the stone wall which separates our grass
from those hills where the Serenity Prayer was written.

Bravo's muzzle whispers that I should abandon emails
and my camera,
suggests that centering life on a PhD, publications,
and applause only briefly shields
from stabs of malice or heartbreak,
the smells of roses, death, afterbirth,
or your head trembling on my breast.

As I snuggle Bravo's head, his tail wags
you have squandered your time
chasing virtual butterflies
when all you
really needed was right here.

When Away from You

I try not to remember your leaning on the Formica counter
hunched in pain, face furrowed
as you peel carrots, onions, beets
before turning to grace me in your arms.

When away, I worry that those pills
could con you into climbing a ladder
that collapses and hurls you down.

Best to recall that photo on your dresser,
you strong in middle age
smiling at your handsome son
among lathes and drills.

Better to picture your parents fresh from Italy
bragging how you bore a refrigerator
on your back
to their fifth-floor tenement.

I even conjure your ex-wife, daughters and son
picnicking by the river,
while you speed off in a motorboat.

That vision racks me but offers escape
from a grief that rends me.

my inability to heal you.

Clothespin Mom

Mother was a clothespin holding a gigantic apron.
folding shards of Father's alcoholism,
bourbon bottles, corks, crushed pills,
headache powders, which left unpinned
could destroy us.

Each day she combed corners for flasks, bills,
cigarette stubs,
empty liqueur miniatures
she stashed in her underwear,

threw them in her massive apron,
then clipped her giant pin.
to keep us safe.

I rattled in that apron with other remnants.
gnat corpses behind the stove
rubbed off the cobwebs.
spiders wove about me.

until I was polished to stoniness.

She dumped all out onto a molding heap
of sticks and fallen leaves,
then gave me a torch to light it.

Now I stand in the bonfire's ashes,
salute the waving wind.

Catch the Skipping Stones

Some poets write of passions' pounding sounds
like oompah bands, their trumpets blown, in gloves,
but I prefer the coo of mourning doves,
their soothing tunes to hunts with baying hounds.

Some claim desire dangerous seas wake
a thrill—that risk supplies that edge--a knife
which conquers mundane strife and grief at last.
or ride the wind sheers, stir a stagnant lake.

But I need a love like a metronome
or cattail reeds which catch the skipping stones,
so knowing you are close as any phone,
your steadiness will always calls me home.

Once duped by passion, now that I'm older,
I long for the hollow in your shoulder.