

# Journey of Storms

by Paula Bramsen Cullen

An excerpt containing chapter one:  
**Embarking**

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## The Special Hour

Analysis is the kernel of my day.  
Other hours stretch like spokes  
around the hub.

When reaching up for canned tomatoes  
or sinking my hands in a soapy sea  
I remember what he said to me  
and my thoughts drone along  
with the fresh fall bees  
out to get their fill of nectar,  
then flying to the hive  
to communicate discovery.

So I'm alone  
and like a magnet my thoughts snap back to him  
and I think tomorrow  
I'll bring him a handful of honey  
for us to build a tower of cells  
that one day will have the name,  
'Me.'

## Cousins

I am not cousin  
to thinking brain  
or upright stance.  
I am pointed ears,  
cat-clawed feet,  
a tusk-toothed fearsome thing  
living in shielded rock.

When it suits me  
I am a child  
wet from the cavern,  
three breaths old,  
my face screwed up in puzzlement  
at a world turned hard and bright.

How did I come to such a crossing?  
Was it space outgrown  
or ache to stretch straight my tiny bones  
and hear unmuffled by her flesh  
my howls of shock  
to taste the world.

I'd like to think my borning  
was such a consequence  
but to be true  
I was moved by mountains  
as are we all of small account  
moved by peaks of time and space.  
By these we live our years.

But first the forces congregate  
to push us from the womb  
and greet a world  
gone mad with mountains.

## Therapeutic Touch

A stranger's hand  
stretching through me  
clasping my own.

I knew his hand before he offered it  
not despising nor seducing  
nor lost in my despair.

He drew me to a peopled realm  
where sun shines with definite light  
and accountable elements comprise the air  
not dreams.



## The Hook

When you want to be somewhere  
you can't be  
and you want to have someone  
you can't have,

the hunger grows  
and has a family of its own,  
a passel of demons  
that dances at the edge of thought.

Hunger's a proud patriarch, grinning  
to see his progeny inflicting so much pain.

Then you know you've jerked the bait  
and it's hooked you good.

Transference.

## Transference

Transference  
like the prelude to a sneeze  
sets up an urgent call  
and all the world seems enveloped in the need  
until it bursts  
and leaves me breathing normally,  
wondering if the urgency did exist  
or was it a dream  
after all.

## My Analyst

To be like him.  
To live in his skin.  
To sleep in his bed.  
To think in his head.

To put on his clothes.  
To bring forth his prose.

To sit in his chair  
breathing his air,  
touching his hair  
that half isn't there.

To be Jewish like him.  
To be part of his kin.  
We would sit and discuss  
what the world's done to us.

And we would nod and know.

## Analyst to Patient

*Your part is what you do.*

*But I am circumscribed  
and orbited  
and ruled  
by the iron suit I wear.  
My hand draws predicted arc.  
My voice inflected, carefully.*

*A soft spring whisper of a wind  
breathes on my skin  
through a window crack.  
I watch your face feel the breath  
and use it for now  
while I must put it away  
for the end of the day.*

*My sigh for season's change  
will come at dusk  
when I arise from being all  
to be just me and drive away  
to warm home lights  
and cooking smells  
and arms that know me  
singly.*

## Projection? Not Me!

You may proclaim  
'til you've used up your breath  
that hot dogs and beans  
were your dinner last night.

But I see you frocked,  
holding a scepter with which to dine  
on boeuf bourguignon  
made with very fine wine.

Boeuf bourguignon  
I can readily see,  
perhaps pearl onions  
mixed into peas  
but hot dogs and beans  
I'll never believe!

You can declaim 'til you're blue  
but my vision of you  
is royal.  
I can see you all evening  
anointing your knights  
between bites.

## Webs

Poetry is not a thing I do  
but a thing I am,  
opening to me like a peacock fan  
the hidden lining of a soul.

A poem results from an episode  
of boundaries gone askew.

I have no world of my own.  
I move from world to world  
spinning temporary webs  
in confusing quarters of wood planks  
and cross-cornered barn beams.

But as precious as is my silk  
it can be brushed aside by an irritable hand.  
I spin my tenant world  
with nods and tears and sighs.

I move with what I hear.

## Safari

An inside safari  
hunting beast  
that gnaws on my own flesh.

Beast that gives no quarter  
to thoughts of, yes,  
tomorrow may well shine.

Perhaps Iguana  
with wicked flicking tongue  
or more perhaps, a forest cat  
using my arm to hone its claws  
as if it were a barked tree.

A tree cannot scream, *enough*.  
Nor, it seems, can I.  
Level with its shining eye  
I see reflected in my own  
a span of mirrors,  
laughs, derides.

The beast, not in the jungle,  
the beast is in my eye.

## Mirrors

Eyes are my problem  
glaring back at me  
from my mirror  
revealing the ugliness I've become,  
an ugliness deeper  
than another's skin could penetrate.

Do you think, Doctor,  
an eye transplant?

Would another's eyes  
see me softer?  
Perhaps catch a beauty I'd missed,  
a pleasing line etched by love  
an angle in sun's delight.

No.  
Eyes, I suppose,  
are only those  
machinations of glass  
allowing my mind  
images to form  
how it will, how it must.

Eyes have little to do with seeing  
and less to do with knowing.



## Trust

I had the  
knack of trust  
for a moment,  
for a day.

Then astonished  
at the boundary crossed  
trust cradled herself  
with her own arms

and fled  
from  
my open face

leaving me  
for just an  
instant  
stripped

before I could  
lace up my heart's veins  
enclosing the pain  
again.

## Flood

Anxiety cresting  
becomes  
absurd  
tableau.

All ages  
melt  
into one.

Infant  
to  
old age  
rage  
at Death's  
intrusion

too late for perfection  
too soon for completion.

## Depression

I am  
wooden.  
To live  
I am wooden.

My children  
tap on me.  
My husband  
leans on the wood.

They think  
the wood is  
Mother  
Wife.

To allow life  
its shadowed stain  
I've had to become  
wood.

To feel what  
wood  
would feel,  
which is nothing.

## Growing Pains

As long it takes  
to grow up crooked,  
it takes that long  
to grow up straight.

It seems not fair  
not fair at all  
to struggle eighteen years and more  
angling crabwise toward the door  
sniffing freedom, wealth and gain  
reaping sorrow, stealth and shame.

## Patience in Treatment

I'm trying to learn to wait,  
hardest yet to learn that feat,  
to trust fingers of the puzzle  
to click-lock into the holes we've made in me.

I have to trust the man to mold a tight fit.  
Then together slow as cool honey  
we caulk the aching breach.

Soon enough for him.  
Not soon enough for me.

## Acrobatics

Do you see time  
dripping from my fingertips,  
languidly wishing to wait another universe  
to join those drops converging,  
gathering substance to separate  
and finally fall?

Not at all.

Time, a trampoline  
stretched taut,  
disguising by its inertness  
the energy it owns  
to hurl into space  
any laggard thinking to fall back  
on its deceptive plane.

## Icicles-paint

You're thinking icicles  
I'm thinking paint.  
You're thinking handball  
I'm thinking saint.  
You're thinking Freud  
I'm thinking dreams.  
You're thinking projection  
I'm thinking scream.

We touched a moment  
six thoughts ago  
as I bore left  
and you turned right,  
we surely met  
in the narrows there,  
both met,  
thinking bananas.

Why that word? Why just that sound?  
You thought yellow, I thought round  
and we met at  
bananas.

What joy to touch  
before we leaped away again  
to think of slipping  
and tarantulas.

## Two Minutes Left

He raises two fingers  
meaning two minutes left  
but there's too much to say  
to be contained in the week's last day.

I can't find the words that need me,  
so short the time remaining.

When just the right words are said  
they clean out wounds  
and unshackle me  
setting me free to leave.

But this way I feel torn.

Not a nice clean cut with an even edge  
but a complicated tear  
where ligament and bone  
are crushed and ragged  
making for difficult repair.



Unfortunately, when I step out the door  
I'm my own doctor.  
It's up to me  
to gather the strands together  
that let me fix dinner  
sing lullabies  
and sweep up the crumbs on the kitchen floor.

## Small Talk

He might say,  
*Your mother needs to hate you.*  
*The woman in you taunts her.*  
Or perhaps,  
*You want us to embrace*  
*to plunge into each other's skins.*

Voicing such outrageous thoughts  
is all in an analyst's day.

*And now the hour's over.*  
*Screw up your courage*  
*to walk through another day.*  
*I know you love and hate me.*  
*I care about you*  
*either way.*

We talk like this  
in sessions every day.

But when our time is up on Mondays  
he goes out to eat his lunch.  
We enter the elevator together  
and the door shuts noiselessly.

He asks,  
“How was the rainstorm out your way?”  
I say,  
“It really poured. Do you think  
it will be warm by Wednesday?”

He holds open the door for me to precede him,  
a gentleman  
a stranger  
a kind man who always remembers what I say.

You see, circumstance decrees  
only small talk face to face in that tiny space.

Strange how a change of venue  
can make the need so plain  
to talk of superficials  
until we meet again  
within the sanctioned walls tomorrow  
to talk about the pain.

## Carpentry

My old self has a thousand feet  
with steps built for every one.  
Each foothold cozily tamped down  
used two hundred times or more  
in a waking, sleeping day.

When the new-hewn fledgling self  
young and brash,  
clammers up  
like a rudderless auk  
trying to mount the preformed mold,  
it can't take hold.

It misses steps and jerks and bumps  
while the other glides as smooth as silk.

But your words are water drops  
eroding old design.  
Between your erosion and the young self's tryings  
we'll build a structure  
where the old can't fit its feet.

## How Can You Say I'm Special?

I've always felt so  
ordinary,  
extraordinarily ordinary,  
certainly not special.

Special is a word that frights me.  
I've always kept me quite separate  
from special.

Special was my  
tall  
smart  
artistic  
mother.

Before you,  
I could walk through a room  
and be so beige  
no one would see me.

Just because in my own house  
rugs and walls are red  
is no reason to believe  
that I ever needed to be  
or thought I was anything but  
ordinary.

## Can it Be?

Can it be the me  
that I feared was my defense  
against reality  
is really the essence  
of my humanity?

That's where the thinking goes on,  
where any exploration  
that needs doing  
gets done.

I thought we'd analyze that part away.  
Instead we nurture it  
to grow until it can stand barrages  
of stronger wills,  
and cocktail parties  
of very talented people,  
and rejection slips.

And friends wanting  
to take pieces of me  
to fuel the fires  
of their own self-esteem.

## Separation Anxiety

I can't give you your *I* back  
'til I make one of my own.

As you hustle into your vested suit  
to be on time for your long sitting day  
just like any other man  
don't you think of yourself as *you*  
as I do?

If you are really *I* to you  
where does that leave me?

If you sit between patients thinking,  
*Now what have I done with that number to call,*  
it wouldn't be right, no it couldn't be right.  
For if you have an *I* then I've none at all  
and I'm screaming through space  
slowly turning  
alone.

When I have an *I*, I can give you your's back.  
'Til then, in my mind, to us both  
you'll be *you*.  
But don't be impatient  
while my *I* sticks to yours.  
I'll give you your *I* back,  
just wait.