

Journey of Storms

by Paula Bramsen Cullen

An excerpt containing chapter three:
Storm Warnings

© Paula Bramsen Cullen, 1994

All rights reserved.

This document may be downloaded for personal viewing only.

First Edition

Published by Millstone River Press

Princeton, New Jersey

Publisher's Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Cullen, Paula Bramsen

Journey of Storms / Paula Bramsen Cullen

ISBN 0-9637906-4-1 (paper)

ISBN 0-9637906-6-8 (cloth)

1. Psychotherapy – Poetry.

PS3553.U5545J68 1994

I. Title.

811.54

QB193-21921

III. STORM WARNINGS

- Longing • 47
- Angst • 48
- The Host • 49
- Serving Analysand Time • 50
- Hold Your Breath • 52
- Girl Child • 53
- My Two Mothers • 54
- Duals' Duel • 56
- Dual Feelings • 57
- Limitations • 58
- Oh, To Be Written Up • 59
- A Matter of Time?
 - A Matter of Money? • 60
- Almost Home? • 62

Longing

Unsaid words,
unfilled wishes like
undone dishes
stare and gulp at
mother-keeper.

Lock the door.
Set the tongue.
Block the blood
carrying yearnings
to extremities,

making them shake,
making a young woman old,
trembling with senile affliction.

Keep in lock step
the flaming cankers
lest they consume
caretaker veins.

Angst

Fist tensing,
heart pounding hunger
for a touch years past soothing,
for cadence in a silent room,
for a smile in somber eyes,
for warmth in a frosted heart.

The wanting sprouts tentacles,
slipping its arms
sweetly around me
one at a time,
so friendly

just past cognition's edge,
just past where I could halt it,
squeezing out the tears and nightshade.

The hunger has taught the day
to mold its own tentacles
and become indistinguishable
from itself.

The Host

Hunger invited me to dinner.
It invites me everywhere,
a conscientious host.

As we settle ourselves
and after we've arranged our chairs
we discuss how I feel.
Such close companions
we talk with our eyes.

Then it's always a surprise
though why it is I wouldn't know,
for it's always so.
I'm the main course.

Hunger chews up the joy I feel
when I watch my little boy's strong, firm thighs
marching away from me.

Hunger chews up my interludes of peace.

Who's the hunger for?
Whom do I want to eat up?
Why, who do you think?

My analyst!

Serving Analysand Time

Three years in,
still drowned in the din
of the horrors my mother paraded.
Safe in our kitchen,
yet I lived where she put me
in Auschwitz, Dachau,
with Medea.

When my analyst speaks
my eyes appear clear
as my eyes appeared clear
in my girlhood.
Clear as they seemed
the terror they hid
was the fear of the knives and the chambers.

She toured me through Auschwitz,
envisioned Dachau,
waxed forth on the crimes of Medea.
Since I couldn't survive on bile alone
and torture's the meat
being served at the table,
sweets were the best thing,
the very best thing,
to balance the carnage-filled meal.

I've wondered so long
why my craving continues
since I'm safe in the hands
of an eminent man
who never serves corpses for dinner.

But I see now the flaw.
I process his words, though helpfully meant,
as I learned to process my mother's.
I eat them with outwardly tranquil expression
but inside the bile's the same,
inside the fear's exactly the same.

His words come in warped.
I continue to crave.
My heart cannot hear him
so I cannot heal.

Hold Your Breath

The tidal pool
ebbs and surges.

pain

In its ebb I am high and dry on a sand bar
then a tiny claw peeks up
and the round, fluted edge of a clam.
Little lumps of moving sand
signal the water's return
and back it seeps
floating the clam and claw an instant
before they can burrow in again.

pain

The water creeps up my leg to my waist
then to my shoulders.
It's time to hold my breath again.

pain

I would step out
but that I was born here,
amphibian with gill and lung
caught in the diatribe
between warring factions of myself.

Girl Child

If a girl child had been born to me
stunned into wide-eyed reverie
by color and sound
I'd raise her fine
just as I was raised
when drink stole care from my mother's tongue.

I'd lacerate her, as I was taught,
with tales of Jews holding their breath
until they simply had to breathe
and the cyanide slid down their throats
giving them no time to scream.

She'd sit on my knee at two or three
and I'd peel her hide
by making her see
starving Indian babies
shriek at their mother's saclike breasts
while the sacred cows amble by.

I have a trust,
haven't I
to show her the world as I was shown?

Rock-a-bye baby.
Time to sleep.
Dream of how
the lepers weep.

My Two Mothers

Split.

Soft to the left,
taker in arms
crier along with
soother of aches
partner in laughter.

My quarrel is not with you.
I'd as soon embrace you.

You now!
Troublemaker to the right,
wielder of rapier
steel-tongued inquisitor
causer of lifetime pain.

For you my curare dart
for that special pain of a loved one's betrayal.

But gaily
you deflect the dart left,
laughter clanging against your steel bounds.

Now the soft one, writhing,
metabolizing the pain.

You, troublemaker,
pointing jointed finger at the mirth
in this flawless paradox—
The one I love
alone can feel pain.

Duals' Duel

The two of me's converse.
We argue, talk and fight.

Yet we are always held in twin.
Our common skin binds us in
together.

She is me and I am she
lost in twin disharmony.

Dissonance,
a shadow first
scoffed at,

“Look how close we are.
It could not hurt
nor leave a scar
for truly,
see how close we are.”

But slowly shadows
form new lines,
Raging random angles shine,
reflecting bright sharp metal tines,
razored edges,
Satan's smile.

Dual Feelings

I think that I am one
not two.
But I have the feelings of two.

One is kind,
the other not.
One can feel,
the other cannot.

Mostly I am kind and feeling,
but under stress,
like the groaning molten sea
beneath our mother crust
creates pressure,
first in one spot, then another,
causing a spew of lava
up the straw of its volcanic mouth,

so do I erupt when feeling trapped,
spewing out the words of the one of me
that does not feel, and so cannot be kind.

It is a shifting of energies.

Limitations

Einstein could have predicted
this uncoupling of self
from in-self,
could have predicted the consequences
I mean to say.
He understood energy.

The inmost one
stretching its tail
in frequent sways
with stinging licks upward
from its scaly musky cave.

It is a question of energy.

The person I am to others
pursues in reasonable course
her myriad roles
each important to its own extensions.

It is a question of energy and its depletion.

Sustaining two selves
is burdensome,
a Promethean effort.

It is entirely a question of energy.

Oh, To Be Written up

I stumbled across my analyst
at the library today,
not in the flesh
but in a prodigious tome.

It seems he wrote me up,
disguised me with a number.
But I knew me,
he couldn't fool me.

It made me mad
to be discussed in that objective way.
Of course, I'd have been madder still
had he ignored me.

I also was quite sure I knew
patients numbers one and two.
One of two's demeanor
preceded me on Fridays

and number one, I'm almost sure
was always coming in the door
as I was leaving Tuesdays.

A Matter of Time?

A Matter of Money?

“If only I had the money,” they say.

“If only I had the time
I'd surely be an analysand.
What could be more fun
to pass the day?

What's to fear?
Spurts of talk,
commas of silence.”

Glass splinters.

“We'd talk of good and bad times.
He would nod his head.
Then time would be up
and I would leave untouched.”

Glass splinters pushing in.

“I wouldn't know where the tears came from.
He'd only have nodded, after all,
said so few words,
I can't imagine that I'd flinch.”

Arms full of glass splinters.

*I'll see you tomorrow
and the day after that
and we will continue
'til we edge the splinters out.*

“I could not stay untouched.
He'd have invaded me with so few words.
I'd hardly have gotten the kids to bed
before I noticed the blood was flowing.”

Glass splinters spread through every limb.

Almost Home?

For years
slowly came understanding
so I'd got to thinking
I'd only the mopping up to do,
the rag tag ends of insights to tidy up
to fit into my ordinary days
and soon I'd be gone free.

Strong and analyzed and free,
that's what I'd be.

But then a storm of gale force
from the unconscious sea
knocked me beaten
back to base point.

Time still remains to recovery.