

Journey of Storms

by Paula Bramsen Cullen

An excerpt containing chapter five:
Almost Home

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Something Borrowed

The buildings rushing past my car
are a brooding horde.
The trucks on either side
might in an instant swerve to crush me.
The marshlands through which the road unwinds
could at a moment suck me down.
I'd have to fly to be protected
and everyone knows a girl can't fly.

I'm seeing the world as my mother saw it.
And if this is the way she saw the world,
I'm not surprised
she needed to be rid of it.

So she poured it into me.

Now her world is seeping up
through the cracks analysis has cut
and if this is the way she saw the world
I'm not surprised she fed me it.

Anything to be rid of it.

Drilling

When I mine in my mind too deep
it's into the Alice in Wonderland well.
So I don't make the journey too often
or alone
because any truth
dredged from so deep a hole
owns its own dynamic
and won't listen to my censor's voice.

It can let me in on secrets
I would rather not hear.

Dream Work

When I woke
I thought I'd got
all the night's
dream work done.

My dream, with a beginning
progressing to a natural end,
left me feeling so sorted out
I began to search for my slippers
to start coffee

when I saw the time
was only half past one.

I Deny an Inner Life

In the deepest, darkest
time of sleep
a wild caravan antics
in silent gyrations
across my bedroom floor.

In my day-bright eyes
the caravan has nothing to do with me.
I only see

bacon and eggs,
wipe your nose,
wash your hands,
off to school.
Now it's time to eat,
rock-a-bye baby,
time for sleep.
Good night, good night.

Then out careens the caravan again,
piercing pinwheel lights,
people in a whirling wheel,
mouthing silent screams.

Tossing over on my side
I see the drapes hang still.
I see my sewing machine, gently white.

But then the dark lump of dresser
sheds its shadow,
becomes a diving board.

An artisan climbs,
dances to the edge,
leaps, curls, shoots out straight,
hits the water in the tiny tub like a dart
and jumps up, seal slick, grinning.

I'm the morning child.
Why do these monstrous caravans
pry into my sleep?
I'm the morning child.

“The Royal Road”

Dream symbols
scream messages
to my analyst's ear.

I can introduce that part of myself to him
without embarrassment
because to me my dream
is not really a part of me
but a guest who came last night,
draping the black hours over his shoulders,
carrying them to places
that dazzle or stun
but have nothing to do with
grocery shopping hours
or arbitrating fights between my sons.

They are hours spent in surreal lands
where Dali's clocks could ooze and flow.

Even if I'd stood naked in the hardware store
or chopped off my father's head
I could tell it not blushing
because we all know
it was only
a dream.

Unconscious

Like the great right whale
slaps the water with his giant tail fin
before rushing deep
where green becomes black
and turns level
to soar through the lightless sea.

Necromancy

The leaf's night rustle
brings my father back to me.
The wind's sighs
erupt him from cold earth
and bring him warm to me.

I own him,
more so now
than when alive.
His fresh shirt smell
and shaved soft face,
love smile just for me.

The wind gives me custody.

Analytic Session

*I see our time is up.
Stash your longing over here
your anger over there.
We'll take it up tomorrow
we'll deal with the pair.*

*If not tomorrow
perhaps next week.
Certainly not a year could pass
while before our eyes
the stacks would grow
to teetering piles
in grotesque row.*

*The piles then
might overtake,
counterfeit a life and make
living moans,
a pharaoh's sighs
entombed by time.*

Ouch!

I heard the words
never doubt it.
But when I reached out my hand to touch them
they burned my fingertips.
So, of course, I jumped back.

Who wouldn't?

After leaving your mouth
they shot into the ring of fiery pain
I live in
and assumed its glow
so their meaning was too hot to handle.

I'll have to wait
'til they've cooled down
to take them in.

But don't worry.
I won't forget them.
I'll get to them
as soon as they've reached
room temperature.

Dissociation

Before I left my analyst that day
I felt dissociation
overcoming me.

So I drove the long way round.
I took the route through town
for I needed
white frame houses
and perpendicular streets
and stop signs
and children playing hopscotch
to order me.

I needed to stop at intervals
to let a tottering old lady cross the street
to hear children chanting old songs,
jackets tied around their waists.

By going through town
I bypassed that new freeway
where cars move in aimless speed
which would have left me more split than before.

End and Beginning

When box canyon waves
yawn in kaleidoscope session,
rushing always toward,
there comes an instant
of decision
to pierce the sea,

to sear through confusion
arrowing into the green depths,
into silence
insulated by millenniums of old water,
hoary with foam,
having seen the time of Moses,
the time of Eden.

In this buoyant antiquity with
no reflection of waves' thunder
I can float,
suspended by Lilliputian droplets,
cotton eyelids closed,
released to the sea's seductive sway.

It is an end and a beginning—
an end of loss
with its crystal pain,
a beginning of trust,
stinging as warmth on frostbite.

Take Me with You

*Take me with you
to the weekend house
scraped raw by brittle branches,
balancing demons screeching anathema,
their wild silent arms clawing
the chipped shutters.*

*Take me with you.
Objectify me.*

*In your mind's eye
feel my solid warmth
and know you may attain me
at your will and need.*

*I am away
yet with you too,
to confront the isolation
of the demons and the shadows.*

Analyst's Vacation

I'll bet your vacation flew for you.
For me the days had as many tiresome minutes
as a millepede has legs.

But they didn't scurry
like that fast bug.
They moved
with as much indifference to my impatience
as a slowly humping caterpillar.

But the minutes gathered into days
and passed,
though I never thought they would,
until those languid hours
became my friends,
giving me room to stretch and sigh
and even close my eyes
without previous pains and shames
parading past me.

I snuggled into the peace
pulling it round me like an eiderdown
and wondered, I couldn't help it,
if I were in my right mind
to pursue such a painful occupation
as analysis.

Interim Psychiatrist

I wait.
Peace.

For we have agreed
not to touch deep
so as to wound.

When chance or ethics
calls you out
in your absence
I measure your sphere.

Your books
are only titles
not by me to be caressed
or sucked in
as a breath of you.

Your covered voice
on phone nearby
does not scream
rejection in my ear.

Your returning
does not startle me
for we have agreed
not to touch
deep enough to wound.

To My Analyst

I fly.
I soar.
I'm more than before.

I am us
and we are strong.

From you flow
clean threads of health
stretching into generations.

A man is here
then gone
but here again,

passing with all people
to the past
but, too, alive—
become a part of those who love him.

Planting

When I planted my self-hate in him
how could I tell him my feelings?
His disgust with me would surely flourish
as my anger with myself flourishes
when I expose my thoughts.

Countless times he disowned
the disgust for me I placed in him.
But his disclaimers performed
about as well as feathers
to knock down the stones in a mending wall
until our thousand hour struggle
let me withdraw my projection
from his kindly eyes.

I slid me out from him,
allowing him his own separate thoughts.
Only then
 could I tell him the things that shame me.
Only then
 could I let his separate words heal me.

Generations

Mother,
dispensing evenhanded—
tenderness,
destruction.

First, arms cradling,
baby's breath sweet
with scent of trust.

Then poisoned stinger
barbed with indifference,
anger spent,
bleeding for the flesh of her flesh.

I am her child.
I bleed for my child.
I bleed for Mother
at last.

Therapeutic Caring

A touch of caring,
simmering soft,
breaking heart and healing.

Are you surprised he cares?
I am surprised his care was waiting,
held in suspension for me,
a piece of his completed life.

No breast he offered but not so different,
love tasted and consumed,
not constant vigil
but contact distilled.

As embryo rapes its nourishment,
uncaring for the source,
life with love unsated,
seeks its surfeit,
exchanging yearning for receiving.

Are you surprised my heart was breaking?
I am surprised my heart is healing.

Renewal

Scooping up my day's
aborted variations,
I carry them,
pieces of cracked tunes,
carefully to bed.

Losing no note,
the broken staves crank out
their discordant harmony
to my closing eyes.

The night's resurrection
in dreams and turnings
rights the scattered clefs
and spins out
the morning song of me.

The Gift

A gift is given
and once the giver withdraws his hand
there is no way to trace it.

Perfect pitch is owned by few
but to them it's ordinary.

Perception drawn as fine as crystal
is given to just a few
but to them its reverberations are so familiar
they can't believe,
in ordinary moments,
its extraordinary dimensions.

Inspiration

It will come again,
I know it will.
It has a hundred times before,
come and grown and flowered.

Now the trees sit black and still,
weave no magic
on the gun-gray sill.

Yesterday the darts of light
were traders set on foreign sea,
gay eyes, hungry hands;
barter, their anchor in alien lands.

It will come again, it must.
Tomorrow I'll be a baby girl
purple with my first drawn breath
indignant at the need to breathe
to be expelled from wet warm womb

my cries spattering forward
as I am ripped from my nest
on the nether side
of formless time.