

Journey of Storms

by Paula Bramsen Cullen

An excerpt containing chapter six:

Port

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Turning Point

Something's happened.
We are face to face.
Something's turned.

We've been in the foothills.
Careless, I thought
but he knew better.
Careless to me was design to him
and we are approaching the core,
the most frightening place to go
embarrassing
humiliating
unspeakable.

But it doesn't feel like the core.
It feels like death.

Shame is a dance I do
gyrating unspeakable rhythms
to a frightening thundering beat.

Reconstructive Surgery

When I left the office
I pulled my heavy coat close about me
against the balmy air.

Having just had the skin peeled from me
the coat had to suffice.

I walked carefully to the car
taking pains
not to displace too noisily the air.
Everyone else I met
seemed eager to wide-spread their arms,
coats flapping open in the fragrant autumn wind.

But I walked
as if I were in a burn treatment center
with the smell of dead flesh being slowly
very slowly
replaced by new
in a place where all concerns diminish beside
the most important one—
grafted skin taking hold.

Each tiny piece that sticks
is cause for celebration.

Sun Ray Day

This particular day
sparkles
glistens and
shines.

Not yesterday
certainly
and probably
not tomorrow.

But this day
sandwiched between the usual days
when irritations mount
collecting to obscure
eternity's allotment
in murky minutes
to be gotten through.

This day shines
incontinent
spilling in red silk folds
splashing ruby wine.

Psychoanalysis

Akin to picking raspberries in an overgrown field
intricate
thorny
tedious
delicate
a luxury

not in which to be indulged
unless life systems are finely tuned
and humming soft

and only when attention
can be safely drawn away
from watching for bears
or funnel clouds.

Some castigate and question,
calling it futility.
But I can only see
beyond the shades
if first my eyes can search the shadows.

The most gratifying berries
often grow in the thorniest places.

Caving

It's been a nightmare
of tunnels and caverns
stalagmites and stalactites
pointing conflicting ways
though my tour guide
always swore we'd come to light.

But believing my eyes
has always been my albatross
so I didn't believe in light
until I saw a glimmer
between the drugstore and the cleaners
when I was doing errands.

That glimmer—
I'll never forget the lightening
it caused me.

If the Skin Fits...

I wish that I were
sixty
bald
and loved the opera
(tuneless pomposity to me)
like him.

I want
to want
to stroll in old towns
searching down antiques
(dusty throw-aways to me)
or scour galleries
for a lost Matisse.

But my eye just caught the flash
of yellow forsythia
as I sped past
and how could it help but
begin a glow in me
that had nothing to do with him.

The Analyst Man

The comfort of you!
The sheer, strong comfort of your human form
dressed in shirt and slacks.

I've seen you with blind eyes
all this time.

Support from Without to Support from Within

The dearest gift of all
and I gave it to myself!

Still reeling from an image of me
in the vortex of converging tides
there followed a flash,
a picture in my mind of a girl stooping for shells,
ankle deep in a tidal pond
with the sea beyond,
swelling only to a heartbeat's rise.

Though never before having felt this peace
I knew it as essential,
a tool if honed and cherished and held
that could protect me from despair.

Like Homo Habilis
one day saw a stone
not as a piece of the earth as given
but if shaped and strapped onto a stick with hide
would provide food and cover,
and even in his primitive brain divined
it could lead to unimagined power.

Never, henceforth, could a like piece of stone
be just a piece of the earth again.

That image of a peaceful girl
with the sea spreading round her
like a field of wheat
could have slipped
through the cracks of my fingers
had I not clutched it as an embryonic tool,
an incorporated sense of peace.

I would not again be without defense.

Rising

The pain these years have doled out
has been like an awful grieving.
Like a terrible tale told
of a loved one lost and gone.

In the sunshine
grief is a temporary night that lifts
one the grieving rites are done.
But in the shadow I occupied
the aching shuddered through me
day and night.

I ached and kissed my children off to school.
I ached and sang a lullaby for them to dream.
I ached at night at my husband's side.
Sleep was the only balm.

Grief's tyranny was absolute.
My analyst probed so gently
as one would probe a bleeding child.
I flailed like a wild girl
so he probed more gently still.

But now the aching's dead and done.
The Process, grain by grain, has won.
I do not miss that ache a wit.
I'd no affection for it.

I can see the sun as a golden globe.
The autumn wind is fresh and spry.
My children's laughter is a song,
and the day's regained
expectancy.

There's much work left to do.
But the work that's left is work,
not grieving.

Subterranean Activity

Why, the growing's gone on underground!
An impulse, pure electric,
shivered through the soil
and rammed the buds to life.
Now they're sprouting in abandon,
not a seasonal progression of blooms
but superfluity.

Somehow the persistence and the pain
locked atoms and bonded into gain
producing an impulse
so pure and strong
to make a physicist grin.

I can spin a tale,
grow a child,
hold my man.
Why, the glory of it
and the brightness of the hue.
Oh, the things I can do.

Emerging from confusion so deep and dark
it consumed any ray escaping.
I'm finally
at last
tasting the sun.