

Poetry Series

Deborah Cameron
- poems -

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Deborah Cameron(2-23-1953)

Little to tell. I am a much-divorced, hippy grandma struggling with depression and pain management who finds solace in writing and friends.

Asunder

Why would any creature mate for life?
Does this arrangement settle longing
Or placate God, or swaddle the young ones
against teeth in the hungry ocean?
Are we thus assured, we will continue
In some form, and is that the point?
Seas come and fall away again,
And the furnace of worlds and stars
Burn out—what is 'will' and 'do' to this?
What of those mated ones whose lot
Is to come unmingled,
who lose to anxious waiting,
the curved neck,
the rising wing,
the sweet-licking muzzle?
But you—you, with your arrogant mouth,
do avow
That I am merely half,
cleft for your pleasant tongue.

Deborah Cameron

Drive

When the papers are final, I pack the car
with our suitcases, a few boxes, my wedding dishes,

and I go home again. My three-year-old daughter
cries and throws her doll out of the window

for the last time somewhere near Topeka. I drive
all night with the map upside down, a migratory bird

out of season, with only the homing instinct left intact.
My mother coos over the grandchild she has seen

just once, calls me her boomerang kid and tries to smile,
makes bright smalltalk, the good hostess

of a party she does not really want to give,
until my angel falls asleep on the sofa, and I plead

exhaustion. In my old room the bed is pushed
against one wall between boxes of toys.

The sewing machine, dusty with waiting
For someone to finish that yellow prom dress,

is piled with laundry and mending. I pull back
the fresh, hasty sheets and settle my sleeping child

in the bed where once I dreamed restlessly
of her father and burned to be gone.

I wonder if ghosts of those dreams remain still
in this place, in the corners, like cobwebs,

to trouble me in a half-light. I curl against
our child, trying to find the right shape again

that will make her part of me, unseverable,
until she chafes at the sweaty closeness and pulls

away. In the morning, before she wakes,
I slip away, too. Avoiding my father who stands

in his underwear, scratching and watching the coffee brew,
I swipe the keys to the Mustang and drive.

Through the quiet hour, through my own history,
this Disney set, too real to be. And I drive

past the old high school, past my best friend's house
that stands weedy and small, past the cloudy pool

at the Y, still rocking with the rhythm of yesterday's
play. Past the grocery and the Texaco

Where I bought a gallon of gas on Fridays
with bottle deposits saved all week.

Past the farms, wild seeds gone to flower, painted
cattle in lavender fields, a burned out shell of a barn.

That's me in the rearview mirror. In front of the new
Wal-Mart, someone waves me down. A boy I knew

In school. Danny something, or Barry.
He still has outlaw eyes and a cowboy smile, says he always

had a crush on me. There is a place we know beyond
the last blacktop road in town where the grain

still whispers in an endless field of silver and green.
I cut the engine, and it begins to tick in the cool air,

And far off, a tractor hums. On cue, the field comes alive
with clicks and taps, the dry talk of insects.

Now the buttons of my dress are quick and numbered,
and falling back upon the ripe ground

I think, how easy this is,
how well he fits.

Deborah Cameron

Man On Mars

Turning in a landscape of eyeless white, he falters
Heavy with strange gravity and life-support
suit hissing, machines talking-
one-ten over eighty...one-oh-three... point-oh-six...
breath, starting to hitch and burn now
as atmospheres begin to balance.
Hastily he searches this new world
that held such glory and promise, may still hold, but
something has gone wrong.
Where was the misstep, the alien microbe, the thing
he could not outrun or foresee? He had been so sure,
a star pilot in his element, armed with science and teleology.
What else could he have done?
He frets: what will the report say, finally-human error—
or worse? An awful silence now sings the end of air,
leaves only the false resurrection of the agonal breath-
or—maybe? —they will find him in time. His comrades,
those voices
he can still hear somehow,
carried to him across a cold divide, not by sound
but on the inward ocean of his name:
No pain...He can't hear us anymore...
not long now.....

Deborah Cameron

Mother Love

Something spooked the pony and he ran
My little sister atop, clinging to the saddle horn
With all her nine-year-old might until she lost her grip
And bounced away, a tumbleweed of flying hair and limbs.
Mother set her mouth and went inside. She came back
With the four-ten, sighted and squeezed the trigger. Shot him.
The pony staggered, wild-eyed, stunned,
And even from where I stood, I could feel his fear,
See the holes in his hide, down his neck and flanks, hundreds
Of eyes running red, obscene and bloody. I cried.
Shut up, she said, he had it coming, and lowered the gun.
I brought him back and rinsed his wounds with tears
And iodine, feeling his skin jerk and tremble beneath my
Tender ministrations.

Deborah Cameron

My Perfect Love

Can I ever watch you sleep now,
And not see ghosts of the dead,
In their slow procession, blank,
And waiting?
Feel your warm belly
And not embrace a chill,
Hear your heart against my ear
And not think of those who
Went to stones in my arms,
Though I begged and bargained?
Are we who love this much,
Always and always to know how it will end?
Must I see that inevitable box of ashes
Everywhere we go,
and know that it is all I get to keep
forever, by your leash and favorite toy?

Deborah Cameron

Sestina In An Autumn Field

This field in autumn is quiet, awaiting a winter death
to be interred beneath a skylless vault in the shadow
of woods that creep and stretch to touch the cooling earth.
The ground gives up heat without a sigh, turning in to hold
the heart safe from frost. Below, a dark burrow
lined with fur already smells of sleep.

I come here to name things: blackberry vines matted in sleep,
wildflower ghosts, weed-flower faces surprised by death,
hollow grasses that bend close to conceal the burrow
where small mouths suck life from a dormant form and shadow
is lost. Seasons move through a tunnel of moons. Thistles hold
the tilted spokes of a spider's web, a wheel above the earth.

I come here, sovereign in this place, and claim the earth
when it is quiet and turned away, defenseless in sleep.
a frightened quail whirls up at my feet where leaves hold
the shape of her body, a whisper of heat. She sees death,
I think, dark wings above the field, the wheeling shadow
of a hawk in breathless search of a nest, a burrow.

A furred body slips past seeking shelter. Its burrow
beneath this skin is the warm place where earth
keeps her own. There, away from the circling shadow,
the twitching dream begins. Animals of prey, in sleep,
must still run. The underground rings with echoes of death
imagined, flights of the flightless in a predator's hold.

Long nights begin the season of equinox. The skies of autumn hold
neither rain nor snow nor sun. The earth-dwellers burrow,
hoard seeds, pods, summer's dry fruit, against death
in the hungry winter. I resist the urge to pry into earth,
uncover the secret cache and hold it in my hands. In sleep
sometimes, I have wings, feather-stroke, a hawk's shadow.

small bodies jerk in the dream of the circling shadow
that passes overhead. Here is where I always wake, hold
myself still, remembering the bones cracked in sleep,
the warm marrow sucked from my fingers. That dark burrow

is real; I have been there, sleeping beneath the earth
among spring-born rabbits. Dreaming, there is no death.

I come here to elude death. This autumn field in shadow
draws me to the quiet earth, turning inward to hold
safe the heart in a fur-lined burrow that smells of sleep.

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