Three Poems

LETTER TO AN ENGLISH AUNT

I wonder how the winter is in Kent.  
The summerhouse you wrote of last Spring  
may soon be veiled in snow  
and I imagine you'll curl up, instead,  
beside the central heating to read.  
I picture you in a favourite easy chair,  
but what you’ll read, I'll never know -  
Your thoughts are a territory I cannot embrace.

Here, in Australia, the days grow slowly warm  
but never seem to match the heat of childhood summers gone  
when the ripe air smelled of peach and plum,  
and the gaping cracks of drying creeks.  
These impressions do not belong  
to the few details you know of my life  
yet, you seem to know me well  
and I sense, beyond knowledge,  
a unity awkward to describe.

You've read between my lines  
whispered back in silent spaces  
a language other than the tongue.

I still have the book of Eliot's poems  
you gave as a gift, a decade ago -  
its inside covers brushed  
with the felt tip flourish of your pen  
secret messages woven in script  
meaningful quotations copied out  
and floral artistry to hide the marks  
where its jacket, once taped down, was ripped.  
I cherish the feel of its blue naked cloth,  
your careful choosing.

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You were always the artist. This much I know - pressing gold-leaf to your sacred icons perhaps, well into the night. Your egg tempera kitchen of canvasses; the childish works your mother hoarded, with the enduring message that stirs me still to tears

'to Mummy, with love'

There's an abstract of yours in the Tate. And I have a drawer full of home-made greetings but, for all the love of your art, the letters, cards, and icons, imagination is a deceiving gel and I can never seem to draw you from these fragments whole.

*Deb Matthews-Zott*
MISS WILEY VISITS SPRINGWOOD (1918)

Glorious morning.
Sunlight makes the gum trees new.
So peaceful, leaving the city.
Only the train rocking along its tracks
toward the Blue Mountains.
The novel, unread, open on my lap;
my city gaze drawn out through windows
to a silence of trees and sky –
awed at such beauty.

Two hours later, I arrive in another world
where the hiss and squeal of brakes
wakes me from a dream, still three miles from the Lindsay's
and the only horse and buggy travelling another way.

Perhaps I will walk in trees and sunlight
along dirt tracks – rainbow birds swooping before me
flash of colours whirled on a palette.

But my errand awaits, there is no time to wander
and the parcel grows heavy in my hand.

There's a motor car, I'm told – the only one in town
and, for a fee, its owner might run me out.
When I tap at the office window, the estate agent, reluctant,
tells me Lindsay's buggy might soon arrive – I ought to wait.

The Lindsay's buggy will not come, I know,
for I am not expected – an invitation might have been denied.
Better to arrive on the verandah, to stand among the nudes,
unshockable as I am, and plead 200 autographs from his hand.

For six shillings, I strike a bargain.
The agent is curious, but my gaze drawn, again, through windows
maps, by heart, the landscape as we go.

*Deb Matthews-Zott*

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LOVE POETRY

All my life I've loved poetry.
I've sat up at night with it
coaxing rhythms from unruly stanzas,
arranging words and images on a page.

My life was never a blank slate
as my emotions chalked up
poem after poem, from feelings impossible to erase.
An indelible blackboard I wouldn't want the class to see.
Especially once published
when the poems no longer seemed part of me.

Sometimes Poetry was suicidal
and I'd love it to death.
Forget your death-of-the-author theories.
It was simply euthanasia of the text.

I loved poetry when I slept alone in my bed.
It was a kind of comfort waking at first light
to find Shakespeare's spine pressed against my cheek,
or Eliot propped up on my pillow
with his band of Hollow Men,
and one or two contemporary poets tangled in my sheets.

I loved love poetry, death poetry, erotic poetry,
in any shape or form. Real, Surreal, or Unreal.
Warts and all. Sometimes I played Frankenstein
with the poetry of body parts.

I've had elbows, knees, breasts, toes,
Freudian phallic poems, tossed off
in the guise of other images.
Even belly-buttons have shimmied their way into my heart.

If I've ever been unfaithful to poetry
it's to the rhyming kind – I simply cannot be a couplet
with Free Verse on my mind!

Deb Matthews-Zott

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