

ALL of These Poems Are Edible



by
Helen Burke

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Cover art by Helen Burke

Origami Poetry Project

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The Point of Men

Like mountains they are simply THERE –
Awaiting climbing with their
Unexpected hand holds beckoning with their
Hinterlands and sudden winds and base camps and
That suggestive planting of flags.
With their
My-wife-doesn't-understand-me glaciers.
Tread carefully here.
The ice on these is thinner than you think.
The most difficult face is always the one you must conquer.
The one that beat all previous attempts. And
What do we gain? they eye us loftily from a distance –
The nearer we get, through wind and rain and snow –
The more the point is lost to sight.
But still we rope up, buy provisions.
Feel ecstatic at the thought of touching sun and sky.

The Russian Doll that Was My Mother

Like the Russian Doll we kept on the sideboard –
That was you, mam.
Foreign, exotic, that mysterious smile, unflinching.
Your exterior of certainty, so hard won, over years.
(How many dolls since I saw you?)

For everyday, you used the first doll – she is tough and gruff.
Sometimes on birthdays and at Christmas
A second doll appears – kinder eyed and softer.
Then once – walking home – myself falling on the ice –
A further doll still – one who held me tight and said –
“My Lass, My Own Lass – You they Must Not Break.”
And so we walked together on – through the dark eyed storm.
(How many dolls since I saw you?)

That last doll mam – her I never met nor even knew.

But what strange mystery she had –
I know I learned the trick from you.
Dangerous the doll that gives too much away.
How many dolls since we walked through the storm??
How many? How many dolls? ...

Walking the Dog

Why should I speak of pain?
He does not speak of me,
But goes his own way, this dull dog.
There he goes, across tall iron gates.
Can you see him? Can you feel his icy tread??
When I try to pin him down you know
There is little of the green fields I have loved
About his eye. Today I will not go with him.
I will make him look away, for you know
He has no guts.
And his eye will lack courage at the last.

Beer

Beer is you. Beer is you Against All Odds.
Uttering the Great Truths of the Universe,
And me, listening.
Beer like you always lands on its feet.
It is a secret halved, a good woman the one
You say, you'll never meet.
Beer is a gold embrace and all that glitters.
It is where in the barnyard's lonely flat,
Joe the cat suns himself, in a single
Billiard-ball of light.

Stay in Touch

You will, won't you – you WILL stay in touch, she said.
Of course, we said – well,
That's to say, we tried.
Wrote letters, sent photos, even once a present.
(What a couple of fools).
But it seemed like was busier for her than us.
So we never heard squat.
Then ten years later, she saw us in the town, and wept.
“I would have stayed in touch, but it's just not my forte –
Things got on top of me,
The years and jobs and men.
But, NOW, the kids have gone
(moved to the moon to be nearer their dad)
Now I've nothing else doing and I'm as miserable as sin
And I'm throwing a breakdown party this very Saturday,
Now my life no longer fits or suits me.
You both MUST come. I simply won't take No for an answer.
Yes – this time – I really WILL, stay in touch.