

## Four Poems

*Ruthann Robson*

POSTED FROM TAVISTOCK SQUARE

Yes, I remember when you were in London:  
you were here with your husband,  
leaving me, your bad-girl lover, twenty  
years younger (than you, than now)  
to stay put in my unmonied place,  
to read Kerouac's travels across the States.

Yes, it was true, you always compared us  
to Vita and Virginia (but who  
was who? I never asked; I thought  
I knew). We wrote long letters with passionate  
assessments of poems, of stories, of novels; of our own letters.  
You never said you'd leave him; I never asked you to.

No, I've forgotten what you brought me:  
I'm certain only that I no longer have it.  
Some trinket, but it wasn't from Bloomsbury;  
it wasn't literary or even sexy.  
Something suitable for a friend of your daughter's—  
Is that what you pretended? To him? To you?

Yes, you did send me a postcard. Perhaps even two.  
One was of Sissinghurst. You wrote that the gardens  
were beautiful, which any fool would know  
from the glossy image you chose. I imagined that you

imagined you lived there. And when he was gone,  
you would invite me for a fortnight or two.

Now, for the first time, I am here in this country, this kingdom, this city.  
I find it evocative, but shabby and fusty.

And you, my long-ago lover, my lingering correspondent,  
are home in the the States, specifically Georgia. Divorced,  
divorced, but still married, somehow,  
and no longer writing with length or with passion.

So, I am sending you a postcard, telling you  
about the weather, about the lecture  
I am here to deliver, but not about the worrisome  
connections that persist between *Mrs. Dalloway* and  
*On the Road* and Joan of Arc and a poem I never wrote, about you—  
about you and your husband, making love in London.

## aubade

you dream of me leaning  
hard against another woman  
pushing her into the wall  
with my mouth on her mouth  
and my arms bent and posed  
as if i'm doing stand-up push-ups.

i can see myself in your dream  
my muscled tan arms straining  
my hair still long and fanned across a tight  
white shirt as the split ends tease my jeans  
my body pressed against a mock resistance  
: that woman, who is you. you.

## tumor

This is not a symbol I would use  
Casually. I dislike metonymy,  
Especially involving the body.

Think blood and guts. Scars.  
Incisions. How predictable,  
Thus powerless. Oh, O.K., I'll

Admit to a certain squeamishness,  
Though I've never obeyed  
Sappho's command

Not to prod the beach rubble.  
In fact, that's my favorite site  
for excavating images.

Think coquina shells. Claws.  
Nautilus. How perfect,  
Thus precious. Oh, O.K., I'll

Agree that my treasures are bodily.  
Even agree that I am nothing more  
than a sad sea creature

Floating on the terrifying ocean  
Adrift between two continents  
Benign and Malignant,

Malignant and Benign.

## books of the dead

as if I could survive this crisis like other ones—  
I'm reading  
sending my lover to the small stone library  
across the street from the post office  
where the cherry trees bloom profusely  
to celebrate spring in our village  
their branches must be bare now; it is winter  
I am too weak to wander downtown,  
to pull on my boots, or fix myself cereal.

new fiction is best, I instruct her  
it seems she brings me the same books  
over and over, not recalling past choices,  
or thinking my memory is as frail as my body,  
but the plots are unforgettable: someone always dying of cancer.  
in novels, they never recover.  
though the story often goes on long after,  
as if we all agree  
that living is the real tragedy.

try biography, I suggest, but avoid celebrities.  
the presidents pile by my bed  
thick volumes I can barely hold.  
slimmer ones of a dancer, a painter, a soprano,  
their talents all silly when reduced to words.  
I am looking for diversion, absorption,  
but also inspiration, a woman, a writer,  
someone who wasn't self-destructive, someone smart,  
a dyke survivor.

finally, she brings me Rachel Carson, a naturalist  
with politics, and everything I hoped (well, almost)  
(where is the romance, the lust, the trust?)  
but i'm coping until after page three hundred  
when she's diagnosed while writing *Silent Spring*  
trying to keep it hidden, convinced  
knowledge of her cancer will impugn her credibility,  
mar her objectivity, as she indicts pesticides  
linking the toxins with tumors in humans.  
It is 1960 and everything is hidden.

I flip to the end to learn when she dies,  
four years later, at fifty-seven.  
I throw the book, but it doesn't go far  
my strength insufficient for destruction;  
the spine is not broken, the pages not torn.  
Oh where is the fairness? No guarantees.  
I was never one to cry, but now I sob  
for all the books we'll never read.  
My lover takes the books back to the library  
and brings me poetry. A posthumous collection.