

JANE
HIRSHFIELD

THE
BEAUTY



POEMS

THIS IS A BORZOI BOOK

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FADO

A man reaches close
and lifts a quarter
from inside a girl's ear,
from her hands takes a dove
she didn't know was there.
Which amazes more,
you may wonder:
the quarter's serrated murmur
against the thumb
or the dove's knuckled silence?
That he found them,
or that she never had,
or that in Portugal,
this same half-stopped moment,
it's almost dawn,
and a woman in a wheelchair
is singing a fado
that puts every life in the room
on one pan of a scale,
itself on the other,
and the copper bowls balance.



MY SKELETON

My skeleton,
who once ached
with your own growing larger,

are now,
each year
imperceptibly smaller,
lighter,
absorbed by your own
concentration.

When I danced,
you danced.
When you broke,
I.

And so it was lying down,
walking,
climbing the tiring stairs.
Your jaws. My bread.

Someday you,
what is left of you,
will be flensed of this marriage.

Angular wristbone's arthritis,
cracked harp of rib cage,
blunt of heel,
opened bowl of the skull,
twin platters of pelvis—
each of you will leave me behind,

at last serene.

What did I know of your days,
your nights,
I who held you all my life
inside my hands
and thought they were empty?

You who held me all your life
in your hands
as a new mother holds
her own unblanketed child,
not thinking at all.

MY PROTEINS

They have discovered, they say,
the protein of itch—
natriuretic polypeptide b—
and that it travels its own distinct pathway
inside my spine.
As do pain, pleasure, and heat.

A body it seems is a highway,
a cloverleaf crossing
well built, well traversed.
Some of me going north, some going south.

Ninety percent of my cells, they have discovered,
are not my own person,
they are other beings inside me.

As ninety-six percent of my life is not my life.

Yet I, they say, am they—
my bacteria and yeasts,
my father and mother,
grandparents, lovers,
my drivers talking on cell phones,
my subways and bridges,
my thieves, my police
who chase my self night and day.

My proteins, apparently also me,
fold the shirts.

I find in this crowded metropolis

a quiet corner,
where I build of not-me Lego blocks
a bench,
pigeons, a sandwich
of rye bread, mustard, and cheese.

It is me and is not,
the hunger
that makes the sandwich good.

It is not me then is,
the sandwich—
a mystery neither of us
can fold, unfold, or consume.

MOSQUITO

I say I
&
a small mosquito drinks from my tongue

but many say we and hear I
say you or he and
hear I

what can we do with this problem

a bowl held in both hands
cannot be filled by its holder

x , says the blue whale
 x , say the krill
solve for y , says the ocean, then multiply by existence

the feet of an ant make their own sound on the earth

ice is astonished by water

a person misreads

delirium as delphinium
and falls into
a blueness sleepy as beauty when sneezing

the pronoun dozes

MY EYES

An hour is not a house,
a life is not a house,
you do not go through them as if
they were doors to another.

Yet an hour can have shape and proportion,
four walls, a ceiling.
An hour can be dropped like a glass.

Some want quiet as others want bread.
Some want sleep.

My eyes went
to the window, as a cat or dog left alone does.

MY SPECIES

even
a small purple artichoke
boiled
in its own bittered
and darkening
waters
grows tender,
grows tender and sweet

patience, I think,
my species

keep testing the spiny leaves

the spiny heart

MY CORKBOARD

However many holes are in you,
always there's room for another.

However much you carry,
you can hold more.

Like a saint making a joke,
imperfection of surface
suits you.
Your seams
remind of quiet tectonic plates.

Chthonic corkboard,
always beneath
even when hung on your vertical side,
your waiting thumbtacks
seem to me
a glittering affection,
the *mi casa, su casa*
of a door standing open in every weather
of invitation.

I apologize to you, corkboard—
I, who would like
to be more like you in spirit,
cover you over
with maps, plans, bills.

Even these words that praise you
further disguise you.

MY MEMORY

Like the small soaps and shampoos
a traveler brings home
then won't use,
you, memory,
almost weightless
this morning inside me.

MY WEATHER

Wakeful, sleepy, hungry, anxious,
restless, stunned, relieved.

Does a tree also?
A mountain?

A cup holds
sugar, flour, three large rabbit-breaths of air.

I hold these.

IN MY WALLET I CARRY A CARD

In my wallet I carry a card
which declares I have the power to marry.

In my wallet I carry a card
which declares I may drive.

In my wallet I carry a card
that says to a merchant I may be trusted to pay her.

In my wallet I carry a card
that states I can borrow a book in the town where I live.

In my hand I carry a card.
Its lines declare I am cardless, carless,
stateless, and have no money.

It is buoyant and edgeless.
It names me one of the Order of All Who Will Die.