

Brutality

LAURIE LESSEN REICHE

I.

There is something I want to say about brutality.

It comes out the lips of the hateful
mother, the beautiful mother.

It is a delicacy served under a silver
dish, under a shiny dome.

It is the sustenance of the old home,
the genetic nest. In my blood there is only darkness,
river of cruelty flowing in one set direction, the anthem of terror,
the pledge of desolation sealed with the kiss, the scary
caress.

It is her love that I love, the promise of eventual goodness, the hope
that brutality will be short-lived even though I am awful
and do not deserve her forgiveness. Let her rage against me and I'll join in
the crusade! I am brutality's baby: bad, dirty, lazy. I'll get the kerosene, burn
myself alive, prove to the brutal monster that she was wronged by every twist
and birth-turn of fate: a misfortune the day
I was born.

I have nothing more to say about brutality.
It comes and goes on and on
like a song.

II.

Am I really so many sheath-thin flakes of ash?

Am I really a burst bubble of spurt pieces

lighting up the air? Or am I resurrected?

I think I am—I see out two human eyes, breathe air

into a human lung, long arms are curved on this desk in front of me

like Escher's print of two arms resting on paper, a pencil in the right hand

drawing a picture at the very moment we are gazing at it.

I gaze at my own hand writing these words.

I have fingers! And the brutal woman is far away

weaving vivid stories of betrayal to any stranger who will listen.

She is Jewish in that way—a verbal necromancer.

I am Jewish in my own way—full of catastrophes I hide away like a secret diary

buried in an underpants drawer. Still, now I am I

and that's nothing to pooh-pooh.

A miracle! I hear people cheering! I've reached the finish line

at the other end of heaven's burning desert! I am thin, bones brittle, skin

sheer as water. If I drank a fluid that I crave

it would go right through me like a snake slithering in one end and out

the transparent other. It is something to be thirsty.

It is something to recognize a flower in the hands of a child in the crowd of happy

people who have come to meet me. O' memories! O' Mnemosyne,

leave me for a while so I can mingle in this crowd!

Do not remind me of my tattered sandals.

Do not remind me of the needle that burst the bubble of my small self.

Let me float among all the happy angels who are dressed as civilians.

Let me fall bodily into their outstretched arms.