

An Ode To Love's Strength





POET MARGARET GIBSON, of Preston, sits in Stonington with her dog, Mitch. (Mara Lavitt | Spectator to The Courant)

BROKEN CUP

I've forgotten how it broke, the great cause
or the petty cause that cracked the handle
into two pieces and left me without
a cup for morning coffee. In the cabinet
there were others of white porcelain,
with steeply elegant lines, cups that matched
their saucers. But my cup was Mexican,
squat, and as round as Rivera's peasant
bent before the wall of callas
he carried on his back, his burden of blossoms.
Hand-painted, my cup was carnival

purple and yellow, flowers that honored earth,
birth, death, geometry, symmetry, riot
good sex, good coffee, the sun rising hot.

I banished it, broken, to my desk and used it
for paperclips. Now I've rescued it, fit
and glued the pieces back together.

Still I'm afraid to lift it, even to wash it by hand
in hot water — it is that fragile.

You brought the cup to me from Puerto Vallarta,
that seaside trip you took to help
your daughter past heartbreak — a little hotel
by the sea, with bougainvillea
and a great deal on cocktails as the sun
rolled its dying splendor onto the Pacific.

I think I was jealous; I was jealous. I hoped
you drank margaritas and missed me —
most likely Dos Equis with a squirt of lime.

The cup gave me Mexico each morning,
on the cheap. I loved it. I loved it,

it broke. I ignored it, I cast it aside —
sounds like a classic sitcom-bad marriage.
Sounds like the wary caregiver who reads
The Thirty-Six Hour Day, heart empty.
Who really wants to know about this despair?
I have minimizing friends who tell me,
It's not so bad — just a little accelerated
forgetting, such as we all have these days.
O Ancient of Days, that was once a name
for God, for something so deep within the self
it's beyond us. Even so, it is possible,
I want to tell them, to love what is broken.
Possible, urgent, and necessary.
And so for love of thee and me,
I take my broken cup and set it down
before me on a yellow place mat. I make
toast with ginger jam and real butter,
coffee whose beans have flourished
on a mountain in Peru, I hope near Machu Picchu.

I sit down in my Japanese bathrobe,
in my Navajo beads, with bare feet; I sit
without ire or envy, without fear or despair,
and drink and eat. Slowly. Very slowly,
savoring all I can remember of that first
night we met, the good talk, the dancing
until we were too tired to do anything else
but take the dancing to bed — the miracle
of unintended meeting, the first of what
was to be years of meeting, moments
I hope to remember when I lie down to die,
my beautiful love, your head of unruly hair
and unruly thoughts unraveling
into a silence that will lengthen . . . or may
break off, as this handle did, in two pieces.
Who knows how love will hold, or if we will
ever be all right. Who knows what wrong
tastes like or how much emptiness the cup
will hold as we share it — who knows?

And if it is the cup of suffering,
drink it down — or better, may it pass from you,
and you live easy and go gently
where you will, or where you must. I'll go
with you, grateful for plum-colored flowers
so close to bruising, coffee, sunlight, earth;
the journeys we took together — and the long one
left us to walk until we lie down near
clear water, shade trees, green pasture.
In that place, there will be nothing unspoken,
nothing forgotten or feared. Day or night,
whatever the hour, it will be all shining,
our whole and broken bodies full of light.

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