

Extracts from *Speechless* (2007), Bernadette Cremin

NADIA

Highly commended by Forward Poetry Prize 2009

keeps a bunch of razors
tidy with a tartan scrunchie

has let talcum settle
on a jar of clouded bath oil

and kept the black chiffon bow
from a cheap bottle of French shampoo

and is content to let oatmeal soap sit
in the same milk-puddle for months

has left a tub of crushed apricot stone
and horse chestnut scrub to crust

into a cluster of scabs
around the rim and under the lid.

Sometimes Nadia stares for too long
into the frosted pot of lilac balm

that sits in the middle of the sill
like a spoiled princess.

DAZED ANGEL

Her boiled voice gargles
wrong answers to his crossword clues
he feeds her mashed banana
with a plastic spoon

picks out soft centres
peels fruit with a patient blade
tidies her bedside cabinet
every evening before he leaves.

He invents gossip and well wishes
from neighbours that never visit
and repeats the same over animated tale
about a cat she can't remember since

her head collapsed.

But when he wheels her to
November-bruised windows
there are no words brave enough
to describe their crooked silhouette

wrapped in the scarf of starlings
carving its path toward West Pier
her hand in his, the broken wing
that hangs between them.

A dazed angel.

SURGEON

He weeded the clump
of mud-clung sad
from the back of her mind

plucked it at the root
from the stem of her cranium
and peeled her into perfect sleep.

His priest-thin fingers coaxed
the open wound that wore her
and with impartial patience

he stitched a tiara of scars
barbed ribbons for her hair
and left September pending.

FOR THE KIDS

We sat on the wrong side of sympathy

as Dr Scott's manicured words
outlined the shadow that has crawled
around your lung like spiteful ivy
since last autumn.

For the last time we faced
that painting in her consulting room:
'Mountain' (oil on canvas). Abstract.
Signed in a contrived hand, underlined.

For a moment truth made the view bigger.
Outside, London was still happening,
red, amber, green.
Brixton was planning its tea.

You fussed with your cuff like a truant
as the diagnosis was disguised
in plain English for us to take home
to the kids, a gift-wrapped grenade.

Forever gracious you offered to drive
knowing I am petrified of twilight.
We sat, gridlocked, then as if it didn't matter
You leant forward, let a violin out of the radio.

We pulled into the drive, parked.
Chloe's bike was still against the shed
where yesterday had left it.
Now is where the end begins:

I'll start to collect your silhouettes,
Fingerprints left on glass and plastic.
Your discarded shadows, left-over profiles
And rough sketches I'll never show you

for the portrait I'll paint,
David (oil on canvas). Abstract.
To hang at that sly angle
only you would understand.

POLLEN COUNT

A cinnamon woman ripens
in a sun-infested garden

branded by bikini lines
her rosé flesh marinates

in the pulsing scent
of meat-red petals

riding on the shirt tail
of a mischievous breeze.

She stretches one more inch
across the manicured lawn

pulling her slow-gold limbs
like honey sinews

from a muscular spoon
then parts her thighs

like lover's reluctant tongues
to let skin drink the afternoon.

She imagines pollen tickling
buttercup chins

flirting fingers
and giggling champagne

feels her eyelashes kiss
when she isn't looking

thinking of nothing
and lilac.

SIMMERING

The train pulled
me gently from
your broad hand

and I left
the summer
simmering for you

to smell.