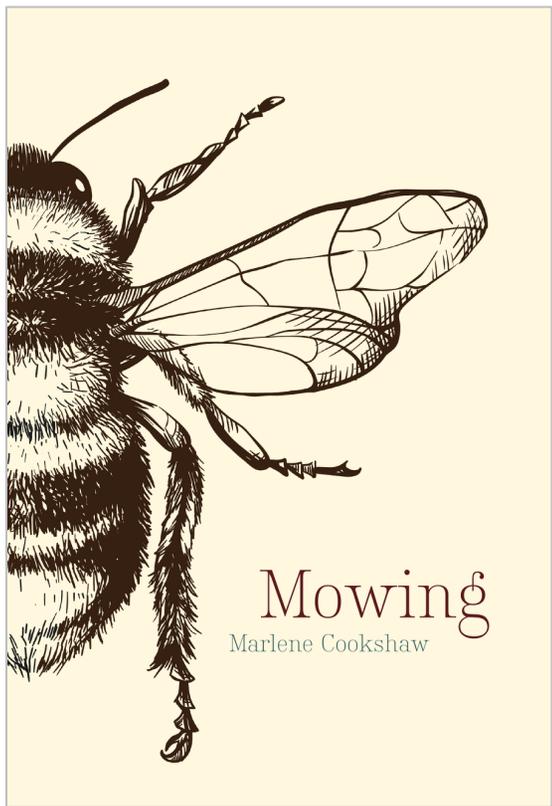


FALL 2019

Mowing

MARLENE COOKSHAW



6 X 8.75 INCHES / 80 PAGES

TRADE PAPERBACK / POETRY / \$20

AVAILABLE FROM WWW.BRICKBOOKS.CA

ISBN 978-1-77131-515-9

Sample Poems – Page 1 of 6
Brick Books – www.brickbooks.ca

Moving House

*For each of us, there is a place from which our night-dreams
proceed and around which our mental faculties take shape.*

—Roo Borson

That's it: mine's lost. Every dream
occurred in that small city yard,
even tinier brick house: worlds

it contained, and histories.
But only one future, and we all
moved away from it. For years

in dreams I brought friends home,
aligned who I met with where I
came from, made something new. I believed

the figures of my parents,
diminished
this way, became human-sized.

*

The owner of the Victoria Hotel, which
I don't recall but must have seen,
was interviewed this morning, having sold

the building after living in it all his life.
He has a snap of his mother on the roof
holding him when he was eight months old. Here

is a man who has not lived alone, meaning
with fewer than hundreds, since the hotel opened
in June '65, when he was one. In October

he will sign it over to a mainland firm;
They will break it into condos. He says
he's never known the building without

people in it, cars in the lot, the elevator
going up and down.

*

In the middle of the day I walk with the dog
to my aging ex-in-laws for tea.

Tom studies the phone book for the name
of the shop that used to be Radio Shack
while Muriel and I point out birds

through the sliding doors. She tells me
about the pair of pigeons—she calls them
peacocks—that visit every afternoon. Like Tom

she's dressed in eggshell blue and beige.
Frailer each week in extremity, the two
are softer, and round in the middle.

*

It's 5:45 and the sun's heat has weakened.
I pull on my hoodie and zip it.
The Zephyr squash is a dome of green

that would easily house a child. Again I
move the hose. Squash, squash, pear is day one.
Then, four beds in the greenhouse.

On the third day, sunflowers,
kale, black currant and beans.

River Road

My mother, who has not walked without support
for more than a decade, who has dwindled

in height each winter and clasps, in passing,
the backs of chairs, the kitchen sink,

lifts her face from the coffee I've set
at her elbow to tell me again, make it

vivid, her dream: she is ten years old,
her rag-curl'd hair bound by a floppy bow.

At her back, under trees the women in her family
picnic from a spread cloth at the coulees' edge.

Her father will fetch them in the Gray-Dort
with its seats like skin and curtained rear window

before the sun has dipped. She stands on the brow
of a green slope flush with late-spring grass,

and when the Gray-Dort engine
purrs like a smug bumblebee from the river road

she looks up from her patent leather shoes rubbed
with vaseline for gloss, and laughs, breathes in

Mowing

MARLENE COOKSHAW

the honey scent of balsam poplar's sticky leaves.
The sturdy machine of her heart propels her,
swoops her down into her life.

Sixty

All my memories are getting old.

No longer able to dance and drink
after digging the garden beds, sometimes
not even entertaining that desire
when sitting in the porch armchair
and reading about stars.

Late afternoon I sit, the sun going in and out,

inadequate to dry my greying hair. I am ashamed
of the twenty extra pounds, soft belly,
hard pads of flesh that ride my hips.
I am ashamed of my shame.

There is no end to it.

Mowing

MARLENE COOKSHAW

Relay

The days are handed off like bright batons.

A runner stutters into dark, the night
ahead. Ahead, dawn tucked beneath her arm,

someone else begins to hammer
the pulsing slope of mount grief,

while, in her wake, another navigates
the barberry thicket of what might

have been achieved. Who she was or will be
keeps her company the far side of the track,

winded, lurching forward, looking back.

Mowing

On Friday Karl spiralled the field on his tractor,

mowing the June-high grass to a carpet of green
that over the next days silvered in the heat.

He arrived again, towing a gang of rakes that hooked
and flung the hay, and the day after that

towed the chunky baler, folding and stuffing the wiry stems
into a maw that ka-chunked and spat them transformed.

Ninety-eight bales threw sunset shadows in the field.

Before dark, two pickups entered the lower gate
and crawled west. Beside them the labourers walked,

tossing the bales to the truck bed, where one of them sorted
and stacked. The courses rose by the minute, and the stacker,

while, laden, the vehicles sank on their axles.
Forty bales per truck, I figure, in maybe a half hour.

All that had surged to shoulder height in a season
was stowed and wheeled away, steamer trunks

of weather and trauma, coincidence, time, gone
to be winter's meal for soft-mouthed sheep.

Mowing
MARLENE COOKSHAW

The bales appeared to rise of their own accord
from the workers' hands. I know what a bale weighs.

Water and soil conspire to multiply, to occupy
a breathing space above the field.

This is magic. Then comes night and a smattering
of rain, broadcast from the scudding clouds.

In the morning a haze of new leaf.