

Preface

The Gates of Pearl has two authors. It is in two voices, mine and my mother's: mine in my traditional poems that are mostly addressed to her; her voice in my rendering of things she said on the telephone, and her voice in the journals. I was my mother's amanuensis. I wrote down her words when we spoke every morning, maybe as a way of not listening. She was dying of Paget's disease, breast cancer. The jagged telephone poems alternate with my poems to (or about) her, and with her journals — her creative writing — that she did in Overeaters Anonymous. When my mother died in 1979 she weighed 80 pounds.

Her life is fully revealed in her journals, mine half hidden in my poems.

Her story is a story of divorce. She went to Mexico twice, once to a clinic in Tijuana to take Laetrile, and once to divorce my father.

I remember as a child my mother braiding my hair every morning for school. The knots she called Nazis. I have loosely braided these three strands into a poem, and over time her unique strand (her journal) has grown fatter. It has played an expanding role.

Our collaboration extended from the mid-1970's until today, March 17, 2017, her 101st birthday.

(Telephone Poem)

— the washing away of the postcard, my life
bore out what I dreamed Dad really did
In my dreams you were distraught and
crying and you were writing my
story and
and I live by day to day and hang
in and hang in by my fingernails
and for you to pick a different
heroine and — I don't know —
it slipped away — I had to find something to comfort you —
that you might have to leave
this heroine, and put her away
but in the dream — your tears, your
crying woke me up! — as if
you were little and I only slept with one ear —
but your tears and your face were so —
and your shoulders too
slender for this burden. Your face
was near my pillow / a horror for me — I was
bingeing — into food —
chickens — maybe ice cream cakes — into
the food and this young man who was a doctor or was
going to be a doctor asked if I could play the piano.
I said 'Not really.' There was my parents' piano
in the corner — he would teach me the chords he said.
His name, maybe Terence, was in the society column.
Safir. (Safe Fear)

There's a poem I knew when I was a child called 'The Lost Chord.'
When I woke up I said, "That's my lost chord."
But then I got up in the morning and got
a little persnickety — I got a
little angry at Daddy — he likes to
throw a bone and not be questioned.
I have an odious task and I hope he
won't make me want revenge and
then I'll have to steal —
lentils. flanken. Key Food.
Ring the bell: make friends with the butcher.
I'm in bed with a rag around my breast. . . That A emulsion that he
literally poured down my throat — and one young guy — Tom —

Book of Pearl

I have short changed the Tel Co.

I short changed Bus Co Subway

I short changed a designer in my Father's Business by getting his job

I did not live up to my potential

I short changed my parents

I short changed my children

I short changed a wicked Aunt and Uncle by staying too long as a guest (even though I earned my way)

When I am overcharged in a Fruit Market — I have not been above evening the score I stole a 25c to buy Food from Aunt Rose's

Purse I stole 5 pennies from my Mother's purse

If I were let loose in Nixon's San Clemente estate I would steal him blind for not rolling back prices when he should have This started galloping inflation along with the wheat deal When I

was bingeing 4 years ago — I would steal ice-cream from my daughter's fridge so they wouldn't see the gluttony. I would

steal from my own refrig as soon as my then husband was asleep —

1/2 gallon of ice cream — I short changed Jerry my first fiancé by breaking the engagement I am very ashamed that I pawned his diamond engagement ring and I gave him the pawn ticket instead of the ring

I short changed my husband (even though he deserved it) with the divorce.

I short changed my younger daughter in particular — Wendy — she looked like my husband's ugly family — she was like them in many ways — a different breed I was a crying — depressed Mother.

I short changed her of laughter joy and the security of a loving Mother. I short changed people in the past by not having them back to dinner in my home — we used to take them out to dinner — by doing that I eliminated the fear that I wouldn't make a perfect dinner — the anxiety of overeating before and after they left

I short changed my body by being a compulsive overeater.

I damaged my liver — I built cancer and arthritis loneliness — isolation and the hard work of building health with the sword

(Daughter-of-Pearl)

CAULIFLOWER

These things that I can give you with my bare hands
are like men on a neighbor rooftop, colorful but
suspiciously small.

Take this one long exquisite slender white rose.

I throw it across Central Park to you.

It is the white snow, the red carpet, the white
cauliflower,

the plush red coach,

the white lace at his neck, your red
stays.

(Telephone Poem)

my breast is worse — there's no question about it —
bleeding all over the lot —
I need an avocado but I think I'm going to have some bedrest.
Last night I was a relentless eater — I wanted my food and it's
backed up on me
All those years of fasting — and I want
what is coming to me — and leave me alone!
I just had a dream that I slipped and fell on the ice — and in O.A.
we say the first bite is a slip/
my body is going through something — I'm
itchy all over.

She's a hard nut to crack. I also had a dream I was foraging/
I was wanting to eat flat
Hungarian strudel.
And corn with sparse kernels —
all not good phallic symbols for me.
Anyone who writes about me is taking her life in her hands.
Well, I think the beer-drinker better cut down his bills.

I'm letting my illness live itself out.
I'm two parts.
25¢ is haunting me.
"Would you please cover yourself," she said. This same Elaine
gave a eulogy for me that should have only been given to me
when I was dead. I couldn't listen to it.
May is painful to me — because of rhododendrons — those birthday

cake flowers that we had in Syosset — that open out pink and white — and because I had a chance to have them again on those two acres near Anna. Lewis — because with drowning people you have to get away to save yourself, and then, you give them a bop and go off someplace in your self. Talk to the reader the way you would talk to me.