

Late on Mother's Day

MARDEN J. CLARK

You're just joking, I told her.
No human bones, these that clutch
Like talons at my sympathy.
Just stylish pads to square the shoulders
Or make the elbow try to reach where hand cannot.
Bone grafted to bone in grotesque disfigurement:
Bone can't pad where flesh won't fill.
Only knobs of bone, extra-skeletal, that harmonize
With fingers and hands twisted
Past even the shape of pain.

I was broad waking

And so was she. No pain in those knobs,
Not even in the swollen feet. But
Pain everywhere, in a body grown too thin
To support pain—or to house it.
No room for pain!
But endless, dull, and pure,
It fills that frame, whispers from tired eyes,
And overflows the room.

Pain is behovely.

I look for reasons in that shrunken face.
Is this the price she pays?
Price? or result?
We nine, each borne at the price of a knob
Long delayed, as though time had kindly accepted a mortgage
Due and payable in full at forty-five
But also to be amortized with interest over the whole of life.

Just joking! The days drag by
Sucking their feet from the mire of pain
Feet can't know that pain is behovely.
They only feel the suck and drag of it.
They only echo the tired eyes.
They know the nightmare flowing from the room.

We nine, we feel no pain
Except as symphonic vibration set up
By the lyric knowledge of our source.

But He must feel it, He in Whom
All pain was given flesh, through Whom Love
Wielded the scourge. Could He be joking too?
He must have known that body is no place for pain.
What kind of laugh when the joke recoils on Him?
When He must feel her pain, amplified
By timeless distance and spaceless time
And multiplied by the number who are feeling pain
Or who have ever felt pain?
Hers overflows the room. Theirs must overflow space
And find a lodging in its Source.

We nine, we're all she has.
Are we enough? Creatures of pain,
We now are separate, yet more a part of her
Than ever those knobs no labor
Can rid her of. We grew in her too.
But we have life of our own. Life, I say,
Purchased by a knob—that lifeless thing
That even while growing was dead.

We know no pain. Even that we feel—
The ache of a head or a heart, the stab
Of a bleeding hand—finds its way, somehow,
Back to her. It stays with us
Only as dissonant sound on a late March day
Whispering that winter was.
And she gladdens to bear it,
Lifted to gladness by love
That falls on us, the bread we prayed for and sorely needed,
To give us strength in the wilderness.

She's dying now. And well she should.
The pain overflowing her frame has siphoned it dry.
Only the will is left, only the love.

Yes, He must feel it, He in Whom
Love was made flesh, through Whom pain
Was relieved of the scourge. It pains Him too.
And only an infinite love can know an infinite pain,
Or bear an infinite weight.

Just joking? Yes, a divine comedy
In which—no, not she—but we,
We nine, feel no pain
But sense the problem, question the source.
Come to know grief
And come to know Love.