

Bette is Still Here.

a narrative in untrammelled verse

Milton Moon

Dedication

To the memory of Betty (Bette) Moon (Pestell), a wife of sixty-seven years. She was an 'enlightened' person who instinctively paid respect to the injunction '*keep it a secret, especially from yourself.*'

PART ONE

Bette is still here....

On the fourteenth of June
two thousand and fifteen
Bette died, at midday and I wasn't there.
Returning home a nurse rang and said
"come back quickly" —
but she had just gone —
I wasn't there,

Twice each day
at lunch and evening
for almost for six months
I went to the nursing home
to help her eat her meals,
(Carers helped with breakfast.)
She had been eating
less and less towards the end,
(not that she ate much
especially with a hand tremor,
and she didn't really like the food.)
I made soups in a small thermos
thickened with shredded white bread.
Oddly, her tastes had changed
from elegant foods which
she preferred all her life —
especially subtly-sweet desserts —
now her taste was for food
quite spicy and strong.

Bette suffered a multiple
connective-tissue disorder
and been prescribed medicine
daily, for twenty years or more
(to keep the ESR and CRP
below astronomic levels.)
She had fractures from
osteoporosis, seven in the spine
three in her sacrum,
her skin was like tissue
both arms and legs
encased in stocking bandages —
the medicine prolonging her life
was taking life away.
We never spoke about that
but she accepted the unspoken
with bearing and grace.

'How are you darling?'
carers and nurses asked.
Her reply was always the same
'I'm alright thank you.'
I had asked her would she like
paintings from home
brightening up her room,

or photographs? We were
a doggie family with many photos:
always two dogs, an older one
to teach house manners
to the younger one.
'No, she didn't want
anything from home,' a place
to which she would never return —
wanting nothing to which she would
be tempted to cling.

A smart but casual dresser
her clothes in the nursing home
were nighties with long sleeves,
(always 'cling cotton'
which I washed daily.)
One day she asked for
special clothes from home;
a Rugby top with two broad stripes
in Navy and mid-blue,
and corduroy slacks of Navy-blue.
I asked why she wanted them?
"in case I need to see the dentist."
When Bette died the nursing home
washed and clothed her,
she wore them for the last time.

She didn't want a public farewell,
strangers saying obligatory things.
It was a proper funeral, conducted
'in family.' Damon, our son,
assembled photographs,
nicely printed in a six-page folder
and wrote about his mother.
I spoke about her life,
and sixty-seven years together.
Lucinda, our beloved daughter-in-law
played solo violin, her own arrangement
of Canzona "La Bettina"
a baroque farewell.
I went with her,
a final journey together:
her ashes rest by my bed
until joined by mine.

I had already sold our home
buying a smaller one,
a Unit near the nursing home,
hoping an access cab could
sometimes bring her there
and share time together,
to see again those things
that were part of her life

Japanese banners, tattered,
rescued, cut and stretched —

Tomoe Gozen a female Samurai,
famous for her bravery,
and Jimmu Tenno, the first
Japanese Emperor depicting the
legend of the golden bird.
The Thirty-six Immortal Poets,
an artist's original instructions
(from which wood blocks were carved,
stories in Chinese characters
poems in Heian script —
water-damaged but restored,

Greek icons too;
Saint Spiridon
candle-burned and blistered;
expert restoration offered
but politely refused.
The newer ones? Doxiadis trained,
clever female artist, old techniques.
One, the same saint, skilled perfection,
as though protectively wrapped
kept from prying eyes
and careless hands,
as though for hundreds of years,
So many many treasures.

Flowers too, as always
(but now they're dried natives
except one vase), a single flower
before the Buddha's Image
'calling the earth to witness.'
Gone is the lounge suite,
the dining table, Mexican chairs
(no more socialising, except for coffee,
Japanese or Chinese green tea.)
This new place in which I live
is our home — I still say 'our' —
shared with the one who has gone
(although she had never been here).
I have the feeling Bette *is* here,
with me, in our home.

It started as a dream —
everyone has dreams
but this one was different.
What was odd was the
casual everyday-ordinariness;
no trace of earlier thought,
so casual and so ordinary
making it unforgettable.
It was a visit to our old home,
where Bette and I had lived.
Perhaps I was collecting mail,
something quite unimportant,
but Bette was suddenly there.
It was like somebody

walking from another room
“I don’t know where you are living now.”

Just that simple statement
‘I don’t know where you are living now.’
Bette had lived in that house
for twenty years, but for the past
six months she had been in the nursing home.
Her appearance was no different to before,
an ordinary being — nothing supernatural
about manner or appearance,
but no longer unwell and bed-ridden.
My response too was normal and natural;
“I am going back shortly —
you can follow me.”
Not *“I’ll take you”* but *“You can follow me!”*
It was familiar territory where I now lived,
Why did I say **You can follow me?**
Bette didn’t have a car.
I woke up, urgently,
directions unfinished
but I am sure she is here.
Earlier I had described where I had bought
and she must have remembered
but how?

Her ashes are by my bed,
awaiting mine. I burn incense
twice a day and I feel her presence.
I have the feeling she is waiting,
curious and patient
for me to join her;
or is it I myself who is asking her
to await my joining with her?
I tell her ‘now’s the time for learning’
and there is much she can teach me,
and perhaps a little I can teach her;
a time of total openness.

Some say consciousness has a
physical reality,
insisting those departed
will remain — if only in part —
as long as the need is there,
or the living relinquish their hold.
‘Drifting apart’ is a human expression
and we are all different.
No one can fabricate consciousness;
it is quite beyond
calculation or intention.
Consciousness? It is said
‘a veil that is lifted reveals
yet another veil.’

PART TWO

Soliloquy

Nature or nurture?

The question persists

what are the limits of both?

Nature *and* Nurture,

both play a part?

Every thought, every word,

everything affects everything?

Nurture hones things sharp,

or makes things blunt?

Nature makes things live

then decay.

Nurture is what refines,

removing the dullness

revealing the burnish beneath?

Nurture is culture,

both good and bad?

Culture changes craft to art?

But craft is also Nurture

honing skills.

Culture changes awareness

of the beauty and mystery

beyond skill?

Nature? It is the blue, grey

and deep black of the skies,

it is the birds that fly and the

things that swim in the sea.

it is the flowers that make

beauty for the eyes to see

and scent to attract the bees

that pollinate whilst stealing for honey.

Nature is the North, the East

South and the West,

the *Enso*, the circle of life itself.

The words we use are Nurture.

Nature is the withering of grasses

and falling leaves, the rain that falls,

the buds and fruit which follow the life

the cycle of the seasons;

the changing life that measures our time

and measures time itself;

the bursting into life we call birth

and the absence we call Death.

We're taught 'everything strives

for the most stable configuration.'

Nature is Nurture and Nurture is Nature

both above and beyond

intention and calculation,

even beyond duality itself?

It is before our eyes, 'can't you see?'

The masters taught

"outside of Mind no other thing!"

PART THREE

Finis

Where I live now,
Bette's photo is enlarged
small portrait-size,
framed and on the wall.
After sixty-seven years it is
nice being with her still.
I can feel her with me,
there are no secrets;
she knows the worst of me,
those things that embarrassed,
causing hurt and humiliation
but she is still here; or so I feel,
so much yet to give and
so much yet to learn,
each from the other.
There is no deception,
we are both grown-up and our
Destiny is destiny and is
only over when it is over.

No one knows what happens
when we die. The brain is dead
but, and this is a big 'but',
the Mind is everywhere?
Ancient wisdom speaks
of the Alaya-vijnana,
the Store-Consciousness,
the Mind beyond the mind?
Most say the Mind is owned
by the one who uses it
but others say the Mind
is without limits, ever-present,
not owned by anyone,
never lives or dies,
is used by everyone.
The Mind is a dimension
we don't understand.
Some say the Mind
is neither pure nor impure
whatever the contents,
beyond duality itself.
It is the content which
is stained or soiled
not the Mind itself.
Every thought, every word
is stored by the Mind
which has no limits.
Like stain in an ocean,
pockets persist
if the water is still,
or dispersed, if not!

Outside of Mind no other thing!
Is the Mind the Past, the Present
as well as the Future?
Is Mind the whole of Humanity,
the 'everything' of science
known and unknown?
the conscious? the sub-conscious?
and un-conscious even?
Is Mind that which we call God?

I still talk to Bette
and we know all,
spoken or unspoken.
Who knows,
after sixty-seven years,
and maybe more,
even many times over,
dividing, combining,
beyond measure,
traces within
the sea of consciousness
ebbing and flowing,
still in it's stillness
or motion in movement,
un-fathomable?
and un-knowable?
Bette is still here.waiting,
I am here too,
waiting.



dated 1742. Genbun 6th Year. April. Emperor Sakuramachi, (1720 -1750)

"incense was dispersed for the soul of the young girl." (San Ko Do Jyo)

Acknowledgements.

The thoughts in this poem came first from my mother
Victoria Jane Moon (Kaighin) implanted in my early years
and also from Charles Bruce, a half century ago.
More insights came from a Zen master, Kobori Nanrei, Ryokoin, Daitokuji.
also Dennis Hirota, Professor Emeritus, Ryukokuji, Kyoto;
Hisao Inagaki, Professor Emeritus, Ryukokuji, Kyoto;
James H Austin MD, neuroscientist and author;
Michael Detmold, Professor Emeritus Adelaide University;
Barry Magid, psychiatrist psycho-analyst and Zen teacher of New York, and
lastly, veterinarian and thinker outside the usual, David Lindsay.

