

# 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)*

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