



SARAH PALEY

TWO POEMS

BRAVI I MORTI!

“I have just got back from the Tragedy and am still laughing”
Goethe (on going to the opera in Venice, 1786)

Sydney Morning Herald. A 49-year-old man has been found dead wearing what appears to be a homemade mermaid suit. The Melbourne man was found in a paddock near Toolondo Reservoir. Police said he was wearing a “fish-like green bodysuit made from an old waterbed. The suit covered his whole body except for two holes for eyes. It tapered to a tail like a mermaid’s. There was no hole over the face through which he could breathe.” The police believe the man was hopping to the reservoir when he died. There were several similar suits in his garage.

I’ve had this paragraph pasted on the back of a post card of Winslow Homer’s *The Fog Warning* for so many years I no longer know how I came to have it. Did a friend send it to me? Or did I clip it out of a paper while sipping my morning coffee? In the painting by Homer a fisherman, his oars raised in a pause, looks out toward a setting sun. Gray clouds on the horizon and pink clouds over them. He rows home with a huge fish—the giant tail fin propped up on the side of the small boat but the head is concealed.

It could be our hero being rescued at least once before the end of **Act III**.

Act II

...he can no longer blot out the siren's call. He sets to work learning everything he can of what he is to become.

Act I

Our hero tries to enjoy something, anything in peace and comfort and pleasant company but instead gets himself into trouble and danger because of an absurd desire he cannot contain. Cornered by himself...

PANTOUM

*The grizzly bear is huge and wild
It has devoured the infant child
The infant child is not aware
(S)he has been eaten by a bear*
—A.E. Housman

It has devoured the infant child
with room for her to stretch and grow
she has been eaten by a bear
some might say a problem—or a woe!

With room for her to stretch and grow
she did just that and even knitted socks
some might say was a problem or a woe
but for her the bear was home, not just some box.

She made do, and as I've said, even knitted socks,
not to mention quilting, lathing and botany.
For her the bear was home not just some box.
Born an optimist she held monotony at bay.

Not to mention quilting, lathing and botany
in her twenties she played "Fur Elise" on the bear's rib cage.
Born an optimist she struggled to keep monotony at bay
but the bear most ardently desired to turn the page.

In her twenties, she played "Fur Elise" on the bear's rib cage
In her thirties, she drank, in her forties she sought God
the bear most ardently desired to turn the page
a thing crept inside *her* though and it was odd.

In her thirties, she drank, in her forties she sought God.
Something happens to a woman over fifty five.
A thing crept inside her and it was odd.
She etched on bones, tore through walls, renounced baking pies.

Something happens to a woman over fifty five.
She did not keep house, keep busy, keep thoughts leashed.
She etched on bones and tore through walls and practiced dives;
she stood up—took up more room—and never ever made another quiche.

She did not keep house, keep busy, keep thoughts leashed.
And, he who devoured the infant child
now must live as equals—an unlikely pair—
with the *woman* who had been eaten by the bear.