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## Dwell

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## Dwell

### Abstract

To keep a place alive in your heart, it must dwell in your mouth. Heart-Mouth. Mouth-Heart. This is how you remember or want to remember. The first plum shared with Nancy of the plum garden next door. It was heady sweet. You were both twelve, but she was taller. You were blissfully worried that she might kiss you, because you had plum skin stuck at the roof of your mouth.

MERLINDA BOBIS

## DWELL\*



## ARCHIVE OF THE PALATE

To keep a place alive in your heart, it must dwell in your mouth. Heart-Mouth. Mouth-Heart. This is how you remember or want to remember. The first plum shared with Nancy of the plum garden next door. It was heady sweet. You were both twelve, but she was taller. You were blissfully worried that she might kiss you, because you had plum skin stuck at the roof of your mouth. But you grew up and plums never tasted the same again. Then there was the last barbecue before your father left for Vietnam. You had the only burnt sausage in the pile. You wanted to blame him. Later, all talk of war always left a burnt taste on your tongue.

Your mother used to bake a cake to make things better. These days, you still dip your finger into the batter, anyone's batter, and lick it furtively. Like testing hope, or maybe love.

Heart in the mouth, mouth in the heart. Maybe each dwells in the other. Maybe each is a dwelling, as memory is a dwelling but without enclosures. It is vulnerable. You remember Judith, the Filipina who once brought rice-cake for office morning tea. Back in the old home, her mother used to make it just like this: 'Ay, so sticky like you won't believe it and with her secret caramel'. She poured the hot syrup over the cake and, in a gesture that was like a blessing, coaxed the aroma with her hand towards her nose, then yours. 'Caramel scent ... mother scent,' she sighed and could not meet your eyes.

## ENCLOSING

Imagine your child imagining. It draws a chalk circle around it, feels contained. No villains will dare cross to its side. This is faith, if there can be faith in a paradox. This home is enclosed but free. It is drawn on grass, which will grow over it. It does not disturb the air, which still flows through it. The animals can walk through it and nibble the

grass. 'Because they have to eat too,' your child says while making mud patties.

It is an unusual circle. This containment is not fearful. It is a wise circle. It knows fear is the most terrifying enclosure. It leaves us joyless, impoverished.

If only the body could take on this unusual wisdom or faith: this body is open and enclosed. It belongs to itself. It is always home. The dwelling dwells in us. Otherwise we will be forever lost.

Watch how your tired child says, 'I want to go home, mummy', with thumb pointing to her chest. Perhaps this is not a gesture of identification, of asserting the 'I'. Perhaps this is our innate comprehension of the true homecoming: home is in me. Did the ancient peoples know this all along? Did they go walkabout and carry home within? Did they think of the sky as an infinite roof? When did we start building the earthly firmament, the enclosing armament?

#### TO CARRY: TO BUILD

A body carrying another becomes a new body. Entwined, bodies become a new structure. It could be home. It could be home-like. It could be joyful.

It never ceases to astonish you — the sudden arms around you, the sudden lift within. The grip, the heat, the beat. Skin, breath, heart together as if it were a last chance. Like departures. Nancy moving to Perth, abandoning the plums, the plums abandoning their sweetness. Or Dad mucking up the barbecue. You felt his heart for the last time. Last chances are enduring. The last wedge of light before we shut the door. It remains in the eye long after we have turned away.

Now you hold your own child tightly sometimes. You refuse to let any light pass between your bodies. Again it astonishes you. But she wriggles out of your love, distracted by Barbie on TV. Her mother rolls her eyes. You enclose yourself in the evening news. Feels more like home. There's Iraq, Bali, the stocks plummeting, and you wonder what's the ratio between construction and destruction. How much do we build, how much do we break?

The smell of garlic takes over. Stir-fried noodles tonight. You're not partial to garlic, but they say it's good for the heart. You are careful about your body. You know about building it. You wish to know more about bodies building into each other. You wish to understand connection, reverence or simply survival: if all bodies dwelt in each other, no body will be allowed to break.

#### IF A PLACE

'If there are trampolines among the trees — '

'I can see their tops.'

'If there are lollies on their tops — '

'I can jump to sweetness.'

You play the 'if' game and find your child is a master of seeing. You are jealous of her sheep wearing a tutu in the sky. Especially of her trampolines among the trees, and where the vegetation is thickest, her slides that go 'all the

way down to the roots, daddy!’ Where are they? When did you put on this blindfold? When did you keep losing your way home?

You cannot return to that first time, when the plum broke between your teeth so close to Nancy’s. You can only eat your mother’s cake ‘for making better’, grateful for the little reliefs. Oh for the constancy of love, its ordinariness when things grow too estranged. You wish for strangeness, though: your own sheep in the sky, if you can’t have the old plum sweetness back. ‘Wish’ is another word for discontent.

Your child holds your hand among the trees. ‘There’s a snake grinning on this tree, look!’ You agree. You dare not betray the trick of light, or the wish for the trick of light.

#### PASSING LIGHT

Light softens edges. Light makes people kind, if not beautiful. For a moment it dwells in a body: filling the concave of a cheek, smoothing furrows, making lips shimmer with intent.

The green light for ‘go’. It does funny things to the air. Suddenly a rain of green dust or green fireflies. After a drought, you can believe it’s raining chlorophyll. Your child asks what chlorophyll tastes like. ‘Uhhh ... fresh, I guess.’ She eats a leaf to prove you right.

But there are other lights. They hurt the eyes. That last wedge before the door closed. That burning plane in Hanoi. That napalm. Things go off focus. When your doctor advises glasses, you almost laugh. You want to ask about the different ways of carrying bodies from the light. Or the ratio between building and breaking. How tightly bound are they? How much light can pass between them, if you so allow?

He shines his pen light into your eyes. You see the sun rising from his nose. It is a shock, this recognition. When the light dwells in you, you see more. You really see. Some think of it as affliction, others call it grace.



## *Ana's Bruschetta\**

*(serves one)*

### *INGREDIENTS*

*fresh tomatoes*

*garlic*

*feta cheese*

*flat leaf parsley*

*any bread (best being white bread)*

*olive Oil*

*butter*

### *METHOD*

- 1. Put the slice of bread into the toaster. While waiting, cut the fresh tomatoes and parsley into small pieces. For extra flavour, add small amounts of red onion.*
- 2. Put all of these into a bowl and put approximately ½ teaspoon of oil into the bowl and mix well until contents are shiny.*
- 3. When the bread is ready, take it out carefully and butter it. When the butter has melted, rub garlic into the bread.*
- 4. Spread the tomato and parsley onto the bread until it's all finished. Now put a small amount of feta cheese on it.*

*NOW.....EAT!!!*

*\*Recipe by Ana Marginson.*