

Anne Sexton, The Complete Poems (Boston:  
Houghton Mifflin Company, 1982),

## THE DIVISION OF PARTS

1.

Mother, my Mary Gray,  
once resident of Gloucester  
and Essex County,  
a photostat of your will  
arrived in the mail today.  
This is the division of money.  
I am one third  
of your daughters counting my bounty  
or I am a queen alone  
in the parlor still,  
eating the bread and honey.  
It is Good Friday.  
Black birds pick at my window sill.

Your coat in my closet,  
your bright stones on my hand,  
the gaudy fur animals  
I do not know how to use,  
settle on me like a debt.  
A week ago, while the hard March gales  
beat on your house,  
we sorted your things: obstacles  
of letters, family silver,  
eyeglasses and shoes.  
Like some unseasoned Christmas, its scales  
rigged and reset,  
I bundled out with gifts I did not choose.

Now the hours of The Cross  
rewind. In Boston, the devout

work their cold knees  
toward that sweet martyrdom  
that Christ planned. My timely loss  
is too customary to note; and yet  
I planned to suffer  
and I cannot. It does not please  
my yankee bones to watch  
where the dying is done  
in its ugly hours. Black birds peck  
at my window glass  
and Easter will take its ragged son.

The clutter of worship  
that you taught me, Mary Gray,  
is old. I imitate  
a memory of belief  
that I do not own. I trip  
on your death and Jesus, my stranger  
floats up over  
my Christian home, wearing his straight  
thorn tree. I have cast my lot  
and am one third thief  
of you. Time, that rearranger  
of estates, equips  
me with your garments, but not with grief.

2.

This winter when  
cancer began its ugliness  
I grieved with you each day  
for three months  
and found you in your private nook  
of the medicinal palace  
for New England Women  
and never once  
forgot how long it took.

I read to you  
from *The New Yorker*, ate suppers  
you wouldn't eat, fussed  
with your flowers,  
joked with your nurses, as if I  
were the balm among lepers,  
as if I could undo  
a life in hours  
if I never said goodbye.

But you turned old,  
all your fifty-eight years sliding  
like masks from your skull;  
and at the end  
I packed your nightgowns in suitcases,  
paid the nurses, came riding  
home as if I'd been told  
I could pretend  
people live in places.

3.

Since then I have pretended ease,  
loved with the trickeries of need, but not enough  
to shed my daughterhood  
or sweeten him as a man.  
I drink the five o'clock martinis  
and poke at this dry page like a rough  
goat. Fool! I fumble my lost childhood  
for a mother and lounge in sad stuff  
with love to catch and catch as catch can.

And Christ still waits. I have tried  
to exorcise the memory of each event  
and remain still, a mixed child,  
heavy with cloths of you.  
Sweet witch, you are my worried guide.

Such dangerous angels walk through Lent.  
Their walls creak *Anne! Convert! Convert!*  
My desk moves. Its cave murmurs Boo  
and I am taken and beguiled.

Or wrong. For all the way I've come  
I'll have to go again. Instead, I must convert  
to love as reasonable  
as Latin, as solid as earthenware:  
an equilibrium  
I never knew. And Lent will keep its hurt  
for someone else. Christ knows enough  
staunch guys have hitched on him in trouble,  
thinking his sticks were badges to wear.

4.

Spring rusts on its skinny branch  
and last summer's lawn  
is soggy and brown.  
Yesterday is just a number.  
All of its winters avalanche  
out of sight. What was, is gone.  
Mother, last night I slept  
in your Bonwit Teller nightgown.  
Divided, you climbed into my head.  
There in my jabbering dream  
I heard my own angry cries  
and I cursed you, *Dame*  
*keep out of my slumber.*  
*My good Dame, you are dead.*  
And Mother, three stones  
slipped from your glittering eyes.

Now it is Friday's noon  
and I would still curse  
you with my rhyming words  
and bring you flapping back, old love,

old circus knitting, god-in-her-moon,  
all fairest in my lang syne verse,  
the gauzy bride among the children,  
the fancy amid the absurd  
and awkward, that horn for hounds  
that skipper homeward, that museum  
keeper of stiff starfish, that blaze  
within the pilgrim woman,  
a clown mender, a dove's  
cheek among the stones,  
my Lady of my first words,  
this is the division of ways.

And now, while Christ stays  
fastened to his Crucifix  
so that love may praise  
his sacrifice  
and not the grotesque metaphor,  
you come, a brave ghost, to fix  
in my mind without praise  
or paradise  
to make me your inheritor.

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