

Anna Nicholson

CANTO XXVII

*It's a strong wind—
the rain in it has too few drops
to douse a blaze*

BRUTAL WIND

It has been very hot. Yesterday,
there was a threat of thunder, that
intense building heat. She sleeps
erratically, turning over and over
in the dark and waking sporadically
to outlines on the sky from some
strange illumination on the southern
gully. The dogs had barked all evening
across the valley and a wombat scratches
through the night, under-digging
foundations and banging the water pipes
with its need to get to where it wants;
in the night, a crack of thunder loud
enough to wake her and the slow pat
of rain drops.

And now the wind.
The backs of the grevillea leaves
are grey against its force, their new
growth pushed towards the east like
a woman's hair round her face. She's learned
to watch and prepare for her defence
with raincoat, layers of clothes and boots or,
better still, laying up inside and watching the extreme
pass her by in streaming force before
the glass.

She's not always been so prepared
with a plan—sometimes, caught off balance, she's been

out there in the elements, buffeted by the wind
and has been unable to defend herself.
No knees bled, nothing scuffed or lost, who was
there to witness it or even tell. She remembers telling
once, but the friend laughed it off and put an arm
through a boyfriend's arm and said *calm down*
you'd better not tell your parents, there is nothing to be
done—she was still breathless from the struggle
and the run, her hair gobbled with pine needles
where she'd been thrown down and her little-girl
dress and new shoes, with a heel, her downfall,
she thought: no one could resist such a tottering
thing. *It was Tony* she said, still crying, thirteen.

It was as though she'd been blown down
by the wind and her voice carried away with it,
no one seemed to hear. If she'd fallen off
the pavement and grazed her leg or banged
her wrist diving in the pool, someone would have
kissed it better or given some support, but here
in this night, softly dark and full of stars
(she saw her first shooting star there, a falling
arc of loss, unremarked except for that split
second, so many more to take its place,
nothing indicating where its place had been)
she learned the meaning behind *do you want*
a walk?

Now, she's more prepared, but it never
comes from the same place or in the same
force, and the phrasing's always somehow
different. *Lightning never strikes twice*, but
it may not just be lightning—if she took a picture
now of this scenic place and avoided the flapping
grevillea, there'd be nothing much to indicate
the gale these things contend and whether they'll
bend or break.