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 calmdown
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 gobbed 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.