

l a u r a b o g g e s s

Waiting for Neruda's Memoirs



the poetry club series

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She stared up at the ceiling as he studied the paper. Swung her feet back and forth under the desk. She could barely reach the gleaming tile floor with her tiptoes. Who made these chairs anyway? The Jolly Green Giant?

She tried breathing deeply...slowly and quietly gulping up the atmosphere. But something about the way he raised his eyebrow as he read niggled. She knew what was coming.

The voices of the watchers hissed in her ear. *Who does he think he is? That he could sit there and read about you—about you, for heaven's sake—without saying one word? As if you weren't sitting there right in front of him. And now this: A raised eyebrow?*

She tried ignoring the voice. But the more she resisted, the more insistent it grew—dividing into multiple echoes until a cacophony filled her head. Panic welled inside her as the voices reached a crescendo. She glanced frantically at the man studying her resume.

“Those aren’t the best pieces of me, you know.”

As soon as she spoke, the voices quieted and she felt immediate gratitude.

He lifted his eyes and looked at her over his glasses—eyebrows raised again.

“Pardon me?”

“Those aren’t the best pieces of me.”

He looked absolutely baffled.

“I’m sorry, I’m afraid I don’t know what you mean.”

“Well, you can’t expect me to bring the best parts, can you?”

Not to a perfect stranger. Not to someone I don't even know."

His mouth was hanging open now and he dropped the resume on his desk in front of him.

"I'm sorry...I don't..."

She was feeling quite indignant and the watchers' pleasure heated up her cheeks. But just as quickly as the triumph *umphed*, the reality of the situation dropped hard between them. Amy looked at the bank manager looking at her. He wasn't much older than she—probably mid-forties. He had taken his suit jacket off when they entered his office and as she walked through the door behind him she noticed that his white shirt was terribly wrinkled in the back—he had only pressed the front. A practical man. How could he possibly understand?

And yet...he had been kind to her—had smiled with his whole face—even his eyes. If he noticed her dress was too large, he hadn't let on—as if he frequently interviewed malnourished neurotic women. He had inquired about her life with genuine interest—was she from around here? What brought her to these parts of Virginia?

Now, he stared openly at her with the expression of someone who had just discovered mold on a piece of bread already half eaten. She watched as the slightly shocked expression faded into one of concern. He leaned closer to her over the top of his desk.

"Ms. Pinkleberry...are you okay?"

He knit his brows together and slid his hand across the desk tentatively, his fingers stopping just short of hers. As if bridging the distance between them might bring her to her senses. The kindness was more than she could bear.

"Oh, nevermind!"

She stood up abruptly as tears welled, grabbed the resume from his desk, and fled the office. She didn't stop running until she was two blocks away...then she leaned up against a gray brick office building and sobbed uncontrollably.

So. Steven was right. She really was crazy.

She needed that poetry book.



Amy stared out the window at her empty mailbox. A few frail flakes skitted in the rushing currents. Thirty-mile-an-hour wind gusts, the radio said. She watched her neighbor's garbage can pick up speed as it rolled down the street.

I should be nice and go get that.

Then: a loud crashing noise from the back deck. She would have to break the vigil. More rumbling and tumbling sounds greeted her as she approached the back doors, mustering the ability to care. One quick peek through the glass, however, lent her the required urgency. As soon as she opened the door the wind plucked it from her fingers, slamming it against the condo's siding.

Why didn't I put this stuff in storage?

The deck furniture had taken flight. The umbrella—neatly rolled up and tied—had nevertheless served as sail to the patio table, and now the two hung like Siamese twins, dangling over the deck rail. When she stepped forward to rescue the twins, a chair came sliding toward her. She sidestepped, grabbed her attacker by the arms from behind and wrangled the thing through the door. Five more chairs and the set of twins later, Amy sat panting on her living room floor. Her slippers were soaking wet and the wind had cut cold straight through to her bones. She stared out the French doors at the snow falling down and burst into tears.

You're never going to make it.

The watchers were back. After Steven left, the voices stopped

for a time. Dr. Larinsky thought it was due to the new medication. Amy did too. And then winter came.

You'll never make it on your own. You can't even find a job. The money he gave you is about to run out. How will you pay for this place? How will you survive? You might as well give up now. Just do it. Quit. Quit this thing. There's no use trying.

"Shut up!"

But they refused to be quiet—watching her every move, berating her every action and decision for the past ten years until she was curled up on the floor—a quivering, tearful mess. She must have fallen asleep, because when she opened her eyes it was dark outside. She straightened her body and let the cold of the wood floor melt through her PJs and into her skin. She listened to the wind continue its wreckage outside. The cold of the floor made her tingle, awakening forgotten nerve endings and calling them to move.

You'll never make it.

She buried her face in her hands, heaved a sigh and tried to wipe it all away.

Just let that thought float by like a boat passing you on the river, Amy.

She took three deep breaths with her eyes closed and on the third exhale rose to her feet. She peered through the glass doors, flicked on the deck light, and surveyed the damage. All of her terra cotta pots had been tipped, little piles of dirt now swirling atop remnants of snow. The railing had been knocked loose by the weight of the table, and she would have to repaint the white boards that the splintering planters had gouged.

And her living room was full of deck furniture.

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