

Picking Blueberries

It starts slowly, a few here and there,
until I work deeper, gain technique,
roll berries off fingertips three at a time,
discover clusters hung like grapes,
where I make off with twenty at a hit.

Berries invade dreams, big as 36-point type;
make my things-to-do list. Mother, finally joyful
over my nine acres, takes to us picking together.
She, at eighty, folded over, ass-up like a kid,
pulls each like a wiggly tooth and gets a pint
of perfect gems. I eat from a bucket, bulldozing
through patches, not by passing leaves and stems.

Hunkering close to the ground's hypnotic.
I lose track of time and place. There's the smell
of earth, long silences interrupted by birdsong
and gangster crowing. Picking is backbreaking,
so I'm glad to stop and observe a woolly caterpillar,
designed just so, with a double set of antennae,
and a tail that sticks straight up, observing me.

I coo, feel a child again, until ouch, I'm bitten,
can't stop the itch, feel panic and a pang of conscience.
Where's mother? I left her in the hot sun.
Maybe she's drifted off. I call out, fighting brambles,
feel lost until I sight a familiar signpost: a young pine
chewed in the middle by hungry deer. Then I see her
standing alone in a thicket. She waves when I call,
keeps picking and doesn't want to call it quits.