

Sarah Valeika

The Voices:

There is yelling downstairs.

“Were this an apartment,
I could claim uninvolved,”

I think (because hypotheticals are a poor man’s way out)

I cannot disentangle voices now from the way those voices
used to be.

There’s a short, stocky woman
voice like a Celtic drum
and I can imagine her with
choppy, frenetic gesticulations
and Celtic-drum outbursts.

I think,
“sister is the Irish tin whistle”
(because metaphors are a coward’s coping mechanism)

Mother is a Celtic drum and sister is a tin whistle—
shrill and loud,
hands upon her hips.

This tin whistle once played jigs for me,
but now acts as a fife
in an army lineup,
keeping marchers in line with the drum
the Celtic drum
which used to rumble low and soft...

playing me to sleep

The Thing Without Feathers:

You never did muster that
pebble-sized hope that
you needed.

I estimated, when I thought about you,
that a pebble size would do.

If it were concentrated,
like a vitamin or pill,
a pebble-size hope should sustain
the desire

[a desire that all hearing ears,
all seeing eyes,
all feeling bodies
assumed you would possess]
a size much like that of a pebble—
paltry and unassuming
dwarfed by a world of epic passions—

but you said
did
asked for
nothing.
Gave nothing.

What Sweet Girls Cannot Have:

“Sweet, kind” girls get lonely.

“Sweet, kind” girls get left behind
when the whole wide world is loving

and the kisses are taken, for
nobody thinks of “sweet, kind” girls
when they stick their tongue
in another being’s wet mouth.

Nobody thinks of “sweet, kind” girls
on hot Friday nights in the summertime
because

if wild youth isn’t her style,
she can’t be a youth like them—can’t.

“Sweet, kind” girls might like to
talk about Thomas Aquinas while eating mint ice cream,
on a slow rocking swing in the eveningtime,
talking about theology and the way God works (or doesn’t)—

but “sweet, kind” girls get left behind
by a world off living and loving.

Nothing left for them here.