

Brandon McQuade

Never Let Me Go

Hardened white film

mold

scale

at the bottom of the kettle

chips away

as the water boils

like baked cheese on day-old dishes

*

Now and again

I want to collect these papers
bundle these bridges I have built with words

rip

tear

shred them all
and throw them all

out the car window

at near highway speed

*

Watch them float

ripple

in a swift current

tight pocket
of rippling air;

in the brief moments
before they madly flutter

aimlessly

toward the earth

I could almost change my mind...

reach out against
the cold hard wind
and pull them back

*

In the same moment
that they're gone

(and I'm glad their gone
I wanted them gone)

I will reach for them

I will stretch

reach

(even though I am glad they're gone –
remember?
It was me, myself, who wanted them gone)

reach out against
the cold hard wind
and pull them back

stretch

my arm against the angry wind

*

For these pages hold
my friends and loved ones

letting me

go

as I let them

go

so I'll let them

go

if you'll let me

*

The black words
 are little black flies

on the white pages
 that grow white wings

they turn and look up at me

flapping
 madly

a great white heron

against the cold hard wind

*

It is the flies
that open my eyes

finally

wake me

I am waken

to the pages shaking
in my cold hard hand

and I reach out against
the cold hard wind
to pull them back

but they never left

no

they haven't

no

not yet

Whiskey Memory

I woke without phone, shirt, glasses or keys
my whiskey memory
could not lead me back to them.

I remembered climbing and hopping over a fence
falling from much higher than I would recommend
when the throbbing started to set in
on the bottom of my left foot, from body to heel
and back, as I hobbled from a foreign couch
toward the front door.

I could barely see without the blinding light
of the Sunday morning sun
sharply digging into my eyes like a handful of sand,
a thousand little knives.

Church bells rang as I hobbled, squinting
from the sounds and sights on the streets of Dublin
mothers, fathers and children
looked me up and down
my thin blue eyes surrounded by thick dark circles
my cardigan ripped open, nearly half the buttons missing
baring my bare chest to the morning sun.

I could read their disappointment and disdain
as easily as they could smell whiskey on my breath
the spicy malt oozing from my pores like sweat.

I remember her hair, short and red
and that her name started with an M
and that she was tall, and she wore a black dress.
Her face bore many freckles, she tasted of menthol cigarettes
and her eyes were even more blue than my own,
which came as a bit of a surprise
given the recessive nature of both traits.

She had an aura of confidence about her
which can be attractive in man or woman
but not when it prevails, pervades
above and beyond all other traits.

I wondered as I walked home
past the churches that looked like castles
past the shops and buildings huddled together

like a band of hooded figures
with only the dark and narrow streets separating them
in the way that the Liffey
the river-butcher
cuts the whole city in half—
how could anyone in their right-mind
want to take her home?
Want to kiss her smoke-dry lips
pull her dress over her head
lift her skin in bumps
lift the tiny hairs on the back of her neck
with the tip of their tongue.
When I lost my phone, shirt, glasses and keys
to the strong-running waters of the Liffey
I lost a little piece of my life,
wrapped up in the whiskey memory of that night.
No matter how long I sit and think
and try to remember, no matter how often
I fill the lined white pages of my little black book
no matter how often I mistake
the stars above for satellites
from the warm bubbling waters of our hot tub
the cool running waters of the Liffey
will still separate north from south,
the current will still move beneath the bridges
eroding the brick and rock on either side,
and a little part of me will still sit
on a park bench on the south side
seeking shelter from the rain
beneath the wide branches of a lime
my stark wool collar bending in the wind.

Evolution in Trees

I

I think
the trees can speak
amongst each other
when they want to

they share water and clean air, their hard branches beyond our reach
are closer than us

somehow

more in tune

under the sun
stars
moon

II

Their hard roots warm and dry under the sun's glow
after they have taken in
and given away
all they can take in
and give away

flaccid underneath

buried

in the dampness and the dark

mingling

like blood in our veins

marrow in our bones

III

If I plunged
 a hypodermic syringe
 deep enough
 into the cracked earth
 between these roots

all that's left
a microdot
like the last star at night
barely in the scope
of tired eyes

these interlocking forearms
this village
of fingers
toes
blood
bones

this new consciousness

disseminates

like yolk in a freshly cracked egg

sexually transmitted disease

HIV

from chimpanzees to monkeys

this new, now airborne plague,

spreading, evolving in trees