

Brandon McQuade

TEA PARTY

I swear I can see through the clouds

as we make our descent

through the sea of green grass

houses

highways

streets

my twin sisters sitting down to tea

with our father

their bodies are so small from this height

the green grass is screaming to be mowed

their dresses are like pastries

puffy and white

hiding their legs

carving halos

deep and round

in the green grass

*

My brothers are behind me

half-asleep

in their seats

their eyes fluttering

under heavy eyelids

their feet keep falling

heavy and slow

they are breaking

through the floor

*

Is there anything I could throw

starboard

to keep my father from leaving?

Their mother in the kitchen

has been gone
for so long

she can't remember
ever loving him

her head buried so deep in her cellphone

she is beginning to lose her kids

they flash like stars behind closed eyelids

nerve endings

overtaken by dreams

my father's eyes are fading
dark and grey
faster than his hair

his hands shake

his breath stinks

of beer and vodka

he is staring down the barrel

of the bottle

*

If only I could jump out this window

Brandon to the rescue!

If only I could save them

from themselves

my red cape flapping in the wind

I would put a cup of tea in both of their hands

turn their heads

their eyes

like manikins

change their minds

*

Surely some resolution could be at hand

if this plane would speed up

if we could just

sit down

and rewind

my brothers waking up behind me

finally

but divorce is all that's left

the twin cups of tea

spilling like the tears of my sisters

apple juice

spilling over the edge

table to earth

ants marching below

on the brink

of civilized war

over dissolving molecules of sugar

FISHING

I

I think it's worse

insects

crawling over my skin

than a corpse

I can feel mosquitoes

their mouths and legs

penetrating

epidermis

like tiny scalpels

II

The fish jumped

coming up

out of their beds

for air

in the river

behind us

The sun shined

speckled trout

the light was heavy

on the water

over our shoulders

like diamonds

I dug my hand

into a bucket of earth

dangled worms

before them

III

The first fish I ever caught
like a soldier in the trenches
gutted
mouth to pelvis

His carcass splayed
my hook barbed
sharp as a grenade

my fingers
pulling the pin

IV

Laid up in bed

I was punished for my sin

My fishing rod

in the corner of my room

the hook dangling

over my head

like a chandelier

I sat up

to find it

buried in my eye

When my mother found me

screaming

she fished it out

so tenderly

my tear ducts

formed a dam

around her fingers

MEMORIES

You are riding a tandem bicycle
in your sleep

puppy dreams

you are trying to keep up
with yourself

your whiskers are horse hair

stitched

to bumps on your face
beneath your chin

my brother got high-sticked

his chin splashed across his jersey

an impressionist painting

one of your whiskers is broken

discoloured
dying

like discarded toenail clippings

*

Are you tired?

Are you hungry?

My dog eats her own hair in clumps

swallowing whole pieces of herself

her past

the dog she once was

but she grows them back

if I could roll up my memories into one giant ball

I would eat them all

like cheese

spaghetti Bolognese

one by

one

erase the moments

I have spent

so long

trying to forget

*

It's sleep-dark now

the lamp has long been switched off

a thin tail of light

sneaks in under my door

my brother is asleep
beneath me

my mother kisses us on the forehead
(him first)

her little angel

my brother full of light

my eyes are shut tight

she tucks us in

slides the board across my bunk

like a gatekeeper

all she ever wanted was to be a mother

she closes the door

whispers good night