

Heart rot of the pine

for Mícheál McCann

It's the cafés that will save us. I'm talking
to the new barista about his two-faced cat.
From this angle she looks like someone else.
The illusion of having more than one thing to love
like flipping a gold coin and always winning.
He feeds her fresh fish. The shorter
a creature lives, the more expensive its life.
Make her feel your love while she can, anything
else would be cruel. For you or the cat, I ask.
Sorry? He's remaking the coffee, wasn't happy
with the first pour. This is the type of guy
who thinks we have time to try again.
It's a Saturday morning so I might forgive
him for it. Maybe because he thinks I'm local
when I'm not. He grew up on this street
so it's only natural for him to die here
in his grandmother's house. They had to cut
down her tree outside, some infection or other.
He's not sure how to explain it, only words
like *bark, branch, wound* come out as the steam
rises. It's in the heart, he says. I never knew
trees had hearts, that they soften. Break.

Hot November

What was I in the world but legs under a duvet
and now there is no relief in softness.

The heat came on
like a headlight in the dark. I stood still
in the middle of the road and raised my palm.
Brow furrowed as if I could be confused
by what was coming towards me. The light,
the light! Later I would call it *blinding*
though I stayed and let it grow from yellow to white.
Even with eyes closed I felt it. How do you brace
for impact and claim you were caught by surprise?

Irish goodbye

Black mold sprayed across
my ceiling like your hands
on that last good night.
With the water gone
I would almost press my lips
to that damp and drink it.
Pull back with the beard of a saint.
Sure won't god take me
when I'm out the door?
I had spells of it, believing.
Sometimes I chose to save
not buy. I gave this city my grief
and now I am sad to leave it.

Fire in the mouth

At first I dreamed of going home
knowing the home I dreamed of was not mine.
Things are always worse than I would care
to admit, but everyone is on that same wave.
Sandbags on the shore while your neighbour's
house swells and you think to yourself
*I used to sit on that wall by the sea eating
a bag of chips, complaining about the lack
of vinegar.* Nothing ever burned enough.
You could flip the switch, fistful of wires
feel the power of a whole street
fizz up through your fingertips and still
text your friend *I don't know how to feel.*
What do you want me to say? I stood
in front of the mirror and slapped myself
across the face over and over, waiting
for that sting to settle the sting of everything else.
I told my therapist but only in a half-joking way.
Googled *am I a narcissist* because I wanted
her to like me. Sometimes I wonder where
she is in all this. Do you think if I paid her well
enough she would listen? What should I say?
*I was always scared of death, now I sit between
wanting this to end and wanting to save myself.*

Legend of a living animal

I took the blame with me to this new place
but who am I to call it new?
All the monsters they claim to live
out here just look like men.
All existence an anecdote
something I convince myself happened
lying on my side in the dark
wondering if an orgasm is possible
at the end of the world.
Even the great ape is nothing
but a masturbatory animal.
Women heard the cry
of a bittern marsh bird and fled.
I stayed as I always do, past the hour.
Let what's next come for me, only after
will I lie and say I tried to run too.
Who else would slash the throat
of a wild boar? Leave footprints along a river?
Walk calmly past the lens, reach
your hand through the screen window
me, lying on my side in the dark.

*I begged him to come
and leave his tracks in the morning*

I spent my days on food and now I come to you hungry

Thought a solution could be unlocked with a fingerprint
or a face but now I have turned to writing. Paper after

paper *whoosh*-ing into delicate metal.

Outside an egret stalks the water searching for fish.

I fail again and again. Into the files with the rest
of my dead. In the evenings I fall asleep in front of static.

Wake from a dream in which I eat both the egret and the fish.
I have come to the place where there are no people left

to save the people I can no longer save. Here at the desk
I crack the window and whisper prayers to whatever remains

as if the words should leave me green.

My woman, my land

all this curving earth
take it up into my blood
 the very heartwood of me
let me become terrible terrible terrible
 we haven't got much time left
a normal amount (but that's not much)
why wait with your foot above the gas
 when there's nobody coming
stars above look like nothing but a glitch
 and there's a fire for me to run to
blood! blood! let me become the last
pre-packaged sandwich
 lips on a scorched dream
 taste of a man I once kissed
I have sat at the table I have stood up and left
there is a lesson to be learned
 (but I won't live to hear it)
the list on my phone reads egg chicken knife
 if god won't fill me then to ash I go again

Lived once, buried twice

Soil between my teeth, oh, I could taste your ancestors.
Touch me, my skin so exfoliated. I lay in your garden
for lifetimes, out back while you stood in the kitchen
letting a stew simmer. Even in the depths of this world
the laughter of children carried. Little feet running
across the dirt. Though it was dim down there
I could have sworn I saw the girl's thin legs skipping.
Yes, I kept looking up. Patterns in the earth only made
by worms, but in each one I saw a girl with my hair.
In some life where I have a house and a car I badly want
a girl with my hair. Uproot your well-planted vegetables.
I never came for anything I wasn't owed. The land cried
out for the hand so far within it touched the inner core.

Awaiting revelation

lack of oxygen
though leading to death
will first produce within
the subject: euphoria

*with that bag on my head
you looked like one big eye
I grabbed your eye-arm
said I just need you to—*

(Know if I had two knives I would take you first.
Love, not to rip you from me. I only want
to be the one to hold you. I have carried much
already, the weight of things I could never tie
down. How could I worry about all that was done
to my body, when there is no ground left for falling?
I tried to say I had never loved, that there was
no point to it all. You heard me, didn't you? Thick
with drink I wished it all away. What I wouldn't do
for drunken stupidity now. That day in the café
I walked home and stopped to pet a small creature
sitting on a stoop. I was hot from caffeine and looked
around, realising that every direction was tree-lined
that my life had been green enough for me to breathe.
I only had to cap the bottle and cover the knife.
For safety. For keeping all those things I did love.
When we left the city, I wished for a harbour.)