

PROUST REMINDS ME

I GET READY TO SELL THE FAMILY HOME

I find barnacles on the bottom of our old sailboat
upturned tortoise-style in the backyard.
They are brittle as a gang of great-grandmothers,
and scrape off with my bare hands.

I fire them like I used to throw snowballs over the peak
of our bungalow roof, now burnished copper,
drenched by sunlight soon departing the day.
The yard becomes a blur once the sun deserts the sky.

Until my eyes adjust to dusk's bathing every blessed thing,
I see my mother crumpled beneath the old elm, her skin
the ashen color it had become when they cut her down.
Even blinking rapidly will not dispel that flinty image.

And tears long thought dried sit bitter on my tongue.
It's hard not to visualize the men swaddling her
like a mummy. No, no—more like something
cocooned—before finally taking her away.

PROUST REMINDS ME

your leaving scars me still

(after rob mcLennan's *the girl from abbotsford*)

two years one month four days
i waken, my hand on your pillow
still lonely for your warmth.

your cat curls at my feet
but is still not my cat does not
purr—ever — awaits your return.

i continue to lose weight.
food does not interest me
nothing does really—

i am holding your taste
like a verb on my tongue
afraid to swallow your tense.

i wonder how long it takes
for wounds to fully heal
and if scars ever fade.

perhaps they are all
that keep me here, remind
me of you, that i was loved.

PROUST REMINDS ME

THESE ARE YOUR HANDS

Here, where the babe lay, stillness
now. These are your hands holding
my hands, both so empty even as
we try to catch at life,
our lives, whatever we imagine is left.

There on the steps is our dog, uneasy
in his stance as if suspecting the sea
change in us. He sleeps with one ear cocked,
one eye slitted open to our strained
tension-filled space.

Our television, like some artifact, remains
silent. Closed off, as are we, gathering
dust in a living -room that mocks us
almost as much as the nursery and the
family-room are wont to do

The names of things have never meant
much until now when cruel irony seems
to rebuke at every turn. You are careful
not to cradle my womb, as am I, that
empty vessel where Ely last lay.

Lay in a perfect breathless slumber
that will remain forever flawless,
however tragic. Determined, we strive
to be stoic. Don't you think our Calvinist
parents will be so proud?

PROUST REMINDS ME

ON THE CUSP OF RECALL

"The half-life of love is forever."

—Junot Diaz, *This Is How You Lose Her*

The night you put me on notice was a hot August one, the day before your eldest son's 5th birthday – do you remember this as clearly, as do I?

Whenever August nights are hot and sticky as scones with butter and jam, and the skies grow so black they have glimmers of seaweed-green running through them—the colour that threatens storms that can portend tornadoes—I remember that night and can hear you screaming. Odd that, as all your threats and final words were in writing – you never spoke, never shouted, nor screamed –all of that is me imagining your voice from other times, times I had forgotten entirely until now.

It wasn't as if your sister, you, and I didn't have some crazy fights—especially when you two were growing up—and they got wicked loud— But we always made up and came together—especially you and your sister, and you and your Dad. It was you who couldn't stand for anyone to be mad. And you, who would be the first to apologize and make up. That's why this prolonged silence, especially without any explanation, and no hope of reconciliation (your words) is so bewildering and hurtful

Another Christmas looms, and of course, I find myself thinking of you, my love, and your boys – our grandsons.

I can't help wondering, as I often do, what you told them about our abrupt absence from their lives? We, who love them fiercely and saw them often were suddenly just not there – heartbreaking for us, confusing for them.

I was stopped at a green light the other day, waiting
for a funeral procession to pass
And found myself thinking that I was glad we still observe
this courtesy
The police tasked with blocking the intersections so
the cortege could stay together, stood outside their cars,
and removed their hats in a sign of respect.
It occurred to me that perhaps you've told your boys
that we're dead, and that's why they don't see us anymore.

Or maybe they were content with hearing we've moved away?
We haven't, but it would likely do as an excuse.
I thought after enough time passed, I might not still feel a
physical pain when I think about this estrangement;
I was wrong
When you first kicked us out of your lives—I remember
it felt like half my family had been ripped away as surely
as if they'd been in a car accident.
I didn't express this feeling ever because it seemed outrageous
– I knew you and your kids (and your husband, who I've grown to
distrust, as I believe he's a large part of this) still breathed.
Treating my loss as if you were dead seemed over the top.

As time wears on and nothing changes– in fact, any
overtures I make to try and reach you are so firmly rebutted,
(including legally, as it turns out),
I begin to feel ill – both physically and emotionally – my mental health
starts to deteriorate also, and my anger grows; you *know*, one of the
things that triggers my depressions is a fear of abandonment (long
stories, but you *do* know them)
I wonder if you are so self-absorbed with whatever it is you think
we have done that warrants being cut out of your life forever,
it doesn't occur to you that your excising us from your lives might
also send me spiralling into a deep depression?
It's not like you weren't aware of this possibility – it happened
more than once when you were growing up.

Five years on, and still no word from you. Half a decade.
It occurs to me if we bump into the boys somewhere,
we won't know them nor they us
I worry all the time about how they are, how you are.
Should I send the police to do a wellness check on you?
Or am I just fooling myself? Trying to believe that you must be ill
or surely you would have been in touch by now –

PROUST REMINDS ME

your father and I are getting old. Do you realize that?
We'll be dead, and there will be no resolving this.
Is that going to be okay with you? I don't believe it. I don't.

The wind has picked up, and there's a blizzard
blowing outside the window
Visibility is nil which suits me as I write
about our situation – as always,
I can't see clearly about any of it –
still, I wish only the best for you. Truly.

PROUST REMINDS ME

LEAVING TO ARRIVE

She gasses the old mauve Buick at the last self-serve on the way out of town, smacks at droning but harmless bugs landing on the stalk of her smooth white neck and keeps shifting; stands with one dirty barefoot covering the other, then switches.

She watches the numbers flip over on the gas pump, notes the ping announcing every gallon added, and jerks the nozzle out before it's finished.

A faint dribble of fuel scents the air as the excess runs down the side of the car.

Bill paid, she sashays back to the car, refreshes, *Sweetheart Pink* lips in her rearview, pops the clutch, puts it in first, and peels into the night, the dust chasing her out to the two-lane the only evidence she was ever there.