

\\\ return to sender \\  
sam cahill

i don't remember the patch of flowers your dad left for you  
the day he mowed the lawn.  
i don't remember the way they stood,  
but i bet there was something hopeful about them—  
how they stood resilient even as everything around them...  
as everything around them became as we are.

i prayed you weren't so fleeting,  
that the seeds of our nascent love  
could here rest atop the soil,  
your roots cracking the rocks of my uncertainty,  
but i am trapped in this ground.  
buried deep.  
and my chest rises slowly now,  
as though perhaps i'm caught somewhere between  
needing oxygen  
to stay alive and  
hoping i don't get enough.

and yes,  
those deprecatory stares do frighten me  
still from when we treaded lightly along the tightrope  
of our clandestine love  
while i trembled with your hand in mine,  
under the table.  
their animosity echoes still between my ears  
and i am unbearably cognizant of this pressure  
on my frame.  
this water  
in my lungs as i begin to sink.  
down,  
out,  
under,  
in,  
out.  
and i am trapped underwater.  
buried deep.  
and my chest rises slowest now.

at the rippling surface  
a lone blade  
of grass treads lightly along our tightrope,  
its edge  
freshly cut  
from this day.  
your dad mowed the lawn.  
and everything around us is as we are.  
and torn,  
and defeated,  
and distanced.

i don't remember,  
so please remind me.  
stand where i stand and tell me  
again  
all the ways i know i have hurt you,  
as though i don't see your face each night  
i try  
to close my eyes.

tell me.  
as though these broken pencils and crumpled papers are not  
but remnants of my bruised and beaten morale  
from each time i tried to write you but couldn't,  
for my heart was too quiet  
and my voice too small.  
so stand here.  
i want you to  
stand here and  
quote my poetry.  
describe my body.  
tell them, too,  
because each day i'll still wake with this  
overwhelming guilt  
that i made it out of this  
and shouldn't have.

tell me because i don't remember.  
believe me, love, i swear i don't...  
except  
i do.  
and i cannot forget:  
what we could have been  
but never became,  
the promises i made  
but never kept,  
the nights i saw more stars in your eyes  
than ever the sky could offer,  
and each time i should have told you  
*i loved you,*  
but never did.  
and never will.