

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Rebecca Schumejda: Excerpts from Something Like Forgiveness

Rebecca Schumejda · Wednesday, December 4th, 2019

I was talking with a friend, whom I had not spoken to in a long time and he asked me If I forgave my brother. I evaded his question and later while reflecting on my reaction, I realized that I was furious because I couldn't answer his question. How do you forgive someone you love for committing a horrific act, an act that ends the life of another person you loved, and impacts so many other people's lives? What I am learning is that forgiveness is a process, one that requires daily attention. Initially, I thought I had to forgive for her sake, then for his, then for mine, but finally I realized that forgiveness is a more universal gift for everyone. We all have to face difficult challenges, ones that test our character, ones that make us rethink our previous convictions. Something Like Forgiveness is a poem about this process. The process is non-linear, doesn't always make sense, is sloppy, redundant and filled with trial and error much like the poem itself is.
— Rebecca Schumejda



...there is another inmate
with tattoos all over his face
he sits down in front of me
he asks me how I am
and I ask him who he is
It's me he says, *Steve*

stop lying to me
tell me what happened
to my little brother
tell me what happened
I need to go on

you were always kind
and quiet
thoughtful
and helpful

not an animal
who could commit
such a heinous crime

you were my little brother

my best friend

the little boy who
wanted to be a fireman
the teen who wanted to be
an engineer
the adult who wanted to be
free of the voices
that no one else heard

prison changes people
my therapist said
as if I didn't know
imagine what he is going through

and I tell her
I thought about that
everyday
until I couldn't anymore
I tell her I came to her
to find forgiveness
she picks up her calendar
and tells me she will be
out of town
that next Thursday

Look the blue jays, she says,
when she spots them
in the crabapple tree in our front yard

I turn my head, but close my eyes

the blue jays remind me
of prison guards

the guards who walk you down corridors
in wrist and ankle chains
guards with guns
maybe lovers and children
brothers and sisters
mothers and fathers
maybe even wives

guards who have learned how
 to identify other birds
 who cannot fly
 by their voices
 who watch birds
 stretching in the yard
 birds sharpening shivs
 birds being stalked by cats
 guards who do nothing
 when they should do something
 and do something
 when they should do nothing
 guards
 who watch
 birds hiding contraband
 birds fighting over worms
 birds waiting for visitors
 who never come

He has NO ONE
 and I am annoyed
 with how my subconscious
 is trying to guilt me
 into forgiveness

I want the world to make sense again

I want to be able to look through old photo albums
 without tears—

you holding a lobster

a bluefish

a striped bass

a snapper

a bushel of clams

an oyster you are shucking

a deer's antlers

a lunchbox

a bulldozer

a teddy bear

a pumpkin
a handful of leaves
a tree branch
a snowball
the hand of the woman you loved
my oldest daughter cradled in your arms
your oldest son cradled in your arms
your youngest son cradled in your arms
my waist as we ride on the back of an elephant
at the only circus we ever went to
all of these images captured forever—
reminders of times that made sense

In our mother's room, I saw a picture
of you and her in the visiting room
of the maximum-security prison
that you call home
I turned the photo around

I could not look into your eyes
they are the eyes of your sons

they are muddy puddles

that my daughters jump into

with their good shoes on

they are the edge
of the woods
in autumn

they are raw clams
on a half shell

they are the cat's eyes
watching a cardinal

they are cockroaches

scurrying in and out
of your cell

they are the tar
that stained dad's hands

I thought I would never turn away from you

I thought I would never

say I am an only child when asked

the cold weather is setting in

You can purchase *Something Like Forgiveness* at [Stubborn Mule Press](#)

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