

# 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

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...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

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you were always kind  
and quiet  
thoughtful  
and helpful

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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

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*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

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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

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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

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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

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

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