

Tim Liardet
from The Storm House

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Sequestered brother, a year dead, now the world
must get by without you. If once you had willed
world and self into being, and looked for their limit, now
the world vaporizes with the self. Let's say
you're further from home than me tonight. Out here,
estranged from my own life, I've the space to confer
with your rather untalkative absence. It might be
a sort of praying, or a speaking of terms which will
remove me further and further from the lobby:
the noise is far below, now that I've slipped away
and have to lift the dicky bar of the fire door
to retreat to my room, until a time rain through the glass
streams, like a ghost, over the hotel letterhead
which was never once intended to address the dead.

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The two policemen, seven foot tall, came to tell
our mother you were dead – their overcoats dripped along
The Acorns' newly polished corridor before their words,
spoken softly, released the flash-flood of her grief
which set her arms flailing and ornaments flying
as she moved to knock the lanky messengers
on their backs on the slab where you lay, feet splayed.
A straitjacket was considered, but how could a bodice
that anchored her hands, a grope of straps, constrain
out-of-body grief? The constables read their shoes,
and news of your death reached as far as it would get.
Fishy, said our beautiful Asian doctor, to the pharmacist
who said the same to the salesgirl, who seemed to say
such fishiness could already smell the sea.

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Unprovoked, said our mother, the attack on you
a month before you died – the death before the death:
the stave with six inch nails driven through it
clutching the flesh of your back like the scourge's hooks
as you hugged your knees for protection;
as if those spikes tilling the soil of your back
were not considered a clue, as if wounds
more terrible, more disfiguring, might have been a clue.
Though these wounds appalled the doctor they drew
the mandatory nod, the shrug of the police:
this was the way you were taught the imperatives
of justice in this world, how each nail which could
have punctured wrist and ankle had not spared
an inch of flesh against your broken word.

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The stick came down from every angle,
there were twenty, no, thirty sticks, each seen from another angle,
each coming down empowered by the reason
for its own force, more vehemence here for this
less vehemence here for that, some regret here,
some grief, some asking-for-forgiveness,
but in that moment, I do believe, most sticks imagined her
sat in a wicker chair on some Bolivian balcony
watching insects over water, comfortable she was too far
from her sins to be blamed. And the damage done
by the blow, you were convinced, was a kind
of suitable punishment, a sort of justice.
It was justice that was energy, justice that was fuel;
it was justice that put the whip in the ferule.

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Like something that cannot help but move
however injured, appalled, however hurt,
she climbed back to her feet. Raskolnikov's nightmare –
the old woman rising from the puddle of her blood.
And this the strange thing – the blow which had felled her
in the very manner it had been delivered came back,
came back, came back and struck you across the head
and split the skin of your cranium, blue bruises bloomed
all across your torso, and the pressure which
the blow had released was pushed back
into the chamber which created it, but worse now,
cramping your muscles. The blow came back, and almost
wrenched out from its socket the very arm
which had delivered it, sent back to where it started from.

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The nights pour over and are not themselves
and where has she been, for all those hours? Wandering
in her nightdress, to the bottom of the garden
where just for a moment she might have seen you
where just for a moment she saw you
where she saw you, she says, like the Batalha Christ
– all torso, blown away at the knees –
visible only from the waist up, looking straight ahead;
where she saw you, she says, forming and unforming
in the vapours of low blood sugar, standing stock-still
and relenting from under the firs into a sort
of smile, a sense of the yet-to-be-assembled
weighting the darkness behind the ash-cans
and weighing, weighing in your punctured hands.