
The Speed of Rust, or, He Marries

KAREN CONNELLY

It rains.
My heart disintegrates for other reasons
while the bald eagle gazes at me
from the lifeguard's chair.
His head is not white but scuffed, dirty.
He may look like a bird of prey but in fact
he is a fifty-two-year-old man
who has just crawled out of bed
with a hangover and a wife
he never loved well.

Whatever

was clear and powerful
about his life has been given over
to the swamp-sky of March,
rain in April, through June,
and tomorrow is the first of July
though it's hard to consider
celebrating Canada Day
with anything but a scream.

Which the bald eagle does:
the serrated thrust of his voice
shreds the grey light as he opens
his wings and lifts, lifts,
heaves himself into the heavy air.
There he goes, flapping over our stunned heads
toward the jungle that stalks Vancouver
like a panther, the same jungle
I fought in cold blood this morning,
so much fierce bamboo.

You and I walk the wide sand flats,
slick grey acres of seaweed,
cracked shells, crabs scuttling sideways
like our desire. We are so close
to the barges that we see
a modern galley slave moving

feverishly about on the long deck.
He is silent in labour, I am silent
in sympathy, listening to you tell
how you think maybe you can't marry her.

I suddenly remember my hedge clippers
lying on the grass in the back garden.
Tools rust if you leave them out
in this rain. They teach us, every year,
not to do it again.

Why it's all wrong takes so long to explain
that the tide begins to slide in around our cold feet.
You could save yourself by drowning
but do not: we walk back to the stony shore
littered with condoms and weddings,
one of which will take place in exactly
forty days. You ask, a tear in your eye,
How much longer will it rain?

Karen Connelly is the author of nine books, including The Lizard Cage, winner of the Orange-Broadband prize; Burmese Lessons: A Love Story; and the forthcoming poetry collection Come, Cold River. Her journalism, essays and poetry have been published in the Globe and Mail, New Humanist, National Geographic Traveller and many other periodicals.

I reply, You're lucky enough
to have choices. Old lover,
surprise yourself and make one.
Useless advice, like all advice
must be at this moment. You wring
your heart on the beach while on the far shore
landmines explode, men labour on
prison ships, children drown in wet sand
similar in weight to this wet sand
but lethal, marbled with blood,
impossible to walk away from.

You say you cannot walk away.
I say *I know, I know*, and think again
of my clippers in the grass,
the speed of rust. I say,
You are a good man
and she is a good woman.

Kissing you goodbye, I wonder if
that is how bad marriages are made:
the hungry shovel of the heart
wants to break the clean surface of goodness,
get to the rich filth underneath.

I like how mistakes wait in our hands
like the orchids we crave for their beauty
though we don't know how to grow them.
I like that we want to learn.
I love how we fail.

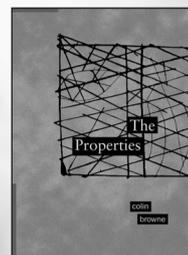
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