

Grief's Mercy

Jacob Nantz

appears in its absence
of teaching, in how it permits us to wander
in its shadow, feel for something to grip
for guidance toward whatever comes next.

What you do in the privacy of your driver's seat,
engine still sputtering before you must breathe
steady, must muscle up a smile for the world,
is your business.

It's only mine if you need it to be, if you feel lost
and need a hand through this lightlessness,
need help making a map of the way
you mourn.

You have permission to scream or to sink
into silence. What a kick won't solve a prayer just may,
but note—any attempt to cope can reopen a scabbed
heart as if it were an exposed, scraped knee.

I can offer soothing words, a tending ear.
I can show you my purging of pain,
the way I beg God to be still, act as a canyon
as I ball up my confusion and heave.

I only need this, not answers
to my questions or prayers. Listen:
these things feel heavy in our hands,
but look how weightless they fall,

how subtly they click against the walls
of whatever place we throw them
in faith that they, like the sounds of their tumbling,
will soften to nothing.

It is this, our steady earning of rediscovered joy,
that allows us to extend with a healed mind
a curious gratitude to sorrow: not for what it steals,
but for what it returns. For what it lets us keep.

Jacob Nantz holds an MA in Poetry from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, and his work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Evansville Review*, *Sinking City*, *Emerge Literary Journal*, *Gigantic Sequins*, *Sou'wester*, and elsewhere. Born and raised in the Chicago area, he currently lives and writes near Washington DC.