

The Hidden Blessing of the COVID Quarantine Rodd Whelpley

You think I am going to say more time to read,
and I say it is more time to read—outside,
to read particularly that heavy, aspirational tome,
province of only egg heads, the one on whose spine
intermittently for twenty years my fingers fell,
tapping lightly while I calculated effort and reward
and decided, well, perhaps when I'm in prison.

It is May on the back deck, bright sun
and a dark chapter furrowing my brow,
when from the next yard disruption arrives
as the neighbor girl in full-on Disney Princess—
a wrinkled blue something with grass-stained hems
she must have worn for days. In her hands,
her arms half outstretched to heaven, squirms
her Simba-like Chihuahua, panting, hapless,
bug-eyed, uncomforted by her singing loud, directly
at his face, *Let it go! Let it go! No one ever understands
me....And I don't care...I just don't care.*
...The weather doesn't bother me anyway.

I think, at first, to get some royalty-canceling
headphones, but then decide, I too, will let it go—
return to the book too difficult to read. But
how does one resist a girl who can so fully hold
the song without the grasp of all its words? Soon
I'm back to my confusion with the text, but,
this time, not because Anna-Elsa and her yapping dog
are now making operatic snowmen in the grass. How
am I to concentrate—my mind so reeled with odds
that a tiny kindred spirit is plagued with me next door?

Rodd Whelpley manages an electric efficiency program for thirty-two cities across Illinois and lives near Springfield. His poems have appeared in numerous journals. He is the author of chapbooks *Catch as Kitsch Can* (2018) and *The Last Bridge is Home* (2021). Find him at RoddWhelpley.com