

When your lover tells you she doesn't love you anymore,

Poetry • Braedon McConnell

you will find yourself
 at the Chinese lantern festival
 the mayor commissioned last winter.
 You will be standing under the massive chest of
Bai Long—White Dragon, god of rain and autumn—
 who has been reborn out of 20,000 dinner plates,
 each one engraved with golden pyrite.
 The guide from Beijing, who offered you
 scratch-offs from his back pocket, will laugh
 to himself from deep within his belly,
 “Now, isn't that some fine China?”
 and you will laugh yourself silly
 until your throat swells and your eyes sting.

you will find yourself
 wondering why you never stopped
 laughing. You will drive three hours to visit
 your father just to ask him if he has
 a story to tell, and he will tell you a good one:
 “Your ancestors lived just north of Derry
 in the dark times, and they barely escaped
 the Great Irish Famine, just by the skin
 of their necks, and they sailed for
 miles and miles and miles until finally,
 the Clan washed ashore to find the Campbells
 pointing long guns at their heads.”
 your father will cut
 the back of his hand with an old army knife,
 “This is what the water looked like afterwards.”
 And, as you wish him goodnight, he will flash
 a wide, toothy grin as he tells you he laughed
 in the face of a Campbell the other day.

you will find yourself
 daydreaming in German 120,
ich liebe dieser Moment, aber ich liebe dich nich,
 and all at once, you will be back
 at the foot of her bed, circling your thumb

around the knot in her ankle,

“You sprained it bad, it’s bruised like a lemon,”
and she laughs herself silly like you
used to, like the time you watched the fog
roll in at the bell tower or when you first leaned in
close to each other’s collarbones, and
suddenly,
she stops
with all the nonsense,
looks down at your stretched-too-thin smile,
and sighs.

“Does it hurt?”
She tells you no, it’s nothing, it’s just
time for bed is all,

and,

when your lover tells you goodnight but stops on *good*,
when your lover tells you to sit back down for a second,
when your lover tells you she doesn’t love you anymore,

you will find

you never lost your humor
it never left, did it?

And you will laugh and laugh and laugh
you never stopped, did you?

until your lover knocks on the door.

You will smell her Beijing Blue perfume
hang low off her wrists and you will yell at her to

komm herein, komm herein, hinsetzen

and when she does, you will descend
like 20,000 dinner plates
raining down on the roofs of your skulls,
and your lover will scream for you

to stop all of this, to stop
loving the idea of a broken thing,
but the back of your hand is bleeding
now, the punchline is cut by its neck,
and in the span of five seconds, your laugh

will be found again.

You will be found again.