

MEGAN MUELLER

Ely Cathedral

It was raining when we left Cambridge
a light, misty, crystal fog.
Through windows drenched with condensation
we could see the church from the train
rising high over the lush, Anglo-Saxon landscape
same as it had for centuries.

Was this the morning
we both went to The Fitzwilliam
missing each other by only a few minutes?
It's just like that now:
We return to the same space
in a different time, and miss each other
all over again.

We were making our way
toward the abbey
umbrellas clutched
pacing side by side
cobble streets
when you told me
your bones hurt.

I wasn't listening properly
thought your daily walks were catching up
to your senior's frame.
I joked; tried to comfort.
The cancer scare, two years behind us.
Could I really hear the edge in your voice

or is this a construct, in retrospect?
 It was, granted, a simple question:
 Why is this happening?
 Something to ponder, back home.
 I couldn't see that it was chasing you, even then.

Inside the abbey, we marveled, awestruck.
 The ceiling of the nave
 a rich, mossy green
 the timber octagon
 above the crossing
 medieval carpentry at its best, matchless
 lace-like orchestration
 Perpendicular Gothic:
 A ship's underbelly
 turned upside down
 inside out.

We wandered the ramparts in slow motion, dreamy
 peering into thick hedges, ancient stone work
 worn by wind and rain of a thousand lifetimes.
 But the dye was cast; we were circumspect
 drifting around in the fog
 rootless, itinerant
 pondering leg joints and possible meaning.
 When I thought we were free for two years
 we weren't, not really.

Flash forward—six weeks
 New York vacation
 an early summer stroll in the West Village
 your voice on Laura's answering machine.
 We came in late, laughing, giddy, half drunk.
 It was hot.
 Strange: What could it mean?
 You never called us on holiday.
 Is something wrong?

Nothing, really
 you wanted to hear "a Saskia story."
 I told you how she fell asleep

on my lap in Central Park
a sunny, blue sky afternoon
loved the MET
had two ice creams in one day
found a dusty old cat in a health food store.
She's fine.
I am uneasy.

Today, of course, I know why you rang:
You were afraid.
It stabs me now, this thought
a blistering revelation.
You needed to hear your daughter
my voice, over the phone line
late at night, long distance
through darkness, blindness.

I pray that I gave you some kind of comfort
fumbling, feeble
when I couldn't understand
the depth of your fear.
The iceberg beneath.

And now, we can't get back to Ely Cathedral
or the slow, dreamy introspection.
This is truly the beginning
of the end; the chase is over.
The mystery, solved.
We can't return to the dream of one day.

