

Dial Tone

by Paul McQuade

I am asking for something as simple as water.

In an oak tree, weeping, a child climbed too high.

Tears that the barkstain will never wash clear.

O love. We ask far too much when we fall.

In a momentary lapsus, the words shuddered clean.

Glass and cheap plastic, is this what remains?

Technology at our fingertips but nothing to touch.

Save speech, the receiver — component parts.

Wind-blown, the terrace, the city below.

Eyes closed I gave in: to hope, to the fall.

Saliva and wax petals, a bucolic diaphora.

They could have made a postcard out of us.

With the right address it might reach you. If only I knew.

How or why, the right questions to ask.

No response, forthcoming. The number you have dialled. Click.

Five stitches no love letter but some message still.

A deer in mid-sprint on a long summer night. Scene of taut muscle.

I envied it, the animal with no image.

No sign for which to suffer.

I would buy a stamp, six roses — what price for a guarantee.

This ocean between us one trope among others. Unfathomable distance.

A lover, a wake. On one hand is East, and in the other, sunset.

Bodies of water, frail and too human, gathering only to fall.

Is this all we are, this liquid fragility? Falling over and over,

wave after wave. Cast back, cast back, these letters and poems,
these postcards in flight. Bare clusters of voice, trembling.
A message in a bottle, I cram the neck down the dial tone.
And wait eternity for a response.

