

RIGGER
DEATH
&
HOIST
ANOTHER

poems by

Laura McCullough



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For Mande

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All I know is a door into the dark.

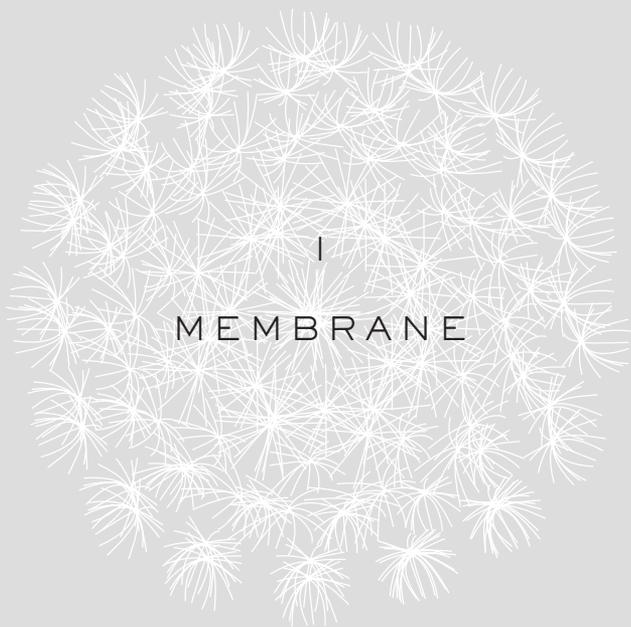
SEAMUS HEANEY

The day of the absolute is over, and we're in for the
strange gods once more.

DH LAWRENCE

If trees could speak, they wouldn't.

DORIANNE LAUX



I

MEMBRANE

TRAJECTORY

Here we are not whisked away to jail
in the middle of the night;
instead we are ignored,
or perhaps that's too generous
implying some awareness;
rather it is as if we are invisible,
no star or scar or color or accent,
nothing to reveal us except the odd comment
at the Little League game,
the Foundation fund-raising dinner. No one
pulls us over and demands *anything!*

It is as if we have fallen into the collective amnesia
of the world: too busy
keeping on all the lights
against the encroaching dark
or standing in line at the pharmacy
watching the lions on TV
eating each other endlessly.

Who stole humor? God
is buried under the floor
of the Mall of America
below the roller-coaster.

Is this is why we cut off pieces of ourselves
or withhold food,
or get tattoos, that invasion
of skin by small, sharp instruments?

There, that little pain again—
is it all we know to offer? See
that field? The nest of baby rabbits?

That rototiller with the hobby farmer behind it?

RIGGER DEATH & HOIST ANOTHER

At the Black Abbot on High Street,
drinking single malt—it was Scotland,
a minute's walk to the North Sea—
the guy next to me might have felt
he was a cliché, too, just back
from a three week stint on an oil rig
starting his fourteen days home,
divorced, and on his own.

He was a crane operator
and wore small round glasses on his boney,
bent nose, looking at me over the rim,
grinning with a loose mouth, teeth askew
and talked fast, showing me his tattoos:
 inside his lower lip: MOM;
 an oilman's cartoon on his shoulder;
 a sun on his belly;
 and only joked about the two trees
 flanking his groin
 “to make me penis look larger,” he said.
How could I not be won over? And clinked glasses,
cheered with him as if I knew where I was
and what I was doing there.

It took a month after the Gulf Coast rig blew
for me to think of that guy, to wish
I'd kissed the coin he'd tossed in the air—:
heads, I'd stay; tails, go—had done something
besides laugh.

Now, I think of the trees on his thighs
I don't really believe existed,
but mostly of his good humor,
what a fine time he gave me, a girl
on the loose in a town bar in a far town
glad to be disassembled from the rigging

of her own life. What matter
that all he wanted was connection,
to recover from weeks of living
above water, off hoisting things
from one place to another? Scotch

whisky's smoke comes from peat. *Mouth feel*
relies on the size and shape of the stills.
Oil is distilled, too, as are memories,
each time retold, re-shaped as the bangs
and nicks of mind change, the mind
a kind of still, as well, and each time we tell
something, we burn the way peat is burned,
details like smoke added back to the kiln
increasing the flavor. Still, it took me
a while to recall my rigger, tatted and grimy
though he smelled of soap. Did he?
I can't quite recall, and did anyone die
in the Gulf Coast disaster? Yes, of course—
eleven—but I never met any of them.

Peat has many uses: it stabilizes flood zones,
amends soil, can be cooked on, warmed by,
but is dangerous when left unattended,
can catch fire, like oil
which comes from similar basic matter:
things that have lived and then died.

Peat on the tongue is hard to describe,
like a memory that won't quite latch,
there at the back of the mind's throat,
green in its darkest hue settling inside
your chest. Maybe this is why bodies
are so often buried there: 700 bog men
have been recovered. My nameless rigger
is not a bog man; the eleven in the Gulf
died, some just missing, blogs, replacing bodies,
repeating the same words: *so sorry, loss, responsibility.*

The North Sea is connected to the Gulf Coast
by so many miles of water my mind
can not contain any of it. When I left my rigger
at the bar, his coin having failed him,
I stood a little drunk on the beach
picking up small stones I could carry
home in just a pocket, pebbles, really,
greens and reds that puddle now in a small dish
on my desk, maybe a hundred, like tiny eggs.

Is this what we resort to?

Organic souvenirs, hidden honeys, seeds
and plants we smuggle from the places
we've been? Why we plant our children's
lost teeth in the garden, sift death-ashes
into rivers and oceans, stand on the edge
of wide water facing it, or rowing over it
or churning below it, or building platforms
above it, as if we might claim some control

and maybe why we drink, why we pay
for the rarest malts, the most smoke
and wood,

why we hoist another one, nosing and tasting,
taking sips and rolling our lost
histories around the tongue, so they penetrate—
and distill—
the scarred membranes
hidden inside our mouths.

SO IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD AGAIN

The world is coming to an end,
the Mayan calendar says,
which is not what scholars of such things say it says,
but which a filmmaker made good use of
to show us what the world coming to an end
might look like if we could see in hyper-realistic terms
over and over and in the kind of detail
real humans
in real crisis
can not see.

Then, when the world is crashing,
when the meta-narrative metaphors
the world's monuments represent
are bashed and smashed,
we would not see, but only feel,
the lens of us not enlarging
but growing smaller and smaller still,
reduced to the size of a little girl

cowering behind a bed in a corner.

The news report says a video shows
the girl being carried into the hotel room
by a man not her father for purposes
of "sexual servitude," and her mother
is charged with prostitution
and making false statements
to the police for telling them
the girl was missing
when in fact, she'd sold her.

Everything the girl believed in—
without knowing
she was doing something
called “believing in”—
has been broken into and ransacked,

and she is so small,
and all she knows to be true
is the only thing that’s true:
a monster moves towards her
in slow motion
with hands so big,
there’s nothing she can do
but close her eyes.