

POETRY | FALL 2018

The Handkerchief

By Paul Taylor McCartney

Seven days later,
The memory of our panicked dash across country
Through torrents of rain,
Blocked motorways,
A thousand congested routes into the city,
Starts to recede.

Emerging
From a revolving door,
I sprinted down a bright hospital corridor –
Colourful shapes flying by, soul fit to pop,
Me, already talking to you,
Ordering you to
Hang on, darling, if you can, please do that for me ...
Wrung my hands out
On a silk handkerchief yanked from
A hole in my left breast,
Until a perfect triangle in my fingers:
A tear of fabric, really, that is all,
Retreating again into the memory
And away from the rawness of
Those shocking minutes leading to your departure.

And then
A blur of whispers and last words
From people who could not be there ...
... and in a flash of tears and body-wracking grief ...

It is the evening of the second day ...
Morning of the fourth ...
Afternoon of the fifth ... where I'm expected to care
About all the things I gave time to before that day:
Job. Refugees. Brexit, Brexit, Brexit.

All new activity passes through a filter,
An emotional lens figuring out if anything can
Ever be as perfect as the past itself.

When you stood at my side and gave me away,
Sharing one final cup of tea on the morning
Of my wedding
In your suite in that beautiful hotel,
When I fixed your fascinator
And you folded that same silk handkerchief
Into a perfect triangle,
Pressed me towards a new life,
Not knowing your own was entering its final weeks.

Paul Taylor McCartney is currently the Head of Secondary Teacher Education, overseeing the strategic and operational leadership of a range of PGCEs and related programmes at the Centre for Teacher Education, Warwick University. He is also a doctoral researcher with Leicester University, following a part-time PhD in Creative Writing, as well as external Lead examiner for Bath Spa University and Plymouth University PGCE Programmes covering the subjects of English and Drama.