

Three Monkeys on a Dusty Bureau

On his dusty bureau,
beside the mint lifesavers
my grandfather had a carving of three dark monkeys.
See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil.
“Which one are you?” he would ask.
“I don’t have enough hands to decide,” I replied.
“Eventually, everyone must choose,” he said dropping
another ice cube into his drink.

I left home without ever knowing which he had settled on.
My astute arrogance buffered by courageous ignorance,
convinced my life would be free of such passive despair.
I would never face the same decisions.

Now as I settle into this age of glorious imperfections
with its wrinkles and various indignities,
before the promised wisdom had settled upon these tired shoulders,
and the fierceness of youth is whittled down into memory as thin as hair,
I wait in the mornings with my neighbours
at the train station.
Their faces clutched in concentration,
lips filled with woes they don’t consider petty.
An unfocussed restlessness
disturbs the finely ordered
rhythm of my day.

More than ever I need the tenderness of understanding.
Now, I wish those monkeys rested on my bureau.
But they are gone.
Sold in some anonymous yard sale.
And still, I have not chosen.

SHELAGH McNALLY