

2023

What's Taken, What's Given, and What I Choose to Remember

Grace Cieslikowski

Western Michigan University, grace.c.cieslikowski@wmich.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/laureate>



Part of the Poetry Commons

Recommended Citation

Cieslikowski, Grace (2023) "What's Taken, What's Given, and What I Choose to Remember," *The Laureate*: Vol. 21, Article 81.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/laureate/vol21/iss1/81>

This Poetry is brought to you for free and open access by the Lee Honors College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Laureate by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.

Grace Cieslikowski

58

59

I'm writing this to let you know I've reached baseline
The place I always talked about visiting
On those cold winter nights when the wind blew so hard against the window,
I thought it would shatter

You asked me once how I would get there
Given my heart was empty and my luggage was full
But I didn't have an answer

So, I ran.
As fast and as far as my legs would go and when they gave out, I crawled.
The past was hard to carry but I kept it with me until I collapsed.
It was in that moment
While I lay, face down in the dirt
When I had no way of moving forward
That I could finally rest in the present

I thought of sweet tulips, of stars, and then I thought of you.
Terrible, awful, uncomfortable you who spit venom at me like a snake

See this is where I left you
In a memory so far away that
I cannot recall
How your eyes looked or the shape of your face

This is where I left you
On the floor of your kitchen
Re-reading this trying to figure out

Exactly what you did to hurt me
This is where I left you

li

Alone.

Just as alone as you made me feel
On those days when I hated myself

This is where I left you.

Not physically, I'd already done that but, mentally

'Cause I had forgotten all the things I wanted you to do

And all the things that you did not want to do back

Then I realized that the weight I had been carrying for minutes, hours, days, months,
for years was not something I needed.

And I wept

Like a widow who has decided to move not on, but forward.

To leave the place now too small for her growth.

For my growth.

So, I let go.

Of the pain, of the promises, of the hate, of the doubt, of the memories, of who
I used to be and suddenly,

I could breathe

I could stretch

I could crawl

I could sit

I could stand

I could run

I could fly

GRACE CIESLIKOWSKI

What's Taken, What's Given, and What I Choose to Remember