**6.25.2022**

Isabel Markowski

Phone, keys, wallet.

Sidewalk, quiet, sun.

I need the rhythm in my legs

to burn in my chest as I try

to breathe for the morning run

for the morning after

for the mourning

that hasn’t settled into my lungs.

Gravel, trees, green.

I can’t feel the sheen of sweat

that normally makes me feel alive,

my body numb to the cold of evaporation

already adapting to evaporation

of itself.

It knows enough to survive

but apparently not enough to override

a 6-3 conservation of control.

My legs take a hairpin under the bridge my mother

used to walk with

me in her belly before

she dropped out of classes,

a place named one of the coldest in this nation

the bitter winter winds

preparing her unborn daughter

dozens of feet above a roaring river

for a life with fewer rights than the mother

and grandmother before her:

preparing her for understanding that the coldest part of this nation

doesn’t even hit during winter.

My chest isn’t burning enough.

I sprint.

River, sand, fire.

I stand across from Little Niagara

like I have a hundred times before.

Except I can’t burn

when the exhausted remnants of myself aren’t even mine anymore,

when the opinions of a few whites

have drained all color from our faces,

the millions of me

who strap the debt of this cold nation

on our backs

a rise in spinal dysfunction of the young and once-colorful,

trying to carry the educational, social, and planetary proprietorship

that weighs us down even further

from crawling out of the mass grave

these so-called judges

have dug

while standing on the backs of neighborly slaves,

wiping flecks of dirt off their robes and SUV’s,

glad to bury their assault allegations

and lies under oath

underground

with the bodies that can’t burn

but can’t be alive either.

Because how can I be alive outside my own body that

isn’t seen as a person, but only

as a collection of limbs and carrying compartments

of their Galileic persecution?

How can my legs propel my body across bridges of mothers

under trees of diplomatic leaves

and across a river and a waterfall of childhood

and yet they’re controlled by a body they’ve never met before?

Another body that is just another body,

existing alongside this waterfall that continues to churn and run,

running far longer than I have lived,

and will run for far longer than any of us?

Its water song and breath into the river is the only thing I can hear,

but on this morning after,

I can’t tell if it’s consoling

or laughing at us all.