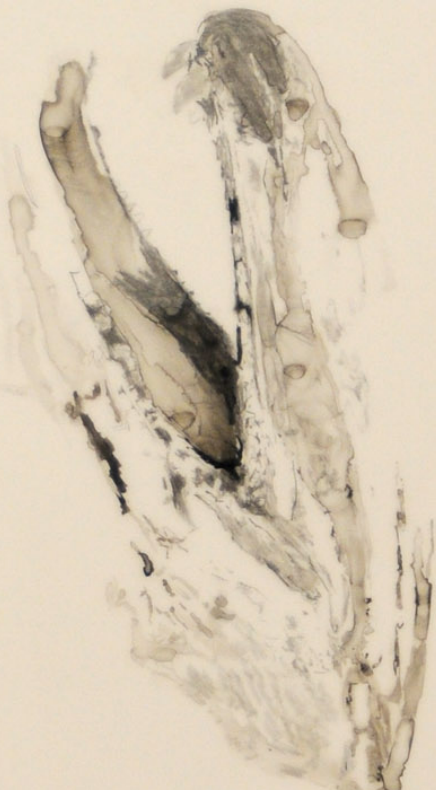


*a description
of the hook
i am capable of*




*by lucas farrell
(artwork by louisa conrad)*

I was given this hook today. A fish hook. And so it is lying flat on my desk. It appeared yesterday on the bottom of the boot that Louisa wears on her foot when she goes places. Usually she is walking, but not always. This was on one of those occasions when she was walking, walking around this town which is relatively small but also relatively big. Most of its citizens are relatives of one another. We are relative too, in that we happen to be walking through. And not just walking through but also not walking through. As in, staying the night. Several nights. A month. Which is also to say that we are living here. Living in a modest room with a bed and a small drawer for dirty clothes and nothing more in a shared house with windows some of which open and others that don't and also six sinks. But we are not just living in a room in a house in a town. Because to say living is also to say being. This hook was being itself but also not being itself when it pierced the boot Louisa wears on her foot when she goes places even when I am not with her. Clung to it. Was one of the fisherman's hooks. Is also to say it belongs partly to everyone in town. Because everyone in this town is related to a fisherman. Actually, if I'm not mistaken, this town is a village. A fishing village. Which means that everyone is either a fisherman or is related to a fisherman. Louisa is related to both the fishermen and also to the fish now that she has stepped on a hook that itself already belonged to a set of relationships; that is, existed among a set of relations. And so she too has become related and is therefore partly to blame. That's the long of it.



The short of it is that this hook is now lying flat on my desk whereas yesterday it was stuck to Louisa's boot and before that not lying flat but rather dragging vertically through the Atlantic and before that attached to the end of a monofilament line, pinched between the pink fingers of a fisherman, and before that was in the mouth of a fish whose blood smatters the hands one shakes in greeting when one comes to live in a village like this one. Or when one stays in such a village. Or when one is merely walking through. And it is not just haddockblood that smatters the hands one shakes in greeting. It is also codblood. And catfishblood. And birdblood. Because it just so happens that the fishermen in this village also shoot birds. With guns.

And just yesterday around five o'clock which is when Louisa likes to go places and take pictures of those places especially as they exist at a certain time of day, namely five o'clock, Louisa said she wanted to go places and to take pictures of those places and I understood her to mean time. And I often accompany her because it often occurs that at 5 o'clock I feel like walking away after a whole day of not walking away. And so yesterday I accompanied her. And we found ourselves both going places and walking away at 5 o'clock. And before we knew it we were walking along the shore of the Atlantic. And we kept on walking to where a band of old warehouses were once erected to serve a particular function they no longer serve. And in that way, they are just like the hook.



The short of it is that these warehouses used to process a kind of fish that is no longer fished here. And not just here, but anywhere really. And though there are many varying opinions held among the people who live in this village as to why this happens to be the case, it seems clear, at least to me, that the lack of presence of this kind of fish in this part of the world and also anywhere really is not due to a superabundance of misplaced hooks but is rather due to all these fish being dead. Which itself results in a superabundance of hooks. That is, a surplus of hooks. Therefore, a hook that goes missing in a village such as this, in a time such as ours, isn't actually considered lost. Isn't considered period.

But let us consider it nonetheless.

The long of it would be to say that this hook is now lying flat on my desk in this studio which is itself just one of those old warehouses whose purposes have been reenvisioned on account of the kind of fish that is no longer being caught anywhere in the living world: the dead kind. And so the hook belongs to an old set of relations that is both alive and not alive and also belongs to a new set of relations. And if Louisa was to take a picture of the hook I would say okay, that is fine, there it is, but please also take, if you wouldn't mind, a picture of its time.

And now having said that, I'd like to take a minute to describe to you the varying sets of relationships which I think I am capable of describing and yet also not capable of describing. Which is fine, actually. You're still going to go on walking and not walking and living and being whether you've read this description or not and you're still going to go on dying whether you've read this description or not and, frankly, so will I. One thing that's certain is that most of the time I don't feel the urge to write about fish. Not anymore. There was a time when Louisa was taking pictures of the Pacific salmon on the coast of Oregon and I happened to be with her because even then we enjoyed going places together and so I saw just how tremendously sad and also how tremendously beautiful the salmon's falling apart was. Because you see, a Pacific salmon's body will actually physically disintegrate, one hunk of soft flesh at a time, in the act of procreation. Is called spawning. And when the last hunk of soft flesh falls from the salmon it is very confusing as to what becomes of this salmon. Because the soft hunks of flesh actually nourish the offspring, welcoming them into the living world.

And so you can see why I wanted to write about the salmon of Oregon. But now I don't think I am capable of a task as tremendously difficult as that. And so I'd rather write about this hook. Okay. I will write about this hook, which looks more or less like this:

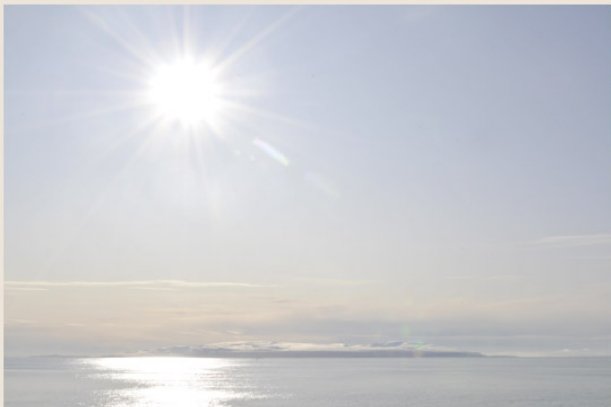


So like I was saying Louisa and I were walking down by the old fish processing warehouses when we came upon a casual heap of newly dressed and vacant-looking birds with eyes sprung open wide



not on account of the uncompromising splendor
of the polar sky at 5 o'clock

or even
the curious strangers standing before
them in such proximity – strangers who
were themselves surprised to see so many
creatures meant for the sky lying in a
tangle upon a very warm heap – but rather
because of death. The eyes of the birds
were open wide on account of their being
dead. There was no question about that.
Not anymore. And their bodies were limp
and their feathers damp and muddied and
their necks unnaturally contorted on
account of their having been newly
dressed and quartered.



The man, a fisherman, was still dressing and quartering more of these birds not ten feet away. We looked up. He was a very kind man and he even nodded enthusiastically and not impatiently when Louisa said can I take your picture and even was nice enough to – and I could tell he was proud and also a gentle man and also not so gentle and probably happy and also not so happy – hold up a bird proudly and even to reach out his thick arm to place a blood smattered hand on the shoulder of his grandchild so as to pull the boy in close for the purposes of the picture. For his grandchild was learning and also experiencing the virtues of boyhood and relativity and so on. And they both took hold of a wing and held the bird up and the man smiled and the boy looked tough and the bird looked dead. And the boy was wearing glasses and galoshes that looked a little bit like my galoshes which I bought for seven dollars six years ago in a place altogether different from this one in case I would one day get to go to a place altogether different from that one, so that I might wear them once I got there. And after posing for Louisa, who was no longer as concerned about taking pictures of places and/or time, the kid went back to stomping shyly



on the neck of the most recently dressed bird, which explained why the necks of the birds in the heap were so unnaturally contorted and also explained the noise: the pulpy, hollow, abrasive, repetitive, flatsoda squishing and soft soft stamping of the neck muscles between the cement of the sidewalk and the boy's rubber bootbottom. That warm, textured noise that Louisa and I could hear almost as far back as the village. A wet and seductive noise.

A song.

So the fishermen in this village also happen to shoot birds. It is not surprising. Actually it is quite commonplace this far north, especially in the remoter regions, but also elsewhere too, in places neither remote nor northerly. That is, the shooting of birds by fishermen for the sake of their livelihood is nothing to get worked up about it. No. It is like having a post office and also a different place where you go to mail your letters to loved ones when they go places and you don't go places anymore because you don't want to go away. It wouldn't make sense. Nor would it make any difference to the pure understanding of what a person is capable of and also what that person is not capable of. Because you don't want to go away anymore. And so you are almost living, which is to say living and also not living. And if you are almost living then you are also almost being. And there is a description of this book which I am capable of and also a description I am not capable of.

You are almost being yourself as a result of your not wanting to go away anymore.

Because it is now Tuesday and it is also
5 o'clock and I see that I too am part of
a new set of relations that I don't want
to walk away from. There is both the
knowing that if I did walk away then I
wouldn't know what else to do with myself
and then there is also the question of
not being sure I could possibly bear
finding myself among one more set of
relationships. Because when there's a
first one, then by definition there's a
second one. And probably there's even
another one after that. And another. And
then another one and another one and
another one and another one and another
one and another one and another one and
on and on and on like that all your life.
And then there isn't another one.
Because that's your last one.



And after being here all day and not wanting to walk away anymore I am capable of also knowing that what I am not wanting to walk away from is being here. And if Louisa wants to go places because it is 5 o'clock and she feels like going places and taking pictures of those places and also of time and will even go without me, well, that's just life. Because if you want to, you can be a fisherman. And if you want to, you can be a fisherman that also shoots birds for the sake of his livelihood. And if you want to, you can be a fisherman who shoots birds and has a grandson who is looking tough and is not smiling and who is beginning to realize just how related he is to everyone in the village and in the post office and in the house with six sinks and to everyone else and to every living thing really who happens to be gentle and not gentle and happy and not happy and alive and not alive and tremendously alive.