

THE (IM)POSSIBILITY OF FAILURE

Scott McClellan

At the edge of the fray,
at the lip of the void,
a vise of iron and ice clamps the chest.
The heart skitters and strains
like an American Quarter rattled in the gate,
for failure awaits me on that field.

“I’ll let go,” the vise intones, “when you withdraw.”
I am the hostage and the negotiator in this anxious entanglement,
fearful of failing,
ashamed of hiding,
frozen in deliberation.

A paucity of courage is, in truth, a paucity of conviction—
the conviction that, once accepted by God,
I am ever accepted by God,
and can therefore endure any rejection,
real or imagined,
that proceeds from coming up short.

I will not always win.
I will not accomplish everything I could or should or would.
But I will never be forsaken,
and that is enough to disregard the vise,
deny its power,
and make an attempt in good faith.

Like a bird in flight,
the heart at rest cannot fail
because it is free from earthly tether.
Even if free should turn to fall
the bird in flight and the heart at rest are,
in their falling,
caught.