

## Dear Sean

In our old village library  
I found an unsent letter,  
addressed to you, inside  
*The Flood*, by Émile Zola,

when I took it from the shelf  
after remembering that time  
we stood in the same aisle  
many years ago when  
we were both young men.

Your name and the address  
of your old family home  
were written on the envelope  
and the letter was dated  
the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, 1970.

The letter opens with the line:  
*Dear Sean, I am very sorry  
and I hope that one day  
you will forgive me...*

It goes on to explain why  
Catherine had to leave you  
and our small village.

She had obviously cried  
the whole way through writing it –

the ink is blotched  
and the page is dotted  
with flattened-out craters  
where the falling tears  
landed in no-man's land.

I replaced the letter  
into the same book,  
returned it to the shelf,  
and told no-one.

\*

(Cont...)

And although it's too late  
to bring the closure  
you often spoke about  
needing to know

before you filled the bath  
with warm water  
and turned it red,

I take some consolation  
from an old artist's proverb  
that comes to mind:

*Five hundred tears must be shed  
if any finished piece of art  
is to produce even one smile –*

and I'm smiling, Sean,  
because it was, I remember,  
the week after Catherine left  
when we stood there together,

the both of us young men,  
and you pointed your finger  
to this same book, *The Flood*,  
by Émile Zola, and said

it was your favourite, and  
you had recommended it  
to Catherine, but doubted  
she would ever read it now,

and then you turned to me  
and said, but you were sure  
that one day I would read it.