

## Traces

My grandmother used to tell me stories  
of her mother's people, the Nortons  
from Mayo – who moved to Scotland,  
Wisconsin, anywhere. You know the Irish,  
she said – too poor to stay at home.

No, I didn't know the Irish,  
not even when I went to Dublin,  
Galway, Cork – years later, searching  
for that trace of recognition  
I was so sure would come to me.

You know the Irish, my grandmother said –  
we had royalty back there, Lady Jane  
Dempsey I think it was, who eloped with  
her footman – which doesn't surprise me.  
There was a lord, too, though that name's lost.

Everyone from Ireland has royalty somewhere,  
she said. And each time I heard them,  
those old stories changed again.  
I asked my father at her funeral.  
She talked to you, not me, he said.

Now *he's* gone, and when my children  
ask sometimes, I trace those old tales again,  
a little more unsure each journey through.  
You know the Irish. It's what we have.  
It's all we have. I've come to say it too.

--Mark Vinz