



Windstorm

Joe Denham

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The voices swirl down, a cyclonic cold wind
a melody beyond the veil
they come close so I am close to hearing

as the fence binds the wood and the saw's wheel
kicks the slab back through
my calloused fingers, which lift and feel

the searing, and the blood stream from and, true
to gravity, down, which is
when the voices – as a flock or swarm in the blue –

swirl, wingbeats curling like oars do in water
the air, a chorus
suddenly cued, the cries of some slaughter

with singing confused (of, say, cetaceans,
the last of the blues,
Pacific greys homing the Bay of Conception)

the artery opened to a world now losing
ocean life oceans wide (spirit
of its soul) and though in time life renews

it is a world beyond weeping the exiting
blood enters, it is perpetual
shock, miasma, day upon day, it

is bees leaving the hive, then lost (little
wonder, little wonders)
it is the cost analysis, and the cost: melting

permafrost. Perpetual shock. The centres
of gravity and buoyancy
differ: a matter of burden, ballast, and weather.

It *is* blowing in the god, this wind, without mercy.
So keeled-over I raised my blood-
soaked fingers – the voices swirling clearly

down – stretched and fisted them over wood
blown to the bone;
time spun fixed like the ripping blade as I stood

transfixed, testing the tendons, and thought, *Love*
treasures hands like nothing
else; of that point over the earth above

which no wind blows. Inside the trough
of each wave is a place
of perfect balance, where the crossing

from crest to crest calms: it is a space
time relinquishes
amidst the torrent, an interstice.

The sea. Is it remembered at all, little fish,
the stream of omphalos
blood humming, amniotic dream, wish

within the waters of a bottomless well?
The voices ring from afar
across the surface of *that* dark, like the bell

of a ship through fog, unseen. There
was no beam of light
doused upon me, nothing wavered, the air

did not alter or exalt, and I won't make shine
here what only with
great effort and good fortune occasionally glows –

it is the dime-here-dollar-there inflation, fifth-
migration money moving
in which dims, it is first class and the myth

of freedom, luxurious fiefdom, the mauve
prescription, the precipice:
each day the cumulative filicide, en masse,

our middling, meritocratic minds (mice
on an amphetamine low
lost in a lab maze while the sea ice

melts) – in our thin glass hearts, the flower
at the centre
a pressed specimen preserved post-extinction

which resonates when the voices enter
(from whichever elsewhere
we allow with whatever we measure

and weigh out this world). There is a tear
in the veil concomitant
with the flesh: the mesh of the weir-

seine we've set from the firmament
to the low point of
the Marianas Trench torn, so filaments

slip through of the unborn-to-the-light-
we-perceive-by, borne
on the windswept, the blinding white

voices, which wept this world to form.
I've heard them howl
at the deck-helm of a tired hull storm-

besieged, cast wide within the full
and open magnitude,
unmoored by any chain and anchor, soul.

The lacerations, like some forced and crude
portal, let them sing
upstream the song which, having accrued

over time *and* space (as the dead), rang
like the bell
of a ship through fog, unseen; the ring

clean as wind as I lifted, bucked, and fell
(like that old hull
into the ever-rising wind-wave and swell)

not to my knees to the floor: into the squall
of awareness: of frailty
of impermanence of the open and full

magnitude, without mercy. I manage fairly
most days, if not to
exceed, at least to go about in an orderly

manner, managing, sadness not through
and through, but a
manageable subtext, like the remaining blue

whales somewhere out there, ending, a
sadness so lived with
it's underwhelming, which withers. A

felled tree, milled, always checks to the pith
so this sadness spilled
like bound water from my centre, a tithe

to all this passing: my children born willing
to a world diminishing
in form, diversity, beauty; our unstill

humanity overrunning – yet still the wish
within the waters,
the seed still in those remaining, the salmon

still returning to spawn, and still the rain
swelling the streams
to receive them, though less (both streams

and salmon, forests and seas) still the dream
of confluence surviving
as they starve, and struggle, as ever, upstream.

This hand has sliced the flesh, reached inside
and taken the roe
bright as sunlight, for wages. Held a hive

brittle as newly burnt ash, in first snow,
and felt the hollow heft of
empty cells, cold as the constant wind blowing

across the decks of those fishing what's left.

With this hand – still bleeding
as the anesthetic enters, and numbs – I'll lift

crustaceans from the sea come spring; I'll need,
so go again to fish
down the trophic chain, turning the seeded

further to fallow. It is the line and hook
we cast *and* swallow,
the surface float of the spirit; the sinker.

The doctor pierced his thread and needle
deep into my finger,
brought it up and cinched the ragged wound

shut, the small wound, which would linger
but heal over, becoming
in time only another scar-line, tiny reminder

to keep mindful in the midst of the coming
storm. We are born
naked and warm and without blame; come

blind and unbreathing into the light, scorn
and sadness surrounding
and love, swirling like the voices borne

from elsewhere (a high wind from offshore).

I watched an old man
wander the ER, his chest bare, the sound

from within like the rattle of uplift on cheap tin
roofing, the whole house
(his aged body) shuddering in the gusts. I can

almost forgive his fragility, though the use
is only to forgive
my own: stone within stone: a home

a happiness, in light of and even so, living
well with no-hope (that empty
moniker of the mind) as though the heart could give

over so easily to what's inevitable. The sea-
green curtain was drawn
and he was gone, my ear suddenly vacant

of his breath, and the voices too passed beyond
my hearing, or I receded
from them, the wound sutured, the rough-sawn

splinters flushed, the adrenaline rush subsided
and the surgical lamp
turned down, my blood wiped and washed away.

In the silence I become a sieve the limitless stars
and sand grains and working
working hands wash through; in the vacuum-shine

my dull and limited mind, in its shadow-thinking
the big bang post-nothing
which is the emperor's unclothing (is not nothing

itself a vast unending something?); sinking
under that free-water
weight shifting the point of lever linking

gravity's and buoyancy's centres, in wonder
well-sprung, I'll swim:
where to begin, without ending? We're asunder

and put so at the source: the thin and naked skin,
the night-blind vision
and the fear that keeps us gathered within

the circumference of our ceaseless fires; a scion
overgrown, its wide shadow
denying photosynthesis to its withered origin.

The two-by-twelve fir that razored through
my fingers was milled
from a thousand-year-old tree that fell low

in a wind that built itself steady (a huge swell
surging through wide oceans
of air) gale- to storm- to hurricane-force filling

the sail of branches atop that statuary soul –
 master of what, in one
place, is attainable – till its platform root

lay vertical, and I took shelter from the sun
 in the dark fecund
soil newly born to light, each tendril-umbilicus

drying out in summer's scorch. *Torch the fund
 managers' bank books
and balance sheets*, I was thinking. *End*

wealth's glittering negation of beauty. The hook
 and line we both cast
and swallow. The voices sang there in the crook

of god's arm: untoiled ground – some of the last –
 the sound faint as a light
wind through the high trees still standing. Then nothing.

The voices are always there. It is their old, sweet
 song keeps this world,
though we hear them only as a child in the night

hearing for the first time through the fold
 of sleep the song
of whales surfacing dark water, the purled

and perfect water opening over and along
 their ancient bodies. I hold
the doctor's pale hand, the curtain now drawn

open and the light again upon my skin. What's sold
and bought but tiny fragments
of soul? The hands with kindness or malice or cold
anger constructing and harvesting the fulfillment
of what we've thus far
mined and imagined; with love or resentment
each thing circulating, hand to hand, our
selves sifted out from
their sequestered cores: this currency: hour
upon hour, the windstorm which gathers, will come.
He isolates each joint
and I grip and resist. Every trauma leaves a sun-
spot on the brain, its size in proportion to the point
of impact and its residual
impact through time, so the mind's flow forever eddies
there where the voices crossed over, contrapuntal
to our dissonant array.
We live in the accrual, this beautiful madrigal.
He places gauze over the scattering of stitches, my flayed
flesh rejoined, the gales
of pain gusting again from fingertip to brain. I prayed
as I drove the long road to the hospital, to this god
we're within, for mercy,
a wound that would heal. He offered his hand as I stood.
You know son, he said. You're a very lucky man.