

## Sound and Water Sutra

*i.*

The tarmac rain-dark as patent leather shoes.  
All morning, the dead make their silent figures  
flash and gleam under the milk-light  
of an overcast sky. An amber haunted glow.  
The laughter of traffic on Orangefield Road  
in Belfast, in a second life. A magpie,  
with its blue shoulder, talons the eaves  
and fans out, with its blue *caw caw*  
shuns the wren, a *chitzoo* and a *chit chit*  
down in the hydrangea. Soon enough I will join them  
out there with my own black shoes  
to walk over all that water, dog-happy and oblivious  
while the dead glimmer and sheen  
across the rainwater, voiceless, still  
trying to tell the story.

*ii.*

In the story of St. Peter in the gospel  
it's when he finds his doubt, he slips  
below the waterline, waves behind his eyes,  
believing he walks on water he walks on  
waves only in his mind. As though

even while the hand that reaches down  
breaks the surface, his lungs arc  
like a shuffled deck of cards.  
Maybe there is a right, a wrong way  
to belief. Otherwise events unbuckle from time

to time, the believing place itself  
that small back room, that camper-shell,  
houseboat of the innermost of us—  
lost to sea—rolls on, and rolls out.  
Like decay. Like so much water.

*iii.*

Water everywhere my grandfather looks  
from the mantle of the grey destroyer,

an arc of lights now appears like an eyelid  
of the dead in the distance. The sound he hears

is the sound of his ship moving through  
the surface of the water in its parting.

There is no line between wake and hull.  
There is no balance for the hand upon the rail

until the engine slows. The reel thins  
on the left wheel of my stereo, his voice

stops coming out of the black speaker  
and the button springs back into position.

Cracked foam, the headphones squeeze  
my ears, my fingers on my eyes squeeze, too.

I'd like to finish looking through the rain.

*iv.*

I'd like to finish looking for an "inner life."  
(To save the family, what can any of us do  
but hope? The language  
for I love is the language for I hate you  
my sister explains—what does that mean

we believe about the words we throw around  
like Nerf balls [She means there is more  
happening. She means, she says, "Leave me  
alone," and her husband knows she means, "Don't ever  
leave me alone."]

as if there were a way to

speak beyond the language, to dip into  
the river of abstraction  
with its silent ripple through us,  
and raise it cupped in our hands,  
to offer it,

to pour it out.)

*v.*

The speaker is unstable. I try to tweak it out  
and twist the dial, hoping that will clear the line  
of static. But the fader adds wave on wave  
of white noise, brown noise, copy to copy  
from decade after dead decade, so I take  
the mp3's out for a walk

over the dog-eared leaves of the next block  
and the next. Each track  
blends into another without time  
delay. The amniotic *sishhh* and *ker-whik*,  
the voice coming through the plastic buds

shoved into my ears. It washes over. I watch my steps

grow cinematic, slow down,  
pan left to right before the wide shot,  
another river, the seven hills in sunlight.

*vi.*

The seven hills in clouds.  
You do not see this marble bead of rain  
slip down the power line toward an oak—  
(*Look at me, Voice*).  
You do not look at me,

then I do not look at you  
and sigh. For presence.  
For that moment you do not tell me  
you will die ordinarily, a heart attack in the kitchen,  
before I'm born, and I will not feel—*what? is it sadness?*—

It will not be uncanny  
when I push open the door slid out of the wall  
in the white brick living room  
to see my name written on a brown box  
under threads of curling tape.

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