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 chizzoo 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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