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A Dream of a Distant Land

Henry Taylor

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HENRY TAYLOR

A DREAM OF A DISTANT LAND

Deep in a darkness many weeks old
I stand alone at the rail of my ship
Listening to the sounds to which
I have not yet become accustomed:
The pump of engines nudging the boat
Through the clear, cold, endless night;
The crack of icebergs that surround,
But do not bind me; and forever
The crash of water on a coast
Where seals on the rocks move slowly.
On the deck, now, I am alone,
Only thinking of you, waiting
Where thoughts of ice and whales
Are rarely more than amusements,
But I know that below me men watch
The hands of curious instruments tremble,
Hunting for the best course south
To the Arctic Circle, the open sea,
Back home to the Temperate Zones,
Where I played as a boy in the first
Cold winds of autumn among shocks
Of corn covered with frost, and walked
In the fields where my father's cattle
Lived. Through the open window
At night I could hear horses
Cantering across a field of stubble,
Steering around the shocks of corn
Like polar bears cruising among
The icebergs as they swim beside
My ship in the clothing of life
Itself: claws, eyes, teeth and hair,
Salt water running in their veins
As it runs in yours and mine.
I think of you waiting for me
In this land where summer is short
Enough to let you remember winter.
Through the veins of the bear,
In your brain and in mine,
The blood that knows will blunder
Its way from season into season,
As it sends the fish beneath me
Through the dark like horses
Dodging frozen white shocks of corn
On a stubble sea, their senses
Of direction trembling like the hands
On the dials of careful instruments below
That guide me to you from breaking waves
Where seals on the rocks move slowly.

ROBERT HOLLANDER

TO JEAN

for Maginel

And so you've turned my book into a reliquary
For a spray of pink asterisks on green wire,
Footnote in the heart of Don Quixote
To fields full of punctuation,
Wild strawberries in flower like small-voiced
Exclamations around the single fruit.

You make me think of careful gestures
My grandmother would have understood
By her warm-smelling upstairs bookshelves
Of how in a moment off the world's way
Something is that wants to be remembered.
Pressing flowers in a book.