



Lorin Ford

A Few Quick Brushstrokes



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“thirteen years of drought” received an Honorable Mention in the Lyrical Passion Haiku Pen Contest 2010

A Few Quick Brushstrokes

Amanuensis

A jar of seashells, each one chosen
for no particular reason or difference.

The slant of light, perhaps,
on an enamelled pattern, a periwinkle's
exposed inner spiral,

an abalone shell
that's lost its sheen. Nothing
taken alive.

What's here's been wave-tossed
and shifted twice a day
for years around rock pools

or stranded with seaweed
on the tide line, where sun
and salt bleach out all traces

of biography. The sea coughs up
words that choke in the throat.
We surface, or drown.

the blue Pacific
slipping through my fingers
moon jellyfish

mackerel sky—
shadows swimming inside
the shark-proof fence

Ocean, Croajingalong

A pair of kids found bones, more bones. A skull's
eye sockets stared at the beach-pounding ocean.

Adults averted their eyes. Observant children,
we knew what we'd found in the dunes by the ocean.

People with spears here. People with guns.
Before we were born they hunted near this ocean.

Unspoken, in town, our skeletal ancestors.
We whisper the Jew, the Abo, to the ocean.

Fishes-in-water, we swim the estuary.
Our fathers brood on the face of the ocean.

We enter the river. The sandbar breaks.
The lake takes the boat out to meet the ocean.

A pelican cruises low above the sand dunes.
Pacific Gulls, a pair, fly south over the ocean.

linen sheets
the sound of the sea
folding, unfolding

spindrift—
dune-grasses turning
their silver backs

Forest

I followed the paths of smaller animals;
valley scrub, foreshore, mountain forest.

You were waiting, a prophet, promises shining
green above the rubble of a charred forest.

Limping across Antarctica, brandy in my ice,
I almost forgot the tangled forest.

Out on the reef, our adopted whales
surfaced—out of season—from the deep forest.

Paper souvenirs— they're here somewhere—
words on white, hauntings from the lost forest.

Clear-felled and milled, the stands of Coastal Ash;
we do not speak of the empty forest.

Out of the woods now, but so much older,
I knit, with children's bones, a witch's forest.

telling the story
in a chainsaw voice—
lyrebird

bellbirds . . .
further and further
from the trail

The cockatoo that sounds like a telephone

after reading Billy Collins

In the morning I wake to the call
of the cockatoo that sounds like a telephone
and in the cool of the evening, when I walk
at ease in my garden, I hear
the neighbour's cockatoo ringing.

Over the year or so that the bird
has practised its signature tune
it has improved. Cockatoos
are known for their ability to mimic.
We had one that cursed
in five languages.

When a poet sets out to imitate
another poet's tone it is not called mimicry.
It is called 'pastiche'. This
was to be my second pastiche.
My first was after John Berryman
but Yeats and Hopkins kept sneaking in

as nightingale, wind-hover, skylark, swan
come flapping and preening now
when there's barely room for Billy
Collins and the cockatoo
that no-one answers.

black cockatoos—
a few quick brushstrokes
before the rain

spring clean-out
a wattlebird flings rainbows
from the bird bath

Snow

for Laryalee

Snow is falling in Canada
Between the pines a woman shovels snow
She stops for breath; the air is sharp
with children's laughter

Here in Melbourne,
the corpse of a Christmas Beetle
burns brittle on the lawn
They're crooning along with Bing Crosby
at the pool party next door
The blowflies are silent
The refrigerator sighs
With a stubby from the six-pack
of Beck's beer, from Belgium,
where ice crystals glaze the names
on a WWI memorial,

I return to the keyboard
and the blue screen, to see
that great humps of snow
have buried the whale graves
at Yamaguchi
and snow is still falling
on the white-capped waves
of Hokusai's sea

whale song—
twilight's blues
deepen

the photo album
full of strangers' faces—
sea fog rolling in

Waiting for Prospero

A circle drawn in chalk becomes the isle.
Recollect sand, beaches. Recall the moon
should rise in the east and set in the western sea.

First the isle and then the voices come.
We're as many as we ever will be. We possess,
of chalk, scrubbed boards and make-up, goodly supply.

The moon is ours to view in all her phases. Listen,
birds are preparing to sing in the foreshore thicket.
Crickets and frogs rehearse the overture.

A pelican cruises as if we were of interest.
Soon we'll remember how far it is we've come.
There'll be shipwrecks, gull cries, fools and hecklers,

lovers and kingdoms enough to pass the time.
A circle drawn in chalk becomes the isle.
Soon, our scripted selves will speak their lines.

thirteen years of drought
the raven's voice
grows hoarser

a curlew
holds its second note . . .
shadows lengthening

We will have images

after reading Denise Levertov

Her fruit:

tangerine, nectarine, river—

the tang of it

How love sticks to skin in the afternoon

Amber, even the buzz of flies

Honey: preservative; the properties of
Earth-crusted jars from the excavations

The fine brushes, the gloves
of archaeology

In a honey jar, slowly, time congeals

Images

are not enough, but we
will have them

last

in the wake of

the world that's

leaving

moonrise—
black swans make way
for the rower

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