

## INSIDE PASSAGE, GLACIER BAY

The ship's orchestra finishes with a forte flourish  
like the midnight buffet's overkill of king crab  
and baked Alaska. Down below polished dance floors,  
tightly closed couples and funereal scent of carnations,  
the engine massages my soles, strums my belly,  
a discordant guitar. The screw munches  
loose ice, spitting pieces against the hull  
like fragments of my life, a hollow random tattoo.

Old images line my crevices. Other guests are primed  
with visions of calving glaciers and gourmet breakfast.  
Now the first corridor is full of trailing sentences,  
serial goodnights. I wait for the last door to close.  
The empty elevator delivers me to the top deck,  
the penultimate chill. The bay  
is Irish whiskey smooth on the rocks. The air  
cleans my lungs like silk pulled through a gun barrel.

Across the bowscape, the moon trails a ramp wide enough  
to climb if I wanted to be higher. At land's end,  
an old worn glacier kneels to lap up reflections.  
The tall young one catches every dangling shine, volleys  
the bright bias from peak to pylon to friezes of poems  
in blue calligraphy. Ice-hoarded indigo scalded by silver  
can no longer resist duress of trapped fire. The facade  
crazes and falls. Sea geysers muffle the shock wave.  
The glacier exposes a new face, new verses. The ship yaws,  
moves on in afterquiet. No mattering difference  
comes of it all.

Why am I out here? Is it because writers poke  
into emotional viscera too much? Are we weak  
or merely overloaded with sensitivity? The answer  
would solve nothing. Crane and Woolf let water do it.  
Deep, caressing water, progressively darker  
till even inner sight is gone.  
And how does it work? Your hollows fill with it and you die  
for air. Tales that it's the easiest way can't be true--  
you struggle, choke, cry with a misdirected milk swallow.

No, better to go right to the heart of the matter,  
then let cold beautiful sea be the mortuary:  
a new divisor, finality forever, the conclusion keeper,  
all-time expert at secreting earthly baggage and bones.

(cont.)

But its salty essence has slapped me to attention-- beyond  
parasitic pall, beyond bottom-dwelling feeders on night  
without end. Liquid silver plates the jagged ice wreckage  
wallowing to the surface, blue-fluxed, light-brazed.

Far below in the galley, bakers still make bread. I feel  
kneaded on their boards, then set aside to rise. I ease  
back, careful not to slip. Slide the safety on. Older  
by decades, I experiment with breath, pick up my coat,  
hunker in its warmth.

A bald eagle crosses the moon-flood, sounding  
like wet sheets on a windy clothesline, circling  
to look again at what is passing under his jurisdiction.  
Like him, I make a slow ascent. Silvered and possible.