

## Sanctuary for the Chosen Lost

We buried our fingers in fleece  
until our skin shone.  
Lanolin. Warm sheep faces  
rubbing our shins. Dirt  
packed so hard only hard rain  
could ease it. Jacketed,  
we closed our throats, scattered  
geese, penned sly-eyed goats  
gave blind ponies, broken ducks,  
a feast of sun. In gravel dawns  
we soaked our shoes in grass  
and shoveled shit. The sky opened us  
with its blade of wind.  
Your body a ladder of light. Mine  
a pillar of salt. Dozens  
of birds between us, their chests  
too swollen for their hearts  
to fill. One time a pig fell over,  
couldn't get up. Bad hip.  
Huge. We strained to lift him,  
a sling around his belly, his eyes rolling,  
his bristle-bare skin so human  
I looked away. Strange  
intimates. He shuddered, shrieked:  
indignity of the treacherous body. I  
saw. I saw. Sometimes my hands  
betrayed me. Sometimes I sang  
then thinking, caught myself,  
covered it, turning my mouth  
to the open mouth of the fan,  
generous gale of its silence.

## Nocturne In An Empty Sea

*In 2007 a bowhead whale was caught off the coast of Alaska with fragments of a late-19<sup>th</sup> century harpoon in its shoulder bone.*

Salt in your mouth and your eyes clouds, you scrape crustaceans  
and drift through winters, calling to the secret wells of water

in vowels shaped for love. There were years  
when no one came. There were long years

when you thought you might be last. Might be final.  
But sometimes from the liquid deep, a beautiful dark shape,

and then sometimes a calf, pressed shining  
to the surface, swelled fat on milk and strong enough

to leave you. Nothing lasts. The world is warming and that old ache  
still grumbles at your back— a spear carved in a lost century,

so men could read of plagues and angels by the blaze  
of your lit fat, or split and steam your bristled teeth

to bind their daughters' ribs. They struck you, but you sank away,  
blood darkening the sea. You healed. You've carried the iron

hooked in your bone for so long now it's part of you,  
driving you on. You have no word for loneliness. You have no words

for summer. Yours is the kingdom of ice and wind. You swim  
and the world spills before you into songs of blue and grey,

you crack the ice and the air is a rush of sweet cold, you breathe  
and midnight comes again with its purple dust of stars.