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A Dismal Tide

the water advances and recedes
the pull and push of an unseen hand
we hold our breath and dare not breathe
the world is made of stones in sand

the pull and push of an unseen hand
the clay that shapes reality
the world is made of stones in sand
the mindless flood of misery

the clay that shapes reality
the illusion of the daily goal
the mindless flood of misery
the mighty weight upon our souls

the illusion of the daily goal
black beneath the water's surface
the mighty weight upon our souls
empty promise of a purpose

black beneath the water's surface
we hold our breath and dare not breathe
empty promise of a purpose
the water advances and recedes

[\(Back\)](#)

Those Eyes

Her eyes were the most
singular shade of brown,
creamy and luxuriant,
fixed and staring past
you without anger,
hatred or spite.

Only when you looked
at her askance,
could you see that
she was dead: her foot
turned at an uncomfortable
angle, her dress twisted
and bunched. And then
all that blood everywhere.

The blow that had broken
her skull had peeled back
a flap of scalp, flipped
almost pink in hue,
and the plume on the floor
surrounding her head
like a cardinal corona
with the metallic smell
leaving its bad penny taste
left no room for doubt.

But those eyes, those eyes
got her killed of course.
Those eyes that could look
right past you were
looking past you still.

[\(Back\)](#)

Gitche Gumee

Before first light
the twenty-four foot
Formula Vee left the dock.

Before too long
the twin outboards had
her streaming smoothly
across the water.

The sunrise was not
spectacular: dark,
lighter, light. Hoping
for better, he found
consolation in knowing
red sky at morning, sailor take warning.

Glassy were the waters,
and the day shone
with promise.

Boats dotted the horizon
at a distance like seabirds
bobbing the surface, rolling
with the current. Humming
motors carried their own
tune, but his head,
strangely he thought,
played “The Wreck of the *Edmund Fitzgerald*”
on a loop, rising and falling,
now a shout, now a whisper.

There were no early coming November gales
(it was not November at all –
nor did he find it a damp, drizzly
November in his soul –

and he chuckled at involuntarily pausing
before coffin warehouses and bringing
up the rear of funerals and mixing
the two in his head) and this
was no Gitche Gumee.

Red sky at night, sailor's delight.

He eased back
on the throttle and the motors
relaxed into a throb.
He peered over
the rail at the deeps.
No face of Fedallah peering
back; no Parsee to lead forward.
The waters rolled green beneath him.
The throttle cut now, the motors murmured
to themselves, to each other, to him:
*Does anyone know where the love of God goes
when the waves turn the minutes to hours?*
The depth finder read deep, deep.

He would troll his way back in –
two birds, one stone,
all that – so set about setting
the downriggers.
The Formula Vee swung slowly
in an arc as if being devoured
by an unseen maelstrom.
He scanned the horizon
one last time: alone, alone.
He checked the bindings
that secured the roll of carpet,

chains heavy and thick,
and found none wanting.
The cinder blocks,
one two and three,
went over the side to the music
of the chains' rattle and hung
suspended waiting for their cargo.
He helped the carpet roll
over the gunwale, and the blocks
were off again on
a race to find the center of the earth.
The roll, with its motionless
passenger in motion, would lose
the race, but at the nadir
strain to return to the surface,
begging for a chance
at two out of three
perhaps, but the blocks
and the chains would refuse.

Now under the bimini at the console,
he eased the motors back to life.
Superior, they said, never gives up her dead.

[\(Back\)](#)

Domestic Disturbance

Officer Wilson was glad for back-up.

Domestic disturbance calls were the worst:
you never knew just who or what you'd find.

Officer Paley, the back-up, hung to
the side, his hand on his gun, while Wilson
practiced his banter over and over
in his head, *Good evening, sir. We received
a call about some noise. Everything
ok here?* and then he pressed the doorbell.

Officer Wilson was still a rookie,
a fact remembered with difficulty,
as he'd finished his probationary
period months earlier by riding
paired with a partner, and as a rookie
his training in dealing with domestic
disturbance should have been fresh in his mind.
Instead of thinking of what he might say,
there were more important ways to ready
himself, and so he was not ready when
Charlie Cochran opened the door and shot
at point blank range then closed the door again.

Officer Wilson thought he should see stars,
but all he could see were dancing black dots.
The pain was so great, and he could not breathe,
so he never heard the other gunshots.
He lay on his back, a stranded turtle,
his mind on nothing except for the pain,
and gulped for air like a fish on land
while shadows swallowed the thoughts in his brain.

Consciousness never left him, but his mind,
cribbed and confined in his blinding distress,
could not hold a single rational thought,
and he found he could no longer suppress
the emotion gurgling up through the pain,
the fear growing stronger, taking control;
it smelled like death, black death coming for him,
the vise in his chest squeezing small his soul.
Time lost its consequence, eternity
passed in each second he lay gasping air;
nothing could save him, he knew nothing would,
then he realized paramedics were there.

Officer Wilson was glad for his vest.
He sat drinking juice in the hospital
watching the news report all about him
and Paley. They both were hailed as heroes,
and the monster Charlie Cochran was dead.
Sadly, so was his wife, dead at the scene.
Nothing to be done, no one to be saved;
life moving on with the dead in the grave.

Officer Wilson thought he was lucky.
No one will know what Mrs. Cochran thought
during her final moments of terror.
Or did death take her by surprise, her life
shutting off like a light switch in the night?
The reporter talked about the dangers
of police work, about bravery and
sacrifice, about the type of gun used,
about gun laws and senseless tragedy,
but said little about Mrs. Cochran.

Found dead and alone on the floor in
blood and viscera, she was not talking.

[\(Back\)](#)

It's Not the Shoes

He picked her when he saw the shoes.

The shoes were a dark-colored high heel. As she stood outside the bistro chatting with another woman, the light would flash and fade as the door opened and closed, and in one of those moments of illumination, she faced away from him, and he could see the soles. They were red. Then he knew she was the one, and he needed to move carefully and not make any mistakes.

She was the third woman he had marked that night. The first came out of a bar part of a laughing trio. They walked behind him as he sat on the bench pretending to wait for a bus. He wore his hood over a ball cap and kept his head down, further obscuring his face. As they moved past, the one talking was loud and excited. He didn't listen to the words, but the sound of them told him it was an amusing, slightly embarrassing tale, and they were all a little drunk. A billow of perfume, an amalgam of their three scents, enveloped him in a flowery, musky, fruity cloud in their wake. He turned and watched them go, and she held her head back with her throat exposed as she laughed hard at the story.

Keeping a respectable distance, he followed them down the sidewalk carefully availing himself of the shadows near the closed shops. He waited patiently for one to break from the others. He planned to follow Laughter until she was alone, but instead they stopped together at a car parked on the street. It beeped, and the lights flashed. They all clambered in, so he retraced his path to the bus bench.

He found he didn't need to wait too long. After less than five minutes on the bus bench, a blonde woman too old for the boots she wore and a man too young for her exited the bar. The young man entreated her in a low voice, and she swayed her hair slowly as if listening to music only she could hear, eyes closed and a pleased look on her face. The waves in her hair bounced in the light streaming down from the streetlamp. Her eyes opened, and the look became a smile. She leaned in quickly and pecked his cheek. She lost her balance a little as she leaned back and steadied herself placing a hand on his arm. The hand lingered a moment as if of its own accord, and when she slowly pulled it back, the index finger remained upright, and it waggled back and forth until she turned away. The turn was executed with deliberation, a concentrated spin on her toes so as not to lose balance again, and she walked away from the young man still smiling. He remained rooted to the sidewalk and pleaded "Oh, come on!" to her back as she smiled her way past the bus bench, her hair bouncing off her shoulders as she gave a little extra action to each step. The young man finally huffed and stormed away in the opposite direction.

Blonde Hair walked in the same direction Laughter had, but instead of continuing to a car parked up the street, she crossed at the corner. The pedestrian signal began counting down before he could reach the corner, and he jogged across holding the handle of the hunting knife in the kangaroo pouch pocket of the hoodie. The streets of the intersection reflected the glare of the remnants of the afternoon rain, and moving away from the lights, the wet asphalt seemed an even darker shade of black. Once back in the shadows he lingered to allow her to create a little more distance between them. She walked pensively as if preoccupied. Light from closed shops occasionally highlighted her hair as she passed.

She turned up the driveway of a parking garage mid-block. Still gripping the knife handle, he jogged again and peered up the driveway just in time to catch the stairwell door closing. He hurried forward and paused at the door listening closely. He stood for what seemed like a long time but was less than half a minute. Finally hearing another door open, he entered the stairwell looking up and saw and heard the door to the floor above clicking shut. He moved quickly now, taking stairs two at a time and coaching himself in his head as he went. *Move silently though the door. Locate where she is. Close the distance quickly and quietly.* At the door he took a deep breath, turned the knob, and slowly pulled it open.

He saw the one thing he was unprepared to see and was taken aback. A few feet inside stood Blondie, arms crossed, glaring defiantly at his face. Her mouth contorted into a kind of sneer, and she held her chin up a little and literally looked down her nose at him. He realized he had grabbed the knob with his right hand and consequently no longer gripped the knife. After standing frozen for an instant, he tried to slam the door shut, but the mechanical closer arrested the door about a third of the way open and slowly rocked it back and forth the rest of the way. He bounded down the flight of stairs in a single leap, holding the railing to control his drop. He turned at the landing and jumped again. Behind him, she shrieked derisively, taunting his back.

When he reached the street, he had the presence of mind to turn in the direction opposite to that from which he had come. He could still hear her yelling from above as he ran up the block. A part of him was enraged and wanted to return to give her something to laugh about. (“Something to laugh about” – he surprised himself thinking that phrase like he was somebody’s mother.) But the part of him that won out said to keep moving, he’d lost control of the situation, too many variables were in play. Did he *want* to get caught?

Luck was with him, and as he reached the next street, the air brakes of a bus exhaled as it stopped at a bench. He swung on board, dropped change into the fare box, and settled into a seat

near the rear exit. He nervously watched out the windows to make sure no one followed him and continue watching out the back when the bus moved up the street. *Stupid, stupid, stupid. Lost focus, concentration. Need to be smarter.*

He rode through two stops and got out at the third because he saw another bus waiting at the light at the cross street. He ran against the light to the stop and boarded the second bus, again paying cash. *You see, now you're being smart*, he told himself. *Switching busses, not using your pass. Now you've got your head in the game.* It was a cross-town bus, and he rode it across town.

If he had been schooled in self-reflection, the bus trip provided a nearly perfect opportunity to do so, for an incident on an earlier bus ride precipitated his current circumstance. That is not entirely true: no single event led him to this; cause and effect led from an intricate web of intermingled experiences no one of which could be identified as the quintessential cause. However, the incident of the earlier bus ride certainly marked a turn toward this future.

As he sat on the crowded bus that earlier afternoon, he was angry. Of course, if he'd been asked in that moment to name his feelings, it is doubtful he would have mentioned anger. Most likely he would have replied that he was tired, for about what had he to be angry? Nevertheless, it was anger he felt. He sat near the rear door, thinking about nothing, oblivious to how the bus was filling up. As more people squeezed onboard at a stop, a woman moved to an empty square of floor and held the strap directly in front of his seat. She was young and wore her long brown hair in a ponytail. A gym bag slung over her shoulder, she sported a lightweight, white nylon jacket that ended at her waist. Her feet were clad in athletic shoes, and on her lower half – and this is what drew his attention – she wore black yoga pants. Slightly hunched forward in his seat, her backside was inches from his face. He was roused from his torpor. *What an ass*, he thought. He lustfully admired its full, round shape, the curves and crevices visible through the tight, sheer fabric. Watching it jiggle as the bus moved along, he felt himself growing excited. He leaned forward ever so slightly and sniffed for a hint of her sex. The urge to feel it, to reach out and slap it, became almost irresistible. And when an old man boarded at the next stop, he rose and offered his seat to him.

He stood behind her now, his growing erection slowly straining, and when the bus jostled over a pothole, he seized the moment and thrust his pelvis forward. Pressed against her, he dragged himself back and forth over her rump. He could feel her stiffen, but she did not look behind her. He continued like this until the bus reached the next stop, and she hurriedly exited without looking back.

The thrill was intoxicating. Some might say it was about power, not sex, but they would be wrong. It was not about one *or* the other, it was about *both*, about power *through* sex, and he knew he'd stepped over a line from which there'd be no returning. He knew he wanted more.

The cross-town bus offered the perfect chance to ruminate over his choices, about whether these thrills were worth the potential consequences to himself (if not to others), but he was not generally reflective. If you asked why he was doing this, he probably would say *because he wanted to*, and that would be the truth. Instead of considering causes and effects, he reviewed his missteps so as not to repeat them.

And now he sat eying Shoes from the bus bench near the bistro, quietly enduring a stench riled up in the storm drain beneath him from the afternoon's rain. When she and the other woman eventually separated, he proceeded with caution and deliberation. He held his distance and followed from the opposite side of the street. It soon became clear she was walking to the parking structure on the corner of the next block. He dipped into an alley he knew connected to a second alley running parallel to the street and ended at the garage. Once out sight, he ran to reach the parking lot ahead of her. It had exposed stairs at the corners, and he mounted the stairs to the second floor and waited for her to appear at the intersection. Soon, she did.

Watching her slowly climb the stairs at the opposite corner, he settled on a strategy. He could easily reach each floor before she did, so he planned to wait at each floor and see if she entered that level. If not, he could re-enter the stairwell and beat her to the next. He reckoned she would not be walking to the top; if parked much above level three, she would have likely taken the elevator.

Already at floor two, he entered and ducked down next to the nearest parked car, clutching the knife and drawing it into the open. As if on cue, she came through the door opposite. He crouched and watched her through the tinted windows of the car. Her shoes clacked louder as she walked directly toward him. Dropping to his belly, he saw her feet from beneath the vehicle. As she got closer, the car just beyond him beeped, and he jumped involuntarily. *Close. Coming right to me.* He saw her navigate around the large puddle that had accumulated near the drain in the floor. She passed his hiding place, and when he saw the red of her soles, he gathered his legs and sprang out. He reached her in three steps just as she arrived at the car she'd unlocked.

His left arm grasped her around the mid-section just below her breasts, and he held the knife at her throat with his right. She yelped. Her purse crashed to the concrete floor, and her left hand gripped the forearm with the knife. In her right, she extended her keys.

“Just take it! Take it!” she said.

“Shut up, bitch, or I’ll cut your throat.” His voice was filled with gravel. “Get in the car.” She reached for the handle on the driver’s door. “The back.”

“It’s locked!”

“Well, unlock it, you dumb cunt.”

His eyes shifted to the back door of the sedan. He heard the car beep again, and he turned to look over his left shoulder to make certain they were alone when he felt a sharp pain in his foot, then it felt as if a thousand shards of glass were plunged into his right eye. He pulled violently away. If he’d been a little less pleased with himself and a little more attentive, he might have seen the pepper spray suspended from the key ring when she proffered the keys.

Reaching for his face, he heard the kerrang of the hunting knife hitting the concrete floor through the sound of his howl. He stumbled back and careened into the puddle and began splashing water into his eyes. Between sputters and coughs he hurled a string of epithets in her direction. The spray had largely missed his nose, mouth, and left eye, so although there was some residual irritation in them, he could breathe, and the pain was mainly confined to his right eye. As it lessened, he tried to examine his surroundings. His right eye saw nothing but shades of light, but things slowly came into focus through the tears drowning his left.

Because of the nature of events, exactly what had transpired would forever elude him. When he’d made his intentions clear, she’d played along by unlocking the back doors, but then quickly shifted her grip to the spray canister on the key ring. She stamped her heel into the top of his foot while simultaneously pulling on his right arm and spraying blindly over her right shoulder. If she’d sprayed a second before, he would have been completely incapacitated for several minutes by a direct hit to the center of his face. As it was, with his head turned to the left, the stream of spray mostly struck the hood near his right ear. When he pulled away, the ever-so-sharp blade, carefully honed while waiting through the afternoon downpour, slit her throat. Her pulling at the arm was not enough to prevent it.

His clearing vision revealed she laid on the ground near her car and his knife rested about midway between them. He quickly glanced about to ensure they were still alone. They were. Struggling to his feet, he moved forward and saw the pool of blood. Objects from her purse and

the purse itself lay half submerged in the pool. A lone dislodged shoe, the red sole pointed toward him, lay among them, the sole and the blood together like a color-match sample for paint. The match was not good. The sole looked like someone's idea of blood, but the pool was closer to black than red.

He squatted down to retrieve the knife. Closer now, the blood around her was so thick he could smell it. Bubbles frothed in the gash, and when they popped, the inner workings of her throat would appear for a fraction of a second. Her eyes stared like those of a fish.

When she blinked suddenly, he scrambled to his feet and scuttled away like a crab.

[\(Back\)](#)

A New World

You started walking
with summer
a half mile, a mile,
telling yourself you just
wanted to be healthy
and not resemble an actual potato.

Then a mile turned into
a mile and a half, two miles,
try jogging a little – just here
to the tree. You had
no delusions; you had
had your share
of starts and stops
before leading to nothing
really. Besides, you
were too old to think about
“getting in shape” –
just wanted to be healthy
to help stave
off a premature death.
And then a miracle happened,
a miracle born of hard
work and persistence:
you were now jogging five miles
and the pounds decided
to pick on someone
their own size.

Through the summer
you chose your way
along the old dirt

logging road, a place
with no names or no names
you knew, so you made
up your own names –
Two Sisters, Power Station, the Great
Curve, Champs-Élysées, Tree Eleven,
Big Trees, Ambush,
Double Ambush, the Crossroads –
for the world you created,
a world whose shape
and form remade your own.
Now and again you'd run
across someone –
a utility truck, a pickup,
a gray van that brought
salal pickers by the load –
and every time it felt
anomalous and surprising,
almost a violation of something
you could not name.

Fall brought hunters (none
you saw; no one
wielding the weapons you heard
report through the trees) and
reports of a mountain lion
exploring your territory.
You wore orange
for one and made yourself
big for the other;
you stayed aware but
not wary, not worried,

remade strong and sanguine.

The rains came. Not
forty days and nights, still
an atmospheric river
dropping and dropping and dropping
until the landscape transformed:
creeks deep enough to float in,
ponds rising in catch basins,
the grasslands turned to marsh,
the land reborn as something else,
as you were reborn, both
returning to something new.
And still on you ran
as if your old self might
catch up to you if you
stopped.

You splashed through
the smaller potholes,
circumnavigated the larger,
pressed on to the Crossroads,
the turnaround point.
Back you went with a new
perspective seeing the road
over which you had past
moments before changed –
the obvious path to take
not so obvious before.

Through the summer the culvert
looked to be someone's engineering

boondoggle – a corrugated black
plastic pipe, three feet
in diameter, protruding on
both sides of the road
suspended above the dry
trench, but now deep
water and the trench
became something sounding
more wholesome. Now deep
within a thicket of underbrush,
now something became
visible and you
stopped.

From where had she appeared
naked, bloated, floating
half submerged? Had she
dislodged from the black
pipe or been shrouded by leaves
and debris in the empty
trench? You stare, stunned
but not sickened, not yet.
Bloodless gashes gape
on her swollen back,
gray yawning mouths,
the work of an animal
or two. Her face turned
to the side but obscured
by matted hair and her arms
bent upward at the elbows
as if surrendering
with her back to you.

Suddenly you're a detective
contemplating whether she was
killed here or moved here post
mortem. Her skin,
distended and discolored,
the edges of the gashes
frilled like the skirts of an oyster,
you know – you just
know – she has been here
a long time decomposing
beneath the road on which
you stand, and you realize
you have passed over
her unaware back and forth,
back and forth so many times,
you should know her
by now, but she remains
as much a stranger
to you as you to her.
How could you
pass over her so many times
but not know she was here?
At the very least
you should have smelled her,
smelled something –
something awful – but
even now you smell nothing.

You ask, was she like me,
a changeling like me,
and one day without

warning crashed to a halt?
She, you, the land, all
and everything transmogrified
into something new yet old.
How? You are
no scientist, no detective;
there is no way for you
to know, and you will
never know anything
more about her
than you do now,
which is nothing
except the fact of her body
and the fact that she was in
that black pipe a long time
and the fact that you ran
back and forth so many times.
You look for a moment
at the trees for some
kind of a sign, but
see nothing. This place was
unremarkable, so unremarkable
it was unnamed by you. Not
as beautiful as Champs-Élysées
or even Big Trees, where
another culvert pipe, this one
rusted metal, extended from beneath
the road (your heart leaps
for a beat – a second pipe,
a second body? but no) but
beautiful all the same,
it was all beautiful. Even

now, the water runs
so clear. Yet,
you had made note of that black
pipe and found it, if not ominous,
at least ugly and you
find your eyes have drifted
back to her cold form.

Why is it, you ask,
the ugly and the beautiful
draw our eyes to them
both the same?
Is the sublime an expression
of the resolution of diametrics?
The grotesque and the glamorous?
The excremental and the exquisite?
The repulsive and the arresting?
The secret aesthetic making monsters
of us all? In this moment
here and now you look on
in wonder and ask yourself:
Is this how such horrors
are summoned from the depths
of our own existence
and brought into being?
Is this pretext
for the dark nature of ourselves?

The moment passes. You must
look away or the rain pounding
in your ears will implode
your very skull. Late

to the party nausea
rises. You pull out
your phone. But what to say,
what to say?
After Power Station
go past Two Sisters
and take the Great Curve
to the culvert?
Where are you? What land
is this, awash in so much
water yet still unclean?
How did we two come
to be borne together in this place?
How can you live with your portion
of this ignominious rapture?
This metamorphosis of humiliation?
This obloquy of degradation?
You can't, nothing can be the same.
Nothing is but is not:
growth and decay –
being and nothingness –
faith and irony.

[\(Back\)](#)

Teeth

She had no teeth. Her mouth
was once full of them, but
no more. It was an indignity
not even paled by her death,
yet it remained a mystery.

Did her killer seek to hide
her identity? If so, he failed,
for though dental records were

useless, her purse
brimmed with identification.

No, this was a final
humiliation, one not to be
felt by her but for her.

Teeth which had ground
many a meal would grind

no more. Worse,
while her body was to rot
away and be eaten by worms,
her teeth rested
in somebody's pocket.

[\(Back\)](#)

Morning Coffee

Lying in bed I love the smell
of coffee brewing in another room,
the scent trail a *come hither* from the day.
Even on days like today, days
when what I really want most
is to stay put and never
to begin the ablutions leading
to the burial of the day,
the smell compels me.
And so I rise, water plashes
my face, and the burning
aroma perfumes my skin.

Sipping delicately, I scan for news.
The screen says: "Six Dead in Murder Suicide"
and I click for more.
An estranged husband killed
his estranged wife along with
their four children in a Texas suburb.
A sky so blue it hurts your eyes,
billowing creampuff clouds, manicured
lawns, white concrete driveways,
backyards with fences, and
six dead bodies and blood
on the carpet, the linoleum,
the wainscoting, the lampshade,
the walls, the refrigerator door.
An incarnadine lagoon soaking through
the carpet padding to stain the wood beneath.

My exhale meant to cool the surface

of my coffee has something in it
like a sigh. This, then, will be
the conversation of the day.
In the breakroom, at the urinal,
during lunch, in the parking lot,
it will be discussed with disgusting
scrutiny, dissected, explicated,
evaluated, opined, and judged.

Douglas will complain over and over
about those who will try to use
this tragedy to take our guns.
Then he will explain over and over
how no legislation, no law could
ever prevent this from happening.

Carl will gripe about our broken
legal system, how it was powerless
to save her, the children,
how multiple restraining orders
were not worth the paper
they're written on.

Terry, the former addict, will talk
about the failure of our society
to accept Jesus as Lord in our hearts,
and about how all things
are possible with God.

The women, the three friends,
the weird sisters, will tsk tsk tsk
about the children and

what a shame
what a shame
what a shame
("Why did she wait so long to kick him out?"
"If a man raised his hand to me . . ."
"Why did she let him come back after the first time?"
"Why did she have two more babies with him?"
"I'd never . . ."
"No siree . . ."
"No way, no how."
"Some people . . .").

I know these things because they play out
as regular and predictable as the tides. It sickens me:
tragedy transformed to our entertainment,
an excuse to expound on our pet topics,
calamity justifying our viewpoints, a mere
reflection of *us* – not things in themselves – not real
terror and pain and death of someone else,
just confirmation of our own ego;
my own implied complicity.
We are drowning in it,
the infonewstainment industry;
we are frogs in a pot;
we are parrots in the oven.
Can one be both inured and sickened?

But I'm all out of sick days, so I pour
my second cup of coffee and click on:
all the scores from last night's games,
bizarre side effects of too much sex,
what not to order at restaurants,

tax loopholes of the super rich,
the weirdest regional slang,
pictures of celebrity PDA,
the top places to retire,
lawsuit against chef,
benefits of sleep,
and then
I finish
getting
ready.

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A Dismal Tide

The smell is always there,
faint though it may be,
but the tide rises
and falls, rises
and falls, creating
the illusion of impermanence:
The advance and retreat
and the odor are
the true constants.

Sometimes the light
shines bright
on the exposed sea
bottom leaving the ruins
of colonies of mollusks
standing in the sun
as whited sepulchers.
These are the times
the odor is profound.
After waiting for the curtain
of water to finally
recede to release
its molecules to the air,
its ecstasy is too
much to bear.

Sometimes the light
is diffused
and sky water
and land are all
the same shade of gray

and the lines between
blur making them
seem as one.

The fecund air, still
pungent with decay,
leaves a moldering
aftertaste, mawkish
as the day.

The undulations of the water
can fool the infirm ground,
but the smell is always there.

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