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Five Poems on "What Next?"

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On looking up old friends on Facebook

Yes, you can smell the sea,
and in the distance hear the cry of the wheeling birds.
That's what that is, long foretold.
It draws all rivers to itself.

I first looked into your headwaters just upstream,
not so long ago nor far away, it seems.
But I suppose it was.
Such perfect beauty, your liquid glass,
the speckled rocks clear on the shallow bottom
and the minnows frisking to and fro.

You and I have both tumbled down the stream bed since then,
picking up strength, weeds, and mud.
Your young waters made rich and fertile
by the slow accumulation of cows, dogs, cats, guilt,
runoff, suicides, pesticides, sunken boats, accidents, stumps,
drowned babies, fallen trees, sin, dead turtles, fights, hate, love.

I can barely make out that simple spring.
I stand on the banks and grieve for lost new waters.

But there will be a return soon.
You turn brackish, then salty, then saltier,
then rush out into the empire of the sea,
dispersing into its secret caves, its inky depths,
as new as the spring but vast beyond knowing.
The sea.
Fresh waters just ahead.

What if death

What if death is not
mainly like the thing itself, the what it is.

What if death is being among the first to hear,
and sending out the sad news,
and waiting heartbroken by computer
and phone to hear back.

And you don't.

You just wait there wishing,
feeling for that hand.

What if it's like that?

Opacity

Through the streaky curtain
Through the greasy glass
Through the fog and rain
Through the stone balustrades
Something can be seen dimly,
troubling the tall reeds,
creeping up from the brown river,
pacing back and forth.

Stars, spirit, always present,
dis-appear in light,
gather strength in shadow.
The Oracle speaks only through the veil.
What is perfectly clear is not worth knowing.

When murk rises and bubbles
boil up from my depths, attend:
something true is coming out of darkness.

Tiny apocalypses

When the lab report trumpets sound, and the Four Horsemen of your afflictions rise into the darkening air—

When the unthinkable pulls way ahead in precincts reporting and every message from our sponsors seems to announce the Whore of Babylon—

When time slows as the inevitable car runs the red light and is a snap away from T-boning you, and you hear the Bleats of Ten Horns—

When news of the shocking wound reaches your eyes before your brain and that moment of grace before agony counts down in millisecond Numbers of the Beast—

When she or he alights upon you to say what cannot be unsaid and your Earth stops spinning without the help of any prophet—no, wait, let's use the Whore of Babylon for *this* one—

These, as you know, are Signs of the End, even the End itself verily, tiny and local apocalypses.

But do not despair—a modest and mediocre millennium will follow, in which your Dead will rise, face the Sun in the East, and get ready for work.

Unicorns

The unicorns, the poets say,
did not get on the Ark that day,
nor read the signs, nor stop to think,
and thus they ended in the drink.
Paid no attention to the peal
of trumpets calling all to heel.
Distracted with their trivial games,
around the world 'twas all the same:
Chinese, Russian, or Peruvian,
thus they'll stay antediluvian.

Now if you get your satisfactions
wallowing in deep distractions,
engrossed by that which can be seen
upon the shining silver screen,
if all your happiness now comes
from pressing buttons with your thumbs,
if your life swings upon these hinges:
videos and watching binges,
singing idols, football stars,
playing simulated wars....

Just for once please risk the boring,
look outside, you'll find it's pouring
notice that your feet are wet,
think what it means and don't forget,
about those ancient unicorns
who could not hear the distant horns.

