

1984

Should I fall and fail to rise

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Should I fall and fail to rise

Abstract

Early in the morning, before the wind takes up its broom, you can see where claws have carved cuneiform runes into the curve and crest of the dunes

Andrew Lansdown

SHOULD I FALL AND FAIL TO RISE

i

Early in the morning,
before the wind takes up its broom,
you can see where claws
have carved cuneiform runes
into the curve and crest
of the dunes

Sandcrabs, secretive in sunlight,
solaced by sand,
scavenge the beach by starlight.

Had I the courage, I would come
alone in the dark
to watch their mechanical rituals.

ii

Above the wet sand, there are holes
asterisked by claws.
Creatures governed by laws

as eldritch and rich as the sea,
laws they neither know nor need to learn,
hide in the dark, spurn

both sunlight and me.
I finger a tunnel, scoop the sand
gingerly with my endoskeletal hand.

And suddenly, angrily, there
it is — the sandcrab!
boxbodied like a hansomcab.

iii

High on the beach, the exoskeleton
of a blue manna crab.
Its crablife has crept sideways
into death's sea, leaving
a frail cenotaph
to bleach and crack in the sun.

iv

I gaze at the ocean. Out there
armoured in carapace and claw
roam crabs as long and as hard
as the bones in my arm.

v

Look carefully, and you will see
the shells walk. Hermit crabs
inhabit the reef — housed
in periwinkles and whelks
tritons and topshells.

And there, in high conical shells,
several crabs waver
with the wash of the water.

Like initiates at a secret ritual,
they dance in their white hats —
the ku klux klansmen
of the crustacean world.

vi

Tiny, translucent-red crabs
hide in the branching coral,
waiting for the debris
of decaying fish.

vii

Camouflaged in combat green
rockcrabs scuttle into crevices.
Waves smash over them, but they remain
immovable. With their periscope eyes
and their bathysphere bodies
they are the ancient world's answer
to science fiction.

viii

Wielding its littleclaw like a broadsword,
holding its shovelclaw like a shield:
the sandcrab. Unless you kill it, it will not yield.

ix

In the sands of the beach
in the rocks by the shore
and on the ocean's floor
crabs click in crustacean speech.

As I walk this beach alone
I begin to realise
should I fall and fail to rise
they will whittle me to the bone.