

P A U L A M E E H A N

*Sea*

*for Tony Walsh*

FROM SCRATCH

To begin again: my hands sifting sand  
at the sea's edge, and nothing to be done.  
All day to do it in. To start again  
from scratch; a driftwood stick, a hazel wand  
to scribe your name deep in the new-found land  
the ebbing tide has granted me. The sun  
is a time bomb tossed to the blue heaven;  
clouds shadow my script, shadow my young hand.  
A heron takes flight as if not knowing  
yet what its own wings can do. There are reams  
of Brent geese landing with their hungry song.  
At the tide's edge your name—going, going  
gone with the turning tide. What was mere dream  
of empire—dissolved, wrecked, gone badly wrong.

## HIGH TIDE

When we stole out of the sleeping estate  
down to the sea shore, we were thieves of night.  
We were thieves of grief, we were thieves of light.  
Hand in hand, each the other's chosen mate.

We wanted to copperfasten our fate  
in the sound of, in the face of, in sight  
of, the highest tide either one of us might  
know. We wanted to feel that mortal weight.

The neighbours must have shifted in their dreams  
and turned, or sighed, or called out of their sleep  
some lost love's name, some unmourned daughter's death;  
as in: my Sarah, my Nancy, my Liam.  
Lyric of their secret fret the sea keeps—  
the drowned forever singing their last breath.

## BOUNDEN

I have to go down to the sea again.  
I cannot resist the pull. The full moon  
is drawing me back: the ebb tide a tune  
of retreat. I surrender. All that remains  
of my life I offer. My animal pain.  
Poetry—you can keep it. It's been my ruin.  
For so many years I was gifted; boon  
presents now as burden, as curse, as bane.

The islands appear, they vanish, return.  
A dog worries her image in a pool;  
disturbs the mirror, digs deep in the sand,  
self unfathomable. And I, who learn  
this craft at the expense of art: mere fool  
that the sea abandons high on dry land.

## HANDSEL

I take my black dog down to the winter sea;  
a mere drop in the ocean each salt tear.  
The north wind is bitter, threatening snow;  
it whips up the waves, it whines through the dunes.  
A small boat is wrecked on the rocks—dragged free  
of its mooring, dismasted, all its gear  
and tackle cast on the tide. A lone crow  
blown from the woods pecks at a sliced pan strewn  
on the water.

Oh the sea neither gives  
nor takes as we fancy. The sea has no needs,  
nor worries, nor wants. If we call it “she”—  
an ur mother—it is because salt lives  
in our blood. And grief drops salt like seeds;  
brings home shells in pockets—memory.

## ASHES

The tide comes in; the tide goes out again  
washing the beach clear of what the storm  
dumped. Where there were rocks, today there is sand;  
where sand yesterday, now uncovered rocks.

So I think on where her mortal remains  
might reach landfall in their transmuted form,  
a year now since I cast them from my hand  
—wanting to stop the inexorable clock.

She who died by her own hand cannot know  
the simple love I have for what she left  
behind. I could not save her. I could not  
even try. I watch the way the wind blows  
life into slack sail: the stress of warp against weft  
lifts the stalling craft, pushes it on out.