

Walking Without Feet

You do not return complete.
You return with broken teeth and bleeding gums,
sores on your heels down to the bone.
You return blind, you have stood too long on the prow
watching the place where sunlight meets the sea.
You return unable to eat, with flesh turned inwards,
you return with a duodenum heavy with parasites,
you return with visible bones.

You return silent, you return deaf.
You return without names for the garden birds, for
the robin's territorial disputes, the magpie's indifference.
You return with vomit staining your clothes,
you return open, you return having lost your defences,
you return choking on flies and cockroaches.
You return from a long journey, you have come further
than Odysseus, than Dante, than Frodo.

You do not return complete. You have walked without shoes,
you have had cholera, you have walked past exhaustion,
past drought. You have walked past language,
past sky burials and cities too ancient to have been given names.
You return and stand on the other side of the wall from me,
as I hang my washing, white and yellow and fresh
against the sky. Bile in your throat. I smile, raise my hand:
you look the same to me.

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