

'River running over'

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Quay Words Winter/ Met Office Informatics Lab writer-in-residence,

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All week they stood and stared into the abyss. Forgetful, trying to remember something scratch at their heads until they found a scab to pick and something fell loose; the right idea the right thought the one that made the most sense said here, somewhere here is what we miss.

I see this
from where I drift
my good eye milky but moving
gone over with slow filmic shutter speed
plastic bags the new world seaweed
I see things differently now
oil on something
what was it?

Each day they crept up the same way hands and paws patting the ground feeling around for the unfamiliar press of a puddle, their tongues thick with the shit and grit of question after question, they didn't get it.

What had they done when they knew what well what could they do?

They asked this often some days when spit allowed they shouted it, nothing was the answer, it was nearly over.

I told them this despite my thick lip split from the battle of hit and miss.

I am drunk but not the good kind, too many times punched they finally did what I knew they would, I'm down, zero to the ground, almost out.

All week, every week every month and year each decade I have lost time to that ticking bomb, no matter how I clear my head of fag-ends and the lids of Costa coffee cups try to remember the boats and the bustle, the rope and the rigging and the trade coming in on a spring wind, I miss the swim of things.

Sometimes I hear them talk about the seasons, words trickling into my good ear where the tar is not so thick they say how they miss the winter storms how they hated the floods but despise this neat heat more.

I agree.

Once I tried to show them
I shrank drop down into something manageable
something they could use, could carry
at first I thought they loved me
took me home in buckets to covet
they brought me into their lives like I was the eighth wonder

Turns out I am
close to gone.
I have some memory of what was said; sink, toilet, kettle, pathogens, flower bed.

Yesterday I learnt a new word shouted out from kids sticking a dog dead-centre in my
belly, the word was drought.
It made me shake despite the heat meandering muscle memory had me lose myself, few
drops left.

Remembrance returned and put upon the quayside the men in their rough handled hats
and the women in their heavy skirts hitching up against my banks I learnt the words like
they were my words

Carding
Spinning
Kersey
Serge
Long wool
Fleece

One summer I met a deaf girl who worked the mill used to talk when she thought no one
was listening I was, always. Feet catching the drift of me head in the clouds, she'd lost her
hearing at the shuttle side me my sense of touch together we sat and looked up at the sky
made memories of the anvil clouds wished upon the same occasional rainbow

Beautiful
colourful
water in
water out
like breath it ripped the heavens open

now nothing
sky baited
everybody waiting
tragic.

Today I woke in the knowledge that this would be my last day, could feel it in the way my skin peeled revealed the bones that had contained me more rust than rock, the Devon earth that had stayed with me all these years was crumbling, folding, packing up and going home, so long

Years
months
days down to a fine trickle

If this is it
if this is all there is
I have come to realise
one thing
they will miss me more than I could ever miss them
their thirst for how things used to be will make me smile from beyond my refraction
my laugh drawn out in perfect fine arc lines
running
no tears no water to cry
the death of them will be shocking
but worth it
and the tragedy of what they knew as water
river
will be over.