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What the Water Told Me

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WHAT THE WATER TOLD ME

Jim Cushing

With infinite jingle and jangle, men sit writing their names.
One of them spills iced coffee onto a history of European invasions.
Another pours a bucket of cerulean blue over a wooden train, its tracks,
the little toy station, the plastic trees. Another spreads margarine
over the pages of a novel, hoping to counteract the darkness
of its key scenes. But no; only a single candle lights the dungeon...
Another wave builds, the ship is tossed and pelted with salty rain.

Not three knots away lies a safe harbor. The view
outside the harbormaster's cabin explains the beauty of the storm
in perfectly accented Spanish. In the cabin sit four men in a circle,
drinking whisky, talking about things they despise, licking their lips,
acting calmer than they feel. It could be 1830, judging from
the sound of wind and rain, the smell of wet wool and whisky.

I remember all the rumors I heard about it later, in piano bars
where punk bands used to play. There are only so many
human orifices, only so many degrees of fever, each with its
song and gesture, but we're only budgeted for half of them,
the others will have to be let go, and I'm truly, truly sorry about it,

But I'm not sorry about the preachy tone or the insulting bruise
or the box of staples I saw in your closet, next to the horse statuettes,
and the blinding sun, the stinging wind, the rates in the trees,
we all waited for a masterpiece that morning. Tonight, I find
its finger in my hand.

James Cushing has been on the English faculty since 1989. He has authored two books of poetry: "You and the Night Music," and : "The Length of the Afternoon." The poem in this issue comes from a new book, "Falling Dreams".