

Sara Letourneau

Breath of a Humpback Whale

Listen.

What do you hear
when the humpback breathes?
Of course you know the exhalation,
that soft, moist explosion like a wave
breaking upon the shore.
But what about the inhalation?
The sound which the naturalist
who's narrating the whale watch said
is her favorite in the world,
and we should keep our ears open for it?

Yes, I know –

I can't concentrate, either.
I, too, want to watch the whale
and see the smooth slope of her glistening back,
her glacier body gliding, cutting the surface
before she dives down again
and lifts her tail flukes to reveal
the white prints of her name.
And so many sounds are competing for our attention:
the chatter of the other passengers,
the susurrus of the ocean, the whipping of the wind,
the rocking of the boat. But sometimes
to hear the new and unfamiliar,
you have to do as the naturalist said
and cast your awareness out over the water
toward the horizon.

There.

Do you hear it?
Long and low and fathomless,
as if the whale is drinking from silence,
as if a brontide is rumbling from the deep,
as if the earth is drawing a gasp of wonder
that some of us, like you and I,
still remember how to listen.

Sara Letourneau is a poet and speculative fiction writer who lives in Massachusetts. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Canary*, *The Curry Arts Journal*, *Soul-Lit*, *The Eunoia Review*, *Underground Voices*, and elsewhere. I also write the "Theme: A Story's Soul" column at the writing resource website DIY MFA and have previously freelanced as a music journalist and a tea taster / reviewer.