

For Hartwin, the Humpback Whale (A Prose Poem)

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I came
All the way to the edges
To that place
Where the waters meet the land

I swam
Through fjords, harbors, and narrows
Longing for connection
Observing everything in my own manner

I wondered

I was seen
Yet without being seen

What are their eyes for?,
I asked myself

My skin dissolved
Yet nothing happened

Was I just a fish to them?
Without lungs without warm blood?

What do they know?, I thought defiantly
My defiance grew along with my strength my loneliness my plea for connection for touch

I had so much to share

About the fate of my species—how we were hunted used dismembered butchered and
further processed

The trauma runs deep within my body
It is embedded in each of my cells

And yet
I still believed I still loved I still hoped

For what?

I showed up

While the forests were burning
The rivers were drying up
The harvest withered

I swam
Even as my skin hung in shreds
Even as everything had dissolved around me
I was nothing but pain nothing but memory and pure sensation

I didn't wash ashore
No not that

I was swept ashore

Impossible to miss
A sign

And suddenly they were there
When I was dead
They came rushing over

Not to help me
No not that

They rushed over
To pull me out of the water
With heavy equipment

Over the edges
Up onto the mainland
Toward them

To do what they've always done
And what they do best—what they've learned and taught over the centuries:
Cutting sawing taking apart processing making functional creating words
Speaking words without understanding

Abuse, once again
Defenseless, once again

What was this life, after all?
What did it mean to me?

I traveled a lot
Along our familiar routes

Until I lost the old trail
And everything became confusing to me

Memories of warm waters my mother's milk
Diving and gliding

Memories of whispers closeness our culture and kindness

Then the loss
The wandering
The pain

But I remained brave
Despite everything

I wasn't broken
Not yet

That happened later slowly
As the net tightened around me

I came
All the way to the edges

I swam

And yet

It wasn't sufficient
To save my life

Who will keep my memory alive?
In whose heart will I live on?
Who will remember and mention my name?
When will our fate finally change?

I'm asking you these questions, you
With a heart that beats
With skin that listens
And a mind that is alert

I hope
And I will not stop hoping