

Sara London

WHY THE WATER

The river,
because an aging father
and his toddling daughter
negotiate the crisis of brush
along its oblivious ballad,
their voices, low
incantations and high,
compose the song
of the muddy bank. Because
the woods' felled oaks
barrel the once mill-fed
channel, the commerce of
noon merely a polite
skyward greeting now—trees
flagging their weary cousins
on the far side, tired light
winking on the water's
measured glide. Here,
behind neighborhoods,
strolling an Indian path perhaps,
we farm our flux of secrets,
and the river yields
passage in its furrow
so our hearts won't crack—
in autumn it ferries
the confusions of
spring, the sorrows
sequestered in the grasses
of summer. In winter's
broken eddies, we witness
strange continents
vying for a home. We,

with our thin echo of veins,
do not ask to slide
our boats along its back,
to be fed by its fishes,
and carried home again.
So resolute, its infinite body
washes our bones and hair,
regardless.

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The ocean,
because it bathes the vast thighs
of earth, rolls along hip, broadens
the sandy buttock. Because
the aimless epigrams
of gulls and the swift
enjambments of terns. Because
surf casters sleep in their chairs,
rods needle the shore, bend
to the bruised day, women
in campers wait, bluefish
slap the red bucket.
Because lovers
stitch its frothy edges
with their blind migrations,
and at day's end, the moon's
miriad umbilicals are tossed
to its yawn. This
is how we lose our bodies. This
is where we ask
the hard questions.
Here is where we confess
and touch. Salt stings
the immaculate iris,
answers the wound. The ribs
of history discover the heel. This

is where anchors go. This
is where loneliness
rides our bones on the surf. This
is how breath gets to know
the inside of the cheek.

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We dream it. We sink our sins
in its selflessness. Plunge our dead
into its orgies. Plunder its reign
for our cities. We ask it favors.
We take its children and rearrange
their hopes and aspirations.
We go to battle in its buoyancy.
We see that it mirrors and we argue
with its surface.
We drink it, we give it anything
we no longer want. We ask
its forgiveness. It forgives. It fills
our ear canals and forever
we hear the scrape and cadence
of indigenous soundings.
It finds our lungs. Heaves
our happiness. We spit
and drool. We grip
its broad back. We want
its far side. It pulls us under, sucks
our breasts, splays our legs
and pushes us away.
It neither weeps nor laughs,
unless we say so. It says,
you are good. Or it says,
you are useless. It retreats,
it returns.

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Have mercy
on the skulls that tick like shells
along your wise currents,
have patience for the ways of the child
and the man clinging to your rhythms,
for the woman dreaming
that the man and child
are at play in your pools,
for the homely girl
staring at her flat feet
yellowing in your sands.
We are a strange kind.
Small and wiry.
We weigh nothing. You can hardly
call our clumsy strokes motion.
But so huge
we are in sorrow, so
mired in metaphor and hope,
you would know us by it.
We ask anything.
You have heard us calling, our song
a dim thing at the edge
of your ancient drumming.
Our thirst is unfathomable.
Our heart, hoarding the possibilities,
follows you everywhere.