

PETER BOYLE

Towns in the Great Desert (7)

There are so many steps you must navigate
to reach the quiet core of the earth.
You stand in a room and call out
but no sound comes.
Sleep has grown all around you
like a beautiful plant.
A confused nuggetty man
is fumbling a mug of raw cinders.
He hands you an ancient rare-edition guidebook
for the town you plan to construct
if you could only sleep long enough.
At the core of the earth
he has put on your sweater and you can't understand
why monsters keep peeling off you
like self-generating wallpaper.
All that moss with its green tangle of pseudo-grass
voraciously feeding on sunlessness.

The centre of the earth you travel to each night
is a small inkling of how it is
when life closes over.
Raw puddle
of a lone waterdrop.
In your slowly opening hand
the wired ancestry of stars:

from the accident of all accidents
these breaths
fated and numbered.

Towns in the Great Desert (8)

“Green Ocean Resort Hotel” the sign reads.
Here in the centre of a wide flat plain
a line of deckchairs wait
for the millennial arrival of waves.
Among crumbling skeletons of desert birds,
the wind-blown grit of dust from disused
chalk mines, rotted freeways, oases of styrofoam,
I await the palm trees,
I await the sky lifting summer off the plain.

Here
where no water has been seen for a thousand years
they erect a shark observation deck
and paint directions for balloons to stop
bringing tourists from remote sunken cities
as they draw the character for water,
for its flowing presence,
the shifting abundance of its rippling
under stars,

and I dream the arrival of the great fleet,
lost fishing boats,
the trawlers of the seven skies,
while the earth is an immense open hand
bearing the stamp of the prayer for water
inscribed into the cancer of its bones.