

James Grabill

From the Front Room

1.

The afternoon is dark seen from a lit-up room,
the Pacific letting loose more of itself this way,
the Columbia River punching ahead faster
than a train under downtown steel bridges.

The washing machine in the back room whirrs
and shakes against the wall, loosening our clothes
in Bull Run water, the Columbia powering the motor
from its massive dam still holding back the whole river,
the years of native fishing buried underwater behind it.

As the machine whirls, 100-foot blades in the gorge
take the wind down, into electrons, into neighborhoods.
One sound before all others: winter wind.

2.

Stairways down to the beach
will measure rising planetary water.
Rivers fed by glaciers will flood, then thin.
Countries where people wash in river water
already are blurred by atmospheric heat.

Does public water belong to the public?
War statues stand a mile high
on the mountain of debt. The end of days
wears me out, as dominionists knock at our laws.
& octopi are waking slowly through their millennia.

One six-foot octopus at a Cornwall aquarium
was given a toy, a Mr. Potato Head
that he plays with. If keepers try to
remove it, he rushes up angrily guarding it.

Mountain gorillas with our faces from a past
burn from crisp pages of a new *Geographic*,
the photographs clearly showing personage,
the gorillas almost extinct.

3.

The back-room washer roars on its spool,
as storm changes over the continent.
Down here, the months still sound like birds
& rain, like grasses shaking & a pickup starting.

The way we see one another when we look,
everything we witness—we know it's interwoven,
part of the sun planted in centers of matter.

It's sun from outside & inside
growing a pepper.
It's sun from inside & outside
healing a wound.

Seen from inside river water,
stone's solid light. Form acts round
until it's around, indivisible,
vibrating from centers of cells.
The sun's birds make a music,
shattering thought into waves
& opening the wind's long door.

Bent sunflower heads feed what comes
from other roots of the sun
& long-haul evenings.

The shells of ocean turtles & shells of plankton
dissolve in carbonic acid,
the ocean inhaling too much CO₂.
Thick oil-smeared damages sprawl
behind ships & small drops
of rain are remaking the earth's volcanoes.

