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“The Frozen Sea”

Art is an ax for the frozen sea within us.

--Franz Kafka

And the sea extends for miles, blank from above,
white and brittle, encircled by black trees, the ice
as hard and heavy as iron, though suffused with light,
opalescent beneath the surface, then, deeper, clear as
glass, fathom upon fathom of tight crystalline strata.

The fish who live here are asleep, frozen solid,
their fins still extended as if swimming for dear life
or caught in a diorama, carefully arranged for viewing by
future oceanologists interested in radical piscine behavior.

The ice has pressed against their gills until their
breathing too is paralyzed, the tissue as pink as the lips
of a young woman, the lines of their throats ballooning
with secrets, messages we were waiting to hear, heard
once but did not understand, but yearned to have repeated.

Beneath the ice, underwater, the dead sailors drift,
their finger bones still nudging blocks of frigid wood,
the sea floor littered with shipwrecks, forgotten languages,
stolen lifetimes, weed as thick as insulation, obsolete
technologies still functioning at breakneck speed, tired
analogies, dead and dying cells, new cells forever being born.

And then one day in the spring, a staccato of chopping,
a small tapping sound that carries from a great distance across
the broad table of the sea and echoes through the forests.