

Simon Perchik

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Finished --no new graves
though yesterday you counted boats
—side by side, adrift

breaking apart under the rocks
—done! here you are
adding rafts to the way

each sea long ago learned
how deep inside the storm
there must be a very big number

—a half-finished arithmetic
where you can't carry over by one
the hand so close to the other

pulling on weeds
so you can include your fingers
take hold as if these dead

would never let go
and their great weight, their place
waiting in line.

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Before she got the chance! this canvas
fitted to a wooden frame though her hair
is hid by fragrant oils and waves, the comb

not yet bone --it's enough
a damp brush will shape it
over and over the way every mask

has the scent you expect from graves
—the artist tried, wiped her forehead
with a shadow that is not dirt

lets her disappear unfinished
and the drought already winter
clings to this wall and lower.

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This rock no longer tries
though you give each grave
the tool it needs

—does it matter
you haven't looked here in years
—you bring the dead

and your forehead each day
closer to the ground
easy to grab, hold close

let it harden, already
scraped for the powder
that cures, can stop the breathing.

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This cup grows nothing
and though you add more water
it boils away, half

tighter and tighter, half
wants you to get some sleep
has become your darling

found a home for your lips
used to fever, smoke
and the slow climbing turn

that stays moist
waits for the rim to cling
left open and shaking.

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Empty and the sand
follows you along Broadway
as if some dampness

was left for shoreline
moves the IRT up
then down the way clammers

use their feet to rake
—you walk on tracks
careful not to miss

while the train underneath
breaks open its doors
all at once --no, you don't jump

nothing like that
—these shells are the same
the mad feel for

though their sweat takes the place
water grieves into
and their mouths are the same

let you yell down
and not a mark inside your body
to call you by.