

**From Nahant, Atlantic Rub, Pacific Skip**

For hours he'd been  
diving for God knows what, a ballistic bursting air  
each time he came up fanning for life, amateur at  
what I was good at, surviving, reaching under all  
of Neptune it seems.

He brought up a stone, gray,  
smooth as the millennium, travel yet indelible, still  
worth rubbing, he said when asked. Then, For what?  
To August sun he marked it, aloft, victor's clutch,  
For the Pacific, he said.

Promising to write, he left,  
the stone under denim underway. And this he says:  
I did the lakes, the Nations, the high grass for miles,  
dry lands, Badlands, the Parks burning for weeks,  
false mountains

climbing into Idaho's shadows.  
Now, mosquito-ravaged, money gone, tired of the weight  
of it all, I have flung it into Alaska's Pacific, rubbed it  
one last time for you, that Atlantic charm, drowned it  
in water it knew

just ten million years ago before I  
came along, Owen McReigghily, biker, Christ-bearded  
my own descriptor, who pays no taxes, lives no place  
but arbor, dry culvert, waddies back where mountains  
have beginnings.

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I've done my passage here, freed  
Nahant Atlantic's stone to taste new salt. Something  
will touch it yet, burn it, shape it, clutch the warmth of  
my hands where I rubbed in time,

grind it for stars not yet begun.

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## From Vinegar Hill, A Small Red Star for Me and My Father

This appointment came when light tired, this arrangement, this syzygy  
Of him and me and the still threat of a small red star standing  
Some time away at my back, deeper than a grain of memory.  
I am a quarter mile from him, hard upward on this rugged rock he could  
Look up to if only his eyes would agree once more, and it's a trillion  
Years behind my head or a parsec I can't begin to imagine,  
They tell me even dead perhaps, that star. Can this be a true syzygy  
If one is dead, if one is leaning to leave this line of sight  
Regardless of age or love or density or how the last piece of light  
Might be reflected, or refused, if one leaves this imposition? The windows  
Of his room defer no light to this night, for it is always night there,  
Blood and chemicals at warfare, nerve gone, the main one  
Providing mirror and lethal lens, back of the eyeball no different  
That out front, but I climb this rock to line up with another rock and  
him  
In the deep seizure of that stolen room, bare sepulcher,  
That grotto of mind.

Today I bathed him, the chest like an old model, boned but collapsible,  
Forgotten in a Detroit back room, a shelf, a deep closet, waiting  
To be crushed at the final blow, skin of the organ but a veneer  
Of fatigue, the arms pried as from a child's drawing, the one less  
formidable  
Leg, the small testes hanging their forgotten-glove residuum  
Which had begun this syzygy, the face closing down on bone  
As if a promise had been made toward an immaculately thin retrieval,  
And, at the other imaginable end of him, the one foot bloody  
From his curse, soured yet holier in mimicry of the near-Christ  
(from Golgotha brought down and put to bed, after god and my father  
there are no divinities), toenails coming on a darkness no sky owned,  
foot bottom at its own blood bath, at war, at the final and resolute  
war  
with no winner.

Oh, Christ, he's had such wars, outer and inner, that even my hand  
In warmth must overcome, and he gums his gums and shakes his  
head  
And says, sideways, mouth screwed into his outlandish grin,  
As much a lie as any look, as devious, cold-fact true, "I used to do this for you,"  
The dark eyes hungry to remember, to bring back one moment  
Of all those times to this time; and I cannot feel his hand linger on  
me,  
Not its calluses gone the way of flesh or its nails thicker now than they  
Ever were meant to be, or skin flaking in the silence of its dust-borne

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battle,

Though we are both younger than the star that's behind us  
And dead perhaps, as said; then, in a moment, and only for a moment,

As if all is ciphered for me and cut away, I know the failure

Of that small red star, its distillation and spend still undone,  
Its yawn red as yet and here with us on the endless line only bent

By my imagination, the dead and dying taking up both ends of me,

Neither one a shadow yet but all shadows in one, perhaps  
A sort of harmless violence sighting here across an endless known.

- Tom Sheehan