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An Impartial Answer

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Douglas Woodsum

An Impartial Answer

You asked me if the ocean changed my life.
I grew up on a point of land, the sea
On three sides, every window in the house
An ocean view, every wet view part wind.
The light and the tides change and the wind changes
And I have changed the way I look at waves.

Besides the waves that break on the shore, waves
Appear in my dreams. The sweet song of life's
Blue mother comes to my bed. She sings, "Change
Is always possible; it rules the sea."
She sings and hums of change. I wake; the wind
Dies, the waves subside to glass, and my house

Holds solid as a ship. But soon the house
Will shake in wind enough to slosh small waves
In toilet, sink or tub, gale gusts of wind
That rock my bed and overturn boats. Life
After life, we mourn the drowned, but the sea
Is innocent. It's not the sea; it's change.

The tail end of a hurricane brought change.
Tides above normal flooded the well-house.
I turned on faucets and out came the sea.
Weeks later I still washed in the trapped waves
That sunk themselves into the well. The life
Of the storm long gone, gone with the white wind,

But still salt in my shower. I've seen wind
Break boats from moorings, the wrecks that change
People's fortunes. I've seen ships go down, life-
Boats flip spilling women and children. Houses
On the sea sometimes sink and sometimes waves
Barge in and take some small thing out to sea.

I learned to fear from my neighbor, the sea
And to love the power and shape of wind
In a sail pushing a boat over waves.
And I learned to weigh the sudden changes
Reflected in water. But take this house
Inland, I don't think it would change my life.

The ocean winds and waves don't rest ashore.
They change into shapes borne far from the sea.
Spray flies. All lives, all houses have ledges.