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Noctiluca| [Poems]

Daniel Ostmann
The University of Montana

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NOCTILUCA

by

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B.A. University of California, Berkeley, 2001

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

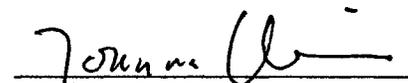
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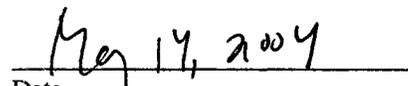
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It is advisable to look from the tidepool to the stars and then back to the tidepool again.

John Steinbeck,
The Log from the Sea of Cortez

He observes how the north is always enlarging the change

Wallace Stevens,
"The Auroras of Autumn"

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SKYE

Beneath the surface, hundreds of jellyfish
hover. From the edge of a cliff you can see
the way they seem to beckon: soft translucence,

a subtle pulse perceived across vast distance.
How far out can you still see them? Glass,
surface without texture, miles of greyblue sea

and a mist that hangs along the ragged coast.
These peaks have names and some
aren't here anymore, ages broken back

into the earth. Pools of black water
raising grey faces over which the wind ripples.
Down there, onyxshining and deeper than

what we can see. Reach for the bottom
with a stick and you won't find it,
the ruins of a small stone house on the cliff,

stove-pipe rusted but erect, sheep everywhere,
one rubber glove and fishing nets, rotting,
rotting remnants of a pulley system

long overdue for a catch to hoist
from the boats. But the boats never come in.
They call the Old Man of Storr

the ancient shepherd and we sound small
against these towering faces, erratic
against the slow rhythm of tides that take on

a lustre beneath the mist until they are almost fire,
a wake across the sea and hundreds
drifting obscure beyond the glasslight.

SANTA ANA WINDS

Power poles exploding across town
and the warships will leave the harbor as light
breaks. Moths under the streetlight are there
then swept away. Lean to me like a palm tree
about to snap. Blue flashes
on the bellies of clouds as you try
to speak to me through wind,
a bad phone connection, leaves scraping
or empty cans in a parking lot; says
Malibu is on fire again says the ships are leaving
San Diego. Are you trying to find me?
Can you smell the burnt hills? My back
against the car at five in the morning –
I still feel you like a blue shock
from the darkening side of town.
And I can't stop watching: there's a palm tree
on fire in the wind, leaning out to the ocean.

THE ORDEAL

Somebody was hurt or somebody / went missing /
evening in the purple field / Junebugs rising
from the grass / open your hand to see / if she's still
there if she's still / moving / when you ask
if they've left / I'll answer that I believe they
have been torn apart / soldiers who broke down the door
will never be able / to discuss the room / will always
be suspicious / of the man on the porch /
even in the forest / on the scorched trunk a black spider
snags a fly out of air / when the superheated gasses
reach the lungs / movement of lights / and no sirens

ABSCISSION

Left the servicemen in the bar dark at noon in the electric
city: grid of concrete sprawling along the banks of the river:
before we built this place, this source in the field:

I have left the service of the electric city: am passing:
am spectrum saying xanthophyll: grassland rising
to plateaus where black smoke cuts

along the line between yellow plains and pale green sky,
bearing metals and freight, bearing lumber for the construction
of the electric city: tonight the courthouse flag will hang

above the night swimmers leaving the blue bar: anthocyanin:
tannin: rotting wood of the fences cutting off
at shifting angles from the highway following the river:

leaving the electric city, westward toward sky thick
with clouds, mountains turning from black
to dark green: ponderosas under a first dust of snow:

the city where money had weight, passed from hand to pocket,
where traffic lights are swaying on cables: beneath the skin
yet visible on the surface of the eyelid blood spreads.

SHADE

left you and I on a shore and I was always forgetting
who I was / or never knew / that sometimes they were making love
we think / the audience wanted you to solve the problem

and tell / them but I didn't want to do / that when
you are always female they said pull / herself together / be
whole I almost remembered / who I was when someone's clothes

were carried away by crabs the audience / felt like they identified
with the crabs a komodo dragon / bit someone a quick bite
on the thigh / not much blood but big enough

for the bacteria / to get in I wasn't sure if it was you
who was bitten / you thought I was going to die / but they were
both so inextricable and as the audience / wished

sometimes making love they would / probably both die
the komodo dragon waited / patiently in the shade
of a palm tree music / seemed to be floating in

on the waves when we all thought / we were rescued
from our mess you cut / into an orange and licked the pulp
from the blade the audience / said they wanted you and I

to be making love they were / someone in the audience
shouted / you is god / there was an argument probably / hearing
the music the dragon's tongue / came out and went back in

WAVES

Left me in sand, left me under orange light
scattered among the rocks. Everything washes ashore.
Everything in driftwood, seaweed, trash.
Orange light shot through momentary walls of green
in the second before they fall over, on themselves,
on the silhouettes that dart through the curl
and disappear in foam. Wavelight. We all
fall. Where will the wind take him? Strange voices
ripped from youth, ripped from tomorrow.
Somehow mine, aeolian song, you will die
young. And sand from the ceaseless incantation
of waves on rocks, slow action of water on the cliffs.
Roll shells and rocks around long enough and they lose
their edge, even glass – they say length of existence,
they say change of properties. The couple
making love beneath the cliff will never finish.
A month's erosion will find them alone –
every night he scratched her back until she fell asleep.
She'll say she never asked him to. Nobody is
enough. Things you learn in between. *A thin grey man
half lost in gathering night*, looking for something
and leaving no footprints. Wavelight leaning
westward, collecting in the pages of an empty book.
And gulls gather around me in the darkness.

COAST HIGHWAY

If I could take back every word,
a pause in traffic as we walk,
plastic bags heavy with fish and a taste

like iron in our mouths, I could lean
against dry wind burning our lungs
like a memory as we stare out over

the boats, following the column of smoke
as it expands past the oil platforms
and settles into a brown haze over the islands –

and there is no sound of waves, no swallows
flit through the air – flecks of ash
on the surface when coyotes come down

from the hills, out of the arroyos, trotting
along the streets of shops selling whales
and sunsets in pastels, while sunlight

goes in and out of red on the avenue by the ocean.
People waiting for the bus are covered
in ash and noise nobody can see. From the boat,

I could see no gulls and am long out of practice,
though careful not to lose hold, the knife
meeting a slight resistance, fingers

edged with dull blood. Out of the glare,

over golden spirals of kelp floating up
from the deep, a bass turned slightly to its side and

less than an inch beneath the surface,
revealed an eye. Meaning it is sick, it is what they do
before they die, manifesting themselves.

WHALE MIGRATION

Unexpected in the range of possible swells
from a sea that breaks with direction: a hull
of flesh covered in barnacles, running aground

in the rocky shorebreak, winter slope of beach,
as innards sluice into the surfline, and waking
to find the shore littered with red crustaceans:

the gull's beak tugging at the legs. The backhoe
grubs into the beach with its halting rhythm,
piling the sand it removes – how deep before

they reach water again? The beak incessant:
strength of rostrum – how deep before the earthmover
will push, will roll the rocktorn girth, in with a buckle

and splash. Water stretching to the tideline
of ripped kelp, stretching viscous where children
are throwing petals as the sea pulls back in thin sheets,

are chasing the gulls into sky. Along the boardwalk
orange lamps color the machinery, uneasiness
in the sulphur-light, concrete and metal releasing

heat. We say these are the materials, wormwood
found in heavy echo, this murmurous surfbeat.
If we walk along the jetty where cats

slink around the boulders, hunting for crabs –
if we throw rocks into the dumb waves and imagine
the descent, the phosphorescent arc dissolving

through the slow heave: a long cloud of pink,
as jet engines leave condensed vapor stretching
into segments, disappearing and then reappearing

orange and wavering as it descends into fog:
low briny mist that hangs reflecting in green glass
breaking with the rise of a finless back.

CHRYSOPYLAE

Woke from dreams of dark sails
passing through the fog, woke whispering
coordinates for locations they could not

remember. Beyond the cresting swell, a gull
dips and rises to render the arc again, the trestles
and abutments, our city on the hills where all

the westward windows are aflame. The bridge
a history and its metal movement, chthonic,
the molten birth of steel in eastern factories,

the furnace and blast of oxygen to cull
the slag from the charge – a history of passage
in distance and force, tectonic plates drifting

toward subduction, the Spanish cannon's range.
Tucked into the headlands above the strait –
the seafloor thrust from sea toward sky,

folds of red chert, pillow basalt and sandstone –
are the emplacements where the artillery
waited: cement pits in the rock, urine,

spray-paint, a condom in the mud,
the rusting doors and window bars
of the barracks where, for decades,

the Army's battery commanders trained
their sights on imagined submarines.
Though in sleep, the angles

and trajectories of approach delivered them
toward a brightness, an expanse of silver,
like an icefield littered with shrapnel

and holes large enough to fall through.
There was no way to determine
the depth of the sea beneath them.

* [Frémont's Exploring Party prepares to return to California]

In the night beneath cedars
near Klamath Lake, *we saw the way*
opening clear before us as poisoned arrows

sunk, three shallow graves and a resolution
to *square accounts*. We have spent days
riding the Klamaths down, chasing them

from their village at night, through sage brush,
into the pines; then torching huts and destroying
the fish drying on scaffolds; behind a sage-bush:

arrows arrayed in an arc, tails toward a center
and points, *reflecting* firelight, made of metal –
a cannonball sent skipping across the surface

of the channel, we splinter the hull
at the waterline; heated *to the point of glowing*,
set wooden ships ablaze; though a face

subsides through fathoms, the distant ships,
the expected ships never arrive. We've heaved
shells *beyond the Farrallones* and camouflaged

the guns in vegetation, the threats increasingly
aerial. Never arriving. Guns replaced
by guided missiles and designed to intercept

aircraft traveling faster than sound: Nike, Ajax,
Hercules: left us scanning the sky, left us
seeking for what arrives unseen.

Slicing through grey glass mottled roseate,
pulling toward the southern shore of the strait
as surf shattered against rocks on the point,

Frémont's company, ascended the bluffs
to spike the cannons, to drive files into the touch-holes
of the iron, long brass and bronze cast in Peru.

And it was mid-summer, a theft of horses on the tongue
like a premonition of empire. Fremont named
the mist rising in morning sunlight from the cliffs

above the channel, where freighters lurch
through the whitecaps, and our traffic falls into
pattern; though above it, pitched higher

than the recurrence of lights entering and leaving
the city – wind, voices passing through cables,
cables hanging from fog – we say deflection

is the capacity to give, at ebb-tide, when water
exposes the pier leaning over a mudflat full of tires,
and the current sweeps out toward the Farallones –

past the golden clouds of kelp, dark shapes
finning circles beneath surface variations of blue
in the wind – or a surging through the deep, bedlamite –

past upwelling columns of silver fish –
in winter storms, to the weight of our moving,
our seaward dream calling bedlamite, bedlamite –

through every chordal beam, wire and coil corrosive,
bedlamite, the hundreds of wings lambent
on the swells – in our skin like a memory of lead.

NORTHING

Among the shells of a hundred vehicles, between
spruce trees, I've assembled the machinery,
collecting the pieces that can only be found

ten miles out of town. The man who tends the frames
is wrenching his fingers around the handlebar
of a black three-wheeled motorcycle,

muttering into the pink sky at midnight,
and there is a white sound that follows me
and disappears over the range, like wings beating

the air above the mountains. Too much
for the eye: even on paper the mountain hides
in the greylight, drawn to the clouds. We have

trouble as we recollect the landscape, details
fleeting as particles, but feel our way through clouds
falling on the mountain top, where rock

gives way beneath the ice and ice and rock
grind into the brown, silt-laden braids of rivers that,
under the right angle of sun and clouds, are rumored

to flow like silver light moving through blinds.
What were you looking for? I can hear engines nearby
and the man who lives alone upstairs is about to

cry out again. The deep oscillation of freight trains
creeping down from the north sends
moose crashing through the taiga. Waking

where the stench is whale rotting and the talk
is of sailing north from sand I've crossed
since evenings when the old man, to himself,

was mumbling *there is a shore where everyone
has been*, and the men extend for miles along
these beaches, all of them in search of

gold, travelling north, the zeppelin sails
into the bending horizon – beneath
these cliffs on which the women stand,

pulling their hair and whispering
we will not return, finding nothing
along a shore where nothing has been spared.

This device remembers where we've been.
And we trust it because we have to. Only
we accept some degree of error, some chance

that if I agreed to meet you in the evening,
when the smoke descends in the thick valley,
I might not be able to find you; only the residue

of a dream in circles: they would need to bring
women or the men would not go, build, on the glacier,
a city, and the land would take on the taste of metals,

would name the river copper, harness electricity
and distribute power with a tram to the mines,
near the peaks, which is to say in the clouds,

where the rocks are blue and maybe green,
sacks of green to be crushed and loaded into trains.
We map as we go, having lost our connection

to the satellites, the river, topography
of the braids, paths forgotten or left
like wolf-tracks leading us through mud,

past the white spruce leaning over the river,
to the expanse of feather moss and twisted black spruce,
under light rain sinking with every step into a field

of yellow and green, our boots damp
through hours of sunlight and strong wind,
leaving dry enough, the surface –

and watch a bluesilver forking on a horizon
that could be dark with smoke and clouds
as flames approach the river in arcs a mile long,

throwing embers almost miles ahead of themselves,
quickly swallowing the difference, a pack of animals
plowing through the shrubs and moss,

slower ones devouring the needles and limbs,
leaving a swath of poles that will stand,
within a year, in an ocean of pink flowers.

Open tundra, where it's more difficult,
at a distance, to discern where the fire turned,
halted, and ran with every pulse or long breath;

along the river we find small single room cabins,
constructed from the larger trees, fur hanging
from rusted nails that protrude from the doors,

wood stoves thick with ash, pitted cross-cut saws
with cracked wooden handles, in parallel lines
running through the stumps – the collapsed forms

of doghouses, mounds of moss – as, walking
back toward the river, the paths of the sleds
become apparent, weaving through the trees

toward their thoroughfare of ice. Nobody sleeps
in the light and we spend our nights drinking until
something happens, until your beer is half gone

and you rush into the parking lot, the sky
beginning to shift, ribbons of light dissolving
overhead, waiting, for helicopters –

where are they going? – in a red flannel –
are they going to hurt my brothers again –
and you're pointing, saying *this*, boreal song,

wind of electrons, moving for us as you stand,
the oxygen ecstatic above – how can we keep this?
Released in silver strings and silver dust.

You've heard what they say about us.
People call us the pilgrims. We cut the chain
because that's our mine, our motherlode

up there and they want to take it away –
stocking draped over the back of a wooden chair,
an unmade bed. The glacier moves faster

as the tram towers lean and the cables sag
into the scree-fields full of ordnance.
One tower has fallen before its position

and stature could be documented.
And out in the remote cirques, in the bottom
of Calamity Gulch, the walls of the shacks

are caving, the explosives leaching into the wood,
a can of bullets on the floor as the adits all stand
gaping – We are the good people on the land

and there is an evil here, in blood and fur,
there is blood on the shrubs – we are building
our own road – and who brings the message,

knows there is golden hair hidden
in the black spruce, knows the wind
that dwarfs the trees, boreal, drives

this red flood into which I put my hand –
and there was fire, written into the map
of what is known to return, and below that

a musty earth ice, traveling below all the rivers,
cutting through layers, an airstrip beyond
anything I know how to say – he is the curtain

of light, geomagnetic, the sky – say he is sky
and will come undone to protect my brothers,
radiant disintegration of what's left, lightning

searing the surface – leaping, tossing flares
of spruce cones that sing: and one is easily
lost while passing through the smoke –

and when the drought is felt in the deep, I reach
through ash and it is wet, yellow, it is your clear
eye, falling in strips of silver, engines,

wolves, a torsion lifted through distance,
embers unrecorded, from which
we might be able to say: *this will stay*.

RED TIDE

How quickly you turn your light on glass:
seafoam gone to vapor. Low tides have drawn

my eyes to boulders waveworn and feathered in the lifting
of deep green algae, dangling, what we called dead man's

fingers, where the nudibranchs graze: retaining
fragile codes of sunlight in the skin. I've heard the Mission bells

over seacliffs where men from the merchant ships
out of Boston hefted leather, sailed the hides down

from hundreds of feet to the rocks. Shore negotiated
by smaller craft, shore of nights when the hotel on the bluff

is loud above the phosphorescent surf, where, in firelight,
our hands pass beneath clothing in the season

of dinoflagellates – we say *coyote* if our cats are disappearing;
we have used hoses to tear the swallows' nests

from the eaves. Noctiluca, your blue waves
outshine the nymphs in untenable hills.

RETURN

And your irises might take me in, the way the evening storm
of hail descends upon the lake in winding sheets

that break, in gusts, the surface, where the city slowly bends
to lamplight and birds still call before the choking inversion

settles upon the town, before the purple minutes turn.
White fields teeming with white spiders. Now you've come

to bring a handful of berries, swollen blue against these grey
and cracking walls. You move across the room

like virga over plains that stretched beyond your vision,
where, under noctilucous clouds, night exposed the silver rivers.

DESERT

Veils of sand lift from the dunes, dirtbikes whine in the distance.
The tortoise has a disease, red-tailed hawks in the skyline

of cinder cones, distant mountains. Out here things get named
after the devil: waste nothing. The roadrunner is fast enough

to eat the rattlesnake. Whip it through the air and slap
the head against ground. Again. *Cyprinodon diabolis*, pupfish,

most die when the water dries up. Something has been tearing
at a faded magazine to make a nest. Three million years

of adaptation and you have a disease. Your eyes sinking
into your head as ravens pick at the young whose shells

are the thickness of a fingernail. Are you written in the petroglyphs?
Golden intrigue, body without hands, where do you lie?

THE OFFING

We live in a place for years and never notice:
out where it's calm, the sky and ocean blur in the dark.

Disappear in a crash of white, seaweed, salt, coming up
for air – always trying too long, always wanting.

More than our darkened room in the house by the ocean,
where gulls on the rusting fence glow in the streetlight;

more than coming home to curtains drawn, clock lying face down
on the floor. And I have tried to follow, unable to pull away

from questions you will not answer, the surface like obsidian
broken by ripples as you dip below. There is no moon

and pelicans fly along the curling inside of waves,
following the formation of a thought until just before breaking.

LIGHTNING

New smoke from this peak, this tower walled in glass,
our green eyes reach for figures beneath the trees

and abandon the radio in the silence of mounting
static. Moment robbed of air, salamanders emerge

from loosening soil, from the dark splinters of rotten logs,
their eyes black against red glistening skins. Charge released

from earth, rend a fissure in this trunk, a spiral scorched
through sapwood, scattering shards of flame and bark.

INITIATION

Yours is the wavelength of rust on barbed wire,
the shade I've lost in the still feathers of the red-tailed hawk

on the rotting post, in bleached grass. What has been drifting
above the town like a gaunt coyote disappearing

from the headlights' penumbra? Night turns to pulses
of orange above me. Flurry of sparks. Burnt trees are falling

through the dark. What charm to keep us, what morning insect
arrives in the orange whirl of wings on black chitin

and ovipositor through charred bark – when the inner surface
of the firehollowed log is sun through cracks in smoke,

a texture of earth, ash and salt licked from the lip, glacial silt
from cold rivers, in a place where you have always been.

HELICOPTER

Out of ground effect, the hover lost to the depths
of blue in the caldera's lake, crumpled secret of alloys

and rotors, too deep for the attentions of fish to bones –
as scree-slides echo across the surface toward treeless walls,

rocks continue down into the dark. Say the edges of clouds
choose to become sky as fabric finely woven

stretches into transparency, as the field beneath you
tears itself into a grey blossom rising; say that a river

makes its way through dark crenellations of earth.
And we may believe this is true: there are things we have seen.

And what of this lake, its water grown clouded; have new vents
cracked the floor? What species trembles and thrives

in the issue of heat; and what of your seeping beads of oil;
how are they carried? When will they appear.

SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO

We approach the hour: chatter and screech of white owls
above traffic signals bathing the ruined walls of the Stone Church

in red and yellow flashes. Saint John, to whom the holy hand,
to whom the sick? When the fault slipped at dawn,

when the ceiling gave at First Mass. How do I come to this?
We still live at the confluence of drought and flood,

soft drone of the freeway resonating through this valley.
What I have known, what I have been unable

to say. It will not rain again for months, the hills will brown,
and the mud turn to sand. O saliferous earth, pale expanse of cement

under the moon, walls that guide the last miles of the arroyo
into the ocean. Llorona, we have left words – that someone

might read the spray-paint and know how to graph the curves
that push against a limit as they race into infinite concrete –

how close can we stand, on the railroad bridge, backs and hands
pressed up to rusting walls, the clanking rush, invisible flakes

of oxidized metal dusting our lips. Without speaking, walking
the banks you come wailing come calling out our names.

VESPER

Bearing our voices over the playing fields still muddy
and gull-strewn in neighborhoods of blackened brick, nightfall

on the backyard party, or the bar where sentences elude the catalogues
of memory, pieces of a code we exchange in half-thoughts, gestures

made by hands holding cigarettes. I cannot collect, cannot recall
every word thickening on these humid streets like a film

on the skin of my neck. Moisture lifted from the lake: its wind-waves,
and what have I failed to see, what has been lost to us

in shadows of spring cumulus passing over the glass
of skyscrapers, platforms of aged wood and steel stressed by trains.

PROJECTOR FIRE

She is trying to get back to the room nobody came from,
in the hotel above the ocean; and the frames that hold her

pass slower, consumed by waves collapsing. Her voice stirs
the seafloor, littoral drift of sand in the tides, pressing her fingers

to red arcs of scurf across his chest. Night pours steam
from holes in the street and we walk in pairs, in long coats

over marble, streetlights reflected in our shoes and black cars
pushing through the city. You have gone out of focus,

carried by effluvial taillights toward a coast where time
is a fire interval side-winding through brush. Claiming the nights,

we wake to our voices, dream a hand hovering over ash, pulling
stones and bits of roots, so rain can lift the earth to slide.

ESSOR

Season of abstractions, of the memory's incessant
tending to the lamplit street. White birds hover

in late sunlight, message sent from a shore, their wings
turning metallic, almost golden as they dart seaward

against wind, then fold back in on the flock already sailing
toward grey dunes. Stretching inland, they pivot, glide,

descend to a lustre still wet with the receding wave,
embers of snow in wind-currents, pulses through a body.

MARTINGALE

Season of nocturnal landings, your unquiet, slipping
from the surf, crashes like silver coins emptied from a pocket

across a table. The spawning grunion cast ashore in the surge
works her tail into sand, waits half-buried for the males to curve,

to spill their milt down her silvery sides before she
disinters her body. Gather us from the sand, this trouble of surfaces,

incubation in light beneath the days: a pattern inherent
in green marble, my cheek pressed to polar glass,

a manifestation of white fur as movement over the ice,
toward the holes where animals might emerge.

Reach me with your highest tides; returning, say the moon
is a sea-lion's eye: black disk edged with a thin white ring.

Be thousands of voices, years, a handful of sea-glass rasping
through the frequencies, as the chorus swells, innominate.

NOTES

Noctiluca: 1. A glow-worm; a firefly. *Obs. rare*. 2. The moon. *Obs. rare*. 3. A kind of phosphorescent substance. Now *rare*. 4. *Biol.* A large, roughly spherical, marine dinoflagellate of the genus *Noctiluca*, which is a principal source of bioluminescence on the surface of the sea. Also (in form Noctiluca): the genus itself. Valid publication of the genus name: D. M. Suriray *Mag. de Zool.* (1836) X. 1, after earlier use by him in 1810. – OED

THE ORDEAL

The words “believe that they have been torn apart” are from Stephen Mitchell’s translation of a letter by Rilke in *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, p. 344.

WAVES

Italics are from “Fergus and the Druid” by Yeats.

WHALE MIGRATION

“murmurous surf-beat” comes from Mark Twain.

CHRYSOPYLAE

Chrysopylae (Golden Gate) is the name John C. Frémont of the U.S. Army Corps of Topographical Engineers gave to the passage between the Pacific and the San Francisco Bay. The name was meant to recall Chrysoceras (Golden Horn), the passage to Byzantium.

Much of the historical and biographical information and imagery came from Frémont’s *Memoirs of My Life* (1887), Tom Chaffin’s *Pathfinder: John Charles Frémont and the Course of American Empire* (2002), *Frémont’s Private Navy: The 1846 Journal of Captain William Dane Phelps*, ed. Briton C. Busch (1987), and numerous documents found on websites by the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District and the National Park Service.

Some of the italicized words in the second section belong to Fremont. “I saw the way opening clear before me” and “square accounts” appear in his *Memoirs*. Both Frémont and Chaffin detail the attack on the “Exploring Party” and the ensuing retaliation.

“a theft of horses on the tongue...” refers to Ezekiel Merritt’s theft of 170 Mexican horses in the early stages of the Bear Flag Revolt. The Americans feared that the horses were to be used to raze their land.

Nike-Ajax and Nike-Hercules are the names of anti-aircraft missiles.

NORTHING

adit: an approach; *spec.* a horizontal opening by which a mine is entered, or drained. – OED

“are they going to hurt my brothers again” and “our motherlode up there”, conversation with Moses Pilgrim, July, 2003.

MARTINGALE

Martingale:

1. *Horse-riding.* A strap or arrangement of straps fastened at one end to the noseband, bit, or reins of a horse and at the other to its girth, in order to prevent it from rearing or throwing its head back, or to strengthen the action of the bit. Cf. *Irish martingale* s.v. *IRISH* a. 2c. Also *fig.*
2. *Naut.* a. A stay which holds down the jib-boom of a square-rigged ship, running from the boom to the dolphin-striker; also more fully *martingale guy*, *-stay*. Also, in a dinghy: a rope running from the boom to the foot of the mast, to prevent the boom rising when it swings outwards. *fish-*, *flying martingale*: see the first element. b. A short gaff spar fixed under the bowsprit for guying down the jib-boom; = *dolphin-striker* s.v. *DOLPHIN* n. 9.
3. 3. a. *Gambling.* Any of various gambling systems in which a losing player repeatedly doubles or otherwise increases a stake such that any win would cover losses accrued from preceding bets. b. *Statistics.* [After French *martingale* (J. Ville *Étude Critique de la Notion de Collectif* (1939) iv. 85).] A stochastic process consisting of a sequence of random variables such that the conditional expectation of each x_{n+1} given x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n is x_n , for all $n \geq 1$. Freq. *attrib.* – OED

RED TIDE

Some nudibranchs (sea slugs) of the order Sacoglossa feed on algae and retain chloroplasts, which continue to photosynthesize in the skin of the animal.

“Dead Man’s Fingers” is a common name for *Codium fragile*.

DESERT

The Devils Hole Pupfish (*Cyprinodon diabolis*), listed as an endangered species since 1967, has come to exist in a single deep pool in the Ash Meadows area of Death Valley National Park (Nevada). The fish eat and breed on an algae-covered rock ledge just beneath the water’s surface. Depletion, for agricultural and development purposes, of the underground reservoir which feeds the Devils Hole pool has threatened to bring the water level below the ledge, putting the fish at risk. A 1970s U.S. Supreme Court case fixed the water level to protect the fish. However, they are still vulnerable to changes in the water level and quality due to environmental and human factors.

SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO

Saint John Capistran (1385-1456), a crusader, is the patron saint of the Mission San Juan Capistrano.

A child-murderer, some say,
and frighten their children

with stories of little bodies
bumping over stones
on the river bottom.

Llorona,
unable to die, unable to sleep,
wanders the night, and the children
see fingers drumming on the windowpane,
the white dress waving
in the white mist beyond the fence,
and hear her long slow moan
calling them, each one, by name –
Are you mine? Are you mine?

- Greg Pape, from "La Llorona," *Border Crossings*

"On the eighth day of this month (December) consecrated to the Most Pure Conception of the Most Holy Virgin, a terrible earthquake occurred while the first holy Mass was being celebrated, which was about (the figure is torn out) in the morning. In a moment it completely destroyed the new church built of masonry (cal y canto). It required more than nine years to construct it, but it lasted no more than six years and three months to the day; for it was blessed on September 8, 1906. The tower tottered twice. At the second shock it fell on the portal and bore this down, causing the concrete roof to cave in as far as the transept exclusively. Forty Indians, thirty-eight adults and two children, were buried beneath the ruins, only six escaping as by a miracle. Of the whites, none were killed, though some were at the holy Mass. The worst of all is the death of those unfortunates. The mishap has left us without a church, for on account of clefts and breaks it is altogether unserviceable; and because the walls of the fallen part remain high, we dare not work and are in constant fear."

- Fathers Francisco Suñer and Jose Barona, as quoted by Fr. Zephyrin Engelhardt in *San Juan Capistrano Mission*, 1922

ESSOR

"from a shore I don't know to a shore I know" – Robert Duncan, "The Structure of Rime I," *The Opening of the Field*.

MARTINGALE

"Grunion (*Leuresthes tenuis*) are members of the silversides family, Atherinidae, along with the jacksmelt and topsmelt. They normally occur from Point Conception, California, to Point Abreojos, Baja California. Occasionally, they are found farther north to Monterey Bay, California and south to San Juanico Bay, Baja California. They inhabit the nearshore waters from the surf to a depth of 60 feet. Tagging studies indicate that they are nonmigratory.

Grunion leave the water at night to spawn on the beach in the spring and summer months two to six nights after the full and new moons. Spawning begins after high tide and continues for several hours." – California Department of Fish and Game.

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