

the fifty-ninth whale

dedicated to Frank Robson

their flukes slap spasmodically against the surf
and relentless shrieks fill the air
as a hulk of a man, vigorous but bent from age races against the
black wind of an incoming storm
his strength waning with each expert lunge of the lance
deep into the jugular

the rising tide whips the bloodsoaked sand
into a purple froth
as he lances the fifty-eighth whale

who else would do it he wonders
and why of all people should he be the one – he who knows better
than to pause and look in their eyes
those godlike eyes that follow his every move and thought begging
for a mercy only he can deliver

drained, exhausted
dreading those penetrating eyes
he sits beside the last dying whale pondering what he's done
and hears a faint cry

that female down the beach
the one his lance couldn't reach
between the wave-tumbled corpses surrounding her
she's crying out to no one but him

it's dark now
he's bone tired, numb
couldn't kill her if he wanted he thinks
so he trudges up the bank to his cottage
and collapses in a deadman's sleep
until she beckons him hours after daylight

stumbling from bed he gulps a cup of cold, strong coffee
grabs the lance and heads to the beach
wondering if she's already dead
maybe it was a dream, perhaps by some miracle,
the kindness of a seagod,
she was taken back in a great wave
but just when he was sure he should have stayed in bed
he hears her pitiful cries from the shore below

crawling over giants washed up like logs in the storm
he stands knee deep in the pool carved by her futile gape
her entire body shudders at the touch of his face and arms
pressed tight against her

with one powerful thrust he cuts her fast and deep
and for him she dies silently

for him she dies in silence

- randall eaton