

Deluge

Jacob J. Staub

I was task-oriented. There was no choice.
 We were in there, all of us, at very close quarters.
 I tended the animals to keep busy.

I was no novice at shivah.
 Long before the dove first returned,
 I learned how to mourn my sister,
 whose husband had led to our estrangement;
 my neighbor Eli, to whom I had owed a wagonload of grain;
 my best friend Enosh, whom I had tickled mercilessly
 when we were kids.
 The God who speaks with me created a world
 in which suffering and death are as common as air.

But that there would be nothing left?
 The tavern over the ridge?
 The splintering shed that I built by the creek
 where my children and their children would play?
 The wooden bench by the pomegranate stand?

I could have wandered there, thought by thought,
 after the rains ceased
 and the droning silence crept heavily
 over the face of the deep.
 We listened for what we couldn't hear
 long before we noticed that we couldn't hear it.

Now, I plant the vineyards
 on a faceless terrain, empty and broken,
 listening in my mind's ear to the crash of the waves.
 God may be suffering from hindsight.
 Unless I misunderstood.
 Unless it wasn't God who speaks to me.
 Unless I wasn't commanded to shut the ark
 against desperate, pleading latecomers.

I hesitate to turn to God for comfort.



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