

*Crabs burrowed his ribcage,
currents eased his bones*

*under silt and sand. The sea
has no obligation to be kind—*

*it fulfills its duties well,
it carries on, it holds no memory.*

Watercolors at Year's End

Your trees were, rightly, secondary,
a wash of sun and sky, branches
fat as velvet pillows, cones
clumsy as the questions I would ask:

Is steel the color of nightmare?
Are dreams smoke-blue? What color love?
Yours were non-answers I translated,
scribbled lines, the trembling brush

you barely held, the muddled colors—
apple-boughs as cramped as thumbs,
a flight of sparrows, rising,
darkness rising its slow wings,

your eyes two iceberg wounds
sharp as a broken window pane,
bloody as your hands, blind
as the ice-crystal wind

blowing in from cedars
lapped by heavy mist.
What depths you knew then
kept your hulk intact,

palms and fingers bandaged,
then scarred, then free again
to finish your bidding.
Like your room, what's inside

is what was lost: gone
the woman bundled in bed
tossed like a passenger at sea,
the bottles empty of their pills,

the wine cold in a cup,
the body at last empty and at rest.
Am I to answer now? You are beyond
my every skill. Your city under snow

is black and white, your days are gray:
gray overcast, gray drizzle,
yourself gray and pencil-drawn,
unseen, in any case,

but for what colors hide you:
forest of Christmas wreath and ribbon,
a pallid face shut like the night,
the stars weightless on your lids.

What color love? It is a messy shadow,
a stain that spreads like failure or remorse.
Never again the child's easy palette.
Never the grace of a blank page.