

David Musselwhite

TO A DYING LOVER

Though no one could know it now,
I will watch your cheeks vacuum
into the hollows of your skull.

Though it is many years off,
your whitewashed skin will blotch and scab over,
and you will resemble nothing so much as
a bleeding elephant freshly-poached
eggs left uneaten on the ceramic plate
we will glaze on our honeymoon,
an artist colony set high in fog-shrouded hills.

Our own private Hiroshima
As the wave crushes the pier
And the crude smoke chokes the dogs
Under the approaching meteor
That'll get sucked up into the black hole right along with us.
The doctor makes his diagnosis.

But it is May, yet, and the sunlight dances
A two-step through your chocolate hair.
It is May and dandelions have taken over the yard,
So thick that I pretend with Aiden and Abigail
That I cannot see them, that they are the reincarnations
Of Vasco de Gama, that the stream
made by your gardening hose is the Great Fish River
and there, our southwest corner of pollenyellow Earth,
Is Calcutta full of gold.

The Great Fish River, you know, my love,
Is where Dias turned back.
His crew would go no further,
fearing death in the Cape of Storms.

There is a monument to de Gama in Malindi, far north,
once rivaled only by Mombasa
For control of trade on Africa's eastern coast.
He built it himself, great coral phallus topped by a cross.
There is controversy now about how best to preserve the pillar,
Which threatens to crumble into the sea.

I cannot know if,
In ten or twenty years time,
I will give in to the urge to mutiny.
But here, in the waxing months of summer,
Drift with me in our Cape of Good Hope.
Let our Junes and Julys keep me from falling over
the edge.