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After Much Pain

Bibhu Padhi

Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India, studio1@csbsju.edu

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AFTER MUCH PAIN

“After great pain, a formal feeling comes”
Emily Dickinson

After much pain, a feeling alone is there—
alien, far from all that you have known
from books and pictures, scientists’
discoveries, wisdom’s commentaries.

The mind finally feels distant, the body
is drawn away from its basic functions, feels
too amply satisfied to remember itself
or other bodies, other worlds, not its own.

Body and mind are entwined by a thread of
compassion for the heart’s much-dislocated
spaces and years, happenings of hopes and tears
that could never be what they were meant to be,

while the passive earth looks on and withdraws
into itself, as if it was thinking of something
gone wrong somewhere in the wild universe—
something it had never witnessed or understood.

The time is late morning now, and there are
invitations from near and faraway places, each to be
attended to, taken notice of, each to be believed
as something where no pain could ever be, no tears.

Every small thing is overly busy recollecting itself
in the very middle of a whirlpool of disbelief, even as
the same feeling quietly relaxes, recalls each pain and
insult, each piece of advice, each earlier body.