

Walking Down an Evening Beach

David Casey

[1]

The tide draws in now, leaving
Lonely bolls of seafoam skating along the sand,
So packed and smooth in the day's late hours.

I think about the sand.

About how each step breaks new grains.
How, no matter how many ancient, creeping things
Have slithered out of these waters,
No matter how many ships
Have straddled this shore,

I am the first, and the last,
To walk these particular sands.

I think about how we used to build castles with it.
About how different things are now, and how complicated.

How we lay roads,
Build homes and office buildings with it.
Add water for cement. For glass, apply heat.

Demolish it.
Drop bombs on it.
Send it up in a cloud of smoke.
Dust to dust.

I think about a phrase from a source I cannot place:
"We are agents of entropy."

I think about the future.
About finding what we're looking for—
She, out there in the water, and I.

And I think about an old family story:

How the very first husband of my mother's mother's mother
Left a note by her bedside,
And walked into the sea.

[2]

Then I think about the sands of a different time.

About that spring break, way back,
Hatching sea turtles in Mexico.
About laughter and tequila at night,
Bloodshot eyes and metallic breath,
Instant coffee from a tin pot.
About how sea turtles lay eggs in the sands of their birth,
So we couldn't carry the hatchlings to the water,
Couldn't save them from the crabs lurking, buried,
Or the birds circling darkly there, above.
How nature doesn't care about irony.

I think about the rock beaches of Rhode Island,
Where we moved when I was in high school.
How we sat at Goddard Park, looking out over the bay,
Sipping from crumpled water bottles half-full of cheap vodka.

About how Nick would recite Kerouac there,
And we started calling it *God's Park*,
Like Sal Paradise would do.
How we laughed as he played up
The pipe-smoking beatnik, wagging his finger,
Strumming it on each syllable as he read.
How, when he got to the last line,
He leaned his elbows on lifted knee
And lavishly drew out that final phrase:
“*I think of Dean Mo-ri-ar-TEE!*”

How the hairs on my neck stood at rapt attention.

I think about how I wore long sleeves in those summers,
Because my arms felt too skinny.
How I wish I was that skinny,
Now that things are different.

[3]

We walk up from the water's edge
And see children combing the sand for shells,
While their parents watch the orange sun
Droop over the horizon.

And I look over, and she's smiling.
And I smile because she's smiling.

And I think about how simple my world has been.
How it once consisted of frogs and dinosaurs
And the snare drum I got when I was nine.

How I could sit in a box on the floor of my bedroom,
Pretending that the ceiling fan could sweep me up into the clouds.
How I long for my own children,
That I might glimpse that so-small world anew.

[4]

Sitting far above the shoreline now,
I grab a fistful of sand and let it trickle upon my feet.

*There are more stars in the universe
Than grains of sand on every beach in the world.*

This thought astounds, almost
Angers me in its incomprehensibility.

Then I bury my foot, then my hand, then my forearm.
I imagine pulling my limbs back out,
Only to see that they have dissolved away—
That they have become sand.

I imagine what it would be like
Were the rest of my body so atomically absorbed:
The carbon and oxygen and phosphorus in my cells
Vibrating into the substrate around me, bit by bit,
Until it reaches my skull and the neurons within it,
Still sparkling with thought and image and memory;

Until the border between myself and the world disintegrates,
And the tide sweeps us back into the sea.

*Does the sand wonder where the time has gone?
Do the mollusks?*

Perhaps that's why old people come here, they say: to die.
That they may be washed away,
Folded back, seamlessly,
Into the universe.