

The Flying Dutchman's Dream

Adrian van den Hoven

The seas' wooden handclasps are empty, all sails have folded
 And already the last wisps of vapor have been laughed away by the sun.
 Now the sailors have lost all fear;
 Mindlessly, they hammer away at the ships' steel sides
 And the drumming of the diesels drowns out my clamouring cries.

I flit in front of them but there is no upheaval.
 Tankers bob their bows and shamelessly slide through my waterbarriers.
 I feign a threat but I know they will not bow
 Like a tin can on a summer day, they bounce off the sun
 And the waves obliterate my apparition:
 They see in me nothing but a shadow, a symbol from a frail and foolish past.

Once more I have had to return to the land and now it is my ocean.
 The highways will be my wake and, unsuspecting but willing, cars and trucks
 will be my prey.
 Already I have overturned three of them, and one I have left with its cabin wedged
 between two trees;
 Its trailer sticking round paws up in the air like a kitten asleep and dreaming.

Fire got to another one. The evening sun sighed in concord with its dying flames.
 A mastodon attacked by ravens, one bone picked white amidst the bloating entrails.
 A third one nearly got away. I left it stuck in a bank of greying snow, mud licking
 away at its belly,
 A listing frigate pointing beyond the horizon.
 Tonight I shall steal up the seaway and make my way inland
 leaving a laker on a rock to mark my course.
 Home base will be the Great Lakes.
 Its tentacles shall be mine and from there I shall strike out.

On a dark Ontario highway, the road rising and falling,
 I'll surprise the drunken carpenter and show him the way to go home
 And leave him among the nascent pine trees
 Let the bark bleed and carve his face forever into the white stone.
 I'll play football with the young collegians long after the game is done.
 They will drink with me their spirits and sip with me their wine.
 Then I will find them a screeching corner and suspend their impudent laughter
 from a burning hydro line.

I will dance before the shy lovers and play a tune upon their car's bobbing lights.
 He'll depress the accelerator and I'll take their dreams in hand
 and let them come together before I scatter them across the land.

There used to be sailors who thought they had seen me
 and who feared they would see me again.
 They knew that I was always waiting
 and that one day some giant wave might reach out at them again.
 But the waves of the land are not moving and it has no soft belly that opens up.
 the wind and the clouds do not follow me and no sailor points to me with his hand.
 And yet the land is littered with wreckage, and the grass and the shrubs are
 scarred by tracks that lead nowhere
 because now it's only a flattened wheel, a ruptured tire that marks the place where
 I've made my last stand.