

THE DOCUMENTARIANS

We make wide arcs around the children
playing in the surf
tap the little yellow box
of focus
tiny sun
to get the light right
not so much light
that the surf looks washed
cloudy in the shot
we want the background rocks and strangers
correct
not too close, not too busy
I point and tell them where to look
I hold a thumb
to the screen the position tips
the scale of light
on these bodies
(we love them the children
in the photo
their bodies being circled
to get the light right)
we love their acceptance
as we pass
closed playgrounds
juice box straws
buried in bark mulch
lights blinking
on empty sidewalks
we hardly find a door
uncobwebbed
chanting the fuzz
off my mouth one day
in a crowd I want you here
listening to the neighbors
get a little loose
listening to rain drown
the pollen
rain slick on the hides
of small creatures

creatures
we've freighted
with meaning all spring
we've freighted plot
on something as simple
as what happens
at the birdfeeder
and where
was the president
my child asks
when something bad
happens
hiding sorrow
in profit, I say
probably afraid
yes, very bad
I add
yet
completely worldly
and it was only
one day
how to say
when each lasts
so long
as long as rocks
The Rocks
they are called
in one painting
by Van Gogh
and they do seem
quite specific
when I turn
to see them in the sun

FERRY

We were walking, then circling,
to find the third level. We
passed many islands. Grandpa

(not mine) told the Pig War
story. Michael left his hat
behind. I knew the name

from his coffee cup. He left
that too. Tom worked here—he wore
a badge. An enormous chain

held a barge in place. It was
sculptural, proof we could bend
metal beyond utility.

Or proof of another world
where circumstances were huge
and crying over small things

meant crying for ourselves.
We floated toward a harbor
known mainly for its weddings.

Fathers queued at the coffee shop
to compare percentiles,
head shapes. There was paperwork

for everything. It showered us
like confetti as we moved
to the prow. Would there be flowers?

Sometimes I brought flowers.
It was night when we landed.
Coins lit the eyes of cold houses.

decides what to destroy or preserve
of our coastal dwellings
salt-lashed marsh shacks
and driftwood castles
it's said at the end
the whale is winner

but really

water

takes the parking lot
takes the beach where children
buried themselves
like clams for the bake
in cold sand saltwater seeps
from an imperceptible source
tonight I could have and then did
make dinner and watch a movie
about a father who wants
to sit down for a meal
with his wife and daughter
but always finds himself
choking out the bad guys
with a broomstick

like weather

these fictions

find a way in
the blessing gentle breeze

the blue room's violence
always streaming
our good knights can't
resist breaking the idyll
even Wordsworth
noted he lived in a time
of the oppressed and among
 the oppressing
yes see how the breeze can cradle
 a tyranny
how wind coos against the surface
of artificial lives and whatever
you'd call this poem
at the beginning in the end
it can't avoid imparting some half-
consciousness to what we know
 is unfeeling
 Nature
we've seen rage having escaped the city
and thought it was a tad dramatic
to name our trip an escape
when it's a wanna-get-away
when it's only right with winter en route
to turn to wandering clouds
some floating things though
high deep thoughts are there
liberty and abstruse

mornings
you wake
determined to walk the whole jetty
and bring a scrap of Lispector
the terrible duty is to go to the end
but that's a little vivid
so you check on the old bar
fashioned from street signs
in the beach town
where you lived and learned
how weather could be
memory
tonight I'm walking
the harbor to watch boats
snuggle in their moorings
I hear a noise behind me
on the empty street
but it's only music
an accordionist on a bicycle
I take her tune with me
I used to borrow
freely
would simply float another's vessel
from the dock at night
in fourteen lines Wordsworth
makes the boat his own

slight sonnet of dispossession
poor Shepherd
I'm sorry
it's just the stars and their multiples
we can't spend all night
making crises from
whatever is knocking
in the home beautiful gas lines
gables or the quiet insulation
keeping the wind outside
while the hero in the kitchen
scrolls financial records
conclusions drawn but unexplained
this ovular
rod taps
the sill
some old custom to leave
the window cracked in storms
before the house explodes
though it's not pressure that does it
it's the lift of the roof the carapace
aloft
in the movie now
a drone strike leaves
its black mark on the desert
once I thought no war could start
if we stood out here at the edge of things

writing
an email "I just resent it"
but I don't begrudge a thing
what I meant was "sent again"
"see you soon" to many people
I've come to see only the back of
they drift in the middle of the lake
they drift
in unsent correspondence
we might meet again on the seacoast
taffy stores and t-shirt shops
it really could be anywhere
but it's more specific than that
colder like a world
without Bach or Belize
or a friend you learned was really
just a circumstance
the light that
lights the switch
that lights the
lamp flickers
in its plastic shell a flame in ice
a way to make the darkness warm
while even now on planet Earth
someone fashions a bell against
despair someone paints a mural
or fires hot air into the lifting

balloon and the film was from
a damp unfeeling place
yet there was allegory to its ferity
two types
of weather
the kind you run from
and the kind where it's best
to stay put
on Main St. a man hears the call
to prayer and lays a purple t-shirt
in the parking lot another man
is shouting something about Waco
sidestepping them into the gallery
I fall from the canvas into
the whiteness of the wall I duck
beneath hanging caterpillars
I mark the occasional dark glance
among us not that anything
bad would happen until
it does I would never believe
in a bike-by stabbing
but then it happened to me
a yellow bike a street hung with Spanish moss
and then the muscle visible
letting in
the wind

like something of our politics
has me back on Tolstoy's digression
on bees which was no digression
at all simply the city captive
to the death of its queen
while the baby sleeps
in the next room with Tylenol
with traffic revving
at the four-way stop
one slight wheezing cough
as soldiers approach the hideaway
my father at the fringe
of the march smoking
or not smoking that mist
on the lake lifts
there's Wordsworth
in the boat he stole
the camera drifts
gray walls of the Pentagon
the lens shifts
among hippies and then
among cops but this
isn't even one fiftieth
of our story we must
digress
again
but smaller

a single bee in the frame
its fuzzy thorax two glass wings
flying into this room which
is now fully mine and soon
will lack one wall

I'm on the set

I've made I

repair and fix

I repair and

fix and then

I take the blue tarpaulin away

TURBOT

The ocean threw forth
its tremendous, proverbial catch,
one fish, rumor went,
twice big as prior nets

had hauled. Along the docks,
rumor of this largeness grew,
and with distance came credulity.
Eventually the species switched:

no longer turbot, but red mullet,
more regal having been
for a patrician's rosy shoes
thus dubbed. Also, double-bearded

with long wisdom, flood-borne
from the reflection pool
on some coast estate, and having heard
the net's winch whine,

the fish thought it was its old lord
whistling for feeding time.
Even as a potter prepped
bespoke tray of gold inlay—

how dramatic would red scales
flake upon that hue—
some said the catch must be returned,
wary toward what pursuits

the rich may tend when lacking
docile mouths to feed.
Having commandeered the hot tubs
of many summer homes,

I volunteered to sneak the fish
back through the mansion gates,
and within me an old coach urged,
Act like you've been there before,

which I had, having grappled
my baby brother's eel-like flesh,
struggling to keep the swaddle tight.
He had limbs, of course,

but they hardly worked. Now
he's thirty-two; I can't hold him
like that anymore. On the causeway,
hefting something I could

barely fathom, I watched morning break
upon all the taking
that the ocean proffers,
classic rock and the honor system

aboard each outbound trawler,
the future flying full speed,
chop-chop through all of this.
Through you and I and through the fish.

BILL CARTY

Bill Carty is the author of *Huge Cloudy* (Octopus Books, 2019), which was long-listed for The Believer Book Award. He has received poetry fellowships from the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Artist Trust, Hugo House, and Jack Straw. He was awarded the Emily Dickinson Award from the Poetry Society of America, and his poems have appeared or are forthcoming in the *Kenyon Review*, *32 Poems*, *jubilat*, *Denver Quarterly*, and other journals. Originally from Maine, Bill now lives in Seattle, where he is Senior Editor at *Poetry Northwest*. He teaches at Hugo House, the UW Robinson Center for Young Scholars, and Edmonds College.