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# Fifty-two Hertz

Jonathan Travelstead

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JONATHAN TRAVELSTEAD

FIFTY-TWO HERTZ

*Imagine roaming the world's largest ocean year after year alone,  
calling out with the regularity of a metronome, and hearing no re-  
sponse... [the animal is saying,] "I'm out here"... "[but] nobody is  
phoning home."*

—Andrew C. Revkin, New York Times

Marine biologists listen  
through their underwater instruments  
to this solitary baleen whale  
and name her for her song's  
unique frequency,  
an exhausted cry no other whales can hear.

120

\*

So we call her June,  
give her a human name,  
claim her as if we could erase her loneliness  
the way we erase our own:

erecting antennae, slinging radio waves  
like ships that sail beyond the script  
on the map's border that reads  
*here be dragons,*

hoping a postcard with a bit of code that says

*You are*

comes lobbing back to our wide, gray dishes.



\*

An alien haunted my bedside as a child.  
Its almond head,  
the ink-black ovals that passed for its eyes  
paralyzed  
me in them,  
one brackwater finger  
held to its subtraction-sign mouth  
took from me the knowledge I was alone.

122

\*

June, let us each come forward  
and join the swelling solitudes.  
Let us commune  
in this dark's first burning breath  
and experience  
the stars' frequencies  
individual in light and sound,  
each unique as the fingerprint's gentle sine  
shining their celestial voices down on us.  
May we not refuse their beauty  
which says  
*I see you. I name you.*