Whale Constellations

our shadows may be faintly visible in the careful night we tread on thick snow in the churchyard & someday the rest of us will spread in the bottom of the bowl where night touches soil we have hunted ourselves long enough to disappear

like whale, unknown & scarce inaccessible & black we do not see the hunters because whale saw no steam catchers, closing generations like a gate that shuts

behind us here in the still cemetery, too stiff for shadow such a big dipper death is still invisible for while you shade the way between grandfather & me extinction is too far a word
remember the catchers at sea
a hundred tons each, at the bow
on a platform, high
harpoon guns swivelled, stuffed
with explosive
shells & barbs, hung
with nylon rope coiled around
for whale? we whisper, memory

through this town under
ursa minor, the north
star in its tail. we reverse
directions on each other
the handle of my arm is broken &
distances are brightest
when evening is a temperate
sea, when hemispheres
curve around us —

this is no place
for long migrations
we can go fifty light
years away like polaris &
still harpoon guns
fire from inboard
end to the main whale line

streets reverse
at corners & we remain
uncertain we want to kill
the night’s loose hold
on our footless days

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