

Whale Constellations

3

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