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Sole unquiet thing

by Ernest Hilbert

Afraid to sleep tonight alone, he joins us
In our bed, scrambling over pillow peaks
And furrows of bunched-up blanket.
Overtired at this hour, he clowns for us
And laughs. He balls the sheet and smiles,
“Look, a wave!” For him, it is a wave, and back

He falls, sunk into white. He lolls between us
And falls asleep while scritchng my new beard
With tiny hands. I drift a while but wake
To find his hand in mine. Where is he now?
He’s far from me, I feel, the more we touch.
I smile to wind up here in our very own darkness

With him. My dreams are thefts, my life halfway
Used up. He pulls his hand from mine, abounding
In waves, cut off from me in his own dream.
Time bobs in me—the past mere jetsam—
My tired body a dirty tide struggling
Against some moon of my own lost joys,

So much exhaustion of earth and empires.
What journeys has he undertaken while we slept?
Soon drizzly light will seep its way through blinds,
Leaking into the clockless hour before
The alarm and coming of day that sours
Our time and all the hopes we’ve sorrowed over.

Sleep well. One day you’ll swim these storms yourself.
There will be snow to cover the wet stones,

And mists arisen to steal the horizons.
Rest, my son. There is always sunlight and sea,
And gales that sweep the margins of our world,
And tall trees lit by lightning in the night.

Ernest Hilbert is the author of *Storm Swimmer* (University of North Texas Press), selected by Rowan Ricardo Phillips as the winner of the 2022 Vassar Miller Prize in Poetry.

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