

The HOWL

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I speak with the same tongue,

Paul Potts

yes—can you hear the youth
still being eaten away in my voice?
A shoreline recedes without admitting it has moved.
Five or six years ago it shone,
or I remember it shining,
as if I could still be a pelican—
bound to the body, yet capable of lifting it.
I mistook the sky for something endless.
I flew too far, and suddenly, I was unwashed,
alone and unsure whether the ache was
hunger or distance.
The wind, at some point, became a whistle,
and I took its train home.
Everything arrived intact: the body filled,
the hands cleaned,
the name spoken again and again.

It is easy to believe in that return at twelve,
or thirteen.
Those were the years of fabric over mouths,
of stepping into alien weather,
carrying a fear for ourselves,
for elders, for the young.

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In that compressed season we bloomed
in ways difficult to name, flowers left unopened.
Memory, in that light, is communal.
We—I, they—kept the same coordinates:
family horizons, familiar roads,
the democracy of dollar McChickens.
I speak now and hear nearly the same voice return,
altered only in frequency,
perhaps half a hertz lower.
I can't say exactly when it happened,
only that there was a before without a name
and an after crowded with them:
a virus, a voice, a veneration.