Interview at “The Brigham”

I sat at a table in a darkened room,  
the chairman opposite me,  
committee members silent on either side,  
while Harvard men in academic robes  
looked down from portraits on the wall.

I’d passed the written exam,  
answered the riddle of the ice fish  
pose by the first committee,  
now sat before the second,  
hoping to be chosen for internship.

“Tell us of your work at Fort Sam Houston,  
and why the Army was interested in whales.”

What did I do with whales in Texas?  
I had entered a dark woods  
of the Brothers Grimm, where the right words  
would grant me happiness, the wrong  
turn me into a raven or toad.

“I’m not sure what you mean,” I said  
and learned of a letter  
sent by a mentor to attest my merit;  
but his memory imperfect,  
a summer at Brooks Air Force Base now Brooke Army Hospital,  
my reading Moby Dick, a study of whale myoglobin,  
an interest in astronautics transmuted  
to a study of burns.

I told them the truth.  
What else to do? But afterward,  
as I left, thought better to have said,  
“I’m sorry, it’s top secret.”

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