Back from Beyond: 21–22 July, 1972

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This poem has its origins in a day some forty years ago, a day which began with my sudden collapse and ended with a dash by ambulance to hospital for emergency and life-saving surgery. As that day wore on, its sounds became mingled with those I could hear in my head, a music played by a shadowy figure waiting not far away …

Grey, as only in July
late afternoon is grey, and
gentle the quiet, homing tide
that carried me hither, far
from the mooring where I had
rocked all day, lapped by dreams as
reality ebbed and flowed …

As jetsam, abandoned by
drifting seas, eroded by
sand-sweet wind, scoured limbs limply
shift and stir as small eddies
of sound break and slap, sucking
into whorled hollows …

Pattering on throbbing skin:
shrilling from dry, stretched gut: thin
echoes spiral up from dropped
pebbles slowly depth-gauging
still pools of cold silence …
Huddled beneath pain’s
tattered blanket, I observe,
incuriously, that Now
becomes a bright close to the
tunnel of Time’s inverted
spyglass, a soft litany,
distant, yet heard with
urgent clarity, before
I am overwhelmed in a
surge of dark oblivion …

Beached stone, bleached bone-white, as white
the winding sheet of aching
hours in sleepless summer nights,
until pearls of song (so the
fifth morning of Creation
broke) drop and gather into
radiance, dewfresh, — the hurt
of it! — annealing …

So rose
waves rescue me from the
disappointed shadow of
yesterday’s musty busker.