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The Single Step

John Nizalowski

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The Single Step

by John Nizalowski

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“It is so sensitive to touch that at a bird’s footfall a whale asleep at the surface will start wildly.” – Barry Lopez, *Arctic Dreams*

That great gray mass,
rising into sun’s blaze,
asleep in cold water,
wrinkled like valleys afloat,
turning in dreams of
suns and moons,
when tracks of claws
whisper across its inner sky,
its whole being shivers
from gentle slide
of nails on skin;
becomes an island
off Japan’s southern coast,
warm coral sea,
smoking cone mountain,
Banyan tree, sweet potatoes,
fresh fish sliced with
bone knife,
or a meadow
high in the Urals,
spine of Europe’s edge,
framed by tall birch
blessing the reindeer

with shade,
yet again becomes
Jupiter, tiny orange note
singing through space
around the monster sun,
itself a point of time
circling the galactic
center, the realm
of globular clusters.
thirty thousand stars,
a beehive of energy,
and all of it,
all of it,
from whale to sky,
vibrating from the single
step of an arctic tern.

