

ALL THAT WILL BE NEW



# ALL THAT WILL BE NEW

Poems

**Paul Mariani**

**S L / . N T**  
B O O K S

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Poems

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*For Eileen, who made it all so possible. And so real.*



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On this side it descends with power to end  
one's memory of sin; and on the other,  
it can restore recall of each good deed.

To one side, it is Lethe; on the other,  
Eunoè; neither stream is efficacious  
unless the other's waters have been tasted:

their savor is above all other sweetness.

—Dante, *Purgatorio* XXVIII. Translated by Allen Mandelbaum.



## PROLOGUE: NORTHEASTER AT PROUT'S NECK

The primordial tensions of those natural forces.  
Watch, as the massive waves surge forward, then back  
out into the vast Atlantic, as if sucked into some blueblack  
vortex, even as another wave and then another comes  
crashing in to smash against the jagged granite shore.

The silver glitter spume explodes just feet away, as old  
and now instant as that whirlwind confronting Job.  
How is it Homer caught the drama in his *Northeaster*,  
just yards from that rustic cabin there on Prout's  
Neck along the coast of Maine back then? And now

the painting glowers in the cloister-like environs  
of the New York Met, replete with a sleepy guard.  
Homer caught it all. Schoolkids playing crack  
the whip in those fields outside some one-room  
schoolhouse. Those three Confederate prisoners

surrendering at Petersburg, to be interrogated by  
a Union officer, one a hillbilly kid, another an old  
man lost, and that young rebel officer, hand on hip,  
his steady sullen staring in defiance even now.  
Then, later, those Southern whites and blacks

in those unforgiving years of Reconstruction, that white  
mistress standing awkwardly by the door, not knowing what  
to say to her former slaves, nor they to her. Or those English  
working classes, the Bermuda natives among the sands  
and palmettos, the dangers of the sea, the drifting boat

with a lone black man as sharks circle him  
with a typhoon rising in the distance. And in time  
even people disappear from his canvasses, and it's  
the sea alone the painter dwells on as at Creation's start.  
As with the poet who must face the blank canvas

of the page and stare and stare and stare again.  
And then, if he is blessed (or cursed) a word  
at last comes uttering forth. And then another  
and another. And then a line, a force, a tension  
felt between a gray, a cobalt blue, a green, a dash

of red, an orange dot, and a smear of white to say  
this is a painting. And then another swirl of white  
as three waves spill, and then that giant wave  
exploding, again, again, again, as the thing itself,  
the real, comes crashing finally down on you.

I



## FIRST LIGHT LAST

*You arrive at enough certainty to be able to make your way,  
but it is making it in darkness.*

*Don't expect faith to clear things up for you. It is trust, not certainty.  
—Flannery O'Connor*

And did you really think there would ever come a time  
when things would go as you dreamed they should?  
That you—you!—could hold the reins of some phaeton-  
fated Seven Thirty Seven as first it whinnied then shrugged off  
what you tried to make it do? You, you poor forked thing,  
screaming as the plane bucked before it nosedived down  
down and down into the unforgiving earth below?

*Late January, Covid-killing time, and six below.  
Sing it, pilgrim! Sputter those words out loud!  
You're in the bughouse now. Oh, yeah!  
You're in the bughouse now.*

Remember that time, thirty years back, in those sea-  
fungus-riddled-pitchblack tunnel mazes of Fort Adams?  
How a woman tripped and fell just behind you  
and you turned to help her up again, even as the guide  
and those in front kept moving on, your wife among them,  
as she slid into the dark and disappeared, like some Eurydice?

Remember (ha!) the blank fear you felt as you moved slowly  
forward, leading the others nowhere, first turning right  
then left, as you called out and the chambers echoed  
their muffled sounds behind you and it hit you how you might  
just be leading yourself and all those others into some instant hell,  
some underworld, where the lost are trapped and will forever dwell.

*Sing it, then, Homer, Hezekiah, Virgil. Sing!  
Sing the desolation of those words. Go on! Sing!  
You're in the bughouse now.  
Oh yeah, sick seer, sad sod,  
You're in the bughouse now.*

Remember how you glimpsed that glimmer of light  
somewhere up ahead, then slowly groped your way down  
the tunnel toward it, only to come up against that  
small grilled window, that *ignis fatuus*, that dead end  
that had seemed to hold out hope, before it laughed  
and mocked you? You, blind leader of the blind?

And then, in that darkness, in that mocking hell  
hole of a maze, as those groans and curses swelled  
around you, a light flickered and our guide appeared  
and we followed her, this way then that, until we reappeared  
once more, thank God, thank God, into the dazzle-dazzling  
bluebell light, as the others, my Eurydice among them, cheered.

*Sing it! Sing the sacred saving words,  
again and then again and then again.  
De profundis clamavi ad te Domine. . . .  
Out of the depths I cry to thee, O Lord,  
Pray for us, Mother, now and at the hour of our death.  
Sing those praises from first light on into the night, and on,  
until the blessed dawn leads us home again.*