

**JOSEPH DONAHUE**

**THE MASTER OF DISASTER**

for Ted Horne (1954-2014)

I

A church so  
close to the

water it might as  
well be a boathouse

\*

An inlet so ashamed to take  
back his soul

it sends this  
bright, icy mist

\*

A death apparently needed  
because he was so good

at fixing things  
The misaligned

elements  
-- now

so close to  
devastating

the planet --  
have

called him  
to help them

\*

Not a climate scientist  
Not an activist

Just an admirer of wind and water  
attentive to conditions

as one would be  
who had lived

at the shore  
had worked

on board boats  
on long voyages

\*

A man with a knack  
for solutions

a tinkerer,  
an improviser,

who could figure out  
most things mechanical,

electronic, automotive,  
anything involving

pipes, wires shingles, insulation,  
concrete, having worked in the trades

and in restaurants,  
in the kitchen

a visionary behind a bar  
a gifted artist

and listener, a man  
with a deep background

in love and grief  
and joy

\*

The one all around  
wanted around

when things  
went wrong

\*

Hard as it was at times to trust  
he knew what he knew

given the percent of  
know-how arising

from not a few close calls  
not a few shenanigans,

schemes, gambits of  
all sorts resulting

in at times only the most  
tenuous of triumphs

and not a few flat-out catastrophes  
hard as it was to trust the

truths to be deduced  
from his outlandish

narratives  
by any

not caught up  
in howls and gasps

\*

Over the years, among  
some who loved him

an honorific  
emerged:

*the Master of  
Disaster*

## II

Throughout a  
nominally

Christian funeral service  
many prayed and did so devoutly

others practiced  
mindfulness

or took  
stoic note

or wept openly  
in dismay

or, disregarding  
the protocols

of  
piety,

offered to the  
snow-welling sky

a silent  
cry: "Let all

die, die  
fast, die now,

die as he  
died,

on short  
notice

in complete  
disbelief

and at  
the

turn of  
a new year”

III

*oracle*

“Grieve only where  
the waters flowing over

the wall of  
a canal

solidify,  
turn white,

where graffiti brightens the  
massive

stone piling of a  
bridge

grieve where a ladder has been  
left above the frozen

floe of the last  
earthly river

the Merrimack,  
grieve deeply in this

arctic vortex,  
in the grey air, a touch of blue

in the muted  
gloom,

in the freezing twilit  
industrial

ruin  
of this, his

ancestral land.  
Pile a few stones

at the foot of the  
ladder

that ends  
mid-air”

IV

*last chat*

*In the  
evening my*

*mind  
sparkles*

*I am both tired  
and not*

*The  
pill I take*

*is so strong parts  
of my*

*body  
go to sleep*

*The pill does all  
the work*

*So much so  
if*

*I didn't take it I'd be  
dead by*

*tomorrow  
night*

*But  
I do and*

*feel great all  
day*

*And  
at twilight*

*wonderful thoughts  
start to*

*fill my  
head*

V

*dream*

Shooting through the traffic  
a tall, silver-haired man

late for lunch, on  
a skateboard

three-piece suit,  
tails flapping behind him

Incredibly, no top hat  
Stopping short he

flips the skateboard  
foot to hand, drops it

in a midtown  
Manhattan trashcan

his wild arrival belied  
by a solemnity

(A bit winded:) "There's a part of me  
a small area, right about here"

he point just below a rib  
"that's all black and rotten.

I saw it on a screen.  
It has already died.

Why would part of me  
go ahead and die?

I don't get it, at all.  
It hurts so, so much.

Brother I can't tell you  
how much it hurts."

(Pause) "But listen: right past  
that beat-up blue awning is

a terrific lunch place.  
The bartender's a friend.

The chef is great. They  
all know me there.

I am so sorry I won't  
be able to join you,

but that's where you  
should go. Order

the special; what-  
ever it is, you

won't be  
let down."

VI

*Fortuna*

Kept carefully provisioned the  
indispensible vessel

every emergency  
anticipated

and a GPS to guide him  
anywhere an ad

video, TV show  
or a movie

was shooting  
closely cared for

everything in place  
for a week on the road

and the camera parts  
and contracts and the

countless small gifts  
for those he met

on his route,  
seldom forgetting

any off-hand sigh  
about something missed

or needed or wanted  
by grips, sales reps,

cameramen, gaffers  
best boys, foley artists,

electricians, directors  
he brought each

a trinket from you  
stored in the depths of

the conveyance you  
lent him in his

last years on earth  
through your

intermediate, his  
employer, World Wide

Camera,  
the white van

he called Vanna White  
in your honor though

without quite  
knowing it

Fortuna, by your grace  
all felt his warmth,

knew his loyalty, were  
amused at his outrageous tales

his high spirits and candor  
his shrewd garrulity,

his immense  
compassion,

his ease playing  
the fool

He cherished the living  
you allowed him

as stressful and demanding  
as that so often was

he praised you not as you  
were known in ancient times,

but as you appeared  
in his historical moment:

a goddess on a game show  
derived from hangman

light hearted, blonde,  
as Vanna White

a beauty who  
spelled out the

fate of each who  
spun the carnival wheel

gasped as it slowed,  
clicked to stillness --

*your* Wheel of  
Fortune

Even when dying  
he thanked you for

saving him from  
the failure

he so feared  
and Goddess,

he loved those long  
sales trips when

he dreamed of  
the movie

his life  
had been

and, he thought,  
still might be . . .

VII

*The ghost of Lucretius*

So, Venus, our  
mother, isn't waiting

to receive us, and  
no heaven flares beyond

our own  
materiality

Were our  
mother anywhere

she would only be in spills of light,  
in the cloud, in the glow

inside the  
cloud

where the last  
of the sun hides

Possibly  
in the robin

gripping a deck chair  
or a phone pole

thrown  
over the

seawall by winter  
in the hole where new rocks will

soon  
be heaped

On this coast  
where so

much  
happened

VIII

*The ghost of Lucretius*

On tables, now, just above  
the water-line, atoms

arranged  
in his honor: wine,

whiskey, beer, a feast, the full moon  
lights the pressing tide,

crests in the  
flowing black

that slap and spume  
the solemn frivolity of

commemorative  
voices

\*

As complete night arrives  
in the shelter of

seawall boulders  
twenty

packets of his  
ashes are taped to the tips of

twenty  
fireworks

-- his last request  
Handing his

grit to the discretely  
grieving

rocketeer  
his

daughter,  
says:

"I always  
thought all ashes

are black, but I  
guess not."

\*

Full night now, tide out,  
kelp-smell and wet

pebble rattle  
in the rising

moonlight  
the fireworks

fizzle, vault, and burst  
over the breakers

in long  
glittering arcs