

Everything, everything is turning and passing.

5 So Shaun thinks and as he slips the postcard back in its pouch he feels like
laughing at the question before him. How are we writing the future of humanity?
We're not writing anything, it's writing us. We're windblown leaves. We think
we're the wind, but we're just the leaf. And isn't it strange, how everything we
do in our capacity as humans only asserts us more as the animals we are.
10 Aren't we so insecure a species that we're forever gazing at ourselves and
trying to ascertain what makes us different. We great ingenious curious beings
who pioneer into space and change the future, when really the only thing
humans can do that other animals cannot is start fire from nothing. That
seems to be the only thing - and, granted, it's changed everything, but all the
15 same. We're a few flint-strikes ahead of everything else, that's it. Chimps
could do it if they watched us and learned, and before you know it they'd be
gathering around fires and migrating to colder climes and cooking their food,
and what do you know.

He offers a prayer, for the lunar astronauts, for Chie in her grief, for those
in the path of the typhoon. A memory comes of a time in a nature reserve in
20 Laos and of hearing the territorial morning duet of gibbons, a haunting
looping song that carried through the canopies. When he thinks of the six of
them here, or the astronauts now going to the moon, he hears that haunting
call - that's what we're doing when we come into space, asserting our species
by extending its territory. Space is the one remaining wilderness we have. The
25 solar system into which we venture is just the new frontier now our earthly
frontiers have been discovered and plundered. That's all this great human
endeavour of space exploration really is, he thinks, an animal migration, a bid
for survival. A looping song sent into the open, a territorial animal song.
With his eyes closed he can hear that gibbon call, hollow and echoing. Can
30 see the dog in the painting in its private dignity. Imagines placing his hand on
the warm neck of a horse and can feel the smooth, oily lie of its coat, though
he's barely touched a horse in his life. The dart of a jay between the trees in
his backyard. The dash of a spider into cover. The shadow of a pike beneath
the water. A shrew carrying her young in her mouth. A hare leaping higher
35 than seems warranted. A scarab beetle navigating by the stars.
Pick a single creature on this earth and its story will be the earth's story, he
suddenly thinks. It can tell you everything, that one creature. The whole
history of the world, the whole likely future of the world.

When Chie goes this evening to check on the mice, as she always does, she
40 sees on the monitor that a miracle has happened - they're flying in circles. It's
taken them a week but they've eschewed the grids in their cage and found
their space-legs and have learned to negotiate microgravity. Now - is it joy or
insanity? - they're rounding their shoebox module like little flying carpets.
Joy, surely. It does look like joy. She goes to take them out of their modules
45 unnecessarily, just for the sake of holding them....