

Getting Ashore

(By Ana Catarina Milhazes)

it started again when
he told me the story of someone
swimming the english canal
knowing there was another story
i wanted to hear. again and again.
and on that one there was no canal
a big whole sea it was
it is
though like in the canal
there was a competition.
but you wouldn't compete for the reward
(unknown)
just only against the penalty.

whatever words he said
i should write 'em down.
i'll get around the troublesome words
(certain words give him trouble).
my story is not mine
it is someone else's.

there was a girl
(isn't there always)
he thinks
he should offer her an onion
(he doesn't have one)
an excuse for her wet eyes.
she shouldn't excuse herself
for her wet eyes though
the sea won't mind no teardrop.

his journey is that of her tears
clouding her eyes.
it has become now.
what is she crying for?
they will soon watch seagulls
waiting for them on the shore.

he watches four seagulls on the sand
he recognizes them.
he knows more about the sea
than they do now.

he can't promise the girl much
while crossing that sea
not even getting ashore.
not a house, dinner, milk for breakfast
but he will be there for the clouding eyes

he will care for that teardrop.

she won't look at him
eyes down
she's embarrassed for her tears
he wants to tell her:
when a big wave comes
lower your head
and let it pass.
it is a saying from his country.
what is your country? he thinks
is it mine?
she wears a veil
like most in his country
is she trying this sea for the first time?
or is she doing this like me
for the fourth time?
she looks first try terrified.
probably can't swim
probably the overpopulated boat
probably not many women aboard
probably no family where she's going to
probably doesn't know where she's going to
probably her first try.
hopefully her last try.
hopefully our first
and last time.

he watches happiness afloat.
this is a desert of water

like the Niger or
the desert land of home
they (he and the girl)
and its vastness.
bare feet and
covered head.

will she look at him
before getting ashore?
will they remember this
a year later,
a decade,
a silver anniversary?
but life is short
and theirs might be shorter.

no one spoke.
two days before
everyone believed
they were stuck.
things went on.
things were said
to fill the void.
then there was a new try.
a boat was coming.
and everything fell silent
least the night.
hope kept them silent
the only sounds being

those of animals and the wind.
hope growing
makes no sound.
they barely breathed.
practicing breathing techniques
you would think.
everybody afraid to drown.
repeating to oneself:
don't panic.

then it was the day
the night
the cracking hours.
he saw bats
which reminded him
of mango trees
and of home.
he was midway.
he thought about this
during the crossing.
where was she then?
had she seen bats before?
was she midway like him?

there's something volatile in this
he talks of big wings above their heads
of bats and seagulls
he talks of the sea swinging
of a boat and a huge jungle of water
of a point but no circumference.

he keeps thinking about the bats.
then the seagulls.
the hull of the boat.
the head down, tears and feet.
the children lying in the middle
some bags, water, vomit.
no place to meet hope
or love.
but there it was.
on his side
and with tears in her eyes.
and it went through his mind
that maybe this was the reason
for his fourth try
for that filled boat
for that crossing of that big sea
for his last five years of persecution
for her devastated country.
nonsense.
but it felt true.