

Wreckage of Dreams

by Shaun Gardiner

The scene, lit only by the moon, is a small boat, adrift on the sea with a dead engine.

A large number of refugees lie on the raft; they swamp it, almost concealing the shape of the hull. It is as if a mass of bodies floated on the sea. They have been adrift for fourteen days, and are dying of thirst and starvation.

Towards the centre of the group a MAN and a WOMAN lie together. The people lying about them are the CHORUS. The WOMAN clutches a small ragged bundle: a baby. It is silent. She grips it tight but does not look at it.

The sea is busy – a squall is blowing.

CHORUS:

The big waves
roll over.

The sea is black blood
and unforgiving
but lost in the flood
we are still living.

Each minute erodes the memory of bread,
congeals in the two-week-waterless veins;
the waves have drawn down the remains
of our hope to the depths, a lineless lead.

The sea plots all, divines the route,
the current commands advance, retreat,
and the darkness sings softly of day's defeat
when the mouth of the sun falls mute.

The squall relents. There is calm.

MAN:

You must sleep my love

WOMAN:

My love, how can I sleep –
on land I knew
knew without knowing

sleep my love

the sun would see me wake.
Here on the waves
nothing is fixed –

sleep my love

who can know the difference
of sleep's calm
from final silence?

Which the lights
behind the lids?
Which the stars?

The sun begins to rise, but with it the waves grow more restless.

CHORUS:

Which day rises?
None of us knows
slumber's respite
from last repose.

What choice remained besides the waves?
Behind us our home, defiled, bomb-broken,
its sleep rent by gunfire, bullet-awoken:
abandon our past or sink in its grave.

Our boards are slick with rot. At night they creak
like the dreamer's ribs when they swell with sleep.
We are dreamless. We await the light.
Day's fire makes change from frost of night.

The music of the sea rises, swamps over the words of the CHORUS.

The sun has risen. A throbbing is heard, a deep concussive rhythm that gradually builds. The sea is disturbed, beaten back in a widening ring.

CHORUS:

Something above us beats the air,
in and out of the sun it fades.
The angel of our granted prayers,
its halo a whirl of blades.

The WOMAN holds up her bundle. The MAN holds up his empty hands. Around them, the

CHORUS *also stir and grasp upwards. The sea streams out in a wide bowl, the raft at its centre.*

MAN:

From the sky they came down
to our shouts,
to our hands.

We thought they would catch us
up to their clouds,
up to their sun.

They only dropped water and bread:
for each of us
a gulp, a crumb.

Kindness half-handed,
cruel, to stretch out
death.

WOMAN:

My baby – see my baby

my baby

my baby

The helicopter fades away. The light is going with it. The people on the raft fade back into hopelessness.

MAN:

They left.

WOMAN:

They may come back.

CHORUS:

Our teeth grind
the air.

Hunger's fire claims
the stomach's ash.
Fuel and flames
close one flesh.

We sought the lands beyond the sea:
northward, where they weave war's wing,
northward, where they strike its sting

from a wall-watch of justice, from a hoard-house of peace.

Again the sea rises and subsides. The sunset is a fiery gnawing.

The shape of a great hull appears on the waves. It draws closer, a huge shadow.

CHORUS:

What is this void approaching?
Its shadow daubs the moon with tar.
Is death, a dog grown bold, encroaching
the wounded sky to scavenge stars?

The ship circles the raft. Finally it is night.

MAN:

They took pictures of us;
outside of a lens
they have no frame
for suffering.

WOMAN:

They came so close. Our faces –
they must have seen –
the little bodies.

MAN:

They took their pictures
and left.

The ship is disappearing into the distance.

MAN:

Suffering – sensation.
Projections on a skin of screen
is all they see.

How can our suffering cross the waves
when we cannot?

That is all we are to them

WOMAN:

Suffering leaps the sense –
lies in the arms, a child
of the beholder.

Who could see another's misery
and not be in sorrow too?

That is why we cannot be

WOMAN *and* MAN:
a mere report of suffering,

WOMAN *and* MAN *with* CHORUS:
a wreckage of dreams.

CHORUS
(*in alternating halves*):

They can see everything.

They will do nothing.

They have seen us.

They will not smile on us.

CHORUS
(*together, softly*):
We are still living
but lost in the flood
and unforgiving.

The sea is black blood.

Roll over
you big waves.

The sea rises.

END