

Vuong Pham

Reborn

I dreamt I was on the refugee boat being born.
It was just before dawn. Golden fruit gleamed
in a blue porcelain bowl. I was abandoned
in the hull, flailing among winter waves pounding.
No, not abandoned, for mother's warmth approached me
covered me, like a blanket. Her rationed fruit,
an inheritance of fullness.
Transparent as water, I lay there
below a figure, raised at the bow like a Têt lantern.
No, not a lantern, steadier, as sunlight behind
the silhouette of a mountain. It was my father,
speaking to me, through me, calm as an estuary
meeting the king tide.

I dreamt I was among fugitives'
faces wrinkled like receding swells.
Ocean-flat eyes searched for an unseen land
of opalescent light
shining in a far-away shore.
We, in our own Gethsemane
drinking from the cup of urine.
The moments like rosaries, all a scatter
of stars, exiled in the blatant
uncharted corners of creation.
Below deck, serviceable as a tomb
we dreamed of migrating
birds more alive than we have been,
their feathers flaring in the sun.

I dreamt God was in the sunbeam
through cumulus, He made us
the colour of everything. His eyes
burned with inquiry: 'What do you see in the first light?'
I paused.

Imagined
and said:

'The brilliant golden glimmer in the distance
resembled hoa mai flowers
blossoming in Saigon during Têt
or perhaps a peace lily in late spring.'
Father exhaled like he was kindling a flame
and murmured something.
'Pardon me?' I said.
He gazed at the sanctuary of sky.
The sun crackled, the heavens
by all the powers that brushed our shadows gold
unfurled their scrolls
and illuminated an atoll.
'Land ahoy,' He said,
'Keep the oars rowing.'