

## Lost Continent

We ascended from the sea like out of a fog,  
lost continent strewn with human bones and archaeological  
remains: temporary lodgings, five layers  
of graves, here and there a shrine, an unemployment office. We read  
the writing in cuneiform: it spoke of us  
so we didn't understand.

Now and then a car drove by, a scorched shell  
on wooden steps. In the distance the fog horn  
hooted. Shrubs appeared to kneel under the weight  
of the water. This is where the final battle took place, preceded by blind  
gropings, interim contacts, assessments. The guide was misguided, had caught a cold, trilled like a cricket.

We parked at the inn. The food wasn't bad  
though patience was lacking. From the window one saw the contours  
of a monument worn down by water: somebody riding and somebody ridden.  
The waiter was a stranger, slant-eyed, apparently from the Far East.  
It felt good sitting by the fire and watching the Tube, remote  
control in hand, unwinding as tourists do, while listening  
to the voice rising from the box, speaking neither to me nor to you.

Lost continent. The promise that was kept and broken, a place  
that emerged and sank back into the sea, a dim place,  
a grim place, no love from above, no dove. You know  
how such words jingle in tunes. The band was good, possibly  
black. Sated after dinner, even  
the waitress baring her breasts in the new style didn't earn  
more than a passing glance.

One should always be on the move, never settle down, as we believe when young.  
Only travel guarantees perspectives, reductions for advance payments, Let  
me out - hollers the jailbird as he rattles the bars. To get out  
is the law of nature: the chick abandons its egg, otherwise  
it perishes. Leaving is a privilege one cherishes. Being not only here or there  
but everywhere and for everyone so long as the odds are even:  
to sing, yet without words, in the deaf world, like the surging sea  
during a winter day, like nightfall on the strand,  
To sit among strangers and practice silence in a language nobody understands  
as all around you life sinks back to where it came from:  
first the vegetation. Then people: men, women  
and children clutching books and clocks, like refugees, and tickets,  
and from an unseen place someone calls and from another  
someone answers and inspectors hustle and soldiers with k-rations  
in their hands carry the aged, while here and there a battered suitcase falls,  
unsuited for travel, and the ships are already here, they're  
always here, the ships, sailing in and out, as old as the world, in dream  
of a world that never was, filled with broken glass and prophets of doom, gloom and  
screams in Jewish, in German and in Arabic, and water covers everything  
without fuss, the sand as soft as it was years ago, and we grow  
accustomed  
and it's good to lie on the shore and never to wake up.

Natan Zach

(Translated from the Hebrew by Gabriel Levin)