

KHAL TORABULLY

**[WHEN THE SEA VANISHED AT LAST]
[OUR CARGO HOLD IS A TERRITORY]
[THE SEA WILTS]
[TO THE NACRE DARKER THAN MY FLESH]
[I HAVE SEEN THE SEA]
[AHOY FROM THE BLUE BOAT]
[BURNING ALBUQUERQUE IN GOA]
[BEFORE, TO TELL ABOUT LEAVES]
[BEFORE FORGING THROUGH]**

TRANSLATED BY NANCY NAOMI CARLSON

When the sea vanished at last
like wizard's ink
I saw Signal Mountain
casting its fires directly north.
My seaweed-filled dreams slid
toward the Citadel, look-out of light,
and I set foot on land
like a bird fallen from a cage.
My compass in my flesh,
I touched my ship
yet never resented the waves.

Translator's note: Signal Mountain and the Citadel are located in Port Louis, the capital city of Mauritius.

Our cargo hold is a territory
that's lost our birds:
let the muffled sound of bed sheets
make the light call out between our dreams.
Only the sail is unnerved
by a woman's cry.

The sea wilts for the drowned,
And mermaids perform their ablutions
when camphor wafts by.
O praise be to phosphorus
whose legend interred
the stars in my native land.

To the nacre darker than my flesh:
for the star to find the full-fledged
sea, give me a single name flush
with light on my marrow's flesh.

for J.M. Fournier

I have seen the sea, the pond,
bees, compasses,
triangles, zithers—
designs of starfish
I measured
with your golden rule—
and in the green water
I saw trees
give shade to the stars.

Ahoy from the blue boat.
How do you lull dusk to sleep
without shutting the eyes of the untouchable orb?
Without passing through to the other side of the sky
and making a ball of sparks?
Ahoy from the gangway of wind
where the light absorbs me to such a degree
that thinking makes me live on in my soul.

in memory of Poivre, from Lyon

Burning Albuquerque in Goa
at the cape of storms
without hope,
stealing spice from the Maluku Islands
and ripping up Marco Polo's book—
tearing my gaff sail muslin of wind,

the only mission I didn't fulfill!

Before, to tell about leaves,
I'd watch the wind.

Before, to close the sky,
I'd draw the curtains.

And to absent women,
I'd picture their birth.

O never before the wound
had I suffered so much from my senses!

Before forging through
firm sea, firm mother-of-pearl—
scar from now on—
I seize the dawn
without wavering
wearing my turban of waves.