

Shores of Lesbos

*You may forget, but let me tell you this:
someone in some future time will think of us.
Sappho*

They float in boats too small for these waves,
even on this short crossing from Anatolia to Lesbos,
rafts and dinghies unfit for a lake,
much less the Aegean Sea,
parents clutch small children tightly,
as waves crest and splash over the gunwales —
some vomit, some pray.

From Aleppo they come, from Kabul, from Mosul;
when tides are right,
they cross the strait to Greece,
to the isle of Lesbos, where volunteers
bring water, loaves of bread, fish, tomatoes,
salve blisters and cuts, wash and bandage feet,
give children juice.

Some will never land alive,
like the child found on a pebbled beach,
no life jacket, eyes pecked out—
some will be forced to return,
maybe on planes and buses,
at least not in rafts,
but some will be locked in pens to wait.

*Send them back
Don't let them in
No more!*

Where they will go?
Nobody knows.
Back to where rain is fire,
where home is stone and ash?

Flour Bakery & Café, Boston

At outside tables on a sunny Saturday,
we hear Spanish, Arabic, as kids
banter back and forth, going from English
to several other languages.

This is a café day, South End summer,
people enjoy their quiche and muffins,
coffee ripples in my cup,
two toddlers stick close to parents' tables,
look around at the corgi and collie
resting on warm cement under tables—
inside there's a line for breakfast.

Immigrants come here to teach at universities,
to work in factories, to work at this café,
people like my grandparents who came
a hundred years ago and lived up the North Shore.

Last weekend people carried swastikas and signs:
go home; white supremacy.

But their ancestors must have been immigrants too,
like most of us having breakfast here.

Oh the history of xenophobia is long,
history forgotten, here, there,
north, south, east, west.

Ancestors came,
on ships to this harbor,
to many harbors,
airports and train stations
or in chains
on slave ships owned
by merchants who lived
not far from this café.

This is home,
this is why my grandparents came—
a bakery and café with breakfast
in half a dozen languages,
a red sun rising over the city,
footsteps on bricks and pavement.

Walls

“Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out...”
Robert Frost: “Mending Wall”

There is a stone wall that borders our woods,
whose only use now is a boundary,
though in places it doesn't even follow the survey line,
maybe once it kept sheep in or out,
stones long ago gone to moss and lichen,
where there was pasture now it's pine and birch,
who this wall keeps out I'd like to ask,
but even Frost wouldn't know.

*Build a wall, a president proclaims,
Build a wall around the USA,
keep out illegals, Islamists, transplants, terrorists!
Don't obstruct progress.*

He's not the first—there was the Know Nothing Party,
in the 1850s when my stone wall was built,
then it was Irish Catholics and Germans to keep out.
This president thinks he has a new idea,
but Frost knew that walls and hate go far back in time.
the Great Wall of China couldn't keep out Genghis Kahn,
Hadrian's Wall kept nobody out of Britannia,
the Berlin Wall lasted less than my lifetime.

It's getting dark as I turn towards home,
I stop to replace a stone that's fallen,
Orion's already up in the east,
one day someone may come upon a crumbling wall,
and wonder why people were walling out
those they could have invited in.

Nana Remembers

a frozen lake where she skated
under clear winter sky with pink clouds,
where chickadees called.
She felt free on ice,
and could glide forever into western light.

Nana tells of winters
when there was snow,
summers when a girl
could wade in ponds,
where painted turtles basked on logs.

It's one hundred ten at noon.
The sea laps eaves of cottages like a huge seal—
but seals are gone—
sun's hot by dawn as it rises purple
and orange over the Atlantic,
which chews away at seawalls and beach houses,
then washes its way inland to the lakes.

The future's begun, Nana said
that first year the big storms came.
She shows us her skates,
tells us of frozen lakes,
how she cut long lines,
and perfect figure eights.

Seasons of Coffee

All it takes is its smell to wake me up,
its aroma always tickles my nose,
you like it with cream, tawny brown
like a mountain lion's fur,
I love it black, the color of a bear
we watched once in spring
ambling out of the woods
across our yard,
spring, first bluebirds, first morning
warm enough to have coffee on the porch,
robins pecking between last patches of snow.
In winter it was still dark
when we had our coffee,
we put wood on the fire,
warmed our breakfast plates on the woodstove,
and now,
now summer wanes and already
I see another winter,
a few maple leaves have turned—
too soon—
we step out with our coffee, sit
just a few minutes in morning chill,
glad for the warmth of the cups,
but before winter sends first snow,
we'll have autumn mornings
in the porch chairs
with our cups of coffee,
while all the world is on fire
with birch yellow and maple red.
I wonder
how many mornings we'll have,
now that we're nearly past summer,
to sit in these chairs,
how many more morning coffees.