Fire, Milk, and the Ocean

Ben Bowers

The man who saw Nepal spoke of the thunderous booms of the avalanches, how the snow and rock consumed entire villages and of the guide who kept them safe. His guide had witnessed a great many things, and he recounted just a few for the man on their journey - like the story about the young, grey goat, who free to roam the farm, welcomed himself into the kitchen, allured by the sickly sweet scent of the milk boiling on the stove.

The goat began to drink, taking in the hot, steaming liquid, before crying out so loud you would swear it was another avalanche. And then the goat resumed, taking pauses only long enough to cry out to the heavens, before lapping up the milk from the pot once more. A few days later, the grey goat lay dead outside the house. The doctors say the cause of death was internal burns.

The woman told us of her tales at sea, navigating the sapphire blue waters with just the guidance of a sextant and the stars. She spoke of the fish that could leap from the water and fly forever, and of the ship she longed to run to and stow aboard, to be reunited with the sea once more. She saw many islands in her time adrift, many were barren, no more than a place for coconuts to wash up and rot. But on one forgotten speck of the map,

there were children playing soccer, who swarmed the woman and asked her to join, in a language she had never heard before. She played with them and learned to speak their tongue, only to learn on the night she left that they could all speak fluent English. The children told her goodbye after they danced at the feast, just as generations of their ancestors had, to wish good luck and fair winds to wayward travelers, in a way that transcended words.

Tired of playing cards in the cabin, the rest of the group soon returned to gather in the warmth of the campfire. I took the opportunity to slip away - One day I hope I will feel as though I can return to that campfire, listen to their stories, wait for the conversation to lull, and then bowl over the group with some spectacle I had experienced. But for now, I just go to sleep, hoping to dream that I am a sailor. Instead, waking up in a cold sweat, with a goat’s cry ringing in my ears.