



Because the Road Rises to Meet Their Feet

by Anne Valley-Fox

Our driver lifts his hands from the wheel to point out a group of refugees walking along the road in the warm night. “Did you see them?” His voice is rough and sad. “Every night a hundred more land on our shores in Turkish rafts. Mostly they come from Syria. They’re walking to Mytilene, hoping to cross to Athens. And then? They don’t know. Our own children are leaving Lesvos—here there are no jobs. The EU has Greece by the throat. What can we do? There is nothing we can do. And still they come, every night they come.”

Anne Valley-Fox has published four collections of poetry, most recently *How Shadows Are Bundled* (University of New Mexico Press, 2009). She is coeditor, with Ann Lacy, of five books of documents culled from the New Mexico Federal Writers' Project (Sunstone Press). See AnneValleyFox.com.

They walk in clusters of twenty or thirty along the
road's shoulder.
Hum of talk as we pass. A woman turns to a man, their laughter
strumming the dark like Spanish guitars.

July's full metallic moon spangles headscarves and hoodies,
the sable heads of small children carried in their arms.

How dark their joy!

Because of the bottomless sea.
Because landfall was cushioned with smooth pebbles.
Because the road rises to meet their feet.

Because they walk in the open with sons and daughters
and brothers.
Because they have honey and figs in their packs to feed
the children.

Because their neighbors are corpses.
Because bombs whistle as they fall.
Because all praise belongs to Allah.

Because blood darkens outside the body.
Because of Christ nailed to the cross in roadside shrines.
Because of the viper coiled in the solar plexus.

Each dawn one or two innkeepers greet the refugees with food
and water.
"I'm sorry," a woman says as she climbs off the raft.
"There's nothing we need," a man says, "—except your prayers."

Because of piled life jackets, plastic bottles, a child's pink
inner tube
abandoned on the shore. Because the dinghy
is already deflating.

Young men call out Hello!—not Yassou!—as we pass on the
road by the sea.
They can tell by my walk, my easy assumption of turf and air,
I come from America.

Because there is no safe harbor. Because we are all on our way.

Sun melts the back of my heart as I climb the olive-studded hill
to the yoga hall.
Mats float like musical notes on the polished floor.

Racket of mating cicadas, just outside the window, pushed
in on a breeze—
the ribbons of my teacher's voice come undone.

Late in the day I bob in the sea, instinctively keeping clear
of the channel
where Turkish rafts, sagging with human cargo,
cross the dark water.

Sun sinks low in the old pine winging between the sea and my
balcony.
Three crows swoop to the field where eight goats graze.

All night I feel the sea on its soft wheels rolling towards us.

Because birds puncture the dark with their bright song.
Because sky
ricochets sapphires off the Aegean.

Mid-afternoon when I go into town I pass a group of
refugees sprawled
on the ground at the bus stop under an awning. Now it's too hot
and they are too weary to smile.