
CATHERINE CANDANO

GREAT — GRANDFATHERS

*Long-ago there was a rich, rich man, who set forth to sail the seas, and he told a lot of lies
to all his many wives. -said the woodchip from Maria Helena of the Seas V-*

Later on I decided, this should be the story:

First, off the boat, name an island.

Go beyond the tedium of wetness and cold feet,
the hot breath of a lover and nights in the motherland.

You are seas from here, in flimsy vessels that splinter in years
without women. And while adrift, only one
warmth remains in relevance.

That name—morphed of many-armed celestial mothers
of seafarers. It made sense to cover the bases, didn't it.

Most naturally, it didn't occur to anyone

how wildly the priests of persuasion would
whisper while you lit the incense sticks, chanted and lost small
creatures overboard in the waves. Why did you not invoke,
the right patron of a lost cause, who would have saved your souls.

Reflexes then were arbitrary, mere muscle and cartilage,
prayers in salt-air to carved idols, left

anchored at port, mere finger exercises on the drift,
that was all. So you made yourself at home in the dampness
as you made love, slow erasures of mountain textures
—and so eventually an entire vocabulary
emerged, sleepers homespun on tongues, took root.

At the docks, new baggage in the hull surprised them;
no one wanted it, even as you all waited.

Even as you called out, in the names made up on the journey,
no one stood to claim us, threadbare, clean,
the lingering dampness masked the bedrock within us
that had been left behind with long-dead wives.