

THE NAUFRAGE PROJECT (Working Title) by Sonja Linden

Translated and adapted from the novel *Naufrage (Shipwreck)* by Vincent Delecroix

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EXTRACT 1

COASTGUARD

Sorry but I just wanted to make it clear that I do not differentiate, I do not think the life of a migrant is worth less than that of someone out on the water for pleasure or someone out fishing. I don't have opinions like that.

INTERROGATOR

You don't have any opinions about migrants?

COASTGUARD

No and I'm not supposed to, so it's a good thing. I'm not supposed to have opinions, because my job is to keep watch over maritime traffic and to co-ordinate help when needed. So I don't think I should be asked what I really think about these people, or rather this mania they have for throwing themselves into the water .

INTERROGATOR

Is that how you see it?

COASTGUARD

I can't send out dozens of boats, launches, patrol boats or 40 helicopters to save 40 boats at the same time, so you have to prioritise.

INTERROGATOR

Prioritise? And how do you prioritise?

COASTGUARD

By evaluating the situation. It's not a negligible part of my work, it's perhaps the most important. You have to triage people according to what they say, their words when they call you. So you can tell when someone really needs to be rescued and when someone can wait, because if you only went by their cries, by the trembling in their voices, by the lapping sound of the water, anyone hearing them would make rescue a priority. Cos really - I mean ask my colleague Julien, he'll tell you - it's really always the same person calling me all those nights.....

INTERROGATOR

The same person?

COASTGUARD

... because you've only just pulled him out of the water and he goes back in again, once, ten times, a hundred times; one night he gets pulled out of the water, out of this catastrophe, he's safe and sound, he maybe says thank you, and the next night, it's him again, calling, because he's there again. As though he hadn't learned his lesson, and he says "Please, please" and everyday we bring him back onto dry land, and every night he starts all over againlike this is going to go on till Judgement Day.

INTERROGATOR

You realise this is being recorded?

Silence.

COASTGUARD

Could I have some water please.

The Interrogator and her colleague exchange a look as he pours her some water

POLICE COLLEAGUE pours water (AMPLIFIED SOUND)

Enter JULIEN

JULIEN

All that giant heaving mass of water, going on forever. It's a leftover from the Flood.

COASTGUARD

Yeah?

JULIEN

Yuh, and what remains of the world are the ruins of the Creation, but the sea of the Flood is still there, eroding and swallowing pieces of the world. We spend our nights and days up here watching all the traffic, the ships and the cargo boats and the liners, going back and forth and back and forth and we have this illusion that we control everything and that the world is ordered, but beneath the surface is chaos, an archaic chaos. And it's not God who reigns over it, oh no, it's Leviathon, that most ancient of creatures. It never sleeps and will not rest till the end of time, and every now and then it comes back and rises to the surface and grabs at random.

SOUND:

Fade up of ambient noise from the maritime surveillance post, interspersed with distress calls coming in on whats app.

COASTGUARD

You and your books.

JULIEN

They procure some necessary tranquillity for the soul.

COASTGUARD

That is SO Julien.

JULIEN

It's true though. We need that in this job.

COASTGUARD

I don't know how you can have your eyes in two places at once, though. It's out there you should be focussing.

JULIEN

My reading matches perfectly with 'out there' as a matter of fact, it's about the misery of mankind and that matches exactly what we have in front of us.

COASTGUARD

Just don't let Michel catch you reading again. He's on duty tonight. He thinks you're a bad influence on us lesser mortals.

JULIEN

Keep an eye out for me then.

COASTGUARD

I'm not your bloody lackey!

JULIEN

All right all right, I thought we were mates.

COASTGUARD

Yeah OK.

Beat

COASTGUARD

(watching Julien still reading) We're supposed to be sharing this shift you know.

JULIEN

I'm watching. I can see what's going on in my patch. Nihil. [pron:'KNEE-hill']

COASTGUARD

What?

JULIEN

It means 'nothing'. In Latin.

COASTGUARD

All right clever clogs. What you reading this time? Not Pascal again. I know, don't tell me, he's your 'favourite philosopher'. "When I have occasionally set myself to consider the different distractions of men, I have discovered that all the unhappiness of humanity derives from just one thing: that they cannot sit quietly in their own chamber."

INTERROGATOR

Excuse me?!?

COASTGUARD

Pascal, Blaise Pascal. 17th century philosopher.

INTERROGATOR

Yes I know who Pascal is. But what kind of an answer is that! I mean do you think quoting Pascal is helpful in your situation, is helping you in any way?

COASTGUARD

Well I just arrived at the end of a long chain, at the moment when it was already too late, so for me, the only question worth asking is "Why do all these men, women and children drown on all these nights in the English Channel or the Mediterranean?" It's not in the Channel their lives got wrecked, that started when they left their chambers, their rooms, their homes. Perhaps it even started when they got it stuffed

in their heads that life would be better somewhere else , when they started wanting supermarkets and family allowances .

The INTERROGATOR exchanges a look with her colleague.

COASTGUARD

And why? Because we chased them out of their chambers, their rooms, because we destroyed their rooms.

So then who is it that drowns them? Who chases them, who disperses them across the surface of the earth, pushes them into the sea where they disappear like dust that people shake off their clothes, what gigantic storm rises up I don't know where from behind them, or what gigantic sweep of a broom in Africa, in Bangladesh, in Afghanistan? At any rate it's not me holding the broom, and pushing them across the surface of the earth before throwing them into the dustbin of the Channel. Who is asking them to leave? Not me at any rate.

EXTRACT 2

COASTGUARD

You seem to think I came here to assuage my tortured conscience or something, hoping for some kind of absolution, or maybe that I've come here so as not to hang myself in my garage.....

INTERROGATOR

Is that something you've been considering then?

COASTGUARD

.....Cry, cry, cry about their misery and their swallowed up dreams? Cry with them and about them - the little girl's anorak , her mother's shoes - which would for sure not have saved them but at any rate, apparently, would have saved me, would have saved my soul.

INTERROGATOR

So you still don't see what's wrong? You can't see what's evil in all this?

COASTGUARD

I see it very well because evil is right there in front of me. I see it everyday and specially at night, because night is the garment it wears, a black garment without stars. It's right there under my nose, how do you want me not to see it? Because evil is the sea. The sea mixed up with the night. She is universal and monstrous.

Beat

I used to love the sea, I was born there, on the coast, with the sea in my eyes and my nose, I was warned that she was dangerous, since she's the only thing that has never been overpowered in 30 million years, no-one has ever conquered her, because she is not like a territory or a field, she's the opposite. Every sailor fears the sea

(overlap) /unless he's a complete moron.

INTERROGATOR

/Unless he's a complete moron.

Beat as they mirror each other

EXTRACT 3

The CALLING MAN taps out the French number

The CALLING MAN

Hello? Please can you help us!

The COASTGUARD is now forced to relive the memory of that night, with the CALLING MAN insisting on her delivering her response again and again.

COASTGUARD

You are in English waters.

THE CALLING MAN

Speak louder.

COASTGUARD

You are in English waters.

THE CALLING MAN

I can't hear you.

COASTGUARD

Help is coming.

THE CALLING MAN

I can't hear you.

COASTGUARD

Calm down.

THE CALLING MAN

I can't hear you

COASTGUARD

Calm down. I've told you. Help is coming.

THE CALLING MAN

I can't hear you.

COASTGUARD

I never asked you to leave.

THE CALLING MAN

(gives her a look)

COASTGUARD

You don't understand, you won't be saved.

EXTRACT 4

COASTGUARD

(Out to audience) Am I really alone on this shore? Is it really just me, all on my own?

That would suit every body but don't believe it, there are others as well, quite a crowd, thousands, millions of people. Even my father is there, behind his lunch table, with his nice smile. The whole world is there, the entire world in fact. If I turned round, I would see all of you, installed on your sofas on the beach, on your chaise- longues, in your offices, looking without looking, while I'm on watch like an idiot, and afterwards, once the spectacle, the show is over, excoriating that "It's scandalous," "It's revolting".

However that night I didn't see anyone throw themselves into the water to come to someone's aid, not one person offered to blow up the dinghy with their little lungs. But when it comes to vociferating and treating others like monsters, for that the whole world has enough breath.

There is no shipwreck without spectators. Without leaving your home, everyone's at the spectacle. And the show is permanent, it takes place every day, every night, even on public holidays, even when we're doing something else, we're all still spectators of shipwrecks. Blind spectators and a spectacle for the blind. I'm the only one with the opera glasses, who sees and who hears and who replies. And the blind person who now spits on me while finishing his copious lunch with his colleagues before going back to his little office, I ask him: that guy who sleeps on a piece of cardboard outside your building, you bastard, you can't see him either? Yet he's struggling in the same way on that hard pavement, and is going under in the same way. He's not dozens of kilometres away in the middle of the sea, though and it's quite easy to get his geo-location: he's at the end of your shoe. So are you going to send him help, or is it up to me again?

You would have wanted me to say, I know perfectly well, you would have wanted me to say, "You won't die, I will save you". You would have wanted me just to say, at least say, only say it, so that everyone can hear, that the whole world can hear their own voice in mine in these recordings, the voice of someone saying: I'll save you, so that humanity will be reassured, so that humanity doesn't doubt her humanity and so she won't come to suspect what she has become, that is to say someone like me, like what I have become. But I didn't say it. I didn't say: You won't die, I will save you.

But it's stupid that now, with the water up to my waist, I don't know any more whether it's me who said it or if it was him, with his mouth full of sea water, and holding his dead phone up over his head, which was going under, as the communication was cut and I couldn't hear any more, as I hadn't wanted to hear any more, as I had heard without hearing

Me saying to him

Him saying to me

THE CALLING MAN

You're not hearing me, you won't be saved.

THE END