

THE MILLIHELEN

Unit for measuring beauty. One millibelen is the amount of beauty that will launch exactly one ship.

—urbandictionary.com

Everyone knows about the beauty that launches
a thousand ships. Her hair unfurls like a flag
and the navy, inflamed, will follow that flag until
everyone is dead. There is power in that. We know.

But what do we know about the power of the other,
the one that launches *exactly one ship*?
And what do we know of that one ship? It goes without
kettledrums or cannon fire, without Achilles or Odysseus,
without the blessings of the Gods, or even their scorn.
No one notices. No epic poem will boast of its bravery;
in fact, as it sails from the choked harbor, it sails
straight out of history and into a night so unknowable,
not even the blind eyes of Homer can guess where it will land.

It would have been easier to stay with the fleet.
There's confidence in numbers. Consider the armada
of stars as they burn heaven above us,
so certain as they scorch their way through infinity.
Why should they bother to track a single vessel
among all the waves? I'll tell you.

In the story that launches a thousand ships, beauty
is a destination, something to crash toward.
In the story that launches only one, there is no destination.
Beauty was there, among the wharves, with her
simple scarves at the beginning.
A sailor and his joy stepped from the pier and into
the fragile boat together. Why was there only one?
Because you, dear, said to the night, *I don't care*
about the rest. And I said, *Neither do I*.
And then the harbor was behind us.

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