

## *Shipwreck Survivors March Along the Coastline*

TIMOTHY MARTIN

Three days, twelve days, a lifetime.  
To starboard, the sea that didn't bury us.  
To port, a land that won't let us pierce it.  
Sand beats our shoes with microscopic hammers  
until the leather flies in strips. The sun  
doesn't search hard enough for clouds to hide it.  
We take turns carrying the child on our backs.

For food, cousins of plums that hang on bushes  
like the crooked scarecrows of beetles.  
Cook samples one and expires on the spot.  
Meanwhile, crimson figs stand in trees  
whose trunks grow an assortment of cutlery.  
The birds that seem to have no song  
eat these and stare.

For water, inland springs...only half a day's march.  
One of us throws his face down into them,  
does not rise. Perhaps he is trying to catch  
a gudgeon with his teeth. Perhaps he will;  
we leave him to his luck.

At night, we make fires to keep back  
the animals that snarl or laugh from the brush,  
or both. We throw on buttons, fallen teeth,  
the ship's log, sextant, stewpot.  
To atone for the lack of wood, the carpenter  
throws himself on.

Day sixteen: a sail on the horizon.  
We hoist the child to our shoulders, who  
tries to do a dance. The sail immediately  
slips away, as if it's seen better.  
That afternoon, mollusks are exposed  
by the tide. When we lunge, they  
burrow into the sand like the tongues  
of repentant gossips. We strike at the beach,  
whose enormous face cannot feel it.

We march. No crossroads, no reckoning, no end.  
The child is dead, but we have forgotten  
how not to carry him. The captain  
walks into the water until he can float his hat.  
The second mate dashes himself on the rocks.  
Soon it's just the bosun and I. He climbs  
invisible rigging to the sky,  
reaches a hand for me to follow him.