

The only way is diving eyeball first into day
and butterfly stroking through it.

To kick and kick until we forget which way is up, we are wave battered
and sometimes swallowed by great whales or carried off in pieces
by bottlenosed dolphins, blowfish, or, adding insult to injury,
a school of shamelessly floppy-shoed clown fish.

Waterlogged and wheezing, we have no choice but to breaststroke into brilliance
as though sea salt didn't sting and carnivorous anemones
didn't subsist on our crumbling skin. As if lungs didn't deflate with every exhale
until they exhaust themselves, and our bones were more than future sea stones
worn smooth by waves, our eyes as eternal as regenerating jellyfish and luminescent
as phosphorous. As if our reflections could stare back without us, unrippled by wind.

While the seaweed ballet sways on
a thousand little losses nibble at the feet
eat their way through skin
abscond with our toes and start on the shins.

And so I learned to save myself
like a woman on the Titanic, or a child. Sent to sea
clinging from one life raft to the next and dwarfed
by all that's gone down.
As if there was anything I could do.

I learned kayaking off Catalina,
dollar bills and camera encased in plastic sandwich bags,
that falls will happen and before the day is through
wet socks will cling to my feet like sea slugs.
I learned to keep my valuables dry

and for all the sinking ships I've abandoned
the body is the true Titanic.
The survivors surviving in shifts, thankful for a second chance
while the men and the old give up their seats,
the legs or the lungs going first, the valiant blood vessels,
the iron in the ichor, the strength in the bones, the memory,
the dexterity in the fingers carried off by schools of fish,
the temerity in the legs listless on the ocean floor,
lifelessly pulled by tide, sea watered senseless,
while the heart, wrapped in plastic sandwich bags,
beating and kicking wildly, will cling to the very last life raft.

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Ana Reyes

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Ana Reyes was born at home, in what once was a Texas brothel. She has favored cowboy boots ever since. Her work has been described as "life raft poetry," which she takes as a compliment. She resides in Los Angeles and was recently featured on the World Wide Word Radio Network.