



Forty-five paces

By Seoyon Kim and Jacquelyn Song

Mom's aloft
amidst the sea
watching waves wash
over her country;
glistening shores
bigger, bigger before her eyes
a kicked-back window seat thrumming
With wind in the wing
a shining blade, splitting water and sky
Pieces of a world left behind dropping into sea
swallowed, unseen

It once took her forty-five paces to get from one blue horizon to the other
when she was younger;
Before the small fish swirling 'round her ankles in shallow water,
The ground two paces away,
learned to skip through the waves
and leave without return;
A prolonged exercise in patience;
contorting themselves in gorgeous revolutions forever below
clear water, never disturbing
the surface
how simple it was, to wrap them all up in a net
every single one accounted for

She's come to appreciate it—
the finality, the warmth, the solid weight of those kinds of things,
now, too far removed from when and where it mattered
contemplating forever a stagnant surface:
there's a time and place for catch and release, she knows—
realized, then, all the fish she'll ever know wouldn't satisfy
Her sweaty palms
that she might climb from these revolving waters,
shoot across the sea, some perpetual trajectory
forward and forward and forward
follow the beasties upstream...
Let yearnings turn to years

And here the years sit
lingering, loitering
by the window seat, counting,
Forty five paces from one blue horizon to another,
Soaring circles 'round a cyclical world
And what do you have to show for it?
a million maritime flirtations of moon and sun and sea
Down the drain for a new moon and new sun and new sea...

A lifetime of you-never-knows
In a succession of forty five lifetimes ago
Desiring, again
The shortest path; to drive,
drive, split a path straight through the crests of the watertops
up and away until you can see no
more and maybe then you will finally know peace but

Futility doesn't sting as it used to
Those fish spiraling around her ankles
Mapped their own paths through the still
and perhaps it was greater than she'd perceived
Mapping, *home, how to get there*, over and over again
Each time unwaveringly
Take faith by the hand, trace these lines that crawl
through the muck of it all—three, four paces away,
and let it be known!
the curve of the plane is longer than its shortest path
so
Show me, again and again
Something to believe in

In another forty five paces,
She'll watch the world recede into
Wisps and waves and wisps
Small, scattered specks
Lights flecked like fish through looming shadows
The unknowing glimmers of light, reflecting,
Of land, or sea, or was that land
And where will she land
And where will she start
And how many paces lie between

Note: Seoyon Kim, RI Youth Poetry Ambassador and Jacquelyn Song, RI Deputy Youth Poetry Ambassador were commissioned by Rhode Island Humanities to co-create this poem for the 2024 National Humanities Conference in Providence, RI in response to the theme: *Making Waves, Navigating Currents of Change*. Performed by Seoyon Kim, November 14, 2024. Former RI Poet Laureate Tina Cane created the [Rhode Island Youth Poetry Ambassador Program](#) in partnership with the RI Center for the Book. The National Humanities Conference is co-produced annually by the Federation of State Humanities Councils and the National Humanities Alliance.