

## STEERAGE

Six apples my mother bought on the pier and wrapped in her shawl with things we'd need every day.  
The things that we didn't—three linen napkins, a handful of silver spoons my mother got from her mother when she married—these we kept in a hamper with handles we'd schlepped up the steep plank.  
Steerage stank, even before we went down iron stairs with no railing. Babies crying.  
We looked back to the top of the stairs: a woman stood, looking down, frozen... *veh*, smells of stale seawater and piss, animals and human sweat. *Gehennna* this woman cried. But the crowd pushed behind her and she went down with the rest. Down there, at first, who knew where to go the toilet, if there would be water?  
In a corner, on blankets, we made house: here, bundles to lean against, there, to keep garlic and bread, sausages smelling of garlic, and just here, clean clothes to change into, as if clothes could make order.  
At night I'd remember: in the market square Feter Joshua held me and said he would come—  
in six months, no more. He talked to make order, he said what he hoped as if God gave us life as we want it. But order is like houses children weave from grasses, twigs and leaves.

The first morning, for breakfast, my mother and I shared an apple. I closed my eyes, and saw the strong tower. I chewed as long as I could for the sweetness. When the ship rocked, and over the thumping of engines the babies were crying and women and men. crying to God for His mercy, I imagined America—Liberty like a tower, her torch, father in a strong house, order. I said over and over,

*the Lord  
is a strong tower  
the righteous run into it  
and are safe.*

Up on deck each day we went heavier, until nobody lifted their head up from steel plates of the deck

and grey winches. Nobody talked. We could not look at the sea  
or the dead sky  
above us. We hung between these. We would be here always.