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The Black Ship translated by K. H. Anton

Pablo Antonio Cuadra

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The Black Ship

Cifar, in his sleep, heard the cries and the howling conch horn in dawn's fog. He watched the ship —motionless— still set in the waves.

“If you hear in night's dark half, in the deep waters, the shouts asking about the harbor: turn the rudder and flee.”

Cut in the froth, the dark and woodbored hull, (“Sailor!” they shouted) the riggings and cordage torn and swinging, and the sails black and rotten. (“Sailor!”) Standing up, Cifar grasped the mast.

“If the moon lights up their ashen and bearded miens If they tell you: 'Sailor, where are going?' If they beseech you: 'Sailor, show us The harbor's way,' Turn the rudder and flee.”

Long ago they weighed anchor Long centuries ago they have sailed in the sleep.

They are your own questions lost in time.

Pablo Antonio Cuadra

Translated from the Spanish by K. H. Anton