

ON THE WAY TO SINGAPORE

Eric Pankey

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This kind of fear is not new to me.
One night on the island trip, I woke
to a breeze of dust and mosquitoes.
The moon, liquid and turquoise, reflecting
on the surface of Lake Baikal,
lit the tall grass along the paths
the reindeer sleighs cut into the woods.
I had heard such paths into the forest
when overgrown at the end of spring
might lead to an illegal still
or the encampment of escaped convicts.
I searched for a long while in my bag
for a pocket-knife I swore I had packed
until I was tired again and slept.
Tonight it is easy to imagine
how dark the sea gets beneath the ship
and how carefully a weight might drift
to the soft silt and sediment.
I have to use a handkerchief
all the time now; my cough has begun.
In the evenings, I feel feverish.
We have buried two bodies at sea.
When you see a corpse sewn in canvas,
hurtled with a slow somersault
into the water you remember just how deep
the water grows beneath the ship,
you begin to feel afraid,
and you get the idea that you too
will die and be thrown into the sea.