

It's still dark when I reach the strand. A street lamp sheds light on the path leading through the dunes and casts a bright cone onto the sand. Only when I leave it, do my eyes begin to separate earth and sky and I hear the rushing of the waves. I can make out the river running to the sea by its flow and I wade into it. Where the waves on the surface turn humpy the water is deeper. I expect it to wash over the rim of my wellies and run with a chill into my socks. But I'm lucky today, only a few splashes. The wet coldness on my legs vanishes after a few steps. The dog has disappeared into the darkness. Now and then I hear his paws on the pebbles that have accumulated at the foot of the dunes, and I know, that if I stood still, his shadow would emerge from the night and run to me over the somewhat lighter sand, although I didn't call him. A kind of confidence washes over me when he spins around me before disappearing into the dark again.

The city in the south is only a thin chain of uneven lights. Further out there is a red flashing, a lighthouse invisible by day. Seagulls screech unseen in the dark. It is said they imitate the cries of the drowning. The shape of the dunes slowly standing out against the sky is familiar to me. At the height of the little hill, we turn back the same as every day. Only now I notice the icy breeze from the north. It creeps under my hood and I pull the shawl closer around my neck. Head bowed I trudge back like a polar explorer searching in snow and ice for a place only to be distinguished by its coordinates from its surroundings.

The river flows faster when I cross it again but it's not as deep anymore. The tide is going out. In the light cone of the street lamp, I remember stumbling over a plastic bucket here some days ago and I lift my feet higher. The dog trots beside me.

**flotsam, noun**

- 1 : floating wreckage of a ship or its cargo  
 2 a : a floating population (as of emigrants or castaways)  
 b : miscellaneous or unimportant material  
 c : debris, remains

Now she remembers the morning they arrived like a beginning, but then it was the end of a journey. They were exhausted from leaving behind what they knew, and a grey warm drizzle filled the air. It clung to their faces.

The ground felt solid. Maybe she was a little bit disappointed to lose the lightness under her feet, the illusion of drifting. It was not important, he said, and she believed him. Being together, she thought, would have a whole new meaning here.

It was too dark to see the shore, too early to look for shelter. Maybe there were birds in the air calling them by unfamiliar names. Unlike flotsam, jetsam means debris that was deliberately thrown overboard, from a ship in distress for instance, to lighten the load, and once in the water, anybody can claim it. The farewell already started to merge into a story from a world as alien as the one they were facing. Surely it is the current that carries flotsam and jetsam in certain directions, deposits them side by side on a shore. But at the time she didn't have any doubts that it was meant to be.

