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Unseen currents moved the ferry diagonally towards the other side of the Narrows of the Hellespont; towards the Dardanelles and the site of Gallipoli. The sea was indigo blue, moving ceaselessly beneath a net of foam. I had boarded the boat in Çannukale, built near the site of the ancient city of Abydos not far from the site of Troy, on the Anatolian side of the Hellespont. That Greek idealist Lord Byron, fully aware of the poetic connotations of this place, swam the swift flowing strait successfully, a channel notorious for rips.

At dusk the promenade of the town of Çannukale was lit up, with people walking up and down on the edge of the sea, looking at the fishing boats; bits of music and voices floated. The car ferry to the other side went back and forth every hour. The sea, clear and transparent close up, was a sheet of silvered green in the distance as the light faded—people were sitting and talking in a café, children playing, a pack of dogs wandering past, a pregnant cat stretched out on the still warm stone of the sea wall; icecream carts, a man selling balloons. A little further on an old mine-layer, a metal ship the 'Nusrat' was set up as a memorial to the war of 1915. I had sat beside it and drawn the town, once Sestos, on the opposite shore, with its white minarets and odd heart-shaped fort (the story was that the architect was in love, and the shape he built was to persuade his beloved.)

No one has bridged the Hellespont since Harpalus, a Greek mathematician from Samos, devised an extraordinary combination of a suspension and pontoon bridge for Xerxes the Persian king as he prepared to invade Greece in the fifth century BC. The construction of the two bridges was dependant on woven cables one and a half kilometres long of flax and papyrus. Six of these woven cables were suspended from strong land posts over warships anchored in the fast current, and twisted taut. Over the cables a roadway of planks, brushwood and earth was laid above the warships—more than six hundred of them. Although the exact number of Xerxes'

forces is not known, hundreds of thousands of men and supplies from all over Asia crossed—Herodotus proposed five million.

Later, after the the Persians had been defeated on land and sea, the Greek general Xanthippus found the great cables of linen and papyrus which had suspended the bridge and carried them off as marvels to be dedicated in temples at Delphi and Athens. In fact, I thought, if cast into bronze, those thick cables would have looked very similar to the bronze serpent column in Istanbul, which still stands as a vertical bronze of twisted spiral ropes, the bodies of two entwined serpents. Brought to Constantinople by Justinian as booty from abandoned Delphi, it was part of the treasure from all over the collapsing empire that contributed to the building of Hagia Sophia, nearly a thousand years after Xerxes. Perhaps there was a faint textile memory in that powerful spiral, the bridging rope that brought the Persians so miraculously across the Hellespont. Carried back to Constantinople, this truncated bronze, worn with memory, seemed an unconscious sign of joining, of the broken ties and irresistible attraction between Europe and Asia.

Gallipoli is an extreme place, despite the calm beauty of the panoramic vista of sea and cliffs. The aura of human dread, a miasma of memory still hung over the peninsula. The Turkish guide put his hand on my shoulder as we sat on deck in the evening breeze, returning by ferry to Çannukale. He said 'Each day brings a new day, fresh changes.' I felt deeply shaken and upset as we churned across the narrow stretch of water, seemingly smooth but torn with inner currents. I wept.

A waning moon hung white in the sky just above the horizon throughout the journey back.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Diana Wood Conroy.