



Source: Steven Erlanger, 'Israel hints at talks with Hamas to ease deadlock', *New York Times*, Reuters, AP in *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 20/12/07.

Tags: [water](#), [animals](#), [dreams](#)

Writer/s: Nikos Papastergiadis

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

And then the dolphin from the island of Crete whispered to her long friend, 'Do you remember when the seas rushed out from the straits?' He paused, scratched the grey bristles on his chin and smiled. 'That was a long time ago.' The salt had caked up on the surface of the sea bed. The small fish that could not escape in time lay rotting in the sun. And for many years everyone who had lived by the sea fled inland. Those tribes that had kept apart were now forced to live side by side, and even learn to talk to each other. It was not easy. How does the fisherman talk to the hunter? Nomads and sailors may have something in common, they stare at the stars with love and protection, but they also have their own rhythms of movement and destination.

So in the beginning it was a matter of finding their own paths and boundaries. For so long the sea was one boundary. It marked where one life began and another ended. After it suddenly left there was confusion. The cities of stone built by merchants began to crumble. Was it a curse or a test? A final judgement or an exercise in endurance? There was no sign of how long it would last or if there was ever any possibility of going back. This uncertainty made the conversation all the more difficult. Are we guests or rivals? Should we help these strangers or eliminate them? Are they here for a short time, or have they come to stay for ever? Will there be room for both of us, or will this mean that one of us must perish?

These questions were on everyone's mind and it was not long before they were being spoken. Some people did not hesitate to name their enemy, others waited because they were afraid, or too polite, but soon it was a chorus of discontent. This noise filled the valleys and all the tribes retreated from each other. But in this retreat there was also a preparation. There were many who shouted that this was an invasion. That their homes, wives and children would be lost forever. And if they did not stand up for the fight now, then they would all be killed in the night.

Among the nomads and the sailors there were some who had looked at each other before. They did not know each other's name. They had not spoken or even met before. They were strangers like everyone else. But yet, they knew each other a little. Not much, but enough to pause with calm and pleasure at the moment of their encounter. They could see that sure it was going to be difficult, but they remembered that they could find solutions to their problems. Sometimes they thought that by sitting together along the wall or a ridge that they could hear each other speak, even when not a word was spoken. So how did this familiarity come to be?

'It was in dreams', said the dolphin. 'Dreams are the seeds of stories', she said. And then the old fisherman lifted his

hat and scratched his sweaty head and added, 'Yes, and in stories we let our wonder and curiosity out'. He told the story of a friend.

'They would gather every evening after work. Mostly very tired and grumpy but still they would stop for a while to be together. Often they said nothing to each other. It was very good to know that they were just together. After a little while they would go home and sleep. Sometimes they would laugh and argue. But they did not become friends because they knew how to laugh and argue together. They became friends long before that. It happened in that instant in which they looked in each other's eyes and thought to themselves that they could meet again and even look forward to just that. A silence which was brief but long. It had just arrived but it felt that it was always there.

'These sailors and nomads did know much about each other. Sometimes they looked at each other's faces and saw little differences, the shape of their noses, the color of their eyes. Often they thought he looked like an uncle. They saw that they had different habits for cooking, cleaning and praying. But they did not believe one was better or worse. The strange thing about these strangers is that they seemed like people they once knew. Maybe they had met, but that was impossible. This feeling made them wonder about the time they may have spent before they could remember.

'When the friends went home and tried to explain this to their family, their children stared and giggled. Others were suspicious. Some thought they were being foolish but they also smiled. Not everyone believed you could ever be a friend with a stranger. They thought that it was natural to only want to be with the people that you are with. But the old man knew that this was no answer and that it was never like that in the past, and it could never be like that for very long. The stranger always came and sometimes they came first in dreams.'

The dolphin knew how this story went. She left the sea when the water had rushed out. She managed to find her way to a big ocean, where the water was darker and colder. The fish were fatter and easier to catch, but this did not make her feel better. She longed for the warm waters and the rocks. 'The light. That is what I miss', she kept saying to her friends. She never knew that one day the sea would rush back in and fill the shallow land from Spain to Palestine. When it did it was even saltier and so floated with a lightness that made the homecoming all the sweeter. And it made everything very blue.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Nikos Papastergiadis.*