

Even the Word Obstacle is an Obstacle

Alison Luterman

Try to love everything that gets in your way:
the Chinese women in flowered bathing caps
murmuring together in Mandarin, doing leg exercises in your lane
while you execute thirty-six furious laps,
one for every item on your to-do list.
The heavy-bellied man who goes thrashing through the water
like a horse with a harpoon stuck in its side,
whose breathless tsunamis rock you from your course.
Teachers all. Learn to be small
and swim through obstacles like a minnow
without grudges or memory. Dart
toward your goal, sperm to egg. Thinking Obstacle
is another obstacle. Try to love the teenage girl
idly lounging against the ladder, showing off her new tattoo:
Cette vie est la mienne, This life is mine,
in thick blue-black letters on her ivory instep.
Be glad she'll have that to look at all her life,
and keep going, keep going. Swim by an uncle
in the lane next to yours who is teaching his nephew
how to hold his breath underwater,
even though kids aren't allowed at this hour. Someday,
years from now, this boy
who is kicking and flailing in the exact place
you want to touch and turn
will be a young man, at a wedding on a boat
raising his champagne glass in a toast
when a huge wave hits, washing everyone overboard.
He'll come up coughing and spitting like he is now,
but he'll come up like a cork,
alive. So your moment
of impatience must bow in service to a larger story,
because if something is in your way it is
going your way, the way
of all beings; towards darkness, towards light.