

## ANATOMY OF A WAVE

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It had everything and nothing to do  
with mettle  
    fire before flint before

*How many bodies will a lead ball move  
    through?*

*How many can one stand in a row?*

When the tide went out, they had nowhere to run  
    but that was many years ago, and if they have not died they live  
happily still.

    But you and I know that's not how the story goes.

I wake more ghosts each morning:  
    when I was born my mother and father  
    planted a tree west of the garden.

    We ripped it out when I left home—  
    its roots never took,  
    its limbs harbored mold in the sticky east wind.

We used to think a weak spine  
was inherited  
    but consider the shark  
    how some will stop swimming  
    in their sleep.

How does the forecast change?

We make weather with our teeth.  
Why should I be afraid of the sea?  
Let the toothed skin lie  
    if it asks too many bones.

Wait for the waves  
    to start skipping,

Tie down the drifters and stretch the stomach before the fall.

*Don't turn your back on the water.*

What else grows on an island

without trees?

*The need to make  
makes body—*

Others have seen water act this way before,  
it was many years ago,  
how many bodies a single wave can carry,  
how many relatives, casually.

They tied their boats to the tops of trees  
so the water wouldn't lose them,  
so the story goes.

Some say it was a boat that killed them, Vasiley and Akelina. Bad heart, *traumatized*. Accidentally.  
I'm telling you what happens. Nikifor missed the boat.

Imagine what it might be like  
when the waters come  
to be a fish  
to be twelve strong, to be six, two hundred, or forty  
sharks swimming toward you—