El hombre sirena

Estoy sentada en el bar del puerto, esperando a Daniel, cuando veo al hombre sirena mirarme desde el muelle. Está sobre la primera columna de hormigón, donde el agua todavía no llega a la playa, a unos cincuenta metros. Tardo en reconocerlo, en entender qué es exactamente, tan hombre de la cintura para arriba, tan sirena de la cintura para abajo. Mira hacia un lado, después tranquilamente hacia el otro, y al fin vuelve a mirar hacia acá. Mi primer impulso es pararme. Pero sé que el Tano, el dueño del bar, es amigo de Daniel, y me vigila desde la barra. Disimulo buscando entre las cosas de la mesa la cuenta del café, como si de un momento a otro hubiera optado por irme. El Tano se acerca para ver que todo esté bien, insiste en que debo quedarme, que Daniel ya debe estar por llegar, que debo esperar. Le digo que se quede tranquilo, que enseguida vuelvo. Dejo cinco pesos sobre la mesa, tomo mi cartera y salgo. No tengo un plan para el hombre sirena, simplemente dejo el bar y camino en su dirección. Contra la idea que se tiene de las sirenas, hermosas y bronceadas, éste no solo es del otro sexo sino que es bastante pálido. Pero macizo, musculoso. Cuando me ve se cruza de brazos —las manos bajo las axilas, los pulgares hacia arriba—, y sonríe.

muelle – pier

hormigón – concrete

cintura – waist

macizo - solid

axilas – armpits

pulgares - thumbs

The Merman

I’m sitting at the bar in the port, waiting for Daniel, when I see the merman look at me from the pier. He’s sitting on the first concrete column, where the water is deeper and the beach hasn’t begun, some fifty yards out. It takes me a minute to realize what I’m seeing, what he is exactly: such a man from the waist up, such a sea creature from the waist down. He looks to one side, then calmly to the other, and finally his eyes turn back to me. My first impulse is to stand up. But I know that Tano, the owner of the place, is a friend of Daniel’s, and he’s watching me from the bar. So instead I shift the things on the table around, looking for the bill for my coffee, as if from one moment to the next I’d decided to leave. Tano comes over to see if everything is okay, he insists I stay, that Daniel must be almost here and I have to wait. I tell him to take it easy, I’ll be right back. I leave five pesos on the table, pick up my purse, and leave. I don’t have a plan for the merman, I just leave the bar and walk in his direction. Contrary to the idea people have of mermaids, beautiful and tanned, not only is this one of the opposite sex, he’s also quite pale. But he’s solid, muscular. When he sees me, he crosses his arms —his hands under his armpits, thumbs up— and smiles.

Samanta Schweblin, “El hombre sirena”/ “The Merman”, *Pájaros en la boca y otros cuentos* (*Mouthful of Birds*, Trans. Megan McDowell [adapted]), 2017.

**Please note:** for the Spanish taster session, a translation is used alongside the original text. However, a translation would not be provided at interview. For in-person interviews, often students would have 30 mins to prepare the text with the help of a dictionary. In the last couple of years, some tutors have shared their screens and helped with any vocab the students might not know, but they do not give them a translation. Please also note that the text in this taster session is prose, but you could be given a poem at interview.