Photograph of a Boy by the Sea

Julie Rae Sen*
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The little boy with smooth olive skin
stands grinning gallantly at the edge of the water.
Thick black waves hang carelessly over deep dark eyes
that squint to focus as the sun beams down.
He holds out empty hands to the sea
as if to scoop up every drop of water
into pails
and take it all with him.
Only four years old,
he’s not been exposed to anything
beyond the family who shelters him,
beyond the wall he stands on,
beyond that ancient Bosphorus
he will grow up and leave someday.

Years later, his mother travels around the world
to see her grownup son, meet his new wife.
She packs childhood photos of her handsome boy,
who looks more like his father now.
She speaks to her new daughter in a foreign tongue:
*Developed in a distant land,*
*but printed in his destiny was you.*
The new bride nods with understanding.

She’s never soaked in the sun
or swallowed the salt of the Bosphorus Strait,
never felt the wind on that wall
where her husband stood as a child,
but she’s touched those empty hands reaching
to scoop up life, she’s carried buckets to his side
to hold all the water he can carry.

She hangs the beautiful boy on their refrigerator door and smiles.