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LAYLA MASCARENHAS

When Will The Boatman Come?

Do you really think we are alone?
It's pitch dark, can only imagine the silhouette of the land beyond.
There are lights there...
You'll find out when the boatman takes you across.

There's a faint sound of water lapping at the side of your canoe
As you shift your weight restlessly.
When am I going to die? You whine, repeatedly.
How should I know? Maybe you won't.

I can only keep you company
Till Fate decides your fate.
If you live, I take you home,
If you die, the boatman takes you home.

The hours stretch on inexorably,
My legs are hurting, the night is cold.
There's only place for you in the boat,
So I stand, holding your hand.

But I've heard that we are not alone
When the end is near,
That angels and saints,
Ancestors and friends hover around.

So, if your end is near,
I'm sure we're not alone.
If lightning were to light up the sky,
The whole motley crew would be revealed.

I'm sure they'd wing across to strew flowers and light crackers
As the boatman gently loops the rope
And draws you slowly to the distant shore,
Welcoming you with old pet-names that make you smile.

Mother, we've just got to wait,
You and I, in silent faith
That you won't be alone when the boatman comes,
And I let go of your hand.

BIO-NOTE

Layla Mascarenhas has worn many hats: daughter, student, wife, mother, college lecturer, daughter-in-law, musician, and researcher. Her doctoral research was on Children's Literature, and she continues researching and writing. She writes short fiction and poetry. She lives in Goa.

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