# The Map-Maker’s Tale *by Damen O’Brien*

She came in through the clatter of the doorway,

behind her the squalling storm like a wave’s black tongue

and in her hands a sheaf of maps and mildew

and franked and mothy deeds to lands

long washed out of the way by indifference and

the blue melt and the green gloss of the ice.

I had to tell her that I had no jurisdiction

below the greedy fingers of the highest tide,

that her father’s promises and titles had been drowned

when the islands had gone under and the shores

had climbed up the First World’s sneer to the hills.

The old lives that we followed have been overturned,

the lines we stood behind with our shields and swords

and told the world it could not take its shelter,

all overrun, all gone into a swallow and

the world’s poor wander where they will or not.

She cursed me as a whale might curse a hunter,

as a spear might curse the hand that flung it,

and took back those deeds, the wax and paper

which proved to be a poor seal to the water, to the

welling and washing of her ancestors, the salting of

her ancestors in their lost graves. She warned that

she went to treat with one who owns the water,

that on nights like this I should sit uneasy in my office

where all the lines of yes and no are tangled

and blur and twitch like so much compromise,

for the storm is blowing straight against my door

and it blows the tide behind it to heights before unknown.

She turned and left, her hair wild as the weather, and

where she’d stood, the brief puddle of her leaving

formed a map I have little power to decipher and none

to alter, and by the door, a single sequin scale.