



THAT
LIGHT
FEELING
UNDER
YOUR
FEET

POEMS
KAYLA
GEITZLER

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NEWEST PRESS 

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SATURNALIA OF THE SEAS

When the trumpet sounded everything
on earth was prepared
and Jehovah distributed the world
to Coca Cola, Inc., Anaconda,
Ford Motors, and other entities;
entailed tides and saltwater currents to SSL
marketing itself to the jubilant percussion
of steel drums and sunblock-slicked pleasure
of Calypso and dark rum, and when swelled
with the takeover of independent cruise lines,
demanded marine infrastructure and tithes
from the tourist-desperate ports of developing nations
where sweat-shop labourers long for the freedom
of the red smokestack conga line employing unregulated
overtime and tip skimming — but room and board, all
medical expenses paid — so experienced diasporics flock
from the South China Sea: slender bar staff females
swinging waist-length locks, male machinists, paint-splattered
sailors and disaffected galley workers grateful for toil —
and pale English-speakers lured by cash-paid earnings
cycle through Spas, Casinos and Duty Free shops —
the UK, True North, South Africa and the Eastern Block —
marginalized laissez-faire ants hustle, hustle, hustle
as obnoxious vacationers down cocktails with secret
extortionary fees, and after eat-all-you-can buffet,
belt out ear-numbing karaoke, serenading late nite
body gyrating discotheque affairs
under flags of convenience Saturnalia disembarks,
vessels brim-filled with souvenir-gluttled tourists,
Cadillac-cushioned backs turned from local sunsets,
from Indigenous eyes following their departure,
willing the return of fun ships to their paradisaal horizons.

CROWD CONTROL TRAINING

First thing
is my name.
Two simple syllables:
ran and deep.
Think of a man
who has run
great distances
over treacherous
waves and
tiger-angry tides
to this fleet.

Forget home: Saturnalia
is your family now.
In a year, when
your contract ends,
you will go back
to your village,
to the roosters
crowing through clusters
of night jasmine,
to the chime of ghanta
and clanging bicycle bells
winding through
the market, passed
clamouring beggars,
and old men at the well
drinking tumblers of tea.

Each day will pass
with an unbearable
slowness and
you will sleep poorly
on a bed that does
not rock — tortured
until you are once
again at sea.

But most importantly,
you are thinking
“Randeep, this will
never happen to me.”
But I have been here
seven years — Saturnalia
is now my mother
and brothers;
my wife visits me
less and less every year.
She fills my cabin
with flowers,
makes chapatti,
becomes cross
with my drinking
in the crew bar and leaves.

All I’m telling you is true —
one day you will forget
there hasn’t always been
a light feeling
underneath your feet.

CHUNKS AHOY

the Staff Mess has rules

1. Only Staff and Petty Officers allowed
2. The wise avoid the Mahi-Mahi
3. Follow the Milk Protocol:
 - a. Open carton
 - b. Sniff thoroughly
 - c. Shake for chunks

Casino dealers suffering doldrums
pass the word through the Romanians
and with the fish and the 2%:
actualize that Russian Roulette
scene in *The Deer Hunter* —
nothing's illegal in international waters.

the newly signed-on or hungover
learn the scoff and bolt choreography:
cardboard spout to lips
rapid gulp and swallow
cheek bulge
jazz hands protestation
dash for the oil drum garbage bin.

no point yelling
at the galley workers
— it's not their job
to read expiry dates
or keep the dairy cold —
but they will learn
what time you come to eat:
the buffet trays will be buoyant
the steam table lukewarm
heat lamps callously dark.

SURVIVAL TRAINING WITH COMMANDANT

Eat — *just this much a day and it will save you.* He points to his lips and says *Ahhhh* as though he were a pediatrician, not an officer refusing retirement. He places a ration fragment on my tongue. Tasteless, consistency of Scottish shortbread — crumbly, dry: choking.

The master pantomime uncurls my fingers, tips a viscous puddle into my palm. Callused phalanges against my cropped hair, he pushes against the back of my skull and my mouth meets the heel of my hand. Like this, my father once drank liquid from a cactus's heart in Pakistan — bitter succor.

Violent winds flog ears, rip at uniform collars and sleeves. He knuckles white drums of slumbering survival vessels. *What do you do when it won't open? Don't panic. Push it into the sea and jump. It's hydrostatic!* He exhales forcefully through closed teeth, mimicking a hissing whistling inflation. *Swim around a bit and when it pops, get in!*

This should be done in the aft pool, raft a cut-loose buoy we would stroke towards in clothes and cumbrous cubist lifejackets. One hand pinching his nose, Commandant paces an imaginary circumference on the deck, doing the crawl:

he points, *You — you —* gestures the photographers must shuffle with him, swim and board. *Tight in here, eh?* He pulls them into a huddle, shivers. *You are cold? Raise the raft floor.* He pumps his foot. *Too hot? Then deflate it and sit on the ocean.* He rolls on his seat bones. *I have sat on the ocean. When the terror leaves you, it is beautiful.*

But it could make you feel sick. So if you — Commandant retches and hung-over musicians echo him. *Yes! But always in the raft, or the sharks will eat you!* The ship turns sharply and fish take wing, a springing panicked beauty of blinding scales as we plough through the Gulf of Mexico.

Twenty knots, nearly stationary despite celerity; a physical illusion that sea travel is sedate. A tap on my shoulder. *Don't look at the fishies. Look at me, eh?* The only open-mouthed child at this life-or-death paper lantern show.

A dynamite tube in Commandant's fist. *You must use this to hail any vessel you see.* A magician, he strokes an imaginary flame — a hallowed beacon under the Casino Manager's nose: *This will burn you! Protect your face! Where does it go?!* And the pit boss grabs Commandant's arm, hoisting the inactive flare into the air. *There! The rescue operation has seen you — you are saved! You have all passed this program!*

ANYBODY'S MEAT THAT WANTS YA

minutes shy of 3 AM the worrisome
girls come staggering
for their bunks — giggling

in the loading area stiletto ankles faltering
to pointe slipper pivots, boneless waists bowing
and willow spines twisting in slender backs
mojito heavy legs stumbling from glissade
to *fondue* as vulnerable arms rise in lush halos
alerting the same two contractors —

danseurs ignobles will coerce
an ill-starred *pas de deux* —
a choreography overcoming *échappés*

they capture and lift ivory hips, tip and pour
each limp diva down the B-deck stairs
to the below-deck labyrinth battered by
engine noise and behind fire doors, soloists
unclothed: charcoal eyes and poppy mouths
smear against sheets lesser for once being white

and in perfect lack of light the discarded wake
to late-for-work mornings of crumpled sparkle
and tulle plucked from a stranger's cabin floor

**AFRAID OF NIGHTLY ENGINE FIRES
I SLEPT IN MY CLOTHES FOR SIX WEEKS**

until I went for supper
in the staff mess
and observed
the underwater welders'
waterlogged jowls,
the photoluminescent
curves of their biceps,
clavicles;
their slow-motion mastication
of mahi-mahi slipped half raw
under the heat lamps —
another difficult day
in fins,
compression,
dead-weight gas cylinders,
diving hats and circuit breakers,
magnesium flare
reflected in halo-like irises;
their expressions serene
from suturing in darkness,
nitrogen raptures tempered
from torn hull
seen only in glimpses.

CREW ONLY POOL PARTY

gone wrong. Nothing
finer than a Steiner!
two of Her Majesty's
own hairstylists

Emily and Jan
dressed in matching
nurses' costumes
thrown into the deep end

then ran shrieking
through guest areas
in only high heels
and g-strings

for two weeks
talk revolved
around how the Spa
Manager kept their jobs:

*Candi kneeled before
the hotel director
took off his shoes
and socks*

*hands slicked
with oil
her fragrant
knuckles pleased*

tense tendons
palms kissed
each swollen
hock.

REVENGE: BEST SERVED WITH GHOST SHIP

Early morning sleep perforated by thunderous feet running past cabin doors — someone crying *Sea day! Sea day!* in the hall cursing and shuffling, Steiners and Casino dealers straightening uniforms over booze-bloated bellies as they trip over Dancers raising Senor Frog glasses to work ethic.

Sleep-deprived Shoppies salute the day with *Fuck off!* and roll over until the Manager phones: *Get up to the Shops now, you twats!* and through anemic asbestos walls their disbelief unites in a boys' choir of stiff stretches and hangover tumbles from bunks; deodorant smeared under navy cruiseline polos as photophobic eyes squint out portholes — *Oh God, we're stationary.*

Sandbar-moored in the Mississippi's middle: a whole day late getting back to N'awlins — ten hours with angry flight-missed passengers; to feed them staff and crew meals rationed. Then, in the terminal, seven hundred would-be cruisers ugly with luggage; the midnight of our souls in their flushed faces.

Four days of the guests from hell: vomit in the stairwells, riots over souvenir maracas and 3XL T-shirts; stewards and bar staff weeping; despite Captain intervention even a food fight night of the Black and White Ball; so the av department played horror movies. Whenever anyone turned on the tv there was *Ghost Ship*, *The Poseidon Adventure*, *Open Water*, *Titanic*, *The Perfect Storm* — any scenario where seas swallowed vessels and everybody fucking drowned.