

THE TRUE ROMANCE

Shipping out for a fortnight again,
like the call of the wild long stripped of it's romantic veneer,
is answering the call of the skipper
with a time to meet at the pier.

Slipping out of the house to avoid
the heart-rending wails of a child
and a woman who shrugs off a cheerless farewell
and the reassurance you can't give her
after a sea-lagged short spell home,
a brief listless spell,
like the monthly installments of a husband on the never-never
struggling to settle to an alien world
before stepping back onboard to the queasy smell
of fish and engine oil and the greasy stench of industry
with the body-clock feeling the first uneasy kick out of kilter
before you even slip a rope,
where you just want to retch and spew because you are there,
like a fool, damned and drawn into a sordid love affair,
spew it up!
and let go of the heartaches, dreams, desires, hopes,
longings for home and the love of a woman you leave behind
and put your head down to prepare for the grind.

With the hum of the warps and the clatter of chain
and the creaks and the whine of the winch under strain
working and sleeping in the rattle and din
as the net rumbles out and it rumbles back in
gutting, boxing, and snatching an hours sleep between hauls
in the rancid fetid bunk where you crawl.

Eyes burning, heads swimming, minds dulled in disorientation
in the silences, resentments, frayed nerves and tempers,
jaded jokes, huffs and grumps
with the claustrophobia of cabin fever creeping in
and battered imbalanced bodies aching
from living on the balls of the feet,
leaning like gimbals into a relentless tumbling world,
never shaking off the sensation of just waking up,
that lurks like a flu in the bones
as muscles weakened by the constant crude sleep of forty winks
rudely hauled from damp bunks and the sweaty stink
recoil from damp boots, damp oilskins and damp gloves
stumbling glumly out on deck befuddled
into the rain, the howling gale, abjectly huddled
and staring hollow eyed at the ruthless heart of night in a shiver
or blinking at the dizzy glare of the sun that shouldn't be there,
with faces grey as the sickly dawn.

shoot, trawl, haul... shoot, trawl, haul... shoot, trawl, haul,

There is no romance, or trite poetic lines to pen
of the tedious humdrum of lonely hard-bitten men
wanking away the monotony of the God-awful grind,
and the wearisome wrestle with nature where the elements dictate
the suffering, sorrows or undetermined fate
of fishermen on sea or land,
the brutal backbreaking toil
the fear or the struggle,
the mangled hand or limb
to sink or swim
with death and bankers breathing down the neck at every turn.

No shaking the silver shoals from the nets with a song,
but a stint at the gutting trough, soul-destroying and long
in a splatter of slime and blood
and the quick mechanical slit and flick of the knife
as the mind is free a while to wander
in the relative rusting comfort under the shelter
with nothing coming at your head or catching your feet
as you unwind from the adrenaline of a hairy haul
from hanging at the swamping stern
bucking to the oncoming seas,
soaked to the mid-rift in a boil of water
in the unnerving thunderous clatter of steel upon steel
with every split second a potential disaster
waiting in the wings.

Putting your head down to the tiresome routine in moments like these
without the delusions or dreams in your stomach churning,
and the grind doesn't seem such a God-awful place to be.

While some days,
you just have to appreciate the God-awfulness of it all
that keeps the beast alive and the dream burning.

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