

## INTO THE WEST

“Arise!” he cried, “Rise up my lad!  
Rise from those flannel sheets!  
I’ll show you sheets of canvas swelled like  
a hippo’s cheek and horizontal sheets of rain  
in a wind so hard there is no down,  
only sideways, and even birds are driven  
hard abeam with folded wings like scattered  
black rags and the water comes straight in your  
face like an open fist slap. I’ll show you sheets of  
dried foolscap on which an ancient map delimits the currents  
and the shores.  
We’ll ride that wind together, lad, our ship due  
West, into the Sun where all adventure lies.  
Rise up, lad, rise my darling boy and smell the  
brine of salt sea air, the day is upon us and it  
makes for speed and the tide is crouched and ready to spring  
from port. We shall ride that dolphin’s back around the  
Horn and lash it with all sails aloft, crying out for more sheets, more!  
We’ll see the isle where Cook was killed and roasted  
for a meal, and pick our teeth with his splintered bones  
whence the woolies sucked his marrow dry.  
Rise, I say, Rise Up, my boy, and come away with me!”  
His eyebrows arched like an albatross wing and  
his nose was roseate from the winter gale.  
And thus I woke on many a morn  
when his love for me was so swelled with hope  
that I became the cabin boy to his Francis Drake  
and we lived those fevered moments for his fancy’s sake  
before he departed for the office and a day of mediocrity.  
“Eat Hearty, Lad,” he’d say on his departure for the city.  
“Salt pork and hard tack will see you through the day,  
and wine and rum await us when we gain our port!”  
I’d nod and drink my chocolate milk and give him feigned encouragement.  
Bored and groggy and bound for school, I sometimes thought my old man a fool.  
“Against all odds!” he’d say. “Against all odds, my lad!”  
But his voice was already turning sad.

The odds have borne him down at last  
and he’s finally gained his port, my dad..  
Oh, if I could sail with him just once more  
And be the companion he’d hoped me to be,  
That hardy cabin boy, sharer of dreams and fantasy,

Sailing fleet and fast with the roaring wind behind us  
into the West, into the West!, where I pray he's found his lasting rest.  
His final passage now is done when my life's voyage has scarcely yet begun.