

Up She Rises

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I have seen the ocean swallow up the sun with waves that push out of the surface and curl around the fading orange ball. A long path of light leads from the last disappearing sliver of sun, cutting across the choppy water, reaching towards me. The light dies. The sky darkens.

I have watched the sea give birth to the sun, a great burning egg yolk that slowly bulges out of the water, expelled in a splash of heat and light. The sky explodes. Rays of orange light fly out across the waves, catching silver glints on the crests like a thousand fish writhing in the sea.

The sun is swallowed on one side and birthed on the other. I have followed it around its circular path. As soon as it is gone, I turn around and expectantly wait for its reappearance over my shoulder. The days pass. The water moves in and out. The sun goes around and around. The sky pulls past overhead. I sit and wait.

Jacob Smithy walks along the dock. The smell of brine wafts up from the stale water trapped between the rocks underneath the creaking wood. A hermit crab picks its way over the barnacles, pulling at the splintered wood with asymmetric claws. It gets washed away with the next wave.

The heat of the sun beats down on the back of his pale, freckled neck. He squints his eyes through the haze and waves at the first ship he sees. Its mast stands tall and proud, the folded sails as white as clouds. Sailors mill around, moving crates and coils of rope. He sees the Captain. Clearly the Captain, for the circle of dingy white hair curling around his chin and ears, sporting a fancy hat and coat. 'Are you hiring hands?' he asks. The Captain looks him up and down. Jacob Smithy is small and skinny, his arms still unnaturally long as he recovers from puberty. A large mop of ginger hair sits around his ears and shoulders, making his face look tiny and his head look huge. He carries a guileless smile.

The Captain laughs heartily. 'Go home, kid. Maybe in a few years.'

Jacob Smithy wanders around the docks and stares longingly at the ships that push out to sea.

I climb to the top of the old burnt-out lighthouse. The inner walls are scorched with long, painted lines of black charcoal running up the sides like upside-down drips of water. The stairs creak; crumbling showers of rust sprinkle over the ground far below. I reach the top and look out through the window. I want the light to burn again. I want it to burn bright into the sky and make the stars jealous. I want to bring the ships home from the sea. The wind doesn't blow anymore. There is no keeper here anymore.

Whores the size of horses pull at buttons and straps, laughing with fat cheeks violently shaking and magnificent, terrifyingly large breasts heaving; they push around and then laugh; you're a man now, we guess, haha. He pushes their disgusting faces away. They make wet slapping noises at him.

Rats the size of cats once crawled along the rotten wood. I used to sit on crates with my feet pulled up, watching them run around in the coils of rope, scattering in puddles of water and pulling at scraps of food.

I take them by the tails and string them up along the side of the house. They flail. I watch them dangle. They squeal and screech and claw at the walls, helpless. Flies buzz around them and mock their captive state.

I quickly set them loose again. They run away, diving for the cover of the underbrush. There's nowhere to go, the poor little bastards. We're on an island. They don't know how safe we are here. They don't know how safe I can keep them here. It's okay, guys. Stay here with me.

Jacob Smithy is a solid, stocky man. He is small, but his arms and legs are strong and he hauls crates and coils of ropes across the deck with relative ease. Giant rats scatter over the deck as he hums to himself, watching the other crew members huddled together and singing at night. Wey-hey, up she rises, wey-hey, up she rises. He sits on a crate and listens to their voices carrying across the night air. They wave at him to join them. He looks out over the sea, watching the moonlight cutting across the crests of the dark rippling water. Wey-hey, up she rises early in the morning.

Moving across the field at night, the moonlight barely picks out details in the contour of the ground. Small clumps of grass form bumps and dips to occasionally catch a twisted foot. Walking over it is like sliding across the dark, dark water. Blades of grass ripple suspiciously in the still air. The

darker patches look like holes in the water, sinkholes to draw in unsuspecting ships and travelers lost at sea.

I run from nothing. I just run.

A ring of trees encircles the field. The moon watches carefully overhead. The sky doesn't move.

Jacob Smithy wakes up to sudden motion in his bunk. The cabin tilts back and forth, dumping him on the ground in a tangle of sheets. He pulls on his boots. He climbs up to the deck. A most impressive storm is swallowing up the sea, swirling the ship through angry waves. The wind is everywhere. Water is everywhere. He stares up into the sky; it's too dark to see. 'Smithy, you lazy bastard, give us a hand!' shouts a sailor from somewhere. He doesn't see the man because the voice is torn across the deck by the wind. He grabs a rope and starts hauling down the sails. Cloth stretches and strains; wood groans as the wind threatens to tear the ship apart. The line gets caught on a massive splinter. He starts shimmying up the mast. The boat heaves. He grabs the air, wey-hey, up he rises, floating upside-down above the ship, like the wind is drawing him into the clouds. He can't see where the sky ends and the water begins. He plunges into the sea. The ship vanishes. The sky vanishes.

The ink on the page doesn't get a chance to dry before I turn it over. It smears; e's and s's blur together.

The sea is as flat and smooth as glass; dingy, dirty glass clouded with the detritus of marine life. Heat and brine stink waft up from the stale water. There is nothing moving in sight. There is a speck in the distance. He swims.

A fly tentatively crawls forward on a rock, pausing, rubbing filthy mouth-parts together. Picking at the bleached-white bones. Staring. It moves a tiny inch one way. No more flesh to eat here. It turns. It flies away. The beehive buzzes, a tree rotten through on the inside, full of angry, vibrating things, all teeth and claws, flying out. Sting, sting, sting. Not me this time. Not me. Go for the dead guy. He's been here long enough.

The house is empty. It's well-organized, but years of dust sit on every surface. Books and papers collecting must out of the air. Neatly folded clothes still sitting out on the bed, without a body to belong to. A kitchen with a wood-burning stove, nests of mice living inside. Sharp knives. Clean dishes. A stack of rotten wood just outside the door. Fishing poles with rusted hooks, strong tangles of line. Everything waiting for his return.

The lighthouse on the shore is silent and blind, a cyclopic giant slumbering on the rocks for decades.

I carry fire in my arms, up through the coiling layers of stairs. The burning sticks crackle in my face as I push upwards. I put them in the lamp at the top of the lighthouse. The wick is trimmed to a good length. The oil is fresh, clean, ready to burn. I polish off the giant plates of glass again, turning them to face the open sea. I hope the light cuts through the dark nighttime sky. I want to do the previous keeper proud.

It rains whenever rain is needed, water collecting in troughs and buckets and jars, pooling in rocks warmed by the sun.

Food is everywhere. Fresh fruit grows on trees. Fish jump at the things dropped in the water, landing on hooks and in nets.

The surf pulls at the sand. He feels it dragging at his feet, dragging him outwards. Sometimes he wades out to his knees before going back to the rocks where it is safe.

The body remains at the foot of the lighthouse. Its bones are scorched and twisted. There are no clothes or flesh left on it. He leaves it be; its empty skull stares sadly at the dark sky.

I walk on the beach every night. The sand is hard and heavy and wet, packed down by pounding waves and kicked up by my feet; it slides back out into the sea with every passing wave. Hermit crabs scatter under my bare feet, their half-spiral shells burying frantically down into the watery sand. I sit and wait until they come again. Voices sing in the distance—*wey-hey, up she rises, wey-hey, up she rises, wey-hey, up she rises early in the morning*—as several figures tromp through the surf, arms around each others' backs. I watch and wave to them. They turn and walk back into the sea.