

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.