

Emmy E Smith
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Cruise to Bride Island

The way she talked about it, you would have thought it was the extent of the world, a glossy drop-ceiling cosmos that contained all things necessary and relevant, controlled their flux and relativity, blessed them with a wiggling perm of photons, noodling like fingers toward the catfish of wisdom who circle in soft arcs below deck.

She described

“an absolute drapery of grapes, green, oval, tart with tannins - you know, like wine? And it wasn’t the only fruit, there were others, huge apples and *papaya* and pineapple and coconut shavings, but those were mostly for cocktails and the ice cream bar. Yeah, we ate ice cream practically every day! Like a bunch of 20somethings, can you believe it? There was

-her face relaxed, recalling-

<central image>

this cut glass chalice brimming with glistening, bodacious, crustaceous shrimp, their plasticky flamingo-pink tails and taut rolls of unending abdomen just *made* to hook on the side of that glass.

The sun played on the water, glinting daggers back to the men and women on the ship, flashing backhanded slaps of light onto their reddening complexions, evening the margins of sunburn, transforming their appetite to suit the scene, everything on the cruise was designed and advertised to transform and direct the appetite. The flow of days and nights is an uninterrupted cadence of pure Pleasure and Relaxation. Really a great way to disconnect and get centered, she said. To really unplug. Quiet the endless chatter of the *brain*, you know? The Jazz of the evenings spatula-ed them towards bed or romance, sour mouths seeking to couple, exchange, sweeten and be sucked clean of their terrible flavor, the buzzing of the alcohol carrying through long enough after the sugar from the rum and cola and coladas and sex on the beaches brought them to somnolence to keep them there through the monotonous rocking of the ship, plowing toward ... somewhere, where was the next stop? Well, plowing first toward the morning. For a moment, in the night, the ship was the only rhythm alive, a white plastic bone taking on for a moment the gravity of its ancestors, every little dugout canoe and willowbark boat and every palatial canvass-masted oceanic voyager, humming with the certainty that land was not yet in sight. Meanwhile, the cruise patrons lay bunked as insects in a nest, sweating out the day's alcohol through sun strapped pores, demons extruding out of their most private creases, glands and appendages smearing the substance along the microscopically kinked surfaces of various hairs, through smooth walls of intestines like whales, while tormented by dreams representing this exhaustive inner genocide of all the subtle systems, demons inside of childhood house, familiar but unrecognizable and possibly dangerous pets impossible to know- care for or fend off? betrayals given and received, humiliation in the workplace, and the cruelest of dreams of death, come or coming, and consequences and imminent danger. The dreams zoom swift and jerky through the vertiginous halls and amongst the heads at night, gripping hearts and pumping the toxins faster, protected from waking remembrance by the gossamer curtain of over- indulgence and a lifetime of atrophy of attention.

Waking keeps with the rhythm of sin, the speed and stillness traded between the demons and the human agents, as the riders on the cruise arise into the rituals they know how to perform to preserve the body toward an earlier standard and present the body in this façade on the way to the buffet, there, laid out in the bright observatory aisle of a dining hall –as I’ve said, I’ve never been on a cruise

before but by the way she was talking I could see the disgorged contents of a PARTYUSA store, rearranged, funereal, stiff but with the likeness of a good time, embalmed tablecloths and hot-tub-plastic chairs and cheap representations of royal and noble colors sequined and floral patterned and splattered on the white plastic whale bone of a ship, a palace of real light made artificial between the sky and the deck.

And on the meat of the shore unvisited, the nautically avoided sand and salt and soil, the dark shacks rife with rhythm and red lights and sweaty surfaces, and contact, bodies seen in segment as grooving rotundities, an ass travelling through a song, shoulder living for shoulders sake, cheeks taut with sun from the blistering days that press the alcohol from their heads and

And the cruise would go from island to island she said, each one smaller, brighter and increasingly bridal. The first had five stores that sold polyester and silk blend dresses and juice presseries, the second had an ikea and a call center with an envelope embosser, one strange single story mall ,

And in the sand in the meat of the shore, small twisted garments cluster with the seaweed, mingling scents with sweet rot and the broad sour palms

She said the final island was just like a glittery white little cupcake, the way the waxy leaves of strange evergreen leafy trees reflected the needling spirits of sunlight, peppered with vining flowers, straw umbrellas, a single perfect hotel-style seaside cocktail bar, unlikely clean looking men of endless supply shining glasses softly with white towels and there was a tiered hike to the top of the sleeping volcano, the red hole that swallows all brides into slumber, churning out their bodies into a solid, blinding smoke, their stringy, satiny, lace embroiled dresses stained flamingo pink with the reflected light of the bubbling caldera, hung along the jagged edge, a ring of plump, defrosted shrimp.