ASLEEP NOT IN THE DEEP

by

Harvey Manning
*** ONE ***

Sleep is what I do. Winter sleep, summer sleep, fog sleep, sun sleep, storm sleep, star sleep. All real sleeps I sleep but no stupor sleep, weary sleep. Those are not sleeps but deaths. Work kills. Work in the day and die in the night, resurrected to work again to die again to waste again the sleeplife which only is real. I don't work. I sleep. The party also kills. I sleep no wild drunksleeps, drink and fall and tumble into deathlike hells where once I was perhaps, do ugly things that once I did perhaps working daily, dying nightly, suffering dawns of dry blood grating heart, acid air scalding lungs, sun flame scarring eyes. No work, no party, no death, no hell, not for me. I sleep.

No sleeper ever slept such sleeps as I. I was the first sleeper of genius, I am the last. Other bunglers make monsters, in fright choose death, sleep crudely spoiled, sleeplife cowardly wasted. But not until I came aboard did I sleep my masterpieces. Where I was before the sleeps were fragments, shattered halssleeps mere sketches and outlines, ripped and smashed by bells and shouts, no peace there to sleep a full fine sleep, a museum of sleeps. There is no other brave and skillful sleeper, nor elsewhere peace to sleep the infinite delicious marvels of the sleeps unslept I brought aboard.
Ashore all dead they lie under stars and moon, shores on nightwinds the sounds of putrefaction, bells and whistles the sounds of morning resurrection, bangs and shouts and growls the sounds of daylong suicide. Below they waste the ship, sleep only drunksleep, perversion most foul of art most glorious. When first I came aboard, I lived below, then I too made deathlife journeys into death ashore. Where I slept down there, in the forecastle with the others, that was not sleep, the stench of death, the stink of life, the struggling deathlife, no quiet bed.

river sounds of waves slapping and water flowing and willows rustling, sky sounds of wind in the rigging, rain on my roof, seagulls squealing, all noise below and ashore is far away, not here. When greyfaced drifter from town or sick old girl from school falls overboard the splash with splash of waves, the drowning cry with seagulls gulping garbage. Bells and wails weave in the wind with moonlight on the brown hills east and white fog on the green hills west. Rarely does noise cut this high, the dying squall downstream of the White One's old baby, the screech of the Red One when Cap returns, short shriek from the Black One, when the boy was born, my first summer aboard, and the ding dong bells from school, the bells that smash sleep. Mostly stay below and breathe. No other but one climbs this high. No other but one sleeps in my nest.
It's the quietest of beds, my nest, here where I sleep my masterpieces high in clean wind.

Day sleep is best. In summertime, all silent below with Cap away, I never sleep at night. Spooky haunted sleep it is alone in darkness. In winter, days are too short for all my sleeps but always there is the party belowguard against the quiet. I dare not sleep on quiet nights.

Summertime is heaven. Sunset in the long river, green hills shadowed, brown hills glowing, then nightbreeze and stars in the sky and stars in the waves, then sunrise in the river, ship shadowed by brown hills, green hills gleaming. I go ashore then while town and slough lie dead and walk beside the river where small waves wash, screened from ship and slough and town by willows, and when the bells dingdong go aboard, climb to my nest and sleep.

Morning sleeps are marvels, the more precious mounted in agonies of the banging town, crashing town, dingdorging honking town, suffering out of old death to begin new suicide. No dreams run away then, always a crash, clank, beep, or boom to float me loose from deep danger into safe translucence.

After my morning sleep I go below, but slowly, slowly, not to lose the flow, and eat some small lunch, a doughnut and a glass of milk, a slice of baloney and bottle of ginger ale, an orange, and a hardboiled egg. While chewing I review morning dreams and when my eyelids lower climb to my
nest and wash my beard and lie down drowsy, to return the
morning dream or some old favorite from my book.

Afternoon sleeps are the purest sleeps of all. Though
town noise toward death I am fully alive in my sleeping.
no danger of dreams running wild. Just
the surface I sink, where clouds and wind and waves
can enter freely, mingling in my dreams. When I choose I
sit aside and watch, when I choose I step in and live, freely
in and out I wander. Always it is my creation, my
story and my people and my world, no alien spoilers invade
from darkness, no enemy wreckers lie in ambush.

When the brown-hued hills I review
the afternoon dreams and morning dreams and those deserving
I put in my book. Though all are great some are more
greatness and these I redream over and over. My favorites all
go back many years, back to my first summer aboard, when first
I climbed to my nest. They were superb dreams then, perfect
from the start, but the mark of a master is to improve on
perfection.

How I survive before the book, before the nest?
Beyond imagination. That turgid winter of phantom faces and
rotten teeth and slimy lips and mouths reeking with decay of
entrails, the stink of life and stench of death, and I among
them dying, my stench mingled with theirs.

Strange how from the dark aftercabin Cap stared out at
me one day in spring, I stood on deck by the gangplank. Until
then I was only one of many who come aboard and vanish into
town or school or slough, none to know where, none to care.

Then the others, the White One from the forecastle,
cradling her newborn baby, both staring, the Black One heavy
with child staring from the aftercabin, the Red One with bone-
stretching skin lifting her skullface from the foredeck,
staring, hawk on his knees in the deckhouse, staring,
the Packrats poking their heads from portholes, staring,
grey-faced drifters from town and sick old girls from school,
staring, and from the slough Old Salt in a rowboat staring,
and faces in houseboat windows, staring.

Then I knew I dared not leave, I climbed rung by rung
up the ladder of the last remaining mast, to the nest atop
the mainmast. Luiled by staring eyes I slept my first
good sleep. It was quiet then, Cap went away that night and
during the first of sleeps I found
in the long summer I learned my genius.

Until the day I climbed the mast no one knew I was aboard.
Nor did I. Nor do I know when I came aboard. A long horror
there was, a vortex roaring and I spinning and sliding
toward black deeps below the deathlife hells. All that is
gone now, gone long ago, extinguished utterly by long summer
sleeps, and indeed the peace is all the more serene for
those rare noises, those small twinges when a shorewind
blows aloft the honkhonk of bus, dingdong from school,
howl from taverns closing, crowds swarming down to the slough, and
rattling over the plank bridge, coming to the party.
Old parties, old winters, old years, all are swept away by summer sleeps, as garbage and are swept from the slough by springtime floods. The dreams I save in my book, all else sweeps away, each summer cleans the world. After summer come the autumn fogs, then a long cold rain, then the party begins and Cap returns and the party continues through rain, snow, gales, floods, through the darkness into spring, then Cap goes away and the summer sleeps begin.

Another party has begun in fogs before the long cold rain. I don't like surprises, they wake me up. And fog sleeps are superb sleeps, a season of quiet fog sleeps lay ahead before the party. My good afternoon sleep was shattered at dusk by the rattle of the old plank bridge, a welcome rattle in cold rain when nights grow long, but now in fog a quick leap of terror. But only one, for climbed to my nest I left fear below though early the rattle was familiar, only in fog a surprise all since has been as before.

The party begins quietly, the tall-hatted cooks with their wagon, the red-vested bartenders with their clinking wagon, the white-coated waiters staggering up the gangplank with steaming pans, the bare-shouldered maids tripping aboard with cold bottles.
The Packrats creep from the hold, snatch roasts from platters and scurry away in darkness. The Packrats, who live below in darkness, always think no more than bones. Sometimes by moonlight they strip off jeans and sweatshirts shiny grey with grease and swim in the slough searching for garbage overlooked by seagulls. Sometimes they sink and seem to couple but the slough is secret. Neither has breasts but one has long hair and the other has a beard. They never come to the party, they lurk in shadows and snatch food. Hunger begins the party. In the deckhouse hawk awakes. From the forecastle come Red One and White One and her baby. From the aftercabin, but only briefly, comes Black One and the Boy. From the wheel at the stern comes Old Salt. From houseboats along the slough come the islanders. From town taverns, the greyfaced drifters, from school attics and basements the spectral students, a silent trembling crowd trailing cooks and waiters down to the slough and over the plank bridge, chins quivering, mouths oozing.

Late at night I go down to the party. Not in, I never go in. Long ago I blasted a wall from the deckhouse, dissipating that night's party in the slough in many pieces.
in night and eat a small bird and drink a bottle of black ale.
A hot bird and a cold bottle, first of the season and good
for dreaming, I ripete flesh with my teeth, crunch sweet bones, swallow thick ale, mixing flavors and bubbles in my nose.

No music inside, no wrestling, the ones with bloated bellies sprawled in gorged stupor. The White One in a corner nursing her baby, the Red One facedown and stiff.

Hawk on the throne, he went to war and a truckload of chocolate bars and stocked a castle with girls but ran out of chocolate bars. The girls found other jobs, raising the children, so he sold the castle to the government. Orphan asylum and used the profits to cross the olive oil market. The market went down and the olive oil went rancid, but scrape up a little cash, he has a fortune waiting in the storage tanks for rancid olive oil rocket fuel.

Nobody hears hawk but me. I crunch a smoked pork chop and a stalk of celery stuffed with cream cheese and drink a glass of chili white wine spiced with nutmeg. Then I climb to my nest and wash my beard and sleep, Hawk's continuing stories proof against danger. The party has begun, exactly as all the others began, only this time early, in fog.
Hansel and Gretel

This is the house made of dolls. He went to war.

And in the time one day, telling him to return, he told a fellow with his hand to have a chocolate bar. He was taught a wild ride with the stairs. But, out of chocolate bars and the girl didn't all job.
My people are not from below or from town or school, they are not men and women, except two, I am one, the other is a girl, only one girl. Not from below. Not the White One who always has a new baby but never any old babies. Not the Red One sunbathing on the foredeck wearing dark glasses only, bones stretching skin always white, oversize flaccid breasts without nipples. Not the Black One who stares at my nest from the dark aftercabin, above all not the Black One. Not the houseboat girls who stroll along the island, looking up to my nest. Not the huntresses from town, dancing around the mainmast with upreaching arms. Nor even the girls from school.

I go below into the noise sometimes. There are fragments of beauty in the noise, briefly, they do not last, but I save such treasures as I can. The young are lovely. Not all perhaps, not spiders and snails and clams. But kittens, fawns, and schoolgirls are lovely, briefly. I go below for an ankle, a careless lock of hair, a forearm soft and downy, a laughing lip, a swelling sweater bouncing, an awkwardness of hipswung skirt, a girlish belly bulging bluejeans.

Darling schoolgirls, yet not to follow ashore, for though they swear by music and gods, they have no life to give but daily suicide, nightly grave. Nor do I dream of these brief flowers, rather in them
I see the eternal Brown girl, mine. Only she comes to my nest. She came the first summer, she is the first page in my book and many following, she is my masterpiece of masterpieces.

After she comes I dream no more that day or night. Then, only then, I want no more dreams lest her visit dim. After she comes I go walking, winter or summer, night or day, I walk by the river, the willows, over the plank bridge, and climb the high hills, in summer sunsets, in spring sunrise a shimmer of new green, by winter moonlight phantoms of sweet snow. I climb the swelling ridges to the sky-surrounded crest and we walk together under the hill over hills smooth as her cheek. We walk together in spring dawn through marigolds and blue lupen and daisies, cornflowers and shooting stars (and columbine) and tiger lilies, her eyes catching the light of each blossom. In autumn sunset we lie in glowing grass the color of her flesh, the warm round crest of the high brown hill, what sleep, what dreams, a quiet wind, the silent river far below, green hills west, beyond green hills the sea, and white fog on the river, and a time each spring and fail when the sun sinks into the river of fire and the sky is green, what sleep, what dreams.

The second night the noise begins, the third night the schoolgirls come, and when I have slept alone many days I
go down into the noise to save such glimpses of her as I can. By candlelight they sip red wine and sing sweet songs, they sit on deck by starlight playing flutes and strumming guitars, and rise and dance, humming.

They are young when they come aboard, young as the Brown Girl. They are old by morning, old as Red One, Black One and Boy, White One and baby, Packrats, Hawk, Cap, Old Sait. I am not old. Not young but not old. I feel no wrinkles in my forehead, I see no veins in my hands, my hair and beard grow thick with no touch of grey. I have never seen myself in a mirror. A glimpse in still waters before I can turn away, hair and beard I have seen, never my eyes.

Why do they stare? What do they see? Not a horror, for the huntresses from town dance below, pendant breasts slapping sagging guts, and the old girls from school, young when they came aboard, they dance below, breasts still high and bellies white, dance still awkward yet no longer young, briefly young now old forever.

Something in my eyes, trapped by accident? For I never look into eyes, I have never seen any eyes but those of the Brown Girl, and she does not stare.

What do they see? Why do they stare? Perhaps they know me from before. They never say. Not Cap. Nor Black One who always watches, Black One silent since that one short shriek when the Boy was born. Nor the Boy, silent at birth and silent since, dank slimy Boy staring at my nest long hours, silent.
The dingdong bell and then the plank rattle, through fog the howls and shouts from school and town down to the slough trailing the Cooks and Waiters, Bartenders and Barmaids.

A figure in the fog, a dark figure. Shadows into the hole, a roast sheep, splashing in the slough and a small darkness on deck drowning gurgles.

Waiters with steaming trays and Barmaids clinking bottles, greyfaced drifters, giggling girls from school, grunting huntresses from town. The musicians in the deckhouse play music with powdered wigs and buckled shoes and rouged nipples peeking through lace gowns. Waiters sit crosslegged atop the aftercabin, girls in leotards spinning lightly on their toes. On the larboard deck a fierce guitar strumming and couples struggling. On the starboard deck girls and boys perched on the rail singing old barefoot songs with flowers in their hair. A poet on the bowsprit reciting to seagulls in the slough.

On white sand by a blue sea stood the Brown Girl and I under the curling crest looking through green water to the sun, clasping each to each in the
thunder, tumbling together as one in hissing sand, lying together in quiet foam of spindrift. I descend

Slowly, slowly down the mast into noise where huntresses are clutching boys, hands stifling songs and dragging girls away. In the shadows outside the deckhouse where the musicians play nightmares, I nibble barbecued spare ribs and sip Hawk mumbles from the throne. Now he taught poker to the natives and won a thousand black wives seven feet tall the tusks from all the elephants and the beach was mounded high and the post was invented though he's down on his luck now he can raise a little cash he'll have a fortune because ivory bullets are essential for space pistols.

Nobody Hawk but me. Schoolboys hurl deviled eggs which smear his face and the girls giggle and drink more wine until they get sick and then the boys drag them away.

Below the throne Red One lies facedown, buttocks twitching to the music. An old surgeon flexes his mustache. He pulls her buttocks and picks his teeth with a scalpel. Three teachers in tweed suits and bow ties sit notebooks in hand smoking pipes and sniffing brandy. The viola player snaps his bow and the cellist gets his head stuck in the hole and the violinists club each other with fiddles and Red One quivers all over and the surgeon amputates the three teachers whisper back and
forth and scribble in their notebooks puffing clouds of black smoke.

White One is carried out by four department store clerks followed by a bank teller with the baby. A reporter thumps bongo drums and the young girls, the darlings, are gone, and the old girls and huntresses are stripping off their clothes. I nibble camembert and crackers, green olives and a smoked oyster on a toothpick, drink one small glass of domestic champagne. I climb aloft above the appealing arms and wash my beard and lie down in my nest, snugly alone in fog, fog blurs the noise below, and I go to meet the Brown Girl and we wander through grass cool against our knees, beside the tumble of loud water, and her cheek is warm against mine, I have no beard when I walk with the Brown Girl.
Diffuse dawnlight, grey foglight, fog from the distant sea curling over green hills, swallowing the ship and town. Slowly, slowly down the ladder and away, away from Hawk mumbling on the throne, Packrats scavenging scraps, Red One facedown and stiff, White One vomiting over the rail, away from a now-old girl sobbing on the gangplank, droplets of fog in her hair, away into fog, one glance back at the splash, the girl gone and some small creature scuttling to the dark aftercabin where Black One stares.

Away into fog, secret and alone, and up the high hills through fog bright with inner light, now a blueness, now out into sunshine above the cloudsea. On the round crest I lie down in yellow grass pointed with mellowed blossoms, west the white sea billows the horizon, shining under blue sky against the brown hills, sinking back along valleys, spilling over saddles, joining other clouds whose waves rolling up the river, the ocean, engulfing all. No town, no school, no slough, no island, no river, no green hills west, only a white sea shining, billowing waves washing silently on the shore of my brown island, last remnant of the drowned world, alone I lie in quiet winds rustling yellow grass.
No sleep, no dreams, memories of the Brown Girl, feeling with her and for her the cool touch of wind, the warm flow of sun, hearing small sounds of grass blades brushing, flower seeds dropping, grains of sand trickling, birdwings, ants crumbs mined from my clothes. Under the cloudsea a roving undertow from the drowning town.

the sun full in my face, fog sinking on the river, green island hills emerging. From faraway below dingdong dingdong, troughs cloudways pink above grey, now crimson and black pits of night, then all is lost, all is night. Under the cloudsea the sunken town glares, then the full moon rises upriver, the fog slips downriver, down wandering hills I walk, not alone.

The Cooks and Waiters, Bartenders and Maids, the silent strays, the laughing boys, the giggling girls, the bridge a steady rattle, the island road a crowd-choked roar, toot-toot on the river and visitors rush from excursion steamers, crush through willows, coming to the party.

Things in the slough stare out at me, then swim to the ship and into a porthole dragging a sturgeon from the aftercabin. Black One stares as I climb the mast. The orchestra plays music with horns on its head and spears in its hand and golden goblets clinking against tin breastplates.
Guitars and banjos and drums and flutes, girls in leotards dancing, girls in knee-free skirts and thin blouses dancing, huntresses in no clothes pumping and grinding and counterswinging drifter-clubbing dugs, with satchels on the poets reciting, artists sketching, teachers taking notes, boys bellowing bawdy ballads as they covet covies of giggling girls, boys quavering words into quivering ears as their hands tremble under skirts onto trembling thighs.

I eat hummingbird hearts in almond oil and caviar on barley crackers and drink a mug of mulled sherry.

Hawk shouts from the throne. He won a bank in a poker game and the in defaulted bonds and the bills counterfeit better than government issue except we had his picture on it so the examiners closed the bank but all he needs is a little cash to finance a general who will redeem the bonds and it'll mean a fortune because that country has the only remaining herd of woolly mammoths and their wool when ground up with ivory dust and mixed with rancid olive oil cures every known disease of man and raises the IQ by an average of 50 points.

Nobody hears Hawk but me. The boys throw cream pies at his face and the prize for a square hit is a young girl sipping wine or two old girls gulping gin. A doctor is burning out with a blowtorch the tonsils of a lawyer who is suing the doctor for malpractice in sign language while two salesmen sell the doctor malpractice insurance and the lawyer fire insurance. I crunch several
butter-fried grasshoppers and rinse my mouth with cider and then climb to my nest and wash my beard and lie down in crushed by the loud stream. high on the glacier where dark cliffs dodge in and out of cloud wrecks. I see her running down to meet me and I run up through need and then it is I who stand on the cold glacier looking down to where she waits by a droplet of snowmelt caught in a white rock sprinkled with green lawns and trim corners of alpine for.

The screech from deck slices through the dream before I reach the lake, but I jot down notes and will meet her there later, she will wait. Awake I listen to the announcement of winter, early winter, in for Cap has come aboard and is raping the Red One. he clutches the red hank, shakes the skull, drags the bones on deck and rips bare deathsmooth balloons, seagulls repeat her screeches and abandon garbage to silent swimmers, then he throws her against the rail and stomps into the deckhouse and knocks hawk off the throne and sits bellowing and drinking. she crawls aching to his feet and he kicks her in the face and lawyer drags her on deck and rapes her but she doesn't screech, she crawls back to the throne and teacher is waiting the turn and also clerks and janitors and grocers crawling to be kicked, dragged, raped, but screech only once.

On the throne Cap drains a bottle at a swallow, and another,
then tours the deck and throws poets overboard and smashes banjos on dancers' rumps and returns to his throne. Cap is about six feet tall, within a foot or two, and is about as old as I am, or Hawk, and has hair that is black or brown or red or blond or some other color and has eyes and weighs one or two or three hundred pounds more or less.

Cap sits on the throne and Black One brings a platter of ribs and basket of bottles and stands behind the throne staring at me. I nibble livers and brains and sweetbreads and sip a small stout. Rib in one hand, bottle in the other, Cap roars and crashed on an island and with bare hands killed a thousand of the enemy and was crowned king and given three hundred and sixty-five virgins wearing priceless jewels buried by pirates long ago and all the virgins proved fertile and bore only triplets and when he sailed away he left behind five thousand sons and daughters what with some quadruplets and another batch underway and a hundred leagues from the island the mourning of his wives and children stilled a typhoon and in afteryears they raised a massive temple to his godhood all of hammered gold glinting with rubies and sapphires and emeralds and from a single piece of white marble that cost a thousand lives in the quarrying they carved an image of him taller than twenty ancient cedars one atop the other and now when missionaries come Cap's wives roast them on spits in the temple over a volcano vent and gnaw the bones with their Bibles and brassieres.
clean and mix the powdered bones with fermented blood and
dance themselves to a frenzy around the marble statue as they
drain the last dregs of the missionaries and Cap always knows
when missionaries have landed on the island for often as he
walks the mountains wails come on the wind and soon he
will sail the ship down the river and over the sea to visit
his family.

Hawk staggers from a corner and shakes his fist and
howls that the bottom is rotten and in mud and the ship never will leave the slough. Cap smashes a rib in Hawk's face and breaks a bottle over his head and with one kick lofts him from the deckhouse over the rail far out into the slough. The party continues but Cap goes off to the aftercabin followed by Black One and I climb to my nest and wash my beard and sleep. Like sunrise Cap's return is always the same but always this time, so early, it is strange, as if the sun were to rise at midnight.
Cap comes by night, and goes by night, and never, on
shipboard sees the day. But sometimes Black One stands
below my nest staring, thus Cap calls me in the dark
aftercabin he tells me a story of sunshine,
always in the same.

He has a gold mine in the mountains where the river
begins. High into the sky cut shards of rock and from
the peaks, a glacier creeps, and avalanches to the bank
of a black wall slashed with white quartz in whose crystals gleam yellow ribbons of gold.
From the glacier a torrent streams our river, in one
leap clear the black wall where Cap digs gold secret and
safe behind the sunspangled curtain thundering in the
plungebasin, sweeping then iridescent mists in swift
meanders through green meadows shot with lilies, columbine,
paintbrush, lupen, daisies, and boulders bearing pale
blue blossoms of phlox and violet campion, glinting
in evening Cap comes out from behind the
curtain, sunny, cold as the glacier,
and lies down in heather, and wind from the glacier passes
through the heather bells, the white bells, yellow bells,
violet bells, he lies amid a swarm of swinging bells, silent
bells, and when alpenglow fades from glacier and peaks and
a star bursts into sudden fire while still the sky is blue,
Cap sleeps.
This is the story Cap tells me in the dark of the nightfall he bellows from the throne how once on an arctic beach he found a lump of ambergris larger than a bull walrus and spent it all on ice cream cones and soda. Coke for heathen children, he shot fifty thousand rabbits and thus saved from starvation the sheep of one nation and the people of another who paid a fortune for canned rabbit stew. He clearcut a mahogany jungle and built pulp for comic books. He sowed grass in the desert and fattened cattle countless as the grains of sand and dried them into jerky which fed armies in three wars and five revolutions which killed hundreds of thousands of soldiers and unknown numbers of innocent women and children.

While Cap is drinking and eating and Mrs. Old Salt whispers when he owned the ship he sailed around the world with rum and salt cod and spices and silk and calico and glass beads and tin mirrors and, populated with progeny scores of sleeping-creepers deserted save for nubile maidens before he arrived. He chased them from the deck but at last his children chased him away, so he came to the river and logged the forests to build a town which he stocked with sons and daughters and school where they learned their lessons while he was off at war conquering many nations but when he returned the river had changed course and washed away his town and school and children and stranded the ship in the slough a new town and school.
stocked by some wanderer with strange bastards who never heard of Old Salt.

When Cap returns Hawk goes silent and skulks about the decks trapping teachers and cheating them at poker.

The fog goes, the gentle mists come, then light rains, then hard rains, then hard cold rains without end. The party and I sleep at night lulled by noise below and sleep in day lulled by drumming rain. I walk by the river through puddles, the willows dead sticks rattling in wind. I walk the grey hills above the river dim below in scud, the town a tomb.

A month of rain is enough rain (vowed) to sail immediately for a desert island where he mined a million tons of guano and after his thousand slaves swept it clean and mopped it spotless with tankers of water imported at great cost he posted them with shotguns to keep off the .

The truck slid off the plank bridge into a houseboat and both sank to the bottom of the slough with the loss of six girls and ten encyclopedia salesmen and all the coal except one sack the driver managed to save while escaping the drowning girls. The engineers from school fired up the boilers but the engineers were fatally scalded by live steam and the fire went out so Cap has decided not to sail until spring because Old Salt says there is no propeller anyway, it was melted down in the war to make medals and lunchbuckets.
The river was high, the island road deep mud, a wagonload of greyfaced drifters sank without a trace. The Cooks and Waiters moored a barge alongside and under a circus tent built open fires and roasted turkeys and geese and grouse and partridges and quails and pigeons and ptarmigans and robins and sparrows and bush tits and bats and dragonflies and mosquitoes. The bartenders and barmaids shuttled over the slough in swift black boats scarred with bullet holes. Bankers and butchers and bookkeepers wearing white ducks and yachting caps sailed over in yaws and ketches and sloops and flatties. Schoolboys came in canoes and teachers paddled liferafts some of which sprang leaks and swamped with the loss of all hands. A dormitory of schoolgirls rented a tugboat and evaded a cordon of housemothers and deans. Old huntresses floated across the slough in barrels and Drifters clung to logs and inner tubes and capsized yaws. A skin dived underwater to avoid traffic and was yanked into a porthole out of which a moment later were thrown the air tanks and spear gun and face mask and flippers and skin diver. Since it was Thanksgiving Cup hired a deposed priest and a physicist who did not believe in war and at enormous expense imported a score of virgins and every
hour on the hour the priest celebrated the black mass and the renegade physicist transmuted gold into ping pong balls.

One day Cap called me to his cabin and told how he plowed the desert and grew corn twenty feet high but the sun popped it so he moved into the forest and killed enough trees to roof the world but lightning struck and while escaping a popcorn storm and a forest fire he found the gold mine which unfortunately was in a park and congress wouldn't let him have it so he secretly mined enough gold to buy his own congress which gave him the park and gave their constituents bags of popcorn and charcoal sketches of Cap and then came to the party.

The wind began to blow and the rain beat harder and colder and great waves rolled up the river from the sea and broke over the island, rocking the ship like a cradle, and high on the swaying mast in the howling storm I slept days and weeks of storm sleeps, page after page with the brown girl, running hand in hand over cloudswept hills, vaulting over valleys, soaring silently with in our teeth through clouds and sunshine and white bells, yellow bells, violet bells swarming in glacier wind, silent bells.

One night in a moonburst I saw a mayor rowing a skiff in the flooding current of the slough but the wind tore off his stovepipe hat and whiskers and it wasn't a mayor at all, it was the Boy. Another night thunder without lightning sent
Waiting in a warehouse... Cause there's a tremendous demand for paraffin oil... to make rocket fuel and he has thousands and thousands of barrels.
flights of frightened seagulls squealing unseen by my nest.

After the storm when the river dropped there was a	houseboat missing from the slough and the plank bridge had
vanished. The mayor came leading a delegation and told Cap
he hated to but towns downstream were threatening to
sue because their filtration plants could handle the occasional
grey faced drifter or teacher with crabs eating his bowels but all
the houseboats clogged the reservoirs and when people turned
on faucets canoes and roast turkeys came out and thousands were dying of thirst. Cap said we were missing only
one houseboat, there were shouts for help out on the river
he told the mayor to blame the towns upstream, it was Thanksgiving there too.

Cap told the houseboat crews not to be so sloppy or he'd
cut them all adrift. They said it wasn't their fault, they
were very careful about their cables, and during the storm
they saw a mayor rowing around the slough with a large pair
of wiresnips and towing a torpedo.

The delegation returned and said the towns were still
upset, it wasn't only the houseboats but the liferaft loaded
with detectives who had no fingerprints and the naked women
who got into the turbines and overloaded the circuits and
blew out all the neon signs and also there was a tugboat of
schoolgirls stranded on a mudbank and they were all crying
and nobody could get any sleep.
Cap accused the mayor of diverting to his own uses a houseboat complete with a dozen girls all in excellent-to-fair condition and if there was any more trouble he would sail away and cut the town off without a penny. The delegation tied an anchor to the mayor and dropped him overboard, which evidence of good faith so pleased Cap he promoted every one of them on the spot and gave each a virgin left over from the black mass. He also endowed the school with a research fund on condition the clappers be removed from the dingdong bells and made hawk three teachers and a dean hawk orked until he found an Indian washed up by the flood and settled down to teach him poker. Cap is a fair man and sees the downstream side of the story so he has rounded up all the spare musicians and sent them drifting on rafts to drown out the weeping schoolgirls and at the same time invite all the thirsty towns to the Christmas party.
*** EIGHT ***

Snowclouds brown hills down school and town and island and ship, all day and night crystals drenched by my nest, infinite flakes falling forever, each flake unique until the sky bears identical twins and the clocks stop. Snow sleeps are rare and splendid sleeps, better even than fog sleeps, snuggled among the floating flakes, gently floating down and down. Cold sleep is a cozy sleep. With the brown and rise wind never clean white. Girl I through virgin hills, round virgin hills, the sweet green snow serenely swells and dips. Withered more than real, we rose the wind.

Over the frozen slough the Cooks and Waiters drove herds of cattle, sheep, elk, musk oxen, yaks, and suckling pigs and barbecued them on roaring fires of logs rafted downriver. They herded schools of salmon, halibut, flounder, tuna, bass, and eels from the sea and baked them on planks over coals. The Bartenders and barmaids backed a train onto the spur and skated back and forth dodging hockey teams and jumping barrels with huntresses. A string ensemble concerted the ice. At the bow orchestra in tails played from brass and at the stern a band in scarlet uniforms played oompa-pahs from beer gardens. A group of little girls, mittens and noses sang Christmas carols on the gangplank.
until Santa Claus with a jolly ho-ho-ho pinched their cheeks and invited them into the hold to sit on his lap and tell what they wanted for Christmas. Santa came up but not the little girls and his beard fell off and it wasn’t Santa at all, it was the Boy.

Teachers came on snowshoes and schoolboys on skis and schoolgirls in sleighs with jinglebells pursued by wolves, several of which were grasped by the scruff of the neck and yanked into portholes. A publisher in a fur hat and a buffalo laprobe in an iceboat crewed by newsboys who misjudged the wind while coming about and skidded into a rotary snowplow driven by a band of roving huntresses and iceboat and crew were thrown ashore in small pieces, the only survivor being the buffalo laprobe. Grey-faced drifters crept over the ice on hands and knees but some dropped through circular holes cleverly camouflaged with white-frosted plum puddings.

Other towns came with guests laughing with shouts and shouts of cheery greetings of the season. There was a ferryboat with a steam calliope playing the national anthem and a submarine conning tower trimmed with tinsel and baubles and an outrigger canoe paddled by native girls who wore no shirts but had flowers behind their ears and a shark fin cutting the water behind their canoe in fur parkas. There were explorers waving flags and taking photographs of each other on an iceberg driven by an outboard motor and
a garbage scow mounded with tin cans atop which sat girls in ribbed hats and flouncy dresses twirling parasols "frolicously" in the faces of boys in flannels and striped blazers and straw boaters and plucking mandolins. A balloon passed overhead trailing ropes strung with candy apples and dropped lollipops and peppermint kisses until pierced by a fire arrow and the crowd as the bag burst into flames and the basket plummeted into the river.

Cap sat on his throne shouting how he drilled an oilwell and gusher, drowned a city so he set fire to the oil and burned out a state so he dug a canal and let in the sea which broke the dikes at high tide and flooded a nation and when winter came the oil smoke blotted out the sun and the sea froze so he put the north pole there and moved south.

One day Black One stood below my nest. In the dark aftercabin Cap told how he was chipping quartz from his mine when the waterfall curtain stopped and a block of ice hit his head so he retreated to the meadows and the glacier crept down the cliff over flowers and heather so he retreated to the forest and the glacier bulled into the trees and he barely escaped with a sack of gold and it was his last sack of gold and now it was all gone and his last party was over.

I climbed to my nest a basket of cold roast beef and baked ham and rye bread with caraway seeds and pickled beets
and a selection of white and pink wines and for a week
divided my time between light snacks and washing my beard and
lying beside the Brown girl whose lips are fresh as clover.

One day Black One stood below my nest. In the dark
aftercabin Hawk told me how his newspaper editor spread rumors
of plague and his ordered everyone to take shots only for
he got the teachers to redeem their 100's
and the whole town and school is hooked and he has the teachers
busy making alcohol and he is going to force the government out
of business because he is counterfeiting tax stamps at his
printing plant. Hawk is about six feet tall within a foot
or two and is about as old as I am, or Cap, and has hair that
is black or brown or red or blond or some other color and has
eyes I suggest and weighs one or two or three hundred pounds
more or less.

Hawk stared at me as I left the cabin and so did Black One
and Boy. The Packrats poked up a hatchcover and stared and
from the forecastle White One and her baby stared and on the
slough Old Salt skated to a stop and stared and in the deckhouse
as I ate dill pickles and blue cheese on oat wafers and
sipped mead Red One raised her skullface and stared and on
the throne Cap stared and mumbled but only through the bandages. I climbed aloft and washed my
beard and went to sleep.
Not the sun, some other light in the east, not yet true dawn, but all the eastern sky distant the white hill and sound the mountains now are taller and purely sound sounds not wind, felt rather than heard, but somewhere loud, far away loud sounds. I lie on my back and close my eyes and slide swiftly down in a private storm, rocketing down steep rolls, sweeping down sinuous curves of icy chutes, gently soft mounds, plunging down a blizzard crack.

Wind from the east whips the river into quick-leaping whitecaps, rips foam and flings it high. And now the sun touching the flying pink foam, a sun with color but no warmth.

Along the hardfrozen river path, black willows drip sun-dried icicles, rainbows trapped in crystal. Drowsy from the long cold slide, slowly halfdreaming, I turn a willow terror churns from old deeps the forgotten dingdongs and honk honks and struggling deathlifes.

A white foot with toes like blossoms kicks pink foam into wind, and another splash free, and through a cresting wave burst billowing buttocks glistening in the sun, and then the blossom toes keep high and curving calves and round thighs with inner warmth.
sleek and fleet as a seal and graceful as a dolphin, under the whitecaps and wind, seen then not seen, perhaps only dreamed, the river cold and once more empty.

And now not fear but hope, madness into delirium, for through the whitecaps she floats, arms wide, black hair seaweed drifting on her face, only her nose in the wind, and red lips, and breasts high in the sun, waterbright, warm-shining, and long white legs river-rippling. A flurry of foam she rises sunpink and dripping and darkness overshadows all the pages, all the masterworks, all the summers, of

for she is young, and I know her from before, somewhere long ago she was young.

The river black oil and willows bare sticks in foul wind and I am ankledeep in mud. On cold wind the scent of clover and cinnamon but now the warm wind stinks of garlic. From the aftercabin Black One, old again, stares at me as I climb to my nest. I wash my beard and open my book but all the pages are blank.
Upstream on the island freighters dock and cooks and
waiters herd buffalo, bears, geese, rattlesnakes, chickens, ducks, partridges, moose,
gnus, turkeys, chamois, and rabbits into the factory where automated
buzz and clank and belch black smoke and
hiss white steam. From the factory come out piping hot
with legs in the air and apples in their mouths on the conveyor
belt that passes the houseboat windows and the portholes with
grey hands and then into the deckhouse and around the
ship.

Downstream on the island tankers dock and bartenders and
barmaids pump the cargoes into the factory where swish and tinkle and slosh.
From the factory pipelines lead to thousands of faucets on the
cruising bow and grinds. An endless sidewalk leads from school through
town by the docks where the houseboats land and high over the slough
and back again. From town and school, from upstream
and downstream, they come to Hawk's all-in-one Valentine-Easter-May Day party. To keep it lively the decks are cut
in sections, fitted with timers so that anyone standing or lying
in one place too long trips the coiled spring underneath and is
automatically flipped into the slough thus making room for
new arrivals. Hawk dredged the slough to keep the current

34
moving briskly carrying bodies away.

One night a freighter missed the channel and smashed all the houseboats and broke the conveyor belt and the sidewalk which continued dumping roast animals and birds and green salad and truffle sandwiches and schoolgirls and teachers and barbers and accountants in the slough. Hawk lost his temper and sent the captain into the factory and he came out with an apple in his mouth and was plucked into a porthole. The chief mate was eviscerated and spiced and his giblets strung on a kabob before the chaplain got his tongue free from a Cook who was trying to feed it into a chopper and complained about the channel buoys. They were in the wrong place all right, put the joke on Hawk who took it in good spirit and told the crew once they got their clothes back on he expected them at the party and the chief mate too if the Cooks could find all the parts.

A delegation of from downstream came aboard and griped about green salad and barbers in their filtration plants. Hawk sent downriver with apples in their mouths but another delegation griped about all the roast mayors so Hawk ran pipelines from school and now don't need water anymore or anything because someone got confused and alcohol. Hawk gave the teachers a bawling out and told them their blunder would generate sales resistance and cost a fortune in advertising. The teachers said they didn't know but complained about the vending machine they were running and the teacher who ran it wanted the school to get that sort of thing wasn't their business and they were scientists and shouldn't be expected to know about business details.
Hawk was going to put them through the factory anyway but a fleet of ships arrived with his rancid olive oil and now he has the school busy making rocket fuel.

A steam frigate and trained Gatling guns on the island. The commanding general notified Hawk with signal flags that a herd of woolly mammoths marching overland trampling thousands of people and making a mockery of the anti-noise campaign. Hawk answered with smoke signals inviting the general to a pow wow. The general immediately apologized, his orders gave him no authority to negotiate with foreign powers and he said it was probably only hundreds of people...

They smoked the peace pipe and Hawk invited everybody to the party but the horses took a wrong turn and came aboard piping hot with apples in their mouths.

The new mayor reported to Hawk that nobody in town was buying or selling anything was free on the ship and because that everything was free on the ship or somewhere downstream waiting in line to get on the sidewalk and at this rate it was hardly having a town and he didn't know where he'd get another job, all he knew was being mayor. Hawk the mayor but told him the reason the town didn't amount to anything was it never had a great
Fire so he burned down along with everybody waiting in line and also the mayor when the ships arrived with his ivory he built a factory on the and now his wives are carving statues of him to sell tourists as souvenirs of the great fire and his children are making the splinters into cocktail picks.

In my nest I listen to faraway sounds, not wind, sounds of giant trumpets, sounds of grinding, crunching, screaming sounds more felt than heard but someplace faraway upstream sounds loud.

I listen to noises below of old girls and greyfaced drifters struggling until with a poing they splash far out in the slough and still struggling are swept away. All one night ked One screeched. All another long night White One moaned and in morning cradled a new baby while waving goodbye to old wailing downriver. I cannot leave the nest for the dancers claw the mast, leaping and snarling. Factory smoke blurs the high hills east, warm wind from the west stinks of sulfur and onions and things dead in swamps. I crouch alone, awake, in the nest.
A squadron of monitors and dreadnoughts steamed up the river and fired broadsides across our bow. Hawk pushed a button which flipped hundreds of struggling couples through the air and smashed the hulls and demolished the superstructures and killed several and the commodore and great carnage among admirals, humiliating several and decapitating him. He pushed another button, a salvo of rockets from school riddled the sinking with cocktail picks. The survivors were eaten by woolly mammoths floating downstream on icebergs but swam to the party. They told Hawk his glacier is ruining real estate values and his counterfeit money is so superior to the government's people are calling the president bad names and financial empires are tottering.

Hawk has been growing irritable anyway so he fired hundreds of rockets upstream with an ultimatum to stop blaming him. It isn't his glacier and if they don't leave him alone he will sail away and let the government shift for itself. A dozen of his tall black wives carried him around the deck on his throne and he told us to pack up because soon we may leave on a long voyage to happy lands.

Cap kept from the deckhouse howling that the bottom is rotten and the ship will never make it out of the slough.
Hawk roared with all his wives to bail the ship doesn't need a bottom. Cap howled that the boilers are sheets of rust and there isn't any propeller and if we ever near the sea the ship will swamp crossing the bar. Hawk roared that he could always hoist sails, but Cap stared up at my nest and so did Hawk and for a minute was very quiet and then he had his wives thrash Cap and hang him from the bowsprit by his ankles.

Black One stood below my nest staring. The dancers were clawing at the mast so I dropped onto the conveyor belt into an owl pudding topped with sour porpoise cream and chives between a stewed in a sauce of peppered crocodile blood and a roast polar bear stuffed with curried swan and mice.

In the dark aftercabin Hawk told me he is importing whales to tow the ship over the sea to a marble statue to replace the with a huge souvenir of the great fire his wives are carving and he is going to have the school extract all the gold from the seas after which they'll be worthless and he can pick them up for a song and fence them in with no-trespassing signs while he drills a hole straight down to hot rock for the new continent his architects are designing and after the tidal waves have thus the other continents he'll run help-wanted ads for the ten thousand most beautiful virgins left and they'll produce nothing but so that in twenty years he'll have over a million children and he doesn't know how many grandchildren yet
because the teachers are still building the computer to figure it out but there'll be plenty to conquer other continents and on a diet of powdered ivory and mammoth wool, in rancid olive oil they'll live forever and he'll send rockets to the moon and planets and stars and if anybody is around to argue they'll be shot dead with ivory bullets ratatat-tat just like that.

As I left the cabin Hawk stared at me and so did Black One and Boy and Red One and White One and her baby and Old Salt and Cap slowly twisting around upside down.

Ashore I walk now by the river listening to mammoths trumpeting and glaciers grinding and all the weeping people floating downstream on chunks of ice.
*** TWELVE ***

In bright moon shadowing

School and town and ship and river dimmed in yellow haze.

The sky grew deeper blue and expanded out.

And when the there, I or not attended, the woke me

Unusual warm lines from a sweet hip to fresh
trees.

And now they are building stars and planets, now they are
building continents and seas, now a cast up on the sand
air and does not return into the sea, now he builds
towns and ships, now he builds himself enemies and eats them,
now he tears down towns and sinks ships and gazes
at the mortal stars.

I run from hill to hill kneedeep in flowers
and she skips ahead and I follow through glory into a and catch her hand as
winds stir us into tumult where lightning and thunder
and into brightness above white
and we float down into grass and sleep.

White, sky settles on the crest and peaceful and safe we lie, no ancient tapestry demanding our threads in the pattern, all fresh and new within cloud, no old bones from before to bury in sadness, no new bones to build in pain, all endless motion in clouds.

Yet new, not glad, for as indeed a sudden emptiness awakes me—brown hair and a smile vanish in mist, long slim fingers, one soft downy arm clutch dead flower, and now alone and afraid, under a blue sky above the wisps and tatters of cloudflame, the sun shrunken to a hard red ball, a jolt on the hill and the wizened sun into the river under a thin band of green sky too real for mortality, yet when I turn away absolute night swallows me into—dreadful star.

Faraway where once rose mountains white in moonlight red glimmer. Faraway a roar not wind, a roar of furnaces and rocks smashing forests. Through miasma fires glare below. So down again, and down, into choking wind, the snow rots and with me smears of brown sludge.

The roar from faraway follows me to the ship, I see a sawmill on a raft cutting the logs into boards carpenters build into houses which termites eat and they also eat.
the carpenters and sawyers and loggers and then a school of smelt gobble up the termites, and I see farmgirls with rosy cheeks and farmboys with straw hats off to see the world on a bale of hay but cows eat the hay and sharks eat the cows and farmboys and farmgirls and also the smelt, and I see a band of robbers in a canoe pursued by policemen in a taxi/towing lawyers on water skis and a judge and jury on a merry-go-round and bringing up the rear a hangman and a gallows until they all are caught in a whirlpool and cast out together but muddled and the judge hangs the hangman and the jury sentences the judge and the lawyers convict the jury and the policemen cross-examine the lawyers and the robbers capture the policemen and they all clasp hands and whales surface and eat them up and also the sharks and then wooly mammoths fall from melting icebergs and crawl up on the backs of the whales and them to death and eat them and the mammoths drown and float into the turbines and all the pinball machines go dingdingdingdingding and explode in purple smoke.

As I go aboard I see Old Salt staring at me but his beard falls off and it is the Boy. I take a steaming roast from the conveyor belt but do not eat because through the cloves and ghlistening globules of hot fat I see an appendicitis scar. I draw a glass of red wine but do not drink because it clots. I climb to my nest and wash my beard and lie down, awake, no more time for lessons.
The faraway is all around, a roar not of wind or water, a roar of fires, a roar of stars no longer in the sky but hovering over the ship. Brown hills dissolved in rotten snow edge out into the smoke of the school, the town, the sidewalk, not to the ship stops. The conveyor belt rattle and I watch the old schoolgirls piping hot with apples in their mouths, the grey-faced drifters, teachers, mayors, Hawk's black wives and kabobs of his black children on ivory cocktail picks, and finally tall-natted cooks and white-coated waiters and then the factory erupts in a flash of steam, the river carves the river in starglare, star roar, I watch the red-vested Bartenders and bare-shouldered Barmaids crawl into the pipeline and dribble onto deck from the open faucets, and then the factory dissolves into the river.

On his throne atop the aftercabin Hawk gives the order to cast off from the bowsprit Cap howls but the whale lashed to the larboard and the whale lashed to the starboard flip their tales and as they die we are underway. Hawk slumps back and a seagull perches on his head and streaks his face with lime hand reaches out the deck and clutches the seagull by the feet and pulls it into the hold.

Time for one last lesson? Motion
sleep is suspended in transit from penalty for sins of our past, sins yet to come, borne ever onward downward never to awake until the motion ends. What but sleep is complete? What food, what drink, still hunger and thirst? What love lasts in flesh? What god endures in temples? How live dead? Beware black deeps below, beware blue deeps above, dream lightly in white mist, never dive to the bottom of the sea, never fly above the sky, float softly, float safely. Now at long last clouds mingle droplet by droplet, beyond hunger and thirst and love and dreams the brown girl and I are forever one.

Between two dead whales we drift downstream to another distant roar. There goes a mayor floating bellyup with an apple in his mouth, there goes a schoolhouse with a clapperless bell, there go clumps of willow and chunks of ice and a bloated mammoth and an ivory rocket leaking a trail of rancid olive oil.

At the stern Old Salt with an albatross around his neck is lashed to the wheel staring but his eyes are gone. Hawk with an apple in his mouth slumps on the throne staring but his eyes are gone. At his feet Red One lies on her back, deathsmooth balloons bare, she stares but her eyes are gone. From a starboard port-hole a Packrat with long hair has fingers sunk in a dead whale, from a larboard port-hole a Packrat with a beard has fingers sunk in a dead whale, and both stare,
but their eyes are gone. In the door of the forecastle squats the White One cradling her new baby, both staring but their eyes are gone. Hanging from the bowsprit with a stake through his heart turns slowly round and round staring but his eyes are gone. below my nest Black One staring but she never had any eyes, not now as we float downriver between two dead whales in starglare, star roar, not when we three came by bus to school, not when the dingdong bells drove us to the tavern, not when the tavern closed and we followed the cooks and waiters, bartenders and barmaids, down to the slough to _______ to Old Sally's party not when we came aboard and found her awaiting us, still young then.

The Boy's eyes stared at me and patiently sawing down the mast. Restful, peaceful sound mingled in star roar and sea roar and lulling waves and gentle wind, all misty now my eyes, marvelous sleep in moving fog, now to sleep my brown girl, now the town is gone upriver and the school, now gone upriver are the island and the brown hills and the green, now we are blended in a single sleep my brown girl, one long light endless sleep beyond dreams we sleep together, for gone upriver, gone forever, are all the noisy staring eyes and all the pages of the book, all gone upriver, gone forever, are the days before we were born.

END