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Voyage

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Voyage

Donna Pucciani

Just out of port on a warm June day,
Passengers hung evening gowns, silk ties, with care,
Then stood on the deck in sensible shoes
To watch the Statue of Liberty wave skyscrapers
Out of view, the vast, simple gray of sky and sea
Blotting out the burdens of the granite shore.

Lulled by wine at dinner,
Crowded by gloved waiters serving caviar, they roused to
The captain's staccato British over the loudspeaker
Apologizing for the low-pressure system ahead:
"Hold onto the brass rails; watch your footing."
In rhinestones and tuxedos, sobered after coffee and brandy,
Sated diners staggered from the club to casino,
Riding elevators to the midnight buffet,
Reveling, uneasy, among ice sculptures,
Canapes trembling on silver trays,
While the younger set lurched in the karaoke bar,
And the alto in the lounge clung to the piano,
Singing Gershwin.

In small staterooms,
The portholes had been battered shut
Against the North Atlantic's elephantine sway;
A few tired voyagers lay awake under down quilts
Listening, wide-eyed, to creaks, groans,
The steady rolling darkness of gale force nine
Turning splashes into odd, booming noises,
Not like midnight thunders back home,
Hugely familiar on hot summer nights,
But the deep, slow burbling of some cosmic kettledrum.

The nine-deck city, jeweled and festive,
Bumped like a neon Queen all night,
Grinding in harlequin seas,
While gentlemen in black ties and silver-haired, sequined
ladies
Sought the ship's doctor for tablets,
And crystal goblets in the promenade shops
Chattered like a thousand caged nightingales.