

**Michael Spence**

**All Ashore**

*Get off me!* The sailor throws an elbow back  
Into the face of the guy who's hooked his neck  
With a grimy arm. The sound — sharp as the smack  
Of a salmon slapped down on a flat rock —  
Is a short burst of music: the crack of a stick  
On a piñata. We see his elbow strike  
The right tune for the guy's face to leak  
Like a ruptured vegetable. An encore blow makes  
The arm release the way the lid of a box  
Pops open when a sharp whack breaks  
Its hinge. Most of the people in the bar gawk  
And roar at the show; many have wanted to deck  
The guy themselves — his glares and trash talk  
Made them retreat to corners where the black  
Of shadows is thickest. Now they watch this dick  
Hit the floor like a lumpy, rumped sack  
Thrown off the back of a garbage truck.  
The Shore Patrol's been holding off: the trick  
To breaking up a fight is "let them knock  
Most of the shit out of themselves, then pick  
Up whoever's left." So the SP, for the sake  
Of safety, lets the sailor have a quick  
Shot of whiskey to celebrate his vic-  
Tory — the cheering crowd of alcoholics  
Might make his apprehension problematic.  
Like the last note of an *opera comique*  
Applauding the performance, we shipmates click  
Our mugs to peace in our time and throw them back.

### Considering

Considering how ignorant I am,  
I'm doing pretty well — I got this house,  
A car that's not too old, even a slice  
Of yard out front, though dandelions claim

The ground the grass once covered. Too lazy  
To dig them out, too cheap to hire a gardener;  
I know my neighbor doesn't like it. Who cares?  
My wife's the one who did all that, but *she* —

I use that word so I don't have to say  
Her name — decided there were better fish  
To hook than a carp like me. She's right; what cash  
I ever earned I turned to booze the way

Jesus did with water. (She hated my jokes,  
Especially the religious ones.) She found  
A proper model in her pews, a bland  
But clean-cut hygienist who promised to take

Her away from all this . . . from my all this  
To his, that is. I hear she's happier.  
So do I get some credit for that? The beer  
I swallow this morning scours my mouth with its fizz.

*It isn't that you're stupid*, she used to tell me;  
You lack ambition. I thought her bible frowned  
On worldliness, I'd answer; I might offend  
Her god if I chased after Mammon. *You could try*

*To become a manager — why work on the line  
Forever?* It gave me time to think, I'd match  
Her tone. *About what?* About how much  
I love you, I'd grin and blow a kiss. *You complain*

*That you don't like it, she'd sigh; you could try to get  
A better job. I had grown way too old  
To be a wunderkind, I'd reply. I had called  
It wrong when I chose a dumbass gig I thought*

*Was only temporary — but that final dawn  
My ship came in, it had turned into a scow.  
I turned my back on that sea and its promise. Now  
I keep my gaze here on the pier I'm standing on.*

*She'd said, Your attitude is blue as your collar:  
I have to leave before I drown in your gloom.*

*This house seemed small for us. I've got more room  
Since she took off. So why does it feel smaller?*