

Boarding the MV from Monrovia

by John Davis

The chief mates tries to bribe me with bourbon
in coffee and a wide grin. There's a gap in that grin
a missing tooth. Maybe that's where he'll find

the load-line certificate. He rummages through
papers, bottles, shackles—a bear poking his snout
in anthills, flicking bees from his paws,

about to rub-up against a tree, scratch
his itches, roar that he's found the certificate.
The cabin smells of oil. A *Playboy* calendar

hangs on the bulkhead open to June. It's July
but Miss June smiles her bosomy smile. Tension
off-loads like a ferryboat. The bear bumbles,

grunts like a glacier calving, stomps, smashes
a basket before his thick paw produces
the certificate creased like starlight. His ragged breath

pants. *Where is the COFR?* I ask. He slaps down
the Dangerous Cargo Manifest, growls and grunts,
yanks a cabinet to test his strength. How soon

will fur rise from his hackles, his fangs
glint in weak light and the gnaw and gnashing
begin? Legend has it a woman becomes

a bear when her husband turns to sadness.
Has she become this man? If this were a painting,
anger would be tapping rhythm in a bear's eye,

his mind wrapped tight as ivy. I would be the echo
in the hollow corner with a heart of gray snow.
The bear would sharpen his talons on my bones.

**COFR: "Certificate of Financial Responsibility"*

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