

The Sea is not Sorry

He'd been hurled there. And you found him in the morning. *Todarodes pacificus*, known as Japanese flying squid in northern parts of the Pacific. Dashed to death on the deck. You picked him up by a tentacle. Studied him for a moment. Then you tossed him to the sea. You stared at the water as if to ask, 'Don't you feel just a little bit of remorse?'

And the wind called back at you, in a reasonable, gentle voice at first that quickly changed to a deafening bellow: 'Remorse? Did you say Remorse? Have you no idea at all! The sea does not have remorse! Not ever! The sea is never sorry! Never.'

You knew that all along. But still you asked. Sometimes you wondered where it began and where it might end; what constitution created the sea, and what was merely contrived nonsense made up by us to rationalize our feelings. To make us feel better. You've heard it a lot: 'I love the sea; I gaze at the horizon; walk on the beach when it's wild. I love the taste of salt and the sting of the wind-whipped sand.'

Hemingway knew about this, although he gave it a female identity: "He always thought of the sea as 'la mar' which is what people call her in Spanish when they love her." He pointed out that some use the masculine 'el mar' when they think of her in terms of a contest or as an enemy. But he wanted his *Old Man of the Sea* to engage with the feminine form, perhaps for poetic reasons, "...the old man always thought of her as feminine and as something that gave or withheld great favours, and if she did wild or wicked things it was because she could not help them. The moon affects her as it does a woman, he thought."

You could go with that. Read mood swings, depression, tempestuousness, the doldrums and ennui right in there, intertwined with the fair winds and sunshine. Yet, to be honest, gender has always been omnipresent in the ocean. You have always been the trespasser in this domain, not the controller. You could make a mistake at any time.

On a clear night, 500 miles out and 500 to go, Orion grew proud in the sky as Venus sank to the western horizon. You studied the patterns of the firmament to your heart's content. By dawn you'd had a couple of hours rest after your watch. But by mid-morning, the rain had settled in and you had to follow a fickle wind that took you off course. You were wet. You felt a sense of desolation. Did you still love the sea? By mid-afternoon you were able to gybe and make your way back to your heading. You were soaked through.

The waves had flattened, and the wind had picked up. Sheets of rain blanketed the rolling swells, whipping fresh water across your salt encrusted face. The boat felt well balanced, so you held the wheel lightly, skimming the surface at about 10 knots over the ground. Wet or not, you felt exhilarated. Then the wind continued to increase. You wanted to reduce the sail area; put a reef in the mainsail, but it blew with too much strength and you tightened your grip on the wheel.

It would have been easy to make a comparison in human terms: confront the challenge; reason with it; perhaps deny the issue; or invent some appropriate curse to scream in anger. But you found it wise to deal with the business at hand, and decided to turn away, too busy for frivolous claptrap. You could bear away, to avoid the heavy crash of a dangerously overpowered gybe. Then you could let things settle again.

You gave it an hour or so before reefing to reduce the sail area; when dusk was looming. Then it calmed again, and the wind dropped to nil just as suddenly as it had intensified. It was time to go off watch.

It didn't seem long enough. You were climbing out of your berth and into your wet gear, lifejacket, harness, boots, gloves, beanie and hood. You looked out to the cockpit and lightening flashed. So out you went again. You let the mainsail out to spill excess wind, but it still copped a flogging; loud and crisp. You sat down and hung on to the wheel with torrential rain and salt-spray both lashing your face. Thunderclaps resounded from overhead and from afar. Lightening shards stabbed at the sea. You watched in awe. It was pretty. Then you sang: '*...pour your midnight rain on me*'. You became more settled, but when the storm had passed behind you there was no denying that it was a blessed relief.

Down below again you climbed out of your wet gear and ate something hot. You felt like something to drink. You were tired and you relied on autohelm; trusting the instruments for a few hours.

And then, in the morning, conditions had calmed and the sky was clear. Fifteen-knot southerlies led towards the intended position and there were some eggs to cook for breakfast.

Out on deck you found a squid. *Todarodes pacificus*, known as Japanese flying squid. You picked him up by a tentacle. Studied him for a moment. Then you tossed him to the sea.

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