

strapped to the mast

by Jerry Ratch

The light streaming out of the background of things, in the absence of memory. That's what I'm talking about. Prepare to let out all your light from night until dawn, if you want to be in the middle of life. I never wanted to stay at the edges. It didn't suit me at all.

Yes, I was a waitress. Yes, I rode motorcycles, and witnessed death. Yes, I saw it all, and would have told all, if someone, anyone, had asked. I didn't stay at home on the shores, hungering after Ulysses (was that who you were?) if you want to know the truth. I was in the holds of the ships, with the men. And yes, I rode out the storms with them, lashed to the masts of life. I was the bride stripped bare, descending a staircase for the artist. I was the model for Gauguin, nude upon the beaches, with my rosy nipples in the air.

If you wanted to come home to a bowl of ox-tail soup, you shouldn't have come knocking at my door. And yes, maybe my soul is still up there on your ceiling. Or at least a faint brown smudge of it, with blonde streaks wiped through it, as traces of where I've been.

