

Abandon(ed) Ship

Dante Kunc

I am not sure where I first heard

The way to tell a ship is sinking

Is the scuttle of rats' feet on deck

As they throw themselves into the ocean.

I wonder who first saw the rodents panic,

If they thought it a good omen,

If they saw the unnatural act and rejoiced.

How do the rats know it's time to leave—

A pit in the stomach? Sudden panic? Or is it more

Clever – hearing the whispers of the captain's ineptitude

As they sail further away from the blaze of the lighthouse.

And what makes the waves more alluring than clinging to

The precious hours – minutes – left on dry ground?

Maybe they know they were never welcome here anyway.

The realisation that we'd never reach harbour didn't

Crash into me, no, I couldn't even see the water for the waves.

Less a storm, more a gentle rocking –

Normal, Normal –

Unnatural.

The altitude changed not enough to notice,

But when the world shifted, I stayed in place. Frozen in hope.

Women and children first, but lifeboats speak of uncertainty

And we were all so sure. I am not the captain, never wanted

Anything but peace. The ocean looks charming
When complacency is the alternative.

I don't know if rats are really the first
 To run when water starts seeping into the hull
 But I never imagined that amongst their panicked paws
 I'd hear my own feet against the wood.