

How to Domesticate a Pirate

by Danielle Wood

Step onto a ship wearing a small black dress that is not enough to protect you from a wind that blows colder over water than it does over land. It forces you to seek warmth in the radiance of a man whose bare feet have the same rough-hardness as deck timber and who smells of brine and varnish. In his sunbrowned face his smile is a white cutlass. His eyes, predictably, are blue. Issue an invitation, but do not wait for it to be accepted. Look back over your shoulder as you walk the plank. Say *I'll be expecting you*.

Get used to being caressed by hands that make you feel as rare and precious as other things they've touched, like the horny shell of Jonathan the tortoise, who walked St Helena with Napoleon, and the purple hearts of ebony trees, both king and queen. Learn to fuck in a hammock, you on top, taut fabric curling like another skin around your knees and calves and feet. Fall in love with the feeling of poems reeling out of you like tunes out of his battered fiddle, some of them as bright and brief as phosphorescence, others as thick and durable as rope. You hope that in years hence you will be able to suck on these and still taste salt water.

When the time is right, begin to lure him ashore. Suggest a tent rather than a house (at this stage) and spend a year's worth of dawns in its pitched glow-worm green. The poems from this time are, like your sheets, stained with pindan. You will never be able to wash it out, but nor would you want to.

Now accept a proposal of marriage that is offered to you on the palm of a hand, along with a freshly-shucked oyster. But then push your canoe away from the rocks, over the aqua shallows to the navy depths where you couldn't hear even if someone were shouting at you to come back to shore. Ostensibly, you don't like weddings. But out here, you wrestle with the Barbie doll sector of your soul. The part that tries to seduce you by whispering crimplene thoughts and scattering fake rose petals at your feet. You try to drown her, but her synthetic hair doesn't hold water and her plastic hollow limbs just keep bobbing to the surface.

Acquire a house, and jobs that mean you can pay for it and all the things it must contain. Oh brave new world! Who would have imagined the glory of choosing exactly the right bath tap! Each new purchase generates an invisible computer code, and the multiplying sequences of numbers encircle you, locking you tight to the world of debt.

Next, bear a child with blue eyes. Suspect that he, too, will grow to think of your poems as the elaborate talking of shit; will learn to smile with baffled indulgence at your finely wrought lines. Know that you are doomed to love him – unconditionally, painfully, gratefully – anyway.

Wonder whether you will ever again write poetry, now that your mind is full of so much else. Else, else, else. There is nothing but else in your head these days, and else is all the

language that is left between you and the man who comes home to you each night now in a suit.

will the nappies last until Saturday?
Optus or Telstra?
what if interest rates rise?
is the car service due?
who wormed the dog?
accumulation or defined benefit?
when *is* enough enough?

The else is like packing foam, insubstantial and expansive. Your head is crammed with little dimples of it that are the same shape and colour as prawn crackers, but quite a bit smaller. Or else the else is like popcorn, clouding and crowding with sudden inflations. Soon cumulus pieces begin to tumble out of the holes of your ears.

Stand in a supermarket queue and pass judgement. Here, you catch yourself despising a woman in beige three-quarter pants because she has filled her trolley with her own suburbanity. And because, when she talks to her toddler, she refers to herself in the third person. But when you – in your internal voice – mock her, you sound just like yourself.

You suspect you might be depressed but find yourself too pathetic to admit it. Nightly on the news American grenades explode brownskinned families while Australian tourists fuck little seven-year-old Thai boys up the arse while the planet coughs up its diminishing oil reserves so that humanity can fry itself and here in your middle class house in your first world country with your husband and your child and your fabric softener, you're crying about *what* exactly?

When your husband comes out of the bedroom in the morning and asks you a question, and you find yourself paralysed by its malice-less venom, know that you deserve it. That you've asked for it. That you've had it coming. That you carried the seeds of it on the hem of your small black dress, that you glimpsed the grit of it in the mucousy flesh of that oyster, that you allowed it to be slipped onto your finger, that you grew it in your womb, applied to the bank for it, wrote it on the shopping list for Saturday. When he asks again, because he thinks you haven't heard, don't cry for your pirate and his roughbare feet and cutlass smile. Don't over-react. He only wants to know if you've ironed his shirt yet.



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