

## *Julius*

(1907 – 1953)

1.

Ice grinds ice in its sleep, ratcheting my spine;  
cold slices deep into bone, flaying me alive.  
All white, all starving, all dried, all changed—  
my eyes to glass; my heart to solids—all  
crushed by wheezing seas and freezing Jesus.

2.

Here lies the fading Julius Edward Falch; the  
named reverse of my father, Edward Julius  
Falch, born and reborn in his life while I, the  
child of one brief mother, am marooned on  
the ship *GB4* stuck like muck in the lids of the  
polar seas. I pray I shall be prized from this  
hold as I was from my mother Maud. Please.



3.

Darkness forgets what darkness looks like and in this soft coffin hammock I feel I should never have been born at all, not even the once. I curse Edward and his blithe serial life from toddler, sailor, shingler, fisher-man, hotel keeper to old man; always if not in a warm light, then on the way to one.

My fingertips freeze on the porthole. My essence rattles its small, cold bell. Anchors dangle on chains as if they would push, not drag, could they but reach. Their swing replaces time.

Wherever Edward Julius looked, he saw possibility.

I may die.

4.

My mind turns to snow. Beds creak and heave as souls leave them. The vengeful God of Silence steps aside for Ice All Mighty.

Northern Lights scream colors across the sky  
— as if light were anything like that. Or heat.

5.

Imagine a place to walk. Orchards and arbors  
and roses and ponds. Imagine your hands are  
warm. You swing open the porthole. A  
breeze lands on you with a puff. You bathe  
in pollen-scented air and hear sounds. Things  
alight. Imagine a house.

6.

My thoughts jumble: last, first, transiting.

Perhaps if my given names had been ordered  
in reverse I would be saved.

7.

My father Edward was born in 1872, in the  
Norse Kingdom. The birds of Norway fol-  
lowed the offal of the boat he signed on to,  
still a very young man, as it wanderd toward  
Shields-on-Tyne, thence to ply the coast. He  
was fourteen and awake and on his unhurried  
way to meet and marry my mother.

I, Julius, his son, now 25, from New Westminster, a decimal of what I could be, near oblivion; my atoms evaluating new hosts.

8.

Edward sailed on the *Bonaventure* to Jerusalem to see the churches, the carved wooden sheep. He returned with a thimbleful of balm.

9.

I am born: Julius, murderer at birth of my mother, Maud, whom I will not meet again on earth, Maud who traveled from Norway o bear me and die with a thimbleful of balm. So far to come so close for far too little.



10.

After Maude, my father married Annie Lawrence of Dundee. She brought a piano to the hotel we lived in. I took a few steps there—west?—bracing myself on the chill walls.

Before me, Annie or Maude, *The Good Lord Nelson* took Edward on a nearer circuit: Glasgow, Liverpool, Ireland. He became expert on game. He stood everyone to drinks.

Later the *Albion* brought him to Oregon. He opened his arms to everything. Lucky Edward: grateful guest, genial host.

11.

My father's father by this time was orderly and still, under a stone near the port, near his old white house. His wife, Julia, lived in his planed board house and walked out in good weather. The coast kept her beloved Norway in and the ocean out. Bad day or good, she climbed the narrow stairways of the house, bracing herself on the chill walls.

From the small, peaked room at the top she could see houses, shops, church, road, docks, ships tilting and straightening as water weighed them each in its shifting palms; and, inland—the distance of only one house from shore—the fenced-off square of grass where her husband, if he was capable, six feet under, must think of the sea and sometimes of his son Julius, sailing away on it. When he was lonelier than even he could bear, Edward might even have thought of her.



12.

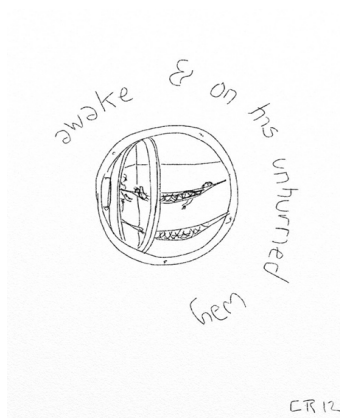
Since rescue and mustering out, I have not been able to move my right foot.

13.

In the whole of his life Edward does not own a boat. I will build one from our atoms.

14.

Edward's voyage to Oregon took one hundred and seventy-two days. Shorebirds, up to their knees in mud, welcomed and chatted him up about the New World. Lucky Edward the Attentive.



He found his way to Seattle and then to Canada where he cut shingles at the end of East Hastings Street. A cedar with an eleven-foot girth yielded twenty-eight cords of shingle bolts. He moved to Steveston on the west coast and outfitted tourists for salmon fishing on the Fraser River.

15.

I am born, pointlessly, a murderer, with no plans. There is a curtain. The world is on one side, the world is on the other.



There is a curtain. I will never again go to sea. I cannot move my right foot.

16.

Julia braced herself in the narrow stairways of the old house, her husband already in the ground; as I would be, later, but as if by a straight route.



Annie took over as Edward's wife from my murdered mother, Maud. There is a curtain. Edward is behind it. There is a curtain. Julius is behind it, able to take a few steps, perhaps to the south.

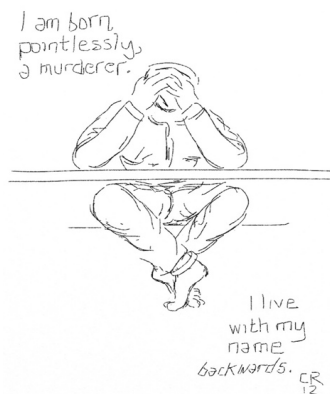
17.

Edward opened his arms wide to everything. I cannot move my right foot. I live with backwards names. There is a curtain.

Lucky Julius.

18.

My essence rattles its small, cold bell.



19.

A sturgeon could weigh eight hundred sixty-four pounds. A summer's catch could earn Edward four thousand dollars. But he contracted typhus. He asked for water. A thimbleful. He fell in love with his nurse and did not die.

20.

I do not die at birth, I do not die on a ship. Rescued and mustered out, I limp to a hill above high water in Seattle and find myself a house.

Onto the face of the door I carve a schooner, its masts filled with wind. Above and below the ship I carve four strong anchors. I do not carve the sun though it shines on the house as surely as it does on the open sea.

21.

Edward writes: *Julius, there are salmon here as big as your leg.*

I cannot move my foot.

I change a window to a porthole. My hands are warm. As I swing open the glass, a breeze lands with a puff.



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22.

I hang pine paneling and fill a decanter with port. I hang a lantern, a tiny hammock for books, a navigational map of the Irish Sea. On a rises of the narrow stairway I carve *Bonaventure*. I carve *The Good Lord Nelson* on another. *Albion*. GB4.

23.

Canadian waters were bristling with fishermen when Lucky Adventurer Edward opened his hotel: *The Royal Neptune*, sailing the streets of New Westminster like a ship of the main. There he met Maude, my doomed mother.

I fashion a captain's bunk with two drawers in the frame. I hang a bell at the front door, a twist of rope hanging from its clapper.

24.

From his hotel, Edward took adventurers to the inland darkness of timbered Canada.

Later, from the little, peaked room upstairs Julia would see houses, shops, church, orchard, lighthouse, pond. From her own fenced square of grass, if she is capable, Julia may think of the sea—of Edward, sailing away on it. She does not know about me: Julius.

25.

I plant an orchard, an arbor. I sink a pond and pile stones for a lighthouse.

I will not meet my mother again on earth.  
'There is a curtain.

I install a view box in the front door so when  
someone outside knocks, someone inside can  
open it and see.

I introduce small, shiny fish to the pond. I  
nestle a candle in the lighthouse.

Darkness forgets what darkness looks like.

I am born.