**OUTRAGE**

**By Alvaro Enrigue**

**Translated by : Brendan Riley**

*Why do I want a life without honor if I already bet everything I had?*

[A. Esparza Oteo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfonso_Esparza_Oteo)

A highway can be like the high seas. The sun burning on your face, the fresh cleansing breeze in your lungs, your hands tightly gripping the rails along the steel deck, the rotten stench rising from the bilge. Drake Horowitz believed this for quite some time without being able to test it out for himself being the newest crew member aboard the [*Outrageous Fortune*](http://www.monologuearchive.com/s/shakespeare_001.html), he had to sit in the middle of the front seat, between Verrazano and the driver. Company regulations prohibited riding outside the cabin when the truck was moving at high speeds. So, with growing resentment, he stayed put, poring over the latest American League scores in the sports section of the *Baltimore Sun*. Drake leaned forward slightly to keep his head out of the way, hardly paying any attention to the two men as they chattered and gossiped, trading thoughts, comments, and insults.

The idea of christening the truck came from a photo in a *National Geographic* they fished out of a black plastic garbage bag. All sorts of things drifted to their ship in that way, as if following the course of a secret tide. Hefting the trash bag, fat Verrazano noticed the dead ballast of printed material inside. He weighed it a moment, raising and lowering the hag clenched in his fist, eyes narrowed, lips drawn tight. Then he dropped it to the ground and squatted down, prodding and squeezing the contents: Those sons of bitches think they can fool a man who’s been collecting trash for fifteen years! he said to his coworkers. After every squeeze his expert nose pondered the smells emanating from the bag: They’re magazines, he continued, recent issues, good condition, perfectly recyclable. He didn’t throw the bag into the trash compactor. Later, as they were heading back to the plant, he opened the sack and saw that it contained shopping catalogs and issues of *National Geographic*. Nary a hint of pornography. The driver, who according to the company hierarchy held the rank of ship’s captain, proposed that they file a formal complaint about the customer—not for violating the recycling rule, but because it was, well, unbelievable. The goddamned white man’s hypocrisy! he said in a low, dense, cavernous voice. Verrazano snorted in disgust and let the bag tumble to the floor of the cab. Drake, who had already finished the sports section, grabbed one of the magazines and began to flip through it. During their lunch break he showed them the photo. They’d stopped at a park and were seated at a picnic table, sharing a package of fish jerky and some crackers. Look, he told them, south of the border they name their trucks. The picture showed a dump truck, its rear license plate frame inscribed with a Spanish phrase in red letters: *No Me Olvides*. The next day, before reaching their assigned neighborhood, Drake proposed that they write *Outrageous Fortune* on the truck’s rear bumper. Verrazano agreed immediately; he liked the idea of a personalized workspace: his own car sported various decorations that made it unique and, in his eyes, elegant. The Captain didn’t even turn to look at them while they discussed it. Drake pointed out that they could also attach a flag to the truck, a black one, he said. Verrazano thought the idea strange but ballsy. It took them weeks to persuade the old man to let them paint the name on. He finally gave in, provided they would quit asking for the flag: company regulations prohibited exterior fixtures and any hanging objects. Fat Verrazano tried one last time, reminding him that the flag would be black. Like your ass, he added. The Captain told him to shut up. If not, he was going to throw the rosary out the window that Verrazano’d had the nerve to hang from the mirror on their first run together.

On the day when Drake Horowitz finally tested out his theory that the highway can be like the high seas, and a garbage truck like a ship, the morning dawned— in defiance of every sailor’s superstition—without auguries. The night before, Drake had gone out to a minor-league game with his brother and his nephews, who swung by the plant early to pick him up. He didn’t call his wife to tell her that he’d be home late. In recent weeks, even the least disagreement set her off on such a loud and wild tirade that he frequently had to slap her to calm her down. And Drake was no wife-beater, by nature. In the car, his nephews asked him about their cousin, but Drake just shrugged his shoulders reluctantly and said that he’d decided to stay home with his mother. Drake’s brother, who knew that the couple were going through a rough spell, gave him a few quick pats on the shoulder before starting the motor. They all said nothing on the way, the boys arguing now and then and their father shouting them into silence when they got on his nerves. During the game, Drake and his brother drank so much that the eldest boy began to get worried, and even tried whining and crying to get them to stop. When beer sales were cut off at the top of the eighth inning they drove to a biker bar just off the highway. The idea was to buy a case of beer and drink it together back at Drake’s apartment—the boys could sleep in their cousins’ room—but the place seemed so comfortable, and the drive back to the city so long, that they preferred to stay put. After the first shot of bourbon, Drake’s brother went out to take his boys a little bag of peanuts and the car keys so they could listen to the radio. Drake’s memory of the night faded out a short while later.

He awoke alone, stretched out on a bench at his neighborhood basketball court, guilt-free and soaked in sweat. He rubbed his face and looked at his watch. Nearly five o’clock in the morning and it had barely cooled off during the night. He started walking home quickly, thinking it was going to be a brutally hot day; he had little more than half an hour to shower and eat something before Verrazano rang his doorbell.

The christening of the *Outrageous Fortune* was just another inoffensive oddity, one of the many that arise in a garbage man’s infinitely tedious life. Horowitz had chosen a fine name for his galleon and the Captain thought it would do no harm to make it official. After he got used to the sign on the rear bumper, he began using the name himself. He’d noticed that overlooking Drake’s whims helped the poor disgruntled fellow get on better with his job. His minor peculiarities were always pretty tolerable, like having to eat jerky and crackers when it was Drake’s turn to bring lunch; or getting used to those nautical terms: *hatch* for door, *bridge* for driver’s cab, *helm* for steering wheel,*locker* for glove compartment. They were inoffensive manias, at least compared to Verrazano’s outright insanity: the fat man was just as likely to pick a fight with a police officer as start kicking over the garbage cans at a house if he thought they’d been improperly filled.

The garbage truck had always made Drake think of a ship. But one morning the previous autumn the tide had brought them a box of books, and since then the idea had gained an increasingly strong hold over his mind. He was tying the remains of some broken furniture on top of the truck when Verrazano froze in his tracks, hands dead at his sides, a look of disbelief frozen on his face. Who do these people think they are? he screamed. This has got to violate every regulation of trash collection in the United States. Busy as he was with his task, Drake hardly paid him any attention. Look at this, Horowitz. Books. Right here, in an open cardboard box. I can’t believe it. Descending the poop-deck ladder, Drake suggested he just dump them in the trash compactor and leave it at that. Impossible, responded Verrazano. Just throw them in the back and forget about it. That’s a crime, Verrazano bellowed. Why? What do you mean, why; it’s perfectly recyclable paper. Besides, they’re books. Kids in the inner city can’t even go to school and rich people in the suburbs throw books in the garbage. Then take ’em to the library or file a complaint against this house for not recycling, Drake said. With spluttering bravado, the fat man declared he would do exactly that, then set the box down in the truck’s cab. Now with lunch finished—his wife had prepared them a fantastic lasagna—calm, settled, and bored by the long return trip to the plant, Verrazano began to look through the contents of the box. He leafed through two or three books. One of them caught his attention. Look at this one, he said, showing it to Horowitz. I can’t believe this: [*Song of Myself*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Song_of_Myself). So much pride can’t be good for kids. Verrazano grabbed the book by its spine and flung it out the window. The other two laughed. He kept on digging through the box. Oh, please, he said after a while, look at this. He showed them a copy of [*Junkie*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Junkie_(novel)). Now, that’s just plain wrong. He repeated his prank, and this time scored a direct hit on a mailbox. Ugh, [*A Doll’s House*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Doll%27s_House). That’s for whores and stuck up bitches, and he sent it sailing with style, like a Frisbee. [*Mexico City Blues*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexico_City_Blues). He snorted. Beaners. Fuck that shit. I’m throwing that one, said the Captain. Nope, replied Verrazano, because here’s one especially for you, and he handed him a copy of [*Heart of Darkness*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heart_of_Darkness). And this one’s for Horowitz: *Drake in the Pirates’ Era*. When they reached the plant all the books had gone out the window except the one about pirates. Drake began reading it that very night. Things at home were still going well then: there was less time for him and his wife to drink when he was busy reading for a few hours every night.

 Such repose would have been impossible during that summer, when the highway was like the high seas. Verrazano thought it strange that Horowitz was already waiting for him—with a face like a castaway’s—on the front steps of his building. Even more so that he didn’t react when Verrazano parked his white Galaxie right in front of him: it wasn’t the kind of car that went unnoticed. He strained to lean over and roll down the passenger-side window, then whistled loudly to get his attention. Drake waved at him and got up clumsily, like a deep-sea diver moving with slow, meticulous care along the ocean floor. He was wearing the same clothes as the day before. From inside the car, the fat man saw him listlessly open the back door and drop a large, canvas duffel bag onto the seat, much bigger than the one he normally carried. The plush velvet seat cushions barely muffled the loud, metallic clatter of the bag’s contents. Are you going to play ball after work? Verrazano asked. No, said Horowitz. But you’ve got your bat in there, right? And my rifle. Sure.

Once outside the city, as on every morning, they chose a random street where they could steal a newspaper. We’re in luck, said the fat man as he spotted the *New York Times*in its blue plastic bag lying in the front yard of a McMansion. Out on the highway, they stopped for coffee at a gas station mini-mart. There, Drake told him what had happened.

When he got back to his apartment after spending the night, or part of it, on the neighborhood basketball court, he was still floating in that hazy serenity between drunkenness and hangover. It took a while for his clumsy hands to fish the keys out of his jeans pocket. Feeling a little dizzy as he tried to choose the right one, he stopped and rested his head against the door, which swung open under its weight. Although he knew right away that his wife had left him, he preferred to think that the door had been left unlatched by accident, and even thought about giving her hell when she woke up to make breakfast for their son. Drake went quietly into the kitchen and drank a glass of milk. As he closed the refrigerator he saw the Post-it stranded in the center of the door bearing the most laconic of farewells: I’m gone. He peeled off the little square note and read it a few more times, surprised that he felt nothing. Before going into the bathroom he went to make sure that his son hadn’t been left behind. Drake wouldn’t have known what to do with him.

He felt a surge of relief at finding himself alone. In the bathroom he turned on the hot water and sat on the toilet, waiting for steam to fill the room before getting into the shower. He’d always thought that breathing in steam had some curative effect. Suddenly he had to piss. Standing up, he lifted the toilet seat lid and saw a couple of condoms floating in the bowl. A burning wave of pain shot up from the base of his spine and surged through his whole body. He kicked over chairs, smashed dishes, flipped the kitchen table upside down. In the bedroom Drake found her robe thrown on the floor next to the foil condom wrappers; a man’s bikini briefs were hanging on the bedpost. He thought of setting fire to them but then saw they belonged to a much bigger man. He dropped them on the floor and sat down on the bed, temples pounding, his brain reeling between rage and self-pity. He held his face in his hands, rubbing slowly. Then he noticed the smell. It took him only a few seconds to discover, in the dead center of the bed, a turd so large it could not have been made by a woman.

Verrazano’s reaction to the tale was surprisingly cool. You say he took a shit in your bed? Horowitz nodded his head. He’s got to be Arab, or Chinese. Why? Christians don’t do things like that. Besides, he had bikini underwear. Real men wear boxers. They sat in silence. Drake slid down in his seat, sinking beneath the weight of his hangover, which was now beginning to assume oceanic proportions. They were driving along the county road leading to the plant. Verrazano had his left hand on the wheel and was stroking his beard with the right. after a while the fat man spoke up, sounding like he had solved a riddle: And you brought your rifle to kill her if we run into them. Horowitz shrugged his shoulders. I’d do the same, brother, concluded the other man, gently massaging the back of his companion’s neck. Drake was so distressed that the gesture actually seemed comforting.

It wasn’t even six-thirty yet but it was already hot. The hazy white sunlight bounced off the plant’s polished concrete in a soft humid blur, shooting directly into the softest, most sensitive part of Drake’s brain. Sweat trickled down, stinging his unshaved face. His wristwatch hand was shaking so much he had to hold it steady with the other just to read the time. He had ten minutes before they headed out for the day, so he walked to the bathroom. He threw up his coffee then furiously washed his face. As he stood there staring at himself in the mirror he recalled how his brother had foreseen the whole blowup. One Sunday afternoon they had gotten together at Drake’s apartment to eat lunch and watch a World Series game. They were out on the balcony, drinking beers and grilling sausages. Their wives were in the kitchen, busy making salad. The boys, having fun before the pre-game show started, were playing on an outdated video game console Drake had found a few days earlier next to a trash can in a wealthy suburb. The Horowitz brothers were in a good mood, recalling their youthful escapades in the neighborhood where Drake—the youngest—continued to be stuck. It was all so pleasant—the fresh breeze, the deep blue sky, the clear sharp afternoon light—that Drake started talking. He told his brother how he had figured out the origin of his name; it came from an infamous English admiral. He went inside the apartment for a minute and came out with the biography of Sir Francis Drake and a telescope—possibly the only object in the whole house that he had paid for. His older brother left the sausages a moment to open the telescope and scan the building on the other side of the street. Drake asked him if their father had chosen his name with the famous pirate in mind. His brother collapsed the telescope and looked at the cover of the book. He turned back to the grill and said he had never heard of any Polish sailor—the most likely thing was that their dad had really meant to name him Derek. He was always so drunk, and so stupid, he must’ve spelled it wrong at the city clerk’s office, he concluded. An hour later, as they sat in front of the TV—wives and kids at the park—the older brother said that it wasn’t really his business, but he’d noticed that his sister-in-law was acting strange, like she was hiding something. What? asked Drake, alarmed. I don’t know, he answered. Maybe she’s pregnant again and she’s afraid to tell you, or maybe she’s looking for a job. He shrugged his shoulders. During the commercial break he went to the kitchen for a couple of beers. He returned to his chair and handed one to Drake. Then, in the most casual voice he could muster, he said: Y’know, that stuff about pirates is just weird, like you’re tryin’ to hide from something, like with that Batman costume you wouldn’t take off after Dad walked out. Find some other job, something normal, where you don’t spend your whole day sitting between a couple of retards.

Drake emerged from the bathroom and put on his coveralls in the locker room. He felt the weight of destiny in his duffel bag as he crossed the parking area. The Captain was already on board the truck, motor running. Verrazano was standing next to the open door, waiting for him with a smile. Cheer up, Horowitz, he told him, we’ve got a long hot day ahead of us. Drake slid in and felt the heat from the already warm forecastle seat beneath his buttocks. The fat man got in and secured the hatch. Drake reached into the duffel and pulled out his telescope: he extended it and pointed it straight ahead, muttering: Anchors aweigh.

The Captain shifted into first gear and got rolling. In spite of the ugly domestic shipwreck that Verrazano had already related to him, he felt sure that work and operations aboard the *Outrageous Fortune* would go smoothly. The mood inside the forecastle was heavy, so he decided to risk a joke to lighten things up. He figured that the wretched Horowitz needed to understand that desertion is simply part of being a devoted sailor. They’d hardly left the plant when he tried to break the ice. With the utmost solemnity he said: So, it sounds like your old lady got tired of eating real Polish sausage and decided to go for the little Bedouin dates instead. Verrazano couldn’t control himself and burst out laughing. Drake didn’t react, so the Captain attacked the other man to show whose side he was on: I don’t know what you’re laughing at, fat ass. My slutty old lady says Italians got dicks the size of olives. The response was immediate, the same flurry of insults as every other day. Horowitz heard it as if from behind a waterfall. He had no desire to do anything, so he closed his eyes, hoping to sleep a little before they started dancing with the trash cans. Suspended in a drowsy darkness he heard very little after the Captain, believing him sound asleep, began to enjoy discussing that amazing bit about the shit in the bed. In a serious voice he asked: How old do you think his little boy is? About three, the fat man answered. I wonder, said the old man, if he was standing there watching while her lover boy squeezed it out. Man, when he saw the size of that turd I bet he started clapping. Drake’s eyes flew open, stricken with rage. He saw the Captain’s shocked face for a moment before covering it with his hand and smashing the man’s head against the window. Without loosening his grip on the driver, Horowitz grabbed the wheel with his right hand and pulled the truck off the highway. He yanked the hand brake, and when he felt the truck come to a complete stop, continued slamming the old man’s head against the window until the glass was covered in blood. Verrazano stared at him in disbelief—truly surprised, perhaps, for the first time. This is a mutiny, Drake told him, his left hand still gripping the Captain’s face, his right hand fishing in the bag for his rifle. Whose side are you on? The fat man didn’t have to think twice: I’m for the people, he said. He took out the gun himself and pointed it at the Captain. Sorry, Cappy, but we’ve got a new set of rules.

They gagged him with duct tape, then bound his hands and feet with electrical cable. The old man offered no resistance. With obvious pleasure, Horowitz set him in the middle of the front seat and took over the wheel. They hadn’t gone very far when Verrazano asked Horowitz what they were going to do with him. We’re going to maroon him on an island. Then we’d better hurry, before the traffic picks up. They took the next left. Drake stopped the truck in the middle of the road. Between the two of them they carried the old man to the bushes. I’ll let the police know you’re here, Verrazano promised when he was sure that Horowitz was out of earshot. Before starting the truck again, Drake took a black flag from his duffel bag and tied it by two of its corners to the antenna on *Outrageous Fortune*.

What followed was barbarous depravity and cruelty: hot pursuit, ramming and boarding, assault, robbing and setting fire to a liquor store. Their broadsides against three parked minivans earned sufficient notoriety that for weeks afterward, housewives in the D.C. metro area would panic at the mere sound of a garbage truck rumbling by. Their spree lasted only a few, short hysterical hours. By noon they were already prisoners of their own catastrophe.

 Heading north on a lightly traveled road with Verrazano at the wheel, they moored the ship on a backwater bend. Drake offered the only gambit he was willing to play: With what we’ve done today, you’re gonna spend the rest of your life in jail, he said. He unfolded the chart and indicated a salt marsh in Chesapeake Bay. The only way to get there, he continued, is by following neighborhood streets. We can probably reach the place before they catch us. There’s a big old marina, sticks way out into the sea. It’s not used anymore. My dad took us there fishing sometimes. The fat man gathered what was left of his wits: I’ve got friends in prison. I’m sure I could make others once we’re inside. Besides, I promised the Captain I was going to let someone know which island we stranded him on. Drake shrugged his shoulders. His companion added apologetically: There’s nothing else we can do, Horowitz, my sympathy for your pain only goes so far. Then help me pilot the ship until we get there. I’d be delighted. Without saying another word, Horowitz left the forecastle and climbed the ladder to the poop deck. After bringing the ship about, Verrazano set a northeasterly course under full sail. For Drake the highway was the fresh, clean, wide-open sea. Tightly gripping the deck rail, he felt the sun on his face, the wind against his chest, and breathed the putrid smell of corruption rising from the bilge.

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