

Castaway

by [Devon Balwit](#) in the [June 15, 2022](#) issue

*The intense concentration of self in the middle of such
a heartless immensity, my God! who can tell it?*

—Herman Melville

Like Pip, we float on a horizonless sea,
ringed by immensity. Some fail to see

it, imagining their whaleboat the world,
distracted and distracting in their revelry, startled

into truth only by age, illness, or poverty.
Is it better, like Pip, to be educated early?

Cast away, we take the shape of dead men.
Will it be tooth or terror that does us in?

Terror marks us either way, the hours
spent with only ourselves for comfort, failures

at ministry and uplift. When our fellows finally spot
and fish us up, we are worse for wear. Not

even rum can stop our muttering—*God's foot
treadles the loom, and faithless us to tell it.*