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Lillian Gray

Lea Ruwaldt

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Lillian Gray // Lea Ruwaldt

It's among the sky and breeze. The unknown ships flying their sails half mast. The belief we can fly as if we were born with wings simply by going on a ship. I believed I could fly sitting on my father's shoulders as we walked closer to the mast of wood we would take. The gigantic wonder that looked otherworldly. I had never seen one before but when my mother told me stories of the giant ships she would sail as a little girl I imagined they must be full of the wonder that makes men travel miles.

I must have ran around in the sand for miles imagining what it would look like to see waving banners in the wind. Conrad would tell me not to wonder; that I should be happy right where I am, because land is the only anchor human beings can count on. How was I to know he was telling me what he truly believed? He was a man of the huge ships. He had traveled them to the Americas and back hadn't he?

Why of all people did my mother look so sad to board the massive shoe floating in the water? She had so many stories of the sea how it was wonderful but in those tales there was always something seductive and destructive. Something wrong with wanting to freely float about like a fish in the sea. Sailing on it was no different. It was an endless span of the clearest greenish blue and when it hit the horizon and clouds I thought I was in heaven where all the tired souls go. I thought for a moment I could see all the family I had always heard of, I thought I could see Mr. Bass smiling at me saying "don't let go of yer ma's hand now wee one, too big a ship I say. Too big." And he would be right. It was too big a ship, it hid us from the world below, the endless depths ready to swallow us whole but when I would get older I would begin to think that the sea is where we are lost but it is where we are also found. My mother loved it because it gave her a way home; when for others it was constantly taunting them with the endless void they could not see over to find where they wished to truly be. It gave her a chance to revisit what she had lost and when she found those things she could let the sea swallow them up again to be lost for centuries more until they found their way back to shore. I loved the ocean as a little girl. I loved the sand and waves but now

all I see when I look at them is my mother and what I have lost. Somehow the only things that come back are my father's smile, my mother's voice and Mr. Bass telling me time and again "too big a ship I say. Too big a ship." And he was right there is too much ship between us and the sea.

My mother told me my grandmother once said to her the sea will swallow you up and pull you under its currents. It will toss you and turn you like a rag doll but when it spits you out, my mother always told me, it makes you stronger. Like how shells smooth at the ocean's pull so do I think people when they get too tired they leave this world for another one where the waves no longer crash upon them and wear them down too early in life.

...So will I walk upon the sand beneath the salty waves to feel the currents pick me up and lift away my sorrows lift away my dreams and bring what has been lost many times again. Here I stand, for there I saw a ship one day, and learned too big was it for me, for my life was hid away.