

## The Lost

The rumble was low and full, gaining momentum like boxcars being moved. The sound awoke Ida to a dim reality but it was the crack like the bullwhip of a Paul Bunyan that shot her mind to full terrified wakefulness. Thunderstorms were not on the usual weather menu for this corner of Oregon, being possibly rarer than snow.

Then came the downpour, heavy fat drops that broke on the roof like surf upon the shore. What was I dreaming? Images of a gray beach merging with a grayer sky and the sound of the breakers...the endless beating of the breakers.

Arising in the grey light, a flip of the light switch brought nothing. Power out. She carefully made her way down the creaking stairway to the main floor. There was a small kerosene lantern on the piano, she reached for it, sensing that something was missing. A small ship in a bottle she had bought at the antique mall was not in its place. Afraid of broken glass, she gingerly retreated to the stairs. She didn't have a lighter anyway, she didn't smoke. A flash of lightening showed the bottle on the floor, intact with the clipper ship inside. How it had gotten to the floor, could someone be in the house? She backed up the stairs, quietly closing the door. There was no latch. The downpour stopped, leaving only water dripping from the roof and her heartbeat.

She listened for a time, hand holding the knob in place. Maybe the thunder had shaken the house enough to cause the ornament to fall? Holding the rail, she backed up the stairs, pausing to sit on the top step. She could think of nothing substantial to wedge the door shut so she crawled into bed, lying awake, listening for the door opening until the dripping of water off the roof lulled her to sleep.

The fog flowed over and down the hill like the hem of an old fashioned nightdress, covering the tall trees and blotting the hillside houses from view. The Youngs River Valley had filled to the top with white cotton and now it silently overflowed to cover the big river. The column was invisible, no one could survey the view of water and mountains. The beams of the Cape Disappointment light were invisible to ships at sea. A low fog horn called out from the river, a warning that was unanswered. Only the top of the big bridge across the Columbia showed through the thick fog.

Ida decided to visit the beach, she had never been there when it was swaddled in fog such as this, just last week she had taken her red kite there to fly it against crystal blue skies. The wind had pulled it over the dunes and it had swirled around in circles, almost crashing when its long tail caught on something in the dunes.

Today the parking lot was almost empty, no clam diggers, no children building sandcastles. Just a couple dog walkers who quickly were hidden from view in the fog. The vague shape of the shipwreck on the beach loomed before her as she walked down to the hard sand. She walked for a time north along the high tide line, stepping over broken clam shells and driftwood. There were bits of plastic, which she picked up and stuffed in her large pockets to dispose of later. Something drew her sight towards the top of the dunes. She struggled up the soft sand to the thin hard trail along the top. The surf was pounding hard. Beating the shore like the drums of angry natives bent on driving out the heathen invaders. She was enveloped now within the fog. No gnarled silver driftwood, no line of pine trees holding the sand in place, not even the screeching gulls could be seen. Glancing back, she thought she saw a shadow behind in the fog. A soft dark shape, could another be walking the crest as well? She stared hard into the fog but no one appeared.

The wind screamed louder, a swirling squall headed directly for her, a twisting wraith howling in her face. Ida bent down and pulled up her hood, not seeing the hole in the sand at her feet. Her right foot went down, she tumbled sideways down the dune, thrashing through the beach grass. The screaming wind was louder, wilder. As she came to rest at the bottom, her eyes caught a dark sharp shape like... a cross! Another! Two dark iron crosses stark against the fog. Flickering from the top was a red bandana, no, not a bandana, the missing bit of the tail of her kite swept around, caught on the cross.

Stunned, she carefully stood up, stepping closer to the iron cross. A figure seemed to form behind it, the shape barely discernible yet humanlike. Subconsciously she knew she must untangle the fabric. Stretching high, she pulled the wet red cloth free. The squall suddenly dissipated and a beam of sunlight swept through, as the figure in the fog receded. The wind shifted and quieted and the surf carried on its ceaseless drumming at the end of the land, the end of the world.

Up and down as if in a dream, she followed the crest of the dunes back to the parking lot. An older man was taking off hip boots and putting them in the back of his truck. Next to him was a mesh bag with shiny oval clams, his catch for the day, their long creamy stretching for a sandy ocean home they would never find again,

The man looked up, his weathered face seemed kind. She paused and hesitantly inquired of him "Are there any cemeteries in the dunes? I saw a couple crosses...." Her voice faltered.

"Well" he replied, "I do remember my father telling me of some Portuguese sailors that were found on the beach, drowned, long ago. They buried them in the dunes. I remember seeing the crosses but I didn't know they were still there."

Ida turned the key in her lock. Surreal, the crosses, the beach, she hardly remembered her drive home. The door creaked open and something lay upon the floor. Ida picked it up, it was the bottle, but there was no ship inside.

By Gay S Clodgo