

She was the daughter of a whaling master and his wife. No more than six months on land until the age of six, asea most of the time until fifteen. She was in utero on the sea, born in Peru, and picked up after enough time had passed that Mom's and baby's blood were set upon the land.

She told the stories only to her grandchildren and then only when she thought her grandchildren were too young to remember (and thus to pass them on). As luck would have it, Aunt Anne had a prodigious memory, or they would all be lost.

There was a brother too. On land, he never settled, coming through whenever he did, always coming through though eventually, coming through to check that all was well enough and moving on again.

She hated it. She always turned her back to the ocean. At Pine Point for their week there each year, she turned her back on the ocean. always she watched her granddaughters as they played, but never when they played at the ocean for she never faced the ocean. How strange it was the them that she did not watch them only that one time when they played.

And she refused to float again, even on the Swan Boats in the Boston Public Gardens, even when she went with her three granddaughters, my mother and my aunts. The Garden itself was fine, but floating on any water would never do.

She hated it. Blood in greater and greater and then lesser and lesser parts per gallon of water; fat floating across greater and lesser surface area determining levels of iridescence (from dark brown to mud dull to mud to band and swirl to traces of color to is-it-there silvery sheen, to barely visible in favorable light). Blubber boiled and oil barreled. It was when the fat trapped the blood in glassy seas and the ship stayed in it that she hated it the most. Blood has a smell, the smell of blood, death has a smell, the smell of death for it shouldn't be smelled for when it is smelled it means it is out here to be smelled and not where it belongs in the pulse of a life.

She hated it. Sharp hoes cutting the fat filleting it from the skin of the whale. Can we smell that, can we slip in the grease, can we watch the strips of blubber peeled cut and rent and pulled into the boat while the whale spins into the sea, the strips of blubber pulled into the boat while the

whale spins into the sea, dipped and yanked with great zippering away of flesh dipped and yanked like so many candles in reverse.

She hated it. That small, small cabin, pitch black but for the porthole, where she could only sew and read the bible, that sewing, and that bible, salt cod and that hard tack and that maggoty hard tack (and the hard tack and water and sugar for her only treat, that her grandchildren loved, given with love as she lived with all of them from birth to young ladyhood, all three girls, all three cared for and confided to that which only she could tell).

100's of names for water, for waves, for wind, for clouds, for whales. Breeze and gale, full sail and dead in the water, and water oily and flat with the blood, and the bilge sloshing waves of rotten air. Sea legs, seasick, blood legs, blood sick. Of warm and cold oceans, rounding the horn and being becalmed far from land, of, in all that time, ocean surface and depths, day and night skies, sunrise and sunset skies, calm and stormy weather, breezes and gales, ocean glowing and slate gray, full and furled sails, dry decks and decks wet with blood, sluiced decks and decks stained by blood, rot, and sweat,

frangipani wafting and stink from blubber boiling, sweet and salty breezes. Did only the cabin stay the same? Did the cabin stay the same?

Hard tack and water, root vegetables and dried cod, jerky, scurvy. And did she ever eat fresh fish? The ocean was for oil from blubber, for baleen, and, rarely, for ambergris.

The first-time islanders were cheated into joining the crew (told it would be for one year when it could be as much as four and more) were forced to be called by the last name Kanaka, told apart by the so-called christian name of Jonah Kanaka or Moses Kanaka or Sam Kanaka. Kanaka, spelled phonetically many ways, was a horizontally spread 'translation' of the word, horizontally-spread, used by peoples of the South Pacific for their own peoples. Perhaps Chase did not know, or certainly did not care, but perhaps the other sailors did – that the name was not just a name for a man, but a name for all men, for great men, for free men (and for the Kanaq people). And thus, Chase was calling them kings, great ones, the ones, as they well enjoyed.

When Annie noticed the men as more than sailors, more than her protectors, more than those always

kind to her, she had to go permanently ashore. Sure, she could have been in some danger from a very determined errant man, but the odds being so far against him, and the odds that he would exist among such friends to her, were the least of her concerns.

Mother was rowed in a few times to meet the king, or the traders, the king and the traders. But she could never set foot on the islands, she never set foot on a beach. The men weren't able because they surely would desert, and she wasn't able because she was only a child, because she might be stolen, with much worse to come. Then, she knew land only from sea, so a galloping horse was compared to a sleigh-ride, the men in the skiff roped to a thrashing, speeding, and sounding whale until it exhausted them and they were dragged under, or exhausted itself and could be killed.

One miscreant was soon made to conform when a belaying pin was lashed between his teeth, ripping the flesh toward his jaw joints, left out to dry.

One of many mutines threatened when the casket of opals the Master

got in Australia somehow made its presence known. Believed by the crew to doom their voyage, it was spilled into the sea in their presence to appease them. Was this when a Pitcairner, a "full blood" or "mixed race" descendant of Fletcher Christian, of that Fletcher Christian of the Bounty mutiny was aboard, as they were recruited from Pitcairn too?

Was there a mirror? She is in one photograph from that time, hand colored, that was taken in Australia when she was four, and looking more sad than even the many minutes she had to sit frozen would cause.

She was transfixed by a mid-ocean visiting master's wife's snake ring with ruby eyes.

What were her dreams like?

She heard the drums of Africa off the coast after being blown there by a hurricane. Sounding like nothing she had ever heard before, not even the drumming of waves, the bigger, deeper waves. They must have had to anchor off the coast of Africa, and she must have had to stay on board. Were these particular drums, or just the drums of Africa that we all can hear when we hear that phrase, she heard the drums of Africa. Were these

drums drumming about their boat?
It never occurred to me to ask...

The dusty shudder of a Peruvian earthquake was just one more way the surfaces were partable, fissioned, never fast. Her nightmares were nightwhales, night wails.

Although her school mates in South America -- for the six-months she spent on land -- knelt in the mud when a priest walked by, she, in her first truly white dress, refused.

No wonder no one ever entered the sea, for it swallowed one up in an instant. When men were lost at sea the sharks drawn by the ever-present smell of blood would make of them short work. When a man died on board, rotting canvas and tack would bind them, Work would cease for the duration of a short prayer and he'd be assigned to the deep, parted the surface, or hit and sank.

What would she make of sushi?
Would it be shocking? As fascinating as the silken scarves she collected at finishing school? An alien life form like those the whales belched out? Would she try it, would she recognize it from something somewhere, would she take it in, or would she spit it out?