



“Ship” (Photo: K. S. Brooks)
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Ship

Alyssa Devine

“Ain't fit for man nor beast,” the seaman complained, squinting through the corner window of a ramshackle tavern overlooking an older section of Cleveland's harbor. It was early 1950. Gale-force winds drove the rain horizontally. If it weren't for an occasional burst of lightening, it would have been impossible to see the looming outline of their ship, the massive Great Lakes freighter *William G. Mather*, which was moored tightly to a nearby dock. Twenty-foot waves crashed over the breakwater protecting the harbor.

“I'll tell you this,” said his drinking companion, another of the *Mather's* crew, “if it wasn't for the fact the electricity at the house has been out since mid-afternoon, I wouldn't have driven down here. Good thing this place at least has a generator to keep the lights on!”

“And the beer cold,” said the first, who proceeded to finish his second bottle and signal the barkeep for a third. “Ain't seen nothing like this since the Armistice Day blizzard of 1940. 'Member that?”

“Are you kidding me?! I'd just signed onto the *Mather* 6 months earlier—man, she was, and still is, a thing of beauty, all 600 feet of her, with her brass and oak pilot house, guest quarters, and four-story engine room. As I recall, you'd already been aboard for at least 2 years.”

¹ Though the photo prompt is from Indies Unlimited's weekly competition for February 1, 2020, the story was too long to submit for competition. That said, I thank Ms. Brooks for inspiring me to write this tale.

“Yep, came to her right out of high school. Something I heard in church one Sunday morning—‘*Others went out to sea in ships, conducting trade on the mighty waters. They saw the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep . . .*’² I’ll never forget that. I knew right then what I wanted to do.”

His shipmate laughed. “Well, obviously, you didn’t get the full picture. When I’ve been to church—and it’s been a while, though the misses does grab me by the ears now and then and pull me into a pew—I recall something to the effect that ‘*Then the Lord hurled a violent wind upon the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship was in danger of breaking apart.*’³ That’s the part of the Bible that stuck with me. Which in my book pretty much accounts for the Armistice Day Blizzard.”

“I’ll say,” his friend replied. “That storm scared the bejesus out of me. You weren’t too thrilled yourself.”

“No, sirree. Best I recall, more’n 60 people lost their lives that day on Lake Michigan south of Pentwater.”

“I remember . . . the lake freighter *William B. Davock* sank with all hands while the *Anna C. Minch* filled with water and broke in two.”

“And didn’t the *Novadoc* wreck on a reef in the same area?”

“Yep. Two smaller boats also went down.”

The first seaman shook his head. “The one thing I remember was our wire life line. I can still see it in my mind’s eye. The ice had built up so much that the wire was as big as a hawser. Damn thing was almost touching the deck. I’m surprised it didn’t snap in two!”

“What I remember were the groaning sounds coming from the holds as the cargo shifted. I had dreams about that for months!”

“You’re right! How we made it through that storm is beyond me.”

“I’ll tell you how we made it,” shouted the second seaman, slamming his bottle of beer on the bar. “It was the *Mather*’s size and the captain’s seamanship that saved us.”

“Perhaps,” replied his shipmate. “But if you ask me, ’twas God’s hand on the wheel.”

² Psalm 107:23

³ Jonah 1:4