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In the last year of his life, Gerald's naval-officer-speak was somewhat diminished but he was still able to verbalise one last ambition: he wanted his ashes to be scattered in the ocean.

'Well you're not going to leave me behind!', Thelma had called from the kitchen without missing a beat, as she rhythmically chopped carrots. And when she died four years later, it was expected that she would be carried by the great ocean currents back to her man.

Gerald: the tall man in the uniform with the good posture and finely-combed hair. Gerald and Thelma: the handsome couple. In photographs, he looked like a proper man who would take tea in porcelain tea cups and have the right angle on his cap and please and thank you and right-you-are sir—a captain's voice with all the wonderful words that could make an ordinary request theatrical: 'Go down and help your mother in the galley!' he would boom to his daughters when there were peas to be shelled. His world was a schedule in which beds were made tightly and hands shaken firmly. Meanwhile, Thelma played the piano, laughed a lot and wore enormous flowers in her hair. She had a wonderful sense of humour and made a new friend every time she stepped out of the house.

Klara sat in a university lecture the week after her grandfather died, only half listening to the speaker, a chinless scientist who let spittle fly when he spoke.

'The ocean waters are constantly on the move, swelling, sinking, heating, cooling, carrying nutrients from one continent to another, giving life at one end and taking it away at the other...'

Gerald's ashes were ceremoniously scattered from a prestigious naval vessel in Hobart harbour. The ashes took a long time to leave the urn. Klara's uncles and aunts held each other in the bracing Antarctic winds and were as polite and proper about the whole affair as they knew he would expect. And eventually the ash of Gerald was given over to the bright day, to fall in its own time into the great ocean.

Thelma didn't play the piano or laugh as often after Gerald died but she still couldn't help befriending everyone she met. When Klara took her out in a pedal boat on the bay, Thelma picked out an orange flower from behind her ear and threw it into the ocean. In the voice of an elderly lover she started to sing as the oblivious gulls dived for fish around her.

'I'm afraid I won't find him again dear,' she said as they pedalled back to shore. 'It's so big out there.'

Klara jumped up and dived off the boat, bringing back with her a handful of sand to show her, 'It's not so deep Grandma. And remember, Grandad could navigate by the stars: he'll be sure to find you.'

'You're right, darling!' Thelma said brightly and started singing again.

The scientist contradicted Klara's heart in a nasally drone:

'The surface currents are about 400 metres deep and make up only the first ten per cent of the ocean, which means that in certain parts the ocean floor is as far as four kilometres beneath the surface. The four major ocean currents of the world are the North Equatorial Current...the Gulf Stream...the Canary Current...the...'

You'd have to hold your breath for a very, very long time in order to swim down and grab a handful of sand from the bottom of the ocean, Klara thought.

After Thelma died, it was Klara with her mother and aunt Deborah who began the great task of sorting through her things.

'Who is this woman in the photograph?' Klara asked.

'That's mum,' the two women answered together.

A young woman is doing a handstand on a beach, legs splayed, off balance but beautifully free. It is a black and white photo but the upside down laugh makes Thelma bright. Thelma's hair is long and windy and wild. A young Gerald stands in the background, with trousers held up by braces and a neat shirt, shading his eyes with one hand and looking at her with the unmistakeable eyes of love. A strong gale would not shift a single hair on his brylcreamed head.

When Thelma died, the connection to the world of ships and uniforms seemed no longer relevant. There was no formal arrangement on any naval vessel. Her wish to follow her husband into the sea was talked about briefly—yes, they would do it soon somewhere beautiful—and then everyone went back to their lives and got busy. Family members drifted overseas.

Seven years later, Klara still has the photograph of her grandmother doing a handstand on her wall, and in the heat and humidity of summer the picture falls and she picks it up. Like the great ocean currents, the family has scattered to various parts of the globe. Meanwhile, Thelma's ashes remain in an urn, somewhere in Hobart, waiting for a time when everyone can be together again.

At a family gathering someone pragmatically suggests that as long as Thelma went to the ocean it didn't matter whether they scattered the ashes in Hobart or Port Moresby.

Klara could have told them that the ashes would follow the deep sea troughs and ocean currents. She could have told them that the ocean is four kilometres deep and that it is cold, down there. There are no reflections, no light of any kind apart from the quiet glint of an air bubble rising softly from somewhere far below. No sense of up or down, south, east or west. No stars to guide. Nothing to navigate one soul to another, except faith.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Lucy Broome.*