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When I was five years old, my older sister taught me how to fly: two little girls in kilts crouching on the deck of the *Saxonia* and then leaping into the sky. We were sailing to Canada. There would be icebergs, then ragged fir trees—then on to a big city and shops with sliding glass doors that opened as if by magic. Our father had told us. He'd been in Canada for seven months. My mother had waited behind until he made enough money to send us the fare.

A soldier in full highland dress had piped the travellers away and my mother had stood at the heel of that tugboat, her neck craned toward those people waving on the shore—her sister, her brothers, and beyond them the rolling hills, sage green and violet. I was not looking at the shore and neither was my sister. Our eyes were fixed on the *Saxonia*, a ship that filled up the entire sky right to the edge of the clouds. A huge house of metal and on its uppermost deck, a row of black chimneys, puffing thick smoke. We clung to our mother, each holding one of her hands.

That night as the *Saxonia* sailed down the Clyde and hit the black water of the cold Atlantic ocean, we sailed down a staircase—a glittery staircase, so unlike the stone steps and dark hall of a tenement building. There before us was a golden dining room with white tablecloths and on the menu, turkey and strawberry chiffon pie.

My mother didn't eat the turkey or the too-white mashed potatoes. Kept glancing up at the ceiling as the chandeliers swayed, and then suddenly stood and rushed away, a napkin pressed to her mouth. She didn't stop long enough to tell us what we should do and so we had remained at the table, had eaten the turkey and then two servings of the strawberry chiffon pie that melted on our tongues like sweet pink air.

A sailor took us back to our tiny cabin and gave us each a little metal pin, a replica of the *Saxonia*. I wanted to give mine to my mother but she barely turned in her bunk. The cabin now smelled like the inside of a Glasgow train lavatory and her eyes were glued to the porthole, water splashing on the small circle of glass. I climbed into the bunk above her and lay awake most of the night hovering over unease. I felt guilty—guilty that I had eaten two servings of sweets, guilty that I had a present from the sailor when my mother had none.

The next morning when my sister said that she was going to explore the rest of the boat I turned away, pulled the blanket over my head and said she could go by herself. I was afraid of being on the open water with my mother ill, and the sea and sky so large. I wanted the *Saxonia* to turn around. Wanted to see Heggie's Building, the narrow stone steps to our flat, the deep well outside our small window where at the bottom I had played with my

cousins between sooty brick walls. Those boundaries were the limits of a contained and manageable world.

It was my sister who woke me from the safety of this woozy dream, her face glowing, her clothes smelling like salt and wind.

'I can fly,' she shouted, dragging me off the bunk and bundling my shoes and clothes against my chest. Soon I was out the door, up the skinny spiral ship stairs, up and up, and up to the deck. The wind was fluttering flags, fluttering clouds, fluttering our kilts and our hair. The *Saxonia* rolled its huge metal body over steely grey waves.

'Crouch,' screamed my sister over the thunder of moving ocean and ship. The mighty *Saxonia* was dipping into a trough. 'Now jump,' she ordered again as it heaved up the crest of the next wave.

I jumped. I jumped away from the deck and the sea and my mother lying sick in a cabin below. I jumped into the sky and saw a promise of icebergs, the Saint Lawrence River, Toronto and shops with magical doors. And for a moment we both hovered with our arms outstretched before we touched down on the deck again.

In 1956 it took over a week to sail from Scotland to Canada. My sister and I flew every day. We ate strawberry chiffon pie. We went to the cinema. We followed the sailors up and down over decks; saw those icebergs and the tugboats arriving that would pull us into the mouth of a new land. A doctor had come to insert a thin needle in my mother's arm and attach it to a rubber tube and a glass bottle. A nurse came to sit by her side and so there was little need to go back to the cabin and tell my mother about our adventures.

We didn't really see her properly again until the boat docked in Montreal. It was the first time she was able to leave her bed. She looked pale and grey and not excited at all to see my father waving below.

She sat silently on the train to Toronto while he pulled treasures out of his pocket—a blunt-edged coin that he told us was a nickel and then the thin silver moon that was a dime.

'This is the new currency,' he said, dropping the money into our hands. My mother wasn't interested. She turned away, scratched at a bit of gum stuck to the train seat.

I held the dime in my hand, imagined that later that night it would rise into the sky—hover just as we had hovered over a wide ocean. There would be a silvery beam lighting the way but my mother wouldn't see it. She would have her eyes closed dreaming of somewhere else.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Carol Major.*