

Testament Part 3 of 6

by Gary Hardaway

Our ships once teemed along the shore
like pups at their mother's teats.
After the swelling of the Sea, the dead
outnumbered the living and the shipwrights
died where they lived, along the Sea.
We had looked at water and the things afloat
and learned the happiest shapes and properties
of hulls. Our ships swam shallow in the Sea,
which made them quick. Our rudders thrust themselves
into the Sea, deep enough to make us
nimble but not so deep as to catch the weeds
that flourish under dazzled water.
After the swelling of the Sea, our ships lay broken,
far inland, ribs exposed like those
of whales ashore, rotting in the sun.

The bodies of the dead lay broken, too,
and bloated. Who survived could not know them.
We piled the pieces of ships and pieces of men
and burned them. Smoke arose to dim the sun.

Perhaps the Earth, Sea, and Sky were done
with us and chose to tatter all we were
and leave it to the Mycenaean swords
and fires to obliterate. What we were
lies ruined and mysterious-- evocation
to the unkind imagination
of the Brute-- alive now only
in the children of concubines and rape.

Against that, this testament, scratched

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with misshapen styluses, made
from memory by unskilled hands,
with a pallid memory of ink.

