

For Carol: Life Bursts Out

by Tania Hershman

Life was small. It was tiny even, so tiny it was hard to see it sometimes. Life curled up to make itself even smaller, to fit into the kinds of holes that insects crawl into to get away from bigger insects. Life was sad. Life didn't want to be an insect. Life was getting backache from the curling up. It wanted to straighten out, stand up tall, shout out to the world. But it had been so long, Life wasn't sure how to.

I sat on the railings and looked out over the sea. Waves churned and the sun cackled from behind the clouds, and my mother, scowling, gripped the rail with both hands, her hat pulled so far down that I couldn't see her eyes.

"Do we have to...?" she said, and the wind took her words and spun them around so that they arrived jumbled. I didn't answer her anyway. She knew that, yes, we did have to. So we waited.

Life started by unfurling one finger. It felt odd, stiff, unnatural. But then good, freeing, sweet. Life tried another finger, and another. A whole hand, then both. Then suddenly, like a balloon, Life burst out of itself. Life grew and grew, out of the hole and into the world and along and up and outwards.

When I saw it, I had to stop myself from grabbing my mother's arm.

"There," I hissed, and took her shoulders and turned her towards the direction it was coming in.

"My god," my mother whispered. "I never thought I..."

We stood in silence, watching it approaching. I knew, the way I've always known about things, ever since I was little, that we were getting out of here tonight. That knowing rose up in me like holiness and light, air and fire. It lifted me out of myself.

"Come on!" I shouted and grabbed our suitcase in one hand and my mother's arm in the other, and pulled her down the steps to the

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beach, and we ran towards it, through the waves, my mother holding onto her hat, and the boat coming nearer and nearer.

Life bloomed and blossomed and burst through, feeling as if its lungs would explode with the bursting. And finally, when it seemed to Life that it could go no further, there was a pop and a ringing sound, and everything stopped.

We were about to climb into the dinghy. I was helping my mother—she had one foot in the boot, some big guy was hauling her in, and then there was a loud noise. Everything froze. The waves iced up. The wind was gone. I couldn't move anything. But I could see it, all of it. And all I could think was, 'We were so close. So damn close. Couldn't you just let us...?'

Life looked down and saw a tiny boat with tiny people. Life couldn't remember being that small, let alone as miniscule as an insect. Now that Life was all-encompassing, Life had lost all sympathy with anything that wouldn't grow itself to Life's stature. Life blew a little on the tiny boat. Life watched as the tiny boat swayed and tilted, dipped and dove, sank and disappeared. Then Life turned around and got on with something else.

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