

Victory

So [her mother] disappears with the pushchair, and Molly looks out at the white dots on the grey water and thinks about England. She feels guilty that her mother is making this transatlantic trip solely on her behalf, but not guilty enough to give it up. The prospect of being in London again has filled her world with hope.

She looks out to sea, beyond the boats. Strictly speaking this is not the sea but Long Island Sound, she knows; Long Island lies somewhere out there, between here and the Atlantic Ocean. But a haze of heat has blurred water and air so that the horizon is lost in a band of grey-white mist, and suddenly from that mist Molly hears a distant boom, like the sound of a massive gun.

She squints into the distance. For a moment she sees through the haze the outline of a great sailing ship, three-masted, square-rigged, with a dim cloud of smoke drifting away from its side. Molly catches her breath; she has never seen anything like it except in pictures.

Then it is gone. Molly strains to see more, but there is only the water and the sky. She feels again an odd sense of being beckoned, as if some soundless voice were calling her. Where has the ship gone?

When they are driving home with a cheerful, victorious Russell, she says to him, "Did you see that tall ship, way out?"

"What ship?" Russell says.

"It was on the horizon. Just like the picture in your room, the Tall Ships Race."

"That was six years ago – none of those ships is around now. *What did you see?*"

Molly looks away, out of the car window. "I expect I was imagining it," she says.

by Susan Cooper