

Julia Hartwig · *Poland*

VIGIL ON A BAY

She finally slept but even in sleep the ocean, washed out, roared,
 carrying sand to the beach.
It was as she had seen it sometimes at dawn.
The wind pulled at the door and rattled the shutters against
 the house.
On a chair lay an abandoned volume of gothic stories and a newspa
 opened to the police report.
Her fear was domesticated
as a stone washed continuously by the roar of the ocean.
She saw a woman with flowing hair and wearing a long military
 skirt
burning leaves, gathering them to the center of the fire.
Behind her shoulders the ocean
tried to seize her with each withdrawing wave as if she were a
 hostage held by some secret pact concluded in the past.
To live with the ocean is to live between everyday fear and the fear
 which, like a rock beneath the surface,
is made of layers of fear, fear laid down for thousands of years
 by the gigantic fish, by the birds, by the mind.
And everyone must yield finally to some element, vow it fidelity.
How could she not know that the ocean was always there behind th
 windows of her old house?
Should one cross the ocean for this?
Should one go as far as the end of the world to look in the aged,
 human eye of providence?