

Coming Back

by [Margaret Mackinnon](#) in the [October 2025](#) issue

In memory of Captain James B. Gaskill, 7/2/1916–3/11/1942. This cross constructed from salvage of the ship upon which Captain Gaskill lost his life.
—inscription on a cross on the altar at Ocracoke United Methodist Church

It could have been a morning of old walks
and old words, mist-laid and gray, water churning

near his family's pier—
where a piece of Jim Baugham Gaskill's ship

came back, the mystery of chance survived—
and someone was vigilant enough to witness it.

And someone made a cross, painted it gold,
the grain still visible, though shaped by the sea and tides—

all of it *in remembrance of that boy*,
their shining son returned, or at least, some sign of him.

They wanted to believe a restless love
had brought him back, that time's straight line

could bend for them—
and love was vaster than they knew.

None of this happened in the season of falling stars,
when light, for an instant, overcomes the dark—

but all of it happened on that same stretch of the Atlantic
where we got the news that my mother had died.

Our trip would be cut short. We'd be going home to mourn.
But for one sore afternoon, we drove out past

where the terns built their fragile nests, out
to that point where sand and sea and air converged—
one world joining another—
and though we didn't see it at the time, all the photos

of those long hours show the same rosy angel-cloud,
arms outstretched, hovering above us.