

PETTICOAT SAILOR TO SHE CROSSING:
ADAPTATION IN PROCESS,
A WRITER'S REFLECTION ON ADAPTING A FEATURE
LENGTH SCREENPLAY INTO A NOVEL

by
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ABSTRACT

This PhD thesis consists of a novel entitled *She Crossing*, and a Commentary. The Commentary reflects on my practice of constructing the novel by adapting it from my previously existing screenplay, *Petticoat Sailor*. They both derive from ‘The Seafaring Maiden’, a Nova Scotian newspaper article dating from 1957. All of these narratives are concerned with a nineteenth-century woman who had to captain a commercial sailing ship across the Atlantic. My screenplay, *Petticoat Sailor*, is set entirely in the nineteenth century. Both the newspaper article and my novel frame the protagonist’s voyage as a twentieth-century reminiscence. My novel also introduces a fictional subplot, which was not present in the screenplay. This subplot derives from my research into accounts of cross-dressed women who went to sea when only men were legally employed as sailors.

The direction of my adaptation from a screenplay into a novel is unusual. Most adaptations move from novel to script and this is reflected in the secondary literature about adaptation. Novels resulting from adapting scripts have attracted little academic analysis as artefacts, and even less theorization of their creative processes. There is also an absence of sustained reflection by other writers who have turned their screenplays into novels. Aiming to increase understanding of the novelizing process, my thesis addresses these absences.

The Commentary discusses the differences and similarities in writing screenplay and writing prose fiction by reflecting on my processes in writing this novel. I particularly explore the effects of contingency in adjusting theoretical principles during the creative process of novelization. I also examine to what extent the ways in which I write are themselves adapted from my own experience of directing and acting for stage and film.

SHE CROSSING

a novel

by Georgina Lock

novelized from the screenplay

Petticoat Sailor

Chapter 1**Bad Luck at Sea**

It's the house like a ship, peeling paint and weatherboarded, on the windy, unfashionable end of the promenade. The dark, frost-bitten leaves in the window-boxes look like seaweed. The windows, bottle-nosed under their looped canvas curtains, peer across the lowering Atlantic, as if reckoning on casting off and setting out across the rowdy grey. Pauline recognises the plaster fish on the gate post. She used to pat it on her way to school. Sometimes, she would put her fingers into its round kiss of a mouth. More of its scales have chipped away – fifteen years' worth. As for the house, she has so often passed it. Yet she never imagined who might live on the other side of the weathered front door, with its lion's head of a knocker snarling at the sea. Soon she will fill her notebook with impressions, enough for a two-page feature if she can spin it out. Checking that her notebook is still in the left-hand pocket of her overcoat, she is about to climb the splintering steps when the door opens. A brown, rangy woman of about forty is raising her tufty eyebrows at her.

Pauline keeps her own eyebrows in place. This is an effort in view of the woman's grey, serge bloomers, black woollen stockings wrinkling over scuffed, tan oxfords and a thigh-length brown cardigan, as shapeless as a man's. Given her quaint appearance, she's unlikely to be the maid or the housekeeper. Nor can she be the subject of the morning. Although her crinkly, bobbed hair is greying, her chestnut skin is smooth and glowing. She might, after all, be hardly thirty. Pauline has noticed her in town riding her tall, black bicycle.

“*The Women's Herald?*” the woman asks.

“Exactly. I'm Pauline Stacey, come to interview Miss Hall.”

“She's ready for you and really looking forward to it. I'm Edie Lambert, by the way. Perhaps Miss Mackay mentioned me.”

Edie Lambert looks so hopeful that, despite her expert Episcopal upbringing, Pauline lies. She is growing accustomed to lying. Pleasing people, at least in the first instance, makes for informative journalism.

“Often! She sends her compliments, along with our first edition.” Pauline dips into her handbag and whips out February's newspaper.

There's a blush under Edie Lambert's brownness. She gives a radiant smile which turns her long face handsome. “That's so very kind of her.... What now? Oh dear!” The smile fades at the shriek on the front page: ‘WOMEN FORCE FED IN BRITISH PRISONS’,

illustrated by an advertisement for Watkins and Sons' millinery and another for the latest gramophone.

Muttering about inhuman politics, Edie stands aside so that Pauline can step over the rag-rug into the last century, circa 1870 at the absolute latest. The hall, with a yellowish reek of beeswax, bacon and boiled onions, is hardly warmer than the chill outside, merely stiller and darker. The candlesticks and oil lamps are all unlit, it being just ten o'clock and, probably, the brightest moment of the day. Twirls of sunshine play on the oak banister and glint on the burnished brass of a mirror frame, with a water-colour seascape hung far too close by.

"Look here, dear, just to be clear, this is nothing to do with pirates or smugglers or anything else that's far-fetched and fashionable."

Pauline looks back in surprise. "Oh yes, I'm clear about that. The story so far, the bits and pieces that Miss Mackay told me, sounds stirring enough."

"Please understand that this story really happened."

Pauline blinks at the argumentative tone. She must make friends, at least for the morning, and she must be careful of sermonizing to a woman twice her age. "Yes, it really happened, which is why I asked to interview Miss Hall. And that it's been kept quiet forty years is another reason to tell it. 'Story' is *Herald* slang for news, news that lets our readers know what women can do, which is our passion. Everyone needs to hear all about it, Miss Lambert."

Miss Lambert looks relieved and a little apologetic. "Edie," she says and offers her long, thin hand to be shaken.

Pauline obliges, firmly. Then she lets the hand and its fellow fuss around her shoulders to help her shrug off her overcoat and hang it on the stand. The resident overcoats are heavy woollens and an oilskin. They reek of tobacco; confirmation that the Capstan cigarettes, that Miss Mackay advised her to bring, will be welcome. She checks that they are still in her handbag. Then she peels off her gloves and picks at the knot on the scarf tying on her hat. She is aware that her grey tailor-made, steamed and brushed for this interview, is attracting Edie's scrutiny. Might the woman be envious, or have spotted its economical cut? The damp has invaded the scarf knot already. Pauline accepts help with it and with the great bowl of her hat, which won't take to a peg but fits perfectly on the banister newel.

"There! No-one will disturb it. Come into the parlour, won't you?"

Following Edie, Pauline remembers that her notebook and pencil are still in her overcoat pocket and darts back to rustle them out. It's draughty, yet she sweats.

“No hurry,” Edie says which might be sarcastic. However, as they cross a scatter of Turkish carpets into what might be a warehouse of embroidered screens, assorted chairs and an elephant-sized and footed table, she seems delighted. “Bessie dear! It’s the young lady from *The Women’s Herald!*”

“Pauline Stacey,” Pauline says, wondering where, amongst the convocation of furniture, to direct her voice. The only living thing she spots is a cat, stretched in the moody sun on a window seat. Then the coughing starts, and with such phlegmy racks and breathy heaves that Pauline fears for her interview. Edie merely seems to take it as an indication of Bessie’s presence. The coughing subsides with an audible swallow. Then a yellowing-white top knot rises over the back of a floral armchair. The hair leads a scraggy neck, followed by scanty shoulders, then bones and sinews wrapped in saggy fawn and blue tweed. Pauline, who is twenty-two, expected sixty-two to look decrepit. While it might be said that Bessie Hall is a stick insect with big steely eyes, it is only fair to add that she radiates energy.

“Miss Stacey, how do you do?” The voice is throaty and fruity. The stick insect is gliding, extending a liver-spotted hand. Its grip is hard and icy. Its palm must be lined with calluses. “Thank you for being so interested in my little tale.”

“Oh! Completely intrigued.” If this is gushing, it is accurate. Pauline’s heart pounds with the thrill of her first article. It’s been fluttery since Miss Mackay first mentioned a woman captain. “Please call me Pauline.”

“I will! And you had better call me Bessie. Take a pew. Will you sit by the fire or would you sooner write at the table?”

They sit by the fire. Edie offers tea and goes downstairs to make it, as it’s the maid’s day off. Bessie reaches a box of Swan Vestas from the mantelpiece and scans, sighing, amongst a clutter of china, scrimshaw, postcards and photographs that is, no doubt, sacred. Pauline wonders if there is a maid. It doesn’t matter if there isn’t, but she does hope that the promised tale will be the truth. She must have the truth for her first article.

“Cigarettes. Cigarettes. Where can Edie have put them now?”

Pauline whips out the Capstans. Bessie shines with gratitude and accepts them. She lights a cigarette for herself then waits with the match to light Pauline’s.

Pauline shakes her head as if she’s sorry. “Not when I’m working.”

“Can’t do two things at once?” The steely eyes twinkle.

Pauline trusts that her hazel eyes are twinkling back. “Listening and writing shorthand and asking questions. That adds up to three things.”

Bessie Hall chuckles and throws the match into the fire. “So it does. Sensible girl! We should get on famously. Well, then! First question?”

“First, I should tell you that this interview will be for our ‘Home and Fireside’ section, a two page spread about local heroines. It was what was missing from our pilot edition. We were crying out for a dash of local colour, so you’re to be our first subject!”

Two pale roses are blossoming on the chalky cliffs of Bessie’s face, but she gives a modest shrug. “I’m sure there’ve been heroines since. It was over forty years ago. A spring chicken like you, Pauline, wouldn’t recognise the ocean in those days. Now it’s all steam ships. They got the better of us and airships and combustion engines will get the better of them, I expect.”

Pauline nods at the mantelpiece. “Is that your *Rothsay* in the whisky bottle there?”

“It was rum in that bottle. We had more rum bottles than most because at sea we would use it to sweeten up our drinking water. My cousin, Andrew Lambert, who was our *Rothsay*’s mate, swigged back the last of that one then pushed in his model, leaving three strings outside the neck so he could raise each mast, rather as one might pull at a hawser to raise a sail. If you’d like to see what my cousin looked like, that’s his picture.”

Bessie jabs her cigarette at a photograph beside the bottled ship. It’s of a young man in a black suit, in a white shirt with a collar and a black stock that brush his jawbone. His smooth, somewhat owlish face is cut in two by a moustache, waxed and upturned, standing in for a grin, while the hair of his head has been slicked down, dark and flat, combed away from a middle parting. His lips are full and his light eyes are wide, staring at some distant dream. He looks twenty-five and Pauline feels sure that he is dead.

“Andrew Lambert – so he’s your cousin.” She makes a note in short-hand.

“*Was* my cousin. Wits sharp as needles, but he was never cruel or hasty. That watch pinned on his chest he won at cribbage.”

“And very handsome too, I must say.”

“Yes, it was a fine piece but Edie may show you a better one later.”

“I mean your cousin is – was handsome.”

Bessie looks as pleased as if the compliment had been for her. “If I had a penny for all those females who’d said as much and more of our Andrew I’d have bought myself a dockyard. You can’t judge from the picture there, but he was a splendid six-footer. In that, Edie’s like him, and good with her hands like him. This tapestry is her handiwork.” Bessie tips her footstool with a brown leathered toe and pauses while Pauline nods appreciatively at its cross-stitched hearts and anchors. “As for Andrew, he had magic fingers and such warm,

dry palms; he could whittle any kind of animal out of a stick, or any ship out of a bit of bone, shells and some matchsticks. This one's a schooner. Our *Rothsay* was a brig."

"Only two masts ... so that means fewer sails?"

"You might have almost as many sails if you get your sail plan right, which shows which canvas to run up or down or reef or half let out, or rig up on an angle. Meanwhile, you'll have less wood to cut down if the length has caught the wind and about to turn the ship over. Our *Rothsay* wasn't easy to turn over! She was stoutly built of Nova Scotian fir, including all her panelling and her furniture. Unloaded, she weighed fourteen hundred and forty-four tons and ran two hundred and fifty-four feet bow to stern, with a draught of twelve feet. In case you're wondering, that's some generous hold space."

Pauline, sure that such dimensions ought to be considered, is equally sure that they won't be of a mite's interest to her readers. "What about your own quarters, Bessie? I suppose that you slept in a hammock, did you?"

"Not on setting out. Setting out we had the best of comforts, starting with a shower of champagne over her bows. It was her maiden voyage and out of Liverpool. I'd seen her under construction there. Father, Andrew, Aunt Grace and I all went on a jolly to the shipyard. There she stood, stern to the water on the slipway, high over the half ships and the lonely hulls. Fitted in her aft already was the latest coal burning stove, Dutch-tiled in blue and white. As for my own stateroom, my bunk was beside the porthole. Often, I watched fish swim past. Under my bunk was my chest-of-drawers, fastened to the boards with brass. I had a dressing table painted with popinjays and a chest that served as a sofa, with a blanket and a velvet cushion. Crocheted lace on all the surfaces, some of it my dowry..."

Pauline nods politely. The decor sounds charming. However, reporting on the dowry may set the wrong tone. Bessie can only be as interesting as the questions put to her, and those ought to stir a little controversy.

"Are women bad luck at sea or is that just an old wives' tale to – ?"

"To send the men out into the drink instead of them?"

It's a sharp answer, not the answer that Pauline had anticipated, but it makes a mean sort of sense. Pauline's home, the rectory where she lives with her parents, has a view to the town beach; a half moon of muddy sand, pitch-streaked, scattered with fishing boats, row boats, rope ends, strings of kelp, shards of bottle and chips of metal that children pounce on. Pauline has ventured on the ocean twice, each time for less than an hour that felt like years as the little yacht swirled in vicious rises and plummets. After the first trip, there was a second for Miss Mackay's birthday. Honoured to be invited by her editor, she'd been determined to

grow used to the rise and roll. Again, her guts betrayed her and turned to mush. She won't go again unless there's a second Flood.

"What I meant," Pauline says, gently, "is that superstitions like that may be calculated to take another important job and the payment for it away from women."

"Well, when women sail, it is usually with their men so the work they do is for the family."

"Yes, but in fairness- "

"In fairness, why should old wives get the blame for such a tale? It'd be old croakers gossiping, wouldn't it?"

Pauline grins. "Old croakers meaning old sailors?"

Bessie holds her smoke in her narrow chest and speaks, without letting out a wisp of it. "Some old sailors... I mean the few old rogues who see the cup half empty, never half full." Smoke escapes at last through her nostrils and teeth, which are so stained with brown as to be her own. "But old wives may know something. A regular crone came at me in New Orleans, saying that she had eyes to see the future. Wearing such a web of black lace over her face, it's a wonder that she saw anything. Well, she saw me. Such a lazy voice she had! Taken by surprise, as I was, I scarcely understood her drawl and mumble. But I wasn't surprised at the prophecy she picked out of air. Any girl would have liked to hear it. That promise that I'd be mother to four children helped me through the bad times and kept me going from one side of the ocean to the other. She wasn't right but it doesn't matter."

Detecting an edge of regret in Bessie's voice, Pauline glances anxiously at Bessie's face, but the strong features are at rest and the pale eyes serene as she goes on. "But having four children isn't the only way of being happy. Do you have a fiancé or a sweetheart?"

Pauline shakes her head.

"Neither does Edie. She's dark of course, which some don't appreciate, and she's always been rather modern for the local chaps."

"If wearing some chap's cardigan and those oxfords is modern," Pauline wants to say. Instead she says, "Same here, with not much bounty to my name and no title but Vicar's Daughter. Not that I care if I can work."

Bessie gives her close look. "Life is long. One never knows who may pop up. That's what I was coming to. In my case, Edie popped up. She's Andrew's daughter, not mine by any stretch of the imagination, but she became mine. So that's one child and what should have been a prophecy was only a piece of hope. But it cost me not a penny. I reckon that

canny fortune-teller knew I'd need it ... and there's another clever woman. You see the oval picture up by Andrew?"

Pauline follows the bumpy line of Bessie's finger towards a tarnished, silver frame. The frame holds a photograph of a woman, middle-aged yet beautiful, with fair, aquiline features and piled hair over a high-necked blouse, pressed and pin-tucked.

"Your mother, I suppose."

Bessie shakes her head. "My mother was a different kettle of fish. She loathed the ocean and called any ship a prison."

"So she'd read Dr Johnson."

"I have no doubt! Mother always read all the doctors. She was poorly, with turns and spats and headaches because she missed my father, if you ask me. She always had a headache on the days that he sailed. No, the lady up by Andrew is my Aunt Grace, his mother and my father's sister. That made her my mother's sister-in-law, and let me tell you they were chalk and cheese! Aunt Grace was fit as a flea until she was ninety, then three fussy years in a squeaky wheelchair. Her second honeymoon took eight years. I don't think she could have boasted a first honeymoon, but the second! What an adventure! Hither and yon to China on that second husband's clipper."

Aunt Grace might be the subject of another article. Pauline scribbles a note then stands to take proper notice of the picture. "I see where Andrew got his good looks."

"May Queen twice, but if I know my trigonometry and can name the stars and if I can judge an angle of sun and moon or landmark by angling a sextant in the right direction, it's because she taught me what she knew. My father, that great beard of a person in the Gansey jumper and the thigh waders," Bessie is pointing the other side of Andrew's photograph, "He only taught me what he liked to teach. Such gangling arms and legs he had. I always liked to count his fingers. He had just three on his left hand. The ring finger had been mulched between buntlines when he was a boy. But he made the best of the three he had and kept a full quota on right hand. Some said he was a hard ticket, but he was a fine skipper. As a flier, he'd no equal. He'd run up all the canvas, three thousand square yards, until the wind roared like lions in the spars and nothing passed us."

"How fast was that?"

"Oh! Two hundred miles a day. I'd thought seventy-six miles a day spanking, tacking through the rough Irish Sea. But in the latitude of the Canaries, 34 degrees North and 22 degrees West, as I remember, we picked up the Trade Winds and right galloped over the

Atlantic!” Bessie looks affectionately at the photograph. “He looks like a real cross-patch, doesn’t he?”

Pauline finds a way to be gallant. She remarks that he looks manly. Then she adds, since the captain’s scowl begs comment. “I expect the sun was in his eyes.”

“He was his own man, fixed on use and profit,” Bessie says, happily. “On land, he hankered for the sea. At sea he wanted land. He’d not have had me aboard except that he fell short of funds and with my mother gone to glory he could rent this house if he carried me.” Bessie chuckles and coughs. She sends the cough back to where it came from with a gulp then lights another cigarette.

Pauline is still inspecting the photographs when a floorboard by the door creaks and Edie marches in with a tray of china. She glances anxiously at Bessie, seems reassured and throws a tight-lipped grin at Pauline. “That’s our *Rothsay’s* mate, Andrew Lambert.”

“And your father, so I’m told.”

Pauline looks expectantly at Edie, using the well-tried trick of watching closely without speaking, so that the object of the gaze will aim to deflect attention by finding more to say. Edie’s face doesn’t flicker. She places the tray on the hearth, picks up the poker and stokes the coals.

“So I’m told too and so I believe. I never actually met him.”

Pauline feels corrected for her impertinence and Bessie changes the subject with a clunk.

“The young lady’s a suffragette, Edie.” She flicks her ash into the fire.

Edie’s face lights up and she flashes Pauline a business-like grin. “So she ought to be. She works and pays tax. Fair and square,”

Pauline is aware that she pays no tax as yet. As yet, her work is voluntary – until *The Women’s Herald* finds its feet. She fears that to say as much would present her as an amateur, so she says instead, “I’m just a suffragist actually. I don’t hold with breaking windows or burning down pillar boxes. Neither will our newspaper. Rather than burning the nation’s letters, our aim is to bring change through writing and circulating rational argument and creating a demand to read it.”

“What a slogan! It’s a splendid venture.” Edie is pouring tea and, after enquiry, milk.

Pauline takes two spoonfuls of sugar. Bessie takes three – as Pauline would at home. Bessie sips and gulps. Edie holds out the plate of star-shaped biscuits. Mindful of her manners, Pauline takes one. She’ll nibble it when she’s listening and not talking, which ought to be soon. She needs to get her subject started and takes the plunge. “I must confess I’m

foxed, Bessie. If a woman knows how to sail and navigate, why can't she hold a captain's certificate?"

Eddie shrugs, as if it's obvious. Then she draws up a third armchair and settles with her cup and saucer balanced on her thigh, without spilling any tea or letting fall the perched biscuit. "Well, if she's not allowed to take the test. I expect it will be just the same for the airships!"

She and Pauline look expectantly at Bessie, who toposes on her cigarette. At last she says, "Am I meant to know the answer? My father, who bundled females and their habits together like firewood, would have had it that females don't know economy. Economy is a hefty part of being a captain, but what he never took into consideration is that female economies are different from a fellow's finances because women make do with smaller bits of money. Maybe women skimp on sprats and waste the whales, but men may not see how the little things save big things. I almost got the cat o' nine tails for washing in fresh water instead of salt water. It caused much stomping about for risking putting into a port out of our path to fill our freshwater butts. He didn't appreciate that I had spotted for fat, smoky clouds then collected my own rainwater in jamjars. 'Time is money!' Father used to say. Perhaps he'd say a captain's certificate costs time and money and women should find other uses for both."

The fire spits out a spark. "Was the cat o' nine tails legal in 1870?"

"I'm speaking of the year before, Pauline dear."

"1869," Eddie says, as if no one else might manage to count backwards.

Bessie reaches and pats Pauline's knee. Her icy eyes glimmer playfully. "We had no cat o' nine tails. An accident is its own lesson, not always to the sinner. A loose rope slung down will whip out an eye. But for the lesser sins, which are indolence, swearing, knife carrying, not airing bedding, not being clean and shaved of a Sunday but washing clothes of a Sunday, it's docked pay, docked grog, scrubbing the spattered platforms on the heads and doubled watches at the pump. And any rogue who had been, or might turn, dangerous would be shackled there, until he's beached without a reference, if he's lucky, or marched to the Port Authorities if he's not. If I ever answered back to Father I had to scrub out corners in my resting hours and put my elbow grease into shining up brass until he said he could see his whiskers in it. I still enjoy polishing metal! It clears my mind and shines up my ideas. But I always used to put a long face on for it, to assure him that he'd been stern. He would never be seen to be partial; he never was! Rather he would bawl at me to be careful, in case my

skirt frill caught a coil of rope and nudged a sheet out of its true when I was nowhere near a coil of rope. In the end, he got used to me and so did the men. We all get used to everything.”

Pauline has put her cup and saucer on the hearth and is scribbling fast.

“Edie, let’s rack our brains. Pauline’s asking me about bad luck at sea. Bad luck at sea because of women that is.”

Edie tosses her head and throws up her eyes to the yellowing ceiling. She gives no sign of appreciating the question’s irony. “A ship’s immortal if a baby’s born on it first night out from shore. That piece of luck would need a woman.”

Pauline has never heard of that. She grins at Edie and thanks her. Nevertheless, not daring to ask for privacy in someone else’s house, she is put out that Edie is staying and threatening to take over the conversation.

“And since you ask me, I believe it’s because of our menses, if I may say as much. Men turn queasy at the sight of blood and a woman letting slip a tiny blot or two is awkward to explain nicely. To the sailor’s mind, which looks for warnings, blood spotting the boards might presage puddles of the stuff oncoming.”

Pauline feels her cheeks flaring at such frankness, although the explanation rings sensibly. She is warming into respect for Edie’s boldness. Then Bessie, as pale as ever, says, “I don’t think it can be that at all, dear. There is very often blood on the boards. It springs out at any moment from chafed fingers and thumbs or old wounds breaking open or even rough-shaved chins. Some of the chaps must shave with kitchen knives. And, of course, weather permitting, fellows will run about barefoot so that they can climb. That’s why the decks must be swept and scrubbed.”

“The blood to which I refer would be darker.”

“Edie, you’re sounding like quite the daftest of any sailor.”

“Perhaps you can’t remember, Bessie, but I am looking at the facts. Menstrual blood is magenta, never scarlet. It comes from deep inside the body. How much light is in there?”

Given the combative tone over a subject that makes her turn as queasy as any man, it’s high time for Pauline to guide the conversation back to its moorings, and to prove that she knows something. “Speaking of facts, can we believe that sixty women were thrown overboard not far from here to appease a storm?”

Edie doesn’t hesitate. “Yes, I’m afraid we can. By some fool Sir John Arundel. And his ships sank anyway.”

Bessie sucks the last of her cigarette then lights another on its stub. “That was in the Middle Ages when England was Roman Catholic. I expect there were parsons aboard, as

well. Parsons are every bit as unlucky as women and so are debtors. Or maybe Sir John's fleet was launched on a Friday, which used to ask for trouble. We *have* come on since those bad old days now that we manage longitude. But the fact is, my dears, bad luck at sea is a bad place to have it. Our *Rothesay* had a buxom mermaid as a figurehead. If waves don't care much for women, they do like their naked forms, so it's said, and such a generous chest should have kept any noisy sea in order. Yet we had rotten luck, a long, hard run of it. That might have been my fault for having hair as ginger as a witch's, albeit darkened down with filth, half-plaited and a quarter coiled, stuck with rusty pins under a bonnet. Perhaps my virgin's foot split the boards as soon as I trod on them."

"That's virgins in shipyards," Edie says, "And witches call beleaguered boats to safety by hauling on a rope."

"Not unless they want to," Pauline says. It's a daring, cruel joke but Bessie and Edie grin, which is encouragement to add, "Witches do as they like, don't they? That's what makes them terrible."

"I expect you're right." Bessie smokes, thoughtfully. "Of course, with me, we made thirteen on the home run."

"Only if you count yourself as the last one," Edie says. "You might count yourself first or second. You boarded before most and were there on her sailing out."

"Whichever way I count, it adds up to thirteen. But it was on her voyage out that I heard a sailor fretting. That sailor was a Cornishman, called Cornish by the men, and blue from head to foot with tattoos. False eyes were pricked out upon his eyelids, so that the ocean would never catch him napping. Instead of a shirt he wore a waistcoat swinging with amulets – sharks' teeth, strung shells, wrens' feathers, hawks' feathers, tattered, bespattered ribbons. One day, he happened to cross a shipmate, called Mung. Now, Mung was black as your hat, with ancient slashes on his cheek from some old ritual knife. But he was mostly good-natured and cheerful, and spoke English as well as both of you ... and better than I. Still, he had a fine African turn of curse when it was called for. On this particular morning, he cursed Cornish for a blued fool who would be flung overboard as easy as a bucket. That was Cornish's own fault for throwing his runt's weight about and tossing overboard a bucket that Mung had been swabbing from. A sailor loses wages if he loses or damages any of the ship's tools. That's when we saw the wreck."

"Which wreck? Weren't there lots of wrecks?"

"This was on the voyage out. For an hour on that maiden voyage, we saw one wreck, bobbing on our horizon. She was nothing but a hull's skeleton with stumps for masts and

shreds for sails all lit by the setting sun. But when we dared to peer at it through the telescope, there was something like a scarecrow slumped against the wheel. Every hair on my own neck stood to attention. As for Cornish's lamb's caul, worn under his waistcoat as a charm against drowning, it started throbbing like a heart and that informed him that all aboard had dried to death. That piece of terror stood to reason. What stood less to reason and what he'd have us believe was that the skeleton ship's keel had been caught in the Sargasso Sea, a soup of reeds and grouper fish and sailors' skulls. He warned us too that the wide Sargasso Sea would draw us in, its reeds would bind our keel, we'd be trapped and all hope ended. But as anyone knew who could read a chart, which Cornish couldn't, we were two hundred miles from the Sargasso Sea. Father told him so and so did Andrew.

"They should have told him that the shipbuilder had set coins under our masts to keep us out of trouble and in profit. That was common practice. As it was, Mung took the brunt of Cornish's ignorance by mocking it, along with all his daft amulets. And as Mung turned his back to go to work again, Cornish pounced and pushed him over flat then seized his head and worked it up and down, grating the flesh and the proud bone of that African nose like cheese.

"Now, Finns used to be bad luck as well. Safe enough in the Baltic, I am sure; but they are dreadful omens away from it. Yet the man who saved Mung's nose was a Finn called Vilquist. You'd have looked at him twice, with his thatch of corn-coloured curls over cheeks as high as his eyes, and his eyes so light and shining that they were as good as mirrors. He had a full set of teeth, big as a horse's. The rest was muscle and sinew, sleek as marble and as silent until something worth saying cracked it. Then it would come out in a peculiar accent, light and lilting, although the voice itself was a growl. Luckily, that unlucky Finn tugged Mung's nose free of the bloody bruise between brow and cheeks using only his thumb and forefinger. One sharp crack tore our eardrums. Then he bound the gristle straight between two dowlings and Mung breathed again without snuffling.

"The other spell I saw on that trip was the man-made wonder of the Levee, holding a million tons of the Mississippi's water and its traffic, high above a city of a hundred thousand souls. They say that if you've seen one port-town, you've seen them all. They are all built up similar so that mariners understand how the land lies. Yet New Orleans is different. There'd been a war and a change of flag. But for all the bullets that might have flown around, there were stained glass windows over rose-twined balconies and jasmine-clung jalousies and trumpet music on every street corner. Still, New Orleans is where our bad luck started."

“This won’t get the pudding stirred,” Edie says, shifting to the edge of her chair so she can clatter the cups and saucers onto the tray. Then she springs up, and marches with the tray to the door. “Do excuse me. Ring the bell if you need me.”

Pauline follows the direction of Edie’s nod and sees what must be a cast iron ship’s bell, somehow washed up upon the hearth. She wonders how anyone will lift it. Then, from its dents and scratches and the proximity of the firedogs, she works out that no one needs to lift it. Striking it with the fork or shovel will be enough.

“Yes, dear,” Bessie gives Pauline a complicit smile and says, as the heels of Edie’s oxfords click away, “She’s an excellent cook. Some of this makes difficult listening for her. She wants to hear it, but doesn’t like to be upset. Her father, you understand ... my cousin.” Her eyes turn filmy then to water but she coughs and swallows and finds a hoarser voice. “And other things which aren’t comfortable.”

Pauline leans forward in her chair.

Chapter 2

New Orleans

On the seventeenth of January, 1870, we slid easily over the bar of the Mississippi, latitude 90 degrees west, longitude 30 degrees north. Birds were calling and the sun was rising, dropping rubies into the trees and turning the oily water to copper. The sky was pure turquoise as we moved up river. To Father’s regret, we had to take on a pilot. The fellow tacked safely round the silts and shallows and we made excellent time against the river’s heavy currents.

The bells of St Louis Cathedral, swelling songs from the stevedores and the smell of cloves welcomed us to the Levee. We anchored as safely as we could, out of the paths of the many packet-boats and paddle-steamers. Before we could put our fires out, a fleet of skiffs, lighters and bumboats, countless as Moses’ locusts, had surrounded us. It was if we had been invaders or, as Father said, as if a ship out of Liverpool would still supply their guns. Yet, now it was the new America who would supply us, yelling about sailors’ lodgings and taverns, music halls, wax-work museums, fancy dress hire, lovely actresses and goddesses of singers. There were offers of keenly- priced chandlers and bonded storage, so that we need not pay customs duty. There were also tickets for a theatre play, so that Andrew got excited and asked for leave to wash and shave.

Father told us that we must wait to scrub up until we saw the Health Inspector rowing out to us, because it would pay to be as fresh and spotless as we could for him. In the meantime, we must keep our minds on the duties of docking and turn our eyes from crimps and pedlars until they understood our silence and slunk away.

The Health Inspector boarded and marched about, pink-faced and pot-bellied. His stovepipe hat, waistcoat, frockcoat, gloves and droopy neck tie would have been warm for his breathy labour of turning over ropes and blankets. He gave us an easy time and declared us fit for business. We were less lucky when two customs officers swung aboard. One might have been Father's age and the other my age – which was twenty. They were proper ferrets, the pair of them, for all their braided uniform and insignia. They dangled their lamps into our hold. Then they jiggled their weights and frowned at their tallies. They should have spoken English. After all, English had been pronounced the common language of the United States of America. However, they mumbled French to each other. Then they let it loose on us. It wasn't the French that my Aunt Grace had taught me either, but a waterfall of some dialect. All I that I understood was that they made nonsense of Father's note of promise for the raw cotton that we should have exchanged for our best quality Manchester flannel.

Father put to the officers, loudly and slowly as if to deaf idiots, that our cotton would be lying in sight of some blockhead, with our direction stamped on it, plain as an old maid's dinner. I translated what I could, politely, and the officers pulled their lips down at the edges and riffled through their ledgers. They found no record that could help us except for a load of staves from a stock of surplus, for a supplementary fee.

'Pardon? Pardonnez-moi?' I said. My heart was working like a piston, in case I had understood all wrong, as I often had in my Aunt Grace's lessons, or in case different tongues might make different mathematics. It was odd that any officer should turn broker. Besides, staves are worth less than cotton in any language. If the officers looked askance at woman talking business, as if some block and tackle had broken into song, they did cut the fee, regretting that it was some hungry comrade's commission. They said that the difference could be made up in Union dollars. But we all knew that Union dollars held low value against British sterling, so that what might buy a hold of wool one day might hardly buy a sock the next. Father put on his Tartar face, saying that he was a stickler for an agreement and he trusted other men to keep theirs. So, until we had our cotton, our flannel was our ballast.

He might have left it at that. Or he might have asked, as Andrew was proposing, if a cable might be sent to our agent. Andrew and I often had the same ideas without stating them, except afterwards, to each other. We would often know as much without that and

without the merest glance at each other. We would always have to be careful how we put a word to our captain, who liked have the good ideas himself. On this particular day, Father hadn't had his breakfast, an omission which always shortened his temper. He said that he'd never unload to any New Orleans warehouse, which should take example from Liverpool, their sister-city where we'd sailed from. Liverpool had grown powerful by never charging for bonded storage, instead of swelling past efficiency in the course of being served by slaves. I was pondering how to translate that when he added that I should remind them that Liverpool had blocked its own docks and its imports of food and other necessities for our people. The block had been in aid of shipping weaponry for New Orleans' forlorn hope of defence in their confounded war.

I told him that I didn't have the language for so much history. I was ready to be sent below to do some polishing but Father was speechless. His honesty often blinded him to the perfidy of others. He took a swipe at a gull, which was dirtying our gunwale. Then he started pacing, fit to wear out his boots, scowling at the Levee and the business moving on it instead of his. Then the wind left his sails and he had our sails furled tight. With only our Union Jack flapping, he let two tugs draw us upriver to a deep, reedy backwater, out of the way of other freight and whatever passed for civilisation. There we were told to stay until all parties had matching instructions.

The backwater, which the Southerners call bayou, was a fairyland of drooping trees, all palaces for millions of midges. The water was as green as the noblest lawn because it was skimmed right over with lily-leaves and weeds. Beyond a rough track there was brush and beyond that a plantation of yellowy-green, which Freddie recognised as sugarcane.

"Those canes, Miss Bessie, will turn to rum if they are chewed and the rough bits spat out. I mean holy rum of course, without the joking, dancing, fighting and falling over!"

Freddie had been Father's steward for twelve years but, as soon as I'd boarded, he'd been moved out of the cabin to the sailors' galley. Freddie was hardly an inch taller than I, although he might have been my age. His skin was smooth as toffee, which was its colour. He always spoke as if he was smiling. That day, his lips were as chapped as anyone's but they glistened at the corners as if his mouth was watering at the cane. We anchored away from the banks, under the full and roaring sun. Andrew told the sailors that we were safer mid-stream from bushwhackers and swamp Indians. Then he joked that the rocks lining the bank would be our guards. There were three rocks, which took turns to yawn with teeth like saws, announcing themselves as alligators. No one could get to us, but no one could get away by wading or swimming. Not that many sailors learn to swim. Most believe it better to drown

fast and mercifully, instead of racked to death after the hunger, thirst and shark bites that *The Mariner's Chronicle* always used to warn of.

Andrew said that we might take it turns to go ashore as soon as the ship was clean. That might have been never; humid climes will rot the best timbers to dirt in days or even in hours. The men needed to be kept busy, but they had also to be fed on beef, biscuit and grog. Sailors are bred to habit more than most men. It's well-known that people must eat to stay honest and we had only blighted potatoes.

Father was anxious to track down our cotton or to claim our demerage, which is the insurance that ships are due when they are held in port. He was leaving Andrew as officer-in-charge while he rowed back to the Custom House. My orders were to accompany him as his translator and a purchaser of provisions, who must also do her best to soften an official's confounded heart. These were tall orders and I had to loop up my hair and scrub my filthy neck and change out of my dull, worn blacks into some of Aunt Grace's regalia. She'd had her grey suit cut down for me and then whale-boned up a-new to blow up my pancake chest as if it were a pigeon's. I wasn't much to look at, short and stringy even then. You'd have needed a powerful eyeglass to see me!

The jolly boat was winched down onto the murky water. I clung to its gunwale, sitting on the bench in the stern. Father was in the prow, instructing me not to fidget. Vilquist and Freddie sat amidships to row. The current was in our favour, but the way was long and the air as wet as sponge. My linen clung to my legs and torso. Vilquist's golden hair browned and stuck to his forehead. There was a stink of tar and resin rising, steaming through the embroidery on his smock. That smock was rough wool, no doubt itchy as a fleas' nest. Threadbare, it was darned together by its cross-stitch, which made a pretty bib and cuffs of green Christmas trees and yellow fish. I found out later that his mother had worked it. A pity she hadn't come along to wash it. As for Freddie, he had untied his red spotted neckerchief, dunked it in the river and tied it round his head to block the sunstroke. His leather jerkin was open at the neck and it was tempting to gawp at a livid purple rope-burn crossing his throat. I did my best to distract myself. There were storks under the willows to marvel at and flitting insects and water-rats to watch, but my eyes would wander back to the scar because it looked as if Freddie's head had been welded on. He must have felt my curiosity.

"I do apologize for my ugly scar, Miss Bessie. It comes from running into a Philadelphia signboard in the night. The rusty chain almost throttled me."

"I thought that had come to pass in George Town," Father said.

“So it did, Sir,” Freddie answered. “I always get those Eastern cities mixed.”

No one could correct Father. So whether George Town or Washington was right, or if any of it was true or false, I didn't look at Freddie to guess but kept my eyes skinned for the submerged stumps that might have bottomed us. Even if he had escaped another sort of noose, Freddie never could have deserved hanging.

At last, we came out of the meanders into the river and the danger from paddle steamers running over us or drowning us in their swell, to say nothing of the traps posed by floating obstacles than had been tossed away. The river looked like muddy silk, but it was also the public sewer, no place to fall in. We were plankton in so much traffic. Father stood up in the prow to make us visible and, by some miracle, we reached the wharf in sight of the Custom House. As Vilquist handed me out onto the platform, its planks bounced and swayed under my weight and my knees softened. Three and a half weeks at sea and I'd lost my land legs!

On the way to the Custom House, we stopped at a warehouse run by Portuguese. Men of that nation, in Father's experience, were always open to newcomers and happenstance and had sharp ears to the ground and fingers in many pies. Two dapper gentlemen, white suited and white gloved, gave us a hearing in plain English. They also gave us sugary lemonade, clumps of fudge and bag of ginger nuts, and offered a discount on their best cotton without commission for themselves, as long as we could pay sterling directly. We needed an exchange, not a sale. Still, their request for our sterling confirmed that our sterling was valuable, although only valuable enough for a few careful trips to market. We would not manage without our demeurage.

With thoughts of that demeurage foremost, we joined a weary queue of sea dogs and traders outside the Custom House. To start, some giant magnolia trees shaded us. Then we reached the stairs and the full glare of the sun on our necks and noses. That queue, pestered by flies, meandered through the lofty doors into the wrong office. We were directed to another queue, which led deeper into the building and up a curving marble staircase to a hatch.

The hatch's clerk read our papers. Already dog-eared, they were more stained by the way he dragged his greasy fore-finger under every word of the writing. At last, he sloped off to find another clerk. Father pulled an ugly face after him, pushing his jaw out like a monkey. Then he showed that same face to the queue. That made us all laugh for a minute, then it brought on grumbling for twenty more minutes. The grumbles silenced as the first clerk came back with his superior, who was “most awful sorry” but he could only tell us that

our papers proved precisely nothing. He asked for a bill of sale, which was missing. This meant that our demerage, which was our right and not charity, was not in place and no argument could make it so.

Father stormed away down the slippery staircase. I tripped over my hem and jarred my ankle keeping up. He didn't stop. He just blazed out through those grand, lofty doors. Outside, the sun drove at us and some monstrous, green-backed flies wanted our blood. I pointed out the giant magnolias where we might take our bearings, but Father, his head crying with perspiration, was too concerned to make us comfortable. He was resolved to make a nuisance of himself until he had what would keep us alive. Of course, I understood why.

When I was ten or eleven, a clipper had got into a quandary here in Fairport. I had watched from the window there and I remember the proud cut of her as she'd rolled in to our harbour. There'd been such a flurry of excitement. Folk who were short of business were looking forward to a spike of it and they were graced with it too, except it was all on credit. Night after night, her sailors had made free with Fairport and, according to gossip and the evidence some months later, run up female credit too. Then they'd vanished, leaving their clipper still at anchor, at which she fell into rack, ruin and salvage from the creditors and had to be broken up within the year.

Up the staircase Father bounded, to interrupt the next unsatisfied customer at the hatch. The customer was raging louder than Father, and leaving no room to be interrupted. So Father threw open the door where the second clerk had come from and demanded to see that fellow's master. That clerk said that, in any matter of his honest business, God was his master, as if we never said our prayers at night. In fact, Father was most particular that he trimmed his beard of a Sunday morning and he had his men shave, ready to sing a hymn on the poop and hear some verses from the Bible. But he never used vain talk of God, and he was right to seize that Christian by the collar, lift him off the deck and shake him. I couldn't help grinning. There were so many coves I'd have liked to shake that morning and getting the better of one of them for a moment was a hoot. But it was several steps too far make our case. All the doors and hatches were locked against us. The queue cursed us and the Port Authorities arrived. I was supposing that we would be marched to some underground gaol, where Father would be bonded to build railways and white slavers might have me, when I heard a familiar voice.

"If it ain't Joe Hall, you old devil!" It was Captain Watchorn, off the whaleboat *Walrus* out of Providence, with his tight, wind-bitten look of years at sea. His flat, broad-

brimmed hat was still clamped over his brow as if he had recently entered the building. He must have heard Father's bluster from the floor below and pushed others to save him.

"Joe, my dove, whatever has upset you?" That was Mrs Watchorn. She was season after season, afloat with her husband. I think they never spent an hour apart. Generously made, in crimson and ochre tartan that was less generous, she was puffing up the stairs behind him. Yet, for all her breathlessness, her words struck as if carried through a speaking trumpet and rooted all of us to our spot.

Mrs Watchorn was like her husband's whaling ship. First, she was as stalwart; she'd born three babies at sea, delivered by their father, and healthy sons of guns they all continued. Second, which must have been her choice, the high-prowed *Walrus* was painted crimson and ochre in every jut and crevice. Not that Mrs Watchorn painted. Her dusky rose complexion was her own. As for her bulk, she swept sideways along the whaler's companionways and managed the ladders between decks, agile as a cat. Her laughter was a cackle followed by a tinkle and she had a playful eye for a pretty chap. I know that because we'd gammed with them for an evening. Gamming means to share company between ships out on the ocean. The custom goes that the mates of both vessels will host the men who are off-watch in one ship, while the captains and their families eat, drink, sing and gossip in the other ship. I had much rather have stayed with Andrew aboard our *Rothsay*, dancing and applauding the sailors' yarns. However, at sea as on land, where there are women, other women must be lumped in with them.

As for Father, he was glad enough to sup Josiah Watchorn's Madeira and read *Walrus's* old newspapers, but he had made it plain that he cared not a jot about gossip. And he cared little for the Watchorns, if truth be told. He had counted the couple of hours we'd lost with them, moaning that it was I who had wheedled to be shown a whaling ship. All Father's society had to be business, and fruitful business. The Watchorn's hospitality had been matchless. We drank that sweet, sticky Madeira with Mrs Watchorn's hens' eggs. We drank it with melon, carrots and asparagus. We drank it with mudfish then with roast beef. Another flagon of the same arrived to wash down the custards, syllabub and anecdotes. Then, as her husband asked for brandy and his cigar box, she told him she would show me her sheep in the hold. Those beasts were in such miserable dark pens that merely to look at them was torment. Luckily, we hardly stopped because it was Mrs Watchorn's pleasure to lead me, sworn to secrecy, to the reception station. A snared whale had, not long ago, been welcomed there. Men sloshed about, stripped above the belt waist-deep in what was left of it, which seemed to be little more than steaming fat. Backs and chests gleaming, they laughed as they

butchered bits of monster, playing catch with what was foul. I expect the stench of rotting monster, mixed with their own sweat, had maddened them.

But for all its horror and the headache after, gamming with the Watchorns was to prove its worth. I have never seen a woman, with an angel's smile but so many spare chins, work such sorcery. She freed us from the Port Authorities. She even pinched a policeman's cheek, vowing that matters would turn clear after we had had a wash and a slice of her seedcake. And all those stern men blushed and seemed happy to believe her."

Pauline hardly believes it - friends showing up in the nick of time, one a Medusa. She suspects that something must be left out or misremembered for the sake of story. Bessie must read her mind.

"Speaking of luck, that was a hefty stroke of it. Perhaps Mrs Watchorn was a sorceress and sniffed our danger before it sniffed us. It was extraordinary that any whaling vessel should be a hundred miles up a river with so many shallows. Whalers are deep-hulled and deeper loaded. More extraordinary was that the one whaler which was upriver should be skippered by Father's acquaintance. But the world and his wives loved New Orleans – especially his wives. And Captain Watchorn was his wife's creature. Besides, New Orleans lit so many lamps which, in those days, burned cheaply from whale oil. The Watchorns had blubber to sell and with *Walrus* anchored on the North side of the river, off a work-a-day township called Algiers, they could keep processing their catch without complaints of stink. Whales smell bad alive. They reek worse than ancient cabbage water and dysentery. As for whales dead! It's a wonder that some folk eat them. Making perfume out of ambergris is for magicians.

Anyway, with Andrew waiting in our *Rothsay* and Vilquist and Freddie waiting in the jolly boat, we couldn't taste the famous seedcake. The Watchorns had anchored too far off. I doubt that they really wanted us to board them with their own business to finish at the Custom House, but they were good-hearted and as generous as they could be. Mrs Watchorn steered us clear of the officials and the idling jacks on the wharf, the sailors' gloomy haunts on Dauphine Street and the crimps beckoning from squat doorways. She shepherded us past alleys crammed with dogs and set about with muddy-coloured fire-ships in faded, low-cut corsets. Some of those women looked hollowed out with hunger. With my own stomach growling loudly, I pitied them then for the way they earned their grits, grits being the belly liner of that region.

Many stretches of the streets were missing paving stones. Bare earth was carpeted with rushes and spat tobacco, but incense billowed from the doors and windows. The town's

mood was jubilant with blasting trumpets. Notices promised brilliant operettas and, without paying a penny, we saw a man disguised as a princess and watched a fellow in blue hose, helmet and breastplate declaiming sea shanties like poems. At last, we stopped at a stall in the public gardens where a chirpy mulatta, decked out in cotton print and a calico head-wrap, was frying the doughy cakes they call beignets. A little further off, under a massive cedar, a gypsy band was playing dance music and people were stepping up to dance in the shade.

There I stood, as drab as a floor-cloth. The American women were so frilled and fichu-ed with their long waists and short skirts, shorter than yours, to show white ankle boots. Captain Watchorn and Father were breakfasting on juleps and cigars, while Mrs Watchorn pressed me to risk my waist and eat my fill. She was thanking her stars for my female company. It was what she starved for since her one daughter had left the whaling boat to be married. Not that she'd begrudged that, with that daughter thirty years of age. And it was no marvel that the pretty creature had waited so long, since the only chaps in regular sight had been the whaling boys – rough diamonds, but rough all the same. As for when it came to my view of smoother fellow, she said that if our delay was until Shrove Tuesday, I'd catch the Mardi Gras parade and for that I would need a fetching outfit. Mrs Watchorn promised that if *Walrus* stayed so long at Algiers, she would have herself rowed out to me and help me choose what didn't have to be a fancy dress costume, but it would need to cut a dash. Lord save me! I told her about my black, bombazine crinoline, shot with green, low across the shoulders and infinite about the hem, describing it as if I liked it. She said that whatever I wore ought to be silk and brighter, and that ladies who were kissed with freckles and blessed with auburn hair always looked wonderful in lilac and emerald. Then she flushed even rosier and gasped at forgetting that I was still in mourning.

As she apologised and condoled, who should wander into view but our old Fairport doctor, Doctor Canning. Swinging a cane instead of the black bag of tricks he'd always brought to visit Mother, he looked swankier in light tweeds and a panama hat. His brown dundreary whiskers, which had been like clothes' brushes, had been shaved away in favour of a neat spade-shaped beard. Yet I'd have made him out anywhere. We'd made a mess in Fairport, over his bill. I did my best to look at ease, turned my back and got busy drinking sarsaparilla.

All at once, Doctor Canning was behind me, shaking Father's hand and thanking him for recommending him to be the Watchorns' surgeon. He was crowing at how all had turned out well, even for one blessed whaler who had fallen from a dory and might have lost his life but had ended up losing only his arm to gangrene. That he judged to be the whaler's fault for

scraping his elbow along the barnacled side of the dory as his shipmates drew him up. Captain Watchorn heartily agreed with everything that Doctor Canning said. He also thanked Father for his judgement and generosity, when we might have kept a good ship's surgeon to ourselves. Mrs Watchorn winked at me. Perhaps she suspected that Father had balked at paying a good ship's surgeon. His hair had sprung up on end when he'd seen the first bill for Mother's care. "How sick have you been, Rose?" he'd asked.

Mrs Watchorn clapped her hands to the rhythm of drums and remarked on a handsome couple's mastery of the polka. She supposed that I would like to polka and directed a second wink at Doctor Canning. He regretted that it was too early for cavorting and he was too sober to caper. Mrs Watchorn nudged him. Then the band struck up her favourite tune, at which she must get closer to it and leave us to ourselves for a minute or three.

Of course, she would have been in mind of her thirty-year-old daughter. But I was only twenty and, if there was any man I did not want to myself, it was Doctor Canning. His smile was a matter of teeth, with incisors sharp as a dog's. He showed them to me and said, his mouth crammed with plums, "My dear Miss Hall, I am overjoyed to see you, and looking so much better too! I put that down to the effects of sun and sea. I did worry that damp, cold Fairport might take you the way of your splendid mother. I wish I could have said goodbye to her."

I had no answer. The silence was awkward. He ended it by regretting any misunderstanding of our last meeting. He added, when I said nothing, that with no capital and only the skill of his hands and head to survive with, he'd simply had no choice but to sail to America. Many doctors had been lost there in the war, so he'd planned to make his name in the English part of New Orleans where folk pay well to be ill in their own language. He went on to say that, once his business was in full flow, he hoped that at last I might accept what had only ever been his offer of protection. Good Lord!"

Bessie starts out of her chair as a horn honks outside the window. It's a motorcar rounding the corner. Pauline is getting used to their sudden appearances, their noise and their bitter, black smoke. She only fears that another visitor will arrive before they get to the real story. But the motorcar honks on past, off along the promenade.

"Show off!" Bessie calls out after it, shaking her knotty fist.

"Isn't he? I suppose it's a fellow. So, to return to New Orleans, this Doctor Canning had asked you to marry him?"

Bessie is about to light another cigarette, but her snort blows out the match. She cackles; her narrow shoulders shake with mirth. She coughs and wheezes, mucus bubbling in her lungs, but she's still laughing. Pauline is ready to pummel her on the back but she is frightened to be rough. She almost strikes the ship's bell for Edie. Then Bessie thuds her own palm on her own chest as if to shatter it, pulls a man's handkerchief from her sleeve, wipes her eyes and blows her nose.

"Marry me? No dear. Never! He hadn't asked. Not in any language I understood. I should have shouted 'rubbish!' As it was, my voice was snatched away. My mouth must have dropped open wider than a fish's because he said that I should breathe through my nose since breathing through the mouth increased invasion of miasmas. I should have listened to that." She gives another throaty chuckle, lights the cigarette and draws on it. "I laugh about it now. I should have laughed then. I was young, foolish and angry with him. He didn't make his name in New Orleans. Folk were poor after their war, slow to commit to action. The habit of the place was to stroll in deed and in thought. And, as we'd found out, there was suspicion of foreigners. Foreigners boasting new ideas might have been the worst. America may be all new ideas these days, but then the folk who lived there liked what they knew.

Anyway, Captain Watchorn had a passion for some fragrant eatery with the longest bar north of the Equator, where skippers could meet agents and plantation owners and a whole business directory of help. He proposed a visit to that splendid haven for Father and the doctor, if he cared to accompany, while Mrs Watchorn showed me the ropes around the French Market. Mrs Watchorn was most compliant. She and her husband insisted that they would both be glad to spare us another bit of the morning and let the crowd at the Custom House shrink as the sun climbed.

I was nervous of finding the market alone for I have never found left and right as easily as port and starboard. So Captain Watchorn's suggestion was welcome. He dropped a hot, whiskery kiss on my glove and patted Mrs Watchorn's skirt behind her. Then Mrs Watchorn hung her arm through mine and steered. That arm was heavy on my elbow, but it was worth its weight because of her experience of purchase.

No prices were marked up in that French market. The vendors' way was to make a price once we'd collected all we wanted, and the more we bought the cheaper it might become. We had two sacks of Indian corn, which was sold cheap everywhere, cheaper if we let our gaze drift to other stalls. We also bought a crate of stringy chickens, who kept up a noisy frenzy, as we might in such a crate. Mrs Watchorn flicked her fingers and suddenly, without asking, I'd hired a porter and his mule. I worried what Father would say to that

extravagance. By excellent good luck, he missed all sight of it by arriving at our jolly boat ten minutes after us. I trusted Vilquist and Freddie not to mention the mule. Besides, I'd had value for my money. So many of the earth's riches had floated free from so many consignments and all had begged to be shifted quickly.

The way back to the bayou was longer, upriver on a close afternoon. We thought we'd lost our bearings. One willow tree is like another, and they all dripped sap on my outfit while the midges feasted on us. There were shoals of catfish in the water, slimy creatures with gaping mouths and wolfish whiskers that didn't promise the delicious eating which Freddie promised on their behalf. Still, hungry as I was, it made sense to try them out. Back at our ship, I was out a-stern, dangling a hook and line. Those ugly fish loved weevil-ridden biscuit and raced each other to be caught. I fried them with ginger then with yarrow but, to me, they tasted muddy.

Not that I gave up fishing. I was glad to eat them. Besides, there was little else to do but polish brass or shrink flannel or wear my hands raw splicing. I also read Mr Norie's *Epitome of the Oceans*, with its collection of wind-charts and land-charts and examples of how to measure routes, depths, shallows and trails. That tome was Father's bible and my time was well spent. When I had all clear in my head and could start Mr Norie's sentences and finish them without reading them, I would go to Andrew and he'd test me in his school teacher's voice:

“How do waves warn of rocks beneath? Name the brightest star in the Southern Seas.”

By night, I missed my sleep, although I'd often go to bed at sunset. There was little reason to stay up longer. We had oil, compliments of *Walrus*, but Father begrudged its burning. In bed I was hot. I would pull off the sheet, only to be goose-bumped a minute later, huddling in my shawl. All the while, I strained, past the crickets' chatter, to hear the paddle of oars, which might bring Father with our demerage and news of cargo. When I became too anxious to catch any sleep, up I'd go on deck and watch with Andrew. He always seemed so glad of my company and it was a chance to learn more about the stars, which shone out like sixpences. Close as we were to the Tropic of Cancer, they'd shifted lower in the sky but we could still trace the silver lines that made Saucepans, Bears and Archers. Sometimes, which would be funny now if it didn't shiver me in my shoes, we counted what we called pockmarks on the Man-in-the-Moon.

Often we'd walk fore to hear the sailors and discover what their great gusts of laughter were about. They sat around a lantern, yarning about their adventures, or the

adventures they'd have liked to have had. Cornish had acted Triton at the Equator and ducked five officers, one of them the Spanish Admiral. That person's ebony moustache had reached his eyebrows. The fellow had sailed a galleon with eighty guns from the Canaries to the Rio Grande. It had been such pleasure to wash his pride off. Then Mr Chips, our ancient carpenter, had been born upon a frigate during the battle of Camperdown. Hardly three minutes after, his mother, who was a gunnery officer's wife, had pulled down her skirts and fetched and carried powder for the cannons and just in time, or the Dutch might have had the glory. As for Mung, he had been wrecked for a week on a flimsy bamboo raft. The sun had burned him even blacker, and he'd survived with gulps of seawater, gargling and making his throat a filter before spitting out the salt. He couldn't demonstrate until there was a similar emergency, which God forbid. Mere sips of sea had fried the other survivor's tongue and pickled him into madness, but Mung had retained the clarity of mind to gargle then to paddle with his hands and feet towards Freetown, in West Africa. Just before he reached that haven, he was washed up on an island of women. Every one of those females had been so young and bounteous that he'd hidden from Her Majesty's ship that had put out to seek him – until his wife leaned over the side in a low-cut gown and he remembered how bounteous she was. There were whoops for him at that.

Not to be outdone by a black man, far away on the other side of the Atlantic, our bosun, Spider (so nicknamed for his length of limbs and swollen belly) had been locked in a cosy room by two hookers. Those hookers had stayed on the outside – worst luck. On the inside, worst luck of all, was a hooker from Satan's furnace who'd become his wife by an accident. She'd wanted his ship to sail without him so that she could find him employment in looking after her. He'd smashed his two front teeth in the dashing escape, which was by jumping from the second floor window; but that had only made him a better whistler and the teeth had always been wobbly from a dose of scurvy. Freddie, who had all his teeth and whose voice was honey, had once made his own weight in pennies by singing at a harvest festival, but all was stolen, with his coat and hat.

Speaking of money, the ship's supply was dwindling. I made tea of yarrow and then of mint, which I had carried out with us in tins from Fairport. That was refreshing, but our coffee was brackish water on dregs that had been twenty times boiled. Freddie would often joke that my cat would make good eating. Her name had been Fleabag, but it changed to Cutlet. She was answering to it too.

Andrew was suggesting a bolder change. This was that we lay off our men, cut our crew to a skeleton and, with jacks more common than flies on the water-front, crew up again

when we were ready. Father ranted that the crew had signed up for a round trip and he wouldn't leave them, like dogs, to scavenge on the Levee, for there was no dog like an old dog. Andrew was brave enough to reason with him. He was the only one who could.

“Isn't it impressive, Uncle, how many ships are bound for Liverpool? One in three ships, I believe. Any sea-dog who's done the route stands every chance of being taken on. He'd be home before us, if you ask me. Fair enough, you didn't. But I have to say too, now that I'm saying anything, that keeping them on afloat on this brackish puddle will eat their hope and their standards as sailors and as men.”

Father huff-puffed and blew out his cheeks. Then he unlocked the strong-box in his sea chest. He told me to count all the Union cents and Louisiana centimes into piles which made up dollars. That task took me all morning, not because there were many of those coins but because there weren't. Those few were hard to spot amongst so many other old coppers. Then he asked me to give up Aunt Grace's jet earrings and the black bombazine ball-gown and its cage. He told me that, with so many dances for the Mardi Gras, a European cut of jib for a silly piece of vanity would draw good trade. I didn't mind. The gown was small without stays and the cage, going out of style for Liverpool's ladies, would have only wedged me in a companionway. It was another excuse to go to town, as I thought. However, when I found no duck-down to wrap the earrings, Father snatched them into his waistcoat pocket and went without me. I expect he thought he could drive a harder bargain if there was no connection between me, a sorry figure of a woman, and the marvels that he had to sell.

He did drive a hard bargain, raising enough from my unused raiment to pay off the crew. He shook their hands and clapped their shoulders and presented, as if they were knighthoods, the glowing references I had written out. He informed them about all the Liverpool-bound vessels and said that they could spend out in one wild night and snatch a berth on the first ship sailing.

We weighed anchor and steered closer to the bank. A mile or so downstream, amongst the roots and moss and rats' nests, we met ground firm enough to hold our gangplank. In tip-top spirits at hearing the rumble of the city and sniffing the drift of gumbo, the sailors hiked to town with their sea-bags and rolls of bedding. Their hike saved Freddie's and Chips' arm muscles. They were the only two left to us to row back.

I felt my eyes wet up as our ship creaked with emptiness. I confess that I was envious that I must come and go and stay as Father ordered, whereas Andrew could run around with him all over town. Perhaps Chips was envious too although, at his age, he should have been beyond caring about society. By my count, he was seventy two, with a dried pea of a face,

between gold-rimmed spectacles and an old-fashioned pigtail hanging down from a bald patch. Despite his tight muscles, from swinging a lifetime's blocks and planks, he was safe enough with women to nanny me. That morning, when we'd put out the gangplank, he'd found a joist on it that was rotting and he mooched off to saw and hammer it in his coffin of a workshop. That workshop was six feet square and lined with sawdust. After the strong sun outside, with only a candle end to see by, the light must have been like midnight. And that was all I saw of him until midnight. Meanwhile, Freddie, quieter than I'd ever heard him, painted the jib. As the minutes crawled into lonely hours, I was too miserable to clean but I did my best to study. No time is lost on education and what I learned then about the rocks off Ireland's west coast stood me in good stead.

Four days later, Andrew mustered Mung, Spider and Cornish for the home run. Those sailors, four nights away had been four nights drunk. Anyone might have made that out from the roll of their bloodshot eyes. Alongside them shambled a rabble that made the noise of twelve when they were but six. All of them were greenhorns or rather, since they were yet to spend a minute on the water, landlubbers. None of those landlubbers were dressed for the weather we would encounter. To be cold is hard to imagine in the warm, but each was keener than the next to serve before our mast which, by way of interview, they were asked to climb. Three turned legless on the instant, blaming a surfeit of banana punch at the wedding they had come from. Those three slunk away. One of the remaining three was Griffin, a squat, sallow cove with such a narrow face that I was amazed that his features fitted it. His nose, particularly, looked all the larger. Another was called Phillips, which shortened to Lips, not because he spoke but because he hardly said a word, although his mouth hung continually open as though he was about to say something. It was the third greenhorn, Adonis, who spoke on his behalf and Lips only had to nod. Adonis said they were brothers and they might have been. Adonis was a little younger, I suspect. They were both slender, round-shouldered, yellowish specimens, somewhere between twenty and thirty years of age, with fluffy, ginger beards that needed an even clip. No one balked at the colour of those beards.

As for the wedding, that turned out to Vilquist's wedding. Father's eyebrows flew into his hair when he heard that but all the sailors swore that the wedding was real as their noses. Someone reported that Vilquist had sworn that he would only go to sea over his wife's dead body.

"Bodes ill," Cornish said, of course.

“It was his wife who said that,” Mung said. “All it bodes is that will be easier to scrape off barnacles than part them. She’s a healthy piece of Eve’s flesh, no less pretty for being miniature, and she looks to hold out another sixty years.”

Father only frowned and begged any man to explain to him why, in the devil’s name, it was that even the best fellows would heed no warning about wives when there were so many warnings put out without needing to enquire for them. No one did explain in words but Spider patted his truss and looked knowing. Father gave him a friendly cuff.

I was surprised at such a sudden union. Later, Andrew told me that fast marriages are common amongst sailors. His best example was from Alexandria, where Father had engaged with some other business. That business had trailed on. So, Andrew and their bosun had hired a guide with camels and ridden those camels out into the desert. After ten rolling miles of nothing between date palms, a veiled beauty had welcomed them to a tent and served them mint tea and washed their dusty feet, like Mary Magdalene. The bosun, clever enough to catch what he wanted to know in Arabic, had been too daft to keep his head over two licorice, come-hither eyes in a steady waft of sandalwood and frankincense. He had bought the camel that he had ridden, without bargaining, and he had given it to the woman’s family. So there he was married to her, and refusing to return to the ship. And since a man must make his own mind up and the bosun’s certainty was admirable, Andrew had ridden back with only the guide, to face my father’s wrath and amazement. Andrew confessed that he often wondered about that bosun. He wondered if he still had joy of that wife, in a place that was the opposite of the ocean but for its bigness, or if he had yelled at her once too often over breakfast and been murdered by her brothers, or torn to pieces by the tribe.

As for Vilquist, whatever he had sworn to his wife or she had sworn to him, he did come back at the last knockings. And I learned that he’d seen the girl whom he was to marry on the very first day that we’d put in, while Father and I were arguing at the Custom House. Neither he nor Freddie, according to Freddie, had left the jolly boat and swanked about in the French Quarter. They hadn’t needed to shift a foot or crook a finger.

“Moths never flew to flames faster, Miss Bessie. Two little flash-packets swung over to us with news of a comfortable apartment and a feast of quails, accompanied by trumpets, where they needed handsome men to take them. But didn’t we have our orders not to set foot on land? And didn’t we keep those orders? Yes, we did! So the plump, black one lighting on me flitted off. But the other, copper-coloured, was content to sit above us on the Levee steps. Drawn by strings to Vilquist, she made him love her. Not because of her ankles! They were

like sticks which might as likely go for the rest of her, but her hair is like black molasses and her eyes are green and shiny as china saucers.”

I felt a little sorry for Freddie. It was clear that he'd carried a torch for Vilquist's wife and he would never have stood any chance. Not that I would have known the woman from his description, but I realized that I had also met her, although in grimmer circumstances.

It had been a sticky, sweaty day, about a week after our dreadful visit to the Custom House. Sun had seared my eyes as I'd bargained hard for a sack of cabbages from a fellow with a cart and then made Freddie my beast of burden. Vilquist was helping him stow the sack, trying to find its balance alongside me in the jolly boat. We had just got it right and were ready to cast off, when we'd heard a blood-chilling scream from a sandy forecourt. Beasts were tethered there. A pony was rearing and I'd supposed that some cowardly tyrant was whipping it. Then I'd made out the real trouble. A slab of a man was thumping a mess of torn calico and tearing hair. He'd pinned the girl against a hitching post, his hams of hands round her throat as she'd flailed at him. A crowd had watched but no one had stepped up for her. They might have thought she was a pickpocket, but the policemen, who'd ambled over when all was done, had found the rascal's purse in his inside pocket.

Anyway, Vilquist had sprinted down the steps. Surprise being his advantage, he'd dragged the fellow backwards, tripped him onto his knees and gave him several punches in the face. I'd been afraid that the crowd would set on the stranger for drubbing a local but they'd stood on to watch him, anchored. Nor could I have pulled my eyes away. Out of that lumpy tapestry smock and those tired wool breeches, patched inside and out, a veritable Viking had broken free. There'd been murmurs of admiration, followed by a ringing cheer from one and all as his opponent bit the dust. Some boys had rushed up and kicked the loser and two clucking women had tiptoed to the pile of rags and bloodied flesh at the foot of the hitching post. Yet it was Vilquist who'd done the most again. The girl's head was sagging crooked as if her neck were broken. It makes my stomach spin to remember. He'd drawn her into a sit, taken her head in his hands and set it straight between her shoulders, so we could all see the lump on her hairline and her swelling eye sockets filling up with blood.

“Keep breathing, my Bird,” he'd said, as if a person's lungs could choose.

I believe that Vilquist, left to his own ways, might have mended her just as well as he'd mended Mung's nose. It was I who'd insisted that we put her in at the Marine Hospital. I should have kept my peace, for who should we meet, walking the dark, stuffy corridor, with stains all over his apron and smelling of carbolic, but old bad penny Doctor Canning. The truth is that he was not so bad on that occasion. He'd laid the girl on a cool marble table,

cleaned her bruises and patched her head up gratis, sounding her wits by asking a few silly questions. And speaking of silly questions, I'd asked him how his private practice was growing. His grin was more of a sneer. Then he'd cleared his oily throat and said it was early to be sure but business was slow. Folk were poorer than they pretended and other folk who had made money, including some who'd made a pile of money, were as mean as rich folk anywhere. He had kept Lent easily. Might he suppose that we had kept Lent just as easily, since we were still beached?

No wonder that when our cotton was loading and I was running around filling and wiping lanterns, he'd hailed us from the wharf. He had found the queen of succulent tobaccos and that would shore up anyone's fortune. Would we be so kind as to carry a pouch of it, as a sample, to a British dealer for a whole quarter of the profit?

Father had snatched the chance without any bargaining; tobacco will always find a market and that tobacco was the best. It was easy on the throat and nostrils with a sweet, moist smell absorbed from its heady flowers. Then Doctor Canning had admitted that, while all our fortunes lay in waiting, he needed employment, plain English food and a bed. The Watchorns had sailed on, so he offered us his skill as surgeon and his bantam's weight on the ropes. I am sure that I had looked peeved at that, because Andrew had asked me what in heaven's name was wrong.

"Nothing to do with heaven," I'd answered grumpily. He'd excused himself as if I had corrected him for blaspheming. I couldn't find the words to tell him the real matter but pretended that I was oppressed by doing everything double-fast since the good news of our load had come upon us so suddenly. And Andrew had asked no more questions; he'd only remarked that a statute in New Orleans withheld all news until it was good news - another way in which the city was like nowhere else.

Anyway, on ship's work, the doctor turned out useful as a weevil, always asking what must be done and standing in the worst place to ask. I have never ever seen such dreadful granny knots as his. But, whatever I might have said, Father had been glad to take him. There was so little time to crew up carefully, when the wind was good and would carry us faster than twice as many men. The sooner we left the sooner we'd run ahead of Spring gales in the Atlantic. That was why, instead of three watches of six men, we gambled on two watches of six, which might be considered seven, counting me and a cheeky little Lascar lad, called Tanyel. He had come along behind Vilquist and climbed the mast like a flag run up. In short, after a month, three days before the Mardi Gras, on the twenty-fourth of March, 1870, we left New Orleans undermanned.

Chapter 3**Under Sail**

Off we went down the lazy loops of river, criss-crossed by paddle steamers and tugs. We rounded swamps, flyblown mud banks, quicksand and clouds of mosquitoes that hid the sun and could eat up a body faster than sharks. Some eight miles out of the city's haze we passed Ship Island. A few years before, it had been a rebel prison turned starvation ground. When we sailed by, it was a proper cemetery, with vaults like cottages. "Lest corpses be washed out when the river floods," said our pilot.

Father was never fond of pilots. He reckoned that Mississippi pilot to be the worst of a sorry bunch, spinning out the hours he should be paid for by meandering. Yet to keep a ship upright, there is no choice but to meander on that flattened snake of a river. Besides, it gave us leisure to watch the ibis, roosting and fishing. It was only, as you might imagine, Cornish who saw a horror.

"Look out!" he cried. I looked where he was pointing. I saw nothing, but I wish I had seen what sounded marvellous as well as dreadful. I wasn't the only one who missed it.

Freddie ran to the rail.

"Where is it, Cornish?"

"There!"

Freddie looked confused, and so did Andrew when he came and stood beside us.

"There they are, the pair of them!" Cornish went on, crossing himself. "I knew we'd never get away without them."

"Get away without who?" Andrew asked as Freddie caught my eye and rolled both of his. Cornish, making the sign of the cross with one hand and fumbling at his amulets with the other, had given us the gist of his panic. Still, truth to tell, I had the goose-bumps.

"Two pillars made of water spouting!" Cornish could hardly whisper.

"There's nothing there!" Andrew patted Cornish's head. "We had better get your brains tested!"

Cornish all but hit Andrew's hand away from him then, as Andrew grabbed him by the scruff, he turned humble but no less desperate. "There is, sir! Pillars. At least there was."

"You had better get a hold of yourself, Cornish!"

No-one likes to be hit at but this was uncommonly short-tempered from Andrew. I sniggered. I expect I was nervous, but I spotted the funny side of holding Cornish and telling him to hold himself. Andrew must have seen the funny side too. He laughed and released him and tousled the poor fool's hair.

Then the pilot called out, "If it's pillars, it ain't nothing. Nothing that's real any ways!" And he told us what Cornish, with his lust for ghost stories, must have heard when he was half-seas-over, about two pillars of water which sometimes sprung from the river. A hundred years ago or more, a captain's sick wife and daughter had both been thrown overboard before dying, in case they brought bad luck to anyone else. Pillars were what they became. Of course, the captain of that ship ran mad.

Our own captain ran angry when he heard that story. We couldn't hide it from him, not with Cornish trembling and sweating. As long as it didn't interfere with business, Father would humour superstition. But he took this so-called sighting and its story as a sideways swipe at his judgement for bringing me aboard, and he offered to unload Cornish where he might wade onto the riverbank. Cornish would have been as good as wrecked there and he must have been frightened into sense.

As the water spread wider and the sunset glowed like garnets and amber, the Levee descended into banks which fronted broad, flat fields of yellow flowers. The only matters of importance were to spot bald eagles. Andrew sketched a veritable aviary of them.

That night I fell asleep to the sailors' shanties and rounds, sung along to the beat of drums and the breathy whistles and jangling rattles from whatever could make an instrument. Vilquist and the lad were dancing. I'd caught a glimpse of them, laughing as they swooped and spun around each other as if they'd learned it from the birds. I'd asked Andrew to walk me out to the forecastle so that we could watch more closely and swell the audience. Andrew had always said that the bigger and keener the audience, the greater the inspiration to performance. However, that night Andrew had begged a headache, on account of standing in the sun to hear music on his last day ashore. I said that pain was always the price of pleasure and the grin that he gave me was already strained.

Woken half way through first watch, at the Gulf of Mexico, with rolling swell of currents fighting to lead us and the loud heaving-to of sails, I went on deck to greet the ocean and say goodbye to the last lights of land. It was a long goodbye. Those lights shone all along the sock of Florida and all its ragged inlets and keys. Then the dawn broke, spreading a furnace of sunrise that swallowed all trace of candles, lamps and flares. Behind us, it was tidy hamlets and whitewashed churches. Ahead, it was sapphire sky and waltzing waves. Yet Father chewed his lip and kept his eyeglass trained on any ship coming up behind us, and even on the little fishing smacks at anchor because the Caribbean Islands lay South East.

"Islands jostling with freebooters with cutlasses between their teeth," Andrew had warned me. He had been joking but Father wasn't.

“The natives there who ain’t pirates are very often wreckers. They have it from their fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers, all veritable Belials, who kept common harems aboard the ships they stole. They’d take their pleasure on shore too, females willing or not, so it runs through the mothers’ milk as well. I don’t forget those viragos with faces like chickens. Woman gone to evil is wickeder than a man. If any ship comes up on us, skull flagged or not, down you go below and hide in the hold and keep a knife up your sleeve, until I give the all clear.”

I didn’t think the hold much of a hiding place, because I knew he had in mind those female pirates, Mary Read and Anne Bonny, who had shared Calico Jack as a consort and trumped him in cruelty. Read, or perhaps her good friend Anne Bonny, had discharged a brace of stolen pistols into a hold packed with King’s Officers and killed every last man. Father would remind Andrew of that and of how that blood-letting had been the officers’ punishment for hiding in the hold like snivelling girls. It was proof, if proof were needed, that a man should stand and fight to his last.

Bonny and Read had been dead for generations, but not because of hanging, and Father begrudged them that. When talk of pirates came up, always because he raised it, he would curse them. Then he would curse Rachel Wall, who had feigned distress in a storm-racked ship, and was hanged the year that the King of France was guillotined. It was as if he believed that a pirate, who cut her rescuers’ throats, and old French Royalty were related.

“What if I hide in the lifeboat under the tarpaulin?” I asked Father. “I’ll be lonely in the hold and have no idea when to come out again if things go badly. In the lifeboat I may keep half an eye on the battle and row away or dive overboard.”

Father chuckled. “You have a prize imagination!”

I might have said the same to him, but I wanted more than praise for my imagination. Instead I confessed that, when I was six and he had been at sea and Mother was lying low with a headache, I had fallen into a horse-pond. Up to my eyes in four feet of water, I’d have been hardly heavier than a lily leaf, and I had kicked and splashed to the edge where Andrew was wading in to hook me out. Proud that I had saved myself, I was proud too that after I had learned swimming and, on hot days in the summer, Andrew and I had swum out almost to the end of the groyne here. I left out that piece of derring-do in case it plunged Andrew into trouble for luring me so long ago, when I’m sure that I’d lured him. But I had no need to add it either because, for the first time ever, I noticed a flicker in Father’s eye of something like admiration for me, which was a change of wind. Those first days at sea he’d wanted me and mine invisible. If I’d laid my darning where he’d put his pipe, oh dear! But I had learned to

do what crews call Peggy's work – sweeping, then scrubbing collars, mending shirts and socks, patching sails with a palm guard, making great stitches and seams and clumsy patches on both sides of the canvas and thickening our heavy weather sails with oakum. In time, I moved on to splicing old lines, which takes worse toll on the fingers but was no harder than Mother's hairdos. My mends held as tight as any that the sailors made, but Father would never notice. I wasn't taught to brag, but I should have taught myself bragging too because, until that bright Florida wind licked our faces, I'd been ballast in the wrong place, blocking everybody's path.

It all came from being miserably queasy the first day I set sail. Instead of plucking and roasting the throttled hen on the scullery table, I'd slunk to my cot, without a word to anyone. I could do no other with my stomach fizzing round and round. Lying in the pitch darkness, I'd gripped my cot as it slid up then tumbled down what felt like mountains. I was envying my Mother's peace in her coffin, albeit with earthworms in her hair, when Father had stomped in and ordered me to eat a biscuit.

“What kills anyone is starving. I'm starving without my dinner that I've detailed you to cook! Do you dare flout my orders? Shift your stumps you good-for-nothing!”

The term he used was worse than good for nothing – not that I knew it before then or was in the mood to care. I'd tried my best to stir but my head had weighed like iron. When he saw me flop, he turned kinder. He put the biscuit to my lips and coaxed me to gnaw and swallow. That was his form of gentleness. Perhaps he felt sorry for swearing at me. And as I had gnawed and swallowed that biscuit, he'd said, “There now, even seasoned mariners may spew like dogs in worse seas!”

When I had repeated this to Andrew to find out if worse seas existed, Andrew had assured me that our Old Man had been talking about himself, covering his shame that watching others bring up breakfast could still turn over his own guts. Anyway, by then I'd learned to fix on what was stable and jump to orders. Not that Father stopped moaning at what I did alone or forgot to do, for example, not keeping my pocket watch wound or what was the use of me having it? How would I measure our speed and distance with it stopped? What if one of our ship's chronometers stopped too? They were all fair questions but they were always asked angrily.

Yet, that day off Florida, longitude west eighty, latitude north twenty-five, we'd never got along so well. Father said that he'd set a weapon in the lifeboat ready for me and I promised I would hide, along with our many valuables, and clout any pirate with a belaying pin. He chortled and guffawed, which made me bold enough to remark that I didn't believe

that Bonny and Read had been with child until the sentence to be hanged was upon them, which was probably their ruse to escape hanging. Indeed, although Mary Read had died of fever, Anne Bonny had escaped. I added that it stood to reason that if there'd been babies from them, born alive, it would have been in England. At this, he called me a pert little know-all and sent me below to polish our brass fittings properly at the sink.

Chapter 4

The Miasma

Our food and spices were fresh and I was more practiced in the galley, taking pleasure in my duty of cooking and paying more attention on its presentation, chopping the meat and vegetables fine. Father would eat what he liked and throw what he didn't to the pigs, without thanks or comment, but cooking for Andrew was a pleasure. As well as being a trencherman, he loved variety. Nevertheless, at supper that evening, he was struggling with his gingered duck and making heavy weather of his fried, turmeric potatoes. He knew the value of water and the danger of going on ration. Yet he was pouring all but a quart of the priceless stuff down his throat. When I'd pointed that out, along with criticizing the rude style of his drinking, he'd said that he was sorry, but his mouth tasted like guano.

“Smells like guano too,” Father answered.

I'm afraid that piece of worse rudeness was true. I'd thought that smell came from the back of Andrew's mouth and I'd laid out toothpicks by our forks, in case, for once, they would be used. What was also true was that Father blamed Andrew for his laying off so many of our sailors and failing to bring all of them back. If I'm honest, which I like to be, they'd had a fight about it in the bayou.

It had been so late as to be early and I'd heard them rowing back from town, singing about a little brown jug which they loved, and laughing about tipping over amongst the alligators and biting them back. As they came up the ladder, their mood must have changed – no doubt at remembering how deeply we were trapped. The pair of them had stamped around, whispering for the most part, but I could hear everything. Andrew was saying that four seamen could manage the work that must be done and, were he our captain, he'd pay off all the men except for Chips and Freddie. All the other men were aching for a female and that ache might turn a man uppity any day. That was an unnecessary risk to run, what with the Levee heaving with seasoned fellows scratching for work, which would make it as easy as

eating pie to crew up again as soon as we were in funds. I've told you how my father took advice.

"You'll not be any sort of captain ever, Nephew! Not if you fear a little bit of uppity. Yours, by the way, is the only uppity which I can see, which is due to all the drink you've taken! The drink I've taken will speak louder. What's more, it will make more sense!"

There'd been a thick silence. Then Father went on, loudly, saying that if Andrew had such splendid ideas he might have had his own commissions if he'd had the spirit and inherited *The Fairport Grace*. *The Fairport Grace* had been my father's previous ship, a clumpy brig of a thousand tons, perfect for ferrying pig iron, as she did. She wasn't fit to be inherited and, with the drink in him, Andrew said so.

"You yourself, Sir, called her splinter-wood! And I did agree that was accurate but now I must beg to differ with you, Uncle, because certain errors have been made!"

There'd come the thud of a chair turned over, followed by the softer thud of what might have been a body falling or punched. I'd jumped out of my cot and dashed along the companionway, pulling on my dressing gown and hitting my elbows on the walls. I'd arrived in time to see Father heaving Andrew off the boards and Andrew dragging Father back to the boards, while their legs were kicking and Chips was darting about their heads, as if to find an angle to divide them. Standing at the door, I screamed and they'd all started and stared at me. Then the hatch over us had opened and Freddie had dropped through, clutching a piece of dowling and gaping at the tumble of his superiors and me in my mildewed nightgown.

Andrew had picked himself up and held out a hand to Father, who'd pretended not to see it and had stood up on his own, lying that my screaming was only due to a leggy spider on my pillow. As for him and his nephew, he'd lied that they had tripped over on a ripple after a surfeit of land and if a man couldn't enjoy a bit of horseplay with his favourite relation then the world was a sorry place. Andrew had said that he would go to my quarters to see the spider walk the plank. That was done, or acted done, and Freddie had gone back to his hammock. Then I'd got out the fried fish I had saved for them. Andrew and Father had scoffed so fast as to hardly taste it and slept, heads down upon the table.

In the morning, green about the gills, Father had put his hand out and asked Andrew to put his flipper in it. They'd shaken hands, washed and brushed up gentlemanly. Then Father had done exactly as Andrew had suggested, kept Chips and Freddie and cut loose the rest. I think he had longed to do it all the time.

Now, a week after that argument, they were sitting at the table where they'd slept and Andrew was looking ready to sleep again. He was rubbing his eyes and Doctor Canning was

telling him not to, advising him that the whites of them were already bloodshot and that he'd probably broken a blood vessel on a bit of Southern grit. All at once, with no "Excuse me", he leaned forward and pulled up Andrew's eyelid and ordered him to look up, down, right and left. There was no dirt in evidence. The only foreign body he could guess at was one of the filthy Southern diseases, yellow fever or malaria. He asked Andrew if a mosquito had bitten him.

Didn't a mosquito bite everyone? We had swiped and slapped hundreds and tried to choke the rest by smoking tobacco, but the thousands that had escaped had stung us all. Then I noticed one of Andrew's shirt cuffs undone with its silver link dangling down because his wrist was turning into a livid swelling. Doctor Canning spotted scratches on the swelling and said that, although a man might consider his hands well scrubbed, there was always invisible muck in the lines and crevices and Andrew had scratched and poisoned his own blood with his own dirty nails. However, since his frame was so titanic and his corneas were red, instead of yellow, even the Saint Louis fever, which was caught from kissing vaults in the Saint Louis graveyard, would be less than a bad cold. And should there be a call for mercury, his doctor's bag was full of it. He added a coarse remark about the exercise of hard breathing over women who had lain under other customers from every corner of the globe. Father replied that such an exercise as that should fit up any red-blooded fellow against most ills.

Andrew wasn't the sort of man to need mercury. Mercury was, and may be still, a cure for unwashed wedding tackle. I'm sure that he felt insulted. Added to which, he was particular about his nails and kept them sand-papered as well as clipped, but he answered not one word. I believed that he was keeping his dignity. I realise now that he was already beyond conversation. He was still rubbing his eyes so Father sent him off to quarters to sleep before his watch. He abandoned his meal and reeled off as if he had drunk as much wine as he had drunk water.

He fell into his cot without taking off a stitch of clothing. I know that because I went to him to take him more water, a pint jug full to the brim, and seasoned with a nip of rum. He guzzled all of it and asked for more. I brought more too. Also, I made him promise to eat his duck before his watch began at midnight, when he broke that promise and threw his serving to our two sows. We no longer had to swell out the scraps so I didn't chide him. I thought no more of it and went to sleep.

Our second watch began at four in the morning, and I went to replace him by the binnacle. The fresh night air and the starlight seemed to have done him good, but he said he would be glad to go to bed. He was handing over directions to me when a splutter racked

him. I hit his back to stop him choking but he signalled me to stop, wheezing that his throat was burning up. So was his face by the look of its sweat. I told him to go to his quarters and he turned from me. Then he reeled and crashed backwards, almost braining himself on the binnacle. I tried to heave him to his feet, but he muttered that he would lie there to catch his breath. I knelt down by him and sent Freddie away to fetch Father.

While I was sitting, with less than half an eye to our direction, Andrew's eyes fluttered open and he asked for Sarah to sit down with him. I shivered and glanced behind me where his eyes were fixing. Of course, there was no Sarah. Nor did I know who Sarah might be, but I was afraid of ghosts in those days, and had been since I'd been small.

Fairport had been full of ghosts because so many of my mother's acquaintance had caught diphtheria from dancing and chills from late night strolls, not to mention that miserable white plague that was to take her off. Meanwhile, reported in the newspaper, as well as in the queue at the butcher's shop, were accidents from newfangled machinery and falls from horses or carts and stories, and, to the town's shame, the deaths of widows and children from plain hunger. In the case of some children, Mother informed me, this might have been their own fault for letting wholesome food go cold and wasted. However, we both knew that more often it was the fault of their fathers who had run away or sunk, like Andrew's father had sunk, which was why my mother had brought Andrew and Aunt Grace to live with us. So I'd reasoned that the queue at Heaven's gates would be long and that the ghost in our attic was probably Andrew's father, Uncle John.

I never saw the ghost of Uncle John. Like other spectres, it was transparent. Still, I'd felt it lurk in the low corners where the roof met the floorboards. I had heard it make those floorboards creak on the nights when Andrew was away sailing. I'd hated him going and had pestered to go with him but everyone said that working beside my father would make a man of him just as caring for my mother and our fine Nelson porcelain would make woman of me. As if we would not grow into man and woman without! Anyway, those nights of being alone, I would gabble my prayers to jump sooner into bed, away from the ghostly eyes piercing my back. I didn't blow my candle out either, which was a waste of wax and wick. Of course, the candle burned out, and the ghost would creep to my narrow bed, ready to jump in and wrap its freezing length around me as soon as I fell asleep. It never glanced at Andrew's bed, except to check that he wasn't there.

“If you don’t believe in it, it will vanish,” was Andrew’s advice. I’d never seen how that could make sense, as if all that ties a thing to existence the fact of another creature’s belief, although these days I might agree that that’s right.

“Whose ghost?” Aunt Grace had asked me, when Andrew had let it be known that I was a scaredy-cat.

“Someone dead,” I’d muttered. I was ashamed of being frightened and wanted the ghost forgotten.

Aunt Grace had giggled and tugged one of my plaits. I’d done my best to grin back but the corners of my mouth just wouldn’t rise because she looked worried. She’d kept her grin but her eyes had stopped dancing. And well they might; the bans for her wedding to her clipper captain had been read and, even after ten years, that betrayal stood every chance of raising the spectre of her first marriage. So I’d whimpered and began to cry and she had pulled me gently onto her lap and asked me what a ghost would have against me. Using my teeth instead of scissors? Not folding up my clothes? She was making light of what had usually caused argument. I’d kept quiet and looked at my boots.

“Nothing, Bessie. Nothing at all! It’s only an angel keeping watch. Or do you believe it’s your Uncle John?”

That had been a nail hit squarely on the head, at which Aunt Grace promised that Uncle John’s spirit would never harm me. Alive, he had been kind and jolly and as a spirit he could do nothing to change that; spirits have no power unless we help them to it. Then she’d asked if I thought that a proper ghost would be walking in the broad daylight, and I’d asked her if she would look in the attic.

She’d marched to the coat stand and pulled from beneath it a black leather bag, scuffed but sturdy, with a loud snap of a fastener. She’d snapped it open, tipped out a flurry of onion skins, snapped it shut and told me to wait. Then she’d marched upstairs. I remember being so anxious that she might never come down again because the ghost of Uncle John would kidnap her and take her to his cave under the sea. I’d worried that he would find me, even low in the house on the bottom-stair where I was sitting. All things considered, I figured that it would be better to be brave and help her.

The attic door had been shut, but through the keyhole I could see Aunt Grace, just sitting, on my bed, not the truckle bed, which was hers. The bag was on her lap and she was leaning over it, as if she were listening to the ghost have its say, just as, without other grown-ups by, she would let me and Andrew have ours. I believe now that she was crying. She’d straightened, stood and walked out of sight, leaving the bag shut on the bed. I’d heard a

drawer open, seen the bag move and fled back to the bottom stair. Soon Aunt Grace had followed, carrying the bag as if it weighed heavy. Uncle John had been strapping when he was alive, just as Andrew was strapping and, as she had guessed, the spirit had lost the way to Fiddler's Green, which is the other name for Sailors' Heaven, with all the amenities which seafarers enjoy. So, she was dropping him in at the churchyard where he'd tag along with the other souls flying to the pearly gates and St Peter would see them to their proper stations. If I wished to help him and her I could open the back door then the back gate before the sunlight burned him.

When Andrew had heard about all this he had sniggered and told me I was a proper goose. Yet, aboard our *Rothsay*, twelve years on, he was seeing something like a ghost. "Sarah, is that you?" he was repeating to me.

"No," I said, foolishly. A shudder scuttled through my shoulders. He went on calling me Sarah, muttering that he'd caught nothing worse than a sweaty cold from going about where folk used no handkerchiefs to catch their sneezes.

Freddie and Vilquist strapped him to a board and up-ended him down the ladder to the quarters that he shared with Father. Before the doctor boarded, they'd had separate staterooms. The captain's stateroom had a single cot, a table and a couch which might all be joined together as a marriage bed, and they were joined so in the bayou. Since Andrew had given up his quarters, with its quaint little fireplace, to Doctor Canning, the marriage bed had become two single cots – one for Andrew and one for Father.

Andrew was tipped from the board into his cot. I brought a light and more water and raised his head, which weighed like a cannon ball, to meet his lips to the cup. He had a devil of a time swallowing and sprayed that good water out. He coughed and spluttered and I heaved him up and hit his back between the shoulder blades, at which he praised me for smelling of jasmine and asked who had bought me an ostrich feather trim? I glanced around to see if the ghost-woman stood behind me. There was only the dresser with Andrew's sketchbook sliding slowly across it with the roll of the ship, but I half expected the pages to turn over.

"You gave it me," I said, pretending to be Sarah. I thought to humour him until he became sensible again, but my lie came out as a question and that full-grown man, with muscles as tight as a miser's fists, began to weep all over my bony breast. Supposing his sweetheart to be more fully endowed, I was sure that he would feel the difference but he sobbed out that as soon as he had his wages there was nothing that he wouldn't give me and everything he'd give the son we'd have. This was the first I had heard of any child on its way

and, although it was hardly the moment to be annoyed, I felt annoyed that he hadn't told me. Truth to tell, I was enraged that Andrew had made a baby.

I had always thought that I would marry Andrew. Our history and long affection would have been firm foundation for a calm and pleasant life. On the basis of our night-time strolls around the deck, spotting and naming stars all the way out to Sirius, I had rather taken it for granted. My cousin wasn't the type to get down on one knee. But I must say that in telling me those travellers' tales of what he'd done and where he'd been without me in Alexandria, Lisbon, Providence and Halifax in Nova Scotia, he'd always added that he wished I'd seen what he had. That is tantamount to telling me that he'd missed me. What was more, he'd let me understand that, while he was loyal to my father, he was growing too long in the tooth to serve under him or any skipper. He had his eyes skinned for his own command and, as soon as he could get one, there'd be room on his ship for me.

As children we had always said that we'd sail the ocean together and, before his honest berth on my father's Fairport Grace, we'd even run away to do it. Supposing that a short morning's sail would take us to see whales, albatross and even cannibals as common as we'd seen dogs, we'd set off over the hills behind the house here. Striking out to sail from the next port, where no one would have been looking out for us, we'd planned to sell my plaits that Andrew had cut off. I'd disguised myself with his old clothes. Under the bread and cheese, which we'd stolen from the larder, lay *The Voyager's Compendium*, my favourite bed-time reading. I knew it better than *The Holy Bible* and I should have remembered that, although it weighed as much, it offered no local charts or landmarks. So, we'd lost ourselves in the swirl of hills, ate our provisions sitting on a stile and walked in a circle back to Fairport.

And here we were lost again in our *Rothsary's* tiny stateroom. Andrew was talking in circle after circle and I was doing my best to follow yet lead him somewhere useful. I reminded him that I was his cousin, Bessie Hall, that we were both grown up and, at last, at sea together and that I should do the talking. He had to save his voice for his recitation next Christmas when, like every year, with his best foot forward and chest out, wearing different hats, and to joyous applause from the motley assembly in the parlour, he must perform his medley of characters. This must include Shylock the Venetian Jew, the Scottish King and Romeo. I reminded him of our trip to a real theatre in Liverpool, and how some scenery came down aslant, all for want of a decent weight knot on the fly-rope. I asked him to recall how we'd clapped and hooted for all that; the stage had been set up as a tavern, and the

crooked scenery helped with the actors pretending to be drunk and rolling their heads more whenever they looked behind them.

Andrew seemed to remember that. His mouth and eyes stretched into a dreadful leer and he made a sign for water, which I gave him, and he thanked me with my own name. I hoped that was the end of the fever's delusion and, careful not to sound bitter, suggested that he ought to take Sarah to that very theatre in Liverpool; did she live close to it? He became excited and grabbed my wrist, clamping so hard that he cut the blood to my hand. It turned purple, and the next day it was bruised. Nevertheless, I made out that Sarah lived in Paradise Street and I was to take her Andrew's wages.

I said that if he meant Paradise Street in Liverpool he would see his lovely Sarah in hardly three weeks and give her his wages himself. Would his son's name be the same as his name? That was, as I reminded him, Andrew Edward Lambert Mackay. Andrew had been blessed with two Christian names and an extra surname by virtue of Aunt Grace's second marriage. That should have eased any search I might need to make, although Paradise Street in Liverpool was not a smart address. Moreover, there was risk of other Paradise Streets in other ports, even in New Orleans, which I hoped never to see again, not that I'd seen much of it in the first place. Then I calculated that, for all the time we had spent in that bayou, it was too little for a man to make a child and hear of it. That meant that if the child had been born, or was waiting to be born, it would have to be in Liverpool. This reasoning pointed to the unfortunate likelihood that this Sarah must be from the very Paradise Street that I had once been hurried through, with all its vagrant rascals lurking at pocket height. If that was this Sarah's Paradise Street, she would need to have been kept secret, especially from Aunt Grace and anyone Aunt Grace would gossip with, which Andrew would presume to be me.

Andrew asked me to fetch some light. There were already three candles burning. I worried that whatever he was suffering from was blinding him, or if the darkness was his death creeping up. I opened the shutter on the porthole and was relieved; he seemed to notice the glimmer of the dawn and thanked me. Then he screwed up his eyes at the explosion of the sun, a fire that turned his face more scarlet and threw light on every one of its countless spots. He was going on again at Sarah to find him a clean handkerchief to wipe his head, as if that would be adequate, when he was sweating to drench his shirt and trousers. I found him a handkerchief and pulled a nightshirt out of his trunk, planning to use it like a tent and strip and bathe him under it. That would have wetted the nightshirt, so I decided to strip and bathe him without the fuss. We'd known each other twenty years.

Mr Chips brought a fresh pile of towels and a bucket of salt water. "Where does it ache, Mr Mate?" he asked, as if he could sponge the whole matter better. Andrew groaned, which was not his style, and said he was in a furnace.

In came Doctor Canning, acting omnipotent. He perched his black bag on the dressing table and himself on the chest of Andrew's things and asked if the patient had kept drinking, saying that water first boiled, then cooled, would be capital. I let him know that our water was boiled, then cooled, as a matter of our everyday hygiene.

"Capital! Capital!" Doctor Canning helped Andrew to another gulp and was sprayed with blooded spittle. That wasn't capital. Up he sprang, wiping his face with his handkerchief and then splashed himself with the salt water from the bucket. He dowsed his handkerchief in the water then opened Andrew's shirt on a rash of fiery pus-filled boils. His face dropped to his knees, and I took away the mirror and hid it the drawer in case Andrew died at the sight of his own reflection. Doctor Canning begged us to be so good as to withdraw.

"He's no danger to me," said Mr Chips. He pointed between his snowy eyebrows and I took proper notice of a pit of a scar. I had seen it before but always taken it, amongst his wrinkles, for another effect of his age's wear and tear. Now I recognised it as a pockmark, shaped like Ireland.

I was so relieved that I could have cried. I rolled up my sleeve to show him my vaccination scar. You may still see it, here, above my elbow. It's raised and pitted because it's two scars, one over the other. Mother hadn't wanted two marks in different places on me. She chased beauty as fiercely as she did health. For the first vaccination I was small, small enough to have a butter toffee for it. The second scratch was mere precaution, taken when my Mother had recovered from her first consumption. We'd run out of toffees then. With the doctor's bills, we'd run low on everything. However, the vaccination had come gratis; it was not merely our own health at stake but that of the nation. Smallpox has wasted whole villages in these parts and only fools would refuse to take the cowpox, which is its remedy. After all, we pour cow's milk inside us and the pox caught from cows is hardly worse than a cold.

Doctor Canning didn't remember being so generous. When he spoke to us in the companionway, he asked me if I'd been vaccinated according to British law, the British law of 1866, as if I kept in mind, handy as my times-tables, a list of dates with laws to match. I showed him this mark and mentioned that my mother had asked him for every help that would keep us sound. He nodded and looked proud of himself.

There was a clomping of footsteps and Freddie and Father arrived. Doctor Canning and Mr Chips went to meet them. The four men blocked the companionway and took no heed

of me. I thought of slipping back to see Andrew but I wanted to overhear what would be said, which was that Andrew had picked up smallpox and that Doctor Canning was disappointed. He'd supposed that everyone aboard had been vaccinated. He quoted British law again and asked which sailors he might be sure of. He was worried about the foreigners, especially those from America, where there were fewer Public Health Acts and a widespread belief that vaccination was spurious and natural immunity better. According to him, whatever had been written in their medical journals, it was mere connivance to do with expense.

Freddie's face turned as waxen as brown skin could. He said that he was American and not vaccinated. However, he had seen so many die of smallpox that he should have died long ago, if smallpox had been the death marked up for him. He had slept right next to it yet it had never laid its filthy finger on him.

I was searching for comfort in that fateful idea that God appoints our living and our dying, and that He will sometimes spare us if we can't save ourselves, when more comfort was offered. Father spoke up for foreigners and said that Turks and Chinese were the oldest hands at breaking the smallpox. He believed that there was no better treatment for it than the inoculation that those Easterners practised and he had no more fear because he had just remembered that Andrew had been inoculated. In Alexandria, five years back, he had bought, for himself and his nephew, a pin's end of the pus pricked up from some smallpox victim's suppuration. A Turkish apothecary had sold it to him, scratched it into the veins of their wrists, and bound the wounds with bandages.

Doctor Canning knew all about that method. He said it was known as *variolation à la Turca* and delivered in harems by crones who carried the infection in a walnut shell to parties thrown for that event. The practice had been delivered to England by the famous Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, wife of the Ambassador to Constantinople. That lady might have been a beauty, except that, when she was a child, she had lost every one of her eyelashes to uncontrolled smallpox. Endowed by that ordeal with natural immunity, she couldn't put herself up for the treatment but, when her husband's back was turned, she'd seen it done to their only son and heir. That little boy had survived a short fever. So had all the criminals and the foundlings it was tested on in London – all but one foundling, who was, likely, too delicate to start with. Variolation was staunch protection for a body that was strong and would block the entry of full infection. A fever bought is kinder than one caught went the rhyme.

Perhaps Andrew's body was too strong or he was too well-grown for the treatment, because from the look of him, it had not taken. Doctor Canning was wondering aloud if

Andrew had suffered a few days' fever after being variolated, a week or so later. Father shook his head, as if to say no. However, it turned out to mean that he couldn't recall; when Doctor Canning answered his own question by supposing the only one to know that would be Andrew, Father insisted that he should know. Hadn't he said that he'd been with him? They'd had the muck scratched into them together, and taken a fish tattoo apiece as well. A week later they'd have been a-sail in the Mediterranean. If Andrew or he had suffered fever, neither had let on about it and had, likely, put it down to the sticky weather. They'd never made much of being under the weather. A busy man finds no time to be sick.

Doctor Canning shook his head sadly. "I fear, Sir, that you did not purchase smallpox."

"What the devil might it have been then?" Father asked, testily. He wouldn't have liked it suggested that he'd been hoodwinked.

"There's no sensible answer to that, Captain."

Father decided to look at the bright side as whatever quackery it had been hadn't killed him. The doctor replied that such quackery could and did murder, by lying to us that we are safe. It was of utmost importance that all should be made safe immediately. The only way of that, in the absence of any cowpox, was to variolate in the Turkish style properly. The pus of the recent strain of smallpox could be harvested on a clean needle from one of Andrew's boils. We'd not need much. Nor would it hurt the patient. It might even be collected from one of the suppurations, so that the poor fellow's skin would not be more broken. Doctor Canning was ready to do it and everyone aboard would be ready to take the treatment as soon as they had witnessed what was in the cabin.

There was silence. I supposed that Father was thinking, as I was, that the whole idea of variolation à la Turca might be at fault. But when he finally spoke, it was about keeping Andrew under wraps. He said that what was in the cabin must be kept secret because he would not frighten his crew to death.

Chips swallowed hard, as if to gulp down his Adam's apple. "Danger may call out a man's best work, Skipper." It was brave of him to argue and he got away with it. Father only said that he had his crew's best work anyway.

Doctor Canning pursed his lips then said that he doubted that any man could be variolated in his sleep, if that was what the captain had in mind. Father said that he was aware of that. Regretting that he must spell it all out to a clever cove who spoke Latin, he added that his crew would not be variolated, neither sleeping nor waking. The reason for that was that he had so few of them to man the ship, thanks to his unfortunate nephew. He couldn't risk them

all taking ill at the same time; even a single day of fever for one man would shiver the timbers under all of us.

I had a memory of the wreck that we had passed, ropes hanging and broken, and that awful thing, like an empty suit of clothes, slumped over the helm. Doctor Canning looked grave. He replied that since the crew were not to be variolated, the whole suite aft should be sealed off to contain the smallpox vapours, which would travel in sputum, blood and dust. Indeed, in his opinion, the saloon and staterooms and the cabin's galley should be put out of bounds to anyone who must work the ship, with any chinks in mate's door and wainscot blocked so that no vapours could wind out. What was more, we should not inhale air with our mouths open, and exhaling might be just as bad.

"Everyone except me should be keeping their mouths closed anyway," Father said. It wasn't meant to be funny and I didn't dream of laughing. I thought about Lips who never seemed able to bring his jaws together. "In any case, I will move my things to Mr Chips' workshop."

That workshop, six feet square, was stacked with planks and boxes of tools. It was to be our chartroom too, as if any chart could be spread out there. I wondered, in passing, where I was to sleep, but I was low on the roster. It was not the moment to pester anyone with a trifle such as my comfort. And speaking of trifle, we would have to eat somewhere else and cook our food in the sailors' cramped galley, or eat what Freddie cooked for the sailors. I didn't imagine he would tolerate me at their stove and I wouldn't have liked to use it either. Somehow, I'd need to wash and dress in private. Doctor Canning was saying already that as Andrew had breathed on them, we must change our clothes and steep them in salt water or pitch them overboard, if they were still stained. Before anything was moved fore, it must be aired, scrubbed and disinfected with carbolic. That was our only chance if we weren't to be variolated.

Father loved to see things cleaned. He agreed immediately and, as fast, he decided that he would be variolated. He must live at least three weeks to take us into Liverpool. After that the chaps at Quarantine Dock would manage everything.

"What about the fever that might hit you in a week and your eye to the ship?" I piped up. They all turned round and stared at me as if I'd sworn at them.

"I have two eyes," Father answered.

"It may take two weeks," Doctor Canning said, and he repeated the little rhyme about a kinder fever bought than caught. Father figured that in two weeks we might be almost home and Andrew might be better. If not, and if he himself had fallen ill, we would be in

sight of the Mersey catch-pennies, who would help us out. By catch-pennies he meant pilots. Usually he moaned that they swanked about their skill and laid dangers on thick. That was the first time I'd heard him admit that they might be useful.

“Can the pigs catch it?” I asked. “Andrew fed them his dinner.”

Doctor Canning smiled at me as if I were a child or, rather, a silly school girl. “Noli desperandum! Don't despair!” He added that he doubted that my pigs would be vulnerable because all pigs eat filth without becoming ill, and they clean it for us of all but the odd worm. Then he observed that a pig's skin is leather, as serves their purpose on their lower rung of creation. They weren't my pigs, as he presumed, but they enjoyed it when I scratched them. I was fond of them and I thought they had got away with their lives for a little longer.

We had hardly been outside ten minutes but Andrew's face had puffed up to near on twice its former size. The raw flesh bubbled with pustules and he had forgotten where in the world he was. However, soon after he was reminded, he recognised every one of us and asked again for water. Father doubted that the poor fellow would swallow a drop, so I dipped a rag into the jug and wiped his lips, which were cracking and bleeding. His sweat, according to Doctor Canning, was a cold sweat. Sure enough, he started shivering. So Freddie built a fire of anything lying around, remarking, although it was not his place to remark, that there would be less to throw overboard. He shook so much sawdust into the hearth that the coals spat and one jumped out. He was quick off the mark to throw it back, or we'd have had a conflagration into the bargain.

Father was slipping out one of his cuff links and rolling up a sleeve. Doctor Canning snapped open the fastener on his bag and took out two lengths of rope. There was a stain along one as if from childbirth or an amputation. Tying Andrew's limbs he told him, in case he noticed it or cared, that he was securing him to his bunk, which also would help him not to scratch. Then he took out a wrap of needles, each one thick and sharp enough to sew up leather. He burned one black at the sharp end to make it sterile.

“Your arm now, Captain, quickly, if you would.”

It was more or less an order and I was anxious that Father might have balked but, docile as a lamb, he stretched out his arm. Doctor Canning grasped it and scratched the needle across the wrist so that the skin was broken and started bleeding. Father winced but he didn't shout.

“Hold it there!” Doctor Canning was in the swing of ordering. Father obeyed as Doctor Canning leant down to the fire, burned the needle again then leaned over Andrew's

head. The doctor turned the head sideways and pricked up a globe of yellow matter from a pustule behind the ear.

“I haven’t scarred your good looks,” he said, as Andrew’s eyes flittered with something like his usual intelligence and he seemed to pick up wind of what was happening. Then Doctor Canning turned to Father and smeared the pus along the scratch he had made.

“Bandage!” he barked and I wound a strip of rag around the wound.

Father picked up the rag which Andrew had been drinking from and wiped the broken pustule. His own face was puffy and reddening too, from the soreness of the needle or from unshed tears held in the bags of his eyes. He’d always been fond of Andrew, as if he were his son. I believe he was fonder of him than of me. They’d spent so much time together.

“Haven’t we always shared everything?” Father asked him.

I don’t reckon that Andrew heard him. What we all heard was a blood-curdling squeal – the squeal of a pig slaughtered. To throw two fat sows overboard would have made a worse hullabaloo, not only from the drowning creatures. It was wiser to eat them and eat them quickly, in case the doctor knew less than he pretended and the beasts sickened with some strange pig-pox. Their offal was our immediate dinner. The flesh and fat would be stored in boiled brine, which we had in plenty. We all near jumped out of our skin at that squeal, but Andrew went into a fit. It was as if he had heard Beelzebub.

“Hold me, Sarah, Hold me! Hold me! Hold me!” He bit his own tongue, so that more of his blood sprayed us.

I hope that Father stood in for Sarah then. Not bearing it for one more instant, I snatched up the pail of spattered rags and stumbled out. The door swung behind me with a sorry clang. I still hear that clang. It was like his funeral knell.

Chapter 5

Some Necessary Lies

As I flung the filthy pail overboard, a slice of moon was still radiant, even though the sun was rising, shooting up from the horizon, as it will in southern latitudes. Its glow put me in sight of Cornish and Lips. Lips’ mouth hung as wide open as usual. He was swabbing the boards where Andrew had fallen. Cornish, blinking and yawning, was winding up some whipping. He touched his forehead, in a half-mast salute, and wandered towards me. I shifted downwind so that any miasma from the stains upon me would fly away from the silly

man. But he came after me, as if I had him on a string. I trusted, for the sake of containment, that his amulets would work. He remarked how sorry he was to hear that Mr Mate had lost his sailing stomach, which would have gone soft with so many weeks on land, as might happen to a mariner who had swung as regular as a pendulum over the Atlantic. Then he jerked his head at Lips, who was still swabbing, and asked where Andrew had cut himself. I replied that there was no cut, only a nose-bleed from a sunstroke, a result of being in the sun without a hat. It was a useful lie. Cornish had always gone around bareheaded, as if to swank about his hardiness. Later he appeared with an old, patched shirt as a head-wrap.

There was another fib about the fruit we threw to the fishes, crisp, shiny plums and fat crimson cherries. Frightened of scurvy breaking out and trusting their thick peels and skins to protect their innards, I kept the limes and lemons. Also, I hoarded a sack of melons, bought when they were green. I'd hoped to take one, ripened, to Aunt Grace. We put out word that a plague of sea-borne maggots had infested everything sweet. Some maggots had grown into flies and laid their eggs in the linen aft. That is common in warm, damp climes. If clean linen isn't ironed to burn out the flies' eggs, maggots hatch out against the warmth of human skin and burrow into it to eat our flesh. As it was well-known, and the ship's joke, that Freddie knew better than I did about stewarding, it would have seemed to be my fault for omitting to iron the cabin's bed-linen. The sailors slept in hammocks, a coarser weave of jute which, unlike our mattresses, didn't draw bedbugs in hot weather. So, according to our lie, their bedding would go untouched and that our cargo would be safe and besides, although our very ballast was raw cotton, the maggots hadn't reached the hold. There wasn't enough air there for worms, which made our load safe and saleable and kept us out of trouble too. With so much cotton chewed, as if it had been Doctor Canning's tobacco, we'd have ridden too high in the water. The lightest gust would have rolled us over.

I'd argued, fearing for my own life, that we should keep the fruit to feed my parrot. That was a dratted thing to say because it drew attention to her. At that very moment, she was perched on a bucket, shaking out her feathers. Father reckoned that what she shook off was dust. He ordered me to throw her out to sea so she might wing her way to the shore. Afraid that her wings had been clipped, I hardly put my heart into it. Four times I threw her into our wake. Four times she squawked and circled back to my shoulder. The exercise in the salty breeze would have cleaned her feathers and I figured that, if we could keep the game going, Father would see that. But, for a bird, she was clever. For example, she could say "Chrysanthemum". She caught on to what was coming to her and flew up, screeching, up

into the rigging, all but knocking Adonis from his perch. Then she hopped from spar to rope as Freddie went after her as the rattle of the sails put her into a greater panic.

“We should leave her be, Father! She’s no more dangerous than any other bird flying over us!”

“Use your tiny brain, Girl! No birds fly over us as far out as we are!”

“If we’re out so far, then how is she to fly to land?”

I did my utmost to make him see reason and save her life. He sent me below, not to polish in the cabin. Instead, I must fetch a bit of hard tack from the barrels in the hold to lure her. I pointed out that she would choke on hard tack, and he said that I must chew it for her. While I was gone, she was trapped and brought down. I reckon that her neck was wrung and she was tossed into the sea, unless her benighted feathers were plucked and she was eaten like a pigeon. She’d have made a meal for three, too piquant for common sailors, but a dainty dish for Doctor Canning and Father. And Mr Chips would have tasted her. He was partial to a pigeon, always shooting at them in the bayou with Father’s Pocket Colt. That gun was long for anybody’s pocket. Once, Chips had nearly fallen overboard while keeping hold of it and leaning out to hook in what he’d taken. That would have been him gobbled up. As for my Polly, the last clue I had of her was a crimson breast feather caught under the gunwale. I’ve never had a parrot since.”

Bessie looks so down in the mouth that Pauline must offer some comfort. She fixes on the slick of sable, still asleep on the window seat. “I suppose, with such a lovely cat ...”

“Lovely, indeed! That’s Edie’s cat, called Bonnie when she was a kitten, but we rechristened her Ann Bonnie after the pirate, because she’s never happier than when drawing blood. I reckon her namesake eggs her on. Still, we have no mice and she’s a character. On our *Rothsay*, where we did have mice and their larger, fiercer cousins, we also had Fleabag, once Cutlet, and once a prettier name which I’ve forgotten. She was a stump-tailed tabby, who would lay her paws on anyone’s chest and lick anyone’s throat, as long as it wasn’t Doctor Canning’s. She shrank from him.

What with Doctor Canning’s orders, I had to throw good things I wanted overboard, including my very clothes which might have become infected. I was content to wave goodbye to my tired, workaday, wool skirt. But I also had to lose a lawn blouse that I should have kept for best, as well as my camisole and drawers embroidered by Mother. What was not blood-spattered had become uncommon itchy, which might have come from so much scrubbing it in salt water. Of course, I worried that the itch was the miasma. In my skinny state of nature, trusting that our sailors’ wouldn’t gawp at me, I crept to the salt water butt and squatted

behind it, scrubbing myself to the soles of my feet. In case a towel would rub the dust back on, I shook myself like a dog on the heat of the deck, then shook out and put on what Freddie had collected from my trunk and slung at me. It was my Fairport mourning suit, a bad omen. I had to put it on over nothing. The jacket was tight on my arms and under my armpits, with nothing to let out. My chest must have swelled after all, and my back broadened with months of lifting. Stepping into the skirt, I trod on it so that its front tore from the waistband and I pinned it back into place instead of stitching it. If anything announced a crisis, it was my appearance. On another occasion, Father would have bawled me out for being slatternly.

He had washed as well and was wearing only a dripping, sagging Ounion suit. The sleeves were tied round his waist and his wiry, brown chest hair, which covered him to his shoulders, was on display because he was starting to shave it. His beard was gone already and his new smoothness gave him a surprised look, less grumpy and younger, although it must have cost his vanity to shave. He'd made no secret of pitying men whose beards were thin, and he considered dundrearies and lone moustaches ridiculous. Our hair is our fur and feathers. I wondered if he would ask me to shave off my crowning glory. I wouldn't have minded. Washing it in so much salt had made frizzy tangles beyond the help of comb or oil.

Father's business was to find Fleabag and strike her from the roster. There would be dust in her fur, laced with miasma, and no way to remove it since she'd never lain down for brush and comb and would give short shrift to soap and salt water. I said I'd had no sight or sound of any cat since casting off at the Levee, where there had been a multitude. Perhaps she had taken a fancy to some tom. I was getting into the spirit of lying, but half of this was truth. I'd had so much else to notice. I added that I hoped that Fleabag was aboard or we would be overrun with rats. Father remarked that with everything else that was going on, we needed our rats to keep us floating. We might have to eat them too. I grinned, as if that was funny, and he said, gravely, that rats, stuffed, had been food for Admiral Nelson's table. You might wonder how our rats, which were not bald, were to escape infection. I wondered too, but I only said that Fleabag would have been nowhere near Andrew because she had always steered clear of him. She knew that he disliked her for not being a dog. Father narrowed his eyes at me for that lie, but he let it go and supposed that the minx had holed herself up with a sailor. He said he would call an inspection of the forecandle, which would do to let our quack look over the men's hides into the bargain.

He dressed and brushed up. I did what I could for my appearance, wrapping a piece of sailcloth round my hair. I was more neatly turbaned than Cornish, but not as neatly as the little Lascar, Tanyel. Those who were not steering or looking out had run to their berths and

roused their fellows who were off-watch. They had all brought their bags and boxes, fiddles, clappers, drums and pipes, to the fore deck, where we trusted the brisk wind to whisk away the miasma. The sailors, used to their Old Man's hatred of dust, seemed to think nothing unusual in laying out their sad little piles, and letting me shake each item over the rail while Father nosed around in the forecabin. He might have sent me, but I think he didn't trust me to bring back Fleabag if I found her.

Meanwhile, as if the doctor hadn't spotted me, he'd told the men to strip. I'd often seen bare chests, wet with work and raw with wind and sun, and I'd glimpsed some lower parts as well as the men would hang theirs over the side instead of going to the heads. But standing so close to what might soon be full male nakedness I felt my belly, then my face, burning. Vilquist must have felt equally ashamed; he usually jumped to orders, but now, with the skipper absent, he asked to know why they must strip. He said he'd heard that there risked being maggots in his skin, but maggots in his skin would make him dead, and he had never felt so alive. He believed he spoke for everyone.

"Who said it was maggots?" Doctor Canning asked.

"I did!"

That was my voice. The doctor turned and frowned at me then he chuckled. "Is that female intuition?" He said it as if to me but so that all the men could hear. Then he spoke to them again.

"On my honour as a doctor, I can't say what it is." The words were honest but spoken as if he really didn't know anything. "All kinds of life are different in the climes we've come from. It may be there's nothing to find but a precautionary look should be standard practice and will cost us less time in Quarantine when we reach Liverpool. Undress now, and you can sit by your own firesides in your own slippers a little sooner."

Cornish moaned that he'd never had a pair of slippers nor a fireside of his own, not in Liverpool, not anywhere. He was a born rover and he figured that was just as well; with the pittance that he earned and the fortunes he was charged, he could never afford to settle. A barque was a cheap roof. A couple of his ship-mates muttered that made them born rovers too. I was wishing that Doctor Canning would tell them to be quiet. I was wondering if it was my place to do so when Adonis said that Lips, who stood next to him, was asking if the high old smell from the cabin was the smell of what beset us.

"The smell is my fumigation for fleas," the doctor replied.

"So is it fleas as well?" Vilquist said.

“Fumigation should be a common practice.” Then Doctor Canning repeated that we recently left a sub-tropic where the world’s maladies met and mixed.

Vilquist took off his hat and hung his head, shaking his yellow hair. The doctor seized the moment and told me to inspect the roots for nits, saying as I did, that the treatment was a fine comb and hot salt water, and that ladies could split nits with their fingernails. If this wasn’t palaver and if ever I was a lady, I had hardly any fingernails from so much splicing. I’d started by wearing gloves to work rope but they’d made me clumsy and I’d lost patience with them. Anyway, of course, I saw no nits. The world knows that nits like clean hair – fine hair if they can find it, not locks thick with grease and salt. Besides, the other sailors, following Vilquist’s lead and taking their caps off, showed that they’d no hair or hardly any. Lips and Adonis, who might have had more, seemed in the habit of shaving theirs.

Tanyel, the little Mohammedan, still had on his turban. It was clean and neat and my first thought was that he must have spent time and vanity on winding it so elegantly. Then we heard from him that he was anxious about showing his Almighty the crown of his head, the part that is sacred amongst Jews as well. He ran his eyes around the company as if there might be Jews amongst us, albeit short of head wraps. If there was a Jew, no one declared himself. The only answer came from Doctor Canning about being on a Christian ship with Christian rules that must weigh in for Christian medicine, not mentioning that the medicine he was using was from a country of Mohammedans. There was a pause. Then Vilquist reached and snatched off Tanyel’s turban. After all, the lad only giggled, but he had a splendid cap of raven curls. I set to combing through them. I have never felt hair as soft and silky. It should have been a woman’s.

As Cornish was unwinding his filthy head-rag, he grumbled that it was clear as the day that the mate, God bless him, had picked up a windborne maggot or a whole writhing cluster of the blighters from the deck when he had fallen. The signs were that he had fallen, nosebleed or not. It was also clear as the day that when he’d split his handsome head, the maggots crawled into the wound, and although maggots might cure wounds in Mongolia by feeding on scab and pus, as he’d heard, the mate was no Mongol. So, as Cornish saw it, the maggots were making a fever with their dribbling, which explained the groaning he could hear. He’d know the mate’s voice a thousand miles off.

No sailor would have put out such gammon of his own opinion had my father been anywhere near. I started to worry about what part of the forecastle inspection could be keeping him and wished he would come back, with or without the cat, even if his return

brought on the sailors' nakedness. Doctor Canning should have spoken, as the officer-in-charge. He was saying nothing and could only appear superior. So, I took it upon myself to announce that, although it might have been forgotten or never known in the first place, the doctor was our good ship's medical officer and, at this moment, he stood first in the line of command. He had every right to give orders and anyone was in the wrong who made a dilly-dally over them. Doctor Canning should have been grateful to me but he looked sour. Then he smirked and suggested that what I called dilly-dally was hesitation to upset me by the sight of their male members.

I offered to make myself busy on the other side of the ship instead of mentioning what I could have mentioned about one particular male member, which would have scratched the doctor's honour bright. I didn't because it would have compromised me as badly. We had promised each other to keep silent. So, I went off to polish some lanterns. As I turned my back, I heard Vilquist say that, as for what looked like fang marks on his brother-in-law's wrists, there were no snakes in anyone's baggage. It was merely that the lad had been variolated, which happened to most little Arabs along with the trimming of their foreskin. On that score, the lad was nervous at showing what had gone from his lower deck and would be obliged if he could be excused display.

Doctor Canning must have guessed at this that the smallpox was no secret, at least from Vilquist. As I've said, Finns have uncanny ways but they keep silent about them. At least Vilquist did. I'm sure that when the news did get out it wasn't because of him. Still, he was more or less ordering the doctor to release Tanyel from further inspection and the doctor did as he was told. As I walked to the leese, the lad shot past me, barefoot in his baggy pantaloons, and shinned up the mast. He yelled that he'd seen a block that was rattling loose.

Chapter 6

Marks and Clues

Doctor Canning inspected all our men that day. He spotted vaccination marks on Vilquist, Mung and Spider and he was eager to inoculate Griffin, Lips and Adonis. Father forbid it, saying that no sailor could risk a fever; we had few enough hands to work the ship. He joked that he could keep his wits about him under fire, but mariners hardly had wits in the first place. The doctor didn't snigger.

"Can you make our captain change his mind?" he asked me, later.

I replied that I had as much chance of being crowned Queen. Then the doctor said that he had some good news, which was that the little Mohammedan, with his weight worth less than a man's on the spars, was safe to help him with the mate.

“My father will not hear of that!”

“He will hear, for you will ask him, Miss.”

I laughed heartily at that and told Doctor Canning that he should grasp his courage in both hands then step up to ask my father on his own account. I warned him that he'd be at risk of hearing that he had cloth ears. It stood to plain reason that Tanyel's place was aloft in the crows-nest, or astride the bowsprit, where we could not wish for a lighter, livelier lookout. I added, for good measure, that to present any child with the sight of any man as ramshackle as Andrew would be arrant cruelty.

“He says he's twelve years old, Miss Hall.”

“Boys like to be older than they are, Doctor Canning, especially when there's a penny to be earned. We said he was twelve when we took him on.”

Tanyel had claimed that he'd had no exact idea of his age. That was not uncommon amongst children of his class in those days, and he'd asked my father, in his treble voice, to guess it. When he'd heard that he might be twelve, he'd strutted off splay-legged to climb the mast, which was the only qualification for anyone. I told the doctor that if anyone was to help in sickbay, I would, since I was immune to the smallpox too and Andrew was my cousin. I would have said that he was my fiancé, except that Andrew was putting the lie to that.

While Edie's out, I should tell you this. I've had little occasion to talk about it since Edie grown old enough to believe that it upsets me. But if one doesn't talk, one forgets about what happened and how it happened and even, sometimes, how one felt. The fact is, I was in love with Andrew, but I never knew it in time to confess it to him, so he wasn't to know either. Or perhaps he knew all along and perhaps it would have made no difference. Life isn't just about the good things. A man can't love because he is loved. Neither can a woman. Folk so often get that wrong. And whether he loved me or he didn't, he was the one person in the world who always made me happy – even just to sit quietly with him. I don't count Edie or Aunt Grace. Hindsight makes the heart grow even fonder than absence but I believe I remember right. Even when we fought as children, even when he teased me and told tales, I loved him and I still love him. I will to my dying day.

So I wanted to see all done right by him. I made the case to Father, which was that I had had the proper treatment for smallpox and could sleep aft in my cabin safely and could take turns with the doctor, who must have some rest. Andrew seemed forever thirsty, yet he

couldn't raise the weight of his head. If I was beside him, he was in reach of a drink and someone to mop his sweat and plump his pillow and smooth the knots in his brow veins a little. I expect Father was relieved not to have me slung over him in a hammock in that tiny workshop. I was relieved too. He used to snore like thunder. Not that Andrew was silent; wheezes, hiccups and belches were the best of his noise, but I never minded. I was happy to repay him for those early nights I'd spent at sea, when I'd heaved at the sight of the heaving water. Father had given me hard tack but it was Andrew who had changed my sheets when that dry old biscuit and then the bile came up. He'd done it all without grumble and cleaned my mouth with a tot of rum from his own flask. It had been my first strong liquor and had made me stand. With him laid low, I tried to return this compliment with my own ration, but he choked it all out again.

Sometimes his wits came back to him and he recognised me, but as if I was wearing my old tartan pinafore, which would have made me five or six. He was nine in his imagination and more contrite than he had been at finding me crouching under the desk in Fairport Grace's chartroom. I had been trying to stow away, as usual. They said I'd used to do it every year, around the time of the Spring tides. That year I'd scrambled over the wall behind the house here and nipped up a neighbouring passage to the Hard. As folk in Fairport were often blind to anything but their own business, no one saw me jump aboard through the rail aft.

I begged Andrew not to worry about telling on me so long ago. I assured him that I had deserved to be found for not stowing myself in the hold, where I could have lived comfortably from the cheese and apples that Father carried in those days. I assured him too that I deserved to be punished since I'd heard my mother's screams at losing me and taken a selfish pleasure in it. Besides, as I remembered, it had been the old mate's dog that sniffed me out. Andrew had been held up on the wharf, arguing with Aunt Grace about going to sea in boots that needed cobbling. His soles had been flapping off the uppers fit to make him fly.

Andrew would cling to his own version, albeit an effort for him to wrap his words around his swelling tongue, which was as green as mould. He insisted that he had found me and that he had been determined to, as if to prove that, if only a person searched long and carefully enough, that person would find anyone. That was related to me finding Sarah.

Mostly he slept, wheezing like a steam engine, with his head hanging off the pillow but sometimes when he woke, we'd play a drawn-out guessing game, with nods and croaks for answers. From this, I understood that Andrew had met his woman at the theatre, the theatre with the crooked scenery, not on that very occasion, but later, when he'd danced a

hornpipe in a line of sailors. She hadn't been an actress or a singer, nor a dancer or acrobat, nor a contortionist or tightrope walker, although she played the mandolin a little, in the way that so many can. I suggested that she'd been in the audience and had run round to the stage door to congratulate him. At that, he squawked with laughter, which seemed to rack his guts, but he put his right hand finger and thumb together and made circles with his hand. He was trembling, even shaking, but I made out that he was miming sewing.

"She's a seamstress," I guessed and I was right. I might have guessed sooner had I thought about the evening, perhaps a year before, when Andrew had come home to one of Aunt Grace's dinners with a better hang to the trousers he had gone out in. Aunt Grace had remarked on the new and perfect look of them and he'd replied that any adjustment would have been on account of all the trifle he had eaten at his pal's luncheon, as if it was only the waist fitting properly and not the length of leg. And speaking of clothing, I understood, by bits and pieces, the fine old time he and Sarah had enjoyed in trying on all the costumes that she was fitting up for the theatre. She'd loved to see him as a Roman soldier, and she had dressed up and cavorted as a Roman soldier too. She'd had the chest muscles of a little god and smelt like violets.

By the time Andrew died, which might have been two days later, with days so hard to count below deck, I had the cut of Sarah and her haunts. By the way, I'd seen her photograph. I came across it in the back pocket of his trousers. It was scuffed and bent in its leather wallet, as if he'd leaned and sat on it. Then I remembered a portrait in his sketchbook, which he had shown me. At the time, I had supposed it was of some imaginary native princess. Now I knew it to be of her. He'd asked me if I liked it and, thinking he was going to give it to me, I'd said I preferred the sketch of a cormorant flying and I'd instantly turned the page to see it again. He hadn't given me that picture either, and now the sketchbook had gone overboard and would be already ground to sand.

Against the doctor's orders, I kept the photograph. I washed it and pegged it out on a line underneath my linen. It faded so much that there was no sense in hanging onto it. So I burned it. For a long time, I kept the fact that there had once been a photograph secret from Edie. More usefully, and not for sentiment, I kept those gabardine trousers and his jacket and steeped them clean in salt water. That shrank them, as I'd hoped, to fit Tanyel. Protected from smallpox by variolation, Tanyel might so easily have been laid out by the common cough, which devastates so many of his colour. And no wonder, if you ask me, with their flimsy garb. A calico turban won't warm much once bitter weather strikes. Even in fair weather, damp and salt take heavy toll on any fabric. Tanyel's pantaloons had torn like paper

after two days at sea; he had somehow caught them on a marlin spike and pierced his upper thigh into the bargain.

That accident had been a lucky one, because the spike had dug in a thumb's width away from where it would have blighted a handsome lad's chances with the ladies. Not that I saw the wound, only its dreadful bleeding through what was left of the pantaloons and the loincloth. But, according to Vilquist, the spike had almost cut a vein. I think Vilquist was the only one to see the damage, apart from Tanyel, who said he didn't like to see his own blood and wouldn't show Doctor Canning out of modesty. Doctor Canning insisted for a little, warning him that the whole leg might turn rotten, if not the whole body. Then he seemed to lose patience and ordered Vilquist to clean, with salt and vinegar, all specks of rust or dirt that would be in the wound, to check its cleanliness morning, noon and night and to come to him at the first sniff of gangrene. The damage had taken a week to heal and had used up my supply of rags. But Tanyel managed it bravely, and I made him another pair of pantaloons out of one of Father's old shirts.

One more word on that photograph of Sarah; no surprise to you since you've seen Edie. But I had not seen Edie, and I confess that I was amazed by the woman's blackness. She was neat and she was pretty, in the way that Edie's pretty. I know that I was never an oil painting and I know that a female unfit for a man may draw him like a magnet, and that has nothing to do with beauty. Still, I never imagined Andrew with a black woman instead of me."

Pauline is embarrassed on two counts. Glancing around to check that poor Edie is nowhere within earshot, she is also made to feel awkward by any reference to the famous love, or congenital sexual instinct, between men and women. She has never experienced it. Indeed, she has always suspected that such a passion is society's fantasy or ploy to give bored girls something to look forward to, when it's plain to be seen in any house in the land that a man creates more demands than he satisfies. Besides, Bessie's romance is rather off the subject of the female captain's glory; it hadn't blossomed before it ended badly. Pauline is far more interested in whatever happened between Bessie and Doctor Canning, which is probably unpublishable. Meanwhile, Bessie's eyes are filming over and Pauline finds herself blushing, not because she is still embarrassed, but because she is fighting back an urge to take the old woman in her arms.

"It would have been painful to imagine him with anyone," she manages to say, gently, because her voice is husky.

Bessie dips her head, whips her handkerchief out of her sleeve and gives her nose a blow, one nostril at a time, honking both equally savagely.

“Of course it would!” She nods firmly into her handkerchief. When she looks up again, her eyes are brighter for the washing. “‘Many waters cannot quench love’, don’t they say?”

“‘Neither flood can drown it.’ Song of Solomon,” Pauline answers, as if she’s setting an example at one of her father’s confirmation classes.

“I’ve proved that much, given what the ocean had in store!” Bessie musters up a grin and stuffs her handkerchief back in her sleeve. “We women so badly want someone special for ourselves.”

“Isn’t it our access to finance that makes that someone special more important?”

Bessie blinks and then frowns, as if Pauline has spoken Greek. Then she seems to make sense of such brash hard-headedness and shakes her head, firmly. “To find anyone more special than Edie would be impossible.”

“Oh, I see that,” Pauline nods as firmly back.

“And, in the end, finding her was easy, in the way that what has been difficult so often comes up with its own solution.”

“How was that exactly?” There’s been enough allusion to the Bible, so Pauline doesn’t add wryly, as she would like to, that a difficulty which solves itself sounds like a miracle.

Bessie gives a wan smile and goes on. “I expect you’d call it a miracle and, as you’re a vicar’s daughter, I won’t argue. I had dreaded breaking the news about Sarah to Aunt Grace but, of course, to hear that her son had left a life in the world cheered her. We set off, in mourning, to the theatre in question, only to be told by a doorman that he was sorry for our loss, but Sarah was no longer engaged there. We didn’t take his word for it, but went as if to buy tickets at the box office and asked to see the manager. That fellow came out, oily and humble, ready for a complaint I expect. “I trust I may be of assistance, ladies, but first, please, my heartfelt condolence!”

When he heard our business, he turned even more regretful, and yet stern. He knew the girl whom we were after and saw fit to impart the number of a building in Paradise Street. The theatre kept its costumes in the attic of that lodging, which came as part of wages for looking after them. For a long time, the said girl had deserved her post and the lodging. But we must forgive him for also imparting that an actor had jumped and split his breeches before his public, and all because the girl had got herself a baby to take care of instead of her work.

The theatre was left no choice but to take on a more reliable person. However, he could promise us that the neighbours, if not the shopkeepers and innkeepers in Paradise Street, would know the girl's whereabouts.

That turned out to be an empty promise. The building had a front door, but no bell and no one to open when we knocked. We ventured into the side alley and onto steps to a squalid basement where we shouted down to the residents, only to have a stone flung up at us by a filthy little girl. We asked all along the road, toiling on to the Infirmary, then to the Widow's Refuge then to Mrs Gladstone's Orphanage, a well-appointed house in a lovely garden. That was already such a relief. And in Mrs Gladstone's tidy nursery, there were three darkie boy infants – all of them bonny. By that time, I might have taken any of them. I was footsore, with a headache, and judged it better to give a home to someone instead of no-one. Andrew would have understood that. He and Aunt Grace were Father's relations, but they'd had a home with us in Fairport through Mother's charity, as she had frequently reminded them and sometimes informed others. Anyway, Aunt Grace, who cared about her own grandson before she had seen him, wanted to be sure that she had him and no other. She insisted on making more enquiries.

Weary to the soul, we took a hackney and trotted home for our dinner, with Aunt Grace vowing that she would never set foot in that rude, heartless theatre again. Meanwhile, I was supposing, privately, that both Sarah and her child were dead. That would have explained her ghost boarding our *Rothsay*. However, when we reached the house, as we were putting the key in the lock, Sarah came up behind us. She was most robustly alive, albeit puffing as she climbed Aunt Grace's steps with a bundle in her arms and another bundle on her back. Otherwise, she was as neat as her photograph, shorter than Edie. She wouldn't have been directly noticeable but when we did notice, she was pretty, with black eyes like raisins and a broad, smooth forehead, despite the trouble she had to manage. Hearing that we were looking for her and guessing that we would confirm bad news, she had come after us for the full story, or she'd never have troubled us at our house. She'd noticed our mourning when we'd passed her in the hackney and had felt in her boots that we were Andrew's folk. So what could she do now but unwrap her shawl and show us Andrew's daughter? We should have seen that coming. Men think they make boys by wanting them. What made me sorry was that the child was six months old and Andrew had never seen her.

That was the only surprise. It was no surprise that Sarah had found a new engagement in London, and wanted to have her arms free to do it. She wouldn't stay to share our mutton broth and cow's foot. Aunt Grace did ask her, and I'd reckon that the poor creature was

hungry. But the three of us felt sad and awkward together. No one needed to say so. That was the first and last we saw of Sarah. Either she managed well enough or badly. We had Edie in return for Andrew's wages, Aunt Grace's old coat and the sovereign that fell out of it as Sarah put it on.

Chapter 7

The Burial

When he heard that Andrew had died, Father stomped down to the cabin as if he might catch his one and only nephew on his way out and argue him back to the land of the living. He set his jaw at the sight of the corpse. Then he barked out for a mirror, hoping to prove that Andrew's breath would mist it, as if I hadn't held a mirror to my cousin's mouth already.

I'd hardly believed him dead either. I could hardly believe the corpse to be Andrew's. Andrew had been well-made and yet he'd died ramshackle, racked in such sweaty, bloodied sheets. His shroud was a hammock and to stitch his nose to it, done time out of mind to wake the last lights of life, was past the power of any mending. I managed to pierce his chin. That had always been firm. However, as if from clenching it against pain, it had thrust forward more than when he'd walked about. The jaw had moved and set sideways too.

For the sake of continued secrecy and to shed the corpse from the ship faster, Doctor Canning would have manoeuvred it out of the porthole. Father would have waved it off that way too. Such haste reminded me of Mother's burial in the cheapest coffin. The coffin lid had been closed directly, in case the phthisis steamed out. Then it was trundled off on an open cart. No one would take her upon their shoulders and attendance at the graveside was outdone by bidders for our Nelson porcelain.

Andrew wasn't so easily disposed of, thanks to his size. Although he was shrunk by death and weighted at his feet with blocks to pull him down, he would have been wedged, half in, half out, in grisly view above the waterline. That bore no thinking of as sailors must see a body respected. He was brought up on deck the way he was taken down and buried at night because he died at night, and because there was less chance of making his illness out.

It was Cornish, of course, who moaned that a night burial was no way to be put to rest; a wraith must find its way to the light and that was out of the question without light to travel by. Vilquist argued that there was light a-plenty in the water. Shining fishes lit up the bottom and were brightly-coloured for that very purpose. Spider was proud to confirm that. Spider had seen those fish, because an old barque he'd served on had run against a rock and

split as easy as an orange. Down he'd sunk to the caves on the sea floor, thinking that he must pick himself a tomb, and without putting down a penny. All those caves were lit by the shining swords of sleeping sting-rays, so, instead of settling in a tomb, he'd found a fisherman's hook and line, slipped the hook under his belt and been winched up by a band of female natives, whose only garments were fine-wrought belts of shells. The rest was another history, but he could assure us that, past the sting-rays, the deepest part of Davy Jones locker sparkled because of the sunken gold it had drawn in.

There was no sparkle on our *Rothsay's* afterdeck, only the cheapest, blurry oil light. There we stood amidships, half a circle of sorry faces. The bundle that had been Andrew was laid out on a plank and slung over with the Union flag. It had been pushed out as far a-stern as it could be, while keeping its balance on the gunwale. The ship had been brought about and the sails had been reefed in to put the wind ahead and send the miasmas off behind us.

"Man born of woman has but a short time to live," began Father. He got out a few more lines then choked up on a frog in his throat, which gave some of our bully-boys leave to sob out. My heart was splitting but I bit my lip.

There was a pause which weighed like iron. Then young Tanyel found his squeaky boy's voice and let it out into that old warble: "Oh, Vital Spark of Heavenly Flame, Quit Oh Quit this Mortal Frame!" We all chirped into song, and heartily, as if longing for the "bliss of dying", to free us from earthly misery so that we could "languish into Life" in Paradise. Mohammedans have a Paradise too, for their men at least and the virgins who serve them. So it was not an odd song for a little Arab to give us. And we might as well seek bliss in an event that comes only once to all of us. I sang along, as alto, beside Tanyel's soprano and the men, in their baritones and basses, took up the lower octave, but in two parts, which made a round. I've never heard a hymn sung so gloriously. For some six or seven repetitions the wind was merciful and blew the smell of fester behind. Then it changed direction and brought such thickness to our nostrils and throats that Father lost no time in tipping the plank. Andrew's body rolled face down into the sea, with the shadowy flag spread over it like an island. Then its weights plunged the whole miserable contraption to the sea floor.

Chapter 8**Mortal Thoughts and Healthy Sustenance**

Andrew's passing left in me a burning emptiness. I gouged that hole deeper for myself by letting the same memory circle. I tried to drive it from my head but it was my body that would not forget the times I'd leant against his warm, sturdy chest and felt his beating heart under my cheek. Then I told myself that we, who had our lives, ought to have been thankful for his passing because with it had passed the smallpox. So I reckoned. I sluiced and swabbed and scrubbed aft and threw away what was stained, including the mattress of his sad, narrow cot, and I opened what I could to the air.

I was three times more maudlin for recalling how I'd scrubbed this house from top to bottom after a maid with a hacking cough had come to work for us. Our maids, one at a time, were day help from the Widow's Refuge. The one I have in mind was a good girl called Susan. Susan had been dusting the batch of curiosities that Father had brought home for our mantelpiece, when she'd coughed blood on the hearth and was sent back to her room to be isolated – except she was sharing with eight other girls. I don't need to tell that story except to add that there had been two bad harvests. So people weakened fast once illness seized them and my mother, watching her waist that was barely twenty inches, hardly ate when the larder was full. So, three weeks on, I was still scrubbing the house while Mother slept with a coal fire blazing and all the windows open. That's when I first met Doctor Canning.

He had been new in Fairport, lodging with our neighbour. I never knew where he had come from except that he'd been to a modest Corporation School. He was proud of that and what, with his long medical study, it had made of him. Despite his beaky features which my mother called arresting, he was causing quite some stir among Fairport's many single females and widows. After all, he had plum pudding voice and a portable skill which could follow money. His card was a portrait of himself in hunting garb. Not that he hunted animals.

The cough in Mother's upper chest had demanded cod liver oil, squeezed lemons, barley water, a spoonful of *Canning's Own Tincture* and two of his little pills every day. After a week, she'd got out of bed and I moved one of these armchairs to the window for her. There she'd sit in her leaf-green dressing gown and her vermilion Paisley shawl, with its silk fringes and its flaw in the weave which had made it a bargain. She would read, moving her lips and glancing, from time to time, out of the window as if to consider what she'd read. I believe she was watching for the doctor passing. When he did, she would nod at him and wave, rippling her delicate, white fingers, and he would tip his hat and grin.

She must have known that she was a picture. Her skin was pearly from being so long away from the sun. Her chestnut hair fell in waves and, as she sat, almost touched the carpet. She was lonely without Father and had become ill because she missed him. She missed Andrew too, in another way, and while Doctor Canning sat cross-ankled on our piano stool and flicked through our family song-book, her men were the main subject of her conversation. She wasn't making friends with him for herself but for her future grandsons, who could only spring into life from me. How she longed to meet the six or seven of them before she died, and all that required was my interest in the doctor before another girl, without carrot rats' tails caught up anyhow, snatched him.

When I said I couldn't think of him in that way, she took my hand and kissed it and said that thinking of a husband in any way only mattered when he was absent. Once he was in place, it was useful to think of a rose unfolding. At first, I didn't catch the use of that. Later, I was to hear the same from Doctor Canning and I don't like roses to this day. As for the days of that voyage, I didn't like to be close to the wretch, especially if we were alone and he was lounging, kicking his heels. So when Father moved back from the workshop to the cabin, I was glad.

Father had run Andrew's duties as well as his own, standing double-watches to see all done, as we all had. However, a skipper carried so much more on his shoulders by worrying about it, and he'd had that fool injection. The light was good in the saloon, even better when he broke his mould and ordered another lantern brought in, but he complained of not making out his own pencil marks and he told me that I must find a fix for our position.

I'd grown confident with a sextant, as long as it was only an exercise. When it was a necessity for our survival, I was nervous. I stole a glance at Father's face, looking for a spot and finding only thread veins on his nose and forehead, which he'd always had. He must have felt me peering. He said that if his breath smelt, it was from my concoctions in the galley and I could rest assured that he wouldn't be as swift to ship out as Andrew.

I was used to this sort of banter from him. Still, my eyes wetted up and a lump jumped into my throat. His eyes wetted too. Then he said, gruffly, that we should try to see Andrew's death as a mercy to one in so much pain and to us too, for what if he had died later? A corpse in the saloon would have kept us even longer in Quarantine and bodies thrown into the Mersey weren't countenanced by the Dock Board. He caught my eye as if he wanted me to smile and, all at once, we were both snivelling. I heard how he missed Andrew and how he had been proud that they had fought in New Orleans because it proved the boy a man at last.

He had to confess that he'd wondered when he could be sure of that, with Andrew twenty-five already, yet so gentle and so taken with the theatre and drawing birds.

Then I blurted out that Andrew was so much a man that he had made his own little boy in Liverpool. Father stretched his eyes so wide that he started coughing. He swallowed, coughed again and covered his mouth, catching a dash of brown sputum between his fingers. He wiped it on a handkerchief, saying it was nothing but tobacco from his pipe, along with the shock, of course, that Andrew had turned out such a dark horse and had kept so quiet about an addition to our family. He supposed such secrecy could only mean that the woman was a bad hat.

I'd said nothing about Paradise Street. I'd thought it best not to add it until needs must. My answer was only that as soon as we were in Liverpool, we should do our best for my cousin's child. He snapped back that I didn't need to tell him to suck eggs and that I was the very spit of my mother, with the same head for ordering and apt to state what stood out clear as a row of flags. His eyes swam again as if he'd liked that after all, despite all that jumped into my mind of Mother yelling at him to stay at home and open a chandler's shop and he bellowing, in reply, that he would never be beached by her. He seemed to have forgotten how she wouldn't pack his seabag for him but would tip it out as soon he had packed it, then fling herself to ground to catch his leg and try to pull his boot off.

Different people have different ways. Now I suspect that all the pushing and pulling, cat and dog, was a piece of fun for my parents. Still, on the basis of waiting for the earth to settle, Father hadn't even raised a gravestone for Mother. He'd said that we'd wait three months. After two years, all that marked her grave was a knoll of dandelions.

So, I applied myself to the sextant. When I was busy, as if I wouldn't see it, he let his handkerchief fly overboard and felt his throat, checking that there were no swellings, which warn of smallpox. I know that and I know what he was doing, because I too had felt for swellings on my throat.

It was a liberty, even insubordination, but once our course was set I mentioned Father's phlegmy cough to Doctor Canning. He was sprawling in a deckchair behind the bowsprit, dozing. As my shadow blocked his sun, he blinked into consciousness and apologized for catching up with the nights of sleep that had fled him while he'd watched over my cousin in that muggy cabin. He wished he could have done more for our poor mate. However, where my father was concerned, he could assure me that a cough would have a part in the normal course of variolation, and he was relieved that the treatment was working to order. There again, anxiety constricted a man's throat as well and we had to confess that my

father had a great deal to worry about. There were no chalky little pills for that. All we could do was to wait and see. He gave me a sorry look and patted my arm, and the wood of the deck for luck.

The luck that brought might have been the flying fish, shoals like flights of birds. Lifting on fins like wings, they jumped out of the waves, dealing anyone who stood in their way a firm slap with their rattling tails. They had skin like armour. Freddie had a bleeding bruise above his eyebrow from one of them, but many took the punishment for that one by mistaking their path and hurling themselves upon the lower deck and braining themselves. I reckon that most sailors hated the taste of flying fish as much as they'd hated the Mississippi catfish I had offered them. Tradition was that, if one of those flying fish came down, a gallant fellow would pick it up and present it to the captain's wife to cook and eat. I would have been the next in line for that honour, except with all the sailors busy with other things and some fifty, bulging, dead or dying eyes staring up at me, I had to collect the fish myself. I fried two and pickled the rest in boiled brine. On shore, I'd have started a business. They came in handy, I can tell you.

Chapter 9

Low Spirits and Lofty Tales

As we came up round the Florida Peninsula, the sky was as blue as sapphire. The wind had been "fresh" which, according to Mr Beaufort's Scale, marks nineteen to twenty-four miles an hour. We'd hoisted every sail at every angle. They had filled hungrily and kept filled until one twist of a lamb's wool cloud floated across the blue and hung over us, at which the wind dropped to "moderate", never more than eighteen miles an hour, and mostly on its way to thirteen. Next, it fell to a "gentle" breeze, eight rather than twelve miles an hour, blowing a drift of lambs' tails clouds from the West. Our sails jittered then sagged as the breeze dropped to light. We tightened them and I prayed, without kneeling, for the wind to whip up again in the evening when, in a golden sunset, it fell to a "very light".

At first watch, which was my watch, the breeze plunged all the way to calm by anybody's scale and with it plunged my spirits, lower than ever. I tried to lift them by keeping busy, filling and wiping lanterns and cutting and winding in fresh wicks, as necessary. But my body, tired and heavy, dragged down my best thoughts, which were about the duty we had to ourselves and our shipmates to make the very most of the time that we had

left. After a loved one's death it is normal to be miserable, but to this was added a nagging anxiety about the hoarseness in Father's throat. He'd almost lost his voice, which is a great deal to lose when it's used to shouting over the weather.

The sailors' spirits seemed high. As I lingered over the lamps in the fore-castle, I heard the usual mockery of Cornish. He'd started up again with his superstition, claiming that he had heard the creaking rattle of the skeleton ship on the voyage out and the slow crack of her boards in a waking dream as soon as he'd set his foot on our gangplank. Spider, who was the bosun when he was not being helmsman, asked if he took himself for a Jonah and remarked, equably enough, that if so he should watch his step; Jonahs had propensities to stumble overboard and we were in whale waters, if not shark-infested ones with krakens.

I believe I heard Cornish say that Jonah had turned into a woman, which would have been about me. He was a fool, not worth a blink of my notice, but I must admit that his fool's opinion hurt. I thought, pettily, of the black bombazine ball-gown, shot with green and the fine jet earrings, which had paid his wages. He couldn't know about that gown and I hadn't liked it, but he'd taken no stock of the jobs I did to keep the ship afloat. I had gladly set to every task, as necessary, except for climbing up the masts. And I'd have climbed both masts but for my skirt in the way. I didn't reckon that I'd be scared of being so high, and I figured I would have relished the view from a crow's nest.

The men were batting away Cornish's croaking with their own tall tales of horrid seas and worse adventures, which they had survived. Spider had met a lion that a Scotch missionary had brought aboard, along with a contract to sell it to a circus in Acapulco. The lion had eaten the missionary in preference to the juicy joint of pig, which had been offered, and strolled free of its cage to seek a second course of Doomed Mariner. Oh! and there'd been no drop to drink, not rain not even mist, by the way. The decks were strewn with men too parched and weak to move a lip in their last prayer. Yet the lion's flashing eye fell on Spider, who glared back to it, as lion-eyed as any man could be. For a moment, the beast considered the wisdom of attacking its equal and, in that moment, Spider found it in his seven league legs to leap clear of the ship as it went down. He was the only tar to live to tell the tale, for which he could thank the foam, which bore him up, not the foaming jaws of the lion. That lion had leapt off after him, but had paddled sharp away from a whale which was passing, whereas Spider had harnessed that whale with his belt and a hundred yards of seaweed, then ridden it to the rocks off Galway harbour. And there, as we might expect, the whale shrank, sent its blubber to the proper places and turned back into a mermaid, once long ago enchanted by a balding sea-crone who'd been cross at the mermaid's golden hair. That

gracious mermaid had made Spider's evening heaven, along with all her mermaid friends. And the best thing about mermaids was that, what with their glittering tails, they never got themselves in the family way. The lovely creatures would always swim off when the fun was over and a fellow needed peace and quiet and wanted to share a tippie with the fishermen who'd brought him home.

There were cackles and wry applause as Spider bowed. Then Mung raised his voice for attention. When he'd been wrecked for the second time, or third, which was in the Arctic, the ship had been stuck in ice for three days. All his messmates had frozen to statues, honour bright, with the snow dripping down his own neck, until the South Wind blew big guns and his mates sweated into life again. He lost them almost straight away as the ship keeled over and off they slipped into the drink. And Mung would have slipped off too, except he seized four yards of sawn off mast and bestrode it as if it were a stallion, until he and his steed were sucked into a trough of wave then, all at once, pitch-poled upright. But he would eat his hat if he wasn't flung across the sky onto the forehead of an octopus! It was a boggle-eyed, gap-fanged monster that might have slid him into its mouth. Instead, it juggled him with two tentacles while it ran across the waves on the other six, then threw him in at his own mother's window, just north of Liverpool. And if it wasn't sausages for supper! The octopus had eight of them and gurgled as it chomped them down.

There were screeches of merriment, but the wind kept dropping. We were advancing north-east as required, but so slowly that I could admire the red-cheeked fish that swam alongside us, several fathoms down. Eventually that shoal overtook us. The faces were like my parrot's face, leading shining backs and glittering fins, as if they were the deepest ocean lights that Vilquist had described. When I asked him, he grinned at me and I understood, as if he had spoken, that I had taken for a fairy-tale what was nature.

Chapter 10

The Tall Order

"Reef in," came Father's order, courtesy of his speaking trumpet. He had lost his thunderous voice and the words came out in such a rasp that I think that I was the only one to hear. Some of those words were common curses, which should never have been heard from anyone, as he marched off to Mr Chips. Mr Chips was hammering down a board which had sprung up and I feared that he would be struck for making so much noise. No one could have corrected Father

or interceded. However, all he did was to thrust the speaking trumpet at Mr Chips. He seemed to be telling him to repeat the order.

Mr Chips didn't exactly jump to it. He looked too amazed to move. And well he might, not at being his skipper's voice, but because it stood to common reason that if we reefed in, with hardly a breath of breeze, we'd be at standstill or drift, which would be no better. Yet, as crew, we had to suppose that our skipper was thinking beyond common reason. So, Mr Chips stood up by Father's right hand and bawled "Reef in!" at which every man-jack must have looked askance and a murmur went around that the order had come out backwards. The order came again with more urgency and more detail; the bully-boys should shift their lardy parts aloft to furl in and lash all sheets fast to the wood, but they must leave the top gallant flying and look lively about it.

While our men dawdled to the stays and shrouds, Spider reached Father before I could and muttered something that I didn't catch. In reply, Father pointed to a small cloud at our wake. It looked like a sunburst caught in cotton wool.

"The cloud is yellow, right enough," Spider was saying as I moved close enough to eavesdrop. "But if it's calm before a gale, Sir ... It is the season for gales, right enough, so might it not be better if we hoist all our storm sails and hang 'em wide to catch the little breeze that we do have? Then we can run off ahead of them gales as they come over."

Father glowered at him, but he didn't send him to the pumps. He only replied that Spider should know as well as he did that hoisting all our sails would risk our main sheet being dragged into the sea and, as like as not, the mast. He also reminded him that, as every tar he had ever sailed with would swear, he'd never take down sail until he must choose between life and death. However, if Spider, in his wisdom of Solomon, judged it possible to run a storm sail up and down fast enough with so few hands at the ready, he could run up a top-gallant. The rest must be reefed in tight.

Father was swinging like a drunk. I feared that liquor was the matter and might have been the matter since we put in at New Orleans. Then I hoped this was the case because it seemed less frightful than what might threaten from inoculation. But there was no reek of liquor on his breath, only the smell of guano from his fiery face that was dripping sweat. Perhaps Spider took that heat for rage. He looked confused. Then he said that he reckoned that his skipper was right about the top gallant and he'd jump to it and see it done. He saluted and was about to turn away when Father put a hand on his arm and said, "And let out the lower topsail too then!"

“Thank you, Sir!” Spider sounded wry to my ears, but he saluted again and sped away.

Then Father said to me, “I’ll take a nap! So you must stand in for a son and take command of our ship and our navigation!”

I wondered if I was hearing right. His voice was tripping over his tongue. He said it again and told me not to look gormless. I grinned as if he’d made a joke, at which he seized my shoulder and commanded me for the third time. My blood ran hot into my head then cold into my feet.

“But Father, wait! Isn’t Mr Chips next in the line of command? He’s been mate since Andrew left us and makes a fine job of it. The men like him and -”

“Who are you telling wait? I cannot! We all like Mr Chips! He’s a good fellow who holds his carpenter’s pencil nicely. But I like even more to abide by my own judgements, which is why you will take command because you are the only one who can. I’ll relieve you just as soon as I am rested.”

“Very good, Father. Then my first command is that you take command back!”

I said it as lightly as I could, as if he had been joking after all and now I could joke back. He asked if he looked in the mood to waste strength by arguing. He’d not spent months teaching me navigation as a lady’s parlour game and he had a raw throat and a forehead as hot as hell and would go to his own cot, lock the hatch and have the confounded doctor sent to him.

I scampered after him as he stumbled to the cabin. “I doubt that the men will listen to me.”

“Make them listen! They’ll do as you command in my name or else!” He wiped his dripping brow with his sleeve and rasped that I should put what I’d learned to use and keep my trap shut about the rest ... the rest being the smallpox.

If standing in for his son was a compliment from him and the greatest I had dreamed of, I didn’t want it any more. That’s often the way of what we wait a while for. I had rather have been sick and dying myself than have so many lives upon my hands. Yet there was no help for it. I swung the hatch closed over Father and assessed my commission.

The ship looked so long and broad, with such a heady tangle of masts, spars, stays and shrouds, that I felt my own smallness. What’s more, I was the odd-girl-out. Then I thought of Mrs Watchorn, chasing whales across some other part of the ocean, and of the hearty voice she used to make her Old Man look up lively and change his tune if it wasn’t her tune. I felt sure that she stood in for her husband when he was in his cups, which looked to be often, and

that she kept her beady eyes on the officers in case they got above themselves or quarrelled amongst one another. She had no fear of men. Very likely, she thought them less than her, like those women pirates who had captured squadrons loaded with doubloons, and hanged the King's officers from the yard-arm, as well as whoever of their own crew disobeyed, to say nothing of the Irish pirate Grace O'Malley, who'd cut off her own son's fingers as he clung onto the gunwale. That was his punishment for falling overboard.

Mrs Watchorn worked honestly and kept her temper and would never have grabbed the bread knife to run a heart through in pursuit of her own way. She was the living example of female good spirit. As those whalers sailed under a drunken skipper and thanked her for their emergency orders, it should be no shame for our boys, fortunate enough to be sailing under a generally sober captain, who only needed rest, to accept directions from his daughter. Despite all my reasoning, a craven part of me hoped that Father would wake before I needed to declare myself. It was a vain hope. Even now, Mr Chips was heading for me, asking if our skipper had gone below.

I scanned around to check that no one else was in earshot. Then I told him of my father's latest order and its reason, at which the hollows in Mr Chips' skinny, flaking face grew deeper. He glanced towards the cabin. Then he looked up at the main mast where as many hands as could had put down other tasks, or abandoned their miserable allocations of sleep, to raise the top gallant storm sail.

"I never did trust that inoculation," he muttered. I heard it well although I asked him to speak up. At once, he changed his tune, saying cheerfully that if it was only a sore throat and hot head it was just as likely to be a bout of malaria. Malaria always kept a foothold on a body once it got in. It would strike again with lack of sleep but it might be sent away as fast by a proper slumber. He reminded me of our Captain's watches on top of watches, as if I hadn't noticed that Father was forever on duty, and he reckoned that, worst case, that we could run the ship until morning without making a clean breast to the boys. In the best case, our skipper would be better and that was more likely. He had no doubt about it.

It didn't look as if Mr Chips was much of a liar. So I told him that I was hoping for the best but where the worst was concerned, all that the boys were allowed to know was that I was acting skipper, acting on my father's orders. Mr Chips agreed that was sensible and said that he'd make sure they understood that. As for him, he'd never nursed one moment's dread of female skippers since answering to a slip of a woman three days round the Cape. Her husband, who was the skipper, was lying in prison on trumped up charges of battery, all because a Dutchie had his bleary eye on a bribe. And splendidly that slip of a woman had led

them. The story had been kept secret for reasons of insurance. It worked in their favour that the crew was a band of Hottentots, who barely spoke English enough to tell, even if anyone would have believed them. And hadn't there been another tale, some ten years back, of a woman winning silver in a clipper race from San Francisco to New York? Her husband had fallen ill and even died once they'd reached port, but his wife had won a thousand dollars in the name of their ship. What was just as plucky was that she'd dealt with the traitorous, double-dealing mate. A competing clipper was paying that blackguard to take down sail, which she had loaded on. Down he took it when no one else was watching. As soon as she'd seen her ship was slowing and noticed why and caught wind of who had done it, she'd levelled a rifle at him and had him shackled in the hold.

I was heartened to hear about these further examples of female spirit, although I'd have been more heartened to have a rifle at the ready. All we had, apart from a harpoon, a gift from Captain Watchorn, was the Pocket Colt, which should have been kept under lock and key in Father's chartroom. Mr Chips had used it, and too many of its bullets, by shooting at birds in the bayou. Father, on the look-out for pirates, had kept it, loaded, on his person until, I think, with something else to see to, he'd dropped it into the jolly boat that he planned to get in if the pirates boarded. If the gun was still there it would be awkward for me to reach. If it was back below with him he wouldn't thank me for disturbing him, or for forcing simple commands at gunpoint. Besides, I'd never pulled a trigger. I'd borrowed Andrew's catapult when I was small and missed everything I had aimed at.

My other concern was that our boys spoke English – more or less. Assuming that I was obeyed and could get us home with our cargo safe, our insurers, who had blighted us for six weeks in New Orleans, might well object to my command. Our crew might swear to keep their lips forever sealed. However, drink will open a fool or a boaster's mouth and we had at least one fool and several boasters.

And I'm sorry to say that, for an instant, I distrusted good Mr Chips because, with the death of Andrew, he stood to keep his rank as mate long after I'd relinquished mine as temporary skipper. However, skipper was an enviable rank, one that he might prefer to being mate. I wondered if his story about the silver-winning clipper's treacherous mate wasn't soft advice to hand over my position to him or, since he couldn't navigate, the look of authority, while I navigated quietly. How I despised myself even as I thought that! Mr Chips had served Father faithfully since long before I was born and I could always trust him to back me. It was more likely that my suspicions reared up because I wanted to him to take over. Holding onto

power frightened me. Still, I had Father's orders to appear as well as to be the leader. Those orders might be the last things I had of Father and I'd not let go of them easily.

I explained to Mr Chips that Father's sail plan was drawn up in case the yellow cloud brought on a storm; storms could blow up in full regalia out of a button in the region and once one such storm was on us, we had too few hands to take the sails down. The cloud looked more cream than yellow and even smaller than it had been, well on its way to being a button. Mr Chips admitted that my female eyes might trump his for making out the exact hues of nature and I thought I had got away with it.

"Mind you, Miss Bessie, the plain way out of any trouble would be to run ahead of storm by putting the greatest possible distance between us and the cloud, be it cream or yellow. That needs more sails not fewer."

Mr Chips was saying exactly what Spider had said to my father. A pulse in my throat pounded. Was I to tie the ship into stillness? Mutiny would follow, as sure as night follows day, if the crew lost trust in me or had never had it in the first place.

"Mr Chips," I said, as sternly as I felt uncertain. "My father didn't give that order and since he didn't and he knows his weather, the plain way will not work today."

Mr Chips nodded at me, humbly enough, but he pressed on with useless suggestions. "You can judge by little sparks in the waves as well, Miss. Did our Skipper see little sparks?"

Either Mr Chips didn't know the proper name of the little sparks or he thought I didn't. He was wrong about that. The sparks are phosphorescence. They are creatures, but not fish. They may be related to the deep's shining fish and, perhaps, to the glow-worms that light our way through the lanes here at night. We never spot glow-worms by day and phosphorescence, as I have understood it, is hard to see until the sky goes dark or gloomy. Sometimes, from far off, the blue-green sparks might mark a shoreline or shallow surf. They also show where currents intersect and, as currents are expressions of the winds, the sparks may signal heavy weather. At that moment of that day, nor any other day, I had not seen one spark. Father hadn't said he'd seen one, although his hot head and sore eyes might have made up the millions of them that will turn a distant sea milky. But I told Mr Chips that our skipper had little time to say much because he'd been in some hurry to move himself out of sight.

"Understood, Miss Hall! So what is my first detail?"

I was taken aback. I had been sure that he must know what he must do in such a situation. Then I realised that it was for me to give the order clearly and I hadn't. I said he

should continue as mate and refer to me if anything was uncertain. In the meantime, he must fetch Doctor Canning to sickbay. He saluted me and hurried away.

Without Mr Chips by me, I felt lonely to my core and empty of any idea of what to do. I remembered I should keep my eyes skinned on the cloud to check its growth and what it connected to in terms of other clouds and shades of light. I stood at the rail, gripping it, as if for life, and spotting for our future in the rolls and shifts of sky until my neck ached. Then I gazed down at the water until my eyes pricked and saw their own motes, but the only spark on the sea was the sun laughing, and laughing, I believed, at me.

“Don’t hang that pert little head,” said Doctor Canning, at my elbow. “Your father will recover and in trice, I am sure. Can you help me again as nurse?”

“I can’t. I’m sorry, Doctor Canning. I am Master now.”

He chuckled. “What would you say to a spot of laudanum, Miss Hall? Just to calm what our nerves may do to any of us?”

That chuckle and his arrogant voice made me angry. My nerves were sound as steel given the mess of everything. I kept control of myself. I told him that my father had charged me with our navigation and the role of skipper and while he was out of action, acting as skipper was my proper place. I was the only person who could add, subtract, multiply and divide as well as read a chart and all the little writing in Mr Norie’s *Epitome*, which I knew backwards.

Doctor Canning was screwing up his forehead, as if, in all his cleverness, he couldn’t take so much in. I thanked him for jumping to orders and doing his bit immediately, at which he replied that he would be glad to. Yet he lingered to insist on some assistance, complaining that no one could watch an invalid by day and night, and fetch and boil such quantities of water, as well as keep the fire lit and all the herbs chopped and fumigating. The person, the only person who was fit to be his loblobby, by which he meant his assistant, was the lad who had been inoculated, and it might be wise to keep him below deck too. The air had a warning nip, a presage of weather to catch cold in; it had, very likely, escaped my notice but the lad was practically half-naked.

I grew even angrier at the way in which Doctor Canning was speaking to me and I would have liked to deny him his loblobby simply because he wanted one. Yet, I wanted my father cared for night and day, and I longed for the doctor to leave me and get on with it. I took a deep, patient breath and answered that I felt no shame in looking at a male body, not even a fully naked one and, because I had noticed that Tanyel was under-clad, I had prepared some warmer garments and would supply them when they were necessary. For the moment,

they would not be necessary because I would send the lad to him if he would only make a start on his proper business, which was to make sure that nobody else died. He put his hands together and bowed at me over them as if he were a Hindu. Then he sauntered away to the afterdeck and let himself through the hatch.

I went to call down Tanyel from the spars. He was busy with a ratline and Spider, who was working by him, told me that he must finish what he was about or the rig that the captain had commanded would look as if the cat had got the knitting and the sewing tangled in with it. Had that cat turned up yet, by the way? I pretended not to hear that enquiry but I should have yelled up an announcement about who I had become. Instead, I cheerfully agreed that, in that case, I had better wait for Tanyel. I wasn't sorry to wait because that meant that Doctor Canning must wait. Meanwhile, I could watch the mainsail taken down. But watching its great folds captured didn't give me the usual satisfaction because the ship was hardly moving above a waddle and I was worrying about the cat again.

"You asked for me, Madam Captain." Tanyel dropped down beside me, lighter than any cat. He should have been a ballerina. I drew him away to the afterdeck, where I explained his new position. I advised him to look upon it as a new adventure, and instructed him to fetch his bag and his hammock and put in with the doctor. I have never seen a face fall so low, at which I supposed he, as well as Vilquist, had guessed about the smallpox.

I asked him if he could keep a secret and added that he must swear to keep it. He did swear and I let him into it, at which he became quite willing. He told me that I needn't worry because smallpox was an old adventure for him. It ran and killed in his township of Algiers as commonly as the yaws. He'd been safe from the yaws, a sickness which savaged and killed black folk yet which gave a wide berth to brown folk. And, since one of his sisters had been so good as to get him variolated, he'd be spared the real smallpox. What he'd had from the variolation was a punch-up with smallpox's brother, leaving him with a short, itchy fever while the body cooled itself.

That indisposition sounded less than Father's. I was worried, but I wasn't going to worry Tanyel, so I said it was the same. Then I asked the lad if he had many sisters, imagining that he might have six or seven older ones, sultry beauties who, with one cut of a flashing eye, could manage men and had kept their little brother obedient and trained in what women appreciated. Beside his sparkle, Tanyel had a tender, civil manner that born gentlemen could have learned from, albeit he was young and poor.

He hesitated, as if he were counting sisters in his head. Then he said that there'd been four girls in his family. One of the older ones was Mr Vilquist's wife; didn't I know? I'm

sure I was looking surprised. So, I replied that it had slipped my mind, but that I should have remembered because –

“Because I’m her spit, aren’t I?”

He sounded so hopeful of looking like his older sister that, although he had interrupted me, I smiled and told him that he was as handsome as I had heard that his sister was beautiful, and not only from Mr Vilquist either. Then I added, “What I was going to say before you cut in was that I should have remembered you as Mr Vilquist’s brother-in-law because Mr Vilquist looks out for you. You couldn’t ask for a better protector.”

The boy blushed as if he didn’t like to be protected and he said. “We all look out for each other, don’t we? I look out for all of us from aloft.”

“You have been splendid in the crow’s nest. Now I want you to look out for our captain, my father, and work in the cabin. You must do it instead of me because he has given me other orders which I must obey. So I must trust him to you as if he were your own father.”

My voice quavered on that last bit and he touched my arm. “I will do my best for your father, Mademoiselle.”

I told him again that he should fetch his things and said could sling up his hammock over the saloon table. I told him to be glad of the space and light and general comfort of the cabin, especially when it grew cold enough on deck to freeze off his toes and stick his fingers to any brass on the rigging. He should have looked grateful but he only looked glum.

“Couldn’t I still sleep in my little corner fore? It’s cold when there’s no sun and there I have some of Mr Vilquist’s blanket.”

I thought he had lost the drift of our situation. Perhaps, after all, despite the bright, pert cut of his head and body, his growing lad’s brains could only keep track of the last thing he had heard, in which case he wouldn’t be as useful as Doctor Canning had decided. He might even be a danger to my father. However, now he was in on the secret of the smallpox and might blab about it despite his promise not to, I couldn’t send him back to his former duties, which he’d done so well.

“Tanyel, this is a matter of hygiene, by which I mean we must do our best to follow clean, healthy habits to protect each other, which will protect ourselves. You can’t sleep fore with miasma spread over you from aft.”

“Yes, yes, Mademoiselle. But is it the true miasma or the lesser that just gives fever?”

It was a reasonable consideration. I hesitated. To delay the answer further, perhaps forever, I said, “You had better call me Madam.”

He nodded and said it the French way. “Madame, please, excuse me, and if I wash myself between in salt water?”

I’d had enough argument and rapped out that he must learn to obey orders without any such questions because, even in a benevolent establishment, insubordination had consequences. I’m not sure what I meant or what I could have meant. However, the threat, such as it was, worked. He collected his hammock and his bag that sagged with so much emptiness that I asked if he had picked up everything. Then I took him to the cabin and let Doctor Canning show him the rest.

No sooner was that decided, or a little while after, Vilquist came to me, saying that he’d been seeking Tanyel because they always tried to rest and eat together. He’d had the lad’s ration to give him but he hadn’t spotted him in the spars or at the heads or anywhere on the main deck, and it was time to get a little shut-eye fore but Tanyel’s hammock had gone from next to his. Where was the lad? It was worrying as it was unusual. He was hoping that he hadn’t fallen overboard. I put Vilquist’s mind at rest about that, but when he heard that the doctor couldn’t manage alone in the cabin, he looked as anxious as before.

“Let me take his place then, won’t you? I trump him as assistant to a doctor. I learned medicine for a year in Turku.”

“Doctor Canning has studied longer... and in Liverpool too.”

“I stopped because of money but you know I keep some skill and practice. Mung breathes because of me.”

“Yes and Tanyel’s scrape healed because you cleaned it. I believe you fixed your wife as well when she was set upon.”

His eyes, like crystals, were piercing mine, as if to pierce my brain. I had to look away from them. Then I saw his hands. They were stained with oil and tar. Yet the skin of them and the edges of his fingers had a holy glow as if he might cure Father by touching him. Still, all I could do was shake my head and look up at his great chin, and say:

“I am truly sorry, Mr Vilquist, but we cannot spare you from the helm.”

His long face grew even longer and paler under its ruddy tan and his light eyes clouded. “Please understand. I have a wife who trusts me and I must answer to her for what happens.”

“I understand! But your care for your wife depends on you answering to your shipmates and my father and me first, just as I must answer to all of you. Your brother-in-law is as safe as any of us, and we are all safer for your strength and skill on deck.”

He had to agree with me. Vilquist always saw truth and reason.

Chapter 11**Promise or Bluff**

Only our top gallant and lower topsail were hoisted. This was odd because our ship was hardly moving. Spider was shinning down to the foot of the mizzen where Mr Chips stood to speak to him, most likely about the line of command which I had yet to explain. But I had not told Mr Chips to speak for me. Perhaps he thought to ease my path. I beat a swift path of my own to the pair of them.

“Might as well run a drogue out!” Spider was saying. That was sarcastic because a drogue is sheet anchor, a sail hooked a-stern and slung overboard to cause drag and slow a ship on purpose. I said his name sharply and, despite that sharpness, he looked round at me in some relief.

“Miss Hall, if you would be so kind as to rouse your father? Then we may settle, to his face, which sails to run down – or in preference, up.”

Chips looked anxiously at me. I saw that he had not spoken about me as skipper, master or even mistress and that he was looking to me to announce my desperate promotion in a desperate time. I cleared my throat and said that the sail plan was settled by my father already and that, while he was resting, he’d put me in post as skipper and I would not overturn his excellent orders, which were to weather the oncoming storm.

Spider’s eyes strained so far away from his sockets that I feared that a ragged scar perpendicular over his right eyebrow would split with amazement and push his eye out onto his leathered cheek. He gaped as if he were miming in the theatre. Then he looked at Mr Chips as if for confirmation of such madness. Mr Chips gave a nod and suggested, so that all knew who was who and what was what, that I take the title of Madam Captain, like the woman who had skippered him and that crew of Hottentots around the Cape. I said that would be apt for a couple of watches.

Spider’s eyes narrowed back into their creases. He regretted that he had not been informed of my promotion earlier; he would have come directly to me and wasted less time when time was moot. He doubted that we had a couple of watches to let matters stand, especially since the ship was standing near enough still already. He claimed confidence in my judgement because he knew that I threw the lead as well as him and reckoned direction from charts, which he could not. However, we all had our duties and, as bosun and often helmsman, he must make judgements too. As he’d made so bold as to tell my father, we were doing the very opposite of what was needful, especially now that the predicted storm must have retreated so far behind us that, even if it blew forward of a sudden, it couldn’t strike

close enough, for hours if not days, to shiver a handkerchief. So, we should let out all our sails and harness any whisper of breeze that might shift us. As he spoke, as if to prove that it might be done, three clippers in full crimson sail bobbed across the north east horizon.

It was dreadful to be obliged to state the contrary of what I thought and to agree privately with a man who was arguing with me. I was sure that there would be others who would like to argue and was nervous of how they might show their disagreement. They had been patient for a long time and it wouldn't have been hard for a man at the end of his temper to nudge me overboard. By the time Father awoke, if he ever did, I might have been locked in the hold or put off on some deserted island, which might mean he would be put off too.

I stood as tall as I could and held Father's line with what was mostly truth. "If we take being calmed for granted and a force nine blows up out of it, as so often in this region, there are too few men, limber and willing as they all are, to heave in all the sheets we would like to fly. It wouldn't be done in time to save us."

"The barometer shows fair weather!" Spider burst out then added, "Madam Captain," which sounded civil enough, not mocking in any case. And I couldn't deny that I'd been keeping an eye on that barometer. The last time I had looked, which might have been four minutes back, the mercury was still high in the glass – a clear measure of fair weather.

"Is it possible the salt's got into it?" This piece of imagination was from Mr Chips. It wasn't helpful and might have called the accuracy of any of our instruments into question. I had no choice but to shake my head and say that I was going by a better barometer, below in the cabin. Of course, I referred to Father. Mr Chips and Spider both caught on to that.

Spider gave a hefty sigh but Mr Chips looked placid and said that his bones were his barometer. In over sixty years at sea, he knew that a storm threatening made his bones ache and his bones were aching now. I thanked him though I felt no gratitude, rather annoyance that he should play his wisdom of years over my hard-won study of the weather. This was the first I heard of his ancient bones as barometers. If Spider hadn't heard it before either, we risked being taken even less seriously. So I made a deliberate joke, which was that I had the same feeling as when I must take the washing in. Women were raised to get that right and practiced at it. As for me, I was an expert, who had yet to be proved wrong. That was, no doubt, courtesy of my ginger hair which Cornish could say more about.

Spider blinked and Chips frowned – as if neither knew how to take the sarcasm that should have been beneath me. I did feel a little ashamed. Cornish was a piece of ridicule for everyone, on the bottom rung of the ladder of respect. Frightened of slipping lower than him, I had played the common game. Spider stretched his face into a smile and praised my ginger

hair which he said would brighten any sensible fellow's day. He admitted that women's ways were a mystery to him, but what he did know in his bones, in every bone in his bony body, was that women did tend to be cautious. Men were more daring and what was required at sea was daring. After all, if we were always cautious, we might never leave the land. At last, I found a sensible answer, which was that leaving land was no longer the challenge but reaching land was, and reaching the right part of it safely. Then I bluffed that I knew our ship, what she would struggle to do and what she would do willingly and easily, which was why I could back my father's judgement and see the sense of all the orders which he had given me. I vowed that would see them carried out because he would check that they had been when he had woken.

“One more question, begging your indulgence, Madam Captain.”

“What's that then, Spider? Please bear in mind that I have answered many of your questions – many more than my father would have answered or than you would have asked him.”

“Thank you, but if he were here I wouldn't have to ask him. How can any skipper be sleeping if he believes that a storm is almost on us?”

I gave him my coldest glare. “That is your question?”

That was his question – an extraordinarily rude one. Nevertheless, it was logical. I realised then how ill Father must have been. My stomach turned over and my legs went into a tremble. Trusting my skirt to hide that, I kept my eyes fixed on Spider's greasy face.

“Thank you for your frankness. This business will look odd to those salts who didn't notice that our skipper was on watch for two whole days. Even they must admit it is only sensible that he snatches some sleep in order to be rested and alert when the first gust of foul weather strikes.”

Spider screwed his eyes up at the sky. “If,” he said.

I wanted to push him over, but I only said, “If it doesn't, we'll be lucky.”

He slouched away to the main mast and dragged himself up onto the rig, with the heavy slowness of a man who had given up. That was dangerous too.

I'd hoped that saying all this once would make the second time easier and I called up a muster on the foredeck. The sailors were laggards coming off the lines and those off watch must have made even harder work of rolling out of their hammocks. Mr Chips took the speaking trumpet to bellow at them and, except for Mung, who was the helmsman for that watch, they fell in around me.

Many looked sulky and all of them seemed confused. They had never assembled so fully, except for the funeral and Sunday worship and that was always on the afterdeck. By no one's count was it a Sunday, yet here we stood fore. I gulped a breath of moist, salt air and, although my knuckles felt white and my stomach ice and my heart was thumping fit to set the ship rocking after all, my voice came out clear and steady as I laid out the line of command and our orders. I reminded them that there were only eleven of us to work the ship, night and day, and that we must pull together. I counted myself in that eleven, fit for anything I could do, which was, most usefully, to navigate and to act as captain.

"As Madam Captain," Spider added. He sounded wry. A couple of sailors glanced at him then hung their heads as if they were hiding grins.

"That's right," Mr Chips said, and begged my leave to tell the story of his first Madam Captain and her Hottentots. Before I could say anything, Spider said that the men had already heard it.

"I would like to hear it again," Vilquist said.

"Tell it, Mr Chips," I said.

Mr Chips obliged. His story took hardly a minute, and came out dowdy. There was silence, broken by a rattle in the rigging. I hoped it might be the squall's first blast but the rattle died after half a minute.

"At least our Old Man is aboard and not in prison," Freddie said, brightly.

Freddie was trying to be helpful, I am sure, but there were murmurs from the dog-barking school of navigation, which I can only describe as the silliness that comes of desperation. Excuse me gasping for another cigarette."

"More about bad luck then?" Pauline asks, supplying and lighting the Capstan.

Bessie holds her smoke inside her then she all but tears the cigarette from her mouth. What she says rides on a yellow fume:

"Very bad luck for English dogs – I mean the animals. Before longitude could be properly calculated, some of our forbears carried dogs aboard to mark it. The dogs had been stabbed on purpose and their wounds soothed with some rubbish called the "powder of sympathy" which was kept in some box or barrel in Greenwich. A stabbed dog's wounds would be bandaged then unwrapped. Pieces of that bandage put aside by the box or barrel before the wounds were wrapped again. Then the hound set sail with the task of barking when it was noon in England. It was believed to know because when the sun was at its zenith in Greenwich, the old bit of bandage would be plunged in the powder there and, at sea, with the intuition of beasts, the dog would feel the sting and bark. The mariners would look at the

sky where they were and the difference from the look of the noonday sun would tell them how far they were from Greenwich.”

“And when the dog’s wounds healed, Bessie?”

“Then the calculation would stop working, as if it ever worked. I expect, in those bad old days, once a real sea-dog’s wounds were close to healing, some cruel man would open it again.”

Pauline’s stomach has soured but she tries to look worldly and not disgusted.

“That’s what men are like when they are desperate. So are women, if you ask me. Desperation may kill wise judgement. Some of our crew were claiming that any salt could read a compass. Someone figured that by keeping clear of the Trade Winds which blow West, the Gulf Stream would move us North East to England, compass or not. Another figured that the Gulf Stream would be easy to follow by virtue of its water, which was indigo like ink, whereas the rest of the Atlantic was turquoise, jade or grey. That observation of the ocean’s colours was accurate; the Gulf Stream might have moved us forward on its flow at three miles an hour even without a sail. However, we couldn’t have depended on it. A whisper of the lightest Easterly would cancel any such progress.

I said we had some leagues to go to the Gulf Stream and that the turquoise water all around us was proof of that. In the meantime, a wilder storm-born current might blow us a hundred miles off course onto rocks and sand banks, where we would be bashed to splinters. It was better to lose a half a day than our lives.

Silence again. Perhaps I had raised the risk too high and had proved myself to be a hysterical woman and a scaremonger. I saw Vilquist chew his lip, as if he too was in doubt. For a moment, I wished that the storm of storms would hurry along over to us.

Then Cornish struck up: “Didn’t we leave land to be free of women’s tyranny? Now, at sea, a female would climb on top of us.”

I told myself that he was only a fool, but it was a good job that I kept no knife up my sleeve. I would have whipped it out, and like the pirate, Rachel Wall, I’d have had at his scraggy throat; at the bottom of Father’s sea chest I had found a picture of what Cornish meant by females climbing on top of men. That picture was a shameful one and, as Madam Captain, I could hardly stand to be linked to it. Still, somehow, I kept my temper. It was Spider who grabbed the fool’s neck behind and pushed him to his knees and told him to beg my pardon. I longed to walk away. I was terrified that I might witness a strangling, as if we were a Barbary pirate ship. Luckily, Cornish did beg my pardon. He tugged his wispy

forelock and I got on a higher horse. I said that I would come to that pardon when I was sure that he could keep a civil tongue in his head. If that took too long, my father would see to it.

“What about Mr Chips, Madam, ain’t he next in the line of command?” This came from Griffin, who had never said a word to me before. Now he’d found another way of overlooking me.

“It is Madam Captain,” Mr Chips corrected him. I understood the discipline which comes from insisting on attention to detail but I wondered if my title would cause me more trouble than it was worth. Meanwhile, Mr Chips was confessing that the skipper’s orders, quite rightly, had set his rank at mate because he couldn’t read or write. A bit of paper couldn’t be far enough away for him to make out any of its marks, even the paper was hung off the bow sprit and he stood aft. The truth, he must admit, was that he’d learned to write his name but he had missed out learning to read by being at war for Nelson when he should have been at dame school. Those wars had gone on too long to get round to opening any books. The men looked ready to cheer him but I cut in before they could.

“Is there anyone who can read here except for me? I mean read English and a chart, with all its codes, symbols and warnings?” I knew full well that if any man claimed such double skill he would be lying. There was another silence. “Let’s hear no more then. I’ll not let you down. Nor will we let my father down.”

Then Doctor Canning, in a bloody apron, stepped out upon the afterdeck and hollered. “If you please, Miss Hall, your father begs a word in sickbay!”

Sickbay! He should have hollered out “saloon”. What an arrogant fool that doctor was, as if the world was shaped to his work and no one else’s. Still, I was relieved at a pressing reason to hurry away from that muster with some dignity. As I turned away I heard:

“And we know about the smallpox, Madam Captain.”

It was Adonis who had spoken. He looked easy enough, and there was no expression on Lips who stood beside him. However, Cornish was crossing himself and clutching his amulets, as if naming an illness brings it on. I shot a glance at Mr Chips. Then I glanced at Freddie. Both seemed as taken aback to hear this as I was. Yet, since we were so public, they couldn’t affirm to me that they’d said nothing. Alongside the term “sickbay”, anything they said would suggest something grave.

“It comes of adding two and two together, when all that fruit and fine stuff went overboard,” Griffin went on, looking pleased with his powers of deduction. “Then there was the parrot killed.”

Freddie elbowed him in the ribs and hissed that Madam Captain might not like to be reminded of that. Griffin turned shame-faced. He said he was sorry for my loss but it was only a bird that was put to rest.

Doctor Canning was calling me again but I yelled back at him to wait one minute. He slunk away and some of the sailors seemed shocked that I had raised my voice to such a gentleman. But I wanted to take my own bit of time to assure Griffin that I realised that a parrot was only a bird, yet that didn't stop her from being one of God's creatures. Griffin agreed that to be so and he humbly begged my pardon. Perhaps I wasn't the only one to remember a rhyme that Andrew used to recite. It was about an ancient mariner who'd shot an albatross in the southern hemisphere, since the old fellow had believed the bird to be bringing the bad luck that beset the ship. After that fool murder, the mariner, who was young then and could support the weight, must wear the great corpse of the albatross dragging down from around his neck. That was in case their luck got worse, which it did. I pushed that thought away and used Doctor Canning's turn of phrase.

"I cannot say that it's the smallpox, but whatever it is, it has been carefully isolated to protect you, which should protect you from worry about it."

"We are men, not children." That was from Vilquist, unexpected, and too bold to be polite.

"That doesn't need saying," was all that I replied. I kept my temper. Vilquist, I remind you, said nothing without a reason. I believe he was reminding his shipmates to be manly, when some of those silly coves might have thrown themselves about like toddlers. Then he became bolder:

"Madam Captain, in Finland we believe that a female spirit sails on every ship and you have made that spirit into flesh. But, I must ask this. If the worst comes to our skipper, can you navigate this ship to England?"

This was a doubt couched in flattery. It pulled my back up straight and raised my hackles against a verse of Proverbs, Chapter 27, ringing in head. Always a favourite of my mother's, it goes: "Boast not thyself of tomorrow for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." There were to be so many threatening days! Yet I am sure that Vilquist had asked me so that I'd shout down my cringing dread that we would drown or parch or rot. I had no choice but to boast, so that all those begrimed, unfed men staring at me would hear me, trust me and take heart.

"I can and if I must I will!" I said.

Chapter 12**Man Overboard**

Father's breath was steady but rasping. Spots bubbled all over his face. His eyes were gummed closed and his slack lips dribbled globs of yellow spit through the gingery bristles of his chin and neck. Doctor Canning was mixing something in a glass and directing Tanyel to bank up the captain's pillows so that saliva wouldn't choke him. The lad did as he was told, as swiftly and gently as I had hoped. Then he fixed a pillow-case over Father's chest, as if it were a baby's bib.

"What is our position, Bessie?" Father rasped.

I sent Tanyel and Doctor Canning to wait in the companionway while I spoke to the captain in private. The doctor looked anxiously at me as he stepped out, as if he feared to leave his patient. My fear was that it was clear that I had no precise answer as to where we were at sea. I'm ashamed to confess that I'd neglected to take the noon reading, which was already dreadful management, but I reckoned that we were where Father had left us, more or less, so that's what I replied. Luckily, he didn't seem to hear me. He must have forgotten what he had asked, because he burst out that his head was a furnace. He told to me wrap a damp towel around it because the confounded doctor had refused him that small comfort in case he caught neuralgia. How many illnesses at once might a man suffer?

I was relieved that his wits were cool enough to practice his old humour, which had often poked fun at the saddest things. In two minds, as usual, as to what to do, out of habit I did as he asked and, while I drenched the towel and wrapped his head, I took my orders. There was great deal to remember, or to forget on pain of death; I should stow away what would roll or fly, batten down all hatches, douse the lanterns and the fires and check that was all done properly. Also I had to keep the pump working, with half the crew below watching for leaks and the other half on deck, tied on by harnesses and safety lines. Father stretched his mouth into a grimace so that a pustule over his lip split. I mopped his lips with the pillow case, but he near enough bit me and asked how the devil he could give me orders if I was smothering him. I apologised and asked what else there was to do about the ship. He had me repeat what he already said. Then he told me that I should never let the men see me dither.

"They never will!" I said, sure that I'd learned the hard way, never imagining that it would get harder.

His next order was to harness him to the bed. I argued that the cot was fixed to the wall and if we harnessed him and a wave burst in, he wouldn't float. He argued back that

drowning in a wave was less likely than being thrown upon the floor. Then he shouted for the doctor to harness him, because I must look to the deck and look lively.

Doctor Canning rushed in, saying that securing his patient in his cot was a good idea if it would prevent him from scratching; that way any fits that might strike wouldn't throw him out of bed. I told him that it was to do with the storm which we were still expecting and that we would have to put out the fire that was blazing in the hearth. Tanyel went to fetch a harness. We kept three of them in the chartroom, including mine.

As I stepped over the threshold, the door to Father's stateroom clanged shut and smacked my spine. The pain brought on a tear of self-pity that the quiet little woman I had been was lost to a virago, who was shouting orders that she couldn't believe in. Then I realised that she should believe in them; the door had smacked me because the ship had shifted, which would be to do with a great gust of wind or a current.

On deck, the air felt wetter, moving with no steady direction. Meanwhile, that single cloud had grown fat and was splitting into another, the pair of them yellow as dandelions. In contrast, what had been turquoise sea was turning grey, throwing up small waves like a cat's paws. The gust of wind that had near broken my back had been picked up in the spars and untied the knots that should have held the main sail to the mast. Someone, single-handed, was trying to catch it and roll it back in. I was about to cry out for men to help him when I realised it was the opposite. Some traitor, single-handed for the moment, was trying to roll out the mainsail and putting me in mind of the female clipper captain who had won silver, although her tormentor had ordered her sails down and not up. At least she had been asleep; he'd respected her enough to betray her behind her back, whereas this treachery was in my plain sight and getting plainer.

By the gangle of his limbs and the bulb of his body, I recognised the scoundrel as Spider. As my face drained of blood, the ship slid to starboard and I slid with it. On my way, I saw that the wheel was unmanned. Its spin explained the ship's slide and I knew I must get to it and hold it before our *Rothsay* turned right over. But Mung reached the wheel before me and threw himself across it. "Heave hearties!" he yelled at no one. He must have almost wrenched his arms out their sockets in heaving, so that the ship's next slide was to port. I slid again too, hard down on my hip with my feet caught in my skirt.

"Reef in!" I cried, in a shriek too high to carry. A belch of wind tore the mainsail from its rig. It flapped like a curtain as Spider tried to embrace it yet keep his foothold on the spar. Then a shot rang out and his legs kicked air. Mr Chips had found the Pocket Colt and taken to arms on his own orders, making less of mine. He must have fired into the sky, which was his

habit and not on purpose. However, Spider was in as much danger as if the pistol had nuzzled his heart, because all he had to cling to was canvas which was flattening, fold by bunch, out of his grasp. At any moment, he would plummet onto the boards. That might have been just punishment for his haughty spirit, fair and square, except we couldn't afford to lose him. To lose anyone's life on a ship so lightly manned was to shiver the timbers under all of us.

I told Chips to keep the pistol trained on him, as if to use it had been my idea. It might have needed reloading, but I was hoping that no one would think of that. In the meantime, I sent Freddie, Vilquist and Cornish up the mast to heave in the sail and its human weight, which, although the men jumped to it and did their best, continued to pin the sail where it was. They swung another line at their stupid shipmate, yelling that he must grab it and swing to naked spar. Spider must have been too petrified to reach for it; it passed him by a thumb's length and then swung back to where it came from. Before it could swing again, another belch of wind pushed the sail round ninety degrees and tore it to tatters. As it flapped like a dragon's wing, Spider was tossed around it then slipped down to a corner where he clung, dangling on a shred.

"That's the end," I thought, as I saw him weaken. It would have been, but the ship slid again and tipped so far to starboard that the spar leaned over the water. When Spider fell, which he did with a ghastly cry, he wasn't brained against the boards. He was on his way to drowning.

The first thing was to bring the wheel round and raise the starboard side, in case we all followed Spider. That task was harder done than said. Mung's every muscle quivered and sweated, with his powerful arms stretched taut across the wheel and his legs spread almost flat to the deck. The sea was mocking us. Then, all at once, our ship rocked to port and her mast stood straight as a steeple, so we could lean over the rail and spot for a ring of ripples without so much terror of being hooked off into the drink ourselves.

I knew that Spider mightn't rise where he had fallen, if indeed he ever were to rise. The hull might have been over him, in which case he might have drowned in less than half a fathom or reeds might have wrapped him, which would be as fatal. But if he were to rise and if we turned the ship around to snatch from Davy Jones what we might only throw back in a shroud, where was the man who would or could swim out to him? It wouldn't have been a woman. Although it might have served me to flaunt my swimming at those sneering mariners and throw a gracious rescue into the performance, a horse-pond and Fairport beach are no practice for a moody ocean. Besides, the rising wind in the remaining sails was increasing our speed and distance from the accident; turning the ship around would have taken half a day.

So I stayed at the rail and raised a prayer, privately thanking my stars that there was no trace of the wretch. After all, if the sole navigator was sacrificed to save a mutineer, it would have been the end of everyone.

“There he is! A-stern!”

Sure enough, there was Spider, cutting after us with arms like pistons and proving that a body in love with life will chase the tiniest chance of grabbing it. A hurrah went up and heaving line was hurled out, but the line skidded short and needed to be coiled in before it could be hurled again. Meanwhile, a harpoon led another rope towards him. He ducked away from the point, which might have had his eye out, and was lost under the waves.

I was about to turn my back and see that the tattered sail was run down, when the groan that had gone around became another cheer. The dark head had bobbed up again, caught over the harpoon’s shaft which seemed about to throttle him. As I watched, he wrestled the shaft down and held it under his armpits, so it became the slenderest sort of float. If Spider could hear our shouts above the hungry wash around his ears, he’d lost his sense of direction but, with two men reeling in the rope on the harpoon, it spun him in to us faster than anything seen for days. It was a story worth publishing in *The Mariner’s Chronicle*, every bit as good as one of our own sailor’s tall tales. But it happened in real life and that real life was saved.

Spider, himself, used the weapon to fend off from swinging into the hull and was tipped over the rail to roll, face down, upon the deck. He was coughing as if his lungs would splinter and spewing out a ton of water. I hammered his back to help him cough harder; that hammering had to stand for the beating he deserved. At last, he lay quiet and empty, and I noticed an angry rash on his cheek. That cheek had been lean. As I watched, it was swelling. I was afraid that it might be smallpox in a form that could take on colours. His nose and lips were turning blue. His cheeks and forehead were puffing scarlet. His eye-bags were going green and bearing up towards purple lids. I have never seen the like, nor heard such chattering of teeth as he began a tremble, which grew into a shudder and flung his limbs about. I sprang away and called for a blanket.

“It’s the horrors rattling his bones and no remedy for that,” Cornish told me.

“It is common shock and no wonder. White skin mottles when it’s cold,” Freddie said, as if it was new knowledge.

“It’s a medusa... a jelly fish,” Vilquist said. He pointed to Spider’s calf, where another rash was growing. “Her poison mustn’t reach the heart!” And he knelt, raised the leg, bit into the rash, sucked and spat. With Freddie and Cornish holding Spider down, he applied

the same treatment to Spider's cheek. It was a primitive sort of medicine but the swellings flattened, the colours lost their brilliance and Spider stopped shaking and he lay still as a statue until salt was rubbed into the bites. That caused more frenzy, at which Vilquist rinsed his mouth with brine and spat it out over his patient's face. I didn't think that was part of the treatment but it might have been, so I said nothing. Then Vilquist said that Spider would be useful in a while and that we might save our iodine, which I was suggesting that we smear over the damage, for another day.

"How long is a while?" I asked.

"A little while," Vilquist answered.

For a little while of my own, I'd hardly seen the use of saving Spider, except that if men are left to perish, the general morale will perish too. In the middle of nineteenth century, with the honour of our Empire to uphold, I could hardly turn into a second Grace O'Malley. She was the pirate who'd left her son to drown after he had shamed her by losing his balance. I felt no shame and could act more generous than I felt. I said that Spider had suffered enough punishment from the elements and that he must be kept warm and tied into his hammock so that the storm, which we should lose no more time in preparing for, wouldn't toss him out. The men jumped to my orders, for which I was grateful. Then I raised Vilquist to the rank of bosun. If he didn't know so much about the rigging as Mr Spider, it didn't matter because, according to Father, nothing should be changed up aloft anyway.

Chapter 13

The Wave

The mercury in the barometer plunged at last. Part of me was almost thankful. Another part of me remembered Father's order to put our fires out. Yet another part commanded the last of the pork and potatoes to be cooked and served before we lost the fire in the galley.

Meanwhile, we should equip the boats, at which I heard that there wasn't bully-beef or hard tack enough to set up all three of the boats. That made sense without verification.

Nevertheless, I was on my way to verify it when our *Rothsay* gave a hop which sent everyone sprawling. I found myself under Mung's dirty, bare feet, as he struggled to hold the helm again. Again, the dratted gusts were teasing him, snatching the wheel then letting go of it of a sudden, so that it swung free before he could get it back and find our course again.

“There’s a current pulling away north. Do we want to see the icebergs?” That was his attempt at levity. I could never fault him for spirit.

“We do not!” I clenched my teeth and added my fly’s weight to his. We heaved and hung upon the wheel against the might of that current and the full turn that would capsize us. Adonis ran in to help. I was sure that the weight of all of us would break the wheel when the ocean changed its mind and span the wheel the way we wanted. So we mere specks of human life in monstrous weather fell to the boards, knocking heads and bruising each other’s cheekbones.

The mocking gusts drew away, leaving no dent in the grey skein of the ocean, with our *Rothsay* sliding into a lazy glide that threatened to reach stand-still. At least Mung held the wheel and had the look of control. So, I returned to the question of provisioning the boats. One, tight for a full crew with full provisions, would have been adequate for all of us, even with Father and Spider lying down. We might even have had enough provisions for one boat, except Father would have had to continue isolated. The only bright side of that was that we could spread our luck and our remaining provisions across two boats, one of them Father’s jolly boat, as long as the storm hung away long enough to let us.

I hadn’t planned to go by the afterdeck; that might have disturbed Father. However, I found the fore-hatch to the barrels in the hold had been already battened down, as per my orders. This meant I had to go below aft and pass the cabin after all. As I did, I heard Father’s cough, not the deep, hearty rack of old but the dry broken rasp of a much smaller creature. I longed to go in to him. I was steeling myself not to, when Doctor Canning came out, with his shirtsleeves gartered up and no collar on. There was dark stubble on his neck, and he smelt of disinfectant and rancid sweat. I’m sure I was sweating too, and ready to hear the worst about Father.

“Is he weakening?” I whispered.

“He’s calming,” Doctor Canning replied, in a voice that anyone might hear.

I took his word for it and tried to pass him. He stood in front of me and demanded, just as loudly, to know why we were moving north when all the charts he’d ever seen showed Liverpool lying north-east.

“Why do you think we’re moving north-east?” I asked.

He’d found a compass in a locker drawer he’d been rifling for fresh handkerchiefs. The idea of him pawing over Father’s possessions disgusted me, but I could hardly begrudge a handkerchief. I drummed up a patient smile and said, “I trust you found a clean one.”

“Thank you. I did. Would you like to see the compass?”

I bluffed. “I hardly need to, Doctor. If it’s the little one I’m thinking of it’s as old as the hills and long been broken. Some lead, a toy sailor as I remember, was put in its way. So now its finger won’t hold the right direction. I carry my own compass, which is accurate, like our information from the binnacle.”

“I can’t get up to the binnacle, Miss Hall. Humour me. Let me see your compass!”

“Reading direction is my business. I don’t ask to read your stethoscope.”

One of his little eyes began to flicker treble time. He spread his hands and said that, in the interests of saving other lives, rather than limping on hoping for Liverpool, we might sooner and more safely put into the nearest port and take on a professional captain.

If this was disrespectful to me, I was used to that from him. Besides, I wished I could have gone along with his suggestion. Any port in a storm, as the adage has it, would release me from my burden of care. I longed for a proper dinner, followed by a hot, soapy hip bath. I’d have given my eye-teeth for a bed, that didn’t swing, in a pleasant inn in George Town or Providence or wherever the flow pleased to take us. I doubt that the rogue current, which had staked us into its back, would have taken us anywhere convenient. Rather, it would have swept us into the Bay of Fundy where we’d smash in fog on wicked coasts. The safest place in storm is a wide open sea. A doctor could not be expected to know that, although such a clever fellow as Doctor Canning might have worked it out.

I shrugged, as if it did not need discussing, and told him to let me pass him. He stood in my way and barked at me. How long was it since I’d slept? Was my navigation fit for it or was I in pursuit of writing my own shipwreck story? He cited the evidence of other atlases he had seen. They wouldn’t go out of date, and they showed that sailing north from where we were made a dog’s leg of the journey that was over four thousand miles already. It would double our time at sea and eke out our rations which were already small.

My skin went clammy and my innards boiled. Still, I kept my voice low and said that I did love to suck eggs but that he must let me pass on to the hold so that I could know as much as he did about our rations. He didn’t stir, except to grasp my wrist, spouting some bluster about good water for my father and my lack of womanly care for that necessity. I informed him that the storm would bring down plenty of good water, and that any port would quarantine us without supplies, because no one would bring supplies out in a storm. I told him that he should trust me, as he had no choice, and I lied that I continued to trust him in the matter of inoculation, despite the strength of infection that it had brought on. Then I commanded him to stand away. Still, he stood on rooted. I knew his sweaty grip of old, so I slapped him with the hand I had free. It was the first slap I had ever given, jumping from my

breast more than my arm, but it resounded, having stoked up sting for months. He kept a hold of me, but he felt his mouth with his other hand. My calluses must have caught his lip. I was proud to have left my mark.

“Is your time of month, Miss Hall?”

Outrage clanging between my ears, I hissed that I had no time of month.

A flush, which might have been shame, spread up from his neck to the roots of his hair. “What the devil can you mean?” His eyes roved over my sad, skinny body, lingering below my breasts.

“I mean that you should let go of me and let me go about my business as captain!”

He released me. I was pushing past him when the ship leapt again and rocked so wildly that I fell against him. I thought we’d hit another vessel. The rocking stopped, and I stood up, or what I thought was up. Then I made out, from the look of the ladder between the decks, that I was standing up almost sideways. I shoved and battered at the hatch to open it and even Doctor Canning leant a puny shoulder. That hatch would not budge. My first idea was that something heavy must have slid over it – perhaps a man’s body. Next, I was afraid that Spider had broken free and turned his shipmates mutinous, at which they’d batted me below so they didn’t need to murder a female. Then the ship tipped back straight, and the hatch gave way into sight of an early twilight.

Not moving off the ladder, I blinked stupidly at my pocket watch, which showed eight o’clock. This would have been the time in Greenwich, but it could only have been afternoon at our longitude. I was sure of that because I myself had let out the logline and counted the miles we made against the hourglasses and written it out neatly in the logbook. I was always as careful as could be about that, noting anything of use for future mariners. That way, if the worst should come to all of us, the logbook might tell our tale. And while I was working out how it could be getting dark, a cold blast snatched my breath and slammed the hatch closed on top of me. I fell below with a searing bruise on my crown and Doctor Canning hovering over me, which sent me sharp up the ladder again.

I raised the hatch enough to squeeze through it and crawl onto the deck, flat and clinging like a centipede. The gale gusted from at least four directions and would have sent me in each of them. Too lightweight to stand, I crouched, making out through the eerie dusk one man lying and another fellow squatting. They fumbled with ropes that the weather sported with, as they tried secure themselves and each other to the mast.

I was going to tie myself in sight and reach of the binnacle, to keep an eye on the helm and our direction. But the fluster of commands and duties I must get around to was

making gaps in my head and I'd lost sight of my own harness. Then a harness flew at me. Freddie had picked up two and had sought me out, as if he'd guessed that I'd forget to see to my own safety. He helped me strap the harness on, but his hands were wet and felt far too cold to manage the buckles. He didn't tighten it to fit me. Catching it on anything might have ripped the canvas body or simply shaken me out of it. I fiddled with the buckles myself, as Freddie put his own harness on, but my fingers were all thumbs and the harness was big for me whatever I tried. I saw that I must make do with it as it was. Then I thought of the pork and potatoes. It is always a help to have a hot meal in one's stomach, especially when one doesn't know when a hot meal will come round again. I asked if the men on deck had eaten.

Of course, there'd been no minute in which anyone could have eaten and we'd run out of time for our dinner now. Freddie tipped his head at the sky. "The Moon's come early to see her work and decked herself out for it fine too!" He sounded as cheerful as ever as he roped the pair of us to the mast, giving five yards of play in case the mast broke and we had to dodge away from it. I tried to act as cheerful back to him but I was seeing what was turning my guts to ice. I have never been so frightened or so hopeful of God's mercy.

The moon makes our tides. The more extraordinary she looks, the more we may expect at sea. In that afternoon twilight, while the ship creaked and the sea and wind moaned, the moon was rising, gentle as a drift of silk. It should have been almost full, but a cloud had obscured it to a crescent. As I was gazing at that crescent the cloud shifted and Freddie swore. He swore so hard that he apologised to God and to me. I confess that, if I had been in habit of swearing, I would have sworn too. The crescent took the shape of a dog's bone. Then it shrank to declare itself the crest or rather, the claw of a long ridge of wave. It was a famished shoaling wave that was coming for us.

Freddie and I grasped hands then we hunkered down under our lines, and clung to each other. He told me that we must say our prayers. There was no time for prayers. The wave reared over us as if we had been a toy ship. Then it batted us sideways.

I lost my grip of Freddie and slid and somersaulted, guts in my throat, losing all sense of up or down, and praying that my harness wouldn't strangle me. I saw savage forks of lightning and heard bellows of rolling thunder. Then a second wall of wave was rushing at us. Overloaded with cargo, we'd taken on some water too. We had little hope of recovering from the first wave before a second of those monsters might kick us to Kingdom Come. By some extraordinary fortune or by the grace of God, the second shoaling wave peaked and crashed before it reached us, but we weren't spared its mighty wash. With a terrific shatter of glass

which would have been our portholes, we slid into the trough that the wave's force had carved into the sea.

I would have rolled across the deck again. But a ton of water sucked into my skirt had fixed me to the boards. My eyes were squeezed shut; I was afraid to open them. The second wave roared off, leaving torrents of water poured through the scuppers and a creaking that I trusted was the pump's brake rising. I was tugging at my skirt to tear it off and lose the leaden weight of it. I wanted to reach the main mast, which was still standing, and stand next to it. But my fingers were frozen stiff and couldn't get hold of the buttons. Pushing my arm inside the placket, I jerked the fastening so that it burst. Then I wriggled out of the sopping rag and crawled on my raw, hobbled knees. I'd just reached the mast and was embracing it when I heard another roar of water and freezing brine deluged over me. That must have been a third shoaling wave. To this day, I believe that washed me off the ship and was sending me to the ocean floor. Trained in the thick water of the horse pond, I kicked, beat my arms and surfaced, spluttering out sea from my bursting lungs.

The sky was splitting with lightning, sheets and forks eating the dark. I wondered if so much light was heaven, hoping that I deserved heaven, which was my only chance of meeting Andrew again. Then I felt a warm, dry grip on my wrist, a yank on my arm and another somersault had me thudding down on every bone of my spine, upon what felt like rock. Yet it was our deck. And while I lay, winded, and the thunder bawled and the lightning flashed, that warm, dry hand gripped me and I gripped it back.

I don't know how long I lay there. I couldn't raise my ringing head or twist my neck. My eyes burnt when I opened them. There was hardly reason to open them. With all the lamps blown out or smashed, there was only starlight to see by and little of that for clouds. I heard a man's deep sobbing and another man's confession. Then I heard Vilquist speaking tenderly in his own language. Supposing his tenderness to be for me because I'd landed at death's door, I made a last effort to look at the warm hand that still held mine. There was no one beside me, no one I could see, although I still felt the hand. All I could make out, because I heard its creaking chain and the tumble of what was inside it, was a boat swinging loose and scraping the boards; it was hanging off one davit instead of two. That had to be put right before the davit broke and the boat crashed through to the lower decks, and most likely onto Father. I was doing my utmost to rise to see to it, when with a clanking, the boat raised its dangling stern and hooked itself back on the level.

I've always wondered if I really saw that. It was no play of moonlight because there was still no moon. My eyes might have been confused. They'd strained, from the back and

sides of my head as well from as each side of my nose where the Lord placed them, to see what was going on around the ship. As I'd been thinking about the boats when the storm had hit, this vision might have been a reminder that they still had to be prepared. I call it a vision because miracle followed, which was that, although the main sail was still reefed in and the two topsails were drenched, torn and sagging, the ship was catching a wind! Without listing to port or starboard, she was moving swiftly and purposefully forward, while a helmsman stood straight and easy at the wheel. That helmsman wasn't Mung. It wasn't Spider or Vilquist. Nor was it any living man of our crew.

Sailors and poets say that when a ship's in danger, angels and spirits swell the roster to steer and to work the ropes and pump. As angels and spirits, they can fizzle into air when the ship is safe. It is superstition, but it has its wisdom, which is almost the same wisdom as believing I would have four children because a gypsy told me. In the end, it's a comfortable wisdom. But it wasn't comfortable at first; I worried that the helpful spirit might be Father's; I imagined that he had died during the squall but had broken his journey to heaven to save us. The mediums call such spirits emanations and seem to know more than they used to on that score. Not that I'd go to their meetings. The dead should rest, say I.

Yet, I believe that the strong man at the helm was an emanation of Andrew's spirit. Another emanation of his saved me from the deep and held my hand, while yet another brought the boat aright. A spirit can be in three places at once because a spirit isn't fixed in a body held by gravity. In that wet, blustering chill, this realization rang so true and gave me such deep calm that my eyelids dropped and I fell asleep, confident that I'd wake alive. When I did, to a silver dawn on the horizon, my head was in the scuppers and, although water gushed past my mouth and nostrils, my tongue was as dry as brick.

Chapter 14.

Surviving

As the dawn spread towards me, it lit a right stew on the ocean. Amongst the dead birds, mangled fishes and melons were shadowy shards of timber, shreds of sail, smashed kegs, split chests and broken masts. Those were the only signs of ships which had suffered worse than ours and those signs were grisly enough. Our deck was strewn with broken buckets, rods, ropes and splinters of wood and glass as well as the potatoes we had been boiling. One of our hour-glasses had been shattered. The other was whole, by yet another miracle,

although all its sand had run through. No one had turned it because all my crew seemed to have slumbered as deeply as I had. Some were still slumbering. My pocket watch had stopped as well, so I had no sense of how long I'd slept or which day it was or where we had got to. There was no way of tracking that until I could use the sextant again.

The good news was that I still had my crew. Vilquist was certainly at the helm now and all the men who had been stationed on the deck answered "Yo!" to the short roll call. When I hammered with my fist on the hatch aft and called the roll of those below, only Spider didn't answer. Doctor Canning shouted up that the roster still included our skipper, at which I almost cried. I hardly heard him add that the lad was still fit to help him.

Freddie was bellowing at me, though he stood not a foot away, that he had taken soundings fore and, when he'd measured them, they were deep. He yelled that the roster still included Spider, who was still tied into his hammock, which had fallen down at the foot but not at the head. When we reached him, Spider was still dangling, in the fashion of the haunted boat, but more like a sack of meal or an Egyptian mummy. He spoke sensibly and he seemed to be healed in brain and body. It was as if the shock of swinging down for a second time had wiped away the first shock and the steady spray of cold salt upon him had cooled his rashes and cleaned his blood.

Those were more or less Freddie's words. He shouted all of them, although the wind had dropped and left no need to shout. Yet when I spoke back to him, he yelled that my voice was too light to hear. Vilquist shouted, asking Freddie if he could hear his voice. Freddie frowned and poked a finger in each ear, pulling a blob of waxy tar from one. Then he shouted at us to speak again. I did. Then Vilquist leaned in close to him and spoke. To see Freddie's shoulders sag and his chest shrink, as he worked out that he was deafened, was heart-rending. Freddie had loved to hear music. His greatest pleasure had been to sing and his habit had been to talk nineteen-to-the-dozen and be in the middle of any conversation. Nevertheless, he was living and not dead. We all were living and not dead. If weather might change that on the instant, each instant became more precious. I have never been so fully alert.

As Spider was fit enough to work and we needed every hand we had, we let down the hammock and freed him. He thanked me, begged my pardon and asked how he could best serve me and his comrades. I think we all knew that to stay awake was to stay alive and staying awake was easier if we kept busy. I made three watches of the two that there had been. The new arrangement gave twice four hours of work to all of us, after which we could rest for four hours. However, there was no way for us to live among the debris that heaped the decks and there could be no rest for anyone until all was cleared, port and starboard, fore

and aft. Clearing and hurling overboard, while saving what was fit enough for use, was our first employment.

It was Cornish who, with his runt's weight and his amulets hanging on by threads to the last threads of his waistcoat, scaled the heap that blocked the fore-hatch and took it down single-handed. That turned over my opinion of him; to pull out one item from any of the heaps risked the tumbling of many other bits and pieces into a worse jumble and causing an accident. I tugged out a battered cooking pot and fell with it on my elbow. The pain from the knock to that tiny bone seared through me, head to foot. By gritting my teeth and standing, it faded to a prickly ache in a muscle. My hand still worked. Indeed, considering what I might have smashed, any damage was trifling. There were cuts, slashes and bruises on every one of us and I was often falling over at the best of times, stumbling on ladders and over blocks and coils of rope. I used to blame it on my skirt between my feet. I should confess that, by this stage in the proceedings, I was wearing no skirt and not much of anything else. My outfit was a torn petticoat and torn cotton drawers which did more to reveal my legs than hide them.

If I'm not to admit to being born with two left feet, I might blame that tumble on the light; it was hard to see until the sun came up. The last lanterns had been put out or blown out. All the fires been dowsed, as I had ordered, and all the tinder and matches were wet or had floated off. At last the bloody blot of the sun obliged and spread out rosy in a presage of more bad weather. Within what might have been ten minutes, it abandoned that warning and shone out like gold from a forget-me-not blue heaven.

Vilquist passed the helm to Mung and chased the sun's rays with a broken mirror. I'd heard of that trick but I'd never seen it. What's more, I'd never believed that it would work. But Vilquist caught a spark that he nurtured to a flame by blowing on it. Then he built it into fire of everything we could find to burn in a cooking pot. From that pot we got a flame that lit the stove in the galley. The stove in the galley lit other fires in the other pots that had been rolling about the boards there, as well as a couple of lanterns with the glass blown out. Until we could find our stocks of kerosene or a last dab of the Watchorn's whale oil, those pot-fires had to light our bows. They were our warning to other ships, should any come upon us. It was Spider's job to limp about and scour for combustible odds and ends to keep them bright.

Very carefully, I made my way to sickbay with a pot of fire, covered with a sieve, to light the grate again. Pushing the door, I felt resistance from Doctor Canning as usual. On this occasion it was not deliberate. He called out that he was judging it safer, given the dark and so many shifts of gravity, to lie upon the boards until the ship stood still enough for him to find a path to the porthole and see if it was day or not. I told him the ship had settled and that

the shutter on the porthole must be kept closed until we were sure that its glass was good. “Shift!” I said and, after some scuffling and a whimper, Tanyel opened the door. In the light of the pot-fire, it looked as if he’d been crying. I hoped it was not at Father’s demise. Looking past the lad, I made out a heap of sodden blankets on the cot and Father’s torso, arms and legs strapped under them. Above the neck he was exposed.

That was such relief. I drew closer, to find that water was dripping from off the beams of the ceiling. It was trickling onto Father’s forehead then down over his swollen eyelids, pooling in the hollow of his throat before running off into the mattress. The water was fetid, salt and oily, so I prayed that he hadn’t swallowed it. It looked as if he might have, because his mouth hung open and his tongue lolled out, but perhaps the force of his heavy breath had pushed the water away.

I said that we must turn the patient around. That way only his feet would be dripped on. Doctor Canning replied that the mattress was already soaked, not only by the sea, and we had better move the captain to the late mate’s cot, which had no mattress to be wet, since Doctor Canning himself had exercised his wits and had the rotten thing thrown overboard. However, during the storm, alas, he’d been hit by his own black bag falling and felt some painful damage to his scapula. By the business of caring for the captain he had been so sincerely fatigued as to be at risk of another accident.

The changing beds and the lugging of Father had to done by the lad and me, as gently as we could. All along, I was worrying that the pine slats might absorb a miasma just as easily as cotton, so that the cot that was Father’s destination might also be his fate. I was considering shifting him back to his own cot and having Andrew’s cot hacked down and burned, when Father came around and whispered that he could hear a leak.

I said that there had been a leak right over him from what was probably a split board on the main deck, and that we’d repair it as soon as we could shift the debris that blocked our access. He whispered again that he was hearing a leak under him. I explained that was the water dripping off him, which it might have been, and sounding all the louder for his fever. Because of his fever, I’d been taking his observations with a pinch of salt, but one of his puffed-up eyes prised open a sliver and flashed needle-sharp at me. He let me understand that a drip on the floor had a different sound from a leak and my immediate task was to listen out for the leak and find it, or there would be little sense in doing anything.

It’s true that all ships leak, even fresh out of the shipyard, but such leaks are never more than trickles. This leak was a flow. We should have found it sooner but the three devilish waves had left us with many other gushes, trickles and drips as well as an oily pond

in the hold. Mr Chips and Griffin and I lay with our ears to the boards at every angle, and in every corner, before we traced the noise to the hull, two feet below the waterline. Strange to tell, that position worked in our favour. We hung oakum overboard and the sea helped us to plug its own damage; as the ship moved forward through the water, strings of oakum drifted backwards into the hole and stuffed in. Inside, we stacked up bales in front of the repair, to the ruin of that particular cotton, but so much had been ruined anyway. Doctor Canning's best moist tobacco was very moist indeed. I warned him that he might not get the price he'd had banked on. To do him one bit of justice, he only shrugged and said that the most sensible thing we could do was smoke it. Nor would our men need to pay for it out of wages, which would have been the normal way. I was pleased to hear that, wages being uncertain. That's when I took the habit of smoking. We all smoked to kill our hunger. A pipe of salted tobacco instead of dinner saved our briny bottom rations for a little longer. I've smoked better since but I've also smoked worse.

And if smoking a pipe wasn't entirely lady-like, it went with my garb. I'd put on Andrew's trousers and his jacket. Those garments had been shrunk for Tanyel, but he was sweating in the furnace of the sickroom. It was I who had not a stitch that would keep me warm or decent. My female wardrobe was a piece of ripped under-linen, a blouse that had torn when I had wrung it out and a camisole that was stiff as a board with salt and sweat.

Besides, I felt comforted by Andrew's clothes. True, when I'd first slipped them on, the chill of the lining against my skin and from the bottom of the pockets had been uncanny, as if I were touching Andrew's corpse. Yet, as soon as I moved around in them, the chill fell away. Most of us were dressed in rags after the shoaling waves and the sailors never made one comment about my trousers. I never caught one man jack glancing at them. Nor had they ever seemed to see my naked legs, as if any thought of man and woman and their proper stations had vanished from their minds. It was I who mulled over the difference. Those trousers prompted stride and swagger, as well as any person may swagger with her features whipped raw by wind and water, whereas the frocks, petticoats and corsets that I should have worn were a prison.

Chapter 15

Lost at Sea

Papers had shot everywhere in the chartroom, so finding the chart that I should be looking at was the first challenge. Even when the right one had been found, pulled free and weighted flat, the only idea I had of our position was that, with that wind from the South, we were at least a hundred miles off course. That was serious enough and would become more serious the further we travelled although, for the moment, according to the lead-line I had thrown, we were not travelling far. That was no wonder given our paltry sail.

I'd hoped to work out something clearer from the log-book which, along with the rest of the ship's papers, was still in its drawer. The ink had sweated and fuzzed the writing which was only just legible. I remembered that I'd dead-reckoned the last entry, which is to say that I'd guessed. Still, I trusted that, even at the speed we managed, if more bad weather kept away, I'd have us home within three weeks, on the far side of a fortnight. I only needed to find our direction.

I combed Mr Norie's *Epitome* for clues as to our position and the hazards that were set in stone as opposed to changeable. With a stub of pencil that I'd kept in my boot, under my ankle and digging into it, I committed myself to paper. I wrote that we were still moving north, running with the wind, until we could more safely turn east to meet the Gulf Stream then Liverpool. I called the day Monday because my last entry had been Sunday. Then I realised that we'd missed our hymns and prayers on the afterdeck.

I have never been very religious. Nevertheless, I began to wonder if hymns might have protected us from the storm. It was a foolish thought, as if God, Jesus and the Spirit were traders and Heaven's justice makes men pay for Divine supplies. That belief is based on a petty sort of human justice. Humans can't help but trade, nor imagine other ways of surviving. Besides, I'm sure each of us had been praying privately. It stood to reason that we had been protected when, in other parts of the sea, there would have been rowboats of keening survivors, rafts of dead men and swollen corpses. Their prayers might have been more fervent and might have been more regular."

The floorboard by the door creaks again. Edie is breezing in with another tray. "Are you talking about God, Bessie? Pauline may not like to. Not everyone does, you know."

"Pauline is a vicar's daughter. I expect she's used to it, and more informed than us."

"There again, she may like a change," Edie puts the tray on the elephant-footed table and fusses with the cloth, napkins, cork mats and couple of brass candlesticks, without candles. "Speaking of a change, could I ask you to -"

Pauline, who can never bear being spoken of as if she's absent, can't wait to be asked anything. "Excuse me, Edie. Bessie was just observing that people can't make rules for God. I must say that I accord with that and so would my father. Humans should confine themselves to human justice. We have enough to do with putting that to rights."

"I agree with you, Pauline. We have more than enough to do on that score if only the chaps who run the lawcourts and parliament will let us get to it. In the meantime, it is high time for another nice cup of tea. I'm sure you've both earned it. But I was going to ask if you would like to come and sit up at the table. I need to get Bessie out of that armchair."

This is an instruction, not a question. Pauline rises. She's sorry to leave the fire, anticipating some stinging draughts. Edie seems to spot her reluctance. She marches over to grab the scuttle, pour on coal and apply a fierce stoking to the embers.

"That's cosier, isn't it? Nothing like a good fire. Will you take tea again? Milk and sugar?"

Bessie stays in her chair. She settles further into it, recalcitrant. "I'm comfortable at the moment and we haven't finished the interview. Isn't there something brighter than tea?"

Bessie's face is lit with hope. Edie presses her lips together, feels under her cardigan and pulls out a watch, which is much like the watch in Andrew Lambert's photograph. She shows the watch face to Bessie and taps it. "Forty minutes early."

Bessie pays no attention to the watch. "Don't be a slave to time when I have company, Edie. Can't we celebrate? If it's a celebration, I'll sit very happily at the table."

Edie's inhalation is audible, as if she's gathering enough breath for a long, even a loud, reply. Pauline, embarrassed to be the excuse for such a shameless attempt at manipulation, removes herself to the window to check the view. There's a dull, damp sky over the beach. The tide is low, and the half mile of muddy sand ends in rollicking foam.

"Would you like a tonic restorative, Pauline?" Edie's voice is so clear and her diction so perfect that Pauline can't pretend that she doesn't hear. She has learned to lie, but she's never been much of an actress. Turning around, she sees Bessie energetically nodding at her, behind Edie's back.

"Tonic restorative? Is that fortified wine? We use it for communion." Pauline is playing for time, but she can't play for forty minutes.

"So it will be especially blessed. We have Wincannis wine. A glass before meals cleans the blood and improves its circulation. I expect it's why I'm still hopping about." Bessie taps another Capstan out of Pauline's packet. "May I?"

"They're yours," Pauline says as Bessie leans down to take a light from the fire.

“Most generous. Thank you, dear.” Bessie sucks greedily at the cigarette.

“If it’s not too inconvenient, I’d hope to stay for another forty minutes anyway and since Edie’s made tea ...”

Bessie shrugs dismissively and smokes haughtily. A man passes the window, leading an ambling horse and a rumbling cart. Edie checks her watch again.

“Isn’t that your father’s watch? The one he won at cribbage?”

Edie looks askance. She doesn’t seem to be surprised that Pauline knows so much, only somewhat foxed that she doesn’t know more. “Bessie hasn’t told you what became of that?”

Pauline supposes that it was thrown overboard. She hesitates to say so in case she missed a detail. This might be a test but Bessie saves her.

“I haven’t come to that part yet.” She sounds sulky, as if she might not come to it.

“I see. Well, this watch was Bessie’s and she gave it me. It was her remuneration, her only remuneration, from the owner of *The Rothesay*. What was that gentleman’s name, Bessie?”

Bessie smokes and doesn’t answer. Edie goes on, as if delving into her own memory.

“It was a French name... quite unusual. If I’m not wrong it was Monsieur Givras.”

“You are partly wrong, Edie. Must I remind you that Mr Givras was a sensible Canadian? He threw a fine dinner in my honour for the five of us which meant himself, Aunt Grace, Father, Mr Chips and yours truly. Roast mutton, broccoli, crabs, dabs, lettuce, cheese then syllabub and treacle tarts with porter or wine without stinting and French champagne before and after. How the mighty have fallen! What’s forty minutes between friends?”

Edie sighs, and checks the prize watch. “Thirty-five minutes. Oh! For heaven’s sake!” She goes to a cabinet, brings out two crystal glasses, smaller than egg-cups, and holds them to the light, as if to check for smudges. They seem to pass muster so she bangs them down onto two cork mats, at which Bessie rises from her chair and beetles to the table. She’s in a hurry now, but Pauline gets there first and pulls out the carver chair, as the seat of honour for her. Edie slings a cushion onto the seat of honour then, long-suffering, fills the glasses. She pours herself a cup of tea.

“Here’s to you, dear! And your article!” Bessie raises her glass. Her cheeks are pink already.

“And to you! And your extraordinary story!”

“Down the hatch!” It’s surprising, given the quantity, but Bessie doesn’t drink the Wincannis in one. She slides a look at Edie and then sips.

Edie gives her an approving smile. “Lunch is in an hour. So there’s the watch ... and what else left to tell?”

“We’re still sailing. I couldn’t say plain sailing but we’re done with the really sad part, God rest your dear father, dear.” Bessie grasps Edie’s hand and squeezes it. “Never mind! A life lived well isn’t just about the good times, is it?”

That question is a frequent statement at the vicarage, repeated to justify tiny sacrifices and great injustices, and to explain the many lessons taught by misery and want. It always makes Pauline impatient and, at last, she says what she’s so often longed to at the vicarage.

“If it was only about the good times, there’d be a great deal less to write about.” Now that thought is out, it sounds so callous. Edie and Bessie are frowning, not in disapproval, but as if trying to understand her. Then they both break out laughing.

“She’s quite right,” Bessie says. “What story could I tell if everything ticked along nicely?”

“Perhaps it would be more of a poem or a song – like one of my father’s watercolours in the hall. Azure sea! Glowing sky! The golden sunrise striped the purple night!” Edie is flinging her arms around like an actress. She giggles and turns to Pauline. “Did you get a chance to look at his paintings?”

“The watercolours? Oh, they’re splendid! I noticed them as soon as I came in ... So, Captain Hall pulled through, did he?”

“In his own good time he did, not without the dramatics about how he was ready for the ground at last. I heard at least twenty times that he must be buried over my mother and how I should oblige them both and make myself into a shopkeeper. With the money I would have from the voyage, I could open up the ship’s chandler’s that Mother had always hankered for. But there was no money from that voyage.”

“No money that Bessie saw anyway.”

“You’ve made that clear, Edie. If there was money I didn’t need it. Whatever there might have been was better shared among the men. They had to earn their own livings. I had Father to earn for me and keep me, along with some housekeeping money from Aunt Grace. Father went back to sea until he was my age now, but he would only skipper sailing ships, so the work ran out for him. Then his hip joints let him down. He ended his days here, by the fireside, keeping us on our toes, eh Edie? Then it was Aunt Grace by the fireside. Now it’s me. Where were we, Pauline? Not that I ever knew exactly where we were.”

Pauline checks her notebook. “You left us heading for the Pole.”

Chapter 16**The Way Round Ireland**

Yes, we had tickets, on our forced direction, to watch the Aurora Borealis or, as there has never been much wrong with plain English, the Northern Lights. They flash up all the colours of the rainbow, so I've heard. I wouldn't have minded watching on another occasion, wrapped, head to foot, in furs and with a hot dinner in my belly. On our decks it was icy chill at night and hardly warmer when the sun came out. As it was, I hardly dared to look at the stars. Nevertheless, it was my duty. The stars were my waypoints – often the only ones, as in olden times. I had to mark up our co-ordinates, as accurately as I could judge them when the only thing that I was sure of was that we were running out of everything, including strength. Still, I figured I had to set a course due east and cling to it. Less plain was how to. As I was squinting at the compass then at the threatening grey all around, the wind itself obliged and veered! It twisted the sails and sent us off in the direction that I'd longed for. I could hope that we would meet with the Gulf Stream at last.

What we met instead was a freezing fog which hid the rail and, finally, our own noses. The only sign of the ocean was our *Rothesay's* angry bucking. As for other ships passing, as they must have, we were lucky not to collide and they were luckier still to miss a plague ship. No one would have been safer from the smallpox had we anchored, and we were too deep to anchor. On we went, until a yolk of sun glimmered, broke bloody and fired off the gloom as if ripping away a curtain. That's when I climbed the mast. With the eyeglass hung round my neck and the sextant hanging off the lanyard that kept those trousers up, I was off to see if I could get a fix on anything.

I should have practised climbing earlier. I blew about and felt my gorge rise and my head spin. I only managed because I had to. No one else was as handy with a sextant. Besides, after such bluff, I didn't want anyone else to read it! As luck would have it again, I didn't climb far or take that reading, because I saw a brown lump on the scarlet horizon and heard birds shrieking and the chime of bells. Birds don't sing and churches don't chime mid-ocean, so I supposed that I had sighted land. The question was "Which land?"

It might have been some far flung British island. I imagined a little port in the Hebrides, buzzing with friendly natives who would provision us with fresh water, warm tweed and meat. Then that lump of land clouded, which is to say that it became a dull cloud floating inches above the sea. The cloud shifted its form and its arrangement of greys to declare that wasn't land at all! It was gulls, shrieking, diving and flapping over a fishing boat. The chimes were from fisher buoys. The closest thing to land was the great mound of Grand

Bank. That is in the middle of the Atlantic and from that I understood that we were far more West than I'd hoped and prayed. I caught my breath so hard that I almost choked.

The fishing boat was a tiddler compared to our *Rothsay*. Her one mast was reefed as tight as ours and she must have relied on steam to get along. Her little round boats, the dories she'd put out, lay low in the waves as if the fish might collect by swimming into them. As we drew in closer, I made out the fishing lines spanning out over their gunwales. They'd have been frightened of us cutting into them and turning them over, frightened too of our yellow flag of quarantine, as well as by the bandit look of our decks, still showing like a battleground, to say nothing of my men's ragged appearance, hairy as dogs, salt-smeared, tarred and haggard. Not that I was any prettier than them, or that my knees weren't jelly. My breeches could do little to hide how I shook in what was left of my boots. I was well aware that our hull, deeper than the hulls of fishing boats and their dories, might get stuck in the dangerous sands or scrape the banks of shells that surrounded us.

Still, we needed food and information. It would have been murder to deny us and those fishermen gave us both. They hooked in the line we threw to them and tied a wriggling sack of fish to it. We wound that in as if we were fishing. Meanwhile, they gave us directions in a sing-song language that was Vilquist's, or some language that he understood.

The fishermen assured us that my proper way was along the top of Ireland, past Derry, and not as far off as I had feared. That was the route that we'd come by and I was heartened. However, as the wind blew up big guns and filled our sails, I must have made another error because the devil took another hold of us. The first lights we glimpsed were off the coast of Galway and, although we were moving faster, that error that took us south, as opposed to east, and added days to the voyage. The waterline leak broke open again. Weary survival was our habit and we mended it as we had before. We ate up the fish and had to make do with an ancient seal, which was tough on our failing teeth and so well-pickled in ocean that we might have died of thirst; the water in our butts had gone brackish too. Just in time, the rain obliged. It poured then waned to drizzle, then steamed off as mist, then poured again. To look on the bright side, we were washed, our butts, pails and pans were full and that water was delicious.

Rounding the Southern tip of Ireland, with all those rocky nooks and vicious crannies either side of Cork, a fog rolled back, only to be broken by the lights of traffic ahead. First there were red lights moving away from us. Then there came the green and white lights heading for us. Had we been hit in the fog, and capsized or pitch-poled, we'd not have been found. I took to bawling out through our speaking trumpet. Every barque steered clear, all

but a pilot sloop from Liverpool. That sloop, lit up red, was dealing underhand. We heard through their speaking trumpet that she carried butter, milk, eggs and pigeons. The birds weren't for eating because they were trained to carry messages ashore, which would be sent on by the penny post. As for the pilot, he could be paid in tea or spices or cotton. That was the way that duty tax was dodged, and may be dodged to this day, without marking the dodgers as smugglers. I account that fair because the exchanged goods were enjoyed at sea and, apart from the pigeons, rarely reached land.

We answered back to the pilots that our cargo had been spoiled but that we had valuables to trade, at which they drew close enough to make out our yellow flag and enquire after it. As they'd all been vaccinated, Andrew's silver cuff-links, hallmarked, were of interest. The pilot skipper gave his licence number and his name, which was Captain Riordan, and asked for a glimpse at the hallmark. I said he must come aboard for that, bringing the food he had to trade, at which he caught on that a petticoat sailor was in charge. He asked me where we were bound and warned of bad flood flows, south of the Isle of Man, latitude fifty-four. I felt my jaw drop; if he was gammoning, as he might have been to get more business. However, I couldn't risk being swept away or under. Like it or not, it was my money or our lives and we had no money.

Captain Riordan was disappointed to hear that. He couldn't deal out charity to us with so much likely custom all around and a loan the size of America to pay off on his cutter. So I offered him Andrew's watch. Of course, I'd been keeping it for Andrew's son, but push had come to shove again. Captain Riordan went quiet. I knew about the power of pausing and feared he might move off to more fertile fields. Then he struck up again; he would come aboard with all that he could offer in return for whatever we could offer. This should include a scan of each other's papers and a chat at what might be done with money to be paid later. No sooner had he spoken than a clipper happened by and wanted to be led into Liverpool too.

Captain Riordan had to take the clipper. I don't begrudge him. He had six children. His mate had seven. Close up, Andrew's watch was a tawdry thing, at least as far as its case was concerned. Its decent time-keeping was barely good for two dozen eggs. I'd have liked to have refused the eggs. However, there had been a hunk of cheddar thrown in with it, along with a chart, describing all the local hazards. The chart was worth its weight in rubies.

Chapter 17**Beached and the Escape**

On and on we dragged for miles and choppy miles of Irish Sea. The seconds dripped into minutes, then into hours, every one of them an aeon. I did well with the pilot's chart, but not well enough for long enough, which is to say that I did badly.

The fog was still coming and going, but mainly coming. When it went I could see Adonis up fore, leaning overboard from his hips. He had to make sure that the blue canvas of the lead-line kept coming up wet and yelling out about it but, all at once, he was yelling out that his lead-line had come up wet on its white calico. That marked shallow water. I saw a square ridge of wave break and I knew that a bank lay under it but, before I could take action, there was a grinding scrape and a jerk that had us on our knees, backs and faces.

I wondered if there was any point in getting up. I was exhausted by the weight of my own bones, and fully expecting our lovely ship to be bottomed and flooded, faster than I could scream. Somehow, I heaved myself up to see the sun blaze through on a rugged, grassy coast. It looked deserted – as if we were alone in a mess again. This time the mess was that we'd stuck where we had hit in a gritty mound off the Calf of Man, rightly named The Wart.

Wondrously, we were no wetter than we had been. Water was draining away all around us. From the Captain Riordan's chart, it was plain that there was a tidal causeway between the Calf and Wart. The only thing for us to do was take advantage of the natural dry dock that had beset us, to fix our leak more firmly, and to check for any other damage. Meanwhile, someone must go ashore and find help in the shape of tugs that would draw us off the Wart at high tide, which wouldn't be until midnight.

Doctor Canning was poking his head through the hatch aft. He had his bag of tricks next to him and seemed ready to climb out. "If anyone is going ashore, I should. It's my duty to declare Mr Lambert's death and its cause to the nearest point of authority. I've waited long enough already!"

I refused him, not because the proper way, as I learned later, was to make such a declaration in our port of destination with a statement handed in with some document from the ship's owner. I refused him because we'd all waited long enough. Besides, where, and how close, was the nearest point of authority?

"If we have hit the Calf of Man, as you propose, it will be Castletown or Douglas." He said it as if I were an idiot, and as if he could unfurl a pair of demon wings on his back and flap off wherever he wanted to. He was ridiculous but I didn't laugh.

“In Castletown or Douglas you’ll be quarantined. What’ll be the use of that when your active duty as a doctor must be to care for my father who is still alive? ... Is he still alive?”

“He has been on the road to recovery for some hours. The fever’s burned out and we have washed him. The best thing I can do now is keep him warm and let him sleep.”

This was my first happy news for weeks. I felt face light up, and Doctor Canning’s lit up back. No doubt he hoped to be rewarded with his freedom. When I said that Castletown and Douglas could only be reached by boat, he drooped and went below. I would have liked to go with him and embrace Father, but I didn’t think it right to disturb him.

I stayed on deck to watch the waters round us fall, leaving us high, if not exactly dry, on a long drift of mussels, gritty sand and little pebbles. I worried about our ship sinking into the drift or tipping off its edge if we started hammering and sawing. However, when Mr Chips went over the side on a bosun’s chair and declared the leak wide open again, we had no choice but to hammer and saw. Mr Chips assured me that the hull’s balance was safe but he showed that his own balance was lamentable. Sea legs are hard to grow but once they do, they miss the ship’s motion. His ancient pins in their broken boots melted at the knee and hip. Down he slid and rolled across that bank of shells until a long grave-shaped hollow caught him. I dreaded that the mussels would close over him and we would have to dig him out before the tide rolled back, no doubt at the cost of some other mariner sinking in. Then Mr Chips sat up and sniggered at himself. He was slashed and dotted with tiny cuts. Any of them might have gone septic, but he said not to fuss for they would bleed clean. All that heroic old carpenter complained about was at having to scramble out of the hole and up the hill again. We threw a rope down and pulled him.

Mr Chips said that he had to fix the hull by the turn of tide. The oakum had let us down again and it would be better to reinforce it either side with timber. He might have hacked out what he needed from Andrew’s cot or the saloon table but that risked letting out miasma and could only be a last resort. So I sent a party across the causeway to the Calf to fetch help and collect wood. There are odds and ends on any beach. Also, behind the beach there was heath as well as bushy trees, with brushwood to feed our fires. Moreover, it was spring, so I figured that there would be birds’ eggs, as well as rabbits.

“What if the causeway sucks us down?” Cornish asked.

“Then we will be dead,” Mung answered. I doubt that was intended as a joke but it was funny all the same. We were bursting into laughter at the oddest things. Often, that laughter took such hold that we wouldn’t stop until the tears ran.

It was afternoon when that shoring party of six set off and the light was already fading. Laden with saws, shovels, axes and belaying pins, tools that served as much as walking sticks and prodders for sinking sands, my sailors knew they must return more laden. As well as any driftwood, I wanted kelp, which may be eaten raw. It is hard to chew but splendid exercise for the teeth and good refreshment for a rank mouth. When I saw the sea floor strewn with slimy greens, my appetite, which had been stunned and stunted, leapt awake.

“Fetch plenty of everything and lose no time!” I added that while they were climbing and chopping and collecting, Griffin must be posted on the beach and keep his eyes skinned. As soon as he shouted “Tide!” they must all hurry back to me.

I wished I could have gone ashore to that island. However, a captain is last to leave his ship and, although in the law’s eyes I was no real captain, I accounted our *Rothsay* mine until Father reclaimed her. Also, the wind was blowing away from us and with men ashore and the rest fore, on look-out or stuffing oakum into the leak, I judged it a safe time to lay open hatch aft and air the saloon if not the sickroom. Then we could have the pine board of the table unscrewed, brought up on deck and lowered over the side so that Mr Chips could shape and nail it to the hole in the hull. If that board stayed fixed outside the ship, the sea would wash it clean of any miasma.

Down I went below with a hammer and a screw-driver, only to discover that the hinges and all the fixtures of the table would not budge for rust. As I was trying to find another way of prising off the board, I heard a groan that made my hackles rise and every hair on my skin stand on end. That groan dealt my heart a kick and took my breath away, but then there was a tormented sob. Supposing that, despite the last news from his doctor, Father had died, I ran to the sickroom and collapsed on my knees beside him, I was relieved, past any measure, to find him breathing softly and easily. He was healing. However, he was alone and he shouldn’t have been. Folk in Castletown and Douglas must have heard me bawl for the doctor, but Father only twitched and seemed to hear nothing. What I heard was a scuffling on the other side of the wainscot. Then the rascal appeared in the doorway. His apron-strings were dangling and he was tucking in his shirt behind. His beaky face was flushed and his hair had rumbled out of its parting.

“Miss Hall! How long have you been waiting?”

“I wasn’t waiting. I was wondering where you were and what you were doing instead of looking after my father as you have been detailed to do.”

“Beg your pardon, Miss Hall, with our captain so much better, all the more so for not being disturbed, I was following his example and sleeping. I’ve hardly slept four hours in as many days.”

“And Tanyel?”

“He managed to snatch more rest. It was his turn to watch, but I’ve just understood that he must have crept off to bed after me. I woke with a bad dream, because the lad was blubbering in his sleep. He’s awake now, still snivelling. I gave him a light cuff for abandoning his post.”

I held that doctor’s eyes and he held mine. Bad dreams were common and hardly worse than the waking life we were hanging on to. I had nightmares every time I dozed. Meanwhile, I could hear muted sobs through the wall as if the light cuff was smarting. If Tanyel had abandoned his post it should have earned him a much harsher punishment, yet I didn’t believe that he had. He had too much honour for that and I knew that Doctor Canning didn’t. What is more, Doctor Canning knew that I knew.”

Bessie’s face sours as if at a rotten taste. As if to rinse her mouth, she reaches for the Wincannis. It’s not her first refill. Edie seems to register as much, but only withdraws the bottle to offer it to Pauline.

“Just an inch,” Pauline says, marking the amount between her fingers.

Eddie obliges, precisely. Then, as the clock strikes the half hour, she pushes aside her tea, fetches herself a little glass, and fills it with the viscous wine. “Cheers!” she says, morosely.

“To female sailors!” Pauline replies, raising her glass.

Eddie gives her a close look. “Wherever they may be!”

They clink glasses and wait for Bessie to clink, but she’s drinking on her own and is ahead of them. She sips twice. Then she tips what’s left down her throat and stares moodily at the white-work table cloth. Pauline opts to gulp her inch in one to keep her company. Edie puts the bottle away. Then she comes back to clear the table.

“Don’t mind me but I must get on. I’ve just remembered that I was making junket.” She pats Bessie’s shoulder. “You needn’t tell about anything that you don’t want to.”

“I’m well aware of that, thank you, Edie.”

Eddie sighs and clatters the glasses, crockery and teaspoons onto the tray. Pauline feels sorry for her. Bessie seems as changeable as the sea she fought across. It can be no mean feat to keep patience with her.

“I’d rather not hear what you don’t consider important.” Pauline affects an easy smile and taps her notebook. “I have plenty of stirring stuff here with only the margins left to write in. That’s more than enough to guess the rest. What if I write that the shoring party found some broken cupboard doors or some such driftwood for the hole, as well as some friendly fishermen who came with tugs? I expect that you let the tugs do their business until your *Rothsary* floated free of those oyster shells. And I’m sure it was bitter cold, but I imagine that the men had eaten kelp and young rabbit and had such a passion to see Liverpool that, although it wasn’t everybody’s watch, they all stood ready to lend a hand. Maybe you raised more sail and found a pilot who, navigating smoothly by church spires and mill towers, brought you smoothly into Liverpool, where a crowd of well-wishers anxiously awaited.”

Bessie furrows her wrinkled brow deeper and blinks, as if to clear this golden version from her eyes. “No, it was still bad weather which, along with the tide, delayed the tug-boats. But we were perched high on mussel shells and mussels, dear.”

“Yes, mussels. You did say.” Pauline scribbles ‘mussel mound’ on the notebook’s cover.

“You had better not guess,” Edie says, firmly. “Yes, two tugs came to draw them off. They were good fellows from the Calf as I understand, but there was still no pilot. So, it wasn’t as plain-sailing as all that. It was made worse by the wash from the River Dee. Added to which, forty years ago, there were fewer lighthouses and light-boats to mark the maze of banks and flats around those coasts. They risked being capsized by another wash from the Mersey, with the river in the spring there rising close on thirty feet. So, hungry again, they had to find an anchorage off some oily beach near Rock Point, and then wait for the tide.”

Bessie raises her hand. “If I may speak, since I was there, it wasn’t all misery, Edie. Remember that I told you that Rock Point was where all those herring wives in their clogs and shawls leapt up and shouted and put up something of a light show. There were flashes all round them from morning sun on their gutting knives as they waved them at me, not in threat but in celebration and not a little wonder. I yelled “Ahoy!” And they cheered and cried out, “There she blows!” as if I were a whale. I was standing on the bridge in my breeches with my hair blowing all round my head. It was on the twelfth of May, 1870.”

“That is right. But some facts had to be changed to meet the insurer’s requirements. It was put about that Bessie shared navigation with her father. For the purposes of insurance, he was fit to skipper for longer, after which Mr Chips, who had no need to prove that he could read and write as well as a schoolmaster, became a temporary captain.”

Pauline is scrawling more notes. The junket has lost its urgency and Edie is hovering at her shoulder, squinting at them. Is it possible that she reads shorthand? Pauline directs her full attention at Bessie. “And Captain Hall fully recovered from smallpox but slowly, too slowly not to be stretchered off at Quarantine Dock, Liverpool?”

Edie answers briskly. “Correct. Although reporting my poor father’s death must have been awkward what with no doctor to declare it.”

Bessie clicks her tongue audibly. Edie blushes and bites her lip. This embarrasses Pauline, who looks away from her to the window seat where the black cat, awake at last, is shamelessly washing herself.

“And what about Fleabag?” Pauline asks quickly.

“Ah! You mean Cutlet. She reappeared and lived up to her name, I’m afraid.”

Pauline feels her throat tighten. Now it’s Edie’s turn to click her tongue.

“Of course, I loved that cat. But she was only a cat and my men had eaten the rats and they were starving! Speaking of starving, you’d better see to the junket, dear.”

Edie surveys Bessie sadly. Her “Excuse me!” might stand for an apology as well as a withdrawal. “Ring down when you’re leaving, Pauline. I’ll need to get that door open for you. The catch is always stiff in this weather.”

Pauline hears Edie creak downstairs. Then she hears the clock ticking in the hall. All at once, she is nervous of being alone with Bessie, who obviously needs her lunch to mop up the alcohol. Edie was right to try to control it and just as right to hurry the interview along. As for Pauline, used to a sip of wine at morning communion, she isn’t used to a thimble’s worth before midday. The extra inch of Wincannis that she accepted is pushing questions into her mouth without passing them through her mind and fighting them down is making her giddy.

“So Doctor Canning wasn’t a doctor after all?”

“Oh, I’m sure he was a doctor. He wasn’t that sort of charlatan.”

“But he died... of the smallpox he was tending?”

“Oh, that’s very heroic – far too good for him!” Bessie chuckles harshly. There’s a pause while her tongue runs over her lower lip, then flicks back inside her mouth and fidgets against her cheeks, as if working up saliva – perhaps against a cough. She swallows and speaks again. “I don’t know what he died of or even if he did die because, blow me down, on the day that we were beached, he got himself over the side and slipped away.”

Bessie is fishing out another cigarette. Her eyes are turned away from Pauline who can’t help frowning at a vision of a skinny posterior, clad in ragged trousers, hanging down

over a gunwale. His black bag is already falling and his feet are fumbling for a ledge or hook to step on. If he's not tied to a hawser, securely, he risks falling at least twelve feet, because the ship's draft was twelve feet, added to the height of the decks above the waterline. That would be like falling off a roof, but onto shells that cut like knives and might close over him.

"Got himself over the side..." Pauline repeats.

"And slipped away," Bessie repeats, in a voice so light and playful that it is almost singing.

"He must have had some help ... someone to tie or hold a rope for him, unless he was braver than you paint him or better at tying knots."

"He had no help and nobody saw him! My men all swore to that, every man jack. They'd seen no sign of any rope, hook or other contraption. As to being brave, men will be lions if they're saving their skins and they'll do well what they have to do." Bessie is nodding, as if that settles the matter.

Pauline, still unsettled, seizes on a possibility. "Unless he got out through the leak!"

"I never thought of that," Bessie says. She bursts out laughing, coughs, fumbles out her handkerchief and blows her nose. "Sorry, Pauline. A baby couldn't get out at the leak and certainly not a big baby, like that doctor."

"And what happened to Tanyel?"

"He worked, for a while, at *The Dolphin Inn* in Birkenhead. That was Vilquist's inn, his own property, not rented or managed. I don't know where the money for that property and its ale came from, but Vilquist was a man of many parts and a grafter. In time, his wife came out to him. She'd have been used to handling customers. They had a daughter, about Edie's age or a little younger. They honoured yours truly by calling her Elizabeth. That Elizabeth pitched in too and is still pitching in and still writing to us at Christmas and Easter. Edie's made her a pen-friend. I doubt they have much in common except house-keeping. Elizabeth's spelling is a hoot, but her writing's neat and it's nice to hear from her except for this Christmas gone, when the sad news was that Vilquist had died peacefully in his bed. He was almost eighty."

"That is sad, but at least he reached a good age. Could we go back to Tanyel?"

"I was coming round to that. I haven't forgotten." Bessie sounds testy and takes a deep breath, which nearly has her coughing again. She thuds her chest twice with her fist then continues: "Of course, Edie asked after Tanyel and sent him our best wishes, but there was never a word from him because he had gone travelling again. The story was that he worked

his passage back to New Orleans, with the money for his sister's ticket to Liverpool sewn into his trousers. He should have come back with her to *The Dolphin* but she had to come alone because he went gold prospecting. I trust he did find gold because that was the last they ever heard of him."

"So he abandoned his sister, just as he abandoned watching over your father?"

Bessie's icy eyes flash. "We ought to be as fair as we can about what we don't know. I say that he didn't abandon anyone. I suspect that he and his sister argued. The only time I ever saw that woman she was out causing a fight. There again, which may be more likely, he may have confessed what he shouldn't have confessed about that scoundrel, Doctor Canning. I'd say that he felt ashamed. I know that feeling of shame while longing to confess. But I know too that the moment of any confession must be chosen carefully, so carefully that it might never come. Tanyel hardly spoke to me again above "Aye, aye, Madame", and when I asked for the reason he was flopped down in a corner, weeping like a girl, he only wept louder. I understood that the wound in his thigh had opened again and ached. It had opened before though, and he'd never made a fuss. I was sorry to see that the plucky manhood he'd grown had vanished. He was less than he'd ever been, empty. However, what I knew was that Doctor Canning had got his claws into him."

"And beat him very badly?"

Bessie gives her a patient look. "I don't expect that he beat him at all. I wouldn't expect a lady to know, but there are other ways of doing damage, dear. Tanyel wouldn't show me any part of his body but Doctor Canning was cleverer than to leave a mark. I'm saying too much now that I've had a drop. All the same, my mother thought of roses unfolding when she imagined men. Whenever I think back on Doctor Canning, I imagine pale petals tattered by an insect. I shall tell you why that is, if you like."

Pauline doubts that she will like it, or that it will please her readers. So what is the point of hearing it? Yet she must. Whatever is so unsavoury has skulked in so many twists and turns of Bessie's story that she can't leave without it.

Chapter 18**What's Gone is Gone**

It all began with Mother. So much does.

“Why is your father dilly-dallying?” I was thinking Mother was jealous. Until late in life, Father was square-shouldered and straight-backed with a full head of chestnut curls. So, I'd assured her that he would be missing her as much as she was missing him. That hadn't seemed to have occurred to her. “I fear he must have been drowned on his way home!”

“He's haggling for cargo,” I'd said quickly, but too late. Mother had spoken aloud what she believed would draw down trouble. Dwelling on this had made her weak, then ill. Her phthisis had come back. So had Doctor Canning's bills and along he'd come, without his bag, to settle them.

“Keep on with the lemons and barley water.” His words echoed round our last sticks of furniture. We'd stood here, in this very parlour. I was searching that bureau as if for stowed coins. The drawers were far from shipshape. With no maid in the house, and so much to be done for Mother, I'd no patience for what the eye didn't see and I knew I wouldn't find any money. We'd no penny to rub on anything, but I'd wanted to show that I would pay immediately if I could. All the time he'd crept closer, saying how practised I was as a nurse and how with his continued care we'd have my mother hale and hearty.

“Perhaps you'd take the bureau in lieu, Doctor. It's walnut, not veneer. Mother would like you to have it as a keepsake.”

He'd answered gently that it was typically kind of my mother, and that the bureau was a lovely piece but that a keepsake should be given. On that score, if he accepted, it would still leave the matter of the bill to be settled. I'd had to agree that no one sold a keepsake to a friend. I was worrying about losing our bureau as well as being in debt when he'd said that he couldn't accept anything that would make baggage, because he would be leaving Fairport and England for better prospects in America. So he couldn't think of our Indian lyre or the Chinese screen with its storks flying, or of the piano or even the Javanese puppets which he'd claimed had always so intrigued him. A Turkish carpet was beyond consideration too, because it wasn't small enough to roll up into his trunk.

“There is one lovely piece that would make a perfect trade and enjoying it will take five minutes. Why don't you draw the curtain?”

I'd supposed that he wanted me to kiss him on the mouth in the way that I'd once seen Father and Mother rolling their faces against each other. Sickened by the very idea of such a

kiss with the doctor, I'd told him that it was far too early to draw any curtains because people would think that my mother had died. Then I thought of the velvet curtains round my mother's bed, with all so still inside when last I'd tiptoed past, that I worried now that she had died.

Meanwhile, her doctor had remarked that any affectionate daughter would offer something to keep an ailing woman out of debtor's prison. Some might think a kiss a small price to be free of debt but my contrary mood had taken a hold of me; the more he'd spoken, the less inclined I felt to accommodate him. I did ask him if I might do his darning or his laundry. Then I'd proposed to get money by selling the Javanese puppets to a toy-shop the very next morning. He'd snorted and said that such skeletal blackamoors would frighten the bravest child to death.

Of course, I'd reminded him that Father would be blowing into Fairport very soon and that he would be glad to settle the bill with interest. I think we were both clear that was poppycock. He'd caught me round the waist. I'd craned away from the smell of lime oil on his hair and the sweet, dry reek of his mouth. Blood rushed to my legs to flee but the blackguard was leaning the door shut with his back. I thought about slapping him but I was too stupidly well-bred. Then I thought of breaking free to smash the window and struggle through into the street where I might scream and run. But even if Doctor Canning had been weaker and less used to heaving bodies about, the window would need to have been mended and we couldn't have paid for that either.

"I can't bear your hands on me," I said.

He looked hurt instead of offended. His face grew hang-dog and he said that he laid hands on women day and night, and he longed for a woman's hand on him. Then his own hand went to his placket. I got the gist but my heart missed a beat then pattered like rain. I'd reckoned that a boy's appendage, such as Andrew used to wave at me when we were children, would somehow reach the dimensions of a bull's or a stallion's. However, with the bureau shielding him from the window, Doctor Canning had showed me what veined and red, poking clear of a rumple of flesh to about the length of my ring finger. He'd told me that his organ was standard for a book-fed man and nothing to run a mile from. He'd even added that usually young women lay happily on their backs at the sight of it, but he didn't need me to lie down because he'd never ruin a virgin. He'd always admired my hands and fancied my delicate digits. He would show me where I should place them.

Sure that it would be less slimy than a kiss, I'd kept my gorge down and set to it and in two minutes the ugly thing had spattered. Its owner had said he was sorry, and even

managed to look so. Then he'd said our abiding pleasure would be our secrecy and that we must shake hands on it. I'd replied that I'd need to wipe my hand and proposed that I wipe it on his bill. He'd grinned, given it me and laughed when I tore it up. I hadn't shaken his hand either. To do him justice, I expect that would have been the end of it. He'd left Fairport that very night, just as he slipped off after having his horrid way with Tanyel.

Vilquist wanted to level with that doctor and begged leave, which I gave, to look for him on the Calf. I could see that he was furious, as furious as he'd been in New Orleans, fighting for his wife but, this time, he kept his rage in his body. It flared over his cheeks and dropped his forehead into his eyes. He strode across the strand with his fists clenched then ran up the hills shrieking for Canning to show himself. It would have been no surprise if the doctor lay hidden. I was confused by such passion from Vilquist. Indeed, I stayed confused until I read one of Edie's newspapers with all that fuss about a poet who had been ruined by some young lord, or the other way around. I didn't make head or tail of that case until Edie explained that in the absence of wives and sweethearts, sailors may use lads for a dirtier pleasure, if pleasure can be its name. Not that that Doctor Canning was much of a sailor or a poet, which is why Edie reckons that Tanyel was a woman, as much a woman as I was."

Pauline feels her eyebrows spring up. What a story! What another story! How hasn't she suspected it and worked out, of course, that Tanyel was his own sister or, rather, Vilquist's wife. How could that keep hidden in confined circumstances? Were the other sailors in on the trick?

She frowns. "But Bessie... wouldn't you have noticed if Tanyel was a girl?"

Bessie considers. "I know a pretty boy when I see one. I'd have thought I'd have noticed something ... not that it makes much odds unless ..."

Bessie hesitates. Pauline waits, wishing she could beg to differ on the question of odds. She doesn't dare to speak in case she blocks what Bessie is coming round to, which starts with a shrug.

"Edie's always liked those disguised cabin boy songs. I'm sure we all do. A girl in a raucous story always adds romance. But in real life, to be sensible, I'm sure I was the only female on our ship. I should have put Vilquist right about the doctor's practices, except I didn't know then about such things between fellows. If I didn't speak out, I couldn't without ruining my reputation. Anyway, I sent out more searches for the doctor that evening. The men found no trace and they had to come back aboard for the tide. When the ship was fit again and the tide went out, the second watch went to the island. They made a day of it,

combing the beaches, heaths and hills. They only found more to eat, which was welcome whereas Doctor Canning wouldn't have been welcome."

"In short, you did your utmost to bring him back?"

"We could do no other than our utmost. Our utmost was our habit by then."

"He must have got away to Castletown."

"Castletown or Douglas. What else is there to think? I can't, for my life, imagine how, unless, with such puny limbs, he was a talented swimmer. But, although I've never seen him since or heard of him, I'm convinced that he's made his way in the world and may be jiggling around it to this day. He wasn't a good penny and those coins run through everybody's coppers. As for the rest of us, we managed as well without him. If Tanyel lost hope for a while, I believe he found it. In caring for my father, I believe he learned to care again for himself. I feel sure of that because that's what happened to me, caring for Edie."

The clock in the hall strikes midday and Edie arrives on its final chime. She glances anxiously at Bessie, who is smiling. Then she goes to the sideboard and rattles out cutlery – two of everything.

"Do you think Tanyel was a woman, Edie?" Pauline's words jump out before she feels them coming and Edie flinches. Pauline hopes such directness won't knock the wind from Bessie's sails.

Bessie only chuckles and taps another cigarette out of its packet. "Do you still think so, Edie?"

Edie sighs. "I don't know what I think, not least because I wasn't there. And apart from Bessie, anyone else who was there, and who might have had the proper information, is gone to glory or to ground. No doubt it would make some sort of story, but it isn't the story that you came for, is it, Pauline? We do rely on *The Women's Herald* to deal out facts."

It's clear that Edie would like Pauline to leave, and Pauline is ready. The smell of cabbage is over-powering the wood polish.

"I promise that we do deal out facts, and one fact is that I've had the most wonderful morning!" Pauline gratefully rises from her rock-hard chair. Smiling, she rests her hands upon the table, as if she's about to make a speech, except it's a request. "Might I borrow Captain Hall's photograph and possibly Mr Lambert's photograph to put some pictures to the article? I'll take the utmost care of them. Perhaps there's one of you too, Bessie."

"I'd rather not lend Andrew's... or my father's. Sorry dear."

"Oh!" Pauline is disappointed and she sounds it. Then she drums up a dashing smile to pretend that she understands and can overlook a moment's distrust. "Never mind! The

important picture is Madam Captain's and perhaps a sketch of a fine old square-rigger, like in that bottle there. Perhaps I could even send our illustrator or our photographer out to you."

Now, she hears the doubt in her voice; the illustrator isn't reliably sent anywhere because her income is from typing at the town hall, and that must always take precedence. The photographer is even trickier to arrange because she has to borrow the equipment from her husband's studio. Edie must suspect at least a part of that because her tone warms.

"There's no need for all that palaver, Pauline. I have the perfect picture of Bessie. Here!" She opens her watch, pulls up the underside of the lid and slides out a photograph. "Take it. It's the very thing. I know you'll take care of it. I'll fetch it in two weeks when I meet with Miss Mackay. No trouble at all for me. Would that suit you?"

"Splendidly. Thank you very much." Pauline smiles at her then at the picture, which is perfect. It might be almost be a painted miniature. It's of a young woman in a dark jacket with a pendant on her breast and her light hair piled behind and dropping over her brow in curls. Her face is softer than Pauline had imagined. "So this is you, Bessie?"

"Yes. Who'd have thought it?"

"I meant as Madam Captain."

"I know what you meant. Almost as Madam Captain. I'd been relieved of my command by then. But the fun is I'm wearing the watch there that I had for it, the watch that the photograph came out of. See?"

Pauline thinks that's a great deal of fun, but she must release the photograph while Edie slips it into an envelope. Reverently, Pauline lays the envelope between the pages in her notebook, then into the inside pocket of her bag. "Thank you so much for talking to me."

"Don't thank me, dear. I should thank you for listening." Bessie grinds out the last of her cigarette. Then she stands to grasp the hand that Pauline is extending but, instead of shaking it, she draws Pauline to her and gives her a smacking kiss on the cheek. Then she says softly, "And thank you for understanding it so cleverly. You'll make more sense of it all than I ever have."

Edie only shakes hands, gravely. "Please give my very best to Miss Mackay."

That afternoon Pauline writes all about it ... or not exactly all about it. It wouldn't do at all to write so much for *The Women's Herald*. She writes enough to fit "Home and Fireside" section, which is limited to a mere two pages. Still, it's just what her readers want to hear.

REFLECTIVE COMMENTARY

1. INTRODUCTION

This Commentary reflects on the practice of constructing the novel *She Crossing* by adapting it from my previously existing screenplay, *Petticoat Sailor* (Appendix 1).¹ Also included here (as Appendix 2) is ‘The Seafaring Maiden’ which is the source document, a newspaper article, from whose narrative both the screenplay and the novel were developed.

In 1999, while living in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and researching in the Museum of the Atlantic, I came across the article in *The Family Herald*, a regional newspaper serving Granville, Annapolis County. The article, entitled ‘The Seafaring Maiden’ and published in November 1957, was written by Jennie Bishop.² In the article, Bishop remembers herself as a child, sitting by the fireside, listening to her mother’s aging cousin, Bessie Pritchard Hall (1849-1935). Bishop heard Bessie reminiscing about an Atlantic crossing from New Orleans to the Quarantine Dock, Liverpool in 1870. During this crossing the mate died of smallpox and Bessie’s father, Captain Hall, also contracted the disease. In the absence of anyone else who could navigate, Bessie, the captain’s daughter, had to skipper the undermanned brig, *The Rothesay*, through storms and short rations to her destination.

I wanted to write Bessie’s story into a new form which would give it more circulation than the original newspaper article. I wrote the screenplay, *Petticoat Sailor*, in the course of six drafts between 1999 and 2004. Beginning in July 2010, I adapted this screenplay into the novel, *She Crossing*, in the course of five drafts. As most adaptations move from novel to film script, this is an unusual direction for an adaptation. This prompted me to investigate the processes of adapting a screenplay to writing a novel through the practice of creating *She Crossing*.

There are many creative writing craft books, especially craft books about writing screenplay. Ray Frensham, author of *Teach Yourself Screenwriting*, describes adaptation as ‘a specialist skill for which you will find many existing publications on the market.’³ However, my repeated searches of the market, the British Library and a range of databases and

¹ Please note: Appendix 1 is presented as a documentary convenience. It is not work done during the period of registration for this PhD and is not presented here as material requiring separate assessment. I have included this particular draft because it is 100% my own original work. Other drafts have been absorbed into the novel and are in my possession, but were developed with Elephant Films, a London-based independent production company. For books published before 1850, the place of publication is assumed to be London unless otherwise stated and publishers’ names are not given.

² I assume Jennie Bishop was a local freelance journalist. I have been unable to find anything else written by her.

³ Ray Frensham, *Teach Yourself Screenwriting* (London: Hodder Education, 1996) p. 256.

bibliographies yield, to date, only three publications that concentrate throughout on methods and examples of adapting material for the screen.⁴ The relatively few established screenwriting manuals which consider adaptation do so in a very few pages, and approach it as a problem.⁵ Philip Parker's influential craft book, *The Art and Science of Screenwriting*, contains only two brief sections about film adaptation and Parker justifies his brevity: 'The process of creating the finished screenplay is the same as if you were starting with an original idea. It is not a bad idea to take note of the opinion of many adaptors: that you have to start afresh using the original material as source material and then create an original screenplay from it.'⁶ In a similarly cursory consideration of adapting other media to film in *The Definitive Guide to Screenwriting*, Syd Field concurs: 'In essence, you are still writing an original screenplay and you must approach it the same way.'⁷ This advice does not sufficiently acknowledge the challenges and opportunities that pre-existing source documents present to developing stories in other media.

Screenplays and novels proceed in different ways and have different requirements for their construction. Screenplays use words to describe experiences that can be seen and heard. By showing how characters interact in various environments, the screen privileges interpersonal and social conflicts. Expressing inner conflict is challenging in a screenplay, because thoughts are invisible. Of course, thoughts may be expressed in voice-over or dialogue. However, reliance on voice-over and dialogue to describe inner conflict risks labouring information, when the process of thinking can be more interestingly suggested by the characters' body language, as action and reaction to events. By contrast, novels can only use words to articulate thought and feeling, which may often be analysed or discussed by the narrator, or through dialogue. While novels can convey interpersonal and social conflict, they are able to more accurately present inner conflict than screenplay can, because they use

⁴ Kenneth Portnoy, *Screen Adaptation: A Scriptwriting Handbook* (Oxford: Focal Press, 1998); Linda Seger, *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film* (Brighton, Australia: Owl Books, 1992); Richard Krevolin, *How to Adapt Anything into a Screenplay* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2003).

⁵ See Dwight V. Swain, 'Adaptation and Its Problems,' *Film Scriptwriting, a Practical Manual* 2nd edn. (London: Focal Press, 1988) pp. 195-200 or Robert McKee, 'Problems and Solutions', *Story: Substance, structure, style and the principles of screenwriting* (London: Methuen, 1999) pp. 364-70. Adaptation features only as an exercise for dramatizing a children's book in Andrew Horton, *Writing The Character-centred Screenplay* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) pp. 134-137.

⁶ Philip Parker, *The Art and Science of Screenwriting* 2nd edn. (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2008) p. 58. The first brief section addresses accessing rights to the source. In the second section, Parker describes eight plots, which might underlie all stories (p. 75).

⁷ Syd Field, *The Definitive Guide to Screenwriting* (London: Ebury Press, 2003) p. 323.

precise words to describe and explicate defined points of view. As Robert McKee writes in his short section on adapting for the screen in *Story*: ‘The unique strength and wonder of the novel is the dramatization of inner conflict ... In the novel extra-personal conflict is delineated through description, word pictures of characters struggling with society or environment, while personal conflict is shaped through dialogue.’⁸

Dennis J. Packard’s *The Film Novelist: Writing A Screenplay and a Short Novel in 15 Weeks* is unique in invoking the category of ‘film-novels that read like movies in our heads.’⁹ Film-novels are fictions (usually about 30,000 words, narrated in scenes of visual action and dialogue) written specifically with a view to film adaptation. Packard proposes that such a film-novel will provoke film production companies to subsequently commission the author’s screenplay of the same narrative. Packard refers to episodes from canonical American and European literature and films. Then he demonstrates how a section of a novel may become a scene of film and *vice versa*. He does not explore the adaptation process of writing an original narrative as a screenplay and a film-novel (or novella) from beginning to end.

In the course of this research, I have found no sustained reflections by other writers who have turned their screenplays into novels. Moreover, the novels that result from adapting from another medium seem to attract little academic analysis either as artefacts, which are called novelizations, or as theorizations of their creative process, which is also called novelization. As ‘novelization’ exists today as a term with several mixed categories of academic usage, but not often those employed in this Commentary, I have thought it best to give an overview of how the word ‘novelization’ is currently applied.

As Simone Murray has observed in her essay ‘Materializing Adaptation Theory: the Adaptation Industry,’ the expanding range of commercial novelizations, has created a need to theorize the processes of adaptation.¹⁰ I was expecting to find such material when I searched for ‘novelization,’ as a distinct subject field as well as a word in object titles and their abstracts in ProQuest’s Literature Online (LION). What I found was a fascinating but sometimes misleading range of secondary literature that refers to a seemingly endless and seamless variety of subjects and objects. By far the most common use of ‘novelization’ is in

⁸ Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting* (London: Methuen, 1999) p. 365.

⁹ Dennis J. Packard, *Writing A Screenplay and a Short Novel in 15 weeks* (London: Continuum, 2011) p. 39.

¹⁰ Simone Murray, ‘Materializing Adaptation Theory: the Adaptation Industry,’ *Literature/Film Quarterly* 36 (2008) pp. 4-20.

conjunction with straightforwardly historical studies, such as Adrienne L. Maclean's account of film stories retold in early twentieth-century women's magazines.¹¹ Another example is Ros Ballaster's examination of how British Georgian novels allude to British Georgian plays, and *vice versa*.¹² The term 'novelization' is also used to address the hermeneutics passing between novels and other types of media. Among the many discussions of adaptations of Shakespeare is Douglas Lanier's analysis, theorized by way of Deleuze and Guatarri, about Shakespeare's plays adapted for graphic novels ('Shakespeare as a collectively created, adaptational rhizome rather than a body of texts appropriated by single adaptors').¹³ Rita Charon, a practitioner of medicine as well as an academic, uses the term 'novelization' to reflect on the way her physicality intersects with the physicalities of her patients through a reading of Henry James's novel, *The Golden Bowl* (1904).¹⁴ On account of its title, Calvin Reid's article, 'Script Lit Turns Unused Screenplays into e-Novellas,' may appear to cover similar ground to my thesis.¹⁵ However, Reid's report is a brief overview of an entrepreneur's new novelization company, describing the company's aims, current projects and approaches to commercial production. Reid's only mention of a writer's process is to note that the publisher requires all of the film's dialogue to be included in its novelization.

The above citations of secondary literature are not exhaustive. However, they accurately represent a range of critical work which the authors associate with novelization. The *Oxford English Dictionary's* earliest citation for a 'novelization' refers to a 1995 electronic edition of the journal *Magill's Survey of Cinema*, which discusses 'The process of "Novelization": a book created from the screenplay of a film in order to capitalize on the film's success.' Thomas Van Parys uses novelization in the same sense as the *OED*, when he analyses the commercial practices of the film and publishing industries. Without theorizing their creative practice Van Parys examines the output of professional novelizers who, chosen

¹¹ Adrienne L. Maclean, 'New Films in Story Form: Movie Story Magazines and their Spectatorship,' *Cinema Journal* 42 (2003) pp. 3-26, p. 9.

¹² Ros Ballaster, 'Rivals for the Repertory: Theatre and Novel in Georgian London,' *Restoration and 18th Century Theatre Research* 27 (2012) pp. 5-24.

¹³ Douglas Lanier, 'Recent Shakespeare adaptation and the mutations of cultural capital,' *Shakespeare Studies* 38 (2010) pp.104-113.

¹⁴ Rita Charon, 'The Novelization of the Body, or, How Medicine and Stories Need One Another,' *Narrative* 19 (2011) pp. 33-50.

¹⁵ Calvin Reid, 'Script Lit Turns Unused Screenplays into e-Novellas,' *Publishers' Weekly* 260 (2013) pp. 8-9.

by a publisher and working to tight deadlines, adapt screenplays to novels.¹⁶ Such novelizations are usually longer than ‘film novels,’ and differ in purpose. Whereas a film novel aims to persuade producers to film its accompanying screenplay, a commercial novelization supports a film that has been produced, and explicates, comments and reflects its concepts, as well as its characters and conflicts, to support what Randall D. Larson calls the ‘parenthetical perspective.’¹⁷ Novelizers are not commissioned because they write screenplays, but because they have written published novels in the genre of the script that is to be adapted.

Perhaps the most theoretically accomplished single study is Jan Baetens’ *Critical Inquiry* essay, ‘Novelization: a Contaminated Genre?’¹⁸ Baetens argues that, ‘Whatever claims to purity a cultural form may entertain along its historical trajectory, the *creative* presence of residues has an incontestable and productive mediatic and generic reality.’ In other words, Baetens acknowledges creativity as a disruptive, unpredictable category, but he also construes novelization as a material procedure amenable to historical inquiries concerning processes of adaptation.

There is an absence of discussion about the creative process of novelization, which is what this reflective Commentary addresses. I will examine my novelization through a series of experiments, and deliberate on the outcomes. These experiments will address the issues of narrative content and construction, expression of character, dialogue, description, the management of conflict and points of view. All of these have variations which are distinctive to the two different forms of narrative I have written.

In tracing the differences between writing screenplay and novels, I also observe the similarities. I examine the adjustments that might need to be made to meet a new context, rather as a translator observes the adjustments made in speaking or writing in another language while communicating an appropriate equivalent from the original. Also, I will

¹⁶ Thomas Van Parys, ‘The Commercial Novelization: Research, History, Differentiation,’ *Literature/Film Quarterly* 37 (2009) pp. 305-317. Van Parys and I were on the same panel, ‘Adapting from the Screen’, at the *Collaboration and Adaptation* Conference at University College, Cork, October 2014. His paper was on ‘Novelizing the Contemporary TV Series: David Hewson’s *The Killing*’ (London: Pan Macmillan, 2012). Hewson, who has written at least thirteen crime novels, novelized screenwriter’s Soren Svestrup’s *The Killing* (Danish National Television, 2007). Van Parys was comparing differences in the narratives and assessing their rationale and effect. I benefitted from his contributions at the time of my own paper at this conference, ‘How to Do it? Practical Adaptation in Process.’

¹⁷ Randall D. Larson, *Films into Books: An Analytical Bibliography of Film Novelizations, Movie and TV Tie Ins* (Metchuen, N.J: Scarecrow Press, 1995) p. 3.

¹⁸ Jan Baetens, ‘Novelization, a Contaminated Genre?’ *Critical Inquiry* 32 (2005) pp. 43-60.

examine the extent to which the ways in which I write are themselves adapted from my own experience of directing and acting for stage and film. I reflect on how to combine the actor's mediation of the self to express another character with a director's more distant attention to the effect an actor creates. I will also draw on my experience of adapting to the contingencies of working with a particular cast on particular stages, responding to audiences and acknowledging non-artistic limitations such as financial restrictions.¹⁹

Throughout this reflective Commentary I intend to elucidate those contingent effects which, as in the above examples, have as much to do with material circumstances as artistic or aesthetic considerations. Whatever their origins, these contingent effects provoke adjustments of theoretical principles during the creative process of novelization. My novel, *She Crossing*, and the Commentary, together with the screenplay, *Petticoat Sailor*, and the source document newspaper article, will demonstrate these processes, and their modifications, in action.

2. ADAPTING TITLES AND NAMES

As I novelized, I was also seeking a new title because 'petticoat sailor,' a nineteenth-century term for seagoing women, seemed to suggest male to female cross-dressing. Cross-dressing features in both my screenplay and my novel, but it is in the form of female to male cross-dressing. I decided that the novel's first provisional title, *The Captain's Daughter*, suggested a genre of romance which I did not intend to write.²⁰ I changed it to *The Crossing*, to allude to crossing the Atlantic which is also a rite of passage from novice sailor to ship's master, as well as to hint at possible cross-dressing in a subplot. However, there are three relatively recent publications entitled *The Crossing*.²¹ By changing the definite article to a

¹⁹ Between 1980 and 1990, I acted with Cambridge Syllabus Players, Uzz Muziek Teater, Paine's Plough and Character Ladies. I performed solo tours of *The Handbag Show* (self-written) and a solo *Romeo and Juliet* (which included improvisation with the audience). I directed new work for The Playwright's Coop, Strange Bedfellows, Jamjar Theatre and four devised pieces for Kensington and Fulham Art Gallery. I also directed *An Inspector Calls* by J.B Priestley and *The Promise* by Alexei Arbusov.

²⁰ *The Captain's Daughter* is the title of Helen Watson's romantic novel (London: Mills and Boon, 1909). It is also the title of Alexander Pushkin's historical romantic novel, [1837] (New York: NYRB Classics, 2014) and Leah Fleming's novel about a friendship between women resulting from the sinking of the Titanic (London: Simon and Shuster, 2011).

²¹ *The Crossing* is the title of the second novel of Cormac McCarthy's *The Border Trilogy* (London: Picador 2010) and Serita Jakes' Christian book, a novel about a shooting (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2011), as well as Samar Yuzbek's *The Crossing: My Journey to The Battered Heart of Syria* (London: Rider Books, 2015).

pronoun, I arrived at *She Crossing*, a more specific title for a novel with a female protagonist and a feminist theme.

I also changed the historical Bessie Pritchard Hall's name to Liza Eden in *Petticoat Sailor*. The new name eased my inhibitions, which I discuss later in this Commentary, about representing a real person and allowed me to develop my protagonist as freely as if she had been fictional. In all previous drafts of *She Crossing* she is called Liza. In this fifth and final draft, I have contracted her historical name to Bessie Hall, which is how I refer to her as the fictional person in this Commentary. This is to distinguish her from Bessie Pritchard Hall (the real person who lived in Nova Scotia), who is also referred to in this Commentary. When writing about the screenplay, I refer to her by the name of her character in that document, which is Liza.

3. THE BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

The twin narratives of the screenplay, *Petticoat Sailor*, and the novel, *She Crossing*, have developed gradually. Inevitably, to some degree, they draw on my own biography. Aged nine, I wrote an illustrated story about smugglers. At about the same time, I enjoyed learning the rudiments of crewing in a dinghy on a choppy lake. Since that occasion, I have only sailed on ships with engines, and as a passenger. While I know, in principle, how a beached ship may be floated, how a pump works and how to make sense of a maritime chart, this knowledge derives from studying in maritime libraries and listening to the patient explanations of sailing experts.

My undergraduate thesis in English and Drama (Manchester 1979) was based on Samuel Taylor Coleridge's narrative poem 'The Rime of The Ancient Mariner.' I was intrigued that the shooting of the albatross was based on the report of an actual historical voyage.²² However, perhaps the clearest starting point, some seventeen years ago, was a conversation with the poet Anna Robinson, one of the readers of the current draft of the novel. Anna, who has published three poetry collections, was considering writing a dissertation about female sailors living before the twentieth century.²³ Fascinated that such

²² Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) adapts George Shelvocke's prose account of *A Voyage Round The World By Way of The Great South Sea* (1723) during which narrative his second captain kills an albatross.

²³ Anna Robinson's poetry collections are *Songs from the Flats* (London: Hearing Eye, 2005), *The Finders of London* (London: Enitharmon Press, 2010) and *Into the Woods* (London: Enitharmon Press, 2014).

female sailors existed concurrently with the superstition about women aboard threatening a ship's safety, I suggested that Anna and I should combine our skills to make a documentary about seafaring women and the myths and legends which surrounded them.

The documentary's first title was *Bad Luck at Sea*.²⁴ My first plan was to write a series of six ten-minute mini-documentaries. Having written several ten-minute fictional dramas, I felt confident about shaping material to ten minutes of screen-time, which was an appropriate length to play in museums. I was also aware that ten-minute films were programmed at film festivals and, if only enough money was raised to make the pilot installment, a film festival might be a platform to attract finance for the remaining five episodes. I composed an outline for the series when I was living in Nova Scotia and pitched it to five local producers. Of the three producers who offered to develop the project, I chose to work with Anne-Marie Varner from Tri-Media, an independent film company based in Halifax, Nova Scotia. I agreed with her suggestion that the title should be changed to *Wicked Women of the Sea* in order to emphasize the historic transgression into a man's world, an aspect which might not have been immediately apparent to some viewers.

In May 1999, Anne-Marie Varner arranged a commission for *Wicked Women of The Sea* from the Canadian History TV Channel (www.history.ca), who wanted thirteen half-hour episodes instead of six ten-minute episodes. At first, I was delighted. I had already written two episodes in a hybrid style that evokes Robert Stam's description of adaptation. They were 'a meeting place of different species [combining] the composite language of cinema ... the visuals of painting, and photography, movement of dance, the décor of architecture, the harmonies of music and the performance of theatre.'²⁵ I was envisaging dynamic camera movements which would accelerate, slow, stretch and telescope time to enhance a poetic sense of reality. Yet I knew that style could not make up for the paucity of visual evidence, in the form of existing relevant artefacts which could be filmed. This meant that six-and-half hours of viewing risked outrunning audience curiosity and credence.

I had also wanted to compose a sound-track of dialogues between characters, intersected by women's choruses and various female voices delivering monologues,

²⁴ There are many superstitions that present women as bad luck aboard and in shipyards, although the naked female form calms a rough sea and a witch can whistle up a wind to bring a ship home as well as wreck it. It is also believed that women are better navigators than men and that they distract sailors from duties. www.plimsoll.org/SeaPeople/womenandthesea/theearlydaysofwomenatsea/default/asp (accessed 20.06. 2015).

²⁵ Robert Stam, 'Introduction,' Robert Stam and Alexandra Raengo (eds.) *Literature and Film: The Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (London: Blackwell, 2005) pp.1-51, p.23.

folksongs and poems. However, I came to realize that so many women's voices would be confusing without relevant images accompanying them. Moreover, the titles of each episode promoted different women going to sea, in nominally different roles, but too many individuals were displaying similar stoic courage in similar circumstances through similar actions and reactions in locations only varied by time. On the Aristotelian basis that character is action, as characters' actions and reactions build plot, my subjects' similar actions and reactions meant that they shared the same dramatic role. A fiction would have amalgamated the characters and their narratives into one protagonist and one story.

I doubted that I could sustain my own interest in a documentary series that made such a reiterative argument. Nevertheless, I was still impelled to address the main fact of the narrative, which is that ordinary women leading men are under-represented in fiction and by mainstream history. Eventually, I decided to withdraw my documentary proposal in order to apply my research to writing a fictional screenplay, in which an obscure historical woman would occupy centre stage.

I chose the Nova Scotian Victorian, Bessie Pritchard Hall, to be my protagonist, aware that her completion of her challenging voyage was a hopeful metaphor for my new venture of writing a historical screenplay set at sea. I had already written one broadcast historical radio play, *Heroines*, set in 1841.²⁶ The themes of feminine empowerment and transgression run through much of my other dramatic work. *Getting Off*, my first original feature-length screenplay, developed with the BBC, is about a woman who murders an abusive husband.²⁷ My thirty-minute screenplay, *The Unicyclist*, is about a street performer who creates her own solo-show.²⁸ *Short, White, Pleated*, is a ten-minute film about a man's empowerment through wearing a skirt.²⁹ *The Pick Up*, a three-minute film, is about a mother who is a terrorist.³⁰ Bessie Pritchard Hall's story also confronts expectations of gender.

In May 2005, Elephant Films, the independent film company which had optioned *Petticoat Sailor* with a view to producing it for cinema, decided not to produce it because of the expense of period costumes, filming at sea, and aboard a square-rigged sailing ship. This

²⁶ *Heroines*, dir. Richard Shannon (LBC Radio, 1996).

²⁷ Georgina Lock, *Getting Off* (in development BBC, 1993-5).

²⁸ Georgina Lock, *The Unicyclist*, dir. Mary Soan, (UK: In the Picture Productions, 1995).

²⁹ Georgina Lock, *Short, White, Pleated*, dir. Georgina Lock, (UK: Handstand Films, 2002).

³⁰ Georgina Lock, *The Pick Up*, dir. Georgina Lock, (UK: Handstand Films, 2006).

was a contingent decision which prompted my contingent reaction. When my script was returned to me, I realized how deeply I was committed to communicating the historical episode that I had based it on, a narrative which addressed presumptions about Victorian women. I was determined to find another way of bringing Bessie's story before a public.

This was the first time that I felt impelled to adapt one of my screenplays. I had written other screenplays which had not been filmed, but I had never considered novelizing them. Perhaps this is because these screenplays are fictions, whereas *Petticoat Sailor* was built on a real woman's achievement. Virginia Woolf had a similar perception when she writes: 'There is a virtue in truth; it has an almost mystic power. Like radium, it seems able to give off forever and ever grains of energy, atoms of light. It stimulates the mind, which is endowed with a curious energy in this direction as no fiction, however artful or highly-coloured, can stimulate it.'³¹

I might have adapted the screenplay to radio, which takes the listener everywhere cheaply. I considered making the sea into a speaking character and, as I had in my historical play *Heroines*, creating radio's illusion of intimacy with a single listener. However, Bessie Hall offered no intimate secrets. Moreover, a radio text is still a performance text and, as adaptation theorist Thomas Leitch observes, 'requires interpretation first by its performers then by its audience – whereas a literary text requires interpretation only by its readers.'³² Even auteur directors must rely on input from other professionals while any writer, producing alone, maintains a creative control which I wanted to re-experience.

Jamie O'Neill, who started his award-winning novel, *At Swim, Two Boys*, as a screenplay, makes this point in an interview with Carlin M. Wragg, editor of Open Loop Press. O'Neill explains: 'It started life as a film script actually. I thought it would make a good film ... So I thought I'd have a go at the film script, at doing it that way, and after I'd been doing it for a while I realized I wanted to go into more depth and really a film script couldn't do that, maybe a director could bring that out from a film script, but then it wouldn't be me and I wanted to do it.'³³

³¹ Virginia Woolf, 'The New Biography,' *Collected Essays of Virginia Woolf* (ed.) Leonard Woolf (London: Hogarth Press, 1967) 4 vols. Vol. 4, pp. 229-35, p. 229.

³² Thomas Leitch, 'Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory,' *Criticism* 45 (2003) pp.149-171, p. 154.

³³ Jamie O'Neill, *At Swim, Two Boys*, (New York: Scribner, 2001); interview with Jamie O'Neill by Carlin M. Wragg, 'The Alchemy of Composition: Jamie O'Neill's Literary Magic,' [www. Openlooppress.org/jamie-oneill/](http://www.Openlooppress.org/jamie-oneill/) (accessed 20.06.2015).

Jan Baetens, an influential theorist of novelization, observes that novelization ‘seems to go counter to the visual mutation now affecting every form of writing.’³⁴ Nevertheless, I had always wanted to write a novel and I decided that I would discover a way of writing one by novelizing *Petticoat Sailor*, the screenplay I had already built from ‘The Seafaring Maiden’ reportage. At the same time, I felt that writing the story of a Victorian working woman leading men in the form of a novel would take me deeper into understanding her inner conflict and allow me to convey that conflict more effectively. As Ari Hiltunen writes: ‘The advantage of the fiction writer compared to the film director lies in the ability to use inner conflict as a method of providing suspense and tension, and in the ability to explore the hero’s inner journey in a more profound way.’³⁵

Douglas Kelley’s novel of 2001, *The Captain’s Wife*, about the seafarer, Mary A. Patten, is also about a working woman leading men in similar circumstances to Bessie Hall.³⁶ Similarly, his source is a newspaper article, *The New York Daily Tribune* of 18th February 1857. In 1855, Patten took command of the clipper, *Neptune’s Car*, when the captain, her husband, fell ill during a race from San Francisco to New York. Twenty years old and pregnant, she finished in second place. She died an impoverished widow a few years later, but not before her achievement, rewarded with a thousand silver dollars, had been publicized just two years later. No account of Bessie Pritchard Hall’s voyage was published until 1957, twenty-two years after her death.

The obscurity of the personal narrative enfolded in the ‘The Seafaring Maiden’ resonated with me, impelling me to adapt it. I used the parallels between Bessie’s and Patten’s stories to allude to the existence of other contemporary sailing women, illustrated in my screenplay by the character of Aunt Grace, who sails with her clipper captain husband. Given the conventions of drama’s streamlined action, reference to Patten in the screenplay would have raised expectations that her character would appear in the film, and her appearance would have compromised my protagonist’s isolation. In the novel, however, allusions to Patten foreshadow the resistance a female captain might encounter, even from the sympathetic carpenter (‘Chips’) who remembers Patten’s clipper race, but forgets her name.

³⁴ Jan Baetens, ‘Novelisation, A Contaminated Genre?’ *Critical Inquiry* 32 (2005) pp. 43-60, p. 44.

³⁵ Ari Hiltunen, *Aristotle in Hollywood* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2002) p. 72.

³⁶ Douglas Kelley, *The Captain’s Wife* (New York: Dutton Books, Penguin Group, 2001).
www.maritimeheritage.org/captains/patten/joshua/html (accessed 20.06. 2015).

As Bessie watches the sails raised for more speed against her orders, she remembers how Patten's orders were also disobeyed, with the difference that Patten's sails were shortened to reduce speed (p. 91). She does not know Patten's name.

Like Patten, Bessie Pritchard Hall had no Captain's Certificate. The first Captain's Certificate to be awarded to a woman went to another Canadian in 1911.³⁷ Women's status and identity depended on their male relations. The title of Kelley's novel reflects this reality. The related website, where reportage about Mary A. Patten is accessed under her husband's name, suggests this diminished agency continues.³⁸ The novel's narration contributes to the reduction of Patten's agency by the author's omniscient voice which balances her subjectivity with other characters in the novel. This was another prompt for me to retell the fabula of the female captain, to emphasise Bessie's individuality and to clarify that her achievement was separate from her male relations.

4. METHODS AND APPLICATION OF RESEARCH

This project researches my methodology of novelizing a screenplay, the ways I write and the ways in which my writing has developed. This includes exploring a range of literary forms, as well as visual and sonic media. A further element of this project is my historical and maritime research, informed by a range of methods and sources. As Robert Mayer writes in his critique of Patrick Keiller's feature-length films *London* and *Robinson in Space*, 'films are indebted to literary texts – not as adaptations but rather as collections of elements drawn from a wide variety of verbal and visual texts.'³⁹ This is also true of my novelization. I have assembled its content by making 'raids across boundaries' into material originating in the documentary, the screenplay and my further historical research.⁴⁰

Smallpox is a key element in Jennie Bishop's account of Bessie Pritchard Hall's experience in 'The Seafaring Maiden.' I have been able to draw on my previous research into

³⁷ The Canadian, Molly Kool, was the first certificated female captain. www.shipsnostalgia.com/showthread.php?t=25046 (accessed 20.06.2015).

³⁸ www.maritimeheritage.org/captains/patten/joshua/html (accessed 20.06.2015).

³⁹ *London* (UK: BFI, 1994) and *Robinson in Space* (UK: Koninck Studios, 1997), both directed by Patrick Keiller, are assembled from shots of various locations linked by a characterized narrator's voice-over. Robert Mayer, 'Not Adaptation but Drifting: Patrick Keiller, Daniel Defoe and The Relationship Between Film and Literature,' *Eighteenth Century Fiction* 16 (2004) pp. 803-827, p. 825

⁴⁰ Virginia Woolf, *Roger Fry: a Biography* [1940] (London: Hogarth Press, 1991) p. 239.

the disease, which I had collected to write a chapter about Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1690–1762), who introduced inoculation to Europe from Asia in 1719.⁴¹ I had also read historical studies about women involved in piracy and the military.⁴² Since then, I have read and watched a range of fictional and non-fictional narratives set at sea. As well as studying seascapes in photographs and paintings, I have visited ports and maritime museums, and boarded brigs, frigates, clippers, sloops, yachts, rowing and fishing boats and even a submarine. Particularly memorable, during a visit I made to Sydney, Australia, in 2013, were the lower decks of the replica of Captain Cook's *Endeavour* of 1764. *Endeavour* was originally a collier ship and its confined lower decks offered a stark contrast to the generous proportions of the tea clipper, *Cutty Sark*, now in dry dock at Greenwich. *Cutty Sark* was built in 1869, the year after *The Rothesay*, Bessie Hall's ship, which I had found listed in Lloyd's. At 1444 tons, with most of its space in its hold, the size, design and layout of *Cutty Sark* was almost the same as that of *The Rothesay* and illustrated Bessie's challenge of isolating a contagious disease in the confines of the saloon.

The first display case I had seen in the Maritime Museum of Nova Scotia contained artefacts belonging to the Spicer sisters, Emma, Emily, Antoinette and Adelia. The Spicer sisters were local women who had sailed with their trading husbands in the nineteenth century.⁴³ This began my research, during which the ongoing value of women's labour to maritime business became increasingly clear to me. Then, in 2002, the London Docklands Museum, the principal repository of The Port of London's historical artefacts, commissioned me to give a 'Scripting History' workshop for curators. All the curators, attending from museums across Britain, were women. This workshop group developed ideas to write about past lives on the River Thames through observing and handling clothes, boots, ribbons, medals, models of ships, sextants, and maps. We also listened to and watched recordings which gave a stronger sense of the rhythms and pace of seafarers' lives.

⁴¹ 'Performance and Performing in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Letters from Istanbul, 1716-18,' *Britain and The Muslim World, Historical Perspectives*, (ed.) Gerald Maclean (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars' Publishing, 2011) pp. 102-114.

⁴² Jo Stanley, *Bold in Her Breeches: Women Pirates Across The Ages* (Ontario: Pandora Press, 1996); Julie Wheelwright, 'Amazons and Military Maids, an Examination of Female Military Heroines in British Literature and The Changing Construction of Gender.' *Women's Studies International Forum*, 10 (1987) pp. 489-502.

⁴³ Stanley Thompson Spicer, *Masters of Sail: the Era of Square Rigged Vessels in the Maritime Provinces* (Toronto: Ryerson Press 1968). Spicer includes Emma Spicer's correspondence with her husband, Dewis. For example, Dec. 27th 1892. "I don't think I can stand to live this way and if you have to go to sea I shall have to go with you."

Such sensory and tactile access, which benefited from curators' demonstrations as to how the tools were used, developed my understanding of the museum's fabricated 'Sailors' Town.' This installation is like a film-set, with the sound-track of sea-shanties already rolling and the smell of wood, varnish and oil, which I recall easily. The process of writing clarified what I could not explain because I did not know enough detail and directed more targeted research about sailing ships as well as life on sea and land in both Liverpool and New Orleans during the nineteenth century.

In November 2010, I applied some of the related historical research for *She Crossing* to a paper at an academic conference. This resulted in a co-written essay about the cross-dressed marine and actress, Hannah Snell (1723- 1791), and was vital in reshaping character and plot for my novelization.⁴⁴ It drew on Richard Walker's biography of Snell, whose full title prepares us for the basics of her story: '*The Female Soldier or, the Surprising Life and Adventures of Hannah Snell who Took Upon Herself the Name of James Gray; and, being Deserted by Her Husband, put on Mens (sic) Apparel, and ... enlisted in Col. Guise's Regiment of Foot, ... Also a full and true account of her enlisting afterwards into Fraser's Regiment of Marines.*'⁴⁵

Walker's book was published in 1750 for an emerging market of middle-class readers with an appetite for travel writing.⁴⁶ Snell's biography intersected with conflicts in India and the Jacobite uprising of 1745 to reshape a story that was already current in ballads. According to Diane Dugaw's *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry, 1500-1850*, 'Female Warrior ballads began to appear in print just at the turn of the seventeenth century. By the century's end their stories became a regularized and commonplace motif.'⁴⁷ The Female Warrior genre is broad enough to link female pirates with heroic cabin 'boys' as well as the smoking, brawling 'roaring girls' of Jacobean drama. It also includes the 'Surprising

⁴⁴ Georgina Lock and David Worrall, 'Cross-dressed performance at the Theatrical Margins: Hannah Snell, the Manual Exercise and The New Wells Spa Theatre, Goodmans Fields, 1750,' *Huntington Library Quarterly* 77 (2014) pp. 17-36.

⁴⁵ Richard Walker, *The Female Soldier* (1750).

⁴⁶ Carl Thompson, *The Suffering Traveller and the Romantic Imagination* (New York: Oxford English Monographs, 2007)

⁴⁷ Diane Dugaw, *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry, 1500-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) p. 31. Dugaw observes that the ballad of 'Mary Ambree,' 'whose valorous acts performed at Gant in revenge of her Lovers death,' features in Thomas Heywood's *Fair Maid of The West, Part One* (1609) and Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher's *The Scornful Lady* (1616). 'The Ballad of Mary Ambree' <<http://www.traditionalmusic.co.uk/oxford-ballads/oxford-ballads%20-%200929.htm>> (accessed 26.06.15)

Adventure' biographies of Snell and other female soldiers and sailors, and the 'breeches roles' of eighteenth-century sentimental comedy, celebrating female courage and loyalty in an era of continual wars.⁴⁸

Visual framing of a breeched female is often exploited in modern fiction films about the eighteenth century, with the sexual appeal inflected for a contemporary audience. For example, when the character of Elizabeth Swann cross-dresses she attracts a male homoerotic compliment in Gore Verbinski's *Pirates of The Caribbean; the Curse of The Black Pearl*. Victorian and Edwardian music hall, variety and pantomime combined the sexual appeal of woman's body, which is hidden yet revealed by male clothes, with comedy and satire, not unlike Terry Pratchett's novel, *Monstrous Regiment*.

I decided not make such a well-represented type the protagonist of my screenplay, notwithstanding my exploration of cross-dressing as empowerment, and male to female cross-dressing, in my short film, *Short, White, Pleated*.⁴⁹ Bessie Pritchard Hall had attracted me because her photograph in 'The Seafaring Maiden' proved that wearing a full skirt and a pork pie hat had not prevented her from commanding an Atlantic crossing (Appendix 2). I decided to underline her invasion of a historically male sphere by inserting tropes from the Female Warrior ballads and the many 'Surprising Adventure' biographies about cross-dressed women, who seem to have taken Walker's biography of Snell as their model. Reference to these tropes also led to the development of Tanyel's character in the novel and resulted in a new subplot, which was more subversive, and more satisfying to me, than any part of the screenplay.

5. RESHAPING CHARACTERS

In this section, I explore how, in adapting *Petticoat Sailor* to *She Crossing*, expanding a network of allusions to other narratives added further dimension to my lead character and also developed other characters' roles, through subtext and subplot. Many characters have changed during the course of novelizing. My screenplay's protagonist, Liza Eden, a girl of twenty, exhibits different characteristics from the novel's protagonist. Bessie Hall is a woman of sixty. Her narrative in the novel considers the physical and mental effects of age, and contrasts her perspective on her Victorian past with her present in 1909, when the suffragettes

⁴⁸ Stella in George Farquhar's, *The Recruiting Officer* (1706), first performed at Drury Lane, seems to be the first of many such romantic heroines.

⁴⁹ Georgina Lock, *Short, White, Pleated*, dir. Georgina Lock. (UK: Handstand Films, 2002).

were campaigning for female emancipation. Placing her reminiscence so long after the event also interrogates the reporter's part in making histories explicit.

She Crossing is a palimpsest. It builds on Jennie Bishop's newspaper article 'The Seafaring Maiden' and other reports of women at sea which are present but occluded in the screenplay, and which include, without explicit verbal reference, Female Warrior ballad tropes. The Female Warrior's defining trope is that she cross-dresses. Cross-dressing was a necessary action for my protagonist and I needed to express it in such a way as to make her a character and not just a type. Liza, *Petticoat Sailor's* protagonist, 'wears the breeches' for the first time, towards the end of the second act. This is not a disguise or display of command but the only decent, practical option, as she has nothing else to wear. No sailor remarks on Liza's male garb aurally or visually. If camera angles were to accentuate the actress's shape, this would be the director's choice rather than mine. Screenwriters are not required to write camera angles, but to evoke them for the director.

What I evoke in these scenes of *Petticoat Sailor* reflects the likelihood that personal appearance is irrelevant to all characters at this stage of survival. Bessie, protagonist of *She Crossing*, makes a similar observation when she cross-dresses out of the same necessity, although wearing Andrew's trousers makes her swagger like a man and empowers her to climb the mast (p. 104). However, her self-sacrificing aspect, which is also an aspect of the Female Warrior, has made this cross-dressing necessary. Bessie has sold a dress to pay the crew (p. 31). She has had to throw overboard another outfit, which was contaminated by Andrew's smallpox (p. 55). In the storm, she must abandon her skirt which, saturated with seawater, has become too heavy to stand up in (p. 99).

In *She Crossing*, Bessie's wearing of trousers after the storm is her second occasion of wearing Andrew's clothes. The first is a childhood attempt to run away to sea (p. 46). This childhood episode is not in the screenplay. It would start the narrative too early if told chronologically. As a flashback, it would break the pace and focus. It is modelled on an episode from *The Female Shipwright, or The Life and Extraordinary Adventures of Mary Lacy; giving an account of her leaving her parents disguised as a man; serving four years at sea and seven years apprenticeship in Portsmouth Dockyard. Written by Herself*.⁵⁰ Lacy's autobiography, published in 1763, seems to have inspired two other autobiographies which closely reproduce Lacy's account of cross-dressing. These are *The Life and Surprising*

⁵⁰ Mary Lacy, *The Female Shipwright* (1763).

Adventures of Mary Anne Talbot in the name of John Taylor... related by Herself (1809) and *The Interesting Life and Wonderful Adventures of Anne Jane Thornton, the Female Sailor, written by Herself* (1835).⁵¹ The trope is also slightly adapted in Ellen Stephens' *The Cabin Boy Wife* and in *A Sketch of The Life of Elizabeth Emmons or the Female Sailor*.⁵²

In *She Crossing*, Tanyel manifests as a boy but may be a woman. Tanyel was conceived in homage to a number of real women who had lived as men and whose pretence went undiscovered until they died.⁵³ Like them, Tanyel may have disguised to access a man's work and pay. Or she may followed her lover, Vilquist, to sea, like the protagonist of ballads such as 'The Gallant Female Sailor.'⁵⁴ I also intend to raise the possibility that Tanyel is Vilquist's male lover or, as Vilquist claims, his young brother-in-law.

Tanyel is also a vehicle for other Female Warrior tropes which I had decided to introduce, including that of becoming a nurse, (which also applies to Bessie). Hannah Snell's first-person account of her treating her own wounded thigh suggested to me how Tanyel might explain menstruation (p. 62). In *She Crossing*, the inspection for smallpox scars or variolation plays with the possibility of a gender revelation, that is a point at which one's birth gender is revealed. This playfulness developed from Hannah Snell's gender revelation, although Snell chose to reveal herself and directed the playfulness in order to claim her pension.

I first considered the way in which writers handle gender revelations at the *Great Writing Conference*, London, in July 2012, when I chaired a panel at which Kristy Lee Davidson gave a paper entitled, 'Writing Gender Diversity.'⁵⁵ Davidson argued that the trope

⁵¹ Mary Anne Talbot, *The Life and Surprising Adventures of Mary Anne Talbot* (1809). Anne Jane Thornton, *The Interesting Life and Wonderful Adventures of Anne Jane Thornton, the Female Sailor, written by Herself* (1835).

⁵² Ellen Stephens, *The Cabin Boy Wife to which is annexed the still more surprising exploits of Almira Paul* (New York: C.E Daniels, 1840). *A Sketch of The Life of Elizabeth Emmons or the Female Sailor* (Boston: Graves and Bartlett, 1841). Ellen Stephen's and Elizabeth Emmon's stories are based on fact. Almira Paul's is a fiction.

⁵³ Suzanne J. Stark, *Female Tars: Women aboard Ship in The Age of Sail* (London: Random House, 1998) pp. 82- 122. Hercules Michael du Preez, 'Dr James Barry: The Early Years Revealed,' *The South African Medical Journal* 98 (2008) pp. 52-62.

⁵⁴ 'The Gallant Female Sailor' (York: 1835) <<http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/search/title/Gallant%20female%20sailor>> (accessed 21.06.2015). For a list of Female Warrior Ballads, see Diane Dugaw, *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry, 1650 -1850* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989) pp. 216-219. The 'Surprising Adventure' genre subverts the trope of the missing lover. Hannah Snell's husband was a thief, who left when she was pregnant.

⁵⁵ Kristy Lee Davidson, Victoria University, 'Writing Gender Diversity'

in narratives when cross-dressed characters reveal primary or secondary sex organs to another character (or reader, or audience) is a cliché tending to subsume or dominate other issues. I agreed with her and was determined to avoid writing a cliché, although I wanted to acknowledge and explore what might be done with the trope. In the Female Warrior ballads and their derivatives, the reader or audience knows the protagonist's gender early in the narrative, but can enjoy the anticipation of waiting for other characters to discover it. Rodrigo Garcia's film, *The Singular Life of Albert Nobbs* exposes two cross-dressed characters, playing first on dramatic irony and then on two moments of surprise.⁵⁶ The audience are likely to know from the outset that Nobbs is a woman, which is confirmed when she manages the bandage on her breasts. The surprise is the doctor's when he inspects her corpse, which may recall the audience's previous surprise when a subsidiary cross-dressed character exposes full female breasts. There is a similar impact in Neil Jordan's film, *The Crying Game*, when the hairdresser's nakedness shocks the protagonist and, I suspect, a first-time audience.⁵⁷ Although some characters in *She Crossing* know more than the reader, I wanted to keep Tanyel's gender ambiguous to make the point that gender does not reduce the crime of sexual assault. To do this, I set up the inspection for smallpox scars and Tanyel's reluctance to undress for it. Just as Tanyel might be forced, I purposely frustrate the discovery of gender as Doctor Canning is satisfied by the sight of Tanyel's variolation marks (p. 59). Such ambiguity would be challenging to maintain throughout a film, however proficient the performance, unless, in the credits, the actor's name is left ungendered.

Dr Canning's role in the novel facilitated the subplot of sexual abuse and the creation of a context for Bessie's life before she went to sea. Bessie's previous experience helps her, and the reader, to surmise what might have happened to Tanyel. I set Doctor Canning's humble background, and the Watchorns' praise of his surgical skill, against his recurring use of blackmail for sexual gratification, which might suggest a villain from a Victorian melodrama. However, I have drawn on a Female Warrior trope to end his story, alluding to

http://vuir.vu.edu.au/cgi/exportview/people/Davidson=3AKristy_Lee=3A=3A/Text/Davidson=3AKristy_Lee=3A=3A.txt (accessed 07.06.2015).

⁵⁶ Gabriella Prekop and John Banville, *The Singular Life of Albert Nobbs*, dir. Rodrigo Garcia (USA: Mockingbird Pictures, 2011). Garcia's film adapts George Moore's short story of the same title, published in Moore's collection *Celibate Lives* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1927). I spoke to John Banville, when he was interviewed by way of a keynote speech at the *Adaptation and Collaboration* conference, University College, Cork, Ireland, October 2014. He did not describe, during this event, his practice in writing screenplay adaptations although I was alert to his references to changes because of contingency.

⁵⁷ Neil Jordan, *The Crying Game*, dir. Neil Jordan (UK: Palace Pictures and Channel Four Films, 1992).

the cross-dressed woman's bullying by a superior, which is avenged by her peers. I did not clarify what Vilquist might have done in reprisal as I wanted to raise the possibility that Doctor Canning escapes. This is also congruent with Bessie having avoided naming or describing his offence until her interview with the reporter forty years on.

In the course of writing Bessie's narrative in the novel, I was observing Captain Hall from Bessie's point of view. As a result, I understood why a producer at Elephant Films thought that Captain Hall was the strongest character in the first draft screenplay. Both as the captain and as her father, he imposed his authority on Bessie. She was reacting more than she was acting. I have touched on these subjects in other writing. My first short screenplay, *Fuel*, explored a father-daughter relationship. So did my two one-act plays.⁵⁸ My interest in the Freudian father re-emerged as I developed Bessie's father, who is referred to as the Old Man by his crew. Bessie's father may suffer a greater reversal than she does. His patriarchal values are confronted by circumstances but it is his hubris that undermans the ship. In my novel, he criminalizes women so that, obsessing about the threat of female pirates, he overlooks the danger of insubordination in his crew. As he has further to fall than Bessie I might have made him the protagonist. However, he does not fall; he only withdraws from the fray. I understand him as accidental antagonist as well as a victim of beliefs shaped by a culture of risk, greed and machismo. Bessie, who has not been trained to this culture, must adapt to it and then act against it, when it is necessary to be cautious to stay alive. This means that both her inner conflict and her conflicts with sailors are greater than Captain Hall's.

In 'The Seafaring Maiden,' the writer, Jennie Bishop, does not suggest that the mate, who died of smallpox, was close to Bessie Pritchard Hall. In my screenplay and the first draft of my novel, he is a family friend. In the second draft of my novel and all subsequent drafts, for more emotional impact, I transferred the role and fate of the mate to Andrew, the cousin whom Bessie adores. This adapted the distracting fact, likely to be considered unhealthy by twenty-first century readers, that Bessie Pritchard Hall had married a cousin and had four children. In *She Crossing* she misinterprets Andrew's cousinly affection, because of her inexperience of consensual sexual relationships.

I wanted Andrew to combine the most deserving aspects of the Female Warrior's man with the sailor who, in the adage, 'has a girl in every port'. The ballad trope is that the beloved recognizes the Female Warrior when she nurses him. By contrast, Andrew, in his

⁵⁸ *Fuel* has yet to be filmed. *Vivian Rivers and Her Date with Fate* was performed at the Red Lion Theatre, Islington by The Women's Theatre Group, 1987. *Daddy's Bed* was performed at the Nottingham Trilateral Festival, 2010.

fever, mistakes Bessie for Sarah, the mother of his child (p. 43). I imagined that he had first met Sarah, the seamstress, at the theatre, as Victorian theatres employed sailors backstage to pull ropes and on-stage to dance hornpipes. Such experience would have prompted Andrew's amateur recitals which, like his shipmates' yarns and music, show the importance of performance to seafaring cultures. Bessie, loathe to let go of him, assumes that his emanations are manning the ship in the storm (p.100). This episode alludes to the verse in Coleridge's *The Rime of The Ancient Mariner* when dead sailors rise to man the ship.⁵⁹

My protagonist's beloved has been through many incarnations. It might be argued that imposing a love story on 'The Seafaring Maiden' is a cliché that detracts from Bessie Pritchard Hall's achievement, sexualizing her in a way that she might have resented. However, a love story also expresses a womanly side of my heroine which juxtaposes her assumed machismo. In the second draft of the screenplay, Liza's beloved was a black sailor, representing the high incidence of black sailors aboard nineteenth-century British ships and offering a major role for a non-white actor.

I concur with adaptation critic Brian Macfarlane when he writes that: 'There are many kinds of relations which may exist between film and literature and fidelity is only one and rarely the most exciting.'⁶⁰ However, in the course of writing scenes that played to a late twentieth-century Zeitgeist, which promoted equal rights and liberty to love regardless of race, class or creed, I became uncomfortable with creating an inter-racial, inter-class romance which misrepresented social history. Although nineteenth-century British ships merged class and race in the fore-castle, Bessie Pritchard Hall's place was in the captain's cabin where differences were firmly acknowledged. In later drafts of the screenplay, I transferred representation of the black sailor to an escaped American slave, and to an able seaman, one of the many Victorians of African descent living in north Liverpool.

In *She Crossing*, the inter-racial, inter-class romance became Andrew's relationship with Sarah. This is more likely, albeit kept secret from his family; a middle-class man had freedom to roam compared with the social restrictions on Bessie and the other sailors. Readers might guess that the yellow-skinned brothers taken on in New Orleans are mixed race. I suspect that Bessie would be more aware that their red hair is not regarded as unlucky,

⁵⁹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'The bodies of the ship's crew are inspired and the ship moves on,' 'The Rime of The Ancient Mariner,' *Lyrical Ballads* (1798).

⁶⁰ Brian MacFarlane, *Novel to Film: an Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) p. 11.

whereas hers is. I also felt that she would be vague about Tanyel's north African heritage and use the term Lascar, which means a sailor from the Indian subcontinent.

Acknowledging the plot of 'Seafaring Maiden,' in which the return journey is undermanned, allowed me to combine a number of sailors' roles. Underlining the challenge of keeping the ship afloat, this gave each character more dimension and more moments of encounter with others. The sailors' yarns compete, juxtaposing entrapment aboard ship with cheerful fantasies of 'derring-do' escapes. These put each teller in the centre of his own narrative. The sailors' reports of mermaids, sea-witches, welcoming islanders and their references to the spirit of the ship and the moody sea represent the mythical power of the female. This connects and contrasts with how the men understand Bessie.

A character called Wrecker Queen, based on the sixteenth-century pirate Grace O'Malley, appears in the third act of *Petticoat Sailor*.⁶¹ Her first and final appearance corresponds to the tenth plot-point in Christopher Vogler's twelve-point quest structure which he calls, 'the Resurrection.' Vogler defines 'the Resurrection' as a fresh engagement with a conflict presumed resolved. It delivers surprise, delays the resolution and sends the story in an unexpected direction.⁶² I excised Wrecker Queen from *She Crossing*. She was a function of a screenplay structure which I was no longer using. Moreover, her defeat and the killing of three of her men lacked emotional weight and, even in *Petticoat Sailor*, she was more like an assailant in a video game than a dramatic character. Without a previous appearance she could not foreshadow a danger that might inflect any other character's behaviour. In any future draft of the screenplay, I would either excise or develop her. Nevertheless, I am considering inserting her in this exact position in a video game I plan to create from this project.

The single encounter with Mrs Watchorn is justified in *She Crossing* because she represents a sea-going wife whose control of men inspires Bessie (p.76). Bessie is also inspired by a brief encounter with a New Orleans fortune-teller, whose prediction assures her she will survive (p. 6). This character derives from Moll, the fortune-telling, shapeshifting spy in Murray Maturin Ballou's swashbuckling novel, *Fanny Campbell, The Female Pirate*

⁶¹ Morgan Llywelyn, *She-King of the Irish Seas* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2007). Judith Cook, *Pirate Queen: The Life of Grace O'Malley, 1530 -1603* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2004).

⁶² Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey, Mythic Structures for Storytellers and Screenwriters* (London: Bantam, 1996). Vogler acknowledges that his craft-book draws on the theories of Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968). Campbell draws on Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of The Folktale*, (translated) Lawrence Scott (Philadelphia: The American Folklore Society, 1958)

Captain: A Story of the Revolution, which promotes female agency during the American War of Independence.

The narrator, Pauline, who frames Bessie's story, represents Jennie Bishop, writer of 'The Seafaring Maiden'. As a reporter, the narrator is also a modern equivalent of the ballad singer who, traditionally, begins with a call for listeners. For example, the 'Maiden Sailor' ballad begins:

Good people everyone sir,
Come listen to my ditty.⁶³

Ballad singers were the earliest street reporters, pedlars who sang what they were selling. Often, these ballad pedlars were women and, as Tim Fulford argues, regarded as a menace to the peace because their extreme poverty was a comment on the narratives they sang.⁶⁴ Women singing Female Warrior ballads might be regarded as encouraging women's unruliness, which is where they connect with the suffragettes.

Menie Muriel Dowie's *Women Adventurers*, which includes three other women's biographies, introduced me to Hannah Snell.⁶⁵ Dowie's book has been neglected. Snell was clearly an icon for the women's suffrage movement as she also appears on the cast list of 'A Pageant of Great Women,' which was first produced at London's Scala Theatre on 10th November 1909. In the same year, *How the Vote was Won*, a one act comedy by two suffragette playwrights, Cecily Hamilton and Christopher St John, was staged at London's Royalty Theatre. These two performances, illustrating the prominence of the women's suffrage question in 1909, provided a reason to set Bessie's reminiscence in 1909, when

⁶³ Samuel Pepys, *The Pepys Ballads*, (ed.) Hyder Edward Rollins (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1929) 8 vols. vol 4, pp. 174-5. 'The Maiden Sailor,' attributed to 'John Curtin, Seaman, on board the Edgar,' dating from 1609, purports to be 'a true Relation of a young Damsel, who was Pressed on Board the Edgar, Man of War, being taken up in a Seaman's Habit; after being known she was discharged, and at her examination, she declared she would serve the King at Sea, as long as her Sweetheart continued in Flanders.'

The ballad continues:

The like was never known, Sir, a jest both true and pretty
Which, hear, I come for to declare of a very pretty Damsel fair
Who changed her cloaths, indeed, And put on Seaman's weed
And then she did appear A youth both fair and clear
Like to a Seaman rare. So that you would swear
That she'd been a sailor too.

⁶⁴ Tim Fulford, 'Fallen Ladies and Cruel Mothers: Ballad Singers and Ballad Heroines in the Eighteenth Century,' *Eighteenth Century, Theory and Interpretation* 47 (2006) pp. 309-29.

⁶⁵ *Women Adventurers*, (ed.) Menie Muriel Dowie (London: T Fisher Unwin, 1893). In Dowie's collection of four biographies, three of her subjects cross-dress, including Christian Davies whose autobiography, *The Life of Christian Davies* (1740) was probably the model for Snell's biography. Dowie reports that she herself travelled cross-dressed in her travelogue, *A Girl in The Karpathians* (London: G. Philip and Son, 1891).

women reporters might be especially alert to examples of female heroism. I thought it would create more conflict if Bessie, raised as a modest and dutiful Victorian, opposed female suffrage and asserted that commanding *The Rothesay* merely extended a woman's normal duties of making it possible for men and herself to live. I planned to set her point of view against Marie Mackay's convictions. Marie, who always had a role in the screenplay, was her suffragette step-cousin. Brought up on her wealthy father's clipper, she claimed to know as much as Bessie about sailing. I intended this juxtaposition to release some of Bessie's inner conflict which the first drafts of my novel had lacked. However, the level of interpersonal conflict between her and Marie suggested a play. In previous drafts I had enjoyed writing Marie's dialogue, which had flow and verve. Bessie's responses, expressive of her class and more gendered upbringing, were often understated. I was aware that her first-person account of the action was priggish, while lacking the apparently unconscious humour of the priggish, yet tragic, cleric who keeps a diary in William Golding's novel *Rites of Passage*.

As an exercise to discover more about Bessie and build her into a narrator as well as a protagonist, I interviewed her through the dramatic format of 'hot-seating.' This format is adapted from a rehearsal exercise. Actors in role answer questions from other cast members and the director to clarify what they already know, interpret and understand about their characters, and to stimulate imagined information that will underlie the performance.⁶⁶ I was intending to exclude Marie, as a sufficiently developed character, from this exercise and, perhaps, from the novelization, to clear the arena for Bessie to say more. Indeed, in the absence of Marie, before I could formulate my first question, Bessie made her first statement. Then, in the course of four exchanges, the interviewer transmuted from me into another writer, Edie.

This new fictional character clearly originates from my research in that, as well as being a writer, she is a suffragette and a nurse. Nevertheless, I did not consciously design Edie. In considering reasons to report the 1870 voyage in 1909, one idea had been that, at last, in 1909, Bessie might have found, or been found by, the child that Andrew had asked her to seek. Nevertheless, I was surprised by Edie's fully-formed appearance and her name, deriving from Captain Hall's screenplay name, which was Captain Eden. I was grateful for

⁶⁶ Keith Johnstone, *Impro for Story Tellers: Theatre Sports and the Art of Making Things Happen* (London: Faber, 1999). Johnstone is one of many theatre practitioners who use 'hotseating' and other exercises to build characters in action and develop the actor's flexibility to adapt theory to the contingencies of performance. Through improvisations actors are immersed in character and context, as individual performers and as interactive collaborators, to devise a performance, to create new scenes or scripts or to add layers to an existing script.

the subtexts of belonging, identity and subterfuge that she brought and which I could develop in later drafts.

I include this exercise to show the questions that the interview raised and answered through imaginary characters, including Marie, who was still contending for a place in the narrative.

A Study. The curtains are drawn. The furniture, dark and heavy, is visible by candle light. Bessie, 60, stiffly dressed in floor-length Edwardian black, sits at a desk rifling through papers, tearing and throwing most on the floor. Edie, 40, also dressed in black, is on her knees, stuffing torn paper into a cardboard box and tidying books and ledgers into piles.

BESSIE: I suppose you want to write one of your plays about me.

ME: I did think of it ...

BESSIE: It would make a nice change from the last one... all those women without men.

ME/EDIE: It was only three women, Aunt.

BESSIE: Three women on stage may manage, but you can't do without men aboard a square rigger, and more men than I had, to be sure of coming safe into port.

EDIE: I love your story, Aunt! I know it so well, but staging a storm can look ... amateur. I don't mean to sound proud. I am an amateur. I'm a nurse but –

BESSIE: Don't blame me for that, Edie. You wanted to be a nurse. You insisted. Hasn't Mr Shakespeare written about a tempest? There's your example. William Shakespeare was a genius.

EDIE: He was. But audiences in his day demanded less of stage effects. They managed with poetry, and besides, *The Tempest* is set after the storm...

BESSIE: Of course! So one hears what the actors say. Set it after the storm! Start with a rousing clap of thunder then a song about debris all over the ocean.

EDIE: I do wonder if I shouldn't try my hand at verse.

BESSIE: I'd prefer a song to make us all sit up. Then work backward and forward in the telling, as I do when I ramble on...

The door is flung open. MARIE, 65, in rustling black satin, sweeps in.

MARIE: Haven't you cleared this mess up yet?

EDIE: Marie! I didn't expect you. How did you get in, sweetheart?

MARIE: The writer's favourite character always gets in? If you're going to write something I have to be in it ... and in the discussion about it. And I'd adore it if you use my real name.

EDIE: Your real name? All of it?

MARIE: If you need to.

EDIE: What I need when I write is distance from reality, which may be the reason Aunt's real story is so hard for me.

BESSIE: It's a hard story.

MARIE: Though you claim a happy end.

BESSIE: How can a story end until it's happy?

MARIE: Truth is stranger than fiction.

EDIE: And in the way of fiction.

MARIE: Think of my name as the least real thing about me – whereas our relationship ... What if you change my name to Maria?

BESSIE: Too foreign – beyond French.

MARIE: All the best stories have foreign ... tangy ingredients.

BESSIE: The foreign ingredient is New Orleans.

MARIE: Where is your soul? I'm talking about being on the outside, trying to look inside. I'm always on the outside. So is Edie, which is why she's a writer.

BESSIE: You put yourselves on the outside. No one asks you to behave like decadents.

MARIA: Please accept that through no deliberation on our part, Edie and I were born with a touch of the tar brush. Dark!

BESSIE: Listen Edie! Simply raise the curtain on me explaining what went on to the insurers. That would be your little pretence. I couldn't tell it all because if those gentlemen had known that I'd acted as skipper for five minutes, let alone five weeks -

MARIE: Three and a half weeks.

BESSIE: - They wouldn't have insured anything, nor cared a jot that I was the only one who could read a map. Silly, isn't it?

EDIE: That's why you should be a suffragist, Aunt.

BESSIE: I'm not. I don't pretend I am. So you shouldn't be either.

MARIE: Unless she uses a different name for you.

BESSIE: Call me what you like. Bessie Hall! Liza Eden! What I do is me. Not the name I was given before I could speak and choose my own name.

EDIE: What name would you have chosen? Prudence? Constance? Ruth?

BESSIE; I was raised to be grateful for what I have already.

MARIE; As if your name hasn't shaped you. Or is a woman only what she does? Some who get up, eat and go to bed would be nobodies.

BESSIE Edie wants to write what really happened to me.

MARIE: What you say about it...

BESSIE: Yes, or what's the point of me talking?

MARIE: To hide the real story, that you don't tell.

Edie, another representative of a port's racially-mixed but familial community, is Bessie's niece and adopted daughter. This reflects the fact that Jennie Bishop, the author of 'The Seafaring Maiden' newspaper article, was Bessie Pritchard Hall's first cousin's daughter. Edie's arrival in my novel allowed me to develop a subplot from the screenplay into Edie's mother's story. In *Petticoat Sailor*, Bessie's lover's wife, Sarah, becomes pregnant. By adapting Sarah's story for *She Crossing*, I was able to be more explicit about the vulnerability of nineteenth-century women who were unmarried, abandoned or widowed (p. 88).

Edie's original role in *She Crossing* was to bring the Victorian narrative into the twentieth century and to broker its perceptions for the twenty-first century reader. She was intended to elucidate the core narrative with a critical Modernist interiority and to question what Bessie seems to believe. However, in the fourth draft, I over-developed her as the centre of consciousness and lost focus on Bessie. To privilege Bessie's story, which was the story I wanted to tell, I needed to write the framing story from a more restrained point of view. Edie's views, along with her inner conflicts, accorded with so many of my own that I could only restrain her by restricting her opinions to dialogue, even if this distanced another non-white character from the main conflict.

In the fifth draft, I replaced Edie with Pauline, a vicar's daughter. Like the writer of 'The Seafaring Maiden', Pauline sits by the fire to hear about an adventure and to report it. She is a professional listener (albeit unpaid by Marie Mackay, who is now her editor). Maintaining a professional interviewer's control, she elicits more of Bessie's humour and irony than Edie. Pauline becomes curious to hear the story behind Bessie's hints and ellipses, just as a real reporter would. However, as Bessie resists providing information that she claims not to have witnessed, Pauline can only be sure of as much as a reader of *She Crossing*. The novel ends with Pauline's writing of a sanitized précis, appropriate for her readership, which might even be 'The Seafaring Maiden'.

6. BUILDING STRUCTURE

In this section, I describe how I arrived at an appropriate structure for the screenplay and the ways that I have adapted that structure in writing the novel.

The dominant structure for a typical fictional screenplay is a three-act structure. The first act sets up the conflict, the second act develops it and the third act resolves it. Syd Field, screenwriting ‘guru’ (who uses the term ‘confrontation’ for the second act), recommends that each act be a particular length in a ninety-minute screenplay. The first act is conceived as around thirty minutes, the second act around sixty minutes and the third act thirty minutes or under.⁶⁷ This linear structure carries the plot, the order in which the audience access the events of the story.

Similar attention to the order of telling is no less important in writing a novel. However, novels are read at the reader’s pace in structures which also support the reader looking back on information as well as being able to absorb what is being conveyed in the present. As Larson observes, since the advent of the video recorder, this process also applies to a film. In my experience, it also applies to film when watching in present time evokes a resonance that is remembered and leads to contemplation once the viewing is over. However, drama proceeds on the basis that viewing the whole action of the story should take place in real time. Screenplay structures are designed to promote viewing in real time. The narrative’s order need not be chronological: a set-up might be a flash-forward and development a flashback. Nevertheless, the screenwriter needs to know what the inciting incident, or catalyst, is and then to track the problems it causes until their resolution. Wherever an event is placed along the timeline of the watching experience, it needs to build the suspense that continues that experience.

When writing any screenplay, before I write the description and dialogue, I compose an overview which carries the approximate structure of the story. This overview, or premise, will usually consist of three sentences or fewer. Then, I make only notes until I have conceived the main events of the plot in an order which will promote a rising action, or escalation of the problem which provokes the protagonist to act. This practice comes from reading many screenwriting craft books, including Field’s, who writes: ‘Before you can begin

⁶⁷ Syd Field, *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting, Expanded Edition* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1984) p. 9. Field illustrates a screenplay structure with a paradigm, which he calls a form, not a formula.

writing your screenplay, you need to know four things: the *opening*, the *plot point* at the end of Act I, the *plot point* at the end of Act II and *the ending*.⁶⁸

I departed from Field's recommended position for the above plot points while drafting the screenplay. However, my first premise met the conditions of his paradigm. This was:

'In 1870, when women were considered unlucky at sea, a girl of twenty captained her father's square rigger, through a deadly outbreak of smallpox (plot point one) and storms (plot point 2), from New Orleans to Liverpool.'

The voyage, with the main events in this order, suggests a classic dramatic structure, conforming to Aristotle and Field's strictures that it should have a beginning, middle and an end.⁶⁹ This structure carried the main plot of *Petticoat Sailor*, which transferred to *She Crossing* as the shape of its core story. The exact order of scenes and sequences which expand on the main action, to expose cause and effect, demanded careful planning. I found this more challenging in the novel. This is because I was replacing time-based rising action, which I am used to managing, with an attempt to sustain the reader's rising curiosity, on the understanding that reading may be suspended at any part of the story, before being taken up again, or not. I also experimented with other methodologies. However, ultimately, it was the screenplay methodology of constructing a step-outline, or a scene-by-scene assemblage, which fixed the order of narration and helped me to structure the novel.

My method of assembling a step-outline for a screenplay is first to write the visual information, often just location and action, about each scene on a separate index card. For example, the captain's speech from 'The Seafaring Maiden', following the discovery of smallpox, inspired a series of images. The speech ran:

'As you are safe to handle this man, you will have to nurse him, but don't tell the crew about this. The cabin cat must be destroyed and see to it that all fresh vegetables are tossed over the side ... Gather whatever we will need in clothing and bedding. I'll take the medicine chest and nautical instruments, tack a no admittance sign on the door, and we'll move at once to the carpenter's shop.'

⁶⁸ Syd Field, *Screenplay* (1984) p. 98. Field proposes that the plot points fall between pages 25-27 and 85-90 respectively.

⁶⁹ Aristotle defines these way-points by their position to each other: 'A beginning is that which does not necessarily come after something else, although something else exists or comes after it. An end, on the contrary, is that which necessarily follows something else either as a necessity or a usual consequence and is not, in itself, followed by anything. A middle is that which follows something else, and is in itself followed by something. Thus well-constructed plots must neither begin nor end in a haphazard way.' Aristotle, 'Poetics' *Classical Literary Criticism*, (ed.) T.S.Dorsch (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1965) p. 41.

The dialogue's pace caught the situation's urgency. However, finding the instructions too explanatory, I illustrated the actions he was ordering by a fast-paced visual montage. In the step outline this sequence consisted of the following scenes:

- The captain carrying his nautical instruments along the deck.
- Liza stripping the cabin of linen, blankets and clothes.
- The captain waiting, with nautical instruments, to enter carpenter's workshop as the carpenter brings his tools and hammock out.
- The nursing sailor entering the mate's cabin with a bucket of water.
- Liza tipping vegetables being overboard. A sailor watching.
- The nursing sailor helping the mate to drink.
- A sailor catching the cabin cat and the captain taking it and throwing it overboard.

I wrote an index card for each scene and laid out the cards to show all the scenes of the screenplay and consider the different arrangements which would expose different questions embedded in the narrative. Precise arrangement of scenes predicts the montage which the film will become, and is fundamental to the story that the screenwriter wants to tell. As the early Russian film-makers' experiments with juxtaposed images demonstrate, various interpretations can result from the same scenes. For example, an audience understands Dziga Vertov's *A Man with a Movie Camera*, a silent documentary of 1929, which proceeds without actors or story, by imagining causes and effects which link different images. Each viewer's process may increase emotional identification with the work, but may also compromise the creator's intended meaning. I moved the cards into various different positions to discover an order of scenes for the main plot that would most clearly convey what I wanted to. This process also helped me to discover and develop subplots that would intersect the plot in such a way as to build suspense by leaving scenes at moments of crisis and entering new ones.

In assembling the step-outline of *Petticoat Sailor*, I ordered the scenes to create a linear, chronological escalation of the action, which was steepest in the second act. Then I overlaid the entire screenplay with Vogler's mythic quest structure.⁷⁰ Vogler proposes twelve events that complete a story. These corresponded with *Petticoat Sailor's* action as follows:

⁷⁰ Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey* (London: Bantam, 1996).

1. 'The Ordinary World' was Bessie's life in Fairport.
2. 'The Call to Adventure' was her longing to go to sea.
3. 'Refusing the Call' resulted from her mother's fear, her sea-sickness and her father's dismissive attitude towards her.
4. 'Meeting the Mentor' related to the mate who died and her relationship with Chips.
5. 'Crossing the Threshold' was taking command.
6. 'Allies and Tests' was conflict with smallpox and with men who distrusted her.
7. 'The Approach' was preparing for the storm.
8. 'The Ordeal' was the storm.
9. 'The Reward' was acceptance and admiration by her men.
10. 'The Road Back' was going the wrong way round Ireland.
11. 'Resurrection' was the attack by the Wrecker Queen.
12. 'Return with the Elixir' was her safe arrival to fishwives' applause.

I chose Vogler's quest pattern because Bessie's voyage is a quest for home and safety. Focussing on building a structure that would keep an audience intrigued by the young protagonist and her physical jeopardy, as well as her interactions with the other characters, overcame my recurring inhibitions about misrepresenting the historical Bessie Pritchard Hall. Some of my inhibitions arose from my need to find out more about sea-practices in order to describe them in writing as opposed to showing them. I was determined to avoid inaccuracies that would call the whole narrative into question, which included facts that might still emerge about Bessie Pritchard Hall. As Virginia Woolf writes: 'Biography is the most restricted of all arts. The novelist is free. The biographer is tied.'⁷¹ However, it was Woolf's more nuanced observation that encouraged me to develop a more flexible approach. In the same essay she writes: 'in order that the light of personality may shine through facts must be manipulated; some must be brightened; others shaded; yet in the process they must never lose their integrity.'⁷²

⁷¹ Virginia Woolf, 'The New Biography,' *The Collected Essays of Virginia Woolf* (ed.) Leonard Woolf, (London: Hogarth Press, 1967) p. 229.

⁷² Virginia Woolf, 'The New Biography,' *The Collected Essays of Virginia Woolf* p. 229.

I watched several historical ‘bio-pics’ which adapt the chronology of the source’s events. I was initially offended by Phyllida Lloyd’s film of Abi Morgan’s screenplay, *The Iron Lady*, in which the National Union of Mineworkers’ strike precedes the Falklands conflict.⁷³ In fact, the miners’ strike ran from 1984 to 1985 and the Falklands conflict was fought over a period of ten weeks in Spring 1982. The film’s inaccuracy might disrupt awareness of political causality, except that it is apparently narrated by the protagonist, Margaret Thatcher. By moving from national to international engagement, the order of scenes in *The Iron Lady* privileges the way that she might prefer to recall her eleven year premiership, and the character’s dementia is another excuse for manipulating facts and chronology. Nevertheless, no personal memory is linear or complete, and fictions built on fact sometimes take advantage of this to promote engagement with the characters.

Accordingly, my second step-outline included flashbacks to link with the source text in which Bessie is reminiscing. However, in this step-outline, recall was taking place a night after her voyage. Physical jeopardy was replaced by nightmarish memories as her bed tipped like a ship and her vision telescoped. Writing the scenes in this experimental visual style impeded understanding of what-was-happening-when and compromised acceptance of the factual basis of the story.

I returned to the step-outline, cutting scenes and deleting a subplot, to create a chronological account. This structure remained through all the screenplay’s drafts and until the third draft of the novel. The narrative began with the protagonist’s girlhood in Fairport and recounted the voyage out to New Orleans as well as home to Liverpool. The inclusion of Bessie’s earlier life emphasized how much she had wanted to go to sea before boarding her first ship at the age of twenty, only to be put in charge of a terrible journey. I enjoyed this irony. However, I suspected that, with the encounters in New Orleans, the structure delayed the main conflict until the start of Act II, the moment of casting off from New Orleans. This made a plateau of the first act instead escalating the action. While this might have been acceptable in a more experimental film in its evocation of Bessie’s frustration on land and contentment at sea, it risked boring an audience by making them wait too long for conflict.

In March 2012, I began the third draft of the novel, returning to the idea of Bessie recalling what had happened. The second-draft screenplay had proposed the protagonist’s lone experience of piecing together the memories of her voyage in the visual style of Christopher Nolan’s film, *Memento*. In my novel’s third draft, Bessie was reminiscing in the

⁷³ Abi Morgan, *The Iron Lady*, dir. Phyllida Lloyd (USA: The Weinstein Co. 2012).

summer of 1909, which had marked the first aeroplane flight across the English Channel from France. I imagined Bessie conflating descriptions of the celebrated Louis Blériot, the pilot, as a ‘flyer’ with its nineteenth-century denotation of a ship, or a captain, habitually running under full sail. This would stir her memories of crossing the Atlantic forty years earlier, and I could justify any inaccuracies, ellipses and creations on the basis of time having passed.

The third draft opened with Edie, who had delivered so much new material during her surprise arrival. I intended Edie to be a framing device for a structure in which, as Philip Parker describes in *The Art and Science of Screenwriting*, ‘one main story provides the dramatic structure for the narrative but other stories dominate the narrative (without reference to this main story) inside this dramatic structure.’⁷⁴ I intended Bessie’s story to dominate Edie’s, who would give a twentieth-century view of a Victorian adventure.

As an experiment, because my previous outlines and chapter plans had not facilitated the emotionality I wanted for my protagonist, I approached the framing story without a plan. The level of planning I use as a screenwriter runs counter to the practice of the many novelists who start writing and keep writing until they find out what the story is. While I knew Bessie’s story well, along with the screenplay that I was novelizing, I worried that I was over-familiar. I wondered if another perspective would give relevance and depth to the narrative, in the way that Joseph Conrad uses Marlow’s perspective to expose Mr Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*.⁷⁵ As Edie seemed to have arisen from my subconscious, I decided to allow her, narrating in first-person, to tell me what she found out about Bessie.

This is how Marlow begins his tale of seeking, finding and losing Mr Kurtz in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*: ‘I don’t want to bother you much with what happened to me personally... yet to understand its effect on me you ought to know how I got out there, what I saw, how I went up river to the place where I first met the poor chap.’⁷⁶ Dying and in death, Kurtz disrupts the impressions Marlow has formed of him from other characters’ accounts and articulates Marlow’s abiding experience of ‘horror.’⁷⁷ By contrast, during the third draft

⁷⁴ Philip Parker, *The Art and Science of Screenwriting* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2006) p. 99.

⁷⁵ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* [1899] (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973). I am especially interested by *Heart of Darkness* because, first published in serial form in Blackwood’s Magazine, it adapts Conrad’s *Congo Diary*, kept between 13th June and 1st August, 1890.

⁷⁶ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, p. 11.

⁷⁷ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, p. 100.

of *She Crossing*, while listening to other characters, Edie travelled away from Bessie in a subplot which became a parallel plot, eventually submerging Bessie's experience and drawing few parallels with it.

Initially, I was more concerned by the confusion I was creating over who was speaking by presenting two narrators who both used first person, as well as other characters who told Edie about their experiences on *The Rothesay*. In December 2012, I began a fourth draft, with Edie's centre of consciousness expressed from a limited third-person perspective so that Bessie could continue to narrate in first person. This clearly separated their experience. However, still working without a plan as Edie listened to other characters, I delayed Bessie's more energetic, unbroken narration until the final third of the novel. This is far too late for any structure I would attempt in screenplay. Had I made a chapter plan I would have noticed this immediately. As it was, I was aware that the novel was unbalancing, but I felt compelled to finish the draft in order to mine the information it delivered for a fifth draft. For example, Marie stormed out of the fourth draft so early that I was ready to cut her actual presence from the fifth draft, while retaining the suggestion that Edie may be in love with her.

Over a year later, in January 2014, returning to my previous practice of starting with a plan, I wrote a simple outline for the existing order of chapters. This clarified the theme, action and suspense of each chapter. It also made me decide, as I would have done for a screenplay scene or sequence, where I might start and end each chapter. As Hiltunen observes, 'Many best-selling novels have a structure built on scenes, just as in a film. The scenes should open at a moment when the action is moving towards a climax.'⁷⁸ My experience of entering scenes of screenplay as late as possible and leaving as early as possible to create pace and raise a question was training for beginning and ending chapters and ordering information within them.

In developing the plan into the fifth-draft novel, I followed a classic screenplay structure. The first and second chapters, longer than the rest, reflect the traditionally slower pace of a screenplay's first act or set up. The core story of the voyage runs from chapters three to seventeen. The final two chapters make a third act, which offers a resolution to the main plot, and does this as late as possible in order to maintain suspense. It answers queries about Dr Canning but leaves at least one subplot open. The end is a wry coda, appropriately short and deliberately glib, which addresses the status of reportage and the relationship of the

⁷⁸ Ari Hiltunen, *Aristotle in Hollywood* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2002) p. 71.

personal to public history. This handles the theme of justice with more subtlety, which in the screenplay, with its focus on the unfair marginalization of women, was somewhat trite.

I wonder that I didn't perceive, as opposed to conceive, this structure earlier. It is embedded in Jennie Bishop's article, 'The Seafaring Maiden'. My use of it supports Rachel Carroll's observation that 'all adaptations express or address a desire to return to an original textual encounter.'⁷⁹

7. DESCRIBING ACTION AND LOCATIONS

Screenplay is a verbal evocation of what the characters do and say, how and where, in as few words as necessary, leaving space for interpretation by the director who is guiding the expertise of actors, designers, the director of photography and picture and sound editors. Ari Hiltunen compares the fiction writer with the film director as both need to create a visual fictional world. He writes: 'In novels words should do the task of *mise-en-scène* in films.'⁸⁰

In September 2010, when I began to adapt *Petticoat Sailor* into *She Crossing*, I had presumed that my imagination, along with my experience as a film-maker, director and actor, would equip me to fill the ellipses I had left for the specialisms of other artists. However, I realized how much I had relied on their specialisms.

Researching more material to fill these gaps was less demanding than deciding to what extent I should fill them and how much I could presume of the general reader's imagination as opposed to the assumptions and expectations of people used to working with scripts on a professional basis. While I can envisage exactly what a character is doing and how, I was accustomed to describing, in pragmatic language, what the audience would not hear. I was also used to limiting description of action to what was vital to the plot or to the motivations and traits of character that I knew the actors and director would then build on. Meanwhile, I was in the habit of keeping descriptions as brief and clear as possible so as not to overburden the rehearsal process with information that would break the drama's flow and pace.

When I began to build prose by surrounding dialogue with precise description of what I imagined actors doing and feeling, I thought that I was over-embellishing with adverbs and adjectives as well as describing what the context had already made obvious. When I re-read

⁷⁹ Rachel Carroll, *Textual Infidelities: Adaptation in Contemporary Culture*, (ed.) Rachel Carroll (London: Continual International Publishing Group, 2009) p.1.

⁸⁰ Ari Hiltunen, *Aristotle in Hollywood*, p.71.

my descriptions, I realized that certain actions and feelings were not clear. The difficulties I was encountering blocked me, as if I was searching for a word in another language. This surprised me. After all, screenplay's greatest component is observation of action, representing how it is that most of what we see of other lives runs out of earshot and how we tend to ignore sounds that are irrelevant to our interest. Watching, often subconsciously, is our prime mode of absorption. We are more likely to believe what we see than what we hear and, as Horace writes in *Ars Poetica*: 'The mind is less actively stimulated by what it takes in through the ear than what is presented to it through the trustworthy agency of the eye.'⁸¹

I understood that I was encountering another generic language. However, like other languages, I have learned it by practising it, and acknowledging the importance of context in communicating an original text.⁸² It might be supposed that, since novels and screenplays are expressed as verbal texts, a novelization requires no semiotic transposition. Yet, screenplay is *ekphrasis*, which means using words to describe a picture, conveying colour, light and texture, as well as location and human or animals involved in actions. The descriptions of pictures in a screenplay will be transferred to a shooting script and become photographs in a montage.

Barthes calls photography, 'an ellipse of language.'⁸³ Meaning increases with exposure to the images in the various contexts of the montage. Photography is a spatial discourse, guiding the viewer's response to characters, locations and their context by placing particular, often juxtaposing, elements in particular areas inside a single frame. Elements in the foreground or background, each side of the screen or on its margins may promote dramatic irony, as the audience sees more than the characters, or notices what a character sees. By contrast, every element in the frame might be given an equal visual value by a deep focus lens. Meanwhile, of course, the angle of the photographic shot embeds the off-screen presence of the photographer, and perhaps other witnesses, who might appear in following, or even in previous, shots. *Ekphrasis* can describe all this but without the immediacy of

⁸¹ Horace, 'On the Art of Poetry,' (ed.) T.S. Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1965) p. 85.

⁸² Georges Bastin, 'Adaptation: The Paramount Communication Strategy,' *Linguaculture* 1 (2014) pp. 73-87, pp. 73-74. Bastin observes that 'from the translator's point of view, adaptation differs from translation because it reproduces the purpose, not the meaning, of the original. Meaning is essentially text-based while purpose is context-based ... adaptation is a communication-based strategy which can be cross-cultural or intermedial.' p.73-74

⁸³ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, translated by Annette Lavers (London: Paladin, 1973) pp. 91-93, p. 91.

photography. So the emotional and intellectual recognition evoked by a picture changes pace when that picture is described with words. As novels are read at the reader's chosen pace, it is vital to find a way to convey the emotional pace of the narrative. Performance would make this explicit through the delivery of lines and actions and the duration of scenes.

Jan Baetens observes that novelization stands at the intersection of the visual and verbal systems and 'allows us to consider the workings of the visual turn in a domain that seems to escape its grasp.'⁸⁴ For example, in *Petticoat Sailor* I evoke a close-up of a sailor's face scarred by smallpox. The pockmarks may be taken for the actor's or character's normal appearance but, in context, they foreshadow disease and also denote the possibility of surviving smallpox. Mention of a pockmark in *She Crossing* is likely to immediately foreshadow smallpox to a reader; this is the effect of a word with inescapable connotations. To distract from such foreshadowing in the novel's early drafts, I described the pockmark's shape and position as a focus for Bessie to steady her balance. In the final draft, she takes the textures of Chips' aged face for granted until, when smallpox breaks out, she notices the scar between his eyebrows (p.48). This reproduces the way a cinema audience might notice it.

As Keith Cohen argues, the twentieth-century novel rapidly developed cinematic tendencies.⁸⁵ The following is the opening to Edith Wharton's novel *A Son at the Front*. 'John Campton, the American portrait painter, stood in his bare studio in Montmartre at the end of a Summer afternoon, contemplating the battered calendar that hung against the wall. The calendar marked July 30, 1914. Campton looked at this date with a gaze of unmixed satisfaction'.⁸⁶ Wharton's spare description places a character in action at a particular moment. Signifying details are conveyed in the course of narrating the action and not set up before. For example, the studio is 'bare' because to present any paintings at this stage would distract from the most important 'picture,' which is Campton looking at the calendar. At the same time, the apparent absence of artist's tools suggests that either Campton works in an orderly way or, for a reason yet to be discovered, he is not currently working. This opening needs nothing more than transferring past tense to present tense, and adding just three words to describe Campton's appearance, in order to make it the opening of a potential screenplay. To introduce the artist's mood, Wharton evokes a facial close-up, arguably the most powerful image in cinema, because faces are continuously imminent and repeatedly interrogated for

⁸⁴ Jan Baetens, 'Novelization – a Contaminated Genre?' *Critical Inquiry* 32 (2005) pp. 43-60, p.43.

⁸⁵ Keith Cohen, *Films and Fiction: The Dynamics of Exchange* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) p.1.

⁸⁶ Edith Wharton, *A Son at The Front* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1923) p. 3.

reactions or moments of introspection which convey backstory and inner conflicts. The camera's lingering on a face is created as a moving photograph, often inviting audience identification with the character. Perhaps it is so powerful because it is non-verbal, escaping precise verbal analysis except of what the viewer feels. In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes goes some way towards analysing this when he writes, 'a photograph is a mirror, what we are asked to read is the familiar, the known; it offers to the voter his own likeness, but clarified, exalted.'⁸⁷

Film's lingering facial close-up, often non-verbal and interpreted by music, may transfer to verbal description in a novel by simply describing the emotion. Wharton verbally describes the emotion of Campton's 'gaze'. In the following paragraphs, she describes his circumstances, hopes and memories, which could be shown in cinema through visual or aural narration, including through flashback. However, the opening, the date and Campton's 'first close-up' assume a dramatic irony based on hindsight. Along with the title, this sets up an expectation of the tragedy of war and the suspense of the question of who will survive and how.

Inspired by Wharton's opening, I transferred my screenplay's opening from present tense to past tense. I was aiming to reverse the mid-twentieth century theorization of a methodology for film adaptation as transposition.⁸⁸ The notion of film adaptation as transposition developed from contemporaneous translation theories emphasizing the importance of linguistic equivalence and the translator's invisibility. Film theory reflected this principle by suggesting that a paragraph of prose could be transferred to a scene or sequence of kinetic images, with minimum interference by the adaptor. At the start of this project, in 2010, I experimented with transposing in the other direction, from scene to novelistic episode. I had not studied Packard's *The Film Novelist, Writing a Screenplay and Short Novel in 15 weeks*, which was not published until 2011. However, Packard's demonstrations of screenplay scenes transposed to novelistic episodes rely on reframing voice-over to describe internal conflict. *Petticoat Sailor* had no voice over, which was not the only reason that I realized, after a few scenes, that transposition was not a way to novelize my screenplay.

⁸⁷ Roland Barthes, 'Photography and Electoral Appeal,' *Mythologies*, translated by Annette Lavers (London: Paladin, 1973) pp. 91-93, p. 91.

⁸⁸ Geoffrey Wagner, *The Novel and the Cinema* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1975) p. 222.

Hutcheon writes that, ‘to tell a story in novels, short stories and even historical accounts is to describe, explain, summarize, expand ... To show a story, as in movies, ballets, radio and stage plays, musicals and operas involves a direct aural and usually visual performance’.⁸⁹ In writing the screenplay of *Petticoat Sailor*, I had been describing a film that I was in the process of envisaging. As I was writing *She Crossing*, I was continuing to envisage scenes of *Petticoat Sailor*, but these were often overlaid and interrupted by images of the action from a different draft. This would break the flow of my novel’s description. I believe this disturbance arose from behaving too much like a director in deciding what, from my fund of material, would create the best effect. I was only able to write fluently when I wrote from a character’s point-of-view, without precise reference to particular scenes but with reference to feelings that resulted in and surrounded events. This is more like the way that an actor expresses an experience.

I also realized that, in focussing on the scenes, I was writing a past tense version of the present tense treatment, a document which lays bare the action, style, theme and relevance of a screenplay for a production company. This draft included dialogue, which is not expected in a treatment. However, the scenes, which had been originally been shaped for actors, had lost rhythm and pace and straggled in adaptation. Meanwhile, my protagonist’s experience was distanced; she became one of several characters to watch. In referring so closely to the drafts of *Petticoat Sailor*, I had overlooked André Bazin’s model of adaptation as a triangle which surrounds the central source document and has a film, a play and a novel at each tip.⁹⁰ This meant that I had mislaid what Linda Hutcheon defines as ‘adaptive faculty ... the ability to repeat without copying, to embed difference in similarity.’⁹¹

This surprised me. Unknowingly, I had observed Hutcheon’s apparently contradictory abstraction in adapting my short story to my screenplay, *The Unicyclist*, which was made about a decade before publication of her book. The screenplay reproduces the main events of the short story, but I made the short story’s male protagonist into the screenplay’s female protagonist for a feminist theme and a more satisfying conclusion. On a contingency basis, I had also changed locations that were expensive to film, whereas for the screenplay of my

⁸⁹ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006) p. 13.

⁹⁰ André Bazin, ‘The Cinema as Digest,’ *Bazin at Work: Major Essays and Reviews from the Forties and Fifties* (ed.) Bert Cardullo (New York: Routledge, 1997) pp. 49-50.

⁹¹ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, p. 174.

short story, *Pressing Engagement*, I changed the locations to be more visual and sonic.⁹² In the screenplay of *Pressing Engagement*, I had externalized the inner conflicts of Nathan Springburn, the protagonist of the short story, by creating increasingly awkward encounters. I had also evoked Nathan's inner conflict in managing a full bladder by repeating the narrative motif of water. In his film *American Beauty*, Sam Mendes uses the motif of the red rose in a similar way. However, Mendes also reinforces the protagonist's inner conflict with voice-over, which like an authorial voice, describes, interprets and comments.

As *Petticoat Sailor* had no voice-over, it did not narrate through obvious, subjective description. The protagonist, Liza, absent from some shots, witnesses every scene of the main plot. However, my description of the scenes suggests close-ups of her face and eyes, as well as views of her from the back. This supports McFarlane's statement that 'all films are omniscient: even when they employ a voice-over technique as a means of simulating the first person novelistic approach, the viewer is aware ... of a level of objectivity in what is shown, which may include what the protagonist sees but cannot help including a great deal else as well.'⁹³ Often, the camera's omniscience deliberately privileges dramatic irony to create suspense, while orientating the audience by putting appropriate characters in the picture and juxtaposing their points of view, by shots which show what each character is seeing. The audience may absorb these shots but it is more likely to be orientated by the montage, combining sight of a current shot with memories of previous shots, to assemble a full visual impression of the characters in action. Similarly, readers may pass over the subtext and details of sentences while absorbing the action of a paragraph or chapter. However, reading at their own pace, instead of keeping up with the camera, they may also re-read and linger.

In *Petticoat Sailor* the protagonist's subjectivity is sometimes expressed by a camera shot representing her field of vision. Whereas readers easily proceed without a visual impression of a novel's narrator, and may accept little visual description of other characters, only a few experimental films engage throughout with the visual limitations of a character's subjectivity. Its effect is to draw out suspense. Ridley Scott uses this technique for the opening scene of his film *Boy And Bicycle*. Jonathan Demme also applies it in the sequence introducing a killer of women in his film adaptation of Thomas Harris's novel, *The Silence of The Lambs*. When I first watched both of these films I was intrigued and then eager to

⁹² Georgina Lock, *Pressing Engagement*, dir. John Weinbrenn (UK: Northern School of Film and Television, 1991). My short story, from which I adapted the screenplay, exists as a typescript.

⁹³ Brian MacFarlane, *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) p.18.

discover whose vision I was sharing. However, I was relieved when the camera showed me who I was waiting for.

Writing for an omniscient camera might have prompted me to write the novel from an omniscient viewpoint. However, when I read novels, I enjoy the immersion in a character's subjectivity that narrating in first person or limited third person creates. It reminds me of the immersive way I discovered and expressed characters when I was acting, which led me to a way of writing dramatic monologues and then short stories. This differs from what I do as a screenwriter, which is to describe how I envisage characters in action in an order which carries meaning and creates a plot. Of course, plot, or an order of events, is important to a novel too, but the attitude and motivation of the narrator govern how the plot and its meaning is revealed. This might also be said of performing a script, specifically a monologue, which describes how events leading to reactions and other events took place.

I am now aware that I was combining my directing and acting experience to write the description of *She Crossing*. I began by envisaging a space, which was the house on the promenade. In this space, at the bottom of steps to the front door, I saw the figure of Pauline, dressed in a big hat and long coat. As a director might, I watched her to see how she looked and behaved as she was preparing to knock at the door and if I could offer any improvements. Then, as an actor might, I entered her subjectivity to see what she saw and to describe it, as if to an audience. I continually moved between these two processes to construct Pauline's experiences of the 1909 narrative and Bessie's experience of 1870.

Jonathan Miller writes that, 'In some mysterious way, the description of a scene in a novel appears to be fully occupied by what it describes and never appears to lack what it fails to mention.'⁹⁴ This is not true of screenplay, with the additional inconvenience that anything necessary which is not described may be physically lacking and compromise the film shoot. As a screenwriter, I am alert to including every relevant detail in describing a scene but I am unused to writing long descriptions of location. I become impatient with Lars Von Trier's lengthy stills of magnificent Scottish landscapes in his film *Breaking The Waves* because I am waiting for characters who will reveal a view's significance and, in doing so, themselves. By contrast, I remain intrigued by Patrick Keiller's long, fixed shots of unpeopled locations and objects in his historical film, *London*.⁹⁵ Keiller's 'found' mise-en-scènes reveal the

⁹⁴ Robert Giddings, Keith Selby and Chris Wensley, *Screening the Novel: the Theory and Practice of Literary Dramatization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990) p. 18.

⁹⁵ Patrick Keiller, *London* (UK: BFI, 1994).

subjectivity of an unseen narrator who investigates and interprets them, while he also discusses the subjectivities of other unseen characters. The narrative combines the visuality of film with the literary technique of verbal observation. Lawrence Scott uses a similar combination in evoking a present but obscured narrator in the opening to his novel *Witchbroom*. The first chapter begins with visual and tactile perceptions of a place which stir memories for a character, who is first referred to as 'he', and then 'I', before being named as Lavren.⁹⁶ Both *London* and *Witchbroom* demonstrate the extent to which location can be evoked to reflect and create character and *vice versa*.

In *Petticoat Sailor*, in evoking Granville, Nova Scotia, and New Orleans as locations, I only described sights that relate to action, so that a location finder might have leeway in finding, or assembling two nineteenth-century ports. When I began describing Bessie's hometown in *She Crossing*, I realized that I had spent insufficient time in Granville to develop a feeling for it. Instead, I introduced my childhood memories of the promenade in Herne Bay on the North Kent coast, with a view of 'rowdy grey' from a house with a plaster fish on the gatepost (p. 1). This sea view changed to a muddy beach on the Bristol Channel when I wrote about a storm at some standing stones, placing the novel in the West of England. The new location's specificity stirred a sense of guilt about stealing a heroine from the Canadians. Smothering this guilt by reminding myself that Canada was a British province at the time of Bessie's voyage and that I was writing about a woman as opposed to issues of nation, I invented Fairport as her hometown. On the basis that she returned to where she was born and only went to sea again once, Fairport remains the location of *She Crossing's* framing story. I intend it to evoke any town on the North Atlantic Coast in winter, in North America or the British Isles, only by a view of the promenade, the beach and, looking away from the sea, a wind-battered, weather-boarded house.

This exterior and the interiors of the framing story, restricted to Bessie's hall and her parlour, are presented through Pauline's awareness. Her recognition of the plaster fish establishes her as local and her limited third-person point of view invites the reader to look at and listen to what interests her. Like the reader, Pauline can only have a limited sense of the 1870 locations and practices, which justifies Bessie's detailed description of them. I intend the constricted area of the ship and claustrophobic atmosphere of Victorian Fairport to contrast with the vast changing sea and bustling New Orleans which, like Liverpool, was a major nineteenth-century, multi-ethnic, seaport. Historically, these cities were linked by

⁹⁶ Lawrence Scott, *Witchbroom*, (Oxford: Heinemann, 1993) pp. 1-2.

substantial maritime trade as well as by Liverpool's support for the Confederate States during the American Civil War. In *Petticoat Sailor*, I described war damage to buildings. In the novel, Bessie's recall of dialogue enables emphasis on other effects of war (p. 21). In *She Crossing*, New Orleans is equated with the threat of the 'Other,' which includes disease. For Bessie, Liverpool is a haven of familiarity until Andrew's relationship with Sarah sends her into its poor neighbourhoods (p. 65). I assembled this journey, during the fourth draft, by studying a 1906 Ordnance Survey map and combining the lay-out of the streets with my familiarity with existing Victorian buildings. I edited it for the fifth draft.

The style of description in a screenplay may indicate genre and tone. An audience will not see the script, but will understand genre and tone by watching the action and hearing the dialogue. In *Petticoat Sailor*, there is humour in the dialogue. Also, in the way that the *OED*'s defines irony as 'the ill-timed or perverse arrival of event or circumstance in itself desirable,' there is irony in the action of both the screenplay and the novel when a man obliges a woman to transgress a man-made law. In *She Crossing*, I have been able to develop more irony by describing, for the reader, Pauline's unspoken observations. In terms of humour, Pauline's dialogue with Bessie also reminds the reader of Pauline's presence as a listener. In the screenplay, I brought attention to listening or watching characters by describing their actions or physical responses which suggest emotional and intellectual responses and can be acted and filmed. I kept these descriptions simple and brief so that the actor might interpret them without major interruptions to the flow of the scene. In writing the novel, I have aimed to describe action as vividly as I would for screenplay and, where necessary, I interpret it for the reader through Bessie's memory and explanation. Occasionally, I have built on, or replaced, action by tracing a thought process or emotion. This is considered 'telling' as opposed to 'showing' in screenwriting. My screenwriting experience has taught me not to tell what I can show. In writing the novel, I have been alert to what I can show in order to increase the appeal to a reader's mind's eye to stimulate physical reactions to the narrative, as I would in writing a screenplay.

8. WRITING DIALOGUE

I have left my reflection on dialogue to the last section of this Commentary as I am used to writing dialogue last in a screenplay. Description of action, activity and body language often inflects or changes dialogue in screenplay (or simply makes it redundant), so I always develop and shape the visual information of the scenes first. However, I was working

with dialogue from the first sentences of *She Crossing*, which told Bessie's story in Bessie's voice. In the following section, which I have divided into subsections for clarity, I will consider how I constructed dialogue for the screenplay, how it transferred to the novel and what additions and adjustments I made. I will also explain the choices I made in composing the monologues or points of view to carry the narrative.

(i) Dialogue in the Screenplay.

In the screenplay, I kept the dialogue as brief as possible, aiming for a 'vanilla script.' This is the industry term for a script which declares itself to be highly visual on the page by tight description and sparse dialogue that carries so much weight that the audience is alert to what is said and when. For example, short single phrases or sentences of dialogue and stichomythia support an adrenal pace and convey the difficulty of shouting over adverse weather. Meanwhile, I transferred the dialogue of 'Seafaring Maiden' in ways that would support maximum visuality. Where I kept the dialogue, it was to inflect accompanying images. In 'The Seafaring Maiden' Bishop already combines dialogue with a foreshadowing image, when the Captain asks a pockmarked crew member: "Tom, what do you think the first mate's got?"

I have already discussed how I adapted the image of the pockmarked sailor in order to present the later outbreak of smallpox as a surprise, which, in retrospect, might have been predicted. The captain's question could be intimated by the action, so I did not include it. However, I took these following lines of the captain's from Bishop's article: 'I can't keep up any longer. You'll have to take my place and navigate *The Rothesay* to Liverpool.' I suggested a close-up of Bessie's face to convey her conflicted reaction.

In 'The Seafaring Maiden', Bessie says to the captain, as he is proposing to go to sickbay: 'No, you won't. I'll not stay alone with strange men in the focsle. You aren't any danger to me for I've already been exposed many times to smallpox. Tom can divide his time between you and the mate. Get into your bunk and we'll face whatever comes together.' This relatively long speech is, in effect, Bessie's first order as acting captain of the ship. I drew on it for *Petticoat Sailor* but I juxtaposed Bessie's words with her father's simultaneous exit, in silence, to the sickbay. In doing this he is disobeying her in her role as commander of the ship, just as some of his men disobeyed her later. I also drew on the dialogue in 'The Seafaring Maiden' when, using a similar juxtaposition, Bessie is surrounded by sailors who

say: ‘We know about the smallpox. Can you take this ship to England?’ Bessie answers: ‘I can!’ but her assertion is immediately undercut by an image of rough sea.

Creating juxtapositions is a vital aspect of writing screenplay. It plays to one of film’s strengths which is to show conflicting business or states of mind in a single frame. Where dialogue is used, it can inflect, interrogate or undercut the visual information (and *vice versa*) at the same moment. In a novel, communication of new information as description and dialogue is linear and the writer must decide on the most effective order of conveying it to a reader. In writing *Petticoat Sailor*, I could presume that the audience would see or hear the speaker as they spoke. In writing *She Crossing*, I was often perplexed as to when to precede the dialogue by clarifying who was speaking and what they were doing and when to place that information after the dialogue.

(ii) Transferring Screenplay Dialogue to the Novel

When I read my screenplay aloud, I was sure that actors, who are trained to carry period speech in contemporary historical dramas as well as in period plays, would be able to manage the dialogue’s occasional nineteenth-century syntax, lexis and sailors’ jargon. Timothy Spall, playing William Mallard Turner, frequently uses ‘fare’ as in ‘How d’ye fare?’ and ‘I fare badly’ in Mike Leigh’s film *Mr Turner*. Mike Leigh constructs his dramas from improvisations, as opposed to scripts, so it is likely that Spall, in character, chose this archaism.

In transferring dialogue to the novel, I needed to convey what was no longer visual, like the moment of a character entering and leaving a space, with their facial and bodily expression, responses and vocal nuances. The short lines of dialogue for the screen were not highly characterized. I realized that, in writing speech that was more explanatory and closer to natural dialogue, there was insufficient difference in speech rhythms and implied pronunciation. The result was that all the sailors emerged as men of a similar class. Sailors might be drawn from various levels of the working classes as well as different regions and, as illustrated by Vilquist, they might be drawn from the middle classes as well from as other nations. They would have used the same words, including slang and jargon, to describe rank, work, tools and places. Slang and jargon might have derived from various cultures and regions and the sailors might even have created new words or phrases. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that all of them would be equally articulate in English, or even particularly elegant in speaking their own languages, let alone have a facility with wit and humour.

To address this, I referred to an exercise which I had tried during the ‘Scripting History’ Workshop London at the Docklands Museum. This was to create a character from the recorded oral reminiscences of lightermen and other workers, who had lived on the Thames for generations and who could also recount what their elders had told them. I had joined in with the curators, writing several characters who might be performed in the museum space. The originals were all Cockneys, but the lexis, pitch and speech rhythms of these characters were different enough to build on.

I never wanted to reproduce accent or dialect through spelling, either in the screenplay or in the novel. The transcribed ‘Mockney’ in Will Self’s satirical novel, *The Book of Dave*, entertains me. I also enjoy the transcription of post-apocalyptic Estuary English in Russell Hoban’s *Riddley Walker*. However, transcribing historical Cockney would have put me in the awkward position of representing the period’s Liverpuddlian and Southern American accents. Inaccurate and over-complicated to read, this would have also commented unavoidably on an accent itself in presenting the ridiculed character of Cornish. Cornish and his shipmates cannot read and they speak in short phrases. Hoban’s Riddley and Self’s Dave control their narratives by (apparently) writing their own monologues in their own languages, to which the reader adapts through length of exposure. I want my conventionally written English, which I usually read and hear as Received Pronunciation, to be absorbed as comfortably by readers who speak English with other accents. The fifth and final draft of *She Crossing* manages this by filtering what was said through Bessie’s memory and report of it forty years later.

(iii) Voice Over, Monologue and Point of View

I have always wanted to tell the story from Bessie’s point of view, but even when a producer told me that her voice was missing in the screenplay, I avoided writing her voice-over. A voice-over would have given her control of the story as well as building complicity and empathy with her that would guide reception of the other characters. However, I was trained as a screenwriter in the early 1990s, when the professional consensus was that juxtaposition of images should suggest an internal process, whereas voice-overs detract from the visual narrative and risked over-explaining.

Seymour Chatman calls voice-over, ‘not cinematic description but merely description by literary assertion transferred to film.’⁹⁷ I examined voice-overs in films that might

disprove Chatman's observation, yet I found it to be true. Derek Jarman's voice-over in his film *Blue*, which describes his blindness against an unchanging blue screen, can also be simply listened to or read. The voice-over in Guy Ritchie's *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* interrupts the action and freezes the kinesis as the narrator, who has a role in the action and is often pictured in the still, reflects on the characters and their quandaries. These visual punctuations, like exclamations and question marks, extend suspense and set up an expectation of more stills, which, nevertheless, arrive as playful shocks.

Ritchie's stills, combined with his reflective voice-over, are comparable to John Fowles suspension of the historical narrative in his novel, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, while he comments on his relationship, as a novelist, to his characters. Perhaps the voice-over in *The Usual Suspects* is less literary as it fabricates an ornate lie from a police station's picture-board. However, the unreliable narrator has occupied a secure position in novels since Miguel De Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. The protagonist of *Petticoat Sailor* values honesty, at least until she needs to take command of ship. I might have shown her insecurity by juxtaposing her inner voice, as voice-over, against what we see of her, as in Alejandro G. Iñárratu's film *Birdman: or the Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance*. The Birdman's voice-over is more filmic than literary, because the voice, set against the visual information, creates two co-existing, conflicting personal spaces. Nevertheless, with his novel *Filth* as just one example, Irvine Welsh achieves a similar effect by setting his protagonist's narratives against an antagonist's interrupting commentary, which often includes the repeated letter or numeral '0', and runs, to different lengths and widths, down the middle section of appropriate pages. I reasoned that Liza would smother rather than admit an inner voice that risked her ability to take action, and everything that she said must be in dialogue with another character.

In constructing the screenplay, I wrote Liza's monologues as exercises to find what might be edited to transfer to encounters with other people. Capturing the tone and rhythm of her voice was challenging because I was no longer in Canada and I was still concerned by her identity as a Nova Scotian heroine. I proceeded by building on what the dramatist, Rib Davis, describes the 'fingerprints of speech ... acknowledgement of what makes characters tick.'⁹⁸ One obvious fingerprint was her references to marine terms, including the many marine metaphors and clichés which run, almost unnoticed, throughout the English language.⁹⁹ I had

⁹⁷ Seymour Chatman, 'What Novels Can do that Films Can't (and Vice Versa),' *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980) pp. 121–140, p. 128.

⁹⁸ Rib Davis, *Writing Dialogue for Scripts* (London: A&C Black, 2005) p. 14.

fun with deciding how and when to apply these. Meanwhile, I could cover gaps in my precise knowledge of marine tools and practices by making them Bessie's mistakes.

The novelist Sarah Waters explains, 'You don't go out looking for the voice, it finds you just by doing it and doing it.'¹⁰⁰ I continued 'doing it and doing it' by writing and then speaking aloud the monologues, as if performing them, to discover how their rhythms created mood. The voice that found me was rooted in my childhood memories of old Kentish voices and figures of speech. After all, these speakers, old when I was a child, would have heard speakers who had been children in the nineteenth century. The voice seemed, of its own accord, to be informing me about Bessie's life and times and was the beginning of the realization that I wanted to write a novel. It was also the beginning of the novel itself when I re-read what I had recorded. However, it raised the question of what she could know when she was restricted from entering male enclaves, such as the sailors' quarters at sea and snugs on land. This suggested that a male narrator might share the story.

The many contenders for male narrator made vivid Maureen Quinn's conceptual hologram of the source text and the texts it might become. The hologram presents a different perspective of the same image, depending on where the viewer stands.¹⁰¹ As Golding's Captain Anderson observes in *Rites of Passage*: 'a ship is ballasted with paper ... from the midshipman's logs right down to the ship's log.'¹⁰² Ever since my idea for the sound track of my documentary, *Wicked Women of the Sea*, I have been attracted to assembling a narrative expressed through different character's monologues and exchanges. For my novel, I might have created a cache of documents found aboard the ship, as in Patrick Kneale's novel *English Passengers*. These documents would include the ship's log, the mate's diary, business letters and Bessie's diary, as well as fabricated letters to and from the cousin whom Bessie Pritchard Hall eventually married. However, in most of these documents Bessie would have been considered marginal or not considered at all, which would have destroyed the focus on her that I was able to establish in my novel.

⁹⁹ A. Ansted, *A Dictionary of Sea Terms* (London: Upcott Gill, 1898).

¹⁰⁰ Sarah Waters, 'Thou Shalt Not Steal,' *The Sins of Literature*, Episode 3 of 3, BBC Radio4, 19th August 2013.

¹⁰¹ Maureen Quinn, *The Adaptation of a Literary Text to Film: Problems and Cases in Adaptation Criticism* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007) p. 23.

¹⁰² William Golding, *Rites of Passage* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980) p. 167. Golding does not create a collection of documents but juxtaposes a secular narrator's letters with a cleric's diaries.

I returned to the idea of Bessie as single female narrator, although the story that she told would be juxtaposed with a male narrator's point of view. Each would tell alternate chapters of their experience, as in Patrick White's novel, *Voss*. White writes omnisciently about Voss's and Laura's experiences, exposing two centres of consciousness in a vivid colonial world. Voss's quest into the Australian outback and Laura's containment in Sydney's domestic spaces interface through their imaginations and spirits and suggested that my male narrator might be a ghost. This character was Uncle John, who had abandoned Bessie's Aunt Grace and his son. His regretful ghost returns when Aunt Grace, mother of his son, becomes engaged to a clipper captain. Aunt Grace and Bessie feel the ghost's presence. Bessie's mother, Uncle John's sister, refuses to believe it and waits for him, refusing to go to sea with Bessie's father. This obliges Bessie to stay and care for her, introducing the theme of illness and Doctor Canning. This adaptation of the screenplay's first act content reflects the fact that the historical Bessie Pritchard Hall did not go to sea until she was nineteen and emphasizes her achievement of a successful crossing. Meanwhile, a narrating ghost's advantage over a living narrator (such as Andrew, Captain Hall, a sailor or Doctor Canning) was omniscience and omnipresence. As what Rib Davis calls, 'a mediator between the fictional world of the characters and our own world,' Uncle John could reveal what Bessie's upbringing would prevent her from confessing about her transaction with Doctor Canning.¹⁰³ His ironic, angrier point of view could detail what Bessie could only hint at.

I was also interested in creating such overlaps with Bessie's narrative so as to call into question the truth of one or both points of view, as in Sarah Waters' novel, *Fingersmith*. Waters' narrators are both young women. Susan, raised by London thieves, 'speaks' in the past tense and Maud, brought up in imprisoned luxury, in the present tense. Difference of tense and background, with the different things they can know and the way they refer to other characters, defines Susan and Maud as they narrate the same and related events.

In July 2010, at the start of this project, I wrote two chapters as Uncle John's monologues, approaching his first chapter as a prologue. This was backstory about his impregnation of Aunt Grace during the storm at the standing stones, after which he ran away to sea. His second chapter was about Doctor Canning. I was pleased with the differences between his narration and Bessie's. However, where Waters creates complicity between Susan and Maud, my narrators had never met. John was entirely focused on Bessie, which built intensity, but Bessie, logically, was ignoring what John said. As the repetitions, which I

¹⁰³ Rib Davis, *Writing Dialogue for Scripts* (London: A&C Black, 2003) p. 45.

had intended, impeded the flow of the plot, I decided that differences between male and female subjectivity should be simply conveyed through Bessie's dialogues with the many men in the narrative. They are also addressed tacitly by the juxtaposition of female with male as a woman takes on a man's role.

(iv) Dialogue and Punctuation.

I have already described the third draft's confusion of two first-person narrations. This was caused by insufficient difference in the way that women from the same class and family used language. As the double inverted commas that, traditionally, open a continuing paragraph of monologue risk being confused with the double inverted commas that mark dialogue, I differentiated the dialogue by single inverted commas. However, this did not separate dialogues belonging to 1870 with dialogues from 1909. I considered Will Self's evocation of limited third person accounts which drift into first person without punctuation in his novel *Umbrella*. Self defines 'speakers' through lexis, tone and context. Yet, the overall effect is of a shared stream of consciousness, whereas I wanted to juxtapose the consciousness of a young woman, who argues for sexual equality, with that of an older woman, who has captained a ship, but judges sexual equality irrelevant.

Deleting the inverted commas which began each paragraph of Bessie's and Edie's monologues but leaving the inverted commas introducing their opening paragraphs, improved the pages' appearance. It did not clarify who was speaking and in what period. Therefore, I used inverted commas to mark the 1870 exchanges of dialogue and, for the 1909 exchanges, I used the Modernist European convention of dashes, as in James Joyce's novel *Ulysses*. This looked fussy so I italicized the 1870 dialogues, observing that dialogue in italics suggests a resonance that might be an internalized echo. This effect works well in Kate Grenville's historical novel *The Secret River*, in Self's *Umbrella* and its sequel, *Shark*. However, in *She Crossing*, the echo effect created too much nostalgia and drew attention from the action of Bessie's account.

In *Novels into Film*, George Bluestone observes 'the novel has three tenses, the film has only one.'¹⁰⁴ Perhaps Bluestone inspired me to narrate the framing story, which is told from Pauline's point of view, in the present tense. The present tense is equivalent to the

¹⁰⁴ George Bluestone, *Novels into Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957) p. 48.

kinesis, or the representation of movement in the cinema which fabricates film's appearance of reality.¹⁰⁵ It gives an immediacy to the interview and its setting, and brings 1909 into the reader's present, just as a film always runs in the viewer's present. Meanwhile, Bessie describes the events of 1870 in the past tense, with the progressive and perfect past tenses indicating Bessie's earlier memories.

I narrate the conversation by the 1909 fireside as direct speech, but much of Bessie's narrative is reported speech. Usually, a speaker will condense time and subsume the dialogue of others into reported speech, unless repeating an exact phrase or sentence of dialogue which is expected to make special impact on the listener. In order to vary the pace and rhythm of what is otherwise a monologue, I have inserted Bessie's representation of some of the 1870 exchanges as dialogue, but I have kept these exchanges short for the sake of realism.

Exchanges of dialogue are also brief in the 1909 narrative. As a dramatist, I enjoy reading novels that narrate through dialogue and dialogue which is carrying its own meanings without the need for comment. For example, the long dialogues in Don DeLillo's novel, *White Noise*, maximize subjectivity through questions and observations which extend into arguments about ideas. While I could limit narratorial comment on dialogue, extensive passages of pure dialogue were not appropriate in *She Crossing*. As part of Bessie's story they would have reduced realism and, therefore, credibility while long dialogues between Bessie and Pauline would have distracted from Bessie's story. I have aimed to vary the pace and add suspense as well as energy, through interruptions to Bessie's narrative without breaking the focus on her. Pauline's questions prompt relevant information about issues of history and sailing practice. As I would in writing a screenplay, I have used Bessie's dry humour and emotional outbursts to expose information through subtext. In the novel, these outbursts, like Bessie's admission of jealousy, provoke responses that remind us of Pauline's presence as listener and prompt Pauline's indirect discourse about her own experience of love.

9. CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored the processes of adaptation through adapting my novel, *She Crossing*, from my screenplay, *Petticoat Sailor*. Both of these narratives have developed

¹⁰⁵ Christian Metz, 'On the Impression of Reality in the Cinema,' *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974) pp. 3-15.

from the initial stimulation of finding and reading ‘The Seafaring Maiden’, Jennie Bishop’s 1957 newspaper article. Novelization describes the means, as well as the result, of the creative writing component of this thesis, a novelization which observes what Imelda Whelehan calls ‘the core meanings and values of the originary text.’¹⁰⁶ I believe that, as well being a novelization, *She Crossing* is also a new and original novel as it meets the standard that Gary R. Bortolotti and Linda Hutcheon propose for an adaptation, namely that it ‘stands on its own as an independent work, separate from the source and can be judged accordingly.’¹⁰⁷

Creating *She Crossing* has involved adapting and experimenting with my own writing practice, which I have come to understand more thoroughly by writing this reflective Commentary. I have emphasized the significant differences which exist between writing for the relatively fixed structures and visual imperatives of screenplay and those involved in writing a novel. As I have argued throughout, novels are able to take more liberties with form, length and the explication of subjectivities than screenplays are able to. On the other hand, there are useful screenwriting practices which can be transferred to the processes of novelization. I have outlined a number of them.

My experience as a screenwriter helped me to decide the order of the plot, to be alert to conflict that might expand story, to control the pace of action and dialogue and to report action and activity which can be seen and heard. Crucially, in writing screenplays to be performed, I am practised at envisaging, as a director might, what the scenes might convey, visually and sonically, to an audience. I have also referred throughout to my own experience as an actor, which has helped me to communicate a character’s subjectivity and point of view by imagining reactions to situations and using dialogue and its rhythms to express emotion and states of mind. Most of all, I have demonstrated, through many examples, how adaptation responds to contingency and how contingency stimulates creativity.

¹⁰⁶ Imelda Whelehan, ‘Adaptations: the contemporary dilemmas,’ (eds.) Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan, *Adaptations from Text to Screen, Screen to Text* (London: Routledge, 1999) pp. 3-19, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷ Gary R Bortolotti and Linda Hutcheon, ‘On the Origin of Adaptations: Rethinking Fidelity Discourse and Success – Biologically,’ *New Literary History* 38 (2007) pp. 443- 458, p. 445.

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APPENDIX 1.

PETTICOAT SAILOR
a feature length screenplay
by
Georgina Lock

First draft.

INT. SHIP'S HOLD. DAY. 1856

Darkness. Beneath the creak of the docked ship, amongst stacked casks, packed sails and coiled rope comes the sound of fast, light breathing trying to steady. From above filters the mumble of the Mariner's Psalm.

MEN (O.S)

The Lord is my pilot, I shall not drift,
He lights me across the dark waters,
he keepeth my log, He guideth me by
the star...

EXT.. GRANVILLE HARBOUR. NOVA SCOTIA. DAY.

Wind shivers the sails and sings in the rigging of a small brig, the "Granville Rose".

MEN

... of holiness -

The figurehead, a fine featured brunette, stares across limpid blue water at Granville Town - a small grid of bright clapboard shops and houses slanting uphill to pine woods and golden fields.

MEN

- for his name sake.

EXT. DECK. DAY

7 merchant sailors, in oilskins and sou'westers follow CAPTAIN JOSEPH EDEN, windburned, craggy 35, in prayer.

JOSEPH and MEN

Yea though I sail mid the thunders and
tempests of life, I shall dread no danger,
for Thou art -

ROSE (O.S)

Joe!

Joe flinches but keeps leading the prayer.

JOE and MEN

- near me. Thy love and thy care they -

ROSE

Joseph!

Two sailors CONNOR, vital 25, and JUDD, built like an ox at 16, open their eyes to see two women in dark dresses, ROSE and GRACE, who pelt bareheaded along the wharf towards them.

MEN

- shelter me. Thou prearest a harbour in -

Rose, 24, Joe's wife, skids to a halt in a flurry of petticoats, screwing up courage to cross the narrow channel between wharf and ship. Joe, aiming to finish the prayer, holds up his hand.

MEN

the homeland of -

Rose eyes the seething water between wharf and ship. Her fine features, model for the figurehead, crumble.

ROSE

Can't we stay together and stay alive?

GRACE, 28, worn but pretty, overtakes Rose and steps aboard.

GRACE

No one rechecked the hold?

Grace throws up the hatch leading to below deck. Joe rolls his eyes and nods at Connor, who blows his whistle. The sailors scatter.

INT. HOLD DAY.

Joe, holding an oil lamp, opens a chest. From a corner two anxious wide eyes watch him. He lets the lid fall.

JOE

So a new place... Fee! Fie! Foe!

He sniffs, investigates a roll of sail, scans, seems not to see the watching eyes. LIZA, 6, stealthily shifts position. A mouse darts out. Joseph picks up the clue. Liza flattens into the dark. He turns away then dives on her. With a crow of laughter he scoops her under one arm. Liza screams.

EXT. DECK DAY.

The sailors smirk as Joe passes with a kicking, screaming bundle of red hair and gingham.

EXT. WHARF DAY.

He deposits Liza between Grace and the sobbing Rose. Liza's screams break to a whimper. Joe squats beside her.

JOE

We're just over the sound...
Home on the tide. Moon'll bring me.

As Liza looks at the faint slice of moon in the pale sky, he kisses Rose. He springs back aboard, loosing the ship from its mooring pile.

EXT. WHARF DAY

Rose clings to Liza, wiping her eyes then her child's, as the ship moves out. Grace waves.

GRACE

Wave! Wave to your Daddy.

Liza raises her hand to wave and watches the growing moon lighten in the darkening sky.

EXT. COVE DAY.

Distant rollers crash. A silver fob chronometer on a chain shines in a woman's palm. The time is almost 11.

LIZA (V/O)

So if we go east...

The minute hand makes 11.00. Liza's finger counts forward, lingering between 3 and 4.

we arrive early?

Grace laughs. Liza becomes uncertain.

Or late?

GRACE

That depends on the wind. East and West.

Liza frowns. She turns the chronometer over and traces a Latin inscription with her finger "Turpiter Desperantur".

LIZA

Never give up.

Grace kisses her.

Does my uncle speak Latin?

Liza flicks open the back of the case on a daguerrotype portrait of a dark man with a reckless smile.

GRACE

Didn't use to.

She glances at a rotting hull caught on a rocky outcrop, clips the chronometer shut.

LIZA

He might now. If another sailor's taught him.

Grace smiles sadly and ruffles Liza's hair. Liza looks away at the rocks where she spots MARIE, plump 9, in tartan suit and tamoshanter, exploring pools.

LIZA

That girl again. And her Daddy...

Grace becomes more alert. Marie's father, Captain Mackay, 40, immensely capable, in a gansey jersey and oilskin trousers comes into view.

LIZA

Captain Mackay. What do they want, Grace?

Grace, feeling Mackay's eyes on her, slowly turns to face him.

GRACE

Shell fish.

Liza notes Grace's slow blush as she locks eyes with Mackay and slips the fob into her pocket.

INT. MACKAY'S SALOON ON HIS CLIPPER. DAY.

A ship in a bottle. Marie and Liza lean on a long pine table, watching as its furled sails spread. Liza is delighted.

LIZA

Reef the mains'l, Bosun!

MARIE lets out a string and the mainsail is reefed.

MARIE

Easy. Or you couldn't sail safe.

A light laugh and footsteps overhead.

LIZA

I can't sail anyway...

A muffled giggle overhead.

MARIE

I know. Because Your Ma's brother drowned.

Liza looks appalled. Marie gives an apologetic shrug.

Your Godmother told our Da...

Liza's eyes burn into Marie's.

LIZA

Uncle's a whaler. Those big fish take years to catch!

Marie touches her cheek.

MARIE

Not ten years, Liza.

INT. BEDROOM NIGHT

Grace, sits with her hair down at a dressing table and gazes at the daguerrotype in the fob watch. The candle flickers and almost animates the man's smile.

Grace looks in the mirror, smoothes a wrinkle. Liza is just visible on the mirror's edge. Grace takes a deep breath.

MARIE (OS)

Not ten years with no word at all.

Grace holds the portrait over the candle, which gutters then leaps into life.

"The Wedding March" blasts on fiddles and accordion.

EXT. ANNAPOLIS HARBOUR. NOVA SCOTIA. DAY.

Above the blowsy figurehead the SARAH Jo's sails bat with wind. MARIE, beating a little drum, leads a cortege of musicians after Mackay who carries Grace, dressed in white, across a corridor of ship's decks. A cheer from the land as they reach the *Sarah Jo*.

EXT. PIER DAY.

Rose waves as the *Sarah Jo's* sails fill.

ROSE

I'd have waited for you, Joe.

Joe squats by Liza, who wears Grace's fob watch over her chest. He supports his eyeglass as she scans the harbour, focusing in and out of true.

JOE

But never come with me? More miles means rich dunnage - tea, silk, cotton.

Rose bites her lip.

ROSE

I've wished so many times that I'd packed up and sailed but what with Liza -

JOE

Captain's daughters cross half the world. If she's good at calculating I'll teach her to navigate.

Liza looks hopefully at Joe. Rose coughs discreetly into a hanky.

ROSE

She's bad at calculating.

LIZA

I multiply up to nineteen! Anne Bonny and Mary Read could hardly even count their gold yet -

ROSE

It wasn't their gold, Liza. See, Joe, you'd have her be a pirate?

She flicks Joe's chest with the back of her hand. He grins, points Liza's attention to the ship, which is going about. Liza watches, fascinated. The musicians, on the last anchored ship, slide into a hornpipe.

JOE

He comes out of the blue and takes her all over.

Liza's eyeglass picks up Marie on the *Sarah Jo's* deck.

EXT. DECK OF CLIPPER, DAY.

Marie takes off her shoe.

JOE (V.O)

Now, ain't that a dream come true?

The shoe hits the water in a splash of spray.

INT. PARLOUR, NIGHT

Rose sitting on Joe's lap in the armchair, traces his lifeline.

ROSE

Luckier than my brother? Well...

She kisses his palm. Joe rises, tipping her off his lap.

EXT. GRANVILLE HARD, NIGHT.

High tide, under a huge moon. Liza races after Joe who strides to the pontoons. She grabs his arm. He keeps walking.

JOE

I'll not be beached! Will you ever hear me? If you could see the light where there's no land -

LIZA

And floating icebergs and albatross -

Joe turns amazed, sees Liza, cloak over her nightdress, carrying a suitcase. She shrugs. He meets her eyes, breaks into a slow grin. Running footsteps. Panting, Rose looms against the dark.

ROSE

Wouldn't a little Chandler's shop do?

A curtain twitches at an oil-lit window.

JOE

All I love makes you fearful!

Liza is swept into Rose's arms. Joe strides away. Light from the window spreads.

INT. EDEN'S PARLOUR. DAY.

Sun fires Liza's hair, looped into a low bun. Aged 19, she sews in the window seat, surrounded by Indian throws, African

figurines, Turkish jars etc. Rose, in a heavy chintz dress and shawl, lays out visiting cards portraying the owners in hunting suits, tophats etc.along the piano lid.

ROSE

Father fiddlesticks! What does your father know of the very pride of this county? When is he ever in this county? He's never out in it! Use a thimble on that! You'll have hands like a herring girl!

She crosses to the window, raises a lorgnette to Liza's work.

Sailstitch! That's all you're good for.

She sighs hard at the whirling snow. Liza watches her expression soften and follows her eyes to see a SUITOR with a posy braving the slippery incline to the gate. Rose beckons the visitor in.

ROSE

All I ask is for you to show interest before -

She coughs and swallows hard. AN OLDER SUITOR with a box of chocolates, arrives by the first.

- another girl does.

The suitors exchange hostile smiles. Liza looks away to frosty bare-masted ships in the icy harbour.

LIZA

We've more time than you think, Mama.

Rose makes anxious "lift and open" signs through the window.

ROSE

Till they're widowers... with their children to think of? I was a mother at your age and would see my own grandsons.

The suitors succeed in opening the gate. Rose applauds prettily, stifles a cough, hurries towards the door.

LIZA

I would see a clear view.

Rose stops dead, throws a filthy look at Liza. The door knocker falls. Rose slams out. There is a sudden explosion of coughing from the other side of the door. Liza rushes out.

INT. HALL DAY.

A coffin lies on a table. Joe sobs over it. Liza looks guilty.

EXT. AFTERDECK DAY.

The ship pitches and yaws through a jewel of a day. A slight figure swathed in blankets, half seated in a deckchair, leans on the lower rail. It's Liza, pale under windswept hair. She watches the heaving sea. Connor approaches.

CONNOR

Your father will have you go below, Miss.

Liza peers at the bridge where Joseph, wearing a black armband, keeps stern look out. She pulls the blanket closer.

LIZA

But Mr Connor, I feel sick below.

JOE (yelling)

Nothing but contrary! When your mother,
God rest her, would stay home and tremble
all you thought of was -

Liza pulls herself up, yells back.

LIZA

Not this - being human cargo without
a market to be packed out of your way.

CONNOR

You'll find a market soon enough.

Connor frowns at a tangle of rope by her feet, picks it up.

LIZA

I spliced it but -

She indicates sickness. Connor finds the splice, tugs it, expecting it to break. It holds.

CONNOR

You could save us a wage!

Amused, he prepares to show Joe, who pivots sharply and hurries below on the far side of the deck. Connor shakes his head.

CONNOR

Skipper don't feel too chipper neither.

EXT. SALOON DAY

Books, boxes and lamps from an open locker spill over the boards. Joe crouches among them, lingering over a fine plait of dark hair in the silver fob watchcase. Hearing footsteps on the companion, he snaps it shut, sees Liza, watching.

JOE

No duck-down. Your Godmother's gift!
You had it rattling loose in there!

Joe holds the watch to his ear, nods, bundles it at her.

Why's it out of sight anyways?

Liza drops her eyes to clutter starting to slide across the deck. Connor leans into the hatch.

CONNOR

I expect, Sir, with two chronometers
for all to see she thought -

Joseph knocks his temple.

JOE

Think harder. If one goes out of true
how are we sure what's right without
our own to check by?

Liza sinks out of his angry eye-line to the deck, hastily jigsaws contents into the locker.

CONNOR

She didn't know, Sir -

JOE

(blustering away.)
She didn't think!

INT. SALOON DAY.

The glasses and decanter in the deep hanging tray clink on a book "Norie's Epitome" leather bound and imprinted with a Rose compass.

INT. CHARTROOM DAY

Joseph, overlooked by Connor, fills in the log. Liza stands at the door with the book. He glances at her, goes back to the log.

EXT. DECK DAY.

Liza sits in the shade of the rigging, studying a sail plan in the Epitome. She checks it with the sails overhead, looks towards Joe in the chartroom.

INT. CHARTROOM DAY

Joe plots a pencil line on a chart. Liza enters with a cup. He takes the cup without looking at her, drains it, nods thanks, gives it back, expects her to go. She sits on the bench. He looks at her. She smiles at him, nods at the chart and position.

LIZA

Let me log it.

He lifts Liza's hand to view a roughening knuckle.

JOE

Should wear gloves on rope or have hands like a herring.

LIZA

Herring girl.

Joseph grins wryly, sharpens the pencil.

JOSEPH

Very good. Play secretary.

Liza starts to roll the chart for better access to the log. Joseph swipes her hand away. The pencil falls.

JOSEPH

Never do that! Never roll a chart.

She patiently picks up the pencil. He is slightly ashamed.

JOSEPH

Where's the use of a chart that curls?

EXT. BRUNSWICK DOCK. LIVERPOOL DAY.

A pedlar sells beer from a keg to beribboned LASCAR SAILORS. DOCKERS weave a donkey cart through drizzle and KIDS playing tag. A WHORE touts for trade. An EMIGRANT COUPLE keep track of luggage and 3 CHILDREN, finding two jiggling by an Afro-Caribbean mandolinist, TOM, 28, and JACK, 24, a lithe fiddler whose mop of black hair hides his face.

A trunk and hat-box winch past a figurehead to the wharf.

EXT. DECK DAY

Liza, leaning on the rail, watches the musicians.

MARIE (O.S)

Liza! Liza!

Liza scans the crowd.

LIZA

Marie!

She runs down the gangplank.

EXT. WHARF DAY

Marie, plump, stylish 21, and Liza embrace.

MARIE

Thought you'd spend another twelve years
in customs.

LIZA

To say nothing of quarantine. Thought you'd
be somewhere off China with Grace and -

MARIE

My little brother?

Marie points off the wharf to a coach where Grace sits a TODDLER
astride one of two horses. Liza stretches her eyes.

MARIE

Did she not write? We're landlubbers now.
And I have business to finish of my own.

She nods at GIVRAS, suave 30, smoking by the carriage. He tips
his hat to Marie and Liza.

MARIE

Louis Givras, shipowner and cargo king.
Fair built, what?

EXT. DRY DOCK. LIVERPOOL, ENGLAND. DAY.

Seagulls scream at the fresh wind. "The Rothesay," rests on
timbers extending from the dock walls.

GIVRAS (O.S)
 Fourteen hundred, forty four tons!

CHIPS, sinewy and wrinkled dry at 70, looks round from sanding the figurehead, a buxom Nun. He sees Givras, Marie, Liza and toddler, Joe and Grace descend the grassy bank towards him.

GIVRAS
 Built under special survey. Seven months from laying our keel. Lists not to port nor starboard. A good deep draw...

MARIE
 A match for steam with a flier like Uncle.

GIVRAS
 And our cargo don't go to blazes.

Joe runs a practiced eye over the ship.

JOE
 Twenty to crew her.

GIVRAS
 I recommend Mr Chips there...

MARIE
 Since God don't make 'em like He used to.

Joseph assesses Chips, who breaks into a toothless smile.

JOE
 If he knows the ship and don't smoke below. New Orleans.... interesting!

INT. CHANDLER'S SNUG. NIGHT

GIVRAS (O.S)
 Your share will be!

The buzz of conversation and pipe smoke drifts over a glowing Christmas tree and across brown velvet drapes.

GIVRAS
 Those 64ths'll make pretty pennies.

A whist drive. Connor plays alone, while Givras is helped by MARIE, Liza overlooks Joe and Chips shares his cards with Grace. All hide their eyes from Grace who walks backward shielding her cards from all but Chips and pointing to seven hearts.

Liza catches Givras's eye. He winks. She smiles uncertainly, looks away to the roaring fire, just as SARAH, 23, a pretty Afro European maid, heaves a shovel of coals out of the dumb waiter and pours them onto the flames.

Chips nods at Grace. She lays the winner. Good humoured groans as all throw down their cards.

CHIPS

When you're old enough, Mr Connor, I'll teach you the trick of it...

Givras pushes the winnings to Grace and Chips and reshuffles.

GIVRAS

Change and change about. I'll play with Liza before the January winds whisk her off again...

MARIE gives a tiny, jealous frown. Grace catches Liza's eye. Liza looks at SARAH who lingers, stretching her back. SARAH throws her the briefest wistful smile.

GIVRAS

Or will she let her feet to dry?

LIZA

And miss America?

MARIE

And writing to us.

JOE

A female aboard keeps the men quieter.
Has 'em washed and shaved Sunday.

CHIPS

Won't business let you come along, Mr Givras?

Givras gives a regretful shrug. Marie is mortified. Liza shoots a defensive look at her. Joe rises, puts on his coat.

GIVRAS

Joseph Eden!

SARAH putting the coal shuttle back in the dumb waiter pricks up her ears.

GIVRAS

It's early!

JOE

Too early to stay longer.

EXT. YARD DAY

Cockcrow. A ramshackle shed and studio flank the back of the Chandler's. Sarah runs after squawking chickens, catching and loading them into a crate.

The gate chain rattles. She looks up to see Givras accompanied by Marie and Liza. Sarah slams the lid on the crate and goes to help with the gate.

GIVRAS

No ship should be without a cat.
I want a good mouser for Miss Eden.

A BOY races out of the shed and takes over unbolting the gate. Liza grins at Sarah, who curtseys and looks at Liza's fob.

MARIE

And for Miss Mackay?

GIVRAS

Birds and hanging baskets on a sunny porch.

Marie beams at Givras. Liza looks away, spots Sarah lingering on the fob's Latin inscription.

LIZA

Turpiter Desperantur. Never give up.

SARAH

Or Fear is for Cowards, Ma'am.

Liza, surprised and impressed, notices the plain crucifix at her neck.

LIZA

That too.

The gate opens. The boy leads them across the yard.

INT. BARN DAY

Kittens clamber over sacks of meal and each other. Liza's eyes soften. She scoops up a ginger one.

GIVRAS

Him?

The boy nods knowledgeably, points at the kitten's underside. MARIE flashes a smirk at Liza. Givras, flustered, gives the delighted boy a shilling.

MARIE

And he'll need a basket directly.

Givras gives him another shilling. The boy dashes off.

Liza strokes the kitten. A shaft of dusty light gilds her softening face. Givras admires her, a little too long for MARIE, who slips an arm through his. He turns his smile on MARIE.

The boy, breathless and panting bursts through the door, pointing urgently across the yard.

EXT. YARD. DAY.

Sarah, drained of colour, struggling for breath, swoons. The air is filled with squawks and feathers.

The feathers settle. Sarah comes to. Fingers - Liza's - loosen her collar. Givras's face swims towards her. Sarah smiles wanly, becomes aware of the boy hovering, then of MARIE and Liza undoing the placket at her waist. Sarah pushes Liza's hand away, sits. Liza and Marie draw back.

MARIE

Water. She needs water.

Liza goes to fetch it. The boy gets there first. SARAH slumps.

SARAH

How will I work? God help me.

She starts to get up. Givras restrains her. She bursts into tears. Givras looks urgently at MARIE, who retreats to help the boy at the pump.

INT. ROTHESAY SALOON. EVENING.

Water laps. The ship rocks and sighs. Sun through a skylight and lace curtains at the windows throws filigree shadows across Grace in the Captain's chair, feeding the baby. MARIE watches, sulkily dangles string for the lively kitten.

GRACE

She's a servant.

MARIE glances at Liza in a window seat, mending a sock.

MARIE

That only means she's paid for working.

GRACE

For your Mr Givras, there's nothing else it can mean either.

MARIE

Except that his broad shoulder was there. And I reckon it was there for her before I was. He likes women.

GRACE

You're a woman.

MARIE

Not the first of the fair...

GRACE

Nor the last of the hags.

MARIE growls, pulls an ugly face. Grace and Liza grin.

MARIE

If Liza could show me how she does her hair...

Beat. Liza hides a blush, picks up the kitten.

LIZA

Don't you miss the ocean?

MARIE

I've a better idea of home now.

GRACE

Understand that bachelors may take leeway. More than we care for, or care to know, but it helps them to wait and gives us pleasure from a practised husband.

MARIE

Must he have everything?

Grace looks up with a start.

I had thought ... encouragement - not so much as risks the wedding dress - might make me vital to his world.

Grace tightens her lips. Liza looks fast out of the window.

GRACE

Hold hard to his world. It's wider than you'd have with others. Let me tell you how the world shrinks for a single woman! If that maid's his business, he'll do business fair.

LIZA

And if he don't?

Through the lace curtain, Liza spots the musicians, Tom and Jack, heading along the pontoon.

EXT. PONTOON EVENING.

Jack shakes hair from his eyes. He's the image of the daguerrotype in Grace's fob.

GRACE (V.O)

Then hope the wages of sin is life.

INT. SALOON EVENING.

Liza frowns, reminded of something. She lifts the curtain. Jack moves out of sight.

EXT. WHARF. LIVERPOOL. DAY.

Joe paces, tensely overlooks a letter. Tom and Jack stand beside their instruments, bedding rolls and sea-bags.

JOE

So a violin is all you had of him?

JACK

My father lived light.

JOE

And he made sure you do?

JACK

Like father like son.

JOE

Are you running away like him, Jack Blaney? Warmer audiences in New Orleans?

TOM

Distance from hand to mouth shrinks here come Spring, Sir. We're after a round trip.

JACK

And I keep my people informed, as you see.

JOE

I'd know you without this. No one else'll want to though. What is it, Girl?

He sees Liza hovering at the cabin entrance. She holds up a letter.

LIZA

To Uncle Mackay. Shall Marie take it?

JOE

I'll add my pawmark once I've finished here.

He waves her away, gives Jack back his letter. She hovers momentarily, then goes below.

JOE

So. No special treatment. You show me who you are. Lose your father's name for the now and if your tale runs a bristle from your chin -

TOM

Sleeping dogs, Sir.

JACK

Old stones not to be turned.

JOSEPH

Sir.

JACK

Sir.

EXT. LIVERPOOL WHARF. DAY.

Drizzle. Givras shakes and breaks a bottle of champagne on the Rothesay's prow. Gulls cry. Men cheer.

EXT. RIGGING DAY.

5 Sailors, overseen by Judd, let out the mainyard.

EXT. MAIN DECK DAY.

The gang plank rises. With 4 other sailors, Jack and Tom lean in and turn the capstan, heaving up anchor.

EXT. LIVERPOOL WHARF DAY.

A small crowd, including MARIE and Givras, with the broken bottle, watch the Rothesay, escorted by gulls, move out into the busy traffic of the Mersey.

Marie waves a handkerchief.

MARIE

May your ship ride calmly! Starlight
and sunlight!

She dabs her eyes. She waves again and as Givras slips an arm round her waist, spots Sarah hovering on the edge of the crowd. MARIE bites her lip, stops waving.

EXT. QUARTERDECK DAY

Liza runs along the port rail, trying to keep track of MARIE and Givras, fast fading into the crowd. She stops, squints harder, but loses sight of them completely.

EXT. IRISH SEA DAY

A wave breaks on rocks. Seals bathe in foam and misty sunshine.

EXT. DECK DAY

Chip's gnarled hand guides Liza's at the helm.

CHIPS

Grip firm. As she rises, meet her easy,
not too much wheel...

Liza beams with pride. BERTIE, wiry 14, on the prow of a passing pilot sloop, grins at her. The pilot, FRANK, stalwart 25, with a fresh open face, tips his cap to her.

Chip nods at the swelling sails.

INT. SALOON DAY.

Joe smokes and watches from the window.

EXT. ATLANTIC. DAY

A harpoon log on a chain skims under white water and breaks the surface.

EXT. STERNDECK DAY

Joe helps Liza, who wears an oilskin jacket and big boots, wind in the harpoon log.

INT. SALOON NIGHT.

Connor drinks tea as Liza puzzles over a trackchart, sextant, compass and book of logarithms.

LIZA

I still add for current I guess.

Joe testily empties his pipe.

JOE

Not guess. We're not the dogbarking school of navigators. We reckon. Compass direction, forward speed and wind -

LIZA

- position! I know but I can't -

JOE

Can't calculate. Can't navigate.

CONNOR

Ah. With a handsome officer to do her math -

Joe flashes him a dangerous look.

Young and handsome.

EXT. DECK. DAY.

Jack swabs the deck. On the afterdeck he spots Liza pegging bloomers and stockings on a rope hung off a mast.

EXT. AFTERDECK DAY

She feels his eyes, meets them, becomes aware of the camisole she holds. She flushes. He grins. She continues pegging.

INT. QUARTER DECK. RAIN.

Rain lashes. Liza, in oilskin jacket and souwester, throws grain and vegetable peelings into the noisy hen coop. The cock eyes her quizzically. She looks away to the sound of scraping, sees Jack unlid a water butt.

LIZA

No drying today, I'm afraid.

JACK
Afraid of what? Free wash.

LIZA
... Have you no women in your family?

Jack watches Liza batten canvas over the coop.

JACK
Is there a family without women? Though
as it goes I've lost most of my people.

She looks up sharply, watches him hunch away.

INT. CAPTAIN'S CABIN. NIGHT.

Joseph carves a chicken for Liza, Connor and Chips.

JOE
Show me the man who's not lost someone.

CHIPS
Or not lost himself.

Joe checks Liza, smiles at her. Connor raps the table.

CONNOR
I been lucky so far.

JOE
Coming from a long line of landlubbers.

CHIPS
The Reaper never goes to town?

Liza gives a tense smile. The others laugh harshly. Sound of stifled coughing. A door slams. The cabin tips.

INT/EXT. PARLOUR WINDOW DAY

Rose, coughing, tightening her shawl against the snow storm, stands on the porch as the suitors slip up the steps. A THIRD SUITOR arrives at the gate.

Liza twists away, notices a dark spot on the wooden seat, peers at it, leans forward to brush it with her finger, stares in horror at bloody sputum.

Sound of Rose's desperate coughing.

JOE

Point being if you listened to every -

INT. CABIN NIGHT

The cabin levels. Liza accepts the vegetables Connor offers.

JOE

- tar up ahead you'd never stop weeping.
Leave it at "please" and "thank you", Girl.

INT. FORECASTLE. NIGHT.

9 sailors eat potatoes and bully beef. Tom checks the pot for a second helping. CORNISH, 40, bitter and nervy, hung about with talismans, flips Tom's hand away.

TOM

There's plenty.

CORNISH

And there's us before you.

Jack stops eating, eyes Cornish, who waves his spoon at LING, Chinese.

and before him...

Ling takes his food to his bunk. Cornish jabs his spoon at Feathers, who carries on eating.

and before him too.

TOM

Like our scran cold, do we?

The old Lascar COOK, a ladle hung from his belt, nervously straightens his truss. Cornish jerks his head at Tom.

CORNISH

Cool them Devil's marks on you.

JACK

... God's marks. God saved Tom, eh Tom?

He serves Tom a potato. Cornish glowers.

TOM

From the jaws of death, Jack.

CORNISH

I'll give you jaws of death the pair of you.

EXT. AFTERDECK DAY.

Liza mends a sail. Brooms scratch the deck below.

EXT. DECK DAY

Jack and Tom swab the deck. Cornish ambles by with TAD, who, rippling bulbous muscle, is tattooed to the eyelids, like a primitive carving. While Tom's and Jack's backs are turned, Tad throws Tom's bucket overboard.

EXT. AFTERDECK DAY

Not believing her own eyes, Liza stands as...

EXT. DECK DAY

Tom goes to where the bucket was, looks around. Cornish points at the water astern.

CORNISH

Clumsy devil.

Tom stares at them. Jack swings up his broom, levels it at Tad. Cornish chuckles.

Ooh! we're in for a Fiddler's beating, Tad.

Tad grabs, snaps the broom over his knee. Cornish's grin fades.

JACK

There! won't be me beating you.

He picks up half the broomstick, hurls it overboard.

JACK

For Our Lord Conductor in the Sky...
Dead wood with your name on it, Cornish.

Cornish's hands fumble for an amulet round his neck.

JACK

Whatever you do to keep lucky...

Tad dives at Jack. Jack dodges, picks up the rest of the broom, holds it over the side.

JACK

Touch me or Tom and that'll be both of you.

Judd arrives, followed by Liza.

JUDD

Dramatic interval, lads?

LIZA

No, Mr Judd, the performance still runs at the musician's expense.

JACK

With poor Cornish as the cursed hero, sighting half a broom overboard. Oh horror! Horror!

LIZA

Unless the bucket comes off his pay, not -

She nods at Tom.

JACK

His name's Tom, Miss. I'm Jack Fiddler. Delighted.

Liza doesn't look at him.

LIZA

So that Providence overlooks the wood at Man's justice done.

JUDD

So what's damages? One bucket and -

He picks up the rest of the broomstick and head. Tad looks anxiously at Liza.

LIZA

A short broom has its uses, Mr Bosun.

JUDD

As you say, Miss Eden.

Tad looks grateful.

LIZA

What do you say, Cornish?

Cornish gulps.

CORNISH

Thank you Miss.

INT. LIZA'S STATEROOM DAY.

The cat sleeps on the bed. Liza sits at her dresser, winding her chronometer. Joseph leans in the doorway.

JOSEPH

And what of what I might say?

LIZA

I knew you'd want fair play and fair pay.
Tell me why I remember him?

Joseph's eyes linger on the chronometer as she shuts it. He gets up to leave.

JOSEPH

How can you remember him?

INT. STATEROOM NIGHT

Liza sleeps, her eyelids flicker at the faint swish of viscous liquid and male laughter.

EXT. COMPANIONWAY TO HOLD. DAWN

The laughter and swish gets louder, echoing. Grace appears in the gloaming, grins and beckons Liza down a ladder, warning her to keep quiet. The light grows as Liza descends.

Liza reaches the ledge, Grace points into steaming lamplight at-

INT. HOLD DAWN

Five men, naked to the waist, hip deep in blubber, melt blanket slices of whale in iron pots. The air steams and spits, gleams on the taut glistening muscles of a dark-haired man's back.

GRACE (whispers)

Need your lamp filling?

Raucous laughter blows the lamp out. Black.

INT. STATEROOM NIGHT.

Liza stirs and rolls over.

EXT. EDGE OF SARGASSO SEA, DAWN.

A wreck, no more than bones seen through an eyeglass, floats on the horizon.

CONNOR

Dried to death.

The wreck comes into focus.

JUDD

Long time too. She worth salvage?

A shred of motionless sail hangs from the mizzen mast.

CONNOR

This close to calm? Rot's got her good.

EXT. DECK. DAWN.

Connor hands Judd his eyeglass and crosses himself. Judd raises it to his eye. Cornish ambles up, makes out the wreck and touches his amulet.

EXT. ATLANTIC HORIZON. DAY.

The wreck zooms into harder focus.

JUDD (O.S)

Not much there but grouper fish.

EXT. DECK DAY.

Tad and Jack arrive. Connor moves off.

CONNOR

We'll steer well clear.

CORNISH

And fast.

JACK

Before she chases us?

Tad checks Cornish anxiously.

TAD

With them reeds holding her.

JACK (ghostly voice)

Tugging the reeds rattling after her.

CORNISH

Shouldn't say that, Fiddler.

JACK

And the ghosts of parched horses riding
the spray.

Cornish pales.

CORNISH

Shouldn't call that stuff up.

JACK

That stuff's no ears for what we say. Nor
eyes for who's born in a caul or who wears
a lucky stinking one under his shirt or a
wrens' feather to keep afloat...

JUDD

What you must wear, Fiddler, 's a gold earring
for Christian burial in case your Mammy don't
find you. Better be your first wages.

Judd sniggers, puts away the telescope.

Let's look at Breakfast! Leave the wreck to
look to itself.

He sets off to the foc's'le. Jack follows.

Tad notices Cornish trembling, reaches an arm round his
shoulders. Cornish jerks away, runs at Jack, drags him down,
bangs his head on the deck.

Tad stares aghast at the pummelling Jack is getting. Judd blows
his whistle, pushes Tad to separate them, dives in himself.

Tom, Connor and Joseph come running. Tad pulls Cornish off. Judd
pulls Jack out.

JUDD

Fiddler this time, Skipper. Asked pretty
loud.

Cornish spits on Jack. Tom leaps on him. Judd restrains Tom.

JOE

Put him to cool off on the pumps.

CORNISH

Glad, sir. If we kiss land, I'm walking!
There's safer fortunes in gold.

Judd and Tad flank Cornish away. Joseph, concern growing, bends
to inspect Jack's bloodied, unconscious face.

INT. SALOON DAY.

Liza, clutches a tattered petticoat, looks up from a first aid box of morphine and castor oil.

LIZA

No special treatment?

Joe sits in his Captain's chair, hands trembling as he fills his pipe.

LIZA

His treatment's already special. Or are heads broken every day?

Joe trembles harder. Liza, stunned by this display of emotion, goes to sit by him. Joseph turns away, looks at his palm.

JOE

Nothing finishes, does it?

Liza shudders.

INT. FORECASTLE. DAY.

A gloomy cubicle for twenty. Light from portholes is compromised by airing socks. Narrow niches for sleeping surround a table and benches where Ling scrimshaws a bone. Seabags are lashed into an upper cot. Two cots are occupied by sleepers. In another, DIEGO, 17, patches a shirt. Tad snores, visible only via a tattooed leg slung over the side of a hammock.

Jack, in a lower cot, is barely conscious. His mouth and eye are swollen. Tom cleans a cut over the other eye. Feathers stands by with a bowl of water.

A tap at the door. Diego, Tom and Feathers check each other. Chips enters.

CHIPS

Way for the lady.

Diego leaps to his feet. Ling stands slowly as Liza indicates the can and cotton cloth she carries. Tom rises.

TOM

He's not ready to drink, Miss. Not by a long chalk.

LIZA

This is comfrey. Good for everything -

She approaches, sits on Tom's low threelegged stool.

My Godmother's recipe.

She rips the rag - once a petticoat, dips it in the liquid, dabs Jack's lip. His mouth twitches. She wipes his lower lip, refreshes the cloth, wipes his good eye. The dark lashes flicker. She wipes his swollen eye. His good eye prises open. In a sea of black and red specks, Jack makes Liza out.

JACK

Is it me or thee out of place?

Tom smiles with relief.

TOM

Further from heaven than you think, Jack, both.

EXT.LEVEE. NEW ORLEANS. DAY

A Mississippi steamboat passes. Houses on stilts shimmer in dust and watery light. A porticoed, balconied mansion flies the Old Glory flag.

Under an awning, shading baskets of sugarcane and pomegranites, a BLACK WOMAN fans herself and watches the Rothesay dock.

A team of BLACK DOCKERS sing a spiritual as they roll bales of cotton off a steam freighter.

WATERCLERK (O.S)

Voyez, Capitaine, cotton for z' world.

INT/EXT. AWNING. DAY.

The French WATERCLERK, sleek in a white suit and flat hat, lounges on the support post, watching the dockers. Joe glances past him to two PAPERPUSHERS at a makeshift table.

JOE

So how long must I be kept waiting?

The Waterclerk gives him a lazy smile.

WATERCLERK

Capitaine, we are waiting to be paid.

Joe is amazed.

Money! Do you have it?

Joe throws an anguished look at the Rothesay.

EXT. MISSISSIPPI. SUNSET.

A tug tows the Rothesay up river past fleets of freighters coming down. From the rail, dispirited sailors watch the receding city.

INT. GALLEY DAY.

The cook scrapes mould off bulley beef. Jack, head in a linen bandage, skims peel and chips blight from rotten potatoes. Footsteps. Jack glimpses a taut-looking Connor pass the door.

EXT. DECK. DAY.

JACK

Mr Connor Sir!... When do we go ashore?

Connor's eyes skim the rotten potato Jack holds.

CONNOR

What's it to you, Fiddler?

He nods at Jack's bandage.

Your head's already in a petticoat.

EXT. BAYOU. NEW ORLEANS. DUSK.

Crickets chirrup from the willows. Bats flit. The Rothesay rocks peacefully on the moonlit bayou.

LIZA (O.S)

The complications of land -

A fish flickers over Liza's watery reflection.

JOE (O.S)

Pox all agents, insurers and accountants.
Their time's our blood -

LIZA (O.S)

How long till word might reach Mr Givras -

EXT. AFTERDECK. DUSK.

JOE

Longer than we're paid for.

He stomps away.

INT. STATEROOM NIGHT.

Liza's pen moves over creamy paper: "New Orleans, February 5th, 1869. Dear - "

She pauses, writes " -est MARIE" pauses again, pen poised. The paper swims before her. Faint cluck of chickens.

EXT. CHANDLER'S YARD. DAY

The Boy fills a pail at the pump. He feels someone watching, looks at the gate and makes out Marie, half-hidden between a haycart and an overhanging roof. She smiles uncertainly, checks to see no one else is around and holds up a coin.

EXT. LIVERPOOL CLOSE. DAY

The Boy leads Marie, swathed in a shawl and carrying a basket of eggs, over filthy cobbles. He raps at a narrow door. They wait. Marie looks around doubtfully. The Boy beams at her, raps again. As they hear footsteps inside, he belts away.

Marie looks after him anxiously, then back at the door, opening to reveal a very pregnant Sarah, in a man's threadbare coat. Marie swallows, lets her shawl fall aside, holds out the eggs. Sarah, grateful, takes them.

MARIE

How are you managing? Was it Mr Givras?

Sarah frowns, perplexed.

INT. STATEROOM NIGHT.

The nib drips ink onto the middle of the page. Liza watches it tightly. Sound of SARAH's laughter.

EXT. ALLEY DOOR, DAY

MARIE, hurt, joins SARAH laughing. SARAH steps aside, gestures MARIE inside.

INT. DWELLING ROOM. DAY

A man's cap hangs on a peg. Marie takes in the tiny fireplace, the battered table and chair, the rickety double bed. Sarah shows her a brown paper sheet of handwritten music.

INT. STATEROOM DAY

Liza drips ink off the page and into the inkwell, frowning.

EXT. ROTHESAY. DAY.

Birdsong. Connor oversees Jack, Tom, Tad and Feathers painting the deck. Judd, Liza, holding a letter, and Joe push off in the Jolly boat. Jack nods at Liza. She looks away to insects skimming muddy water.

INT. MUNICIPAL HALL. NEW ORLEANS. DAY.

A CLERK, a pristine Creole, arrives between opening double doors.

Joseph and Liza rise. So do an exotic LASCAR CAPTAIN and FAT SHOPKEEPER. A MAN IN RIDING GEAR stays seated, tries to control a cough.

The clerk wipes his lips with a napkin and refers to a list.

CLERK

Rothesay from England?

He lingers ironically on "England". Joseph hurries through. The clerk cordially blocks Liza and shuts her out.

CLERK

So you come with cargo?

JOSEPH

All ballast till I have what to take back.

A fly buzzes, obscuring the response. Liza, embarrassed, inspects a stuffed alligator then a display of lilies. The Lascar Captain quirks an eyebrow at her. She blushes, fiddles with her glove, inspects portraits of illustrious men on the lofty gilded walls.

The dry cough repeats and is smothered in a handkerchief. The fly settles on a lily. Liza catches the Lascar's gaze in a gilded mirror. Her brow creases minutely. The fly buzzes. She checks the time on her silver chronometer, looks in the mirror, which darkens.

INT. BEDROOM NIGHT.

The flickering candle almost animates the portrait in the fob. Grace's reflection holds the fob over the flame.

INT. MUNICIPAL HALL.

Liza gasps.

INT. BEDROOM NIGHT

Young Liza sits up, sees beyond the reflection, the naked torsoed dark-haired whaler turning to meet Grace's eye. Grace swivels in time, tosses Liza the watch.

CLERK (O.S)
Now see my colleague -

JOSEPH (O.S)
I'll see your master!

CLERK
Welcome, if you come earlier.

EXT. MUNICIPAL BUILDING. DAY.

Joseph descends steps two at a time. Liza follows as fast as she can, opening the back of the fob chronometer.

LIZA
Grace's portrait! Not Grace's but -

JOSEPH
Must I wait for you too?

He heads along the busy street. She cuts in front, thrusts Rose's portrait at him. Joe freezes.

LIZA
It was my uncle's.

Joe closes the case and pushes it back at her.

JOSEPH
Don't wave that round this public.
If you won't hide it I will.

LIZA
You've hidden it long enough! Did you
think I'd tell Grace that her dead husband-

JOSEPH

He's dead but he ain't her husband.

LIZA

...that he made children away from her?

JOSEPH

The less known, the less angry everyone!
I took the son on for your mother's sake.
He's not scratching a living from the street
now. I won't have you reach out on sentiment.
Any jot like his Da in more than looks and -

LIZA

What do you take me for?

JOSEPH

It's how I take him. On proof.

EXT. BAYOU DAY.

Bare masts gleam in the harsh sun. The steamy air sings with birds and crickets. Liza gently takes an egg from the last sorry looking speckled hen, hears female laughter.

Looking along the ship's side she sees a line of sailors gawp over the rail at 3 scantily clad YOUNG BLACK WOMEN, who face them from the wharf. One unlaces her friend's bodice and holds it open on pert naked breasts.

Tad spins a coin across. Liza's hand tightens on the egg as the third woman turns her back and pulling up her tattered dress, bends to pick it up. A long whistle from Diego.

Liza spins away blushing, sees Jack watching the women. He grins as she pushes past with the cracked dripping egg.

EXT. RIVER. SUNSET.

Connor blows a whistle as Judd, Chips and Joe approach the Rothesay in the jollyboat. Feathers, Cook and Ling run to unload cask and cans.

INT. CABIN. SUNSET.

Liza studies a star map. Remains of raw egg and shell sit in a cup. Joe approaches, hands behind his back, secretly pleased.

LIZA

How was the harbour master?

JOE

Normal. Rules and fees in return for no records, no information, Devil may care...

LIZA

These days of nothing -

JOE

- won't last.

Liza looks up. He holds up a pigeon. She smiles, takes it.

JOE

So your little speckled hen might.

LIZA

What about the men? Their wages?

JOE

Someone spoke to you?

Liza shakes her head, plucks a few feathers from the bird.

LIZA

They know better than to speak to me. But I think they'd like to spend some money.

EXT. RIVERBANK DAY.

Carrying bedding mats and sea-bags, Judd, Tad, Cornish, Boots, and six other sailors pick through mud and vegetation to town.

EXT. DECK DAY

Liza, filling lamps, sees Ling, Feathers, Jack and Tom prepare to board the arriving jolly boat, rowed by Connor. Jack shakes Chips hand.

JACK

While she's wooden, she needs Mr Chips.

He slides a look at Liza.

CHIPS

Skipper'll send for you. Purses should do for more than a few nights.

Chips catches the rope Connor throws and pulls the boat in.

CONNOR

At the Cerise Jaune? Water through a net.

He blushes as Joe arrives, looking tense.

JOE

What would you know, Mr Connor?

CONNOR

What the Bosun tells me.

Joseph hands Chips a little case. Chips nods shortly.

JOE

Look lively. Mr Mate and I must make
a round trip by midnight.

They climb down to the boat. Liza waves. The boat pushes off.

LIZA

Will we see them again, Chips?

CHIPS

Your Daddy's a fine skipper.

He opens the box, revealing an old double-barrelled pistol.

CHIPS

Those we don't are fools.

INT. CARPENTER'S WORKSHOP. DAY.

The space is six feet square, at the fo'c'scle stern, lined with tools and a bench. Chips saws a plank. Liza passes the door, sweeping.

INT. FORECASTLE. DAY.

A lamp hangs crooked. Liza straightens it, approaches Jack's bare cot. Standing over it, she spots a piece of hard tack, picks off an insect, chews the tack, sits on the cot, lies, curls on her side, closes her eyes, hugs herself. The cat settles beside her.

Gunshot. The cat flees. Liza starts up, banging her head on the cot above and rushes out.

EXT. DECK. DAY.

Chips stands with a smoking pistol. Three pigeons flutter into the trees. He grins at Liza.

EXT. HENHOUSE. DAY

Liza and the cat assess the last hen.

EXT. DECK. DAY.

Liza fishes from the gunwale. The cat sits beside her, gets up and paces. Thinking she has a catch Liza brings in the line... Nothing.

INT. CABIN SUNSET.

Red light falls through the porthole and across the floorboards. Liza and Chips pick the bones off a chicken

INT. CABIN DUSK.

Chips dozes on the sofa. Liza studies the Epitome's diagram of winds and currents.

Chips hawls himself up.

CHIPS

They'll not expect us to wait up.

LIZA

Sleep well.

CHIPS

Aye lass. Lock your door.

He mooches out. She moves to the Captain's chair, swings herself clockwise then anticlockwise, grins, turns up the lamp.

INT. CABIN. NIGHT.

Distant snores. The lamp flickers. Liza sleeps over the book. A bird screeches. She stirs. The book falls. She wakes.

LIZA

Father?

She picks up the book, checks her chronometer, hears a violin.

EXT. DECK NIGHT.

Stars stud the sky. Liza scans the water - sees Jack closer than expected, serenading her from the jolly boat under the bulwark.

LIZA
Where's my father?

He keeps playing, speaking to the music.

JACK
Trapped in town with someone helpful.
I'm not required to know whom.

He rounds off with two chords, puts the violin down.

I'd have brought food but that shore's
plenty would sink me.

INT. COMPANIONWAY NIGHT

Joseph's and Liza's staterooms are open on empty cots. An ajar door gives a view onto the snoring Chips.

Liza softly closes and locks her stateroom door.

EXT. STREET. FRENCH QUARTER. NEW ORLEANS. NIGHT

Couples and single men jig and twirl under torches hung from balconies. Musicians on percussion, fiddles, mandolins and accordion caper amongst the dancers.

Jack plays for Liza, she notes his supple fingers, laughs at his nimble feet, gradually starts to move.

EXT. CEMETERY. NIGHT

Liza leans on palatial wrought-iron gates, holding Jack's fiddle. Jack negotiates flirtatiously with a pretty CREOLE selling drink and prawns. She hands him a serving, ladles drink into a cup and gives it to him. He toasts her, then Liza and starts to make his way through the crowd.

Liza looks up at a sad stone angel on the gatepost.

EXT. CEMETERY GATES. NIGHT.

A lone mandolin plays. Jack watches Liza eating the last shrimps from a banana leaf. Juice dribbles over her chin. Jack wipes it with a finger.

JACK
How will I stop thinking about you?

His finger caresses her mouth. They sink into each other's eyes.

LIZA
Will you have to?

JACK
Not yet.

He plants a kiss on her lips, taking her completely aback, pops the last shrimp into her mouth.

LIZA
... Jack...

JACK
Anything you want.

He moves to kiss her again.

LIZA
I know there's things you can't tell me.
He draws back.

But I know already.

His face clouds. The music stops. Applause.

JACK
Know what?

LIZA
That we're cousins.

He laughs harshly. Music starts again.

JACK
Is that all?

Liza hesitates, kisses the edge of his mouth.

LIZA
Cousins have been more than cousins
before.

He turns his head, draws her into a complete kiss. The gate behind opens and he moves her through.

EXT. CEMETERY. NIGHT.

Music pulses. The moon gleams through cypress trees, over stone vaults. Liza, blouse wide open, melts against a wall covered by jasmine as Jack kisses down her neck to the rise of her breasts.

JACK

Do you want this? Want this as I do?
I'll take good care...

He raises her skirt and kneels. She starts to swoon.

Do you?

LIZA

Oh - as soon as I saw you I -

He rises and kisses her.

JACK

Do you want me now?

LIZA

Forever.

He pushes into her. Her eyes flash open. Sky and trees take clarity. Moon and torchlight gleam on a sculpted skull and crossbones on a stone tomb. The skull's grin is suddenly defined. She looks away to Jack's full moist lips and kisses him.

EXT. BAYOU NIGHT.

Dawn filters through the trees. Jack rows Liza to the dim shadow of the Rothesay. He pulls in the oars and plucks a petal from her hair.

JACK

You'll like it better next time.

LIZA

I liked it enough to want it soon.

He winds her hair round his hand, leans to kiss her.

LIZA

And I want my Father to -

JACK

- marry us aboard?...

LIZA

It may be early. But we'd not wish to be too late.

Jack lets her go.

JACK

I took care, love. Your moon won't miss a phase.

Liza leans forward to kiss him. Jack sits back.

JACK

And don't he like you to keep secrets?

Liza bites her lip. He dips the oars, rows.

Nothing should come all at once, Cousin.
Give him time to be sure of me.

EXT. DECK. DAWN.

Liza, damp and dishevelled, scrambles aboard, pulls up the rope ladder. About to look across the river, she sees Chips in a deckchair, cleaning the pistol. Her face falls.

CHIPS

Think we'll all get away with it?

LIZA

All's well and as it should be.

He glances at her lap, returns to his work. The cat rubs her legs. Liza notices her blood-stained skirt.

EXT. AFTERDECK. SUNRISE.

The river is threaded with gold and orange. Liza winds her skirt through a mangle, glancing apprehensively at Chips who cleans a the pistol. Chips checks her, then the bank, squints hard as...

EXT. RIVERBANK. MORNING.

Joe and Mackay, picked out in sharp clarity, race to the moored rowing boat. They scramble in.

EXT. AFTERDECK. DAY

White bloomers squeeze dripping through the mangle.

MACKAY

Ahoy!

Liza stops winding, dashes to the rail, sees Mackay rowing.

LIZA

Uncle Mackay!

Joseph waves a letter.

JOSEPH
Hoist sail and go about!

A gust of wind bats the bloomer leg.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS DOCKS. DAY

Connor races along thronged streets, dodging mules, carts and dockers. He stops to ask the way of a Butcher's Boy who directs him up an alley.

EXT. ALLEY. DAY.

A WHORE racked by coughing, leans on the wall. She sneezes. Droplets cut the sunshine. Connor dashes past without a look.

The whore wipes her nose on her hand and launches herself into the crowd.

EXT. CERISE JAUNE INN. DAY.

Fiddle music wafts from a stuccoed inn hung with rusty balconies. A pair of lovebirds twitter from a cage hung off the wall. Connor hurtles inside.

INT. CERISE JAUNE. MORNING.

An OLD SALT drinking at the bar bangs a gong as Connor bursts in, sweating. Fiddle music crescendos from the gap in peeling double doors as a faded BELLE answers the call.

BELLE
Help you, sweetheart?

She closes the doors on the music.

CONNOR
I'm the Rothesay's mate here for Al Judd -

Connor picks up the dark look she fires the Old Salt.

OLD SALT
Give the man a drink.

The Belle rounds the bar. Connor mops his brow.

CONNOR

Just water, my dear.

He greedily eyes the water she pours.

OLD SALT

Want who you can get with them wrecks
after you.

CONNOR

A few been after it over the years or we'd
have towed it ashore. Claimed salvage.

He drains the glass, almost chokes. A flea lands on his arm. He slaps it dead.

BELLE

Could'a used the money's what I heard.
Not lost your men to other interests.

INT. CERISE JAUNE'S BACKROOM. DAY.

Music swells as the doors swing open on Judd and BRIDE standing on a table kissing. Cheers from Ling, Tad, Feathers, Boots, Diego and SPIDER, 40, a lean, lanky Welshman and 6 women. Jack, playing an air with Tom, brightens to see Connor.

Connor snatches an abandoned glass of punch.

CONNOR

Mr and Mrs Judd!

Tom and Jack stop playing. Cornish drunk, snores in a corner. Connor downs his drink, rubs his nose.

I've no gift but wishes. Everything you wish
yourselves though later...

Diego holds his girl tighter.

LING

Tonight?

CONNOR

Old Man's thinking of this afternoon.

BRIDE

My husband's in bed this afternoon.

Whoops and applause.

JUDD

Right as usual, Mrs Judd. A Fundy tide
can't drag me away.

EXT. MISSISSIPPI WHARF. DAY.

Joe and Mackay oversee dockers load the hold with bales and casks. Connor arrives with a tousled crew of 9. Ling is draped round SPIDER's shoulders. Feathers carries a harpoon. Tad hiccups. Jack and Tom support the drunken Cornish.

JOE

The less the merrier is it?

SPIDER

With so few to share the bounty, Sir!
Who'd be afeard of wrecks or -

He straightens under Joe's assessing gaze and salutes.

Spider Davies, Captain Eden. I'll not let
good fellowship sail with twice the
work to be done.

Joe quirks an eyebrow at Mackay who looks concerned. Joe shifts his eyes to Cornish.

JOE

Prospecting not what he thought?

The sailors snigger.

JACK

Never found his land legs, Sir.

Laughter. Feathers slaps Cornish's back. He grunts into consciousness then subsides. Joe's eyes come to rest on the caged lovebirds Jack holds.

JACK

Company for your daughter, Sir...

LIZA (O.S)

Will they speak, Mr Fiddler?

Joe sees Liza leaning over the rail.

JACK

For the right lady? I'd say so.

Joe eyes Jack suspiciously, then turns to Connor.

JOE

Do we expect Al Judd?

CONNOR

Not until he's worn his wife out.
Which didn't look too likely...

Guffaws from the sailors.

SPIDER

I done bosun, Sir! My last Skipper
writes so.

He thrusts Joseph a grimy piece of paper, upside down and points proudly along a line. Joseph turns the paper round, inspects it.

JOSEPH

The word there's "brave" anyway I look.
Then foretop man. Could be worse.

He raises an eyebrow at Mackay, who is concerned.

TAD

Miss Eden must share the watch and all.

Some sniggers. Joe looks up quickly.

JOE

So she must, Tad.

MACKAY

Mariners must be thick as flies here.

Connor shrugs.

CONNOR

We can ask for new hands on the levee, Sir.
May take a little time.

Joseph assesses the men, the ship and the scudding clouds.

JOE

They'll be fresher for some sea air.

EXT. MISSISSIPPI. DAY.

New Orleans recedes as the Rothesay in full sail, glides along the broadening river between verdant banks. Bright birds flit. Flowers open to the sun.

EXT. AFTERDECK DAY.

A lovebird clings to the cage bars, flirting with Liza.

EXT. DECK DAY.

Connor tightens a rope, puts his hands in the small of his back and winces.

EXT. BRIDGE DAY

Liza writes in the logbook: "24th March 1869. Florida Keys. 80 degrees W, 25 degrees N. (One degree lower than the Tropic of Cancer)..."

The cat slinks up and lies on the logbook. Liza strokes it, looks out of the porthole at -

EXT. SEA DAY

A string of shimmering islands.

INT. BRIDGE DAY.

The cat strolls off the logbook, now marking "28th March 1869, 65 degrees W, 31 degrees North."

EXT. PROW DAY.

Liza swings the lead way past the figurehead. It falls throwing prisms of water and rainbow light round the prow.

EXT. AFTERDECK DAY

Feathers replaces Connor at the helm.

FEATHERS

How does she head, Sir?

CONNOR

On course, due North East.

Feathers checks the compass, reading North North East.

FEATHERS

Due North East Sir?

Connor mops his brow.

CONNOR

As I said.

Feathers adjusts the helm. Connor sways as his world spins. Feathers looks round as Connor collapses.

INT. MATE'S STATEROOM DAY.

Liza raises Connor's head to give him water. He shivers so he can't drink.

CONNOR
I'm pitch-poled, eh?

LIZA
Ssh. A little fever, is all.

Liza manages to feed him water. Joseph arrives with Tom. Connor gets the hang of the cup, drinks greedily. Liza glances at Joe, lingers on Tom's pockmarks. Connor chokes. Thick spittle explodes from his mouth. Tom bundles Liza out.

EXT. COMPANIONWAY DAY

The door slams on Liza and Joseph.

JOSEPH
What we need. Take it! Tell no one.

Liza is on the edge of a query. He pushes her to the staterooms.

Now!

INT. CARPENTER'S WORKSHOP. DAY.

Chips, saw in hand, frowns as Liza, in rubber gloves, stands in the doorway, arms full of clothes and books. A jug swings precariously from her fingers.

CHIPS
Sleep here? Two of you?

Liza hangs the jug on a hook, dumps the rest on the work bench.

And Mr Connor?

LIZA
Tom's the one man safe to handle him.

Chips' eyes cloud. He starts to fill a tool bag. The cat jumps out of the bag and scarpers.

INT. FORECASTLE DAY

The cat shins up to Jack's cot, waking him. Jack strokes it. Chips enters with tools and seabag, nods at the cots.

CHIPS

Whose is whose here?

JACK

Tom's above me. That's Feather's. Ling's is -

Chips bundles his seabag on Tom's cot.

What's happened? Something happened to Tom?

He swings up, hits his head on Tom's bunk.

CHIPS

Another secret.

Jack rushes out, fastening his clothes.

EXT. COMPANIONWAY TO CAPTAIN'S CABIN.

"No Admittance" is chalked on the door. On the step the lovebirds twitter in their cage by a basket of fruit. Liza sadly picks up the cage.

EXT. STERN DECK. DAY.

Balancing the cage on the rail, Liza opens its door. The birds hang back. She tightens her lips, thrusts in her hand, grabs and throws one to the wind. The other flutters after it. Liza watches anxiously as both struggle to ride the same air current. She tosses the cage into the dark swathe of blue.

JACK

What's amiss? Where's Tom?

LIZA

The cabin. Working. I may not speak to you.

She dumps the fruit overboard. Jack is confused.

JACK

Unless I let you speak to your father.

LIZA

Let me? I say nothing since I see the sense of it. Tom's safer than anyone.

Jack pales.

And you'll see the sense of not scaring
your mates.

He looks at her aghast, then at the cat rolling on the sunny deck. They watch in horror as it scratches itself. Jack grabs it. Liza looks away. Jack hurls it overboard and slouches off. Liza sinks to the deck crying.

EXT. BEDROOM. DAY.

Grace, on a chaise longue, rocks the baby, passes Marie a calendar.

INT. CABIN. DUSK.

Liza writes in the logbook - "6th April."

INT. BEDROOM DAY

Grace, holding the baby, watches anxiously as MARIE paces in front of the fire, counting back and forward between March and April on the calendar.

EXT. BRIDGE. DUSK.

The last sun plunges into the sea. Joe coughs, puts his hand in the small of his back, winces and stretches.

Liza approaches with a cup of coffee.

LIZA

Let me take this watch.

JOSEPH

Gulf stream runs faster here to the Bahamas.
Blink and we'll run downhill to Mexico.

LIZA

With the watches on watch you're taking
you're more like to blink than I -

JOSEPH

You still well?

LIZA

I've been exposed to smallpox before.

JOSEPH

When you ate, kept warm, and slept.

You're not afeard of those men in the
FORECASTLE?

Liza grins.

LIZA

No room for fear, is there?

EXT. WORKSHOP NIGHT.

The tiny wooden space is lit by a safety lantern. Liza checks the knots on the hammock slung across the workbench which now hosts a mattress, sheets and blankets.

She closes the door and unbuttons her blouse, runs her hands over her face then takes the lantern. Taking her blouse off, she checks for spots, finds only smooth skin. Her hands move over her breasts, she closes her eyes. Footsteps approach. She tries, hampered by her skirt, to scramble into the hammock.

She starts to take her skirt off. The footsteps stop outside. She freezes, holds her breath, hears his. A note on brown paper slides under the door. The footsteps pass.

Liza falls on the note, holds it to the light. In round leaning pencil are scribbled crochets and quavers. Liza frowns, smiles and carefully undoes her fob-watch case.

INT. WORKSHOP. NIGHT.

Liza lies sleepless, lashed inside her hammock. The candle in the lantern is low. The door creaks open and Joseph blunders in. Liza's hand closes on the fobwatch under her pillow.

Joseph groans softly. Without undressing he rolls onto the cot/workbench and is instantly asleep.

INT. FORECASTLE NIGHT.

Jack, sleepless, sighs and turns over.

INT. WORKSHOP. NIGHT.

Joe snores. Liza pulls the pillow over her head, shifts impatiently to watch the dying candle, starts to doze.

EXT. SEA. NIGHT.

A breeze ripples phosphorescent water into diamond shapes.

JOE (O.S)

Secure that companion! Make all fast!

INT. WORKSHOP. NIGHT.

Liza flicks awake. Joe shivers.

EXT. SEA. NIGHT

A long grey wall of thundering wave rises.

JOE
Harnesses and safety lines.

INT. WORKSHOP. NIGHT

Liza swings out of her hammock and, seeing he's lying over the blankets, tries to pull them over him. He wakes with a start.

JOE
Is it here?

LIZA
You're freezing. Cover yourself.

JOE
The shoaler! I thought there was a shoaler
God help us.

EXT. POOP. DAY

Blue sky. Sparkling sea. Liza steers, watching the binnacle.

JOE
Tell them to reef all but topsail
and lower topsail...

His voice is hoarse. He gives her his speaking trumpet. Liza checks the flawless sky, then the steady mercury in the barometer.

LIZA
We've lost two months. Wasting this little
wind -

JOE
Wind's rising not far off. Best time to
reef is when you first think it.

LIZA
Father, you dreamed it. The shoaler was
a dream. Go to your bunk and dream some

more.

Joseph points at the waves, grabs the speaking trumpet and shouts, his voice breaking.

JOE

Reef all but tops'l and lower tops'l.

The sailors look amazed.

JOE

Make all fast and reef in I say!

The sailors make reluctantly for the ratlines. Liza squints at the waves, makes out a faint rippling phosphorescence - white diamonds shining green. She checks the steady mercury in the barometer.

LIZA

The glass has been good all this way.
I don't -

JOE

You don't argue with them as knows.
Let me trust you and join the mate happy.

LIZA

Join the mate?

Joseph shouts over the jitter of the rigging.

JOE

My daughter's sending me to bed, boys!

EXT. RIGGING. DAY

Laughter from sailors moving along the spars. Jack looks anxious.

EXT. DECK DAY

JOE

So reef in and do as she says. If the gales roll in before I'm rested then she's Master.

Liza looks at him, in horror. Chips, mending a block, looks alarmed

EXT. SPARS. DAY.

Sailors freeze in disbelief.

CORNISH

He's run mad.

JACK

Will if he hears you say so.

EXT. DECK DAY

JOE

And Mr Chips there is mate.

Liza looks Chips, sees suddenly old his age. She catches her father as he turns to the NO ADMITTANCE door.

LIZA

You can't -

He opens his shirt. His chest is aflame with spots.

JOSEPH

Not a minute longer. But you can.

He stumbles in. The door slams behind him.

INT. WORKSHOP. DAY.

Tom heaves Joe's bedding off the workbench and out. Liza swabs the bench. She opens the porthole, throws out the rag and remaining water, takes the Epitome out of her hammock.

Spider passes the door, followed by Cornish muttering.

CORNISH (OS)

Never figured to have a ginger wench board...

Liza opens the book.

Let alone have her over me.

Liza sighs, refocuses, brings the lamp over the book.

INT. FORECASTLE DAY

JACK

And there's me envied your imagination!

TAD

Heh, piece like her shivering your timbers!

Laughter. Jack smiles then jumps over the table to seize Tad.

INT. WORKSHOP. DAY

Liza starts at the sound of a scuffle.

INT. FORECASTLE DAY

Feathers stands between Jack and an amazed Tad.

SPIDER

Looks like she'd shiver Jack's.

INT. WORKSHOP. DAY

Liza listens, head to the wall.

JACK

Respect is all.

INT. FORECASTLE. DAY

Jack throws himself on a bench.

SPIDER

Sure. For our lives and loved ones.

INT. FORECASTLE. DAY.

CORNISH

Those red haired gals can whistle wind.

SPIDER

With two sheets, let's hope so.

CHIPS (O.S)

Skipper knows what he's about.

All look round at Chips standing in the door.

SPIDER

Unless it's drink.

TAD

Not Captain Eden.

SPIDER

Know as much as he, don't you, Chips?

CHIPS

That's Mr Chips now.

SPIDER

Captain, if you like.

CHIPS

No one heard that, Spider.

CORNISH

I heard.

Liza stands in the door.

LIZA

I did too. My father knows who to appoint.

SPIDER

He appointed me.

LIZA

He trusted you.

JACK

Had little choice.

LIZA

As you've all no choice but to trust me.
Or can one of you read a chart?

SPIDER

... Mr Chips?

CHIPS

Is it you deaf now? I read seas but
not much little writing.

CORNISH

Any salt can read a compass. Due East...

Spider shakes his head impatiently.

TAD

Aye, on the Gulf Stream.

LIZA

Just keep to the darker water, do we?

The sailors know Tad and Cornish are stupid but don't know how to take Liza. She grins.

LIZA

- to carry us safely off rocks named only
to limit space and wildness and gently,
smoothly...

They snigger.

... to warm sweet harbour.

More sniggers. Feathers slaps Cornish on the back. Liza grins.

SPIDER

Which ain't as far as Liverpool, Miss.

Cornish whoops. Liza fixes him with her eye. He subsides.

LIZA

Liverpool's our ticket.

EXT. DECK. DAY.

The sky glitters with stars. Ling and Diego are at the helm.
Liza checks the barometer. No change.

DIEGO

Still steady. Thanks God....

She glances at the two topsails, fluttering bravely, bites back
a short laugh, walks on, holds a lantern over the side, squints
hard at the ruffling phosphorescence, then checking to see no
one is watching, gently scratches the porthole to the cabin.

INT. CABIN. NIGHT

Tom looks up from spooning gruel into Joe's mouth. He goes to
lift the curtain. Joe grabs his wrist, meets his eyes, subsides
into coughing.

EXT. DECK. NIGHT

Liza waits, listens, steeling herself as the cough hacks harder.
A shadow falls over her.

JACK

Spider has a point, Sweet.

LIZA

Ssh. Which point is that?

He sinks down beside her, whispers.

JACK

That we put in to closer port.

Liza gets up and goes to the side. He follows, speaks low.

Liza, land and sea you're my mistress -

LIZA

Not that any should know how.

JACK

Never.

She looks at him quickly. He finds her hand on the rail, grips it.

But St John'd bring us to a doctor...
and out the storm.

LIZA

If storm there'll be...

She retrieves her hand.

St John'd bring us into quarantine...

She moves off.

What we've missed abroad we'd catch while
we're waiting.

EXT. DECK. DAY.

The almost bare rigging rattles in the breeze. Liza checks the noon sun and her watch, starts to take a reading. The mercury in the barometer creeps down.

INT. WORKSHOP. DAY.

The decanter tray swings wildly. The bottles shiver but stay held. The log slides to the floor. Liza, checking the Epitome, is flung against the wall. She picks up herself and the log and hurries out.

EXT. AFTERDECK. DAY.

More phosphorescent swell. Liza narrows her eyes at flying tawny clouds. Spider steers. Chips checks a block.

Liza checks the barometer, suspects a change but sees none.

SPIDER

Your Da's asleep a long time, Miss Eden.

CHIPS

He knows he can afford to sleep.

Tad looks up from sluicing the deck.

TAD

And Mr Connor?

LIZA

... Must afford it.

TAD

Is it the scurvy? Tongue all swelled
up and -

LIZA

Very like.

Liza tightens her lips. Spider nods at a flotilla of ships
coming over the horizon abaft in full crimson sail.

SPIDER

Spreading some canvas there. We could
do like, get us out of this storm path.

He clears his throat ironically. Liza looks enviously at the
sails bearing way ahead.

LIZA

Faster onto St George's Bank with so
few hands to harness our speed.

The ships vanish in a haze.

SPIDER

Go too careful you'd never leave land.

Liza sees the barometer plummet.

You can't go too careful...

She looks at the rigging, sees Cornish, Ling and Diego ready to
let out the main yard. Her eyes harden.

LIZA

You can't.

She raises the speaking trumpet. Her voice rings clearly.

We'll have that mainsail double reefed.

The sailors look at each other and shrug. Liza picks up a change in the sound of the rigging - a warning jitter.

SPIDER

They don't hear Sweet Fanny Adams, Miss!

The jitter comes harder. Chips puts down his block and goes. Liza looks coldly at Spider.

LIZA

What about mermaids dragging them under?

She puts the speaking trumpet to her mouth again.

Double reef - !

CORNISH (from the rigging)

We don't hear Sweet Fanny Adams from a Petticoat Sailor!

Faint laughter. Liza pales as they start to let out the sail. A shot breaks the air.

EXT. BRIDGE. DAY

Chips trains his smoking pistol on Cornish.

CHIPS

Next oaf says that poor whore's name in the presence of this lassy will be meat for fishes!

Jack and Feathers run on deck. Liza makes for the bridge.

LIZA

Give me the pistol!

CHIPS

Can you aim, Miss? Harder than it looks.

He shifts his sights to Diego, shouts...

We'll not trouble to can him either.

Jack and Feathers dive for Chips. Cornish lets his end of the sail out. Chips fires and misses. Diego slips, grabbing the

sail. The sail tears. Ling grabs Diego, hoists him back on the spar. The rigging sings as a gust buffets the loose sail, almost smothering Cornish who, with Ling, wrestles it back.

LIZA (bellowing)
Can you feel it now, boys?

EXT. RIGGING DAY.

Ling's, Diego's and Cornish's faces fall.

EXT. DECK. DAY

Liza points at lowering iridescence on the horizon.

LIZA
Can you see it?

EXT. RIGGING. DAY

Jack and Feathers climb. The wind steps up.

EXT. DECK. DAY

LIZA
Then hear your Petticoat Sailor!

EXT.HORIZON. DAY

The blot in the sky spreads, shifting through the spectrum and settles on yellow.

LIZA (O.S)
Current's coming can drag us off course
100 miles. Bash us to splinters -

EXT. OCEAN. DAY.

The sea is sludge green beneath yellowing sky. Catspaw waves ripple against each other.

LIZA (O.S)
- in fogs that bury us forever.
Double reef that mainsail!

EXT. BRIDGE. DAY

Chips closes the pistol's safety catch and returns it to its box. Liza puts a hand on his.

LIZA

We can't afford to lose a finger here!

CHIPS

Scared 'em though which -

LIZA

We'll scare them without bullets.

She nods at the barrel.

Remove it.

He opens the barrel and shakes out the bullet.

She holds out her hand. He gives her the bullet. She eyes it distastefully, notices 3 others strapped into the case, slips it beside them.

LIZA

Save them for catching food.

EXT. RIGGING DAY.

Wind shudders the rigging as sailors finish the double reef and descend the ratlines. The yellow sky sickens to green. The masts creak and swing.

INT. CHANDLER'S BACKROOM. DAY.

Rain patters. The masts fade and spin into the pendulums of the grandfather clock. Marie, sipping coffee, frowns at the date on the newspaper Givras is reading and starts at a flash of sheet lightning.

EXT. DECK. DAY

Rain falls in torrents. Thunder.

CHIPS

Dog down all hatches!

Sailors blunder through shining wet. Lightning. A wave breaks over the side. Liza kilts up her skirt. Flying spray and screaming wind.

LIZA
Safety lines fast!

Jack and Chips struggle by with rope and canvas.

INT. GALLEY. DUSK.

Cook dowses the stove, dodges sliding and crashing pans, tries to lash down what he can.

LIZA
All portholes dogged and scuppers -

A wave crashes through a porthole and drives Cook to the deck.

INT. CABIN. DUSK.

Tom, tying Connor into bed, looks up through sudden dark at the noise.

EXT. DECK. DUSK.

A weird gleam under the dark. Liza runs towards Diego's yells. Chips, with an axe, and Jack, shadows against the gloaming, overtake her.

CHIPS
Move her down sea.

LIZA
Down sea!

Lightning. Thunder. There is almost as much rain as ocean. Diego, terrified, pulls on the helm.

INT. GALLEY. DUSK.

Diego, knee deep in water, tries to open the door, fails, grabs a pan and bails from the porthole. A diagonal shift throws him onto his back and turns the porthole into a skylight.

EXT. DECK. DUSK.

The ship careens in deafening creaks and crashes. Spray and wave everywhere. Liza, horizontal, helps Tad and Ling heave ropes.

INT. GALLEY. DUSK

The water rises. Cook comes round to the sound of glass and wood splintering off the porthole. He struggles towards Jack's hand.

EXT. GALLEY. NIGHT.

Tied into a harness, Jack pulls Diego through the porthole. Also harnessed, Cornish helps Chips slide plywood over the broken hole and hammer it closed. Jack almost loses his grip but manages to heave Diego to the deck. Chips and Cornish follow.

EXT. DECK. DUSK

Foam leaps and lashes. Ling and Spider tie themselves to the foremast.

SPIDER

Moonbitch! Come early to see her work!

He nods at a cloud, luminous with moonlight. Ling is stunned by the cloud's effulgence, then realises...

LING

She no moon!

EXT. ATLANTIC OCEAN. DUSK.

The cloud declares itself a steep wave with a huge white crest rolling towards the little ship.

The wave bats the ship onto her side.

EXT. ROTHESAY. DUSK

The wheel is wrenched from Diego, who somersaults, landing on his head. Jack and Liza grab the wheel.

The topsail flaps free as the ship is taken aback. Another wave washes over them. Cornish, still in his harness, slides overboard.

Liza, dragged down by her long wet skirt, clings to the wheel trying to heave it up. Jack heaves with her. The Rothesay starts to rise.

A third wave rolls in and rears over them. As sailors cling to what protection they can, the wave sucks the ship into its trough. The wave crashes over them. Liza and Jack grab each other in the flood of white and green water. They wind round each other and are flung apart.

The wave rolls into the distance taking the thunder with it.

A fork of lightning dives after both.

EXT. OCEAN. NIGHT

The ship rises, decks awash. Liza lies face up, spluttering water. Moon and starlight pour into her eyes. The ship pitches. Stars scatter and break up. She closes her eyes.

Feeling wind and hearing water pour out of the scuppers, Liza opens her eyes, takes in the relative lull.

DIEGO

Sagrada Madre, desculpa me -

Liza raises her head, sees Diego, praying against the wheel and Jack lying in the scuppers.

LIZA

Diego! For the Love of God -!

She tries to drag herself up but is weighed down by her sopping skirt. Jack struggles towards her.

JACK

Hurt?

LIZA

Nowhere I feel it.

CHIPS (O.S)

Man overboard! Starboard bow!

Liza rips her skirt off and runs.

EXT. BULWARK. DUSK

Cornish, like a struggling insect, hangs by his harness and his own nails. The ship starts to buck again.

EXT. DECK. NIGHT.

Liza, wet petticoat clinging her bloomers, runs to the helm. Jack panics to find and pull on the ropes of Cornish's harness.

JACK

Feathers? Tad.

Spider comes running.

EXT. DECK. NIGHT.

Liza makes for the wheel.

LIZA
All clear to port?

TAD (O.S)
All clear! Do we steer or drift?

Liza shifts the praying Diego off the wheel, leans on it.

LIZA
We steer!

Diego comes to.

Steer her. Full wheel. Hard to port.

EXT. BULWARK DAY

The ship turns. Cornish, limp in his harness, is swung out of the boiling waves and on to the deck.

INT. CABIN NIGHT.

Sound of a man shivering over groaning timbers. Tom bends over a sodden body, rolling in a pool of foam, starts to turn it over.

EXT. DECK NIGHT

Jack and Spider roll Cornish over, ogle the rope cut on his chest.

SPIDER
Cornish! Cornish mate!

Another sea drenches them. Cornish coughs into life.

EXT. ATLANTIC. NIGHT.

The Rothesay blusters through furious sea. Patches of foam blow before the wind. A row of faint beacon lights dance ahead.

EXT. PROW NIGHT.

Liza, in petticoats and oilskins, lying roped to a safety line, squints through her glass at the dancing beacon lights. They still and brighten. Liza isolates the Pole star high overhead.

JACK

Where are we?

LIZA

Who's asking?

A bell rings. Jack lies beside on his front, hands her a drink.

JACK

I look as changed as you I suppose.

She sips. A sudden gust blows the cup empty. She hurls it into the wind, nods at the Pole star.

LIZA

Further North than is good for us.

JACK

And Cornish has lost his amulet.

INT. FORECASTLE. NIGHT.

A lantern swings with the groaning ship. Spider and Ling bail and wring out sopping clothes while Cornish, lashed to an upper cot, moans and shivers. Liza enters with Jack.

JACK

He's cleaned.

SPIDER

Not much ain't washed and salted here.

Liza dodges Cornish's flailing arms, which Jack catches and holds. She lifts the dressing.

LIZA

... Best bind his chest, so his skin bonds.
Linen and a yard of sailcloth -

SPIDER

Wouldn't he be better aft Miss? We know
he's a common sailor but two staterooms
there empty and us wanting sleep and -

He picks up a look Jack slides at Liza.

Or should we slide him back in the drink,
as he says?

LIZA

Any man hugs death, tips us all under...

JACK
Do you hear that Cornish?

LIZA
Get the galley fire lit and him over it.

INT. GALLEY. DAWN

Chips chops furniture and a trunk, selects what's dry for Cook to feed to a faint flame.

EXT. COMPANIONWAY DAWN

Ling and Spider, heave Cornish, strapped to a plank, up a ladder.

EXT. DECK DAWN

Liza struggles to the galley with an armful of books and damaged planking. She throws her tinder in at the door, turns to see a pale finger of light streaking the sky, hears a porthole opening. Out of the porthole comes a shrouded body. Liza freezes as it hits the water. Foam swirls then fizzles.

EXT. AFTERDECK DAY.

Liza thunders on the "No Admittance" door.

LIZA
Tom, Tom!

TOM
Mr Connor drowned, God rest him.

Liza stops hammering and looks up appalled.

TOM
'Twas water choked him.

EXT. OCEAN DAWN.

Fish dart aside as a shrouded, weighted body plummets through green water.

EXT. NO ADMITTANCE DOOR. DAWN

LIZA
And my father? My father?

TOM

- Swears on the lone fool sinking this
ship I'll be that if you set one foot -

Jack approaches.

LIZA

Mr Connor drowned!

Liza absorbs the irony, slides to the deck. Jack bends over her.

LIZA

He was my friend since... almost family!
Who'd think I'd gladly believe him dead?

She sniggers hysterically, stops aghast as gathering light in
the rigging throws a death's head shadow on deck.

EXT. CEMETERY NIGHT

Panting and a gasp as moonlight picks out the sculpted skull on
the tomb.

EXT. DECK DAY

Liza looks at Jack. He is tense with caring but in the short
shadows of gathering light, his worn face is almost a skull.

LIZA

We brought this on him...

JACK

What - ?

LIZA

And my father. Our punishment...

JACK

For?

She pulls herself up.

LIZA

Just mine then.

He stares after her as she moves away.

EXT. OCEAN DAY

The Rothesay struggles through fogbands and swirling seas.

EXT. LIVERPOOL DOCKS, DAY.

Waves lash. Thunder. Marie stands on a pontoon under a lowering sky looking out across the Mersey. Somewhere a baby cries.

INT. WORKSHOP DAWN.

Liza, curled into a corner, prays and weeps over the Epitome, chart and compasses.

LIZA

Sweet Jesus, Spirit of the Sea, spare
these lives and this ship and I swear -

The door bursts open announcing Jack. She wipes her eyes.

... What's so urgent, Mr Fiddler...?

He speaks softly.

JACK

That you share the burden of eight men
trusting you.

Liza grins bitterly.

LIZA

Sleep or watch, Mr Fiddler. Anything else is -

JACK

Not with me. With those grown men starving and
pulling for you...

EXT. HOLD DAY

Chips and Feathers scrape empty food barrels and hook rot out of a cask of water.

INT. WORKSHOP DAY

LIZA

Tell them that death's aft too?

JACK

Can they jump ship?

EXT. HOLD DAY

Feathers, waiting to follow Chips up a ladder, pricks up his ears, looks around at a squeak and scuffle.

INT. WORKSHOP DAY

LIZA
Can they lose all hope?

EXT. HOLD DAY

Chips starts, almost falls at a terrible crash behind him. He looks back to see Feathers proudly holding a rat by its tail.

FEATHERS
God's remembered us.

INT. GALLEY DAY

Cornish watches morosely from a hammock, as Cook skins the rat and inspects the meat. He raises himself on his elbow as Cook starts to fry it. Feathers appears in the doorway with three smaller rats.

Lightning shoots across the sky behind him.

INT. WORKSHOP DAY

Thunder. Jack and Liza dash for the companion as rain patters.

EXT. RIGGING DAY.

A sailor climbs down as it pours with rain.

EXT. DECK DAY

Tad unlids the water barrels. Rain pours in. Jack and Liza arrive through a hatch, shouldering two more barrels. They position them, then spread their arms and turn their faces to the sky.

EXT. DECK DAY.

Sunshine. Water steams into air. Ling, Tad, Jack, Feathers and Diego huddle in the prow, picking ratbones clean. Jack throws a tiny glance up at the bridge where...

EXT. BRIDGE DAY

Liza watches, sips water. Chips approaches with a plate of meat.

LIZA
I'm not hungry.

CHIPS

Not funny. Eat. Not fast neither.

Liza takes a grim bite, swallows hard, gestures that he should listen. They hear the crescendoing noise of birds.

EXT. DECK DAY.

The sailors stare at a huge grey cloud drifting over the sea. Tad raises an eyeglass.

EXT. GRAND BANK DAY

The glass shows scores of gulls, kittiwakes and penguins diving and carrying off fish, and beyond a fleet of fishing boats and attached dories.

TAD

Fisherboats abaft!

EXT. DECK DAY

The sailors watch from the rail.

SPIDER

They've officers to spare -

DIEGO

And cod.

TAD

What I'd rather.

JACK

We can't board officers.

COOK

What about the cod?

SPIDER

Who are you, Jack, to say can't! We must!

JACK

Must nothing!

DIEGO

She will get us to Liverpool!

Spider stares at him.

FEATHERS

The lad's right.

CORNISH

Aye, She saw gales in that clear sky -

Liza approaches with a speaking trumpet.

LIZA

And hears through walls. Better the witch
you know.

JACK

If the witch loves you...

LIZA

Even forgives Mr Spider.

She raises the speaking trumpet.

Ahoy! How many barrels?

Men in the nearest dories turn at her cry. A fishing boat's bell starts to ring.

SPIDER

Madam! Clap me in irons but any second
mate there -

LIZA

- would come aboard a plague ship?

Beat. Every face falls. Liza raises her eyes to the sky,
suddenly lowering. Mist rolls in and swathes the sails. The bell
tolls on, is joined by church bells.

INT. LIVERPOOL CHURCH DAY.

The Congregation shuffles into pews. Grace and MARIE kneel in
prayer. Mackay, about to bow his head, sees Givras collect
prayer and books across the aisle.

Mackay scrambles out of the pew, grips Givras's arm.

GIVRAS

Mackay! When did you -

His whisper resounds. Marie and Grace look round. So do more
worshippers. Marie rises. Grace puts a hand on her arm. Givras
signs apologies. Mackay gestures that they should talk outside.
Grace shuts her eyes tight. Marie watches them hurry out.

EXT. LIVERPOOL CHURCHYARD, DAY.

GIVRAS
Left eight days before you?

MACKAY
Shorthanded too...

GIVRAS
So food enough.

MACKAY
If not spilled or spoiled. Storm'd be with them all the way. Every port along rock or tidebound.

GIVRAS
Why? Why the devil would he gamble?

Mackay glances superstitiously at a stone Apostle.

MACKAY
He had a good ship under him.

(
Givras sees Marie approach.

GIVRAS
And still has.

MACKAY
4,800 miles. 45 days. It should take 30.

Givras pales. Marie covers her face with her hands.

EXT. IRISH SEA. DAY.

Views down six telescopes scan lively waters and a misty horizon. A sloop, flying the Blue Peter, marked with a red light and "Pilot 21, Liverpool" on its bow, bobs into one of the frames.

INT. SLOOP HOLD. DAY.

Pigeons coo from a crate. Bertie pours a bucket of tea into a chest lined with sacking, closes the chest, then slips his hand into the crate and caresses a pigeon.

FRANK

You counting leaves down here, Bertie?

Frank descends the ladder with another bucket, nods at the tea chest.

BERTIE

Double deal?

FRANK

For our mother's butter? Worth double again.

Bertie opens the chest. Frank pours tea in.

Plus the duty they escape.

He takes a handful of tea, smells it happily, throws it back and goes above.

EXT. DECK DAY.

Frank arrives beside EDWIN, ruddy 40, notes the thickening mists.

FRANK

Not a day to be without a pilot.

EDWIN

If they see us.

Frank narrows his eyes and points into the grey.

FRANK

See her?... Coming or going?

EXT. SEA DAY.

A ship's shadow, with topsails hoist, drifts in and out of visibility. Voices ring across the fog.

FRANK (O.S)

Ahoy there! Is it Dublin you're after?

SPIDER (O.S)

Tide for Liverpool!

EXT. DECK OF SLOOP. FOG.

Edwin frowns at Frank.

FRANK

Bad flood flows South of the Island.

This easterly's not for long neither.
Will I come aboard?

LIZA

Can you lead us?

FRANK

Can you follow? Who's your Master?

CORNISH (O.S)

Our Petticoat Sailor.

Laughter.

TAD (O.S)

With it all up top and under no one.

Cheers.

FRANK

Let me come aboard.

JACK (O.S)

If we wanted a man aboard knows more than
she, we'd 'a picked him up in the Atlantic.

EXT. IRISH SEA DAY

The white lights of the Rothesay follow the red lights of the sloop through the fog.

Bertie takes soundings from the sloop's prow, running the red red, white and blue leadline through his hands to the deepest mark - blue serge.

INT. FORECASTLE DAY.

Ling, Spider, Tad and Feathers, gaunt and grey, sleep like babies, rocked in their bunks.

EXT. ROTHESAY DAY.

Jack steers. Liza in oilskins, trousers and souwester watches the sloop ahead from the bridge. Both are chafed, gaunt, haggard and dappled with dry salt.

Sun breaks through mist revealing rocky land under two revolving lights. Liza smiles, takes up the eyeglass. The mist rolls back.

EXT. SLOOP PROW DAY.

Bertie frowns at the lights, then the reappearing land. He turns anxiously to Frank.

EXT. SLOOP HELM. DAY.

Frank narrows his eyes in dismay.

EXT. VIEW THROUGH EYEGLASS.

A rugged barren coast and a battered fishing boat.

EXT. ROTHESAY BRIDGE, DAY.

Liza frowns, lays down her eyeglass.

INT. WORKSHOP, DAY

Liza riffles through a pilot book.

LIZA
Anglesey? Port Lynas...

She lingers over a line drawing of the approach to Liverpool, which bears no resemblance to the view from the porthole. She slams the book shut, hares out.

EXT. ISLE OF MAN, DAY.

Sun pierces the mist and bathes sea and shore.

LIZA (O.S)
It's The Calf of Man, you pirates!

EXT. SLOOP'S PROW. DAY

Bertie flinches as the lead-line's calico marks shallow water. He looks ahead and sees square waves splash over a sandbank.

EXT. SLOOP DECK. DAY.

Frank yells down the speaking trumpet.

FRANK
Watch the bank. Hard to starboard. Slow!

EXT. DECK OF ROTHESAY

Jack heaves the wheel. A jolt and shudder. All fall about as...

EXT. SEA DAY.

The Rothesay runs onto the bank.

EXT. SHORE DAY

20 ragged men and women push two battered rowing boats into the waves after a fishing boat. Men hold knives in their teeth. A woman carries a rifle.

EXT. SLOOP DECK DAY

FRANK

There are the pirates.

He ducks a bullet as a rifle fires. Bertie dashes below. Edwin keeps low and manoeuvres into deeper water.

INT. FORECASTLE DAY.

The sailors register a crisis and tip out of cots.

LIZA (O.S)

All hands! All hands!

Feathers grabs a harpoon.

EXT. DECK DAY.

Sailors snatch up chains and belaying pins. Diego wields a frying pan - cudgel and shield.

EXT. ROTHESAY. DAY

Rifle shot and shouting as the wreckers near the Rothesay on three sides. Bedraggled hirsute men stand ready to cast ropes and hooks and board. A scrawny WRECKER QUEEN, 40, tousled hair grey with salt and dirt, towers in the prow of the fishing boat.

WRECKER QUEEN

Morning Duckies. Stand aside for the shorers,

Liza snatches a belaying pin.

EXT. SLOOP DECK DAY.

Bertie throws a revolver through the hatch. Edwin catches and drops it. Frank snatches it up.

EXT. ROTHESAY DECK DAY

Liza grips the belaying pin.

LIZA

Our wages are in Liverpool. We starve and
drink fog over a hold of spoiled cotton.
We've nothing you want.

The woman levels the rifle at her.

WRECKER QUEEN

We'll be the judge of that, my Pretty.

EXT. PILOT SLOOP.

Frank takes aim at the hand on the rifle.

EXT. FISHING BOAT DAY

WRECKER QUEEN

We're saving it from the sea is all.

LIZA

I urge you, for your own goods, keep off!

Laughter from the fishing boat.

WOMAN

What goods would they be?

A shot rings out. Frank's bullet knocks the rifle out of the woman's hands and whistles past the Wrecker Queen's shoulder. Another shot as the rifle goes off on its own. A yelp of pain.

EXT. ROTHESAY DECK DAY

Liza throws herself to the deck. Another shot as the pilots take on a rowing boat. She glances at Cook, beating off boarding wreckers from the other rowing boat with a frying pan.

A noose from the fishing boat is thrown over a belaying pin. Liza throws it back then, as a wrecker almost boards, leaps up and smashes his fingers with her belaying pin. He falls back with a howl.

Jack holds a wrecker at knife point. Tad tips him into the sea. A harpoon flashes through the air.

EXT. ROWING BOAT. DAY.

The wreckers dodge the harpoon, but capsize. This plunges the fishing boat, where someone is bleeding, into more chaos. Some try to help flailing swimmers and others keep trying to board.

EXT. DECK OF ROTHESAY. DAY

A wrecker boards. Chips levels a pistol at him, gets too close. The wrecker knocks up Chips' hand, snatches the pistol, twists him into a stranglehold.

LIZA

Chips!

She eyes the pistol.

Did you load? Did you?

Chips chokes "no". She runs at them. Jack leaps ahead. The Wrecker fires at him, misses, holds the gun to Chips head.

LIZA

Tell them you've won, Sweetheart, and come below with me.

Silence falls. So does Jack's face. The wrecker grins, pushes Chips aside, advances on Liza with the pistol, seizes her hair, forces her to her knees. He looks proudly at his comrades, who don't look at him but, like the Rothesay sailors and pilots, stare appalled at Joseph in a nightshirt, who sits, arms spread to the skies, on Tom's back. They circle the poop.

Liza is horrified at Joseph's suppurating sores. So is the wrecker. He drops the pistol. Liza grabs it, urges him to the gunwale. He tips into the sea.

EXT. SEA. DAY.

The wrecker swims wildly for his comrades' boats, now scrambling for home. The Wrecker Queen fends him off with the broken rifle.

EXT. DECK DAY

The Rothesay sailors gape as Tom slides Joseph off his shoulders into his arms. Liza swallows hard.

LIZA

News is never as bad as we think, is it?

TOM

Getting better.

JACK

Three cheers for our Skipper!

The sailors give three broken cheers as Tom tenderly carries Joseph below.

EXT. SEA DAY

The tide is out around Wartbank, the sands the Rothesay has drifted onto. Chips, Jack and Liza inspect the hull.

Ling, Tad, Boots and Feathers probe the damp sand for shellfish which they collect in a bucket.

Liza reaches starboard. Frank, wearing thighwaders, splashes out of the sloop, anchored further out and approaches.

FRANK

No damage?

LIZA

She'll weather.

FRANK

We'll drag her off with the tide.
Eat it slow.

She frowns at the buttered crust he holds out to her.

There's more. For your men too.

She hesitates. He comes closer. She backs away.

FRANK

We're vaccinated. Law done it right
for once. No smallpox in 16 year.

He takes her hand, puts the bread in her palm. Jack rounds the stern.

FRANK

Could have let me come aboard.

JACK

You'd have steered us clear then?

LIZA

Leave it. We draw more than their boy
figured.

She offers Jack half her bread. He takes the bread and turns back the way he came.

LIZA

Which don't explain the direction.

EXT. CALF OF MAN BEACH. AFTERNOON.

A bonfire burns. Sailors and pilots sit round, eating shellfish and bread and sharing tea and rum. Frank sings to a small guitar.

FRANK

With pitch and tar her hands were hard.
 Though once like velvet soft.
 She weighed the anchor, heaved the lead
 and boldly went aloft.
 Just 1 and 30 months she braved the tempest
 I am told, and always did her duty did...

SAILORS

The female sailor bold!

Applause. Liza smiles and bows. Frank passes his guitar to Bertie, who retunes. Liza wanders away to some rocks. Jack sulkily knots a string of kelp, glances at Frank, looks out to sea, throws the kelp down and moves from the fire.

EXT. ROCKS. AFTERNOON.

Liza straightens her clothes after a pee, stands up into Jack's arms. He kisses her neck. She strains away from him.

LIZA

Not now.

JACK

You wanted me forever.

LIZA

What I want's no different but -

JACK

What will our men think? That life's fleeting
 bounties should be grabbed with both hands.

He reaches inside her blouse. She pushes him away.

LIZA

Did you not hear me? Not now.

JACK

Can it be tomorrow?

LIZA

Not unless my father's better and -

JACK

Then why not now?

He comes at her again. She slaps him. He glowers at her.

LIZA

Because I... I told you. I'm paying for what I did all ready...

JACK

With child?

LIZA

How? Didn't you take care?

He looks at her quizzically. She softens, shakes her head.

I'd love your child, Jack. But it has to be right.

JACK

Well! What a sailor you've become! That wreck caught us after all?

LIZA

That cemetery. We caught ourselves.

JACK

What do the dead own? Graveyard, church, cathedral, all stones over land, land for the quick enough to enjoy each other.

LIZA

We were too quick. Nothing comes for nothing. Nothing's as free as it first looks.

JACK

Not you certainly.

LIZA

Just enough to say no to you.

He catches her wrist as she turns to go.

JACK

Liza -

She meets his eyes and lifts her wrist out of his grip. She walks across the sand to the ship.

Liza!

She runs. Tide trickles in to her footsteps and rises.

EXT. IRISH SEA. SUNSET.

On a sunny pile of kelp, two cormorants watch the Rothesay ride the choppy waves. The sloop moves alongside.

EXT. ROTHESAY. NIGHT.

Frank, at the helm, nods at lighthouses strung along the coast.

FRANK

Passing Formby...

LIZA

Next should be Rock Point.

FRANK

Next time you'll not need me.

LIZA

Next time I'll only need a ship!

She starts to go.

FRANK

Want a fourth part in ours?

She turns, surprised. He winks. Grinning ruefully, she goes below.

INT. WORKSHOP NIGHT.

Liza writes the log "12th May 1869. 3 degrees W. 53 degrees N. A knock at the door.

CHIPS

Red and white light ahead takes us into the River. To Quarantine Dock, will we?

Liza considers.

EXT. AFTERDECK DAWN.

Frank sees Liza arrive by him.

LIZA

My father would do it by the book.

FRANK

And, stiff upper lip, you would he'd die at anchor?

LIZA

He's healing. No one will die at anchor.

FRANK

Not if you dock where I know. Let me make it up to you. Don't your men merit food and warmth?

Liza tightens her lips.

LIZA

Can you get me a message to Louis Givras?

EXT. SLOOP. SUNRISE.

Bertie throws a pigeon, with a message tagged to its leg, into the wind. It wings off towards low hills lined with windmills.

EXT. LIVERPOOL COAST. MORNING.

A mass of masts, smokestacks and slums loom closer.

EXT. LANCASHIRE QUAY. DAY.

A misty morning. Herring girls hunch over baskets, scraping and gutting fish.

Drumming hooves. A HERRING GIRL looks up as Givras, on horseback with Marie riding pillion, stop at the top of the quay. Givras lifts Marie down and walks back to check the safe arrival of a coach and two horses.

Marie yells with joy. Givras looks where she looks. The Herring Girl follows their focus to the arriving *Rothesay*. Her eyes light up to see Liza standing on the bridge in trousers.

Marie runs along the quay.

The Herring Girl nudges a friend, who grins at Liza's garb. Givras helps Grace and toddler out of the carriage.

SARAH (O.S)

Jack! Jack!

EXT. ROTHESAY DAY

Jack and Liza see Sarah, standing further along the wharf at the same time. Jack throws Liza a guilty look.

SARAH

Jack! Jack! Over here! Both of us!

She pulls a tiny baby out of her shawl. Jack widens his eyes, smiles proudly. Liza stares at the child then at Jack in disbelief. He catches her eye, collects himself, looks back at SARAH, and waves.

Liza touches her chronometer, shifts her eyes to Marie, waving madly. Further off she picks out Grace, coming along the pontoon with her toddler.

Ahead of both, at the end of the pontoon she sees a small crowd of urchins. Amongst them, a LITTLE GIRL, 5, in torn, dirty gingham, stares into Liza's eyes.

A sudden cheer for Liza from the herring girls.

EXT. DOCK. DAY.

Sailors start to disembark. They move back aboard as Givras marches up the gangplank with a cash box and ledger. Marie and Grace tearfully embrace Liza.

Tom and two MEDICAL ASSISTANTS pass with Joseph on a shutter.

TOM

Stand aside. Make way there!

MARIE

Oh Uncle Joe!

Joe manages a smile.

TOM

Fever's broken, Ma'am. Nowt that good rest and food won't cure.

Liza takes a few steps after them.

LIZA

Tom!

She unhooks her chronometer, takes out the folded brown paper and Rose's fine plait. She holds out the chronometer to Tom.

LIZA

I wish this was for you. However -

Over Sarah's shoulder, Jack sends Liza a smile. Liza turns her back, notices Marie watching her carefully.

LIZA

It was Jack's father's. Give it to his child.

Tom hesitates.

LIZA

I'll get another.

She tucks the hair into the brown paper and into her belt. Tom smiles, nods at Givras.

TOM

Gold, I trust.

MARIE

With something new in Latin.

TOM

Ain't much new in Latin. You look to yourself now, Ma'am. As much coal as you can burn and a hot breakfast as sits still!

Liza smiles. Tom pockets the chronometer, touches his forehead and strides to the carriage. Spider salutes her from the deck. She nods at him then catches Marie's eye, who leads her focus to Grace. With the toddler tugging at her skirt, Grace is transfixed by Jack, walking away with Sarah and his baby. Liza flickers a look at Marie and approaches cautiously.

GRACE

Who is he?

LIZA

Who you think he is?

She picks up the toddler. Grace looks accusing.

GRACE

Was this -? No one... No one told me.

LIZA

No one knew all in time.

She kisses the toddler, passes him to Grace.

MARIE

And if they did, could much change?

Liza glances at the little girl, "helping" the pilots cast off.

Grace hugs her child, follows Liza's eyes. They watch the sails fill as the sloop goes about.

GRACE

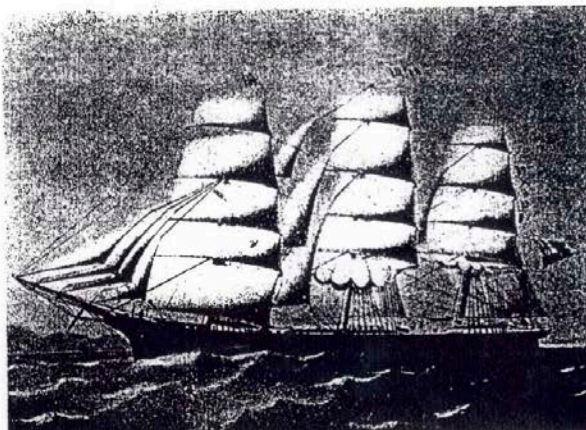
Isn't change all we're sure of?

END

Home and Fireside



Bessie, photographed with her father, Captain Hall, could have become a teacher or a seamstress. Instead, she went to sea.



The *Rothessay* sailed in 1870 with the captain, his daughter and a crew of nine. And so began one of the most unique ocean voyages in nautical history.

The ship labored on, hounded by gales and the helm was a

SEAFARING

THE procession of the Lunenburg Fisherman's Exhibition moved slowly past me with its rhythmic swing and its colorful pageantry. As a float glided by, bedecked by a galaxy of lovely young women, someone beside me laughingly remarked, "They're very beautiful, but do you think they know a cod from a herring or port from starboard?"

As the float vanished from sight, there came to me a memory of a Bluenose girl of long ago who would have well deserved a place in the parade, not only because of her beauty, but because of her nautical skill as well. She not only loved ships, she knew their ways so well, that she was able to sail a troubled ship across a troubled ocean, from New Orleans to Liverpool.

She was my mother's cousin — Bessie Hall — who was born in Granville, N.S., in 1849. I knew her only years after, when she was an old woman, but I loved and admired her and always begged to hear tales of her sailing days. This was in the time of the clipper ships when captains often took their wives and families on ocean voyages. When Bessie, daughter of Joseph and Priscilla Hall, joined her father's ship on her seventeenth birthday, she was a lovely girl with flashing blue eyes, creamy pink and white skin and wavy Auburn hair. Everything around the ship aroused her curiosity.

Soon the names and uses of the sails and ropes were as well known as her A.B.C.'s. Because of this unusual interest the captain — her father — began teaching her navigation. When she had been on board almost three years, she daily plotted the ship's course and experienced the delight of its response to her bidding. Life on land was becoming increasingly exciting too. When in port, this pretty vivacious girl took part in festivities arranged by merchant nabobs as entertainment for their captains and officers, and she was not unfamiliar with the

heady sensation of being 'belle of the ball.'

Later, long after she had left the sea, I would sit by her fireside, listening to her tell of her experiences. My favorite tale was of the *Rothessay's* famous voyage from New Orleans to Liverpool, England.

In the last week of December 1869, Bessie and her father sailed in the ship *Rothessay* from Liverpool bound for New Orleans, under a contract for cargo both ways across the ocean. It was a good crossing, with normal winter weather. The captain, her father, was free from business worries because a cargo of cotton, so the contract specified, would be waiting for him on the American Wharf, ready for the ship's return passage. When they docked at the port, however, there was no cotton in sight!

Uneasy Berth

It took two long months before the U.S. backers could line up enough money to deliver it. Sixty idle days, every one of which shored the *Rothessay's* finances into the red! Harrowing ones for Bessie's father, not only as captain but also as part owner of the ship.

At long last the cotton arrived, and every hand available was pressed into action. In a short time all the bales were stowed in the ship's hold, and on March 24, 1870, the river pilot arrived to guide the vessel 100 miles down the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico. On board were the captain, the first mate, the carpenter, Bessie, the cook and a crew of six — eleven persons all told, when twenty was the smallest number of sailors needed to handle safely a square-rigged ship of the *Rothessay's* tonnage. Bessie's father worried over the shortage of men. The crew had dwindled during the two-month tie up. However, he decided to sail as soon as his cargo was on board. Although the second mate and bosun

were missing on the day of departure, Captain Hall would not be deterred.

He said to Bessie, "I have a good ship under my feet, I'll gamble on my former good luck."

All went well till the fourth day out, when the first mate fell ill. His symptoms alarmed Bessie's father, who called in a pock-marked member of the crew for consultation.

"Tom, what do you think the first mate's got?" asked the Captain.

"I don't know, but give me twelve more hours and I may be able to tell you." It proved to be smallpox, a terrible scourge in those days, but in a ship on the high seas, nothing less than a catastrophe.

Now that the disease was identified Bessie's father turned to Tom and said, "As you are safe to handle this man, you will have to nurse him, but don't tell the crew about this. ~~The cabin must be destroyed and see to it that all fresh fruit and vegetables are tossed overboard.~~"

Then he gave Bessie her instructions. "Gather whatever we will need in clothing and bedding. I'll take the medicine chest and nautical instruments, tack a 'No Admittance' sign on the door, and we'll move at once into the carpenter's shop." Two bunks were built in the shop, a room 6 feet by 6 feet and this makeshift cabin served them for many a day.

Bessie and her father appeared outwardly calm in order to deceive the crew, but inwardly a devastating fear filled their heart, for the smallpox might sweep through the ship. Nine days later, as they were rounding the Florida Peninsula into the Gulf Stream and squally weather, Captain Hall began to feel ill. In desperation, he said that he would go into the ward along with the mate.

Bessie was alarmed. "No you won't!" she exclaimed. "I'll not stay alone with those strange men in the fo'castle. You aren't any danger to me for I've already

been exposed many times to smallpox. Tom can divide his time between you and the mate. Get into your bunk and we'll face whatever comes together."

Further trouble was in store as the squall developed into an angry gale. The *Rothessay*, with sails full and taut, was racing over the turbulent waves, when she was instantly stopped by a right-about shift of the wind. It struck head on and felt like a blow from a giant hand. The wheel was wrenched from the helmsman's hands and he had somersaulted over it, landing on his head. The sails and rigging were helplessly flapping against their masts. The ship which, a second ago, was alive like a white-winged bird in the air, wallowed in the sea, dead as a block of wood. "Taken aback" is the nautical term for this drastic onslaught of the wind which often causes ships to founder with all on board.

Captain Hall had a difficult situation to face, with only five men to handle the ropes and sails. But despite his sickness, he began to unravel the mess. By degrees the sails were taken in, except the lower topsail and foretopsail which were made of heavier canvas and were the only ones carried in stormy weather.

Change of Command

When order was restored, Captain Hall said to Bessie, "I can't keep up any longer. You'll have to take my place and navigate the *Rothessay* to Liverpool." Turning to the carpenter, Sandy, a 72-year-old Scot, he said, "and you'll have to act as first mate." Then he returned to his cabin.

The crew who had witnessed the captain's withdrawal approached Bessie and their leader said, "We know about the smallpox. Can you take this ship to England?"

"I can," was Bessie's reply. Her unwavering answer gave them confidence to accept this young girl in



Even at the age of eighty, Bessie amazed her visitors with her knowledge of the high seas.

plagued by smallpox. At

MAIDEN

By Jennie Bishop

her father's place. Bessie's decision was to have a hurried consultation with the crew by her father's door where he could hear their plans, for she felt in need of his advice.

"How about changing our course for St. John?" It was a natural question as the *Rothesay's* owner lived there and not far away was Bessie's home in Granville.

"No," Captain Hall replied. "You're capable of taking this ship across the ocean, but you're not capable of making that difficult harbor on rockbound coast."

"Then we might signal the first ship sighted and get an officer from it."

But to this the crew demurred, "He might turn out to be a hard task-master. Let well enough alone."

Bessie's mettle as emergency captain was at once tested. There followed twelve sunless days and black nights during which time the ship was buffeted by winds and waves all the way from Cape Sable, Florida, to the Grand Banks of Newfoundland. Besides acting as captain, Bessie stood a watch from 8 p.m. to 2 a.m. These hours were lonely and nerve-wracking for the young girl shouldering heavy responsibilities. Heavy gales ranted and every now and then waves broke over the deck.

How Bessie longed to see the sun! She knew how to plot the course when it was shining, but now she had to figure her position by "dead reckoning", a part of navigation in which she had little practice. Currents and cross currents had to be taken into account. She later told me, "I made a bluff at it and put our supposed position down each day on the chart and in the log book."

At last the storm blew itself out. On April 18 Bessie was able to shoot the sun, and she found that the *Rothesay* was not as far out of her course as she had feared. In order to see over the rail when making an observation to get the horizon, Bessie had to stand on the spare spars, lashed to the bulwarks up by the forward house. The *Rothesay* was now at the Grand Banks and Bessie changed course for the next port of call, Cape Clear on the southernmost tip of Ireland. Calm weather prevailed all the way there; but the voyage was slow since Bessie didn't dare set the full complement of sails with only five men. She had to depend on the storm canvas set by her father for all her sailing needs.

When the *Rothesay* docked at Cape Clear, a pilot took over to guide the ship into Liverpool harbor; but he proved incapable, for he took the ship up the Irish Sea to the Isle of Man.

A second pilot was then engaged, and on May 12th the *Rothesay* dropped anchor in the quarantine ground of Liverpool harbor. Captain Hall was able to come out on the

quarter deck. He had suffered only a slight form of smallpox which sometimes afflicts people who have been previously vaccinated. The mate, though convalescing, was still prostrate in his bunk.

When the government boat came within hailing distance and the harbor officials learned the nature of the contagion, they refused to come on board. Captain Hall could hardly believe his ears. In desperation he instructed Bessie to send a note by bumboat to his good friend, Andrew Gibson. She described the situation to Gibson and asked him to intervene in their behalf.

His reply came promptly, "Keep a stiff upper lip. I'll dock your ship tomorrow morning."

This high-handed promise upset Captain Hall. Another note was immediately sent back, "Don't be a fool, Andrew. I only ask you to try to get us as few quarantine days as is lawful." But Gibson, a well-known ship chandler, docked the *Rothesay* the next morning and showed he had inherited the same proud streak as his brother, Alexander Gibson, widely known as the lumber king of New Brunswick.

There was rejoicing when the *Rothesay* was moored at the wharf for the ship was long overdue and had been given up for lost. Bessie herself was happy to be rid of her responsibilities, to wear once more her pretty clothes, and to sleep in a comfortable bed.

As she was leaving the *Rothesay* clad in her rough sailor's garb, the crew, standing on the wharf, pointed her out, shouting, "There she goes!" This is all the recognition she ever received for a deed said to be unique in nautical history. Legend claims she was the first woman to have navigated a ship across the Atlantic and my search has failed to find a successor.

It is true that the insurance brokers, in gratitude for the safe arrival of their valuable cargo, planned a grand dinner in Bessie's honor where she was to be presented with a gold watch inscribed with a simple account of her exploits. This distinction was denied her as the *Rothesay* had been illegally docked and

her father felt obligated to avoid publicity. However, the dodging of the quarantine laws eventually reached the ears of the authorities and was well ventilated in the press. How Gibson got out of his dilemma, is not known, but it was surmised it cost him a pretty penny.


Shortly after this, Bessie, who had received several proposals of marriage from well-to-do suitors, fell hopelessly in love with a man fate denied her. As a result, she gave up going to sea and returned home a changed and saddened woman. Her last voyage was to the Falkland Islands when she was 21.

Bessie spent a quiet and retired life on the beautiful Annapolis Basin. If she failed to fulfill the radiant promise of her youth, it must not be forgotten that she lived at a time when only three occupations were open to women — wife, teacher and seamstress.

Eventually Bessie chose the former, for she married a man who had long loved her and by whom she had four children. Her contemporaries speak of her as a woman of exceptional personal charm and a worthy exponent of her family's ancient motto "Turpiter Desperantur" (It is base to despair). She died on June 30, 1930 and is buried in the *Old Sney Beach Cemetery* near her girlhood home.

Up until the last her memory of the sea remained keen. On her eightieth birthday she amazed a former member of the Royal Navy with her accurate knowledge of the lighthouses and of the nautical data around the coastal waters of Ireland, Wales and England.

Small wonder that she had retained this information. It must surely have been etched forever in her mind by the crashing waves and howling winds against which she had struggled on lonely watches during the harrowing days and nights following her twenty-first birthday when, as Master Mariner of the *Rothesay*, she navigated her ship and crew safely into port.

Jane Ashley Says 

"You will like this tasty recipe"

**SAVOURY MEAT
TURNOVERS**

2 tablespoons MAZOLA Salad Oil
1 teaspoon minced onion
1/2 pound raw minced meat
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon pepper
2 tablespoons BENSON'S or CANADA Corn Starch
1 cup canned tomatoes
3 tablespoons chopped pickle
1 recipe pastry

HEAT MAZOLA Salad Oil in skillet; add onion and brown lightly.
MIX in meat, salt and pepper.
COOK, stirring frequently, until meat is lightly browned.
REMOVE from heat; stir in BENSON'S or CANADA Corn Starch mixing well.
ADD tomatoes gradually; stir in chopped pickle.
COOK over low heat, stirring constantly, until well thickened, then remove from heat.
PREPARE pastry and roll 1/8 inch thick; cut into 6 rounds.
PLACE 1/4 cup meat mixture on one half of each round.
FOLD rounds in half and press edges together with fork.
MAKE several slits in top to allow steam to escape.
PLACE on baking sheet and bake in hot oven (425°F.) for 20 minutes.
SERVE hot with horseradish sauce, if desired.
YIELD: 6 servings.




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