PART I: FAIR WINDS

1. Eliza: Freddy's Four-Master

My father, Samuel Lee, was a passenger on the steamer *Koombana* when it disappeared in a cyclone off Western Australia, just a few weeks before the *Titanic* was lost.

I was not even five, but I still remember his deep voice and how safe I felt when he swung me up to his warm shoulder. I remember a wonderful scent, uniquely his, of spices and tobacco and sun-dried clothing.

I remember my mother's grief, too. A great beauty named Rosa, with creamy skin and red-gold curls, she had chosen to elope with my father and make her life with him. She could have had any man in Melbourne, my aunt Lucy said, but she wanted only my father Sam, who was kind and wise and handsome.

Of course it caused something of a scandal, because Sam Lee, born of an English father and a Chinese mother, was not a white man. Still, my parents found a haven for themselves in Broome, the famous pearling port in Australia's north-west, notorious for its Asian sailors and informal way of life. A place where mixed marriages—while hardly encouraged—were at least tolerated.

I was born in Broome and nowhere else on earth compares. I remember aqua-glass waters and ember-red soils and seagulls mewling in an amethyst sky. I remember sun-dried clothing and spices and tobacco.

Before *Koombana*.

After *Koombana,* my mother, brother and I went to live in the gunmetal chill of Perth, fifteen hundred miles to the south. In Perth my playmates called me a quarter-caste, a chow, a quadroon, and expected me to be ashamed of my dead father. Ashamed of myself. I could not comprehend their malice, but I did not weep. Since my father died I had not wept.

The Great War began when I was six. We are but a far-flung post of the Empire, our teacher declared, but we know our *duty*. The happy young men marched away and their parents' faces became old, first with anxiety and then with grief.

The neighbourhood boys said the Hun didn't just kill babies, they roasted and ate them. They did terrible things to women too but the boys weren't sure what, only that they were shameful. I didn't understand, then, that terrible things happen to women all the time.

My mother's grief eased, perhaps sooner than one might have expected, and Captain Gideon Meade entered our lives. He had met Mama years before when she sailed from England with her sister Lucy, and now he was master of a great steamship. I could never call my stepfather *Papa,* although he wanted me to. The very thought made my throat clench in rage and anguish.

Gideon Meade was not a good man. He made Mama weep and, although he was kind to my small brother Pete, he was not kind to me. He would pinch me and slap me and tell me I deserved it. I had no idea why.

Still, I did not cry.

The Great War brought us one relief: Gideon Meade went away to Britain to do something very important (he said) at the War Office, and our lives became easier. Then the war ended and I turned eleven, and he returned to our pretty house in Perth.

That did not make Mama very happy, nor me. When no one else was around Gideon started hugging me, and touching me and hurting me when I resisted him. I hated it. I hated him.

Joy at the armistice was brief: the influenza epidemic began. First the mother of a friend died, then someone's brother. Even one of the girls in my class started coughing one day and went home and we never saw her again.

Mama's sister Lucy was a nurse, and I worried for her when she went to work at the quarantine station, looking after the soldiers returning from Europe. She did not become ill, but when we saw her again she was thin and very quiet.

By then Gideon was drinking too much and would yell at Mama in their bedroom. They separated and he moved to an expensive hotel, but that did not save him from collapsing in the final wave of the epidemic. Lucy nursed him, but he died.

Another of my aunts—beautiful Izabel—grieved terribly at his funeral, but I was glad, so glad, Gideon was gone.

Mama, who clearly enjoyed being a wife, married Anton McKee when I was twelve, and a new life began. Papa Anton was easy to love, as he was calm and grey-bearded and never hit anyone. I was happy to become Eliza McKee and forget I once had to carry the name of Meade.

Papa Anton used to be Mama's painting teacher and they were now well-known artists, always holding exhibitions or working in their studio at our house in Victoria Park. My brother Pete and I would amuse ourselves with reading and playing games in the recreation reserve and sailing our dinghy on the nearby Swan River.

I liked books about secrets, ciphers and spies, but most of all I liked reading about windjammers, the great steel sailing ships that carry the Australian grain harvest over the ocean to Europe. Oh, how I loved to dream about life on those deepwater barques!

But Pete wasn't interested in the sea—he preferred Biggles stories and yearned for his own Sopwith Camel. He taught himself Morse code and made me learn it too so we could tap messages back and forth. I didn't mind because it could come in handy if I were ever on a ship.

Despite his passion for the air, Pete also loved growing things. I'd tease him that gardeners weren't allowed to become pilots, but he'd just give me a fresh carrot or tomato and grin. Everyone called Pete a charmer and he certainly was.

Not so me. Gideon used to mutter 'nasty little bint' and twist my wrist. My teachers called me a fidget because I learnt quickly and became bored just as quickly. My schoolmates said I was cold-hearted because I didn't let anyone know when I was hurt or sad or angry. (That, of course, is what used to infuriate Gideon the most.)

Dr Freud's famous theories on repression were reported often in the newspapers, and they always made me smile. I hardly needed him to tell me my reserve had its roots in those long-ago, painful memories.

But while Dr Freud might not have approved, I came to enjoy my coolness, my distance, my clear secret gaze.

We would visit Broome in the wintertime, and in summer my aunt Lucy and uncle Danny would bring their two children to stay with us in Perth. Lucy has the kindest of grey eyes, and Danny, curly-haired and Irish, would call me Lizzie Lee and make jokes with a straight face. I'd try to keep a straight face too.

Danny had been a good friend of my father Sam's when they were young officers together on the square-riggers (so I probably don't need Dr Freud to tell me why I love sailing ships, either). Lucy and Danny would play their violins together—they call them fiddles—and the music would make me want to dance or, sometimes, cry. But I never did.

Lucy was especially close to my grandmother Min-lu, Sam's mother. They'd known each other for years, ever since my parents eloped to Broome. I loved Nanna as much as I did Lucy, although I didn't see her as often because she spent half her time in London.

Nanna was tiny and dignified and spoke perfect English. Her charcoal-grey hair was swept up with golden combs, her clothes were from Paris couturiers and her gems were set by the jewellers of Amsterdam. When she visited my school even the nastiest of my classmates quailed before her level gaze.

Once a girl whispered, 'She must be an *Empress*!' and the others nodded in awe. Sadly their awe never lasted very long.

Mama was often very busy but Lucy always had time for me. One day in my bedroom, gazing into the mirror as Lucy brushed my hair, I said, 'I *hate* my hair.'

Lucy smiled. 'Heavens, why, darling?'

'A girl in my class calls me a Chink. If my hair were red like Mama's she wouldn't say that.'

Lucy stopped smiling. 'What a horrid child. Your hair is lovely, Eliza. It's wavy and thick and the prettiest shade of mahogany.'

'But I *am* a Chink, Lucy. I'm a quarter-caste.'

'Darling, those are just names. Yes, your father was part-Chinese and some people don't like that, but who cares? Sam Lee was the kindest and cleverest of men. Remember, Min-lu always says wealth trumps race, and she should know.'

'But my skin isn't milk-pale like Mama's and everyone says how beautiful she is.'

'Your skin is like silk, Eliza. But remember, child, there are many ways of being beautiful and most have nothing at all to do with looks. Come on, let's walk down to the river and watch the yachts.'

I never felt lonely when Lucy was around. She loved sailing ships as much as I did. She even had her own boat, a lugger named *Sparrow.* Japanese and Malay men would take it to sea for her and go diving for pearlshell. Whenever we visited Broome I'd watch it for hours, skimming like a white sea-bird on the turquoise bay.

At school I stoically ignored the spite. It turned out that I was good at mathematics, so I helped my unpleasant classmates with their geometry and algebra, and when Mama won an art competition and the story was in all the newspapers, I found myself briefly popular.

Over time, other new girls arrived to be the latest blood sport, and at last I was unremarkable and unremarked. That suited me.

When I was sixteen something exciting happened at last! My aunt Izabel came to Australia for a visit. She was the aunt who had so surprised me with her grief at the funeral of my stepfather Gideon Meade (nobody else was grieving).

Izabel had gone to live in London and now, five years later, she was a startlingly beautiful stage actress. She wore furs slung around her shoulders and short sequinned gowns, and her pictures in the paper and a brief outing to my school gave me another pleasing burst of popularity.

Eyes sooty, mouth voluptuous, hair adorably bobbed, Aunt Izabel was glamorous beyond imagination. Born of Min-lu's later marriage to a Portuguese man, Izabel and her sister Filipa were younger half-siblings to my father Sam.

A Portuguese father is all well and good, but to account for Izabel's exotic looks—and of course pander to prejudice—she invented a Gypsy mother, now also conveniently deceased. Only her immediate family knew the truth, but Izabel was so lovely I doubt the dukes and counts and barons who vied for her hand at the stage door were much interested in her real heritage.

Izabel came to dinner at our house. She gave me a strongly scented bottle of perfume and charmed Pete and Papa Anton, although I had the feeling Mama didn't like her very much. After she returned to London, posed prettily on an ocean liner, my life subsided into its usual slog of lessons and exams.

Then one day, amazingly, the dull wasteland of school ended. An obligatory coming-out season followed but nobody paid me much attention. I'm not giggly and I don't paint my eyes or wear short skirts like Izabel. And I still like being unremarkable.

Now, at twenty-one, I'm fed up with *everything*. Despite a certain aptitude—I excelled in mathematics at school—I don't want to go to university like Pete, who's studying engineering. I don't want to get married and have babies, or write racy novels about lust in the desert, or be a secretary, a teacher, an artist or a nurse.

I don't know what I want.

I go to parties and dance and kiss drunken young men, but never settle on a single beau. Some, too persistent, remind me of Gideon Meade and I keep my distance. The thought of actually marrying one of those foolish boys and living with him fills me with despair.

One humid day, reading a womens' journal in the sitting room, I'm overwhelmed with a wave of fury with myself and my boring life. I hurl the magazine across the room and it just misses Liam coming through the door.

Liam is my younger cousin. He lives here and studies art with Mama and Anton. 'Not too keen on the latest hairstyles, then?' he says, knowing perfectly well this will irritate me.

I've never cut my long hair into a fashionable bob, so Pete often makes tedious jokes about the titian-haired temptresses of Victorian art, women who could hardly be less like my own small, dark self. (Mama's own mother was an artists' model of that era, immortalised in the famous canvas *Ophelia Drifting* which hangs, Mama says, in London's National Gallery.)

I shake my head and say, 'Just *bored*.'

'Come and sit for me, then,' says Liam. 'I want to do some figure work and need a model.'

I raise an eyebrow in what I hope is a sophisticated manner. 'A *naked* model?'

'No, just a person. You'll do. Come out to my studio.'

I can't be bothered to argue so I follow him. We're not alone in the house, of course—Liam's studio is across from my parents' and I can hear them murmuring. He sits me in an armchair and arranges my legs and arms as coolly as a doctor. He turns my shoulder slightly, drapes my hair along it, then goes to his easel and begins sketching quickly with a paintbrush.

I gaze at my cousin as he works. Liam came to a school open day recently with my parents because he wanted to see some of the famous old paintings in the chapel. The other girls fluttered and flirted and whispered he was a *sexy sheik*, but he just smiled. Of course he's no longer an annoying little boy like Pete, but for the first time I notice he's grown into his own self in a way that's quite different from my dancing partners.

Is Liam a sexy sheik?

The strong bones of his face suit him, his skin glows with health, his dark hair shines, and his shoulders move pleasingly beneath his shirt as he paints. Frowning in concentration, his eyes shift from my body to the painting and back again. He looks at me and through me, seeing something that's partly myself and partly his own vision.

His hands are large and supple and I think of those clever hands touching my waist, my breasts, as deftly as he turns his paintbrush. I'm surprised at the instant pang of pleasure. It's curious that such a simple idea—his hands on me—could cause such a response. Again. My face flushes.

'Hot isn't it? Want a break?' Liam says.

'Yes. Let me see.'

I stand beside him at the canvas. It's not what I expected. The forms are strong, the colours intense, magenta and turquoise—

nothing at all like the beige dress I'm wearing. It doesn't look like a young woman at first, but then it does, with narrow sinuous lines and a sense of something poised, hopeful, waiting.

Liam gazes at the painting smiling slightly, his eyelashes curved like the corners of his mouth. I turn towards him, my body alert, sensitive, aligned with his. He pushes a fall of my hair back, his eyes curious.

To my own surprise I reach out and touch his wrists, thoughtless with daring, and run my hands along the cords of his forearms to the shift of his shoulders. Barely breathing, I lift my head and return the confident gaze of his eyes.

Mama walks in saying, 'I'm out of burnt sienna, Liam, do—'

I drop my hands. Mama looks at the canvas. 'Oh, that's nice. Do you like it, Eliza?'

'Yes,' I say and turn and leave.

'He's not even my *real* cousin, Mama. He's only a cousin by marriage, and nothing happened, it was just a moment, a stupid moment. You should see the octopuses—octopi—I have to deal with whenever I go to a party. They're the menace to my purity, not *Liam*.'

'I'm not saying he's a menace to anyone's purity, darling. I expect you're more of a menace to him. But you're bored, that's obvious. You need to see a bit of the world. I only suggested you should visit your grandparents.'

'They're in *England*.'

'You went there with Lucy, when you were—what—twelve?'

'I was *eleven*, Mama.'

'You liked it then well enough. Why not go again? Min-lu and Freddy would love to see you and I'm sure Izabel would introduce you to some fascinating people—'

I take a deep breath. I don't know what I want. Yes I do. I want that pang of pleasure again. I want to find out what would happen if my hands moved to the sides of that sculpted head and I brought that mouth down to mine and …

'It's winter over there at the moment,' interrupts my infuriating mother. 'But you could be there for spring. So lovely, London in spring, and the art galleries, Eliza—what a treat!'

I groan. I don't want art galleries. I want—something. Oh, I just *want*.

Liam avoids me and I avoid him. His parents Lucy and Danny arrive and seem to think spring in Britain is a wonderful idea. Even their young children do. Seven-year-old Mikey says I should visit the lions at London Zoo and Anna thinks Buckingham Palace is the place to go. I remain unconvinced.

Then over dinner one evening, Lucy says, 'Eliza, I've had an idea. I telegraphed Freddy to check, and he thinks it's possible as long as you get moving immediately.'

'What's possible?' I say, pushing a few peas around my plate with the fork.

'Freddy's four-master is sailing soon from South Australia. You could go too.'

I look up, startled. '*Go*? On *Inverley*?'

Deepwater ships have always been important to my family. Mama's father was a captain, and my father Sam and uncle Danny were both Masters in Sail. When I was eleven, just after the Great War, I went to England with Lucy, Pete and my grandmother Min-lu, and during that trip two extraordinary things happened that drew me even deeper into the world of ships—*Inverley* and Freddy.

Inverley was a magnificent four-masted barque we visited at the London docks, her figurehead a lady with a sheaf of green lilies. Her master made us very welcome. He had been a shipmate of my father's and knew Mama and Lucy from the old days, when they were girls sailing to Australia.

When it was time for us to leave England, Lucy sailed home on *Inverley* while the rest of us had to go on the boring old steamer. I was bitterly envious of my aunt's experience, although by then I knew my childhood dreams were merely fantasies. Windjammers may appear glamorous, but in truth they are hard, rough, dangerous worlds.

So that was *Inverley*. And Freddy?

Freddy Havers was an old man, a friend of my grandmother's from long ago in Hong Kong. He had a big white moustache and blushed a lot, especially when he looked at Nanna. He took us touring around the English countryside and to Ireland, where he had an estate.

One day Nanna sat Pete and me down and explained that Freddy was actually the father of Sam Lee. He was our own *grandfather*, a shadowy figure I'd always assumed had died years ago.

Nanna said they had loved each other when young but were forced to separate, so she'd raised their child Sam by herself. Of course I didn't understand how agonising her predicament must have been—to my girlish self it sounded poignantly romantic.

Freddy and Min-lu had gone on in life to marry other people, but now they were both alone and it was clear they would never again let themselves be parted.

They had a big wedding, which I liked (I wore a blue dress), but most of all I liked my new Granddad, who would speak to me as if I were a grown-up. It turned out that Freddy's father was a Sir or a Lord or something, but if anyone ever asked he'd laugh and say he was just a second son making his own way in the world.

Best of all, my two new enthusiasms came together after the wedding, when Granddad Freddy bought into the ownership of the marvellous four-masted barque *Inverley*. It was a wise business decision for the time, but I think he also did it in memory of his lost son’s sailing days.

So today, along with a dozen other barques, *Inverley* loads grain from South Australia every year and carries it to Europe. The vessel that makes the fastest passage gets a trophy and wins what the papers call the ‘Grain Race.’

Inverley, sadly, has never distinguished herself in this (or any other) way, but Granddad just smiles and says since they all go different routes at different times it’s not precisely what he’d call a contest.

Yet whatever it is, Freddy’s four-master is loading grain right now and leaving soon for Europe—and if I hurry I can go with her. I’d believed my childhood sailing dreams were long forgotten, and I know perfectly well this is a ploy to get me away to London, but none of that matters. Packing begins.

A few days later I walk into the kitchen and Liam is making tea. He looks up. ‘Want a cup?’

I shake my head and put a plate in the sink and stand there awkwardly, gazing out at the garden and our play-house beneath the trees. I recall my eight-year-old self insisting Pete and Liam take ‘tea’ there with my dolls. How embarrassing.

‘I’m sorry, Eliza,’ Liam says. ‘I didn’t mean this to happen.’

‘Oh, I’m *delighted* to go. Simply delighted. London in spring will be so, so …’

‘Delightful?’ he says, suppressing a grin.

I sigh. ‘Look, I’m sorry, too. I didn’t mean *Mama*—’

I run out of words and shrug. He sets down the tea. ‘Have some, anyway. Better than that vile concoction you used to make Pete and me drink. What *was* that stuff?’

‘Grass clippings and water.’

‘Thought as much.’

‘Why did you put up with it?’

‘We admired you,’ says Liam. ‘You were rather a fierce, definite child. You always knew what you wanted. Pete was too—him with his aeroplanes, you with your ships. I only ever thought about colours and shadows and shapes. I always felt *indefinite* that way.'

I'm astonished. 'But you seemed so certain of yourself.'

'Perhaps we're none of us as we appear, Lizzie.'

My old nickname makes my throat ache and I say, 'I'll miss you, Liam.'

'No you won't, not in the slightest. You'll have a wonderful time, brace-hauling and keel-hauling and over-hauling and whatever else it is you'll have to haul.'

I laugh. 'My goodness, so I shall!' I hesitate. 'But this won't be a problem for you with Mama? Sometimes she's so straight-laced.'

'I doubt she'll throw me out for trying to seduce her daughter.'

'But surely you weren't.' I turn, deliberately graceful, and meet his eyes. 'Were you?'

'Of course I was.' He kisses me briefly on the mouth, then steps back.

I'm disappointed. 'Oh. Is that all?'

'Has to be. We're going our different ways, Lizzie. I've decided what I want at last—and it turns out it's colours and shadows and shapes after all.'

He smiles and tucks a wave of my hair behind my ear. 'But you're embarking on your great ship and you don't need me. You don't need anyone.'

2. Pete: To Port Lincoln

Lord, what a pain in the neck Eliza's departure is. I stay right out of it, spend as much time at the oval as I can, but it's impossible to avoid. Wet-weather gear, cold-weather gear, hot-weather gear, ad nauseum. Boring old sailing ships are the only topic of conversation at every meal.

I've never understood the affection my otherwise clever sister has always held for those inefficient anachronisms. They look dashing enough on the horizon: you might imagine fine timbers, clouds of canvas, a rakish master and brave men who've sailed the seven seas.

But up close—what a disappointment! Rusty steel hulls, patched sails, tubby captains in old suits, crews of hard-faced Scandinavians. No speed, no glamour, just plodding grain warehouses.

Even my Aunt Lucy, a sensible woman in most respects, once sailed on such a vessel, and the name *Inverley* has bored and irritated me most of my days. And it's certainly driving me right around the bend at the moment.

Then they inform me of the ultimate indignity: it's me they expect to chaperone Eliza to South Australia to put her on that stupid boat. *Me*! My team has matches lined up all summer and I'm lead batsman, but expressing my indignation gets me precisely nowhere. Aunt Lucy and her brood are on the way back to Broome, Mama and Anton have yet another all-consuming exhibition coming up, and even bloody Liam just laughs when I suggest he take my place.

In mid-February 1929 we depart Perth, with all the usual tedious farewells at the station. The first leg of the trip is to

Kalgoorlie via the Eastern Goldfields Railway. Eliza isn't what you'd call chatty and I don't have much in the way of small talk either, but time passes pleasantly enough.

We reach Kalgoorlie late that evening, then there's a bit of fuss changing over to the Port Augusta train on the wider-gauge Trans-Australian Railway. (We studied the gauge problem in Engineering Standards, and I rather enjoy seeing the odd situation in real life.)

Eliza and I have separate sleeper carriages and I'm glad of that. I'm still not very comfortable with my body and the way it thrusts me into embarrassing situations with a mind of its own.

I sleep well, and after breakfast Eliza and I sit in the lounge car and watch the passing scenery. It's quite extraordinary at first, with scattered scrub and red stony soil to the flat horizon, but soon becomes dull in its sameness. The waiter brings us morning tea.

I say, buttering a scone, 'No second thoughts, Sis? You're remarkably quiet.'

'About the passage?' Eliza says. 'No, but I'm thinking about everyone I'm leaving behind. When I come back you'll all be different.'

'I doubt it. Not me.'

'Yes you will, Pete. You'll have graduated and be assembling dull machines by then.'

'I've told you a hundred times that's not what engineers do.'

'Well, you'll never be my little brother again.'

I think for a moment. 'You're right, you know. For once.'

She gives me a wary look. 'Oh?'

'This'll be my second year at university and I'll be out in a couple more. And who knows when you'll come back? London in spring, *et cetera*.' That makes her smile.

I lean forward. 'But I won't be an engineer, even though everyone else thinks I will.'

'What, then?'

‘I’m going to be a pilot,’ I say, finishing my scone.

‘I thought you’d given up on that idea.’

‘Mama would get so cross whenever I said it so I stopped. But I didn’t stop thinking about it.’

‘Oh, my goodness, Pete! What if you crash?’

‘What if you sink?’

‘Ships have been sailing for thousands of years, but *aeroplanes*?’ she says. ‘They’re so new and dangerous.’

‘But safer all the time. Remember, Smithy flew the whole Pacific Ocean last year. It’s a great time for aviation, and Australia needs trained airmen. Who knows what enemies we’ll face one day?’

‘The British Empire will protect us,’ Eliza says firmly. ‘And everyone swore there’d never be another war, not after the last one.’

I shrug. ‘I don’t really care about that anyway. I just want to fly.’

‘Well, I suppose that horrid motorcycle of yours is more dangerous than any aeroplane,’ she says. ‘And you haven’t killed yourself on that yet, not for want of trying.’

‘Don’t be so rude about my bike. Norton Big Four, for God’s sake, one of the finest.’

Eliza sighs and gazes at me. ‘You always seem so biddable, Pete, yet you’re really as stubborn as the proverbial mule.’

‘But you’ll always be my determined big sister. Nothing will really change.’

‘Definite? Fierce? *Determined*?’ She shakes her head. ‘I’m hearing far too much lately about what a harpy I am.’

‘Doesn’t make you a harpy,’ I say. ‘You just have to be determined *quietly*, that’s all.’

‘Remember when I’d make you and Liam drink tea with my dolls in the play-house?’

‘Don’t think so. Did you really?’

She looks at me, half-smiling. ‘Yes, I did.’ Then she says, ‘And do you remember our father at all, our real father, Sam Lee?'

'No. I wasn't even two when he died. How could—?' I stop. 'Funny. Now you mention it I do have a sense of … someone lifting me up as if I were flying. Do you think that was him?'

'Yes, he used to do that with you. Oh, I wish he hadn't died. I wish *Gideon* hadn't …'

'Steady on, Sis. Gideon wasn't that bad. You always say he was such a monster but he was good to us. I was dashed proud of him being captain of that steamship too.'

'Good to you, maybe. He used to make Mama cry.'

'She'd cry about everything,' I say. 'Women are like that.'

'No they're not, Pete, they're *not*! And she only cried when he hurt her.'

'Where's the proof? I didn't see it.'

'I saw it and felt it too.' Eliza bites her lip. 'I've never told anyone this before—but Gideon used to hurt me sometimes, as well.' She swallows. 'And he used to … touch me. Touch me where he shouldn't.'

'Good God!' I shake my head in disbelief. 'Eliza, he was a master mariner, he worked for the *government*. Someone like that couldn't, wouldn't—'

She lifts her eyes and looks at me. 'He did, Pete.'

I'm horrified but I believe her without question. Eliza has never lied to me, never in her life.

'Good God, Sis, that's awful.' I stare at her. 'He didn't—*ravish* you, did he?' I can't think of another way to put it.

She shakes her head. 'No. But it was still frightening. He was so powerful and if I'd said anything who'd have believed me?'

'Oh, Lizzie. I'm sorry I didn't understand this before.'

'I'm not sure I understand it even now.' She sighs. 'Anyway, apart from the odd bad dream I've almost forgotten it. But I'm glad you believe me, Pete. I thought you'd be shocked.'

'Me? Man of the world, you know.'

For some reason she laughs.

We have dinner then sleep, the train rolling on into the night, and finally next morning we stop at Port Augusta. We're woken beforehand to take breakfast, then we alight and I'm glad to see the car we'd arranged waiting for us. The driver seems a nice bloke, although someone chattier would have been a relief. We still have over two hundred miles to go before Port Lincoln and it'll take most of the day. I groan to myself.

Soon we're motoring southwards to Eliza's blessed ship. We pass through smoky Whyalla without stopping, then after a hundred or so tedious miles we take a break for an early lunch at Cowell, a town on the Spencer Gulf.

The hotel is a handsome old building near the water and the sandwiches are good. One of the waitresses is pretty too, and she smiles at me rather thrillingly when no one else is looking. Regrettably we don't stay very long.

Next leg is an interminable seventy miles through scrub to a small place with long white beaches called Tumby Bay. We have some very welcome afternoon tea at a hotel, but sadly the waitresses there don't smile much.

Thirty miles to go, dear Lord, but finally we crest a rise and can see the harbour of Port Lincoln. Before us is a long island offshore and several jetties leading out to sea. But what astonishes me—*me*, who's so blasé about this whole project—are the three enormous sailing ships at the longest jetty, their spiky yards and masts like a vision from another century.

'My God,' I say, sitting forward. 'You're going on one of *those*? Golly, Sis. Are you sure you'll be safe?'

She nods firmly, staring at the ships, but she looks a little stunned.

'Glad you're so sure about it all. Now, what do we do?'

'Um, register at the hotel, I suppose,' says Eliza. 'Then see the

Harbourmaster and get a message to *Inverley*'s captain to say I've arrived. They're sailing tomorrow.'

We stop on the foreshore outside the Grand Hotel and I pay the driver and arrange for his return. Across the road is a broad strip of trees and sand, where people are picnicking and swimming in the afternoon sun.

A woman at the hotel shows us to our rooms upstairs. They're small but lead onto a veranda with a fine view of the harbour and the ships at the jetty, perhaps half a mile distant.

'Rather basic,' I say. 'Still, you'll recall this as unadulterated luxury after a few days at sea.'

Eliza digs me ungently in the ribs.

We ask the woman at the desk for directions and find the Harbourmaster's office not far from the jetty. He's a middle-aged man with a grey moustache, who glances at Eliza from under his eyebrows when she asks him to send a note to the captain of *Inverley*.

'A *girl* passenger?' He shakes his head, looking at her light cotton dress. 'I can't imagine what your parents—well, I hope you've got something more suitable than *that* to wear, miss. You'll need—'

'Cold-weather gear, wet-weather gear, yes, we know,' I say. 'She's ready for any occasion.'

Eliza hands him the envelope and says straight-faced, 'You're very kind, Captain.'

I hear him mutter 'Flibbertigibbet,' as we leave.

We stand on the shore and gaze at the handsome old craft, with their great steel hulls sweeping from pointed bows to massive sterns. Tall spiky masts are outlined against the sky, with spars as bare as winter branches touched by a frosty haze of rigging.

Enough of the poetry, lad, I tell myself. They're nothing more than absurd anachronisms in this age of oil and hydrodynamic vessels. Yet it's strangely difficult to look away.

'Which one's your boat, Lizzie?'

'Ship, not boat. And *barque,* to be precise.'

I laugh. 'Who cares?'

'The crews whose lives are easier with fore-and-aft sails on the jigger, that's who.'

I roll my eyes. 'Double-Dutch, Sis. So which blessed *barque* is your famous *Inverley*?'

'There,' she says, pointing. 'See the four-master at the end, in front of *Herzogin Cecilie*?'

'Hair-tso *what*?'

'Honestly, Pete. The magnificent white one, named for the Duchess Cecilie. Won the Grain Race last year. Probably the most famous sailing ship in the world. Ring a bell?'

I shake my head. 'Magnificent? Rusty and worn out, I reckon. But cripes, it's a big brute.'

'Over three hundred feet long.'

'Really? Good God. I suppose you know all about the one on the far side of the jetty too?'

'Yes, that's *Olivebank*. Rather lovely, but not as fine as *Inverley*.'

I can see its name, but for some reason she calls it *Oh-leever-bahnk*. I suppose that's how the foreigners say it.

'Next you'll be telling me they've all got personalities,' I say.

'Well, they certainly have different characteristics from their structures and cargoes and ballasting. I suppose knowing how to work them together is what makes a good captain.'

'Just a matter of engineering, *I'd* have thought.'

'Plus a lifetime of experience,' she says dryly, shading her eyes and gazing at the sea. 'Oh, look, there's another barque out in the offing.'

'Don't be absurd, Lizzie,' I say. 'The offing's not a *place*. It means an event is about to occur.'

She laughs. 'The offing *is* a place, a real place, you ludicrous landlubber. It's the most distant waters you can see from the shore.'

'Ah.'

'And it's where I'm going, Pete,' she says, in awe. 'Tomorrow.'

We rest in the hot, dozy afternoon then meet in the empty dining room, where the menu is limited and a small electric fan beats uselessly against the heat. At least our drinks, beer for me and shandy for my sister, are pleasantly cold.

The door from the street opens and three people come in, a fair middle-aged couple and a younger man. The woman is well-dressed, the older man solid and distinguished.

He says to Eliza, 'You are Miss McKee, yes? I received your note. I am Captain Mattias Nilsen and this is my wife, Maria.'

'Captain Nilsen, welcome!' says Eliza. 'My brother, Pete McKee. And—?'

'This is Mr Harry Bell, able seaman. He is Australian too.' The captain chuckles. 'We are a very cosmopolitan ship, Miss McKee.'

'Please sit down,' she says. 'And do call me Eliza. Do you remember we met in London when I was a child? You showed us over *Inverley* then.'

'How could I forget?' he says gallantly. 'What a curious little girl. You said I was a lucky captain to have such a fine ship.'

'It's wonderful to meet again,' she says. 'And Mrs Nilsen, I'm so glad you'll be on board.'

They sit down while Mr Bell goes to the bar to get drinks.

'Have you sailed often?' I ask Mrs Nilsen. She's blonde and rather fine-looking.

'Yes, indeed. I like to sail with Mattias. This is now my fourth passage.'

'My wife is a very good sailor,' he says, and they beam at each other.

All right, I think, if she can do it I suppose Eliza will survive.

'And how is your uncle, Mr Whelan?' asks Captain Nilsen. 'He was third mate on *Willowmere* when I was just a deck boy. Good sailor, but always playing that noisy fiddle.'

'Yes, he and Lucy are very well,' Eliza says.

'Ah, Lucy.' He smiles. 'I never forget her as a child, in the rigging like a monkey. The men were so shocked, they did not know such a thing was possible for a girl.'

'Do you remember our father, Sam Lee?' I ask the captain, suddenly curious.

'Ah, Mr Lee, second mate. A very fine man. Quiet, but we always jump to do what he says.'

There's a silence, then Mr Bell arrives with a tray of drinks and sits down beside me. We hold out our glasses and Eliza says, 'To *Inverley,*' and Captain Nilsen is pleased. He and Eliza start chatting about something nautical so I say to Bell, 'Australian, are you? From around here?'

'No. Newcastle, north of Sydney.'

'How on earth did you come to be working on a foreign four-master?'

He's a light-haired chap in his mid-twenties, well-built like most sailors. I wouldn't care to go up against him in a fight.

'I stowed away,' he says. 'But they took me on as crew because they were short-handed.'

'Stowed away?' I smile. 'Must have been a great adventure.'

'Not really, it's fairly common. If you work hard the masters don't mind as much as they pretend to. Last year there was even a woman stowaway on *Herzogin Cecilie.*'

'Good God, on *Herzogin Cecilie?*' I say smoothly, as if today wasn't the first time I'd heard the ludicrous name. 'A woman of ill-repute, I expect.'

'No, I met her once. A music teacher, very innocent.'

I chuckle. 'Probably not quite so innocent by the time they reached England.'

He smiles politely. 'Finnish sailing ships are dull and respectable. Passengers and women don't usually mix with the crew.'

I'm finding him a little dull and respectable myself so turn back to the others. Sadly, the conversation still seems stuck in the groove of wet-weather gear and the like, so I'm glad when Captain Nilsen drains his glass and says, 'Well, young Eliza. Mr Bell will meet you here at nine in the morning. He'll help with your luggage and bring you out to the ship.'

They rise, and after farewells and handshakes the three of them leave.

'Golly, Sis,' I say, 'I hope you know what you're getting into.'

'I think so. Oh, Pete, how extraordinary! My last night on shore for months.'

Later, over quite a good steak, I say, 'Tell me again why these ships are sailed by Finns? Whatever happened to the British merchant fleet, or the French or Germans, for God's sake?'

'They've all given up sail,' she says. 'Sold their vessels cheaply after the Great War to anyone who'd take them off their hands. In this case, the wily Ålanders.'

'Orlanders? I thought we were talking about Finns?'

'From the Åland Islands in the Baltic Sea—once owned by Sweden, now Finland. Swedish-speaking, fiercely independent and the finest sailors in Europe. Clever enough to make a profit with these sailing ships when no one else can.'

I shake my head. 'You're quite mad you know, Lizzie. You love dancing and parties! You should be finding a nice fellow to settle down with, not going on old boats with gloomy blokes from obscure Baltic islands.'

'I'm not a fool, Pete,' she says. 'I know the trip will be uncomfortable, perhaps even dangerous, but I've *got* to escape this tedious, limited life. Maybe I'll settle down one day, but no matter what, I'm going.'

I gaze at her fondly. 'Done my best, old girl, can't change your mind. I give up.'

Next morning we wait on the footpath beside Eliza's luggage. Even in the shade of the veranda it's hot and I'm sweating beneath my coat. My sister looks cooler than I feel, her long dark hair tied back under a neat cloche hat.

She's wearing a blouse and beach pants that are apparently all the go from Paris. At least they'll be the soul of respectability for wherever and whatever it is she'll soon be clambering over.

In the dusty haze towards the jetty I can see rail-wagons laden with bags of wheat and barley. 'Does that railway go all the way out to the end of the jetty?' I ask, curious about the weights the timbers have endured over the years. 'Hope it's safe.'

I think briefly about getting out a piece of paper and trying to calculate the forces involved, then decide it's too much like an exercise one of my tutors is still waiting for me to submit.

'The rails do, but not the steam-engines. Draught horses pull the wagons along the jetty, then the lumpers load the bags into the holds of the ship.'

'Ouch. Makes my back ache just thinking about it. Are they nearly finished now?'

'Yes. Captain Nilsen said we sail this afternoon.' Unusually, her voice wavers a little.

In the haze I see movement near the jetty, then a wagon starts towards us. After about ten minutes the plodding horse arrives, hauling a group of five wharfies and the man we met last night, Harry Bell, lying down with his hat over his face. The lumpers jump out and nod, looking curiously at Eliza, then proceed into the pub.

Bell lets down the wagon's tail-gate and slides off. 'Morning,' he says.

He glances at Eliza's luggage then picks up the heavy trunk as if it's a briefcase and places it in the wagon. I put her smaller bag beside it.

Eliza turns to me. 'Darling Pete. Give everyone my love, and have a good trip home on the train. I'm sorry you had to miss your cricket match.'

I hug her tightly. 'You have a wonderful time, Sis. Be *careful*.'

She nods and whispers, 'I will.'

I step towards the waiting man and shake his hand. 'Thank you, Mr Bell. I hope you have fair winds and—oh, cripes, what is it, Lizzie?'

'Fair winds and following seas, you goose,' she says, laughing. 'Well, then, let's go. Bye, Pete.' She sits on the edge of the wagon and swings her legs inside.

Bell climbs up, refastens the tail-gate and sits. The wagon-driver says, 'Giddy-up.'

I watch until they're lost in the shimmering haze, the spiky silhouettes of the four-masters beyond them. I sigh and shake my head and return to the hotel. I can hear the lumpers carousing in the bar—at nine o'clock in the morning, for God's sake!

At least the car is picking me up soon to return to Port Augusta. It'll be another long day but anywhere is better than this dreary hole. And perhaps I'll see that smiling waitress at Cowell again.

3. Eliza: We Sail

The patient horse plods along the road to the jetty.

'Is the grain all loaded now?' I ask Mr Bell.

'Mostly.' He gazes ahead.

'Thank you for coming to get me. You must have to get a lot done before sailing.'

'Yes.'

I try again. 'Have you shipped with Captain Nilsen before?'

'Two passages.'

'Is the crew as cosmopolitan as he says?'

'Yes.'

His voice is deeply pleasant, but sparkling conversation is clearly not his forte.

'Do many of the men speak English?'

He glances at me with cool grey eyes. 'No. That's why I got the job.'

'Job of ... oh.' Me.

The silence lasts until we reach the jetty. We get out, then Mr Bell opens a gate in the side of a wagon on the rail lines. We put my luggage in the wagon and sit on a small pile of grain bags as another patient horse hauls us out along the jetty.

As we slowly trundle along, I gaze at great white *Herzogin Cecilie* to our left. She was once a German training-ship and magnificently set up, but now her figurehead of sweet-faced Duchess Cecilie is thick with layers of cracked paint.

Then we pass *Olivebank* on the right. Like *Inverley,* she's painted black and her figurehead is pretty too, but not (I think loyally) as lovely as *Inverley*'s, whose lady holds a sheaf of lilies. Finally my ship looms large, her name and home port, *Mariehamn,* in white letters across her steel stern.

'She's deeply-laden. How much grain is she carrying?' I glance at Mr Bell.

'Four and a half thousand tons. Fifty thousand bags.'

We stop, and once we get out a group of lumpers reach in for the last of the cargo. Mr Bell and I proceed to the gangway with my luggage. The lumpers wave to us as we pass and one calls out, 'Bon voyage, dearie!' Were it humanly possible, Mr Bell's eyes become even frostier.

Captain and Mrs Nilsen are waiting at the top of the gangway. They shake my hand and welcome me. Mr Bell sets my trunk down and disappears into a crowd of sailors. They all seem very young and aren't in any sort of uniform, just light rag-tag garments suited to the heat.

Mrs Nilsen says, 'Come with us to saloon now, Eliza.'

I want to stay on that vast deck and watch what's happening, but I follow them towards the stern, trailed by a red-headed lad carrying my trunk. Before us is the high poop deck, topped with the charthouse and a great double wheel at the stern. Beneath the deck is a steel door. We step over the raised sill into a corridor with cabins set on both sides.

At the end of the corridor is the elegant saloon, lit by a domed skylight and panelled in timber. Leather armchairs are set around a table where a dark-haired man is reading a book and smoking. He looks up, stubs out his cigarette and rises to greet me. 'Our valiant young lady has arrived at last. Welcome aboard, Miss McKee.'

Captain Nilsen clears his throat and says, 'This is Mr Malory, also a passenger.'

'Do call me Felix. We can hardly stand on ceremony throughout the perilous straits ahead.'

'I do not wish for any perilous straits ahead, thank you sir,' says Captain Nilsen, and for the first time I see the steel beneath his joviality.

'Eliza, I show you cabin,' says Mrs Nilsen.

It's a small room off the corridor, a high bunk along one wall with drawers beneath, and a chair, desk and wash-stand along the other. My luggage is lying on the bunk and through the porthole I can glimpse Port Lincoln.

For an instant I yearn to be back on land, safe in familiar surroundings. Then I scold myself for feeling as if I've just arrived at a new school.

'Thank you so much, Mrs Nilsen. This will be very comfortable, I'm sure.'

We return to the saloon where the steward has set out an elegant tea. Captain Nilsen goes to the deck while Mr Malory chats to Mrs Nilsen and me. He's a good-looking man, with a cleft chin and intense blue eyes beneath dark brows, but I make it clear I have not the slightest intention of calling him by his Christian name. He is older than me (I learn later he is thirty-one), and seems the height of sophistication.

After tea I put my clothes in the drawers beneath my bunk, then the silent red-headed lad takes the bags away to be stored. Along the corridor is a bathroom with a small bath and basin and, I'm grateful to see, a water closet. Refreshed, I ask Mrs Nilsen if I may go on deck to watch our preparations for sea.

'Of course. I show you the way.' She takes me up a narrow flight of internal stairs, a companionway. Off the landing at the top is the charthouse, with a desk and a wall of shelves holding rolled-up charts. Another steel door leads us out to the poop deck. Mrs Nilsen takes me to the fore railing and I can only gaze, stunned.

I thought I had an understanding of sailing ships, but I can hardly take in what I'm seeing. *Inverley* is no dear little three-masted barque, the sort so common in picture-books, but a massive, steel-hulled four-master, and everything about her is on such an extraordinary *scale*.

Behind us is the smallest of her masts and before us loom the other three, soaring hundreds of feet over our heads. They're anchored by ranks of steel cables, each as thick as my wrist. Half a dozen men are high on a yard-arm doing something to a sail, their feet braced on a line that swings and moves as they do. From here it looks as fragile as a sewing thread.

In front of us is a small deckhouse and towards the bow, a larger one. Mrs Nilsen points. 'You see little deckhouse, Eliza? Cook's galley and bunks for day-men—sailmaker, carpenter, bosun. And big one has donkey-engine and foc's'l, quarters for the crew.'

Steel cables lead to winches for lifting, lowering and turning the yards—the main yard must be nearly one hundred feet wide. Swathes of rope drape in every direction, ending in coils along the sides, the bulwarks, of the ship. It is almost impossible to believe anyone could understand what all those ropes do!

The men aloft undo the ties on the sails, clamber down the ratlines to the deck, then run to the next mast and climb again. My breath catches as they scamper so casually, leaning back to climb over and up onto the platform at each masthead, without a care in the world.

On the solid deck so far below them, others (including Mr Bell) are hammering timbers over layers of canvas to secure a gigantic hatch cover. They set steel bars across the timbers and anchor them to bolts on the decks. Naturally I've read of the dangers that require such precautions, but for the first time I feel a chill of anxiety.

A whistle shrieks, the signal for sailors to start releasing the lines holding us to the jetty. Other men haul on mysterious ropes, and I hear the crackle of canvas and look up. The limp sails are filling with air, becoming round and taut.

Silently we begin to move. Slowly at first, and then faster, our tons of steel and timber and grain begin slipping through the water to a distant splashing at the bow. I grip the railing in front of me, my heart thudding, almost unable to breathe.

Captain Nilsen comes over and smiles at his wife, saying with satisfaction, 'We sail.'

Felix Malory joins us as well. 'What a sight, Miss McKee, eh?'

I murmur politely, my mind a jumble of amazement. The day is sunny, the wind from behind, and our passage has begun.

For the next three or four months we'll be out of sight of all land. The ship has a small radio receiver but no transmitter, so no one will know where we are or how we fare. Our survival depends entirely upon *Inverley*'s seaworthiness and the skills of her young crew.

I shiver. I hope it's from joy.

Some time later the red-headed lad comes up to me and squeaks, '*Kapten*,' pointing at the charthouse, then dashes away. Inside the charthouse Captain Nilsen is sitting at the table with a document in front of him.

'We must get you signed on, Eliza. Please put your signature on the Ship's Articles, there.'

'I am to be part of the crew?'

'It is not legal to carry passengers as such. Everyone on board must sign the Articles, and those without sea time must be rated as *jungman*, deckboy.'

'My goodness, I'm allowed to be a *deckboy*?' I scribble my signature.

The captain chuckles. 'In name only. Of course you do not have to—'

'But I'd *like* to. At least learn a little and help when I can.'

'Ah, you are truly Lucy's niece,' he says, nodding. 'Indeed, there are many small jobs you may help with. We have brass to polish, timber to paint, decks to be cleaned. I will put you in the starboard watch under the second mate, Mr Pölönen. He speaks some English.'

'When do I begin?'

'Tomorrow. The off-duty officers usually eat with us, so this evening you will meet Mr Pölönen at dinner. You may rest tonight, then tomorrow we will see how well you like to be a *jungman*.' His smile is kindly, but I suddenly wonder what I've signed up for.

Dinner is in the mess-room near the saloon, not a large space, but the table is set with linen and good silver and china. Captain Nilsen takes the head of the table, his wife opposite. Felix Malory, amiable and amusing, is seated across from me, the second mate beside him.

Mr Pölönen turns out to be a stocky brown-haired young man, with a gold tooth that twinkles whenever he smiles: which is fairly often, as his English appears to be rather more limited than Captain Nilsen had indicated.

To my surprise, unfriendly Mr Bell enters the room and sits beside me in the only empty chair. I wonder why he isn't eating in the crew mess. He's not an officer, only an able seaman, and going on this morning's performance he's certainly not here to charm the passengers.

The steward serves us mushroom soup and Mr Malory remarks how tasty it is.

'We are very lucky,' says Mrs Nilsen. 'We have fine cook. He bakes bread every day.'

'Simple fare,' says Captain Nilsen. 'Yet you will not go hungry on my ship, no indeed.'

'But how can this possibly be the true Cape Horn experience without hard tack and weevils?' says Mr Malory, smiling.

Mrs Nilsen laughs politely but Captain Nilsen frowns.

Mr Bell says, 'There'll be hardships enough ahead. Wouldn't go asking for any more.'

Mr Malory gazes at him. 'Of course, times have changed on modern vessels and we should all be grateful. No oppression of the crew either. Fair democracy reigns triumphant.'

'A ship cannot be a *democracy,* Mr Malory,' says Mrs Nilsen. '*Kapten* is always in charge. I do not understand.'

'Oh, I *must* apologise. Of course, the captain is the ultimate authority. I'm merely referring to your laudable practice of supping with the deckhands.'

Beside me, Mr Bell returns Mr Malory's stare. His lean face is expressionless but I have the odd sense he is amused.

'Mr Bell is not a deckhand,' says Captain Nilsen.

'Heavens, I am putting my foot in it tonight,' says Mr Malory with a short laugh. 'When you introduced us earlier I thought you said he was an able seaman. A deckhand.'

'I fear you misunderstand. Mr Bell is *matros,* able seaman, because he has sea time. You and Miss McKee are deckboys because you do not. But you are all passengers.'

Mr Malory flushes and Mr Bell eats his soup. Mr Pölönen smiles his innocent golden smile and the steward brings the main course which, we hasten to agree, looks delicious.

After dinner Mrs Nilsen, Mr Malory and I walk on the poop deck beneath the crescent moon and a river of stars. The breeze is mild as we sail on Spencer Gulf towards the ocean. Light gleams from scattered farmhouses ashore, but otherwise the horizon is dark.

How wonderful to be on a ship! I breathe the night air with contentment.

Next morning I awaken to delicious scents of bacon and eggs from the mess-room. We're sailing on rougher seas now, and by the time I get to breakfast the food seems a lot less attractive. I eat just a small piece of toast and climb the stairs to the deck, where the last of the land is slipping quickly behind us.

Captain Nilsen says, 'Kangaroo Island, Eliza. Say your farewells to Australia.'

As we reach the open sea the movement of the ship becomes livelier and I begin to regret even that small piece of toast. I return to my bunk, a bucket on the floor beside me.

This morning I will not be joining the starboard watch.

Mrs Nilsen says I will suffer for only a few days, until my body adjusts to *Inverley*'s motion. She brings me tea but I can only moan, and wish I were anywhere in the world but on a ship.

Two days later breakfast again smells enticing. It's cold now, and I tie my hair back and put on dungarees and a woollen jumper. I wonder if the captain has decided yet if we're to sail east past stormy Cape Horn, or more slowly west, via Africa's Cape of Good Hope.

'*Kapten*, have you chosen our route to England?' I ask him at the table.

'Indeed. The winds are better for Cape Horn.'

'How thrilling!'

Captain Nilsen shakes his head. 'Ah, *jungman*, you may yet regret those words. Finish your coffee, then I will introduce you to the starboard watch.'

He takes me to the bow and leaves me with Mr Pölönen and the nine men of my watch. Eight of them stare, snicker or scowl at me. The ninth, Mr Bell, gazes out to sea.

Mr Pölönen smiles and says, 'Pigs, Miss.'

Behind him are the pigs in their enclosure. Mrs Nilsen had mentioned the ship carries nine chickens for eggs, five pigs for meat and three rat-catching cats, but I hadn't realised what that might mean in terms of daily maintenance. Unfortunately it's all too obvious in the surrounding reek; not quite what I'd envisaged as the life of a sailor.

Mr Pölönen says, 'Like farm, yes?'

My brother and I used to go for holidays to Aunt Filipa's horse farm, so I'm used to the basics of animal husbandry. I nod and pick up a broom and bucket. Mr Pölönen addresses the men in the common lingo of the ship—Swedish with snippets of Finnish and English—and they go to other jobs, leaving me and the red-haired deckboy with the task of cleaning the pigsty.

The lad is probably all of fifteen and can't look me in the face. We slosh water around and use the brooms to push the mess out through the washports, while the pigs serenely contemplate us. When we've done our best I stand back and say, 'Good, yes?' to the lad.

He blushes beneath his freckles and says, '*Ja*,' then flees.

I follow him to Mr Pölönen, who's with some men who are chipping rust off a deckhouse. He looks worried at the sight of me and says, 'Pigs good?'

'Pigs good,' I say. He finds some rags and kerosene and takes me to the poop deck to polish the brasswork. He says, 'Cleverly and carefully, yes?'

That's the most he's said so far, so I take it as encouragement and set to work. The hardest part is the brass on the compasses —the large standard one at the fore of the poop deck, and the two steering compasses, one each side of the great ship's wheel.

The helmsman pays me no attention as I polish, which I'm glad to see. If his concentration should ever fail then the ship might broach: turn sideways to the wind and, in severe weather, capsize. The thought of broaching terrifies me.

Finally the watch ends and I'm glad to stop and have lunch with Mrs Nilsen. 'For now, while sea is quiet, cleaning and painting must be done,' she says. 'When storms come men must work sails, no time for other jobs.'

On deck later I'm surprised she calls this a quiet sea (it looks worryingly energetic to me), and the wind in the rigging is making the most eerie noises: a deep bass thrumming, a range of moaning tones and dozens of high fluty whistlings. It's almost like music.

Dinner that evening is quiet. Mr Malory is absent, still seasick in his cabin. Then the second mate blows his whistle and my watch goes back on duty. The men haul lines to adjust the sails and turn the winches to angle the yards to the wind. Various ropes are thrust at me and I hold on and haul with the others—yank, pause, yank, pause, to a rhythm chanted by Mr Pölönen.

At midnight this long tiring day is over. *Kapten* says I'm not to attend the four a.m. watch with the others, so I don't have to work again until after lunch tomorrow. Thank God.

Next morning after breakfast Captain Nilsen shows me our course on the chart. We're almost past Tasmania and heading towards the open seas south of New Zealand, where the constant winds will push us east towards Cape Horn.

My task today is to clean the chicken coop on top of the small deckhouse, and the best that can be said of it is that it's not as awful as the pigpen. After that, Mr Pölönen hands me a tin of black grease and sets me to rubbing it onto various wires.

Some of my watchmates are nearby chipping rust, half-working and half-contemplating me and whispering to each other. Mr Bell is painting the bulwark not far away. I'm enjoying the crisp breeze and blue sky and don't notice one of the men coming closer. Later I find out he's a twenty-year old German named Karl.

'Girl on ship *unlucky*, you must go away, *flicka*,' he says. 'But in trousers, so maybe not girl?' He squeezes my breast painfully and snickers, 'Oh, *girl*, after all!'

I jerk backwards, spilling drops of black grease onto the clean timber deck.

'You in trouble now,' Karl says, shaking his head. '*Bad* deckboy.'

Some of the men laugh as Karl saunters back to his job, while others look shocked.

Mr Pölönen hurries over and stares at the deck in dismay. 'Not cleverly or carefully, Miss.'

I gasp. 'It wasn't *my* fault—'

'Don't argue with an officer,' Mr Bell says. He takes a turpentine rag and rubs at the marks, and they become lighter. 'We can holystone the deck later.'

My jaw clenched I say, 'I'm very sorry, Mr Pölönen.'

He nods sadly. As he leaves he points at the German boy and a couple of his friends and says, 'You. Pigs.' They stare at me with dislike and go to clean the sty.

Mr Bell returns to his painting, then says quietly, 'Miss McKee, you really shouldn't be playing at sailor like this. You heard them, women on ships are unlucky. It's not magic, they're just a distraction—but an instant's distraction here can kill somebody.'

'Then they shouldn't let themselves get so damned *distracted*.' I'm furious, but I don't cry.

He turns and gazes coolly at me. 'Why not simply enjoy the life of a passenger?'

'I don't want to be a passenger, I want to *do* things.'

He puts down his brush and says, 'All right, come and meet the sailmaker. He can always use a hand.'

'You think because I'm a girl all I can do is *sew*?'

'You think sailmaking is just sewing?' Mr Bell laughs. 'You really do need to meet the sailmaker.'

He leads me to the sail locker, beneath the poop deck, and introduces me to Mr Hendriksson. He's a round-faced, middle-aged man who gazes at me over his glasses then smiles, reminding me a little of a goblin. My fury eases.

Mr Bell leaves and Mr Hendriksson fits a leather pad, a palm, onto my hand. He shows me the stitch he wants, then sets me to joining two small pieces of canvas. After a time he says, 'I have daughter, twenty-t'ree, she *never* want to go on ship. How you like being *jungman*, Eliza?'

'It's not very easy, Mr Hendriksson.'

'When too hard, you come here and help me.' He smiles. 'Still much work but I have warm stove, better than cold deck, *hey*?'

'Thank you, I will.'

It's hard to wrestle the large curved needle through the fabric, but Mr Hendriksson shows me how to use an awl to punch holes in the canvas, which makes it easier. Later that night, rubbing balm into my aching hands, I feel glad I've made at least one friend among the crew.

Next day a wan Mr Malory, recovered from his seasickness, comes to breakfast. We tell him about the ship's progress, and Mrs Nilsen says what a hard worker I am. Captain Nilsen asks him jovially if he plans to take up his own place in the port watch today.

Mr Malory flinches. 'I certainly shall *not.* And I cannot imagine for the life of me what Miss McKee thinks she's doing, wearing men's clothing and associating with the dregs of humanity. No good will come of it.'

I sit astonished, a forkful of egg halfway to my mouth.

'Those *dregs*, sir, are the men who will take you safely across the world,' says Captain Nilsen stiffly. He excuses himself and goes above. Mrs Nilsen collects several plates, and also leaves.

'What a thing to say, Mr Malory!' I cannot stop myself. 'You haven't been around since we left port and you don't know any of the crew. I think you should apologise to the captain.'

'I hardly see why,' he says. 'You're not going to pretend they're a bunch of fine Oxford-educated chappies, are you? They're clearly of the lowest type.'

'I'd suggest you keep your opinions to yourself, Malory,' says Mr Bell. 'As captain said, our lives are in the crew's hands and most of them are hard-working lads.'

'Ah, Bell—the Bolshevik emerges at last! Thought as much, given your passion for the proletariat life. But don't expect *me* to labour beside you in delight. I, at least, know my place.'

Mr Bell gazes at him, then shrugs. He picks up his plate and leaves.

I realise a nerve under Mr Malory's right eye is twitching and his hand trembling. How odd. It wasn't a pleasant argument but hardly ugly enough to cause such distress. I feel embarrassed for him and stand to leave, then sit again.

'Mr Malory, I do apologise for speaking rudely, but since we're to be together for some months, undergoing all sort of hardships, perhaps we should be more circumspect in our language. At least until we are better acquainted.'

There is silence then he lifts his head, his eyes strangely remote. 'Miss McKee, you are correct. My words were immoderate and I shall apologise to all concerned. I should explain I am in some … physical distress. An injury that would prevent me from working beside the men. I spoke from a position of humiliation rather than dislike.'

'I'm very sorry to hear that. I hope your injury improves.'

He smiles mirthlessly. 'If it hasn't healed in eleven years I doubt there's much room for improvement. No, it was a shattered hip-bone and I'm stuck with it. However, I do apologise for my bitter words. I expect this bout of seasickness has done little for my temper either.'

'Probably not. Thank heavens that particular trial is over.'

'Indeed.' He hesitates. 'But tell me, Miss McKee, do you truly enjoy getting about in such extraordinary garb?'

'Yes, of course,' I say. 'And if you'd worn dresses all your life you'd love dungarees too.'

'Still—I cannot believe my eyes—is that a *knife* you wear on your hip?'

'We must all carry them. They help with small jobs and we must be able to cut lines instantly in extreme circumstances, it might save the ship.'

He raises an eyebrow dubiously. 'You?'

I laugh. 'Probably not, but the knife is required so I shall wear it.’

‘Yet working with such—dare I say ruffians? What would your mother think?’

‘My mother’s own sister would work beside me if she could. And the men are not ruffians, well, not all. You must let me introduce you to the sailmaker, Mr Hendriksson. He’s very kind.’

Mr Malory smiles. ‘And should I meet this paragon of the sailmaker’s art, will you forgive me my rudeness?’

‘Let us see that new leaf turned over first,’ I say lightly.