

A World Apart

Strong beams of sunlight glint off the deep blue water. I see the bark moored at the harbour and fasten my pace. A dusty road winding down the large hill in front of me leads the way. My blue frock swishes around my legs. A dappled grey horse overtakes me pulling a large wooden cart. The man on board waves and pulls over. I recognize him as one of the farmers from whom Lady Franklin buys food.

“Eleanor, do you want a lift down to the docks?” I look at him, he isn’t the friendliest man. My aching legs make the decision.

“Yes please,” my voice sounds scratchy after the long run. I pull myself up and plonk down next to him. He is wearing musty brown overalls and his moustache covers most of his face.

We are seated on square hay bales. A trailer sways behind us full of orange carrots and bags of wheat. “How’s your father?” the sound punctures the silence almost awkwardly. I think about my father. I haven’t seen him much lately.

“He’s busy.” Then to completely change the topic I ask “Why is the Nelson so late?” I’ve been worried for the past eight months since the boat should’ve arrived.

“No idea,” he sounds grim, “they ain’t never been this late before.” The water draws closer and closer and its sheen seems to call to me. We pass many settlements, brick houses, tents and the horrible convict camp. I hear noises from inside the walls. Screams and groans. The farmer stops again and I nod goodbye and hop off. It is a short walk to the harbour but I run it.

I hear the native gulls squawking at bustling people, in the cluttered dirt roads. People heading, like me, to see the boat. I watch the gulls' wings turn and how they glide propelling themselves through the air. I carelessly stomp on a lady's foot and hurriedly apologize. She tells me to stop looking at the clouds.

I see the bark and quicken my pace. Numerous men are surrounding the three-masted boat, pulling off their crated cargo. The gargantuan white sails are being tucked into their coverings. I see the sailors and my heart fills with glee. I can already imagine hearing the stories of England, of their trip and the many sights they saw. I wonder about the enormous whale they saw last visit. I wish I could see one, I wish I was a sailor, always moving never staying too long in one place.

I walk up to a sailor shepherding convicts. "Why were you so late?" his head turns down towards me.

"Didn't you hear?" he sounds exasperated, "this is the second boat to be sent down to Van Diemen's Land, the Nelson never made it." I look up at the boat and sure enough the writing scrawled across the side reads Golden Mary.

"Do you know about a sailor called Tom?" the question blurts from my mouth. I don't have time to think, I just say.

"Tom, grey hair and glasses?"

"No, blonde hair, young,"

"He's not on this boat I can tell you that much," he looks down at me. "Why, is he your husband?" I blush but at the same time feel tears coming to my eyes. "Get out of here, I have work to do." I walk away slowly. What happened to Tom? He can't be dead. My slow walk turns into a run, through the crowd of people, weaving along the roads

passing the small church, the dilapidated bakery. I feel grass under my feet and slow. I land hard on my knees and bury my face into my immaculately embroidered skirt.

The world is streaks of colour through my tears. Pictures float through my mind. Tom, the most amazing person I know, or knew - gone.



The golden light streams through the dull grey windows. The tome in my hand, heavy. The story scrambled across the page. A story of a different world, a better world. I can't concentrate on the story. The pages fuzz as my eyes fill with tears again. I can't understand why. Why me? Why Tom?

I remember some of the stories he told me, of cobbled streets, of houses older than we can remember, of the poor and hungry. I picture London. My heart fills with yearning. I wish I wasn't stuck on this miniscule island. I start sobbing louder and bury my face into the musty novel. Not for the first time I am filled with uncontrollable rage. I don't know why but I have a need to yell and scream, kick and punch. Cause pain to someone else. I flop suddenly tired. Just sobbing gently. Wondering about Tom. Poor Tom.

I stand up, my legs are stiff and tense. Light pink stripes surround me covering the walls. Nestled into a corner is my wooden bed. A colourful quilt covering the spongy mattress. A large book shelf stands near the window. I walk over. The dark wood is smooth and shining. Half the shelves are empty, waiting to be filled. I run my hand over the thick binding. I place the tome in my flopping hand onto one of the less-full shelves.

I think of the twisting stories. Stories of orphans, of hunchbacks and of disease. The stories that free me from this island. Give me a glance at the world beyond. The world I used to live in. Tom used to give me these glances.



The white floral pattern stretches out in front of me. My bowl and plate shining white. Rosette comes out carrying a large bowl full of thick beef soup. Lady Jane nods at the maid and gives her a small smile. She picks up our bowls and ladles large amounts of the broth into the clear white emptiness of my bowl. Empty like my heart.

“May the lord watch over us in our upcoming endeavours, let us remain peaceful in heart and complete in soul. Bless us for eternity. Amen.”

“Amen” I mutter in reply, my head bowed. I tuck my blank serviette into my dress. Then start to spoon the broth into my mouth. The taste is dull but the warmth fills me. I feel fine. The sadness dulled. I continue eating.

Lady Franklin coughs politely. Her dark hair forming a cloud around her head. The long white gown falling gracefully to her feet. The room is silent, a cold silence, and I feel exhausted and dizzy, unable to control my emotions.

I scrape the last pieces of vegetables out of my bowl and Rosette immediately hurries to refill it. I put my hand up telling her to stop, wordlessly. I place my shining spoon in the centre of my bowl. I stare out the window at the black night and for the first time this evening, I feel warm and cosy.



The sun shines through the hanging pieces of red cloth. My colourful quilt up around my neck. I place my feet on the floor. Coldness runs from my feet up my rigid spine and to my head. My pale pink nightgown hanging down in front of me, soft and smooth. I stand, my body tense and stiff. Walking towards the window, I pull the curtains aside and tie them with the thick golden tassels. The fuzzy trees outside sway gently in a calm breeze and the sun shines brighter than ever. I pull a book off my shelf, a small green leather bound

novel. I position myself delicately on the lightly cushioned bay window and open to a random page. I don't read, I'm too distracted, too helpless. I think of London where everything happens. I remember the wide cobbled streets, the large churches and the small grey hospital I was born in.

My mind drifts to my mother. I don't remember her, the woman who shared my name. We used to visit her shining tombstone, lay flowers where her body rests below. I remember that. Coldness runs through me, maybe if I return to England I will have another tomb to lay flowers on.

My eyes fill with grief. I stand and walk to my clothes chest. I pull out one of my tight corsets. The soft silky fabric is a light pink and the back is neatly laced through the small holes. I pull my nightie off over my head. The corset is tight and I find it hard to fasten. I look in my chest again. Carefully folded on top is my white petticoat. I put that on as well. Next a big red dress goes over the top of everything. The puffy skirt bulges out and the embroidery is extravagant. Its long sleeves end in neat lace. Last of all I pull on a pair of small brown leather boots that were sitting next to the chest. The boots are hard and cold against my bare feet.



A knock on the door rings through the silence. "Enter," my voice cracks as I mutter the words. I expect to see the white dress of a maid appearing through the doors, but instead the pink hooped skirt of Lady Franklin squeezes through. She smiles at me and awkwardly takes a seat next to me at the bay window. She is beautiful, her hair dark, tied up in a tight bun. Her dress falling elegantly around her, encasing her in material.

"I thought I would come and talk to you, Eleanor," her voice is soft and her bright eyes are staring at me. "You've been acting rather strangely lately and I wanted to know

what's wrong." She looks concerned. My eyes fill with tears. I feel ashamed. "You can tell me," she lays a gloved hand on my shoulder.

"I," my voice stutters and I feel out of control, "do you remember Tom?" tears start falling and a sob explodes from me.

"The boy you spent time with on the boat when we were coming over, back when you were twelve?" she looks puzzled but I'm glad she remembers.

"Yes him," I wipe my eyes with my sleeve, "he was on the supply boat when it sunk." Lady Franklin's eyes widen. Horrified. They seem to enclose me.

"I didn't know." She stares at me, her eyes full with sympathy. "Why didn't you tell us?" I feel stupid, ignorant.

"I don't know," I am shaking and Lady Franklin wraps her velvet covered arm around my slumped shoulders. I lean into her burying my sobbing face into the many layers of embroidered material. Seeking comfort. I expect her to retreat, disgusted, but she does not. I close my watery eyes, trying to block out the world.



The room is light, too light, unbearably light. The cushion is cold under me. I feel horribly exposed. I look around. Lady Franklin is still next to me. I am shocked, embarrassed. "I thought I would let you rest." Her voice is calm and smooth. Her mouth frowned downwards. She is calm but I can feel sadness radiating off her. "I wanted to talk to you about something as well. I'm not sure it's the best time but it is necessary." She looks at me and I suddenly feel uncomfortable, nervous. "Your father has been withdrawn." I look at her unbelieving. I'm flooded with happiness and sadness. Unsure, shocked.

"So we are going back to England?" my voice is quiet. I look up at her face. She nods her face unrevealing. Her eyes are staring out the window. She might be upset,

maybe not. I don't know how I feel. Isn't this what I wished for? I imagine the dark street, the hundreds of buildings. My head spins, Tom, going back, Father. What about the journey? The journey without Tom. The way here, he had told me stories, played tag on the deck, taught me to read the stars, and to climb the wavering ladders to the top of the masts.

"I will give you some time alone," She stood up and I watched her exit. The dark wooden door swung almost shut. I stayed still. Back to London, back to my childhood. I think of my old house, my old room, my mother's rocking chair, I used to snuggle up on it with my sheepskin and read. How much I have changed since we arrived on this tiny island. Why was Father withdrawn? I think of the journey back, four months on a wooden vessel, four months with no child companions. I guess I'm not a child anymore. There will probably be sailors my age, but not Tom. I wanted to go back to London, but now I can't imagine leaving the island.

I need some fresh air. I walk to the doorway and gently pull the metal knob. The door opens to reveal a rather plain hall. The runner along the floor is grey and the walls cream, portraits of Father's relatives are scattered along the wall. I walk down the hall passing numerous doors. I can hear noises from behind some, probably Rosette or one of the other maids. The door at the end is gigantic. It seems to be looming over me, shadowing me. The wood is darker than on my door and the patterns more intricate.

The knob is cool under my hand. I rotate it and suddenly am plunged into the light. My eyes ache with the intensity. I walk out, the sun pounding down on me. The sharp grass surrounds me and my brown boots roll on the uneven path. The trees gathered around me have slender trunks, speckled with all kinds of brown. I walk around one of the trees to a special bench Lady Franklin had placed there. She said it was for when she

needed to clear her head. I sit down slowly. The breeze is cool and the fragrant green leaves above my head sway. One falls into my skirt. I look at the gentle lines curving from centre to outside. The leaf is covered in a white powder. I crush the leaf in my fist. The crunch is loud and I feel the pieces in my hand. I let them fall. They hit the brown dirt, blending in to the rest of the fallen leaves. I tuck my legs up and my skirt covers them, a sea of fabric.



The breeze runs through my hair and I feel wild, like one of the natives. The natives I will never see again. Father leads the way over the small wooden gangway. Suddenly the ground under my foot is rocking. I feel unsure, self-conscious as I look out over the crowd, come to wish Father a safe journey, say goodbye. I see many familiar faces. People I will miss, people I care for. My heart aches as my eyes fall on the face of Mr Smith the baker. He always used to sneak me an apple roll when I accompanied Lady Franklin to his store.

I turn, following Lady Franklin across the deck. Sailors are preparing to depart. The sails are being hoisted up. I look at Lady Franklin's face, unreadable, expressionless.

The deck is shining with polish and the three masts point straight into the shockingly blue sky. I follow Lady Franklin down the ladder leading to the rooms below. Father is still saying goodbye to his people, his land. I suddenly feel sick. It feels so weird to be leaving.

The only natural light is coming from the hatch above. We walk along the hallway. The light here is scarce and provided by small oil lamps hanging from the roof. Doors enclose the rooms to my left and right. Which door is hiding the room I shall stay in? Lady Franklin stops suddenly. I nearly run into her. She turns and opens the door to our right. Inside it is dark and smells of old bread. A single oil lamp hangs from the roof. Two beds

are adjacent to each other. The sheets are white and clean and a grey blanket is folded at the end. The beds are smaller than normal beds and have no head or end. A chest of drawers sits between them, made of a darker wood. The rug on the floor is plain and appears colourless in the dim light. A writing desk is the only other noticeable object, a chair is tucked neatly in between the four straight legs. It feels so dark, so small. How am I supposed to live here for four months?

I take off my small pink cardigan. "You can have the top two drawers." Lady Jane sounds exhausted I gently fold the woollen garment and walk across the floor to the drawers. As I open one, a large rat scuttles out a hole at the back. I jump backwards, scared. Slowly I approach again and place the folded garment in the drawers. Suddenly we start moving I can imagine the coast going past us. People waving. I lie carefully on the bed. Tired, I've been tired since that day, the day I found out Tom had left the world.



The ripples spread through the water. The boat cutting through the substance known as water. The water is extraordinarily light blue and the creatures elegantly leaping out are clearly visible beneath the surface. The grey fins poking out of the creatures' backs look like the fins of a shark.

"Eleanor, lunch is being served." I turn around suddenly. Lady Franklin is waiting for me. I take one last glance at the creatures before walking towards her. "They're beautiful aren't they?" I nod with a smile spread across my face. We go down into the darkness. It feels horrible when the day outside is so light. We walk towards the bow of the boat. This is where Father's room is. Here there are small windows inside the rooms. Lady Franklin knocks on one of the doors.

“Enter.” I hear Father’s voice through the door. The door is opened and natural light streams into the hall. A small table is in here. Father and the captain are already seated. I take one of the empty seats. A pot of soup in the middle of the table has steam rising from it. My bowl is filled with the same brown onion soup we have had for a week. The captain says grace today.

“May this journey be safe and successful, delivering us all home in London alive and well.”

“Amen.” The spoon in my hand is cold and refreshing. I slowly eat the soup. The flavour is bitter and I don’t particularly like it.

Lady Franklin is slow today. Daintily eating the small pieces of onion. I finish and stare out the window. The view is just above the water and all I can see is water. The light streaming in makes sitting here somewhat enjoyable. Lady Jane taps on my shoulder.

“You may leave if you would like,” she smiles “I left one of my books on your bed. I thought you would enjoy reading it.”

I walk out, nodding thank you to the captain and Father. I go along the hall and enter my dark bedroom. The oil lamp is still burning but the darkness is very prominent. The book on my bed is small. I pick it up. It feels new. ‘The *Old Curiosity Shop*’ by Charles Dickens is printed neatly across the cover. Excitement flares through me. I had a copy of Charles Dickens ‘*Oliver Twist*’ and loved it. I sit on the bed and open to the first page.



I look down at all of the people. Straight ahead is the city of London. I see the docks and excitement floods through me. Few people are wandering around, mainly sailors at work repairing boats.

My attention is drawn to the sailors throwing ropes over the side of the boat to others standing on the dock. I can't wait to have my feet on solid ground.

"We are going straight to our new house" Lady Franklin's voice sounds tired but relieved. I watch as sailors jump over the side and position the gangway to help us get down.

I eagerly follow some sailors down the gangway and place my feet on the cobblestones. It feels amazing. I feel Lady Franklin's hand on my shoulder as she steadies herself.

"Come on, Eleanor," Lady Franklin sounds dead exhausted. She beckons to a horse and carriage.

I look out the window at the buildings and houses, fountains and statues. The city is spectacular, better than I remember. The dappled horses trot carefully along the cobbled street, the wheels rolling behind.

We eventually stop. The door is opened and I follow Lady Franklin out onto the street. A large wooden country house is in front of me. A tower rises up from the roof. The gardens stretch around the edges of the structure. Flowers scattered colourfully in patches. A gazebo is neatly positioned in the centre of the front patch of lawn. Birch trees surround the grass creating clouds of shade.

"I hope you like it," Lady Franklin is smiling. We walk to the front door, painted blue. A big brass bell hangs from a hook next to the hinges. The door is opened by a maid. She curtsies. "Could you please take Eleanor to her room?" a different girl appears and leads Lady Franklin in a different direction. The maid leads me to a flight of stairs. The stairs go up and up until meeting the wooden door. She opens it and I enter. The walls form a circle and I realise we must be in the tower. The oak wood floor has a circular rug

in the centre and a bed is in the middle of the room near a towering bookshelf stuffed full of books. A branch scrapes across the window and I see a tree running up the side of the house. A beautiful rocking chair is in a corner, not my mother's but still beautiful and I snuggle up into a ball. My eyes slowly close.



A post-boy comes into view. He walks down the path and I hear the bell as it rings through the house. I gently open the window. It squeaks and the boy looks up. His yellow hair is so familiar. His blue eyes are so intense. I gasp suddenly and before I know it, I am racing down the stairs two at a time.

"Tom," my voice explodes from my mouth.

"Eleanor," his eyes are wide. We both stand there, awkwardly staring at each other.

"What's going on," Lady Jane runs out from the dining room to see what the commotion is about. She sees Tom and looks flabbergasted. "It's good to see you. How? Well it doesn't matter come inside. Mary could you please make us some tea." We walk into the dining room I had supper in last night and sit down on the tall backed chairs. Soon we have porcelain cups of tea in our hands. A plate of sweet biscuits has been set in front of us and Lady Franklin is taking dainty bites out of one.

"Why did you come back to England?" Tom's voice sounds surprised.

"Sir John was withdrawn," Lady Franklin says "Eleanor was convinced you were lost when the Nelson sunk." She pauses.

"The Nelson sunk?" Tom sounds shocked. "I didn't know."

"Why weren't you on the Nelson?" I speak for the first time.

“My mother died and left me as head of the family, I decided to settle down and get a new job as a post-boy. I sent a message for you on the boat, but if it sunk it would have never reached you,” I am suddenly filled with emotion. Happiness, sadness, anger.

“Well at least your safe,” I smile and tom smiles back.

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