

Buoyz 'N Da '*Hood*' – '*Hood* And Hoodwinking'



by

Catherine Meadows

Chapter One

My name, dear Reader, is Elizabeth Bennett, and I will, in this narrative, seek to relate, as best I can recall, the events of my extraordinary life in relation to the recent wars against the French, and that hated Corsican ogre Napoleon Bonaparte, now safely caged upon the island of St Helena.

The year is 1804, and I was but six and ten years when, having disguised myself as a boy, I eloped from home and daringly took the King's shilling and joined the Royal Navy. I bet you're even more impressed (geddit?) that - as 'Bob Bennett' - I was posted to HMS 'Hood', a new 74, named after the venerable retired Admiral. To cut a diverse and convoluted story short, we were assigned to be part of Admiral Sir Peter Lowe's squadron, and were busy fitting out at Portsmouth. I expected we'd soon be off to sweep the seas of the dastardly French, as we resist Napoleon's hated 'Continental System' of Europe-wide free trade. No to red-tape and driving on the right for jolly Jack Tar! 'Rule Britannia! Britannia rules the waves!'

Our skipper, Captain Darcy, was jolly dashing, and very free with the rum ration, as he wrestled with his personal demons and inability to play the cello. Were I still a young lady it is a truth, universally acknowledged, I would have found him most charming and eligible. But disguised as a midshipman in His Majesty's Navy such thoughts are, of course, impossible.

Yet France was not our only enemy, and it was with great surprise we were dispatched under Admiral Lowe to the West Indies. Jamaica? No, dear Reader, we happily assented (geddit?); for we were sorely needed to check Spanish ambitions viz a viz our colonies...

O

Seven bells – almost noon – and the sinister Captain George Wickham strode the quarterdeck of HMS 'Lannister', a fair breeze in his hair, the rest of the fleet in sight.

"Your *special tea*, Sir", Midshipman Jack Hawkins saluted.

"Thank you Hawkins", Wickham sipped, tasted it had sufficient rum to fortify against the increasingly clement weather as Admiral Lowe's squadron worked its way south-west. "'Lannister' is a good ship, Hawkins. Word of advice, Boy. Knowing what your ship can do is lot like knowing your way around a Poole

Quay tavern wench. Both need careful handling - or they'll make straight for entangling themselves with the buoys".

"Indeed Sir", Hawkins sycophantly found that most amusing.

"That's what differentiates successful captains like me from clots like Darcy in the '*Hood*'", Wickham waxed lyrical. "Prize money, my lad. That'll get me made-up to Commodore in the coming battle".

His wish was about to be granted...

O

Fortune, it is said, favours the bold. As a younger man, and a frigate captain, I learned that Admiral Lowe boldly boarded a French vessel, back the days when England was allied to Spain. He rescued a captured Spanish maiden on board, a senorita of considerable wit, wealth and beauty; her fiery Iberian nature steadfastly defying her gallic captors. She is now the Lady Julia; for with the prize money they were able to wed. How romantic! Just like one of Miss Austen's celebrated 'bodice-rippers', where the assertive heroine wins the gentleman of her choice, in the face of all adversity... Except, of course, in 'Sanditon'.

Alas for me there is no such option, for I have eschewed such feminine notions, and hope only for the best for my dear sister in her romantic endeavours. I faced the coming battle with equanimity and trust in our leaders, for being married to a fiery Basque senora of great wit and beauty... Admiral Sir Peter Lowe knew the Spanish navy was not to be taken lightly...

O

Île Fantastique was used as a base for raids on British trade by the Spanish, and therefore a great prize.

"Blistering barnacles! Then we'll attack Porto Grande, in the south of the island", Admiral Lowe directed his and of brothers. "What you can't capture of the enemy's shipping, destroy".

"Aye Sir!" mindful of prize money his captain's chorused.

"We'll need a diversion, Sir?" Captain Darcy of the '*Hood*', however, demurred.

"Quite so", Admiral Sir Peter considered. "Then you, Darcy will take the '*Hood*' and land on the north of the island. Go ahead. Hopefully that'll draw the Spannies out into the open sea".

"Of course, Sir", Colin agreed.

"All the more prize money for the rest of us", Captain Wickham quipped – and many laughed.

"All the greater honour for the 'Hood'", Colin retorted... it all he could do not to strike his hated brother officer.

O

Île Fantastique was a glorious action. Ahead of the fleet we in the 'Hood' landed and demonstrated, as the Admiral required. Before long, a Spanish squadron of three frigates emerged to chase us off, believing we were but a lone raider. Seeing the enemy's merchant shipping left unprotected, Admiral Lowe then proceeded to attack Porto Grande itself, and slipped his squadron into the anchorage, HMS 'Lannister' in the van, even though all knew our vessels would only be able to navigate in single file through the narrow, twisting, channel. Following a brief combat the Spanish merchantmen surrendered; though the fort and garrison took much time and fire to be silenced. No landing was attempted.

The attack was a complete success. We in the 'Hood', meanwhile, made full sail to the north, the hapless Spaniards believing they had seen us off. As their frigates returned to Porto Grande we too doubled-back, to catch them in a vice, between our good selves and the Admiral's main squadron. It was here we gloried ourselves to capture the Spanish frigate, 'Santa Kylie de la Conception', the one Spanish ship that managed to get close could not get most of its guns to bear, and was consequently battered into wreckage, the remaining two other enemy vessels set on fire by their crews after becoming stuck fast...

The engagement of the Spanish at Île Fantastique was a great victory, and saved our Caribbean colonies. Admiral Sir Peter became the toast of London. My share of the prize money I dispatched anonymously to my dear family in Hampshire, trusting they would use it wisely to prepare by somewhat vacuous sister for her destiny in the kind of 'society' I had eschewed in hiding my gender and joining the Royal Navy.

To maintain my secret identity I contrived to use my shore leave for study and self-improvement. Most assiduously did I avoid pirate haunts and low drinking places like Poole Quay, especially on a Saturday night. For obvious reasons I

avoid tavern wenches (unlike some of my fellows). I also learned much more of our bold skipper. Poor Captain Darcy! I understand, tragically lost his sweetheart to the miasma, and has no belle or spouse. I expect this explains his mournful cello playing...

Chapter Two

'It is a truth, universally acknowledged', Captain Darcy continued to pen by candlelight his 'Notes For The Improvement Of Midshipmen In His Majesty's Navy', 'that when properly trained from an early age, bright midshipmen make the best officers.'

Indeed they do. Pausing, he turned to the 'Hood's' log and wrote. *'I am fortunate to have Midshipman Bennett appointed. He is a diligent young man with little of the adolescent fripperies and juvenile humour of his contemporaries. He also shares my love of the cello. Physical fitness is vital in the Royal Navy... and I've advised him to see the surgeon, however, as his chest appears somewhat peculiar and deformed...'*

Colin paused. As four bells sounded he picked up his pen and began to again scribe. It was some months since Île Fantastique, and here was the 'Hood' again – about to enter action and...

"Captain Sir!" Midshipman Bennett interrupted his reverie. "Your jolly boat is ready".

"Thank you, Bennett", Colin looked up. "Doesn't do to keep Admiral Sir Peter waiting..."

"Blistering barnacles!" Admiral Lowe explained as he briefed his captains, his 'band of brothers'. "There's even more prize money for all to be had there. Capture as many as you can".

Passing the port Colin Darcy noted them all nod their eager agreement – especially the 'captain' of the tiny *HMS 'Asp'*, young Commander Frederick Wentworth. "Return to your ships and prepare for close action", the Admiral amused...

O

Thus it was we cleared the decks for the action off Brest. As I understand events, the enemy commander, a certain Admiral Macron, an alleged close-personal confidante of the Corsican ogre himself, was most anxious to escort

the grain convoy from the Americas to harbour; these supplies vital, by all accounts, to the victualing of Le Grand Armee, with which Napoleon was preparing to invade our dear England...

The enemy had too and inconsiderable fleet with which to protect their three transports, the 'Ville De Paris', the 'Espace Gingembre', and the 'Thunberg'. Admiral Macron deployed forward as escort his flagship the 'Bucentaure' (2nd rate); 3rd rates 'Redoutable', 'Achille', 'Argonaute'; and 6th rate frigates 'Clio', 'Hermione' and the 'Laconia'. We brave sons of Albion - and in my case secret 'daughter' of said motherland – had arrayed against this gallic host the 2nd rate HMS 'Temeraire' in which Admiral Sir Peter flew his flag; 3rd rates the swift HMS 'Bellerophon', the well-drilled Captain Hornblower's HMS 'Sutherland', we boys ourselves in the 'Hood'; fellow 3rd rate HMS 'Overlord'; bold Wentworth's unrated, HMS 'Asp'; 6th rates HMS 'Phoebe', HMS 'Glenmoor' and HMS 'Amazon'. Peradventure we were fortunate that Captain Wickham's HMS 'Lannister' had been detached, for it is a truth, universally acknowledged by all polite society, that he is no gentleman when it comes to his affairs with the gentle sex; from which I, of course, exclude myself.

I feared not death, dear Reader, more wounding, that my subterfuge and identie secret might be exposed and I forced back to life on land, and a victim of 'society', as are all of my class and gender. Yest, as we made all sail, I sensed some underhand gallic stratagem awaited...

O

"Alors mes amis!" with the approach of the ominous British squadron Admiral Macron rallied his crew. "On drait qu'on a un convoi! Vive L'empereur! Vive la France! Mort a Albion perfide! Quand nous envahirons l'Angleterre, j'embrasserai personnellement Mademoiselle Jane Austen!" he expressed in no uncertain terms his indecent proposal upon the expected conquest of England...

Battle was about to be joined. Knowing the French had the wind gauge, the wind blowing from due west, Freddie Wentworth aimed to put himself as far in advance of the fleet as possible. Indeed, it was he who first spotted the enemy. Ordering the signal hoisted to alert the kindly, if bluff, Admiral Lowe he yet privately burned with the desire the gain prize money to recompense for his

poverty, which led to his love, Miss Anne Elliott, breaking off their engagement.

Prize money would considerably improve his prospects in 'Society'.
And that would show her and her blasted family...

O

Thus it was battle was joined. Sadly, this engagement, all did not go as planned. As 'The London Gazette' reported...

'It is with regret that we must report an Admiralty Board of Inquiry is to be called into the recent action off Brest. Admiral Sir Peter Lowe's squadron attacked with vigour, but the French grain convoy escaped. The admiral himself was rendered *hors de combat* by the ague before the action commenced, but his deputies boldly pressed on. Moreover, several of His Majesty's frigates were taken by the enemy, and ships sunk on both sides; the enemy keeping the wind gauge. If the explosion of the enemy 74 '*Achille*' can be considered some consolation... the only real bright spot - it is a truth universally acknowledged - was the seizure of the French frigate '*Laconia*' by His Majesty's brig '*Asp*', boldly commanded by Commander Frederick Wentworth. No doubt their Lordships will require little persuasion (geddit?) to award this dashing young officer and crew not only their prize money, but command of said frigate...'

An Admiralty board was indeed convened...

O

'...you see I have known all along who you really are - my dearest, darling, Lizzie...' the gentle smile and lips of Captain Colin Darcy loomed ever closer...

Then - suddenly! - the carriage jolted - forcing her awake.

"Never fall asleep if you can avoid it, Bob", Captain Darcy mildly chided.

"Sorry Sir!" her 'dream' disturbed... 'Bob' was quick to recover her disguise as the '*Hood's*' brightest and best Midshipman, selected by 'his' captain to accompany him to the Admiralty Board, the inquiry investigating the 'setback' off Brest, and the escape of the French grain convoy.

"Do you think they will find Admiral Lowe guilty of dereliction of duty?"

"I doubt it", Colin mused. "He was taken with the ague just before and confined to quarters. Also, the blasted Frenchies had the wind gauge *and*

sacrificed their warships to thwart us. Brave chap Johnny Crapard, Bob. Never underestimate your enemy”.

“I will not make that error, Sir”, ‘Bob’ considered. “I understand Captain Wentworth has been promoted? And given command of the ‘*Laconia*’. The enemy frigate he captured?”

“Quite deserved, Bob. Cutting her out with just a brig. That takes nerves of steel and good fortune”.

“The prize money will make him quite eligible to many unattached ladies?” thinking of her absent sister Lydia, ‘Bob’ further mused.

“That it will, my boy. There’s an incentive for you in our next action”.

“Indeed, Sir”, ‘Bob’ considered it was indeed like something in one of celebrated novelist, Miss Jane Austen’s, ‘*bodice-rippers*’...

O

“What ails her?” Sir Walter Eliot was confused by his daughter Anne’s unusually strong emotional moods.

“The naval *wastrel* we persuaded her to break off her engagement from has come into money”, eldest daughter Elizabeth explained. “Captain Frederick Wentworth? He captured a French frigate - single-handedly by all accounts”.

“Money from *trade* has no social standing”, the Baronet dismissed. “Real gentlemen do not sail the Seven Seas like common pirates...”

O

Six foot two inches in height, and having inherited his father’s rugged Cambrian physique and his mother’s Iberian good-looks... Lieutenant Glendower Lowe, son of Admiral Sir Peter Lowe, was the toast of society in the new resort of Sanditon.

“Is there yet any news of your missing sister, Miss Bennett?” he spoke kindly to young Lydia.

“No Sir”, she bashfully replied. “It is most agreeably empathetic of you to ask. She has quite disappeared. Our mother remains quite distraught. And our father’s inquiries have come to nought”.

“Oh dear...”

“You, peradventure, are here for the season?” Lydia pressed.

“Alas I am called to duty, Miss Bennett”.

“I trust we will see much of you before you depart?”

"No. I take the stagecoach in the morning. To support my father at his Admiralty Board of Inquiry. And thence to take up my new posting to *HMS 'Hood'*. Under Captain Darcy?"

"Ah! We hear his cello playing is quite... *remarkable*..." Lydia dredged her mind for the latest scandal...

The guests awaited their return carriages outside of Castle Main. Standing back from her parents Lydia Bennett steeled herself to harness her 'inner actress'.

"Oh my!" she quietly exhaled. "I have quite forgotten my shawl!"

"Oh! Allow me Miss Bennett", as quick-thinking at *soirees* as on the deck of a frigate, and ever the gentleman, Lieutenant Lowe darted inside to oblige. "I see your carriage nears".

"Thank you, Glendower", Lydia chanced a familiarity. "It would not do to delay everyone".

But he had already departed. Checking she was - as deviously planned *unobserved* - Lydia too made back inside - once in the drawing room saw the kindly young naval officer had located her forgotten garment. Slamming the door behind her she calculated the sudden gust of air would likewise extinguish the solitary candle.

In this predicate she was indeed most astute.

"Who's there?" turning the Lieutenant alarmed.

"It is but I", Lydia assured. "Thank you for your alacrity, Sir".

"Miss Bennett?" the Admiral's son concerned for the young lady's *reputation* as he instinctively took a defensive step forward in the gloom.

At which instance the door burst open. "Lydia!" Mr Bennett exasperated. "You will make us late..." he paused, stunned. "Lieutenant Lowe!" he growled. "You seek to meet my daughter unchaperoned! In the dark!" he saw Lydia's shawl in the naval officer's hand.

"Forgive me Sir.. I but..."

"I must ask you, Sir! What are your intentions towards my daughter? My other daughter may be missing, Sir!" the wine now had its inevitable effect upon Mr Bennett's sense of sensibility; his pride and prejudice. "But I am not a man to be dishonoured! Explain yourself - or I shall have my seconds call upon yours!"

"No Papa!" Lydia feigned distress. "This is not what it *appears*!"

"Am we to understand there has developed an understanding between you?" Mrs Bennett now arrived... and habitually confused the situation by grabbing the wrong end of the stick and beating around the bush with it.

Glendower Lowe recalled his naval training. 'In a tight spot, always ask yourself, what would Nelson do?'

"With your permission, Sir, whilst I am at sea on the '*Hood*', I would wish to correspond with Lydia..." he therefore did as England expected, and engaged the enemy more closely, before heaving to and disengaging.

"Oh my!" Mrs Bennett applauded.

"You may Sir", Mr Bennett gruffly agreed to make the best of a bad situation....

O

"...so we attacked without the weather gauge", arrayed before their Lordships Captain Darcy explained. "The French were pulling away. It was then or never. I believe the Admiral's final signal to the squadron and was to press home to the fullest. The French frigates sacrificed themselves boldly in a pre-emptive manner. I saw no negligence, only misfortune", he glossed-over the poor handling of *HMS 'Amazon'*.

Watching him deliver his evidence 'Bob' Bennett was again taken by his noble and naval bearing; mindful of her *subterfuge* again suppressed a swelling of admiration that welled within in her bosom; her warmest of admiration for her gallant captain.

"It is not always possible to win, my Lords", Admiral Croft remarked, having already declared that young Wentworth was his brother-in-law felt able to comment freely. "Nor is it possible to avoid sickness at advanced age, such as Admiral Lowe's".

"Thank you, Captain Darcy", the presiding First Sea Lord Admiral Hay dismissed. "We will consider our verdict..."

O

It is a truth, universally acknowledged, that boarding actions are short, sharp and vicious. The winner takes the loser as a 'prize' of war. Thus it was Lieutenant Glendower Lowe, RN, had the distinct feeling he'd been 'boarded'.

The next day, as he awaited his coach back to Portsmouth, the whole town of Sanditon seemed under the impression that he was now formally *obligated* to Miss Lydia Bennett. 'Glen' considered her a *friend*, true, but now? Her most solicitous farewell was public and somewhat affectionate...

Perhaps Captain Darcy would know what to do when he arrived at the '*Hood*'...

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Thus it was we had, posted to the 'Hoods's' muster, our dear Admiral's son, as a full Lieutenant, a rank I myself propose to attain upon successful study for my naval examinations...

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"No, remain", Captain Darcy ordered. "Unless Lieutenant Lowe has any... objection?"

"None Sir", Glen Lowe sensed some kind of 'test'. "Midshipman must know all duties conducted in the King's service".

'Bob' blushed. "Quite", Colin approved. "Welcome to the '*Hood*'. You're settling in, Lieutenant?"

"Indeed Sir".

"Shame your father is now assigned to sailing a desk", Colin felt obliged to comment on the Lieutenant's famous sire. "Ill health will come to all of us, eventually. In the fullness of time. He has done king and country great services. No doubt he will soon be formally rewarded".

"No doubt, Sir", Glendower was unsure whether this remark be statement or question.

"Well, your family I know", Colin continued his interview. "You have a sweetheart?"

"I am - *apparently* - now obligated to a Miss Lydia Bennett", still unsure exactly how that had come to pass, Glendower felt duty-bound to admit.

Her own *sister*! Could it *be*? 'Bob's' ears instantly alerted. She knew her minx of a sibling well. Poor Lieutenant Lowe! He deserved *better*...

"Bennett?" Captain Darcy (meanwhile) mused. "A relation of yours, Midshipman Bennett?" he teased.

"Not that I am aware of, Sir", 'Bob' maintained the secrets that he kept.

"Mm", Colin amused. "Well, you're watch officer, Lieutenant. We put to sea within the hour. We're to at some point join the Brest blockade".

"Fireships?" Glendower suggested. "Forgive me, Sir. I couldn't help notice the hulks that arrived yesterday?"

"Very astute", Colin smiled. "You'll go far, Lieutenant Lowe..."

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As a result of the Naval Board, and his unfortunate attack of the ague, Admiral Lowe was confined to the shore, his squadron to be temporarily commanded in his absence by a delegated senior captain...

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"Wickham!" Captain Colin Darcy silently boiled with rage at the order.

"You seemed surprised, Sir?" Lieutenant Glendower Lowe checked.

"I'm sure your father knows best in appointing *Commodore* Wickham to command the expedition", Colin measured his response - could *never* forget the shameful way the man had treated Georgiana, his poor sister. "I assume he'll be allocated *HMS 'Temeraire'*? Your father, Admiral Sir Peter's old flagship?"

"No Sir!" overhearing 'Bob' arrived with a telegraph. "Commodore Wickham will fly his flag in his own 3rd rate. *HMS 'Lannister'* is due back within days".

"Mm..." Colin silently brooded after *that* piece of news as he scanned the message. "Gentlemen!" he ordered. "Prepare to put to sea for a short voyage..."

Chapter Three

"Goodness Bob!" exclaimed Midshipman Hardy. "You're such a stick-in-the-mud! What's wrong with a bit of... rum over the ration and the company of a few comely tavern wenches!"

"Tom!" 'Bob' prudishly replied. "We are berthed at Poole Quay to help the local militia contain the industrial Luddites and rural Swing rioters. Not to... visit the drinking haunts and consort with... *local ladies*. Besides", 'he' again deployed his clincher, "my father is a clergyman and would not approve..." (Lizzie was finding it harder each month to maintain her pretence and pass herself off for a boy).

"Have it your own way", Charlie Dickens (with two 'K's' amused). "Let's go chaps! Shore leave better watch out for the boys from the '*Hood*'..."

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With such a heavy naval presence the usual low-life of the (former) pirate haunt of Poole Quay was decidedly absent of its usual smugglers and other low-life.

Yet tensions remained. 'Hah! Hah!' the '*Lannister's*' midshipmen cheered at the tavern wench slapped Jack Hawkins for being improperly familiar with her person. "Yews keep your hands off me young Sir!" she demanded. But Hawkins was having none of it. Again he moved to embrace her...

This - finally - was too much for Tom Hardy. "The lady said to leave her alone!" he rose to his feet, the poor girl scuttling away.

Silence fell across the tavern. "Says *whom*?" Hawkins stood up to him.

"You're drunk, Sir", the poor girl now safe from Hawkins' unwanted advances Tom attempted to diffuse. "Manners maketh man, right?"

"Well *you* wouldn't *know* what to do with a wench!" Hawkins now chose to escalate - his companions shifting chairs, preparing to back him up.

"A gentleman, *Sir*, needs no instruction from a... *rake*", Tom stood his ground - was gratified to see his chums too array by his side.

"Just like their Captain", Jack Hawkins now jested. "*Useless!*"

His companions laughed. "Everyone's entitled to an opinion..." Charlie moved to prevent Tom reacting violently to such an insult to their beloved master and commander.

"*Our skipper* - Commodore Wickham", Hawkins again goaded by inflecting the superior rank, "he knows all about the Darcys. Well, Cap'n Darcy's sister at least... by all accounts!"

More laughter. "He's not worth it..." Charlie again firmly suggested restraint.

"But then our ship - the '*Lannister*'", Hawkins continued to provoke, "is a proper *man o'war*. Not like that worm-eaten hulk the '*Hood*'!"

And it was then Midshipman Charlie Dickens threw the first punch...

O

Despite this fracas, to which, it is a truth, universally acknowledged, I was not a first-hand witness, we returned to Portsmouth, our mission to prepare for the fireship attack on Brest. Yet, at that time, I wondered what more secrets might yet be revealed about the sinister Commodore Wickham and his motley crew...

O

"Blistering barnacles!" Admiral Sir Peter roared. "I will not have my officers brawling in taverns like common Army officers!"

"Midshipmen, Sir..." Commodore Wickham yet managed a smirk.

"You will be silent Sir!" the Admiral roared his disapproval. "You - you too Darcy - you will discipline your motley crews! Cancel all shore leave! *Dismissed!*"

As the chastised captains left Surgeon Crippen administered the Admiral a draft for his ague. "Blistering Barnacles Crippin! I want you to get me fit enough to sail".

"Admiral?" the doctor demurred. "The Admiralty's orders are most precise".

"Then we need to persuade their Lordships I can still swing a cutlass..." Sir Peter brooded. "*Don't we?*"

O

As a mere midshipman, it was only later in life that I learned the truth of all this discourse. But, even we lowly midshipmen knew 'revenge' for the action off Brest was in the air...

O

"...I regret I have been at sea, Madam, and have not yet caught up with my correspondence. Alas too, my sister is also most secretive concerning her writing", if Francis Austen, captain of *HMS 'Canopus'*, was polite to Lady Julia Lowe... he was yet vexed at people of all classes constantly inquiring of him when his infamous sister, Jane, would publish her next 'bodice-ripper'.

"Hello *Darcy!*" Commodore Wickham gloated at their reconnection, here at the *soiree* Admiral Lowe had arranged for his 'band of brothers'. "How's your sister these days?"

"She is well, Commodore", Colin restrained himself behind a *façade*; knew poor Georgina had yet to be readmitted to 'society' following the cad's outrageous behaviour.

"Gentlemen! To business!" Admiral Lowe called as Lady Julia had the ladies departed... his staff bringing out a detailed model of the port of Brest....

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It was at this time we learnt of Admiral Lowe's elevation to the peerage...

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"Blistering barnacles!" Admiral Lord Lowe chafed under his full-dress uniform.

"Stop fussing!" his spouse Lady Julia, herself a lady of great wit and beauty, insisted. "You are being honoured".

"First Brest was a cock-up", the Admiral growled. "Unfinished business with Macron. We need to get back there and..."

"Papa!" the new Honourable Miss Petra Lowe injected. "This *honour* is for your victory at Île Fantastique. You action where you saved the Caribbean colonies from the Spanish!"

"And I have forgiven him", Lady Julia - of Iberian extraction herself - amused. And the carriage trundled on...

"So?" you're now Lieutenant *The Honourable* Glendower Lowe?" back on the 'Hood' Captain Darcy mused at the strikingly handsome young officer.

"I shall not let it impede the execution of my duties, Sir", Glen insisted.

"Quite so. Well, you'll have the scheming mothers of every young lady in the area after you now, so be warned".

"I am already - apparently - due to confused circumstance - obligated to a Miss Lydia Bennett", he replied.

"You request leave?" Colin confused.

"No Sir. In fact, quite the opposite".

"One of those, eh?" Colin sighed. "Best you tell me all about it..."

"Well traded up, Sir", the investiture completed, His Royal Highness, the Prince Regent, congratulated the new Lord Lowe and moved on.

"Well deserved Lowe!" his Royal Highness Prince William, himself a sailor of note, warmly shook Sir Peter's hand. "We need more people in parliament who understand the importance of the Royal Navy. Especially the need to give Johnny Spaniard a damn good spanking - er, present company excepted", he then apologised to the new Viscountess for his *faux pas*.

"Of course, your Royal Highness", used to the rough ways and sailors Lady Julia restrained her fiery basque ire. "Peter!" she then prompted her spouse.

"Oh, yes", the new Viscount Lowe recalled. "Sir, we are unsure of protocol. Will my wife and daughter be presented at Court?"

"No idea", the Prince summoned his equerry. "Chalmers? What happens to new Viscountess? Social whatsits?"

"The custom is the await a call from Her Majesty, your Royal Highness".

"There you go, Lady Lowe", Prince William assured. "Wait for the tide. Toodle pip..."

O

"...the mission is likely to lead to certain death or - worse - grave disfigurement. I therefore must, given my sense of duty to your good self, and the friendship we have enjoyed, request you no longer correspond with me. I release you, honourably, from all obligation between us'.

'Finished!' Lieutenant Lowe mentally exclaimed. 'How clever of Captain Darcy to know a dodge to escape an obligation to a lady, with no fault on prejudice on either side'. "Bob!" he then called out. "Be a good chap and take this missive to the postmaster!"

"Of course, Lieutenant", Midshipman Bennett moved with all alacrity...

The missive to her sister being *unsealed*... it was with little effort 'Bob' was able to read it before dispatch. 'My!' she thought. 'Such honour and self-sacrifice to release a lady in such a way!' Not that she felt much sympathy for her selfish sibling.

Truly Lieutenant Glendower Lowe was a true gentleman – the 'mission leading to certain death and disfigurement' part yet failing to register upon her mind as a matter of concern...

Chapter Four

"Nous avons fait bon, Macron", were the Emperor's parting words as the Admiral withdrew. True, Pierre Macron had brought the vital grain convoy to Brest, but his squadron had suffered grievously. Worse, it was reported in *'Le Monde'* that his arch nemesis, Admiral Sir Peter Lowe, was now a Viscount. If there was one thing Macron knew it was that, if he remained bottled-up in port, his crews would quickly lose their *edge*.

"Ils est temps de sortir..." he mumbled as he prepared for his last night in the capital, by a visit to his favourite *bordello*...

oOo

Meanwhile, *trans La Manche*... "Lady Julia Lowe and the Honourable Miss Petra Lowe!" the equerry announced. Nervously Petra entered the audience chamber – sensed her fearless mother shake not one iota as they both formally curtsied to Her Majesty, Queen Charlotte.

"Welcome to Court", Her Majesty announced with a broad smile. "I see, Miss Petra, you have inherited your mother's good looks?"

"Thank you, Your Majesty. Also something of my father's temperament".

Shock rippled. It was clearly not *done* to reply in such a fashion. Lady Julia nudged her wayward daughter.

"Excellent!" Her Majesty smiled. "You will need to be steadfast within the nest of vipers that is 'Society'". Then she made a snap decision. "Perhaps you nautical ladies will accompany me when I visit my refitted boat?"

Although couched as a *question*... it was clearly a royal *command*.

"We will be honoured, Your Majesty", Lady Lowe accepted the invitation with alacrity... little realising that the 'boat' in question was the rebuilt 1st rate, HMS '*Queen Charlotte*'...

A young lady's first Royal Garden Party is always an occasion to savour. Leaving her dear mama, Lady Julia, to discuss the 'servant crisis' with Lady Felpersham... the Honourable Miss Petra Lowe accidentally took a wrong turn, whilst returning from the *necessities*. Right or left? Confused by the signage she was most shocked by the unexpected apparition arrayed before her as she entered what she thought was the ante-drawing room.

"Heavens!" she exclaimed – for there before her was the Prime Minister, Mr William Pitt (the Younger) and Miss Jane Austen – standing close by and – *unchaperoned*! Such *scandal*! A bachelor minister of the Crown and a spinster novelist! *Together! Alone!* What *would Society say?*

"Ah!" the quick-witted PM explained. "Miss Austen and I both became *lost*".

"*Separately*..." the celebrity writer elaborated.

"You too, Miss...?" Mr Pitt questioned.

"I am the Honourable Miss Petra Lowe, Sir", she explained – fought the urge to curtsy in the face of such literary and political greatness.

"Ah! Simple navigational error", the architect of the hated 'Lace Tax' continued. "I would not wish tittle-tattle to affect Miss Austen's *reputation*".

"Nor I Mr Pitt's", Miss Jane concurred. "God forbid the electorate believe our beloved Prime Minister to be within reproach"

"Golly!" Petra considered – and smile duly crossing her visage. "This is indeed like an awkward scene of actually quite innocent confusion in one of your bodice-rippers, Miss Austen, is it not?"

"I prefer the term *romantic novels*", Jane knew her publishers persistently edited out all the really juicy bits.

"Let us then all return to the garden party", Mr Pitt suggested. "Her Majesty will wonder where I have got to, and His Royal Highness, the Prince Regent, will be anxious to know of my plans for waging war upon the Corsican Ogre".

"Yet the French, with their Continental System of free-trade, have no need to tax lace or windows? Or income?" Miss Austen was waspish as the trio again reached the garden.

"Spoken like a true Whig, Miss Austen", the dashing Prime Minister smiled.

"My father will have nothing of your Tory party, Mr Pitt", Jane shot back and accusing glance. "He would be most alarmed were he to see us a much as... *converse*".

"Then ladies", Mr Pitt bowed, "I'd best bid you *adieu*", he left for his audience with the Prince Regent.

"You find Mr Pitt *disagreeable*, Miss Austen?" Petra questioned.

"You are yet young, Miss Lowe", the worldly novelist sighed. "*Frission* is both inevitable and desirable where ladies and gentlemen are concerned".

"Golly! I suppose..." Petra considered the *tempestuous nature* of her own dear parents' marriage...

oOo

'The forts look strong', Admiral Macron considered his defences through his telescope as he surveyed his fleet at anchor, busily preparing for the break out. He had his flagship, the 2nd rate '*Bucentaure*', the 3rd rates '*Redoutable*', '*Argonaute*' – also the new '*Intrepide*'. The frigates '*Clio*', '*Hermione*' and one he couldn't readily identify completed his fleet...

"We will wait for bad weather", he declared. "Then we will break out and ravage the *anglais*' shipping, *n'est pas*?"

"*Dacord!*" his enthusiastic captains all agreed his plan...

oOo

Viscount Sir Peter Lowe wasn't sure what was worse – having Her Majesty Queen Charlotte on board his new flagship... or his wife and daughter likewise.

"A *cruise*?" Her Majesty remarked. "How jolly?"

"With respect Ma'am", the Admiral explained, "we sail to war against the French, not for pleasure",

"I am sure, Your Majesty", Lady Julia insisted, "my dear husband will take great care of your new boat".

"Yes", the Queen remarked. "You do seem to have a lot of them, Admiral?"

Indeed he *did*. For attacking the port and its forts the Viscount had assembled – in addition to the 1st rate *HMS 'Queen Charlotte'* – the 2nd rate *HMS 'Temeraire'*, the 3rds *'Bellerophon'*, *'Sutherland'*, *'Hood'* (on which served his son Glendower), *'Lannister'*, and the frigates *HMS 'Phoebe'*, *'Glenmoor'*, *'Amazon'* and the currently detached *'Laconia'*.

"One can never have enough ships, Ma'am", the Admiral pondered. "And we sail on the dawn tide", he wondered how his plan was already progressing. "Ah!" he saw his captains arrive. "My band of brothers! Led here by Commodore Wickham", he gestured to the skipper of the *"Lannister"*.

"Your Majesty!" he bowed low, upon rising let his eyes lock in a brief smile with his Admiral's beauteous young daughter, now formally 'out' after her presentation at Court.

Noticing Colin Darcy seethed with rage – from his own poor sister's *exploits* knew Wickham to be nothing but a cad and a bounder...

When Captain Darcy returned from HMS 'Queen Charlotte' I could tell something was vexing him. As we spliced mainmasts and cleaned cannon and issued rum and prepared to again sail to war, I noted him summon Lieutenant Lowe to his cabin. 'What could it mean?' I asked myself. 'What would Miss Jane Austen do?' and, having availed myself of such a moral compass, I attempted to eavesdrop.

And what I heard was most shocking to relate...

oOo

"*Bien!*" Admiral Pierre Macron relaxed into his chair with a copious brandy as he was *debriefed* by the Emperor's 'special agent', Mademoiselle Dubois. "Eet will be most useful", he trusted the new 1st rate *'L'Orient'* would soon arrive to reinforce his fleet ('because he was worth it'). "And what of zer English?"

Yvette shrugged. "Zier Monsieur Pitt is determined on continuing zer war. If 'e were replaced by zeir opposition leader, Monsieur Fox, zen they may seek peace. We are working 'ard to find something zat will outrage zer sense of sensibility of zer English ruling class, but as yet wee 'ave found nothing".

Pierre shrugged. "'Eet is fortunate yew can come and go as you please, disguised as an emigree *modiste*. And zer Marine Royale?"

"London is full of rumours zat Viscount Lowe is preparing an expedition. Some say to 'ere, some say to Toulon".

"Zen I will be most cautious", if he feared not his *Pays de Galles* nemesis... Pierre Macron knew to never underestimate him. "Now, Mademoiselle. Please return to England. I would 'ave yew discover a weakness in Monsiseur Pitt's armour, no?"

Chapter Five

"Squadron cleared harbour Admiral!" Viscount Sir Peter's flag captain, William Bligh reported.

"Set course for Brest!" the disconcerted Admiral growled. "Maximum warp!"

"Admiral?" Bligh confused?

"Blistering barnacles! Make full sail!" the Viscount knew he was disconcerted by Her Majesty refusing to go ashore from 'her boat' (*sic*). And – if that wasn't bad enough – her entourage included his wife and daughter. He would need to be cautious...

oOo

Il s fait beau a Brest, ce soir. Striding the quarter-deck of his flagship 'Bucentaure' Admiral Pierre Macron watched his fleet assemble, ready to breakout as planned. 'L'Orient' had not arrived it was true, but he could not wait. His arch nemesis might appear over the horizon at any moment.

Indeed, in that assumption, he was most prescient. '*Les Anglais arrive!*' the lookout shouted.

"*Bien!*" Pierre snapped shut his telescope. "*Clearez-nous le harbour!*"

If he had not the wind gauge... he would at least make the open sea...

La dame Fortuna had, sometimes, a certain *je n'sais quoi*...

"Blistering barnacles!" on the poop deck of *HMS 'Queen Charlotte'* Admiral Lowe exclaimed his frustration.

"It seems, my Lord, that the Frenchies aren't as surprised as we had hoped?" Bligh remarked. "Shall I secure our guests?" he suggested.

"Make it so", the presence of the royal party necessitated he hold his flagship back... thus he'd have to rely upon his trusty captains; his 'band of brothers', to win this battle...

Our surprise, it appears, was incomplete. Sanguine, heedless of the danger, we nevertheless advanced to the attack under full sail, the enemy doing his best to

match us out upon the open water. It was several minutes before we were able to join battle, our frigates and the French advancing into a general preliminary melee. First to engage was HMS 'Glenmoor' against the 'Hermione'. Indeed, after several minutes the enemy's 'Clio' was sunk – and we of the Royal Navy received a surprising boost to our fortunes...

"Scare bleu!" Captain Lacoste exclaimed as the *'Laconia'* hauled down the tricolour and hoisted the white ensign of *les anglais*.

"Puff!" Admiral Macron dismissed. *"I suspected as much. Zis eez why I posted 'im at zer derriere", his sense de six had felt something quite not droit about the frigate's timely arrival, but a few days before. "Advance and finish 'im off n'est pas? Zis English interloper is not as clever as 'e thinks, non?"*

"Oui, dacord", Lacoste issued the necessary orders...

It seemed the bold Captain Wentworth had infiltrated the enemy harbour... but his daring had not had the catastrophic effect desired. Indeed, a French 2nd rate was now vengefully bearing down upon the poor 'Laconia' as we all now joined a general melee; both our and the enemy's frigates suffering great damage. As we beat to quarters that monkee the enemy's 'Hermione' went to Davy Jones' locker; our own poor 'Phoebe' was heavily damaged. Worse, however, was to come for we jolly jack tars...

"Blistering barnacles!" Admiral Lowe put his telescope to his good eye. *"It's 'L'Orient' alright!"* the arrival on his starboard quarter of the French 1st rate was indeed an unexpected kettle of fish.

"She'll take time to get into action, Sir?" Bligh cautioned.

"Aye..." the Admiral agreed. *"Signal all ships. 'Engage enemy more closely'"*

"Aye aye Admiral", as Bligh acted a royal equerry arrived.

"Her Majesty's compliments, my Lord", he nervously looked at the battle ahead. *"But she would like a better view".*

"Blistering barnacles", the Viscount growled. *"Motson!"* he ordered a random midshipman. *"Stand at the hatchway and provide the Queen and her entourage a running commentary if you please..."*

"Bother and blast!" Freddie Wentworth exclaimed his annoyance. *"We didn't even get into position for a shot".*

"It was still worth a try Sir", Croft reflected. *"False colours are useful sometimes".*

"Enemy second rate bearing down on us Sir!" a rating reported. "It's the 'Bucentaure'!"

"Macron's flagship", Croft reflected.

"Think of the prize money when we board and take her, eh Croft?"

Wentworth laughed at the odds – calculated it'd land him at least a knighthood *and* turn the head back of the inconstant Miss Anne Elliot, and her haughty, controlling, family...

It was now the turn of we on the 'Hood' to engage. Though I have successfully passed myself off as a boy... inside my bosom yet beats the heart of a red-blooded Englishwoman. It was thus, I must say, with some admiration feminine that I watched as my dear, brave Captain Darcy issued the order to fire. As our bold broadside rippled out it left the enemy vessel 'Redoutable' a blazing hulk. How we cheered the destruction of the King's enemies – a sensation made all the more sweet by knowing the dastardly Wickham and his 'bucket' the 'Lannister' had been consigned by our dear Admiral Lowe to the flank. No glory for him!

'Damned Darcy – stealing my thunder', aboard *HMS Lannister* Commodore George Wickham silently raged. "Can't this thing go any faster!" the martinet vented his fury upon his poor crew as he wondered if this was *karma* for his treatment of Darcy's sister...

"Excellent shooting!" Colin cheered his brave crew. "Lieutenant Lowe!"

"Sir?" the strapping Glendower reported.

"After the battle. Extra rum ration for the men! Bennett?"

"Captain?" 'Bob' reported; 'his' heart beating fast with the thrill of action

"Your eyes are younger than mine. Over there?"

"It looks like the enemy '*Intrepide*' crippled", the enigmatic midshipman duly reported.

"Our '*Phoebe's*' gone, Sir", Lieutenant Lowe reported. "Sunk by the '*Argonaute*'".

"Johnny Frenchie all over", Colin mused. "3rd rate picking on a frigate. You mark my words, young Bennett. The *crapauds* aren't to be trusted".

"Indeed Captain", 'Bob' took that on board...

O

It was at this moment Her Majesty became *impatient*. "Can't my boat go any faster?" she strode up onto the deck. "I wish to crush my dear husband's enemies and be back in time for Ascot".

"Blistering barnacles!" Admiral Lowe immediately alarmed. "Please, Your Majesty", he attempted to summon his notoriously thin diplomatic skills. "It is not safe out here – you may become injured!"

As if to confirm the dangers inherent in maritime fisticuffs... there was a sudden explosion from a premature charge. In shielding the queen the gallant Admiral took the full-force of the blast, and was injured.

"I am a nurse!" Lady Lowe exclaimed as she helped her wounded sovereign away. "Take my husband to the cockpit. I will nurse him personally! Do not die, Peter!" she demanded of her bleeding spouse. "The carriage isn't paid for yet!"

But the hero of Isle Fantasque was already unconscious. "Signal Commadore Wickham he is now in command of the squadron!" Captain Bligh dutifully ordered...

"Signal from flagship Sir!" Midshipman Hawkins duly reported aboard *HMS 'Lannister'*. "Admiral injured. You are in command!"

"Excellent!" George Wickham grinned. "More glory for *me*. Set course for the '*Bucentaure*'! Maximum sail!"

"Aye aye Capt... er, Commadore...."

Even in the heat of battle it was hard to comprehend as the news reached us on the 'Hood'. Poor Admiral Lowe – injured. Worse – the sinister Commadore Wickham was now in command of the fleet...

"Damn idiot's sailing under that fort's guns!" snapping his telescope shut Colin Darcy exclaimed.

"It's extreme range, Sir?" Lieutenant Lowe suggested - but - as if to disabuse him - a salvo rang out from Brest's defences as the '*Bucentaure*' also turned on the hapless '*Lannister*'. In a trice the replacement flagship was mauled and began to sink.

'Every cloud...' because of his poor sister's *embarrassment* Colin hoped this would finally be the end of George Wickham.

Certainly of his *reputation*...

It was at this moment the battle turned against us. In the general melee both Hornblower's 'Sutherland'¹ and McIntosh's 'Bellerophon' were quickly burning hulks. "There's something wrong with our bloody ships today..." I heard my dear captain remark as Captain Bligh of the 'Queen Charlotte' assumed command of the squadron. Our own, dear HMS 'Hood' had it's steering twice jammed, to leave us a sitting duck. The fighting 'Temeraire' was able to cripple the enemy's 3rd rate 'Argonaute' ... but the tide of battle was now irretrievably turning against us. Holed, we quickly began to sink...

"Abandon ship!" Colin Darcy ordered as he steeled himself to go down with his vessel for king and country; prepared to meet his dearly departed sweetheart in the life beyond the grave – an internal explosion finally doing for the 'Hood' – whatever else happened its heart would go on with the vessel's next generation...

Chaos reigned as – thrown into the water - we survivors endeavoured to grapple what wreckage we could. In a titanic moment I noticed my dear captain's hat float by – he beneath it. Acting quickly I pulled him onto a section of bulkhead and removed his sodden jacket, which was dragging him down. This had the added benefit of enabling me to side my feminine curves, now indecently accentuated by my wet shirt. Also too I quickly saw my captain was not breathing – so steeled myself to give him the kiss of life. As you can imagine, dear reader, this had quite an effect upon my maidenly sense of sensibility – for what red-blooded Englishwoman would not feel her heart beat faster whilst – in a dramatic situation – being obligated to 'snog' such a strapping naval officer...

"Ugh!" back from the dead Colin wretched sea water. "Bennett?" he looked up in confusion – saw the enigmatic midshipman had somehow saved his life. "I owe you, Sir", he blustered in confusion. "Thank you, Bob".

"Look Captain!" 'Bob' too was highly embarrassed – pointed out Wentworth's frigate 'Laconia' making straight for the enemy 3rd rate 'Intrepide'.

"Damn fool!" Colin remarked. "He'll never take that one!"

"It is a truth, universally acknowledged", 'Bob' laconically suggested, "that one can never have enough prize money, Sir?"

¹ Subsequently brought back to port for repair. (Ed.)

It was at this point I was forced to admit I held within me a certain fondness for my captain. Yet it was a desire that could not be revealed if I was to remain within the navy as – clinging to the wreckage – we watched the 'Temeraire' boldly grapple the enemy 'L'Orient' (because she was worth it). Sadly, in the boarding action, she was narrowly captured by the French. Indeed, their crippled 'Intrepide' had now safely manoeuvred under their forts guns and – despite Wentworth's nimble 'Laconia' raking the enemy 1st rate 'L'Orient'... Captain Bligh gave the signal to withdraw; right and proper as he had a royal personage aboard. Of dear Admiral Lowe's original squadron only the 'Laconia', 'Queen Charlotte', 'Amazon' and 'Glenmoor' managed to escape. Of myself and Captain Darcy? We began to paddle for shore when...

"Captain!" the approaching fishing boat hailed.

"Lieutenant Lowe!" Colin exclaimed.

"Captured this boat, Sir", Glendower amused. "When they came to loot. At least we have one prize this engagement", he amused. "Once you're aboard we'll head for home!"

"Well done Lowe!" Colin hauled himself aboard. "Midshipman Bennett!" he addressed Bob as he helped him likewise to safety; the midshipman's flesh strangely heated. "Excellent work! You need to take your Lieutenant's exams post haste!" he suggested the fishing boat prepared to sail for Plymouth.

"I dare say back home they'll say we've been beat", Glendower remarked.

"We have been", Colin mused. "But no doubt a Board of Enquiry will blame Wickham. Especially since he's so conveniently drowned..."

"You speak ill of a brother officer, Sir?"

"The man was a cad and a bounder", Colin railed. "Not like you, eh Bennett?" he companionly slapped the young midshipman upon his back.

"Indeed Sir", Bennett sighed...

How can I describe my emotions at that moment? A battle lost for sure, but inside I realised my feelings for my Captain could no longer be denied... Yet be denied they must be...

O

Meanwhile, in Brest roads, the triumphant Admiral Macron and Captain Lacoste prepared their triumphant report for the Emperor.

"A great victory, *n'est pas?*" Pierre mused. "And a prize too, *non?*" he thought of the *l'argent* from the '*Temeraire*'.

"We are rounding up English survivors now", Lacoste grinned. "We 'ave already captured one captain. The fool Wickham 'oo challenged our fort".

"Pah! Invite him to dinner", Pierre suggested with amusement. "There will be much intelligence to be gained as we prepare to wrest control of *La Manche* to transfer across *le grand armee*..."

As, at that very moment, the sinister Mademoiselle Dubois prepared to disembark *en Angleterre* – determined to find sufficient *gossip* to bring down the hated Mr Pitt and install in English government the more amenable Mr Fox...

Chapter Six

"Our captive *capitaine Anglais* has been most talkative", Captain Lacoste reported to Admiral Macron, now flying his flag in '*L'Orient*' (because he was worth it). "A bottle of brandy and one of Mademoiselle Dubois' *fille de jour* and zis George Wickham has revealed much about zer *defences anglais*".

"*Bien!*" Pierre enthused. "If Villeneuve can do 'is stuff we can unite our fleets and execute zer Emperor's master plan – we can wrest control of *La Manche* and ferry across *le grand armee*. We will depose Monsieur Pitt and leave Monsieur Fox in charge. I care not for zeir bonkers King George. Who knows, Lacoste. Ashore *en Londres* I maybe meet zer celebrated Miss Jane Austen and snog 'er, *n'est pas?*"

Jean-Luc Lacoste had long ago learned to laugh at his Admiral's jokes...

O

It is a truth, universally acknowledged, that love will find a way. Eight years ago, Miss Anne Elliot rejected the then Commander Frederick Wentworth, the man she loved, out of a sense of duty and obedience to her selfish father's wishes. Now an ignored spinster, she followed her financially stricken family around the 'scene' of Bath. Yet, since capturing the 'Laconia' and his daring-do in Brest roads, Wentworth, it is here faithfully reported, returned with a fortune in prize money, in search of a spouse, and this time did not intend to be thwarted of his true love 'prize'...

"Dare not say that man forgets sooner than woman, that his love has an earlier death", this time Wentworth was determined to fully plight his troth. "I have loved none but you".

"Unjust I may have been, weak and resentful I have been to accede to my father's wishes", Anne concede to defend, "but never have I been *inconstant*".

"You alone have brought me to Bath. Despite all I still burn for you Madam, and you alone", Freddie confirmed. "For you alone, I have thought and planned. And now I have a fortune. A word, Anne, a look will be enough to decide whether I again enter your father's house this evening or never".

"Oh yes!" Anne agreed – her *excitement* like his rising to fever pitch. "I too desire no other solution to our feelings! Have you not seen this? Can you fail to have understood my wishes?"

"Then I must go, uncertain of my fate, but I shall return hither..." Freddie determined to again approach Anne's vain father, Sir Walter Elliot, Baronet...

The jolly boat slipped again around the bow. "She's a beauty alright", Captain Colin Darcy agreed as his new First Officer, the freshly promoted Commander Glendower Lowe, too looked on. "We need to get as many of our old crew together as possible".

"Already seen to it, Sir", Glendower amused as the boat pulled up to the ladder and Colin began to climb. "She's a 74 like before... but I'm after obtaining a few extra carronades".

'Oh wee ha!' the boson piped as Colin climbed aboard. "Welcome aboard, Sir!" as Leading Midshipman Bob Bennett greeted.

"Thank you Bennet – don't forget to put in for those Lieutenant's exams", Colin grinned. "Mr Lowe!"

"Aye Sir!"

"All hands on deck! Make sail! Take us out! Let's see what she's got..."

"Aye aye Cap'n!" Glendower issued the necessary orders to the jolly jack tars – who with all due alacrity prepared to take the new *HMS 'Hood'* out for harbour for her shakedown cruise...

*How can I describe my feelings upon seeing stood there my handsome captain
– the man whose life I had saved and who now perpetually stalked my dreams
with maidenly unwholesome dreams of passion undenied in a happier future;
one where the world was finally rid of the Corsican ogre.*

Yet, sometimes true love does find a way...

"Anne? You want to marry *Anne*?" the Baronet was most confused. "Whatever for? I assure you Wentworth", despite his financial straits he persisted in remaining socially far superior, "I will give you no dowry".

"I have means of my own from prize money, Sir", despite his personal dislike for the 'snob' Freddie forced himself to be civil. "And, by marriage, I shall relieve you of the expense of daughter", he then couched his proposal in terms his hateful prospective father-in-law would *understand*.

"Then Sir, I give you my permission to wed my daughter", give the circumstances Sir Walter couldn't believe his luck in disposing of his plain, uncultured and burdensome offspring.

"We must wed soon, Sir", Freddie pressed. "For I must soon return to duty with the fleet with all alacrity".

"How does this afternoon sound?" Sir Walter too was anxious to expedite the contract...

O

As we prepared to take the new HMS 'Hood' to sea I couldn't help but wonder how my estranged family were faring at home, not knowing whether I lived or died – including by (almost) shameless sister, Lydia Bennett...

"But I don't *want* to work!" Lydia Bennett protested. "I want to marry a rich gentleman and spend my days reading novels and conversing with my friends!"

"We have no choice", her mother scolded. "With your father taken ill with the miasma we need the income. We have arranged for you to become Governess to the wayward offspring of Captain Hay. The poor man is a widower and finding it hard to juggle children and commanding *HMS 'Royal Sovereign'*, for Admiral Collingwood".

"Is that not a first rate?" Lydia trawled her mind for something her disappeared and 'navy mad' sister Elizabeth had once related.

"I have no idea. But he is much away at sea. Regardless, you leave for Westhanger Hall forthwith. It is located out on the wildy, windy, moors of Dorset, near West Moors".

'First rate captain - and with a Hall of his own – must be minted', Lydia Bennett began to lay her traps to ensure the life of luxury she felt to which she was entitled...

O

"Sixteen knots Sir!" 'Bob' duly reported. "We've a fast ship here!"

"Indeed we have", the freshly promoted Commander Lowe agreed. "Reckon we could do the Kassel Run in less than twelve days".

"Affirmative", 'Bob' agreed as Captain Darcy strode back onto the quarter deck – his manly frame and noble bearing again awakening passions within her. Oh! How she *longed* to expose her true self to him and...

"Ship bearing south-east!" the lookout shouted. "It's the '*Reliant*'!"

"Stand by to inspect!" Colin ordered his crew. "Stand by on guns! Let's use this happenstance meeting as a drill. I want to be doubly ready for any Frenchies we might encounter..."

"Beat to quarters!" Commander Lowe ordered the drummers. Majestically the new *HMS 'Hood'* began to make sail towards the merchant ship. Watching the handsome commander 'Bob' realised how lucky he was to have so deftly avoided the clutches of her sister Lydia...

O

The lady walked over to her dressing table and sat down. It was all so *overwhelming*. Just this morning she had been Anne Eliot. Upon return to the house from their reception she had left her groom in his study to change... and now she waited for him in the bedroom of her new home. Anne was nervous about her wedding night. She knew a little what to expect but not everything. But she loved and trusted Freddie for his tenacity in their once forbidden and thwarted love and knew he would never hurt her...

Anne relaxed when a young girl maybe a decade younger than her – in her teens entered the room. "Madam, my name is Amelia. Your new maid. I'm here to help you change", she said giving a curtsy.

"All right", Anne smiled at her and turned around so the maid could unbutton her hastily borrowed wedding gown; let Amelia help her into the nightgown then sat down at her dressing table.

"Would you like me to brush your hair Madam?" Amelia asked moving up behind her.

"Um...sure", Anne looked at her in the mirror - handed her the brush and then stared through the looking-glass as Amelia took her hair down from the glorious knot it was done up in. As the maid brushed Anne glanced toward the door and immediately felt very nervous when Freddie walked into the room and her eyes met his...

"That will be all Amelia", he said, never taking his eyes from Anne.

Amelia put the brush down on the table, curtsied then left the room.

Wentworth closed the door behind her – pulled off his shirt to reveal his manly and powerful torso – and then moved towards his bride. Anne's breath caught in her throat as she watched him - her eyes widening as he moved seductively towards her. She suddenly forgot how to breathe as her new husband – after such an interrupted courtship - drew her to her feet and wrapped his arms around her waist pulling her tight against him.

"Breathe my love", he said with a smile. "Tonight our passion need no longer be denied – for we are now man and wife..." he smiled at her - then lowered his hunger-filled eyes. Anne watched him for a second then closed her eyes as she felt his lips touch hers - reached up and ran her fingers lightly through his hair – their hearts beating in time as soon the two would become one...

Chapter Seven

The carriage departed – and Lydia Bennett prepared to finally entered the dark, satanic, and foreboding edifice of Westhanger Hall. Ringing the bell the door was answered by a wizened crone.

"I am Miss Lydia Bennett. The new Governess. Here to see Captain Hay", she asserted

"Course you are", the old woman contemptuously gestured. "I'm Mrs Miggins. The housekeeper".

'The house is a dungeon. I can feel it', Lydia mused to herself. 'Slime and cobwebs....' She was shown into an office where sat a surprisingly youthful and sprightly naval officer. "Captain Hay?" she curtsied.

"Miss Bennett", he coolly appraised her. "There is much to be done and little time. Tomorrow I leave for my duties at sea", he rose from his chair. "Whilst I am away you will defer to Mrs Miggins in all things. Best you meet the children. Follow me..."

O

The Admiralty Board's deliberations reached their predicted conclusion. No blame was attached to Admiral Lowe for the debacle off Brest; his injuries alone justifying in actions in returning to port with the Queen and her entourage. To my dear Captain's great pleasure all censure was devolved upon Commodore Wickham for so foolishly sailing under the fort's guns to commence and unequal struggle for his own vanity...

"Seventeen, eh?" Commander Lowe amused. "Two years and you can take you exams, Bennett", he advised the midshipman (who looked decidedly *young* and *boyish* for his age).

"We sail Sir?" to further distract him 'Bob' openly wondered.

"Aye! My father the Viscount is back to duty... so we sail to blockade the Frenchies on the morning tide..."

O

There could be no better disguise for one of the Emperor's *agents especial* than that of an emigree *modiste*; celebrated by all *societe Anglais*. And now?

And now Yvette Dubois had - by pure serendipity - struck the proverbial jackpot.

"...funny. They too seemed to have taken a wrong turn and to have wound-up in the wrong room. *Alone*", the Honourable Petra Lowe joked to her mother, Lady Julia, as the highly-recommended and trusted *modiste* measured her for a new ballgown.

"I am sure it is all perfectly innocent", Lady Lowe admonished her daughter. "But it is best not to speak of such things. Such a scandal as a *liaison* between a bachelor Prime Minister and a spinster novelist would do Mr Pitt's administration no good at all".

"How so, Mama?"

"Her father is a Whig. Mr Pitt a Tory. Although a clergyman, were he to suspect, he would demand satisfaction in a duel".

"Fi!" the naïve Petra denied. "I feel they would make a handsome couple".

"Duty to king and country must come first", Lady Julia admonished.

And Yvette Dubois took a most careful, mental, note...

O

It was a hard decision to take. To return home to be cashiered for his error... or to turn his coat? Yet *still* George Wickham languished under a most comfortable arrest on the Bastille. He *could* take ship for America...

But France too had its *charms*...

"Jailor!" decided he banged upon his cell door and spoke. "I wish to speak to someone from the *Marine Nationale*..."

O

"Doris, Edna", Captain Hay admonished, "always with your noses in books, eh? This is your new Governess, Miss Bennett".

"Mesdames Hay", Lydia fought to establish a stern countenance as she surveyed the brace of neo-feral under tens.

"She will teach you French, Geography, History, Mathematics and such. You have six years, Miss Bennett", he then turned to his new employee. "Then they're out into Society".

"A deadline I can handle", Lydia accepted her lot as a step towards furthering her plans... the captain not half bad, as she reckoned these things...

"Can you also teach us to ride?" one questioned. "We have horses".

"That too should be possible", Lydia assented...

Chapter Eight

"Lacoste. Never trust a man 'ho turn 'is coat, *n'est pas?*" Admiral Pierre Macron remarked as they made their way down the gangplank of the fitting-out privateer, '*Le Cochon Noir*'.

"Dacord", he agreed. "*Capitaine* Wickham cares for none but himself. Zer *Marine Royale Anglais*, are well rid of him, *a mon avis*".

"Loyalty, Lacoste", Macron agreed. "Zis is why I 'ave not permitted him onto zer Emperor's service. As a privateer zay will seek 'im out for revenge – be distracted - and vee will *strike!*"

"*K'pla!*" Lacoste agreed in his native Breton dialect. "Zer fleet is ready to sail in the next tide..."

oOo

Back in England - within days the fell scandal had somehow broken in the press in darkest London...



...what faith can remain in the standards of public office, if these latest rumours to be proved true? That a bachelor Prime Minister should clandestinely

meet with a spinster novelist *against and without her father's express permission - and without a chaperone*. If this scandal be proven true this editor suggests Mr Pitt be obliged to resign forthwith, and his Royal Highness, The Prince Regent, appoint Mr Fox of His Majesty's loyal opposition to form a new administration; one able to bring to a conclusion this war with France...

"What say you, Bennett?" as the *Hood* prepared for sea Captain Darcy casually pass the newspaper to the midshipman who was busy polishing up his extended telescope.

"I believe, Sir", 'Bob' spoke carefully, "that Mrs Wolstonecraft's, '*A Vindication Of The Rights Of Woman*' has much merit. That the female of our species deserves totally equality with the male. That she should not be beholden, under law, to the whims of her father or husband. Be regarded as but a mere chattel".

"How very *modern* of you", Colin amused. "Revolutionary, even. Would you have women serve the in Royal Navy too?" he teased.

"I see no reason why not", her heart beating with the fear of discovery... Elizabeth spoke proudly. "If she be of stout heart and sufficient moral and physical strength. And appropriate *accommodation* is provided. In this case I see not why Miss Austen and Mr Pitt – free as they are from the bounds of matrimony – should not be permitted to meet as they see fit".

"To *court* each other, even?" Colin amused.

"Indeed, Sir", 'Bob' asserted. "Why should do a lady be able to declare the admiration for a gentlemen without censure", into Elizabeth's mind flitted a vision of she and Colin – alone – on the beach at Sanditon – declaring their mutual affection...

Then in strode Lieutenant Lowe. "Admiral Lowe's compliments Sir", he reported his father's orders with all due duty and formality. "He wishes you attend a captain's conference. The '*Penelope*' has arrived with a report the French have sorties from Brest".

"Then we sail on the tide!" it was a truth – universally acknowledged – that Colin Darcy wanted nothing more than revenge upon the *crapauds*...

O

Meanwhile, far to the north, across the border in Scotland, just past The Wall, Mr William Pitt (the younger) sought to do the only honourable thing he could do to save both his career (and therefore perpetuate the war against France), and to restore 'honour' to the House of Austen.

He – and his *belle* – had *eloped* to Gretna Green!

“Och! It’s like something in one of her own bodice-ripper novels, ye ken?” called as witness to the hasty ceremony... Mrs Scott whispered to her husband.

“They must have rode all nights to get here”, her husband Montgomery replied. “They’d have nae got here quicker without changing the laws of physics...”

“...and do you, Jane Austen, take William Pitt to be you lawful wedded husband”, the clergyman continued the service in his Caledonian accent, “to have and to hold...”

Suddenly the church door burst open. “Stop the wedding!” in strode armed redcoats with loaded muskets; and not a few riflemen, led by Captain Sharpe. “Stop the wedding!” behind them advanced Her Majesty the Queen, Lady Lowe and Miss Petra Lowe in attendance. “I refuse to allow this wedding to proceed unless I am *immediately* made Matron of Honour!”

“Bastard...” Captain Sharpe mumbled under his breath as he trusted this would mean the thwarting of plans to make peace with the Frenchies...

O

Meanwhile, back in Portsmouth...

“...it’s clear they intend to try and wrest control of the Channel from us”, Captain Dawkins of *HMS ‘Euryalus’* reported. “Ferry across Bonaparte’s army”.

“That’ll put further pressure on Mr Pitt to resign”, Captain Hornblower of the *‘Sutherland’* was gruff.

“Blistering barnacles!” the Admiral exclaimed. “Then it’s up to us to stop them!”

“The *‘Hood’* is shaken down and ready, Sir”, Colin Darcy too reported grim-determination... the other captains also chorusing agreement.

“Then we sail on the tide”, Viscount Sir Peter Lowe determined. “Now Hay here’s arrived with *‘Royal Sovereign’*. Gentleman – prepare for sea! Stand by for action!”

O

“...so, when I entered that room that day you *were* actually *trysting*?” wide-eyed in shock Petra realised she was still very naïve.

“There is no harm done now”, ‘Mrs Pitt’ amused as she held her groom’s arm at the impromptu reception. “For we are now man and wife. Though I shall continue to use my maiden name for literary purposes”, she smiled.

"Might also be worth a few extra sales", her husband the Prime Minister remarked.

This made Petra *ponder*. "You know, I did remark to my *modiste* about my mistake that led to our encounter at the palace... I wonder if, peradventure, she then... furthered that confidence? As an amusing tale of confusion?"

"Bond?" realising what this could *mean* Mr Pitt summoned his bodyguard. "I think we may have found of leaky spy".

"Prime Minister?" the agent appeared neither shaken nor stirred.

"Make it look like an accident", Mrs Pitt added an afterthought of *revenge*...

O

Difficulty asserting herself over her charges? "Miss Edna! Who gave you permission to look off your work and read a book?" Lydia Bennett returned to assert - was pleased her charges had fallen into her trap.

"You're lucky to live here with gentleman's children like us", it was Miss Doris who now defied. "You should go and *beg*", she voiced her contempt for her new Governess; Miss Edna sniggering in conspiracy.

Too much? Knowing she had to make a 'go' of her lot Lydia decided upon firm action. Taking up a copy of Caesar's '*Commentarii De Bello Gallico*' she belted the unruly child with it.

"Wicked and cruel - you are a slaver - a murderer!" as her sister cried Miss Edna fisted. "I shall tell Father!"

"*I hate you! I hate you!*" Miss Doris joined in the banshee chorus.

"I care not as long as you achieve", Lydia denied... privately decided that if she ever inveigled to become their stepmother... they'd have to *go*...

Chapter Nine

Using a terrible storm as cover all was ready. Darkness fell across the land, the midnight hour close at hand. Confident of success Admiral Macron watched his squadron slip out in the foaming main - set course for the Straits of Dover – the blockading force of *Anglais* successfully avoided.

Unaware that his arch nemesis Admiral Lowe was already lying in wait...

O

In Hampshire too was a terrible storm. Obligated by employment to rise from her bed in the dead of night... Lydia Bennett made her way through the darkened corridors of Westhanger Hall, guided by a single candle towards the screaming offspring of her employer. Being a Governess was even less agreeable than she'd ever imagined it would be...

"Doris! Edna!", she semi scolded. "What ails you both?"

"The storm", one of the children blubbed. "Father is out at sea! The thunder sounds like cannon!"

"He will prevail", Lydia reassured – despite her better nature did the 'professional' thing and hugged and comforted her charges. "He but fights the French. And they are but dullards".

"It is said they drive on the wrong side of the road and eat garlic?" Miss Edna both disgusted and feared.

"I have heard that too", Lydia calmly deflected.

"And it is said that Napoleon drinks the blood of maidens and endorses cat-juggling?" Miss Doris too opined.

"That I have *not* heard", Lydia wondered from whence these fanciful ideas originated. "Have no fear. They will never come here whilst the Royal Navy exists. As Lord St Vincent has said, 'I do not say the French cannot come, I only say they cannot come by sea'".

It was at this point the door swung open. It was Mrs Miggins. "Captain Hay usually leaves them to cry, Governess", she glowered in the half-light. "It is said to be character building".

"Captain Hay has delegated me their charge", Lydia realised she had a power-struggle with the Housekeeper ahead.

"The captain said you were to defer to *me*", the old woman growled.

"Then I shall leave and you shall calm his daughters", Lydia haughtily retorted. There was no reply. "No, Mrs Miggins? *Good*. Then I shall *decide* in matters appertaining to their wellbeing..." she knew getting the children onside would be vital is she was to secure access to the Hay fortune...

oOo

As day dawned and the great storm calmed, we slipped out of Plymouth – our noble Viscount Lowe's plan to emulate Drake and use the wind gauge to come up behind the enemy. As we cleared the decks and beat to quarters... I found myself summoned to the captain's cabin...

It was a shock for Elizabeth to be confronted by such a sight. But – remembering she was to all intents and purposes Midshipman 'Bob' Bennett - she forced her maidenly pulse *still*... despite the sight of Captain Darcy stripped to the waist and washing, his knotted muscles churning beneath his taut skin...

"You sent for me, Sir?" she quailed.

"Indeed, Bob", he barely looked up. "We have them now, I'm a thinking. Revenge for the assault on Brest. I want you to keep an account of the battle. You will act as my personal runner".

"Of course Sir", 'Bob' agreed with all alacrity.

"I haven't forgotten I owe you my life. Sooner we get you your Lieutenant's exams the better".

"Yes Sir. Thank you, Sir", was the best reply she could manage...

"*Alors Lacoste!*" a grin of amusement crossed Admiral Macron's face as he snapped his telescope shut. "A low trick, *n'est pas?*" he punned. "To *avant a derriere*. So. We 'ave a choice. Stand and fight – or run for Boulogne and zer Emperor's waiting army?"

"In port zay will use fireships? I zay we fight and leave zat job to Villeneuve".

Our squadron began to approach for larboard. It looked like an even fight. We mustered 1st rates: HMS 'Queen Charlotte' (Admiral Lowe's flag, Captain Bligh), HMS 'Royal Sovereign' (Captain Hay): 3rd rates: our own 'new' HMS 'Hood' (our noble and dear Captain Darcy), HMS 'Sutherland' (Captain Hornblower), HMS 'Canopus' (Captain Austen – brother to the famous novelist, by this time Mrs Pitt): frigates HMS 'Euryalus' (Captain Dawkins), SMS 'Aurora' (Captain Kjsiala – our brave Austrian ally), HMS 'Amazon' (Captain Fletcher), HMS 'Glenmoor' (Captain Hook), HMS 'Laconia' (Captain Wentworth). The enemy consisted of 1st rates: 'L'Orient' (Admiral Macron's flag - Captain Lacoste): 2nd rates: 'Bucentaure' (Captain Bardot); 3rd rates: 'Intrépide' (Captain L'Escargot), 'Argonaute' (Captain Renault), 'Berwick' (Captain Picard), 'Jeanne d'Arc' (Captain Le Penne); frigates 'Hermione' (Captain Descartes), and 'The Black Pig' (under that infamous turncoat Wickham). Making sail in three columns we aimed to close, our frigates in a flanking manoeuvre, the enemy happy to offer battle...

Those foolish *anglais*. How easy it was to ape and Irish accent and find employment as a cleaner. And now, there she – Yvette Dubois – the Emperor's master spy *was*, in Downing Street itself (complete with garish wallpaper).

Creeping up behind the seated Prime Minister she slowly drew her aim - and fired. The bullet went clean through Mr William Pitt (the Younger's) skull...

Only it wasn't a skull. It was one of Madame Tussard's waxworks.

"*Zut alors!*" Yvette exclaimed when - suddenly - a kick knocked the pistol from her hand before she could reload.

"How better to draw a spy out into the open than to let her in!" Yvette's assailant amused.

"Miss Austen!" recognising the voice Yvette knew that a novelist's labyrinthine mind had outwitted her. "Prepare to fight!" Yvette's thoughts were only now of escape.

"'Mrs Pitt' to you", Jane proudly retorted. "Both my *sense of sensibility* and my *pride and prejudice* are of..." (and here the novelist delivered an uppercut) "...the *persuasion* that you will now end your days in Northanger Abbey jail - if not hung".

"Uggh!" nothing to lose Yvette Dubois fought back and - wrestling free from her literary assailant - was able to draw a knife - and lunge!

"Typical underhand Gallic trick", the new bride that was Mrs Jane Pitt was able to smother to lunge with her shawl - as the Frenchie fell forward was able to deliver a Vulcan nerve pinch to render the French spy unconscious...

As our frigates sought to sweep around the enemy the bold 'Aurora' - like the famous hussars of her native land - fought a duel with the 'Hermione'. There was inconclusive boarding in which Captain Kjsiala gave as good as he got... until overwhelmed and sunk by the 'Jeanne d'Arc'; the 'Sutherland' also heavily engaged in the action...

"More sail!" Colin Darcy demanded – for he could not countenance the 'Hood' being at the rear of any fight.

"Most of our crew and new and inexperienced", Lieutenant Lowe cautioned.

"Make a note of that, Bob", Colin ordered the recording midshipman...

"Well done Mrs Pitt!" back in London Agent Bond arrived post-haste. "Your plan for drawing the enemy spy out is a success", he congratulated as the *faux modiste* was taken away.

"My husband?" Jane asked.

"Safe. About to give as statement to parliament on the Lace Tax".

"A revenue hated by every woman in the kingdom", Jane amused. "Still nobody's husband, it is a truth universally acknowledged, is perfect", she

smiled how her experiences of 'genuine married life' (*sic*) might prove useful in her next so-called 'bodice-ripper', *'Fifty Shades Of Earl Grey'*....

O

There was now a general melee as we in the 'Hood' attempted to get into the action. The 'Royal Sovereign' herself was, at this point, crippled by concentrated enemy fire...

"But you're wounded Sir!" the surgeon exclaimed.

"'Tis but a scratch!" Captain Matthew Hay boldly refused to leave his post on the quarterdeck.

"A boat's picked up Kjsiala, Sir!" someone reported of the Austrian.

"Those white uniforms have there uses for standing out", Matthew mused.

"The '*Hermione's*' struck Sir!" the lookout triumphed. "And '*The Black Pig*' is running!"

"That turncoat Wickham!" the Captain knew...

"That turncoat Wickham!" Darcy knew. "Can we close?" he considered his own personal 'score' concerning his poor sister.

"No Sir", for his part Lieutenant Lowe had no time for personal vendettas – through his telescope saw the '*Sutherland*' inconclusively board the '*Argonaute*'...

"Too hot for us", now more 'pirate' than 'privateer' Captain George Wickham remarked to Bates, his ship's master. "We'll put in to Poole Quay as an American freighter", he named the notorious Dorset smuggler's nest, "recruit some like-minded fellows and make for our fortunes in the Med".

"Aye, there's no profit in dying, Skipper", Master Bates agreed...

The battle now reached a crescendo as the 'Canopus' fired upon the 'Berwick', and vice-versa – frigate 'Glenmoor' boldly attacking the 'Bucentaure'; the 'Sutherland' and 'Argonaute' drawing off from their duel. As a squall came up Admiral Lowe signalled to withdraw to Portsmouth; the French likewise pulling away to disengage. Later we were to find they had bombarded the whelkers of Weymouth, en route to Cherbourg...

O



...this organ feels that Mr Pitt is most wise, in this time of crisis, to tax fripperies such as lace; for we are assured his so-called 'income tax' remains but a temporary measure during the national emergency that is constant war against the French and their Corsican ogre. We are also heartened to hear of Admiral Lowe's successful action in containing the enemy into Cherbourg, as we await news of Lord Nelson's pursuit on the enemy combined fleet...

"Blistering barnacles!" Admiral Lowe exclaimed as he assembled his captains in Portsmouth. "Get those repairs done and we'll to sea to blockade Macron".

"At least the whelkers plight has not made the newspapers", Dawkins observed to Fletcher.

"Where's Hay?" Colin Darcy noticed the absence of the captain of the '*Royal Sovereign*'.

"Gone to his house nearby to rest his wound", Hornblower remarked. "The '*Royal Sovereign*'s' been re-assigned back to Admiral Collingwood. Hay's been given the '*Neptune*' as replacement".

"Enough!" the Admiral veritably exploded. "Repairs gentleman! We sail in three days!"

There was little else to be said on the matter...

Chapter Ten

"Papa! Papa!" Doris and Edna Hay exclaimed as their father alighted from the hired carriage at Westhanger Hall. "You are wounded!"

"I shall recover", the sailor embraced his anxious offspring as housekeeper, Mrs Miggins, approached.

"Sir", she apologised for the children. "That Governess *indulges* them".

"They seem to me much brightened in countenance", a child by each hand Matthew Hay ignored the ache of his wound and led inside his stately pile; the footman bringing after his sea trunk and uniforms. "But I return to Portsmouth in two days. Our Gallic enemies grow haughty at sea".

"Come, children!" their Governess appeared. "Your dear father needs rest. And you must to your studies", with the captain home for but mere days... Lydia Bennett decided it was time to execute her *plan*...

"Captain Kjsiala!" Colin Darcy welcomed him aboard the '*Hood*' with a vigorous handshake.

"A captain without a ship", the dashing Austrian sighed. "Is such a man a real captain?"

"You are our ally, Sir", Lieutenant Lowe consoled. "Joined in a new, Third Coalition, against Napoleon".

"Hum", Captain Darcy coughed politely. "Captain Kjsiala. My First Officer, Lieutenant Glendower Lowe".

"Aha!" Joseph saw. "Your resemblance to your father".

"The Navy is indeed in our blood, Sir".

"As it is in so few of my countrymen's", Kjsiala joked. "But one day we will have a fleet to rival any in the Balkans!"

"Well, the '*Hood*' is your berth for now, Sir", Colin explained. "You will serve as my exec. Tonight the Admiral throws a ball. You will attend?"

"Of course", sensing an *order* rather than a *request*... the Austrian clicked his heels in a customary Teutonic salute...

O

As we all set about repairs to our dear vessel I faced, myself, a personal quandary. Though I had forsaken my sex to live as a man, in His Majesty's navy, in service to King and country... I could not yet strangle the strange pulse within my maidenly bosom, eretime I espied my captain. Oh Captain, my Captain! Curse Mother Nature for her enforcing upon me such base desires and thoughts that would make a sailor blush (for, as a sailor, I knew these well). Fortunately, I was spared that night attending the Admiral's ball...

The great doors of Drake Hall opened to reveal the ball already in progress. A dazzling affair, servants took the hats and swords of Captains Darcy and Kjsiala; and of Lieutenant Lowe. Glendower noted the gentlemen were in blue naval uniform - as was only proper – Kjsiala's Austrian white (and red hussar trousers) matching yet contrasting with the ladies' predominant white.

"Blistering barnacles!" Admiral Lowe proudly addressed his son. "We'll make a sailor of you yet, lad".

"Indeed, Father. Captain Kłóśala", Glendower began, "may I introduce my father, Admiral Lord Lowe, my mother Lady Julia, and my sister, the Honourable Miss Petra".

"Sir, ladies..." Joseph found his eyes unexpectedly linger upon the vision that was the Admiral's charming daughter. "Perhaps, Miss Petra, we may later dance?" he was then overly bold in *Wiener stil*.

"Perhaps Sir", she gently responded.

"Yes – you Austrian chappies go in for that a lot", the admiral wracked his brain for total recall. "Dancing and waltzes and things..."

The '*Hood's*' bell sounded the start of the second 'dog watch'. Stuck in Portsmouth Harbour little adverse was likely to happen... thus Midshipman Tom Hardy allowed his thoughts to stray to the perplexing matter of his sweetheart; Florrie Beatty. Pacing the quarterdeck he came upon his fellow, Midshipman, Bob Bennett, also on watch.

"Bennett", he acknowledged. "Warm night for the time of year".

"Hardy", he returned. "Yes".

"Bob..." Tom continued. "We have been spared the Admiral's ball. You, Bob, you're a man of the world?"

"I am? I *am*", Bob replied, his voice strangely deeper on his second utterance. "I sense a problem, Tom?" he was grave.

"'Tis my sweetheart..." Hardy stared wistfully out at the harbour lights.

"You write much?" (this was news to Bob).

"*Much*", he confirmed. "Her name is Florrie. Her father is a hardworking and honest publican. In Poole..."

"Indeed?" (Bob declined to comment on such a tautology).

"We met during that fracas with those ruffians from the '*Lannister*'".

"You protected her and her fellow maidens from their unwanted behaviour?" though not present Bob recalled the incident.

"My family..." Tom sighed. "They wish me to give her up. They are merchants. In that new seaside resort, Sanditon. They consider such an alliance beneath our line..."

Bob Bennett's mouth flapped like a fish. Then he collected his thoughts. "Merchants, Tom? Are not publicans also... *merchants*?"

"By George!" Hardy exclaimed. "That there *is* a course to chart with them! Bob old chum – you're a genius fellow!" he slapped his compatriot warmly on the back. "I'll write to them all as soon as we're off watch!"

"You must follow your heart in such ways that it does not conflict with your duty to king and country", spluttering Midshipman Bennett added as – from over Gosport – storm clouds and a breeze began to *brew*...

What else could I say? Tom and the others took me for a man – had never questioned by awkwardness in the heads. If there was now a spring of hope for the future in his step for the rest of the watch... I found myself brood darker yet upon my own feelings for my captain. What if he was to be introduced to a suitable young lady at the ball? The Royal Navy was full of officers anxious to be rid of extraneous and financially burdensome daughters...

"*Santa Maria!*" Lady Lowe observed to her husband as the dancing couples dueted - outside - the waiting thunderstorm finally breaking. "I dare say I have never met a more pleasant Austrian gentleman in all my years. Looka how he dotes on our daughter!"

"Blistering barnacles!" the Admiral was having none of it. "The man's a foreigner! And a lowly captain".

"Petra has always done what is best for our family", Lady Julia gave him one of her basque 'death-stares'. "It is but early in the evening. But, zay maka da handsome couple..."

"Blistering..."

"Humpf..." a look from his formidable Iberian spouse silenced the bold Welsh Admiral for the duration...

It was another terrible storm. Obligated again by her employment to rise from her bed afore midnight... Lydia Bennett made her way through the darkened corridors of Westhanger Hall, guided by a candle, towards the screaming offspring of her employer...

"Doris! Edna!", she semi scolded. "What ails you both?"

"The storm", one of the children blubbed.

"Always with you two it is storms!"

"It was on a night such as this that the miasma took our dear mother..." the other blubbed.

"What is this commotion!" true to form the annoyed Mrs Miggins appeared.

"You may rest, *Housekeeper*", Lydia sought to establish her ascendancy.

"Girls, we do not wish to wake your father. He must rest because of his wound, must be not?"

"They already *have*", also with a candle the sternly brooding figure of Captain Hay arrived. "My instructions were that it is good for character to let them cry", he rounded on Mrs Miggins.

"Their Governess seems to think she knows *better*", the housekeeper was sarcastic as she withdrew. "And you don't pay me enough to argue..."

"So I see..." the captain grumped.

Friction and *resentment* between them? Her chance to *ingratiate*? "With respect, Sir, given the storm's dark associations it is *cruel* to let poor children suffer so", Lydia spoke up.

"Governess, I left *instructions*..."

"Fie Sir!" momentarily leaving her charges Lydia advanced to confront her employer – in the candle's half-light heaved her not inconsiderable bosom beneath her nightdress. "These children have long lost a mother's love. They need care and compassion!"

"Damn you young woman!" Matthew retorted. "You seek to lecture *me*!"

"No Sir. I seek to do my job – to remind you too of your parental duties!"

"Please Papa!" Edna spoke up. "Miss Lydia is good and kind".

"She teaches us well!" Doris too interjected.

"We have learnt French, History, and how to skin a rabbit".

"Whilst it's still alive too!"

"Ugh..." the captain growled. "Does the scripture not say, 'There will be an answer, let it be...'"

It is a truth, universally acknowledged, that a single captain in possession of a fortune in prize-money, must be, in the eyes of matrons with redundant daughters to discharge, in want of a wife...

Thus it was Captain Colin Darcy's look out saw - too late – Captain Wentworth's bride, Anne, approach on his larboard side; a young woman hoving too, in consort with her...

"Mrs Wentworth", he stood-by to repel boarders.

"Captain Darcy. May I introduce my dear sister-in-law, Miss Olivia Wentworth".

"Miss Wentworth", bowing Colin saw he had been outmanoeuvred – indeed was about to be raked in his stern.

"You do not dance, Captain?" the comely young woman questioned.

"Rarely", Colin replied. "I find so few partners tolerate my two left feet".

She smiled – and he realised he'd just trapped himself twixt between the Scylla and Charibdes.

"Is it then *practice* you lack, Sir?" Miss Olivia responded. "I too am much in need of some, my dear sister here frequently remarks?"

Mrs Wentworth coughed, politely (though to Colin's ears it boomed as loud as any French 74).

"May I then have the next dance, Miss Olivia?" knowing his duty Colin Darcy promptly struck his colours.

"Why you may, Captain", the maiden smiled – and the womenfolk departed.

"What was I thinking? Have I no presence of mind?" he saw Glendower had arrived had seen and overheard *all*.

"I dare say you will find her agreeable, Sir?"

"Heaven forbid! That would be the greatest misfortune of all for a man wed to the sea - to find a woman agreeable whom one is determined to eschew! You could dance with her instead?" he hoped.

"My card is full, Sir", Glendower amused. "As son of an Admiral I too have much duty to discharge..."

As the rain thundered outside Lydia decided to approach her employer as he sat by the fire, brooding with a glass of port.

"Your fine daughters are sleeping now, Sir", clad in a dressing gown, her hair wildly let down, she perfunctorily reported.

"Thank you, Governess", Matthew Hay deigned to look up as he stared into the fire.

"Your wound troubles you much, Sir?" Lydia declined to withdraw.

"'Tis but a scratch..."

"You should rest, Sir", Lydia removed his port decanter.

"How can one rest when Napoleon's fleet and army could be upon us at any moment?" he humped – looked up to see the comely young Governess remained. "You have more to say, Miss Bennett?"

Her chance? "Sir... Mrs Miggins?" Lydia most deliberately heaved her bosom beneath her dressing gown. "I... I *question* her reliability with your daughters. She seems... excessively *grumpy*?"

"I cannot dismiss her", Captain Hay shook his head sighed. "After my mother died she... *comforted* my father for many years". He paused. "Until his death. That is a total confidence I charge you to never repeat, Miss Bennett?"

"Of course Sir" (for Lydia it explained *much*). "My lips are sealed".

"You are right", suddenly galvanised Matthew Hay threw his remaining port on the fire. "I must rest if I am to be successfully back at the Frenchies", he tottered to his feet.

"You wish I assist you to your chamber, Sir?" Lydia manoeuvred to offer.

"You are a comely young woman, Miss Bennett", the captain of the '*Royal Sovereign*' shook his head in the negative. "And a good Governess. On either count... that would not be *proper* for your reputation".

"Then, Sir, I shall follow at a discreet distance", Lydia Bennett felt she was indeed making *progress*...

O

If the Admiral's ball was winding down... the Honourable Petra Lowe's excitement knew no bounds as she danced yet again - face to face - with 'her' handsome Austrian *hussar*. Having conversed much that evening they enjoyed a rare moment of silence as they much admired each other. Joseph noticed beside him his host, Colin Darcy, seemed perplexed as he too danced with a young woman of no fixed hairstyle...

"I do love a Sarabande?" Olivia remarked.

"Indeed. Most invigorating", unlike when fighting the French Colin was unsure what to do or say, so continued, for a moment, in silence.

"It is your turn to say something, Captain Darcy", his partner toyed with him. as a cat would with a mouse. "I talked about the dance, now you ought to remark on the size of the room or the number of couples".

"Forgive me", Colin responded. "But I am more at home on the foamy main than in a ballroom. I am perfectly happy to oblige. Please advise me of what you would like most to hear. Does one talk - as a rule - whilst dancing?"

They were suddenly parted by the choreography of the dance. "Very mild weather we've been having?" seeing as he was now with his Admiral's daughter, Colin felt the imperative to be polite.

"Indeed. Apart from this evening's thunderstorm. You are Captain Kjsiala's host on the '*Hood*' are you not?"

"I am Miss".

The dance span again – and Colin found himself back with Olivia Wentworth. "I remember hearing you once had a sweetheart, Captain? My condolences. Is this why you are so cautious in the company of my sex?"

"Perhaps", Colin gritted. "May I ask, Miss Wentworth, to what these questions tend?"

"Merely to make out your character, Sir".

"And what have you discovered?"

"Very little", she replied as the dance finished. "I hear such different accounts of you as puzzle me exceedingly".

Colin was now as confused as a landsman in a ropery. "I trust to afford you more clarity in the future", as the dance ended he bowed to her and moved quickly away – found other chaps – like the always cheery Midshipman Bennett – far easier to speak to...

O

Meanwhile, across the Channel...

"Zer Empereur's instructions are most precise, Lacoste", Admiral Macron directed as *matelots* began to work the shrouds and sails in hope of a breeze. "Vee are to sea to tie up as many of *les anglais* as we can".

"*Oui, darcord*", the *capitaine de drapeau* agreed.

"A bounty for *deux cent croissants* for zer man 'ho brings me zer sword of Viscount Lowe", Pierre Macron relished their next duel...

O

One by one the carriages collected the guests. Viscount Lowe was surprised to be approached by the now ubiquitous Captain Kjsiala. "Sir", the handsome Austrian formally clicked his heels in a deep bow. "I ask you for permission to call upon your daughter, Miss Petra, when next in port?"

"Blisterin..."

"Of course", before her husband could fully speak Lady Julia forcefully interjected to silence him. "If Captain Darcy can spare you?"

"Er, of course", Colin grasped the rope of opportunity with both hands...

Sat in the carriage Captain Frederick Wentworth dozed. "Captain Darcy?" his wife Anne whispered to his sister, Olivia.

"He is most unconfident around we ladies", she smiled serenely. "I intend to board and claim him as my prize", she then declared. "But first I must lure him, like a siren, onto the rocks of outrageous fortune".

"You are bold like your brother", Anne immediately approved the plan...

Chapter Eleven

As we put to sea that October, to blockade Cherbourg, we had no idea that but a thousand miles away, off Cape Trafalgar, Admiral Lord Nelson had finally cornered the enemy combined fleet. Nor indeed, that the Corsican Ogre had

broken camp and Boulogne and advanced his armies to attack our gallant allies...

"Steady as she goes Mr Phillips!" Captain Darcy commanded the '*Hood's*' skill-challenged helmsman. "Let the tide take us".

"Left-hand down a bit, aye", he responded...

Back at the quayside a flustered young woman stood sobbing – her bonnet in her hands. "I've missed him, I've missed him..." she wailed in her Dorset accent. "I may never see him again!"

Needless to say, her distress caught the attention of the Royal Marines on guard duty. They were unsure how to react, for she did not seem like the usual dockyard *fille de jour*.

Luckily the *situation* was spotted from the Admiral's Residence – and Lady Lowe decided to dispatch her housekeeper to investigate...

"Signal from the flagship, Sir", Midshipman Dickens saluted smartly as the '*Hood*' rounded Whitecliff Point. "Fishing boats report Macron has already left Cherbourg and is heading up Channel!"

"Damn and blast!" Captain Darcy swore. "If he were to rendezvous with Villeneuve - and he too give Nelson the slip..." he trailed off. "Mister Lowe!"

"Sir!"

"Make sail and follow the flagship's intercept course! Maximum warp!"

"Aye aye Sir!"

"Herr Kjöiala!"

"Mien Kapitän?"

"Exec – organise a gun drill. This time we take Macron *down*!"

At this point a spontaneous cheer erupted around the '*Hood*' along with heartfelt cries of 'God save the King!'...

O

"My name is Florrie, your Ladyship. Florrie Brewer".

"Are you *con nino*?" Lady Lowe's first thought was stern.

"What? Oh – no! My love is a *gentlemen*. He protected me from ruffians. Mr Hardy? Of His Majesty's ship '*Hood*'?"

"*Santa Maria Christo*", Lady Lowe knew the vessel to be more 'trouble' than any other in her husband's command.

"I have run away from home. His family have forbidden us to wed. I was hoping we could be married by Captain Darcy... It's so unfair! Why *must* I be looked down upon by snobbish people - simply because I am from Poole? My father is an honest publican. He *never* waters the beer!"

"I see", having been ostracised by much of 'Society' because of her Spanish birth... Lady Julia empathised.

Yet friendship with the Queen had changed all *that*...

"You and I will wait together, then", she gestured as her daughter, Miss Petra, arrived with her maid. "*Si!* We waita for the homecoming of our brave sailor boys, from the sea..."

O

I estimate we were mid-Channel when the action began; the wind from the north-east favouring our fleet as we advanced to contact with all due alacrity. The enemy squadron consisted of the 1st rate 'L'Orient' (Admiral Macron's flag - Captain Lacoste); the 2nd rate 'Bucentaure' (Captain Bardot); the 3rd rates 'Intripide' (Captain L'Escargot), 'Argonaute' (Captain Renault), 'Berwick' (Captain Picard) and 'Jeanne d'Arc' (Captain Le Penne). Our own fleet, meanwhile, was the 1st rate HMS 'Queen Charlotte' (Admiral Lowe's flag - Captain Bligh); the 2nd rate HMS 'Neptune' (Captain Hay), the 3rd rates: HMS 'Hood' (my own dear Captain Darcy), HMS 'Sutherland' (Captain Hornblower), HMS 'Canopus' (Captain Austen); and the frigates HMS 'Euryalus' (Captain Dawkins), HMS 'Amazon' (Captain Fletcher), HMS 'Glenmoor' (Captain Hook) and HMS 'Laconia' (Captain Wentworth). As the action opened fire was exchanged as HMS 'Amazon' and 'Laconia' the French 1st rates...

"Blistering barnacles!" Admiral Lowe confounded. "Can't we go any faster?"

"I canna change the laws of physics, Admiral!" sailing-master Scot protested. "We're carryin' as much sail as we can. Any more an' the canvas'll rip!"

"It's clear Macron's making to take the engagement away from our big ships", snapping his telescope shut Captain Bligh confirmed.

"Blistering barnacles! Signal Hay on the 'Neptune'!" the monocular Admiral grumpily ordered. "Make best speed! Close that range up!"

"Aye Sir!"

As usual our brave Captain Darcy decided to place the 'Hood' in the thick of the action. As we approached the melee - whilst Hornblower was engaged in

cripling the enemy 'Berwick' - the Jeanne d'Arc' let loose an underhand broadside on the 'Sutherland'.

Sadly, we ourselves were not immune from enemy fire...

'Boom!' the enemy salvo hit the 'Hood' full square on the beam – wood splinters showering the poop deck. "I'm hit!" Captain Darcy coolly examined the jagged wood that was lodged in his arm and thigh; drawing blood to turn the white of his uniform crimson. "I'll go below and get the surgeon to remove and my wound dressed. Exec! Take over!"

"Javol mien Kapitän!" the gallant Austrian accepted with aplomb – Darcy promptly fainting.

"Mr Bennett!" Commander Glendower Lowe ordered. "Help me carry the skipper to the cockpit..."

"Signal the other frigates to avoid closing!" on the 'Laconia', meanwhile, Freddie Wentworth saw clearly the enemy plan. "Looks like they're out to pummel us. Let's keep the Froggies busy until the Admiral's big guns can get here and turn the tide".

"Aye Sir!"

"Frack!" Wentworth exclaimed as an enemy salvo promptly crippled Hook's overly-bold HMS 'Glenmoor'...

"Bien! Yaw plan eet works, *mon Admiral*" on the deck of 'L'Orient' Captain Lacoste observed their 3rd rates close with the enemy frigates.

"Dacord", Macron grinned. "A *Legion d'Honneur* to the captain who brings *l'Empereur* an enemy prize this day, *n'est pas?*"

As the guns thundered above Midshipman Bennett and Commander Lowe carefully lay the wounded Captain Darcy into the 'Hood's' cockpit.

"Aggh!" he screamed in pain as Surgeon Kilmore removed the splinters and bandaged his wounds.

"Appen we'll not 'ave to amputate just yet", the bluff Yorkshireman considered. "Loblolly!" he called for an aide.

"All busy, Sir", Midshipman Bennett observed. "I can stay with the Captain?"

"Aye, 'appen you can..." Kilmore was called away.

"Kismet, Bennett..." on the edge on consciousness Colin Darcy opened his eyes to exclaim.

"Oh yes!" mishearing 'Bob' Bennett advanced 'his' lips towards 'his' skipper's pale and quivering counterparts...

"Blistering barnacles!" Observing through his telescope Admiral Lowe exclaimed. "What's Wentworth *at*? Fellow's lost his usual *elan* since his wedding!"

"Avoiding being crushed like '*Glenmoor*'", Bligh saw the '*Amazon*' too suddenly crippled by enemy fire – the '*Queen Charlotte*' and '*Neptune*' unable to intervene in the general engagement; 3rd rates of both sides taking heavy punishment – Austen's '*Canopus*' boldly exchanging fire with the superior, 2nd rate, '*Bucentaure*'...

Golly! My bad - it appears I misheard 'kismet' for 'kiss me'! What would Dr Freud say about that, eh? (much less Miss Jane Austen?) Yet – despite the fiery passion welling within my maidenly bosom - I restrained myself – contented and quelled my thoughts that I had just done what Miss Olivia Wentworth could only ever dream of doing...

"*Alors! Vive la France!*" the crew of '*L'Orient*' rejoiced as the '*Intrepide*' grappled and boarded – took as a prize – the enemy frigate '*Amazon*'.

"We 'ave tamed zer '*Amazon*', no?" Macron jested to Lacoste. "No longer is she 'Wonder Woman', *n'est pas*?"

"Yet zer battle in zer balance hangs?" the flag captain noticed the enemy frigate '*Euryalus*' cripple the '*Berwick*' – the '*Sutherland*' likewise cripple the '*Bucentaure*'... which drifted off to the horizon, on fire, to a fate unknown...

Delirious from loss of blood? In his wounded haze it wasn't young Bob Bennett administering the kiss of life to Colin Darcy – but an *angel*! A beautiful maiden – in his (drugged by morphine?) haze the Midshipman morphing into his promised bride – as consumed by passion for him as he was for her...

"The ship?" he fought to retain his composure and banish the hallucination.

"Captain Kjsiala and Commander Lowe have everything in hand, Sir", Bob Bennett placated. "You must rest if you are to recover..."

"Aye..." with that Colin Darcy again fell unconscious from his wounds...

Yet all was not well on the deck. On fire and unable to effect repairs... the '*Hood*'s' gunnery began to slacken.

"Orders, Sir?" bruised and sooty Commander Lowe requested from the Exec.

"Make smoke and let us drift", Kjsiala calmly ordered. "If zer *swinehunds* zink we finished are... we may escape being boarded as a prize..."

"Aye aye..." Glendower endorsed the desperate measure as - in the distance – HMS *'Euryalus'* – suffered a monkee on it's back as it too went down to Davy Jones' locker...

"They're getting away!" Captain Bligh exclaimed as the satisfied French made for Le Havre. "And taking our frigate with them as prize with them!"

"Blistering barnacles!" Admiral Lowe complained. "I can almost *smell* that garlic-laced glee! Confound Father Neptune! **** the French *****!" he exclaimed. "Signal a return to port!"

"Admiral?" Bligh questioned.

"They're now more dangerous than before!" the Admiral's vast experience told. "We need to regroup!"

"Looks like the *'Hood's'* gone Sir!" Bligh sadly reported. "Drifting off towards the enemy coast..."

O

The cheering crowds thronged the quay in Le Havre as the triumphant fleet prepared to dock. "Send a messenger to *l'Empereur tout suite*", the victorious Admiral Macron ordered.

"*Oui*", Lacoste agreed. "Now all we need is Villeneuve and zer Combined Fleet to do zie thang and England is ours!"

O

But a few hours later – as night fell - Admiral Lowe's wounded squadron limped back into Portsmouth harbour. "My husband has returned safe again", on the quayside Lady Lowe trusted the fates for – unlike many vessels in this squadron – the *'Queen Charlotte'* seemed undamaged.

"I can't see my Tom's ship - the *'Hood'* - your Ladyship!" poor young Florrie Brewer seemed close to panic.

"Eet is but delayed, I am sure, *mi pequeño pollo*", Lady Julia attempted to console - a glance from her daughter Petra assuring she too had her doubts.

"I trust you are right, Mama", The Honourable Miss Petra held her breath.

"My daughter burns a candle for young Captain Kįśiala", her Ladyship explained to Florrie.

"No Mama", the girl proudly modified. "Not a *candle*. An *eternal flame*..."

Chapter Twelve

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The London Gazette

EXTRAORDINARY.

Published by Authority.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 1805.

Admiralty-Office, November 6, 1805.

DISPATCHES, of which the following are Copies, were received at the Admiralty this Day, at One o'Clock A. M. from Vice-Admiral Collingwood, Commander in Chief of His Majesty's Ships and Vessels off Cadiz:

*Buryalus, off Cape Trafalgar,
October 22, 1805.*

SIR,
THE ever to be lamented Death of Vice-Admiral Lord Viscount Nelson, who, in the late Conflict with the Enemy, fell in the Hour of Victory, leaves to me the Duty of informing my Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, that on the 19th Instant, it was communicated to the Commander in Chief from the Ships watching the Motions of the Enemy in Cadiz, that the Combined Fleet had put to Sea; as they sailed with light Winds westerly, his Lordship concluded their Destination was the Mediterranean, and immediately made all Sail for the Straights' Entrance, with the British Squadron, consisting of Twenty-seven Ships, Three of them Sixty four, where his Lordship was informed by Captain Blackwood, (whose Vigilance in watching, and giving Notice of the Enemy's Movements, has been highly meritorious,) that they had not yet passed the Straights.

On Monday the 21st Instant, at Daylight, when Cape Trafalgar bore E. by S. about Seven Leagues, the Enemy was discovered Six or Seven Miles to the Eastward, the Wind about West, and very light, the Commander in Chief immediately made the Signal for the Fleet to bear up in Two Columns, as they are formed in order of sailing; a Mode of Attack his Lordship had previously directed, to avoid the Inconvenience and Delay in forming a Line of Battle in the usual Manner. The Enemy's Line consisted of Thirty-three Ships (of which Eighteen were French and Fifteen Spanish), commanded in Chief by

Admiral Villeneuve; the Spaniards, under the Direction of Gravina, wore, with their Heads to the Northward, and formed their Line of Battle with great Closeness and Correctness; but as the Mode of Attack was unusual, so the Structure of their Line was new;—it formed a Crescent convexing to Lee-ward—so that, in leading down to their Centre, I had both their Van, and Rear, abaft the Beam; before the Fire opened, every alternate Ship was about a Cable's Length to Windward of her Second a-head and a-stern, forming a Kind of double Line, and appeared, when on their Beam, to leave a very little Interval between them; and this without crowding their Ships. Admiral Villeneuve was in the Bucentaure in the Centre, and the Prince of Asturias bore Gravina's Flag in the Rear; but the French and Spanish Ships were mixed without any apparent Regard to Order of national Squadron.

As the Mode of our Attack had been previously determined on, and communicated to the Flag-Officers, and Captains, few Signals were necessary, and none were made, except to direct close Order as the Lines bore down.

The Commander in Chief in the Victory led the Weather Column, and the Royal Sovereign, which bore my Flag, the Lee.

The Action began at Twelve o'Clock, by the leading Ships of the Columns breaking through the Enemy's Line, the Commander in Chief about the Tenth Ship from the Van, the Second in Command about the Twelfth from the Rear, leaving the Van of the Enemy unoccupied; the succeeding Ships breaking through, in all Parts, altern of their Leaders, and engaging the Enemy at the Muzzles of their Guns; the Conflict was severe; the Enemy's Ships were fought with a Gallantry highly honorable to their Officers; but the Attack on them was irresistible, and it pleased the Almighty Disposer of all Events to grant His Majesty's

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Arms a complete and glorious Victory; about Three P. M. many of the Enemy's Ships having struck their Colours, their Line gave way; Admiral Gravina, with Ten Ships, joining their Frigates to Leeward, stood towards Cadiz. The Five headmost Ships in their Van tacked; and standing to the Southward, to Windward of the British Line, were engaged, and the Sternmost of them taken; the others went off, leaving to His Majesty's Squadron Nineteen Ships of the Line, (of which Two are First Rates, the Santissima Trinidad and the Santa Anna,) with Three Flag Officers, viz. Admiral Villeneuve, the Commander in Chief, Don Ignatio Maria D'Aliva, Vice-Admiral, and the Spanish Rear-Admiral Don Baltazar Hidalgo Cisneros.

After such a Victory it may appear unnecessary to enter into Encomiums on the particular Parts taken by the several Commanders; the Conclusion says more on the Subject than I have Language to express; the Spirit which animated all was the same; when all exert themselves zealously in their Country's Service, all deserve that their high Merits should stand recorded; and never was high Merit more conspicuous than in the Battle I have described.

The Achille (a French 74), after having surrendered, by some Mismanagement of the Frenchmen took Fire and blew up; Two hundred of her Men were saved by the Tenders.

A Circumstance occurred during the Action, which so strongly marks the invincible Spirit of British Seamen, when engaging the Enemies of their Country, that I cannot resist the Pleasure I have in making it known to their Lordships; the Temeraire was boarded by Accident, or Design, by a French Ship on one Side, and a Spaniard on the other; the Contest was vigorous, but in the End, the combined Ensigns were torn from the Poop, and the British hoisted in their Places.

Such a Battle could not be fought without sustaining a great Loss of Men. I have not only to lament, in common with the British Navy, and the British Nation, in the Fall of the Commander in Chief, the Loss of a Hero, whose Name will be immortal, and his Memory ever dear to his Country; but my Heart is rent with the most poignant Grief for the Death of a Friend, to whom, by many Years' Intimacy, and a perfect Knowledge of the Virtues of his Mind, which inspired Ideas superior to the common Race of Men, I was bound by the strongest Ties of Affection; a Grief to which even the glorious Occasion in which he fell, does not bring the Consolation which perhaps it ought; his Lordship received a Musket Ball in his Left Breast, about the Middle of the Action, and sent an Officer to me immediately with his last Farewell; and soon after expired.

I have also to lament the Loss of those excellent Officers Captains Duff of the Mars, and Cooke of the Bellerophon; I have yet heard of none others.

I fear the Numbers that have fallen will be found very great when the Returns come to me; but it having blown a Gale of Wind ever since the Action, I have not yet had it in my Power to collect any Reports from the Ships.

The Royal Sovereign having lost her Masts, except the tottering Foremast, I called the Euryalus to me, while the Action continued, which Ship lying

within Hail, made my Signals, a Service Captain Blackwood, performed with great Attention. After the Action, I shifted my Flag to her, that I might more easily communicate my Orders to, and collect the Ships, and towed the Royal Sovereign out to Seaward. The whole Fleet were now in a very perilous Situation, many dismasted; all shattered in Thirteen Fathom Water, off the Shoals of Trafalgar; and when I made the Signal to prepare to anchor, few of the Ships had an Anchor to let go, their Cables being shot; but the same good Providence which aided us through such a Day preserved us in the Night, by the Wind shifting a few Points, and drifting the Ships off the Land, except Four of the captured dismasted Ships, which are now at Anchor off Trafalgar, and I hope will ride safe until those Gales are over.

Having thus detailed the Proceedings of the Fleet on this Occasion, I beg to congratulate their Lordships on a Victory which, I hope, will add a Ray to the Glory of His Majesty's Crown, and be attended with public Benefit to our Country.

I am, &c.

(Signed) C. COLLINGWOOD.

William Marsden, Esq.

The Order in which the Ships of the British Squadron attacked the Combined Fleets, on the 21st of October, 1805.

V. A. N.	R. E. A. R.
Victory.	Royal Sovereign.
Temeraire.	Mars.
Neptune.	Bellerophon.
Conqueror.	Tonnant.
Leviathan.	Bellerophon.
Ajax.	Colossus.
Orion.	Achille.
Agamemnon.	Polyphemus.
Minotaur.	Revenge.
Spartiate.	Swiftsure.
Britannia.	Defence.
Africa.	Thunderer.
Euryalus.	Defiance.
Sirius.	Prince.
Phoebe.	Dreadnought.
Naiad.	
Pickle Schooner.	
Entrepreneur Cutter.	

(Signed) C. COLLINGWOOD.

GENERAL ORDER.

Euryalus, October 22, 1805.

THE ever to be lamented Death of Lord Viscount Nelson, Duke of Bronte, the Commander in Chief, who fell in the Action of the Twenty-first, in the Arms of Victory, covered with Glory, whose Memory will be ever dear to the British Navy, and the British Nation, whose Zeal for the Honor of his King, and for the Interests of his Country, will be ever held up as a shining Example for a British Seaman,—leaves to me a Duty to return my Thanks to the Right Honorable Rear-Admiral, the Captains, Officers, Seamen, and Detachments of Royal Marines serving on board His Majesty's Squadron now under my Command, for their Conduct on that Day; but where can I find Language to express my Sentiments of the Valour and Skill which were displayed by the Officers, the Seamen, and Marines in the Battle with the Enemy,

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where every Individual appeared an Hero, on whom the Glory of his Country depended; the Attack was irresistible, and the Issue of it adds to the Page of Naval Annals a brilliant Instance of what Britons can do, when their King and their Country need their Service.

To the Right Honorable Rear Admiral the Earl of Northesk, to the Captains, Officers, and Seamen, and to the Officers, Non-commissioned Officers, and Privates of the Royal Marines, I beg to give my sincere and hearty Thanks for their highly meritorious Conduct, both in the Action, and in their Zeal and Activity in bringing the captured Ships out from the perilous Situation in which they were, after their Surrender, among the Shoals of Trafalgar, in boisterous Weather.

And I desire that the respective Captains will be pleased to communicate to the Officers, Seamen, and Royal Marines this public Testimony of my high Approbation of their Conduct, and my Thanks for it.

(Signed) C. COLLINGWOOD.

To the Right Honorable Rear-Admiral the Earl of Northesk, and the respective Captains and Commanders.

GENERAL ORDER.

THE Almighty God, whose Arm is Strength, having of his great Mercy been pleased to crown the Exertion of His Majesty's Fleet with Success, in giving them a complete Victory over their Enemies, on 21st of this Month; and that all Praise and Thanksgiving may be offered up to the Throne of Grace for the great Benefits to our Country and to Mankind:

I have thought proper, that as Day should be appointed, of general Humiliation before God, and Thanksgiving for this his merciful Goodness, imploring Forgiveness of Sins, a Continuation of his Divine Mercy, and his constant Aid to us, in the Defence of our Country's Liberties and Laws, without which the utmost Efforts of Man are nought, and direct therefore that be appointed for this holy Purpose.

Given on board the Euryalus, off Cape Trafalgar, 22d Oct. 1805.

(Signed) C. COLLINGWOOD.

To the respective Captains and Commanders.

N. B. The Fleet having been dispersed by a Gale of Wind, no Day has yet been able to be appointed for the above Purpose.

SIR, Euryalus, off Cadix, Oct. 24, 1805.

IN my Letter of the 22d I detailed to you, for the Information of my Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, the Proceedings of His Majesty's Squadron on the Day of the Action, and that preceding it, since which I have had a continued Series of Misfortunes, but they are of a Kind that human Prudence could not possibly provide against, or my Skill prevent.

On the 22d in the Morning, a strong southerly Wind blew, with squally Weather, which however did not prevent the Activity of the Officers and Seamen of such Ships as were manageable from getting hold of many of the Prizes (Thirteen or Fourteen), and towing them off to the Westward, where I ordered them to rendezvous round the Royal Sovereign, in Tow by the Neptune: but on the 23d, the Gale increased, and the Sea ran so high, that many of them broke the Tow Rope, and drifted far to Leeward, before they were got hold of again, and some of them taking Advantage in the dark and boisterous Night, got before the Wind, and have perhaps drifted upon the Shore and sunk; on the Afternoon of that Day the Remnant of the Combined Fleet, Ten Sail of Ships, who had not been much engaged, stood up to Leeward of my shattered and straggled Charge, as if meaning to attack them, which obliged me to collect a Force out of the least injured Ships, and form to Leeward for their Defence; all this retarded the Progress of the Hulks, and the bad Weather continuing, determined me to destroy all the Leeward most that could be cleared of the Men, considering that keeping Possession of the Ships was a Matter of little Consequence compared with the Chance of their falling again into the Hands of the Enemy; but even this was an arduous Task in the high Sea which was running. I hope, however, it has been accomplished to a considerable Extent; I entrusted it to skilful Officers, who would spare no Pains to execute what was possible. The Captains of the Prince and Neptune cleared the Trinidad and sunk her. Captain Hope, Bayntun, and Malcolm, who joined the Fleet this Moment from Gibraltar, had the Charge of destroying four others. The Redoubtable sunk after of the Swiftsure while in Tow. The Santa Anna, I have no doubt, is sunk, as her Side was almost entirely beat in; and such is the shattered Condition of the Whole of them, that unless the Weather moderates, I doubt whether I shall be able to carry a Ship of them into Port. I hope their Lordships will approve of what I (having only in consideration the Destruction of the Enemy's Fleet) have thought a Measure of absolute Necessity.

I have taken Admiral Villeneuve into this Ship; Vice-Admiral Don Aliva is dead. Whenever the Temper of the Weather will permit, and I can spare a Frigate (for there were only Four in the Action with the Fleet, Euryalus, Sirius, Phoebe, and Naiad; the Melpomene joined the 22d, and the Eurydice and Scout the 23d) I shall collect the other Flag-Officers, and send them to England with their Flags, (if they do not go to the Bottom,) to be laid at His Majesty's Feet.

There were Four Thousand Troops embarked, under the Command of General Coutamin, who was taken with Admiral Villeneuve in the Bucentaure.

I am, Sir, &c.

(Signed) C. COLLINGWOOD.

Printed by ANDREW STRAHAN, Printers Street, Gough Square.

[Price Sixpence.]

I understand the news of our Navy's great victory at Trafalgar was yet tempered by the tragic loss of Admiral Lord Nelson, in the execution of his duty, as indeed all England expected. As a nation mourned we on the 'Hood' were yet unaware of the victory as more pressing matters failed to ease my troubled mind as - two days later - fought to save our sinking vessel...

"Damage report Exec!" despite the pain of his wounds Captain Darcy struggled onto the deck of the battered and heavily listing *HMS 'Hood'*.

"We need to make port – and quickly", Kjsiala reported. "Like a Prussian gunboat - we leak everywhere!"

"Insufficient boats to take to", Commander Lowe also unfavourably reported in a tone that couldn't be overheard. "The pumps can't handle it".

"Ship ho!" the lookout then helpfully reported...

"You wished to see me, Sir?" Lydia haughtily entered the study.

"I see my daughters thrive under your instruction, Miss Bennett?" back at his home for a post-voyage visit Captain Hay remarked as he stared at the fire.

"Thank you, Sir", Lydia smiled her sweetest. "How long will you be returned from the sea this time?"

"I do not know", he mulled. "My new ship – the '*Neptune*' has recently been involved in an unfavourable action. There will have to be a board of enquiry".

"At least we are now safe from invasion?" his Governess queried. "Following Lord Nelson's great victory aboard the '*Victory*'? Are we not?"

"Indeed. No matter", staring at the dancing flames Matthew Hay pondered to fate of the lost *HMS 'Hood'*... "Will you dine with my daughters and I tonight, Miss Bennett? I sense they are now sufficiently... *tamed*?"

"I would be honoured, Sir", Lydia saw that – *at last* – she was moving a ladder-rung above the other servants at Westhanger Hall. "I will advise the girls how to dress formally".

"You have a suitable frock yourself?" he questioned. "With which to act as exemplar?"

"No Sir", Lydia answered truthfully. "Leastways, not *here*".

"Mrs Miggins!" the gruff captain summoned.

"Sir?" she dutifully arrived (no doubt from where she'd been covertly eavesdropping).

"The late Mrs Hay was about Miss Bennett's size. See if anything in store would fit her".

"Very good Sir", the old housekeeper smiled sinisterly. "This way, please *Governess*", she edged.

"Of course", Lydia felt it had suddenly all become somewhat *sinister*.
That the *hunter* had somehow become the *prey*...

"Damn and blast!" Commander Lowe reported. "A Frenchie!"

"Shot-up by the looks of her..." Kjsiala spotted.

"It's the '*Bucentaure*'!" Darcy discerned. "Damn and blast! They've more sail than we have! Stand by the repel boarders!" he ordered. "And summon all the Midshipmen to my cabin..."

*It was indeed a fell meeting for we band of brothers. But there was little time to brood upon events as -minutes later – we were obliged to fight a short but vicious boarding action. 'Hood' boarded by the dastardly French; their damaged 2nd rate the 'Bucentaure' superior to our crippled 3rd. My poor, dear, Captain Darcy! They had his ship - so he struck our colours to save his crew, with honour, for we had fought hard as His Majesty, the Admiralty, and all England would expect us to!
But my turmoil was not yet at an end...*

"My sword, Sir!" the boarding over Darcy offered the token of surrender.

"Zank yew, Captain", Jean- Luc Bardot took it with allalacrity – when – suddenly - there was a commotion.

"*C'est une fille!*" as the captives were led below... one of the French sailors realised 'Bob's' hidden identity - it being a truth, universally acknowledged, that they that inhabit the other side of *La Manche* are much more versed in such things.

"What?" Captain Darcy was surprised and aghast (though he had long suspected something not quite '*right*' about Bob Bennett). "In that case - unhand her – you croissant-ingesting blaggard!" despite his wounds he nevertheless rushed to his covert Midshipman's defence...

"*Dacord!*" the French Captain amused a hearty laugh to intervene – his men restraining the injured Darcy. "Take 'er down to my cabin. Madame Renault, *ma femme*, she will enjoy ananoza lady's companionship on our voyage, *n'est pas?* Your crew Captain?" he turned on Darcy? "We work togever we must to save zis ship and our lives? You will all be well-treated?"

"You will parole us, Sir?" Colin insisted.

"Yew 'ave my word, *Monsieur*".

"There are yet minor fires aboard my ship", Colin cautiously appraised.

"Noted. Maison! Take zer '*Hood*' under tow - and set to 'er what pumps we can spare!" Jean-Luc saw the night was already drawing in...

Unable to resist I was bundled below to the French captain's cabin. There – in the mess of a ship almost as shattered s my own dear 'Hood' - I found myself confronted by a fine lady, attired in the latest Parisian mode. Outnumbered, I realised she was accompanied by a brace of formidable looking maids...

"I am *Madam* Renault. And yew are?" the French captain's wife's strong Gascon accent permeated the air.

"I am Midshipman Bob..."

"*Non, non non*", she and her maids laughed. "'Ooo are yew *really*?"

"My real name is Elizabeth Bennett", the game up... 'Lizzie' was forced to admit. "*Spinster*. I disguised myself as a boy to run away to sea".

"*Dacord*", the Frenchwoman smiled. "I am Madame Clio Renault. Zese are my maids; Marie and Clare. Yaw *Capitaine*? Yew were 'is... *consort, n'est pas*?"

"No!" with great shock Elizabeth realised the dread *implication*. "Captain Darcy is a good and honourable man! He – and the crew – had no idea at all I was – *am* – a lady".

"Zese Englishmen zay are as stoopeed as zay say, no?" the maids giggled.

"Yaw disguise was good", Madame Clio appraised. "So, yew will tell us of all yaw adventures, *n'est pas*? To pass our time before – *I 'ope* – we make port..."

O

As dessert arrived... Captain Matthew Hay carefully brooded upon his growing daughters. Five years and they'd be of an age to 'come out' into 'Society' - and be married off to become someone else's financial drain...

"Daughters", he remarked. "Your manners are much improved. We have Miss Bennett to thank for that, I'm reckoning?"

"Indeed Papa", as the eldest Doris spoke up.

"Miss Bennett is most accomplished", Edna endorsed.

"Before your arrival, Miss Bennett, they didst know not which fork to use. You are turning them into ladies worthy of my family name".

"It is easy, Sir", Lydia simpered. "One simply works from the outside in".

But - as she spoke there was – *suddenly* – outside a huge commotion – and an ominous orange blaze upon the horizon...

"And e never suspected?" *Madame* Renault continued to amuse at Elizabeth's tale.

"No. And, in his solo presence, I was able to... *resist* my natural inclinations", Elizabeth felt somewhat relieved to at last be able to express to someone her true, repressed *emotions and desires*...

"What the devil's going on Truss?" rushing out Captain Hay demanded of his aged gamekeeper.

"Unexpectedly foul gust of wind blew Sir", the oldie was close to panic. "Buffeted the side of the stable – caused the wooden wall to crack. 'Poof!' over went the oil-lamp!"

"The horses!" following up Doris and Edna squealed their collective alarm. "Save our horses!" it was plain to see the fiery liquid contents had spilled - caught hold of the dry straw on the ground.

"Water! More water!" knowing the fear of fire at sea... Captain Hay demanded of his staff as the terrified equines inside the conflagrated wooden building neighed and whinnied their growing terror.

"They was tethered for the night!" Truss explained.

"Papa! Papa!" the girls entreated "*Save them!*"

"Damn your eyes – you useless barnacles!" seeing his servants were reluctant to enter the inferno... Captain Matthew Hay, RN, knew what needed to be done – and throwing away his coat boldly strode inside the flaming stable...

Skulking - hidden in the bowels on the crippled and taken '*Hood*'... it wasn't difficult for Midshipman Charles 'Charlie' Dickens to work out what the Frenchies were trying to do.

To save and capture the vessel as a prize of war – the blaggards!

And now? He and Tom Hardy had drawn the final straws to stay behind - but knowing Hardy had a sweetheart back home in England... Charlie had '*fixed it*'.

And now? And now he knew he must be the one to light the blue touchpaper - and *not* retire! Better for all this way too... Much better... For he truly *loved* Tom Hardy – and this was a far, far better thing he did now for all than he had ever done before – a way out for him from a life of personal torment and persecution...

"*Rechercher tous les incendies restants!*" Charlie heard the French search for fires – and knew it was now or never...

Seconds later three terrified horses came bolting out of the stable; a structure now burning beyond salvation.

"Hurrah for Papa!" Miss Edna acclaimed as the servants went to chase down and calm the frightened equines.

"But where is *he*?" Miss Doris, however, alarmed.

"Smoke!" having hastily studied science (in order to become a Governess), Lydia knew the danger. Not wishing to see her 'meal-ticket' inconveniently demise - she cast aside her loose shawl and - keeping low - dashed inside the flames...

The explosion was loud and deafening as – under tow – the wreck of the '*Hood*' suddenly exploded – the magazine detonating.

"Zut alors!" upon deck Captain Bardot exclaimed. "Bring me the enemy Captain – *now*!" he fought to quell his anger at losing such a valuable prize for *l'Empereur*...

Dead? *Here*? *Not* from fighting the King's enemies? Captain Matthew Hay, RN, opened his eyes to see an angel arrayed before him. Trying to focus he heard her speak...

"He's coming round", she declared.

"M... *Miss Bennett*?" Matthew confused as he identified the voice.

"Sir", Lydia responded. "We have sent for the Doctor. You have inhaled much damaging smoke".

"Aye. T'was the Governess what saved you, Sir", Mrs Miggins graciously conceded.

"It was but elementary", Lydia forced herself at least *try* to be modest. "From my studies I know that smoke and heat rises. Being small and keeping low I was able to reach you - and to drag you to safety".

"W... What?"

"You need to lose weight, Sir", Lydia now played her part to perfection. "As a mere maiden I found you hard to dislodge from the floor".

"I owe you my life, Governess", vaguely recalling the captain attempted to rise as he realised the truth of her words. "Yet I feel the rest of our repast is now somewhat *spoiled*..." he was nevertheless sanguine..

"Yaw doing, *Monsieur*?" Captain Bardot snarled angrily at his damaged and weakened prisoner.

"I warned you about the fires", his wounds weighing heavily... Colin Darcy explained to his captor – inside knowing the deep despair that one of his Midshipmen had made the ultimate sacrifice for the good of The Royal Navy.

"Zat you did", Bardot brooded – yet remained... *suspicious*...

"You and I are alike Sir", Colin proffered. "We know both our duty and our honour to the sovereigns we serve".

"Zat we do..." Jean-Luc now smiled to himself. "Our tables, as you say, could easily have been rotated, *non*? Yew will take a brandy with me, *Monsieur*?"

"I will Sir", Both captains knew it was going to be a long night on a crippled vessel...

O

The darkest hour is always before dawn. As he stared at the still smouldering ruins of the stable Captain Matthew Hay, RN, realised just how close he had come to death. Not the honourable death at sea against the King's enemies he courted in the line of duty... but death from the vanity of saving mere animals onto which his offspring a bestowed unreasoning affection.

Was it, perhaps, a message from the Lord Himself? A lesson to *learn*?

"Sir?" he suddenly heard a voice approach. "Have you not taken the doctor's draught as instructed?"

"Miss Bennett!" Matthew saw the Governess was clad in but a nightshift. "Yes, er, I have. Though I dare say rum would be far more... efficacious..." he gulped as – by the light of her lantern – he noted the contours of her bosom and comely feminine frame – against his will and better judgement felt his *bête à l'intérieur* suddenly *awaken* – his nautical began to *shake*...

"You are cold, Sir?" sensing victory in sight Lydia advanced towards him until but inches apart – their breath coming in steam from their mouths in the chill.

"I must... make a will", Matthew steeled himself. "Prepare for my daughters' future... *My future*..."

"Is not – Sir – the *present* also to be lived in?", Lydia remarked. "Is it not called the 'present' because it is actually a *gift*?" she looked at her employer with her sultriest of eyes as she took a step closer *yet*...

"*Madam*... Governess... Lydia... I..."

"God works in mysterious ways – his wonders to perform", Lydia quoted scripture as she deftly reach to boldly pull at the fastenings of his shirt - rip at his bodice...

And it was *then* he finally kissed her...

Chapter Thirteen

We were landed at Brest and – as promised - the 'Hood's' crew – including Captain Darcy - were paroled; to be returned to England; I to my (no doubt) relieved parents, the 'Bucentaure' far too damaged to be of use to the French for anything other than timbers and spares...

"You look most agreeable in a dress, Miss Bennett", on the gallic quayside Colin Darcy was truly astonished by his (former) 'midshipman's' dramatic transformation.

"*Dacord*", Lizzie's new mentor – Madame Clio – and her 'husband' - Captain Bardot both amused. "I trust yew will return 'er to her family safely', *mon capitaine?*"

"Of course", dragging his surprised eyes away from Elizabeth's comely visage, Colin readily agreed.

"*Bien*. Your new adventure begins, *n'est pas?*" Clio locked eyes with her *protegee* in amusement of the dark secrets they had shared, as friends. "Yew can... *peut etre*, brush up 'is cello in London, *n'est pas..?*"

"Yew blew up zer 'Hood', didn't yew?" Jean-Luc had meanwhile taken Colin aside – "*Non!*" he saw the Englishman's mouth flap. "Do not answer. I would 'ave done the same in yaw position..."

O

Marooned, they were taken to an old fort; a building that appeared to have been re-purposed by the indigenous natives. There – still in chains – they were led into a kind of throne-room.

"*Kneel!*" the chief guard demanded – in English! Reluctantly – and out of options - Captain George Wickham obliged – gestured his fellow survivors do the same.

"You *are?*" the African queen demanded ('again, in English').

"I am, *Lady*, Captain George Wickham", he endeavoured to deploy his famous charm. "Of the trading vessel, '*The Black Pig*'. A storm wrecked us on your shores".

"Slavers!" her minister openly accused.

"Not so!" Wickham denied. "We are British! We have abandoned the slave trade years ago".

"Only *four*", Queen Uhura was pithy. "And - shipwrecked as you are – you have nothing of value to *trade*".

"Save, *Lady*, our seafaring skills", George smiled and, though still kneeling, bowed as low as he could.

At which point a messenger rushed in – and jabbered in the African tongue.

Whatever it was it didn't sound good as Wickham and his fellow survivors were led away to the old trading fort's dark dungeon...

O

It was from the captain of the packet home we learnt the mixed truth of the war – of Lord Nelson's great victory at Trafalgar – that the Corsican ogre had previously long departed the Channel coast to rapidly fall upon our Austrian and Russian allies in the Battle of 'Austerlitz...

"What will you do, Kłśiala?" Glendower concerned for his Austrian chum.
"Now your Emperor seeks peace with Napoleon?"

"I will ask to remain in England", he resolved. "As naval attaché. Continue the fight that way? Austria – we will rise again!"

"Has my sister Petra, perhaps, influenced your decision?" Glen smiled.

Joseph smiled. "I cannot keep a secret from you, can I, *mien kamarad*? That is a future matter for your father... and for my Emperor to be considering, no?"

"Hope!" George Wickham screwed his eyes up to identify the vessel in the harbour. "It's a British frigate. Can't make out the name tough..."

"Musta be parta the West African Patrol", Bates suggested.

"There to stop the likes of us", ex-RN himself George knew well the navy's new role in suppressing the African slave trade. "Well, hopefully we can blagg our way outta here..."

"Ahem..." seeing 'Bob' was alone on the prow of the ship – silliouetted as nigh began to fall - Colin nervously ventured to approach her. "Miss Bennett? I trust I am not intruding?"

"Not at all", Elizabeth turned a smiled. "You can call me 'Bob' if you wish?" she then openly joked their neo-farcical situation.

"Ah..." Colin smiled too. "Twice, it seems, *Miss Bennett*, I owe you my life. The wreck of the first '*Hood*'. For balming and soothing my wounds during the second '*Hood's*' penultimate action?"

"I merely did what any red-blooded Englishwoman would do in my situation", Elizabeth modestly smiled back.

"Yet because of all *that*, Miss Bennett... because of *all* we have together *endured*... you *must* permit me to now reveal and express how most fervently and ardently I admire and revere your good self. May I be so bold as to request that – with your father's permission of course – that once we return to England - I may be permitted to call upon you?"

"Yes", Elizabeth smiled her heart's desire. "I would very much like that. You know", she added, "I once kissed you. In the cockpit?"

"Then I was right to believe my guardian angel had indeed visited", Colin Darcy smiled as – together - they relived their earlier *encounter de coeur*...

Once again they were led into the African Queen's throne room. George noticed the guards were this time better armed, with British muskets. As he was thrown to the floor in supplication... he *thought* he recognised the naval officer now in conversation with Queen Uhura.

"Stand!" breaking off the conversation she ordered her captives.

"State your name?" the naval officer addressed Wickham.

"I am Captain George Wickham", he deftly bowed with all his relieved charm. "Of the trading vessel, *'The Black Pig'*. A storm wrecked us on these shores. We are free-born Englishman, like you, Sir".

The captain smiled. "I am, Sir, not English, but Irish. And you – Sir - have a short memory".

"Do I?" Wickham alarmed.

"We've met before, Sir", the officer fought to control his wrath. "I am Captain Patrick McGinty of His Majesty's frigate *'Titan'*. Previously of *HMS 'Queen Charlotte'*. And, you, Sir... you are a traitor and turncoat – last known in the service of the French!" he fought to quell his righteous anger for the many wrongs done.

"Not slavers?" Queen Uhura amused.

"No Ma'am. Worse - *pirates*! I request their extradition. Back to Britain to face trial and execution for their crimes - should they be proven as guilty as they undoubtedly are".

"Thank you, Captain", the African potentate considered. "The men you may take – as a gesture of good faith. The captain, however, will *remain*", Nunata Uhura had a mind to find about if it was 'true' what they said about 'white boys'... before handing the pirate over to her people for 'justice'...

'As for you and Captain Darcy?', I hear you ask?

Dear reader - I married him!

His cello playing remains truly dreadful but – relax with your rum ration - there is still much music made in our marriage. One day, peradventure, naturally resourceful ladies such as myself will no longer be debarred from service, at sea, for King and country.

And the others? My sister, Lydia, wed Captain Hay... and is, I hear, now much tamed by her... experience... Captain Kjsiala did indeed become Austrian naval attaché, and remains in London to work for his Emperor's revenge upon the Corsican ogre. He, as I understand it, a most frequently caller upon the Honourable Miss Petra Lowe...

The court of enquiry into the battle exonerated Admiral the Viscount Lowe, though I understand his health no longer permits he command at sea. Though we mourned the loss – in the line of duty - of our fellow Midshipman Charles Dickens... Tom Hardy and his bride Florrie the publican's daughter have sworn to name their first son in his honour; for they too have wed. Commander Glendower Lowe is now 'Captain Lowe' of His Majesty's frigate 'Cerberus'. My rival (such as she was), Olivia Wentworth, is abroad in society in Bath, so I warn you naval officers with prize money there...

TO BE CONTINUED... ????

The Regency Novels Of Catherine Meadows

'Pride & Sensibility' (currently out of print)

SET: 1797-1798

Serena Middleton is a shy, thoughtful, warm-hearted and vivacious sixteen year-old doing 'the season' in Bath. She accepts a proposal of marriage from handsome, young, dashing naval officer, Lt. Henry Monkfish. He is clever, confident, and ambitious, but poor, and has no particular family connections to recommend him. Yet in the Royal Navy – with prize money – becoming a self-made man is not impossible.

Sadly Sir Jasper, Serena's vain, haughty, imperious and socially conscious older brother - and her equally self-involved older sister Philippa - reject her choice, maintaining Monkfish no match for a Middleton of Downhanger Abbey. The oldest sister has to be married first, does she not? Serena's older 'companion' and mentor, widow Mrs Bracknell – also her brother's scheming mistress – manipulates Serena to break the engagement, for she, too, feels it was an imprudent match for one so young. They are the only ones who know about this short *obligation*, as the whole thing was hushed up so as not to diminish Philippa and Serena's chances of advantageous marriage.

The Middleton family is also in financial trouble, losing money in their northern cotton mills because of the French occupation of Egypt. Needing to reduce expenses, the family estate, Downhanger Abbey, will be let, and the family will rent in Bath until finances improve. Sir Jasper and Philippa look forward to the move. Serena is less sure she will enjoy Bath, but is forced to go, along with the increasingly sinister Mrs Bracknell.

As the novel ends, Mrs Bracknell dies in a mysterious carriage accident, upsetting Sir Jasper. Philippa 'marries well' to Lord Greystoke, and Sir Jasper becomes a philanderer, intent of marrying his younger sister off to the highest bidder. Serena, meanwhile, holds a dread secret concerning Mrs Bracknell's demise, a knife, and a cut brake reign...

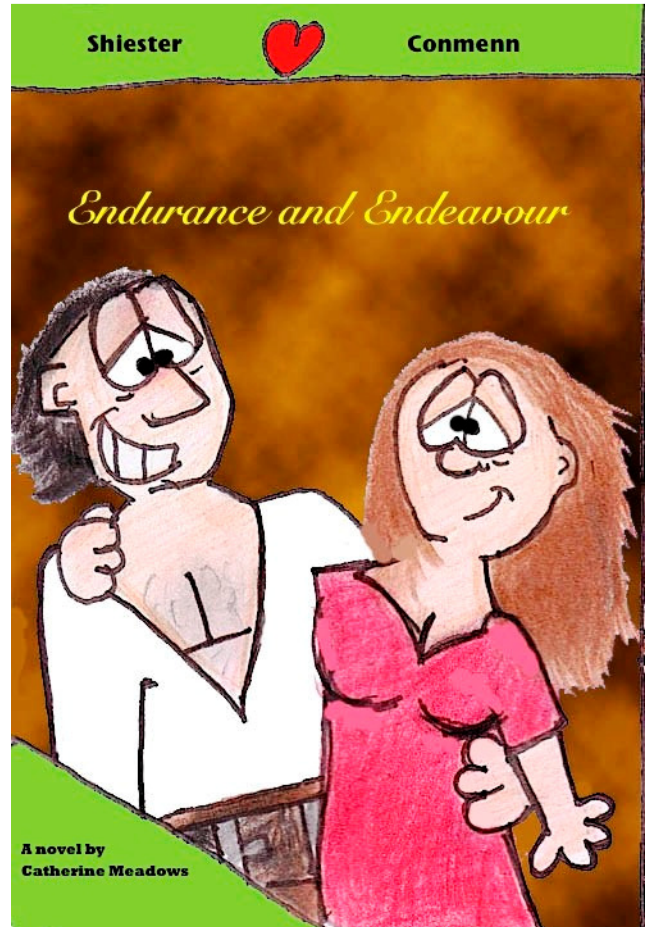
'*Endurance & Endeavour*' (currently Out of print)
SET: 1804-6.

Escaping the hell of Napoleon's 'European Union', emigre *mademoiselle* and lady's *companion* Marianne Renault discovers not all English gentlemen in Regency Bath behave as such. Employed by Sir Jasper Middleton as his sister Serena's new *companion*, she fends off the improper advances of her employer, who considers her – being a poor foreigner – a suitable candidate as mistress. At sea, meanwhile, a series of furious naval engagements take place...

Dismissed upon a pretext – but really for refusing evil Sir Jasper's attentions – things look bleak for Marianne until Lady Julia Topham, younger half-sister of Admiral Sir Frederick Topham, suspects the truth and befriends her, taking her into her employ as *companion*.

It is through Admiral Topham Marianne meets the now Captain Henry Monkfish of *HMS 'Endurance'*, returned from Trafalgar wealthy with prize money. She must reconcile her forbidden attraction for him with his cruel defeat and capture of her (now paroled) Bonapartist brother, Francois, commander of '*Le Endeavour*' – also too her loyalty to her patroness, Lady Julia, a younger maiden sister out to inherit her brother's wealth and wishing to find a suitable suitor. For Lady Julia has also fallen in love with the dashing Captain Monkfish, her half-brother's protégé...

In this Bath-based maelstrom Serena Middleton endeavours to re-kindle her romance with Captain Monkfish, but is publicly rebuffed. Marianne sacrifices her love for Monkfish for her faithful friend Lady Julia - and the novel ends with she and Monkfish married. Unable to reconcile her permanently thwarted feelings Marianne accepting a position as *companion* to the newly-arrived



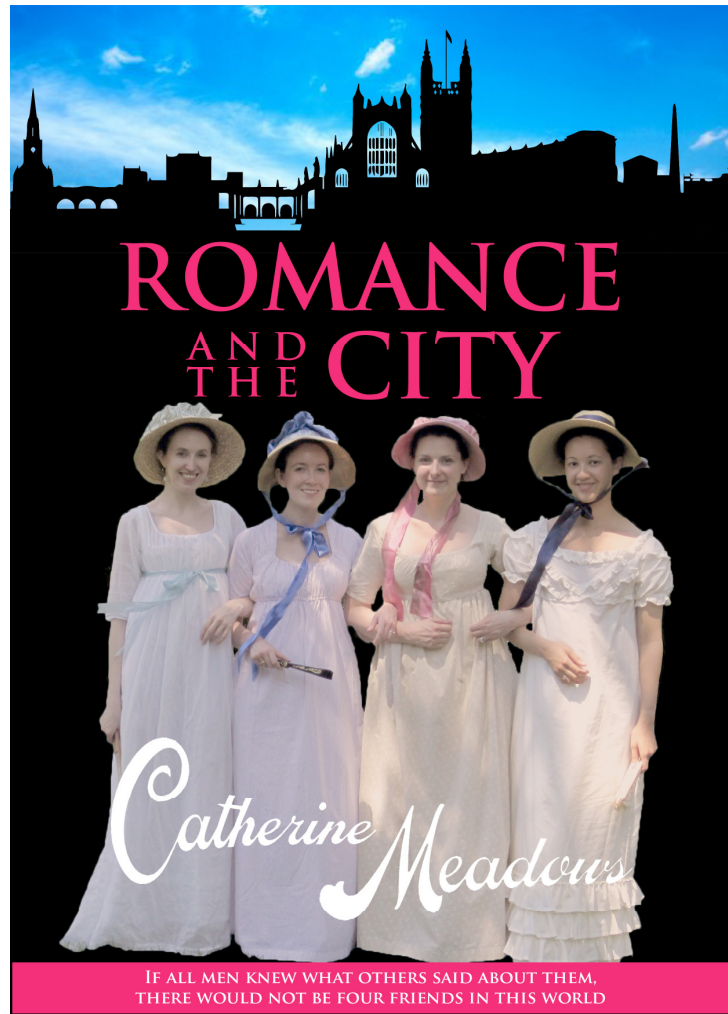
Austen sisters, the hapless Serena throwing herself into the weir from Pulteney Bridge, in despair at the love (and prize money) she has lost...

'Romance & The City'

SET: 1806.

Already card-based role-playing game – novel in print.

It is mid-morning in the Austen household, in Bath's relatively unfashionable Sydney Place. Calamity! The precocious and impulsive Miss Virginia 'Gin' Austen has gone missing a few minutes before. She is abroad in the 'sin city'! The cause of her disappearance has yet to be determined but, being considerably more 'flighty' than elder sisters Jane and Cassandra, it is feared she has *rendezvoused* with an unsuitable suitor. 'Gin by name, Gin my nature'?



Gin has recently been seen in the - barely chaperoned - company of several gentlemen – some far more disreputable than others – those who take a scarlet or naval coat for personal advantage, rather than for duty to King or country; or use their wealth, charm and position in order to seek a young woman for a mere *dalliance*, or for obtaining her fortune; by holding her reputation up to possible ridicule. One is even a French republican!

The object of the game is to safely retrieve 'Gin' – *within ten turns* - for with the gathering of night 'her tale' will be all across the city - her reputation – and the marriage prospects of her and her elder sisters – forever ruined. Players also make suitable 'matches' to gain extra points... The novel will tell but one version of events...