

# Buoyz 'N Da 'Hood' – 'Fire & Flood'



by

Catherine Meadows

## Chapter One

'What a silly place to leave a toolbox!'

'I say! Be careful with that blowtorch - there's a good chap!'

The yard rang to the happy cries of the shipwrights as they went about their business of completing the replacement *HMS 'Hood'*.

Destined to skipper the Royal Navy's new Type 26 Frigate, Captain Elizabeth Bennett climbed on the half-completed bridge...

"Ah! Bennett!" she was greeted by gruff old sea-dog, Admiral Sir Peter Lowe. "Let me introduce your new Number One – Commander Colin Darcy!"

"We've met", in seconds Elizabeth's mind had run a full gambit of positive - and negative - emotions.

"Indeed", she could see Colin react likewise in similarly shocked surprise. "Captain Bennett and I have been prodigiously acquainted since childhood, Sir", he explained. "Served together, even..."

"Blistering barnacles!" the Admiral laughed. "Small world to be sure! Admiralty recruitment tell me *nothing!* As soon as '*Hood's* completed - it's sea trials. Then escort for the next '*Queen Elizabeth*' class carrier Group, showing the flag around the globe".

"Sir", Elizabeth and Colin agreed - knew where their duty lay to King and country... if not precisely which adventures might lie ahead as they sought to put their unfortunately collided past behind them...

oOo

*I float, serenely, tied to the jetty in Portsmouth. Does an angel contemplate my fate? I hear from buzz my replacement will soon be completed, and will take my name and role. What is then to become of me? Scrap? Sold and renamed? A museum curio? I hear them debate...*

*It has been but two short weeks since my decommissioning. I have already fundamentally changed. My stores have gone, my crew have gone, save for a select few; an unhappy few; a band of brothers and sisters who keep me on life support. Palliative care? I know not...*

*And now she is back again to probe me like a laboratory specimen...*

She was back. Again! The Admiral's niece, confound her...

"I am I disturbing you, Commander?"

"I'm already disturbed, Miss", Commander Christopher Macalpine, RN, joked.

"Please", the woman smiled her sweetest, "do call me 'Cassandra'".

“Och!” Wouldn’t be right, Miss”, Chris protested. “You’re a civilian - and I’m on duty...” ever since novelist and historian, Cassandra Winters, had arrived on board to research her ‘history of ships called *'Hood'*... he’d been unable to focus on keeping the retired Type 23 ship-shape and Bristol fashion, ready for (probable) sale. Something about the civvie ‘Jenny’ deeply unsettled his normally calm Caledonian equilibrium...

“Whatevs...” Cassie rolled her eyes. “Commander Macalpine”, she replied in form. “How will you properly maintain the engines if the fuel has been removed?”

“It can be added again if needed”, Chris explained. “And we’ll oil everything until the old girl’s fate is decided...”

As if on cue the ship shuddered – the normal sounds of a vessel at rest.

Yet the ‘civvie’ looked alarmed. “All normal, Miss”, Chris let her off the hook as he continued to inspect the piping. “Ships are like people. They creak – ‘especially when they’re old”.

“The previous HMS *'Hood'*?” she then questioned.

“The Falklands one?”

“Yes. Is it true items from it were transferred here?”

“Aye Miss. It’s an old naval tradition. Likely the crew whipped most stuff as souvenirs too”.

“Will you?” she teased.

Christopher looked at her sideways... but deigned to answer...

oOo

“With respect, Minister”, the First Sea Lord was pithy, “we have no ships to spare. Like before the Falklands conflict... political decisions to cut-back have left us short of suitable vessels. Given the Ukraine situation we’ve had to deploy more to watch the Russians”.

“Well that won’t do”, the Minister refused to accept responsibility for his party’s bad decisions. “The High Commissioner in San Miguel is quite clear. The Baratines are sabre-rattling. The least we can do is send a gunboat to protect the colony”, he spoke anachronistically of the situation in the Commonwealth enclave in South America. “The PM expects action. There’s an election coming up”.

“Umh”, the Sea Lord’s aide cleared her throat.

“Yes Swift?” he indicated she could speak.

“Sir, *'Hood'* could still be reactivated? Only just decommissioned?”

Had they 'got' the pen-pusher? "Excellent idea Swift. But *that* would require additional funding. *Minister?*" he then addressed with an amused smile...

oOo

*Suddenly – out of nowhere - all was again activity? Was I to be spared? Reprieved? Brought back from the dead? It seemed something like it...*

"Status report!" Captain Elizabeth Bennet strode onto her bridge as daylight broke over Portsmouth's Spinnaker Tower.

"Everything taken off if the last two weeks is being put back. Where *possible*", Commander Colin Darcy amused. "The crew are being recalled. Commander Macalpine has done a good job keeping the old girl ticking-over".

Elizabeth nodded she understood. "I've requested – and he's agreed – he'll stay on as chief engineer".

"Ma'am?" Colin queried.

"Henderson's been posted to the '*Lannister*'", Elizabeth scorned her great rival, Captain Georgina Wickham. "We'll integrate the newbies on the voyage down to San Miguel", she indicated he follow her into her day-cabin.

"*Problem Captain?*" Colin sensed the tension in his once and former CO's voice.

"Hopefully *not*. Civvie reporter on board by the name of Cassandra Winters..."

"*What?*"

"She's – apparently – writing a book on ships called '*Hood*'. Press department think this is a good opportunity". Then Elizabeth inhaled. "She's also Admiral Lowe's niece..."

"Blistering barnacles", Colin aped their Admiral's traditional exclamation.

"Indeed... She'll have your cabin. You can mess with the other senior officers".

"Of course", Colin stoically accepted his lot.

"We sail in twelve hours", Elizabeth ordered. "First stop Gib. For additional stores and personnel. Make it so, Number One".

"Aye aye Captain..." Colin set about his duties with all due alacrity...

oOo

*Back to life, back to reality? It was wonderful to feel the throb of my engines again as we made to clear Portsmouth harbour, civilians on the quay waving farewell to their loved ones...*

"Any one seeing you off, Commander?" Cassie made her way towards the one officer on the 'Hood' she knew well.

"No Miss", Chris Macalpine grinned back. "You?"

"No attachments for this spinster writer", she teased a ambiguous reply.

"Tell me, Commander? Will we be permitted a run ashore in Gibraltar?"

"That'll be up to the Captain", he shrugged.

"The press are making a big deal of our deployment to San Miguel?"

"'Loose lips sink ships'", Chris knew the Baratine airforce and fleet to be (relatively) formidable. "'England expects every man will do his duty'", he then quoted Nelson.

"And every woman", Cassie amused. "After all, *Commander*, this is the twenty-first century..."

"Left hand down a bit", upon the bridge Colin directed Sub-Lieutenant Phillips at the helm. "Harbour entrance cleared!" he then informed the captain as the ship buoyed into deep water.

"Excellent", Elizabeth approved the way her scratch crew seemed to be already 'gelling'. "Full ahead!" she then ordered. "Let's give the old girl back her sea-legs".

"Aye, aye Captain!" Colin responded. "Full ahead Mr Phillips! Maximum warp!" he then habitually joked. "Set course for Gibraltar!"

"Aye aye Sir..."

*It was so good to be back – the high seas back beneath me, the throb of my engines as we crashed the waves and headed south to warmer climes – to a brand-new adventure – once again the boys and girls of da 'Hood'...  
But would it prove to be my last? My final hurrah...*

## **Chapter Two**

Commander Nicholas Henderson took a taxi from the airport to his new posting on *HMS 'Lannister'*, currently docked at Mina Salman Port, Juffair, Manama, in Bahrain.

"Permission to come aboard!" he mounted the gangplank.

“Granted”, First Officer Commander Vader led onwards to the Captain’s day-room; where - sat at her desk with her ‘special coffee’ – was Captain Georgina Wickham.

“Chief Engineer Henderson reporting Ma’am!” Nick saluted.

“At ease”, his new skipper gestured. “You’ll find I run a tight ship here. Not like the ‘Hood’...”

“Ma’am”, Nick was careful to say something... but nothing at all.

“Operation prosperity Guardian”, the Captain gestured. “Have your department ready to sail in six hours. We’re to patrol the strait of Bab el-Mandeb Strait. Dismissed!”

oOo

*I never thought to see Gibraltar again. Tied-up at the dockyard it was nice to be cared for again...*

The pub on Gibraltar’s Main Street was especially busy that Saturday night. If he felt disquiet about having to ‘babysit’ the Sassenach reporter... Chris Macalpine tried not to let it show as he ordered at the bar.

“So Commander...” slightly tiddly as she was Cassandra asked in a loud voice. “When’s the rest of the Task Force joining the ‘Hood’?”

“You’ve had too much, Miss Winters” - flustered, paying for the drinks he’d now never imbibe - Chris quickly let the indiscreet civilian woman out of the bar and back to the ship...

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“How did it go?” Captain Bennett sighed as she entered her day-room.

“Very well, Skipper”, Chris exhaled a sigh. “Miss Winters here...”

“...please call me ‘Cassie’...”

“...I’m on duty, Miss”, he continued, not missing a beat. “Miss Winters here is an accomplished actress. I’m sure the bar heard. Spies or otherwise... it’ll be certain to be all over social media and the news soonish”.

“Let’s hope it makes the Baratines think twice...” Elizabeth mused upon her *ruse de guerre*. “Thank you for your assistance, Miss Winters”, she then raised a rare smile at Cassie.

“All grist to this novelist’s mill”, Cassie flicked her hair and smiled back. “Commander Macalpine was also most convincing in his role as, ‘grumpy naval officer lumbered with escorting a irritating civilian’”.

“Please don’t *tease* my officers when they’re on duty”, the Captain intervened. “It smacks of over-familiarity...”

“Apologies...” Cassie realised she’d over-stepped the line.

“Excuse me Captain”, Commander Darcy now entered and knocked. “Message from the Admiralty. As soon as the crew are recalled were to make full speed for San Miguel. The tanker *RFA 'West Moors'* will RAS<sup>1</sup> us mid-Atlantic. The Baratines have been gobbing-off at the UN...”

“We sail at dawn”, Elizabeth ordered. “Miss Winters, a word please...” she added as the officers departed...

oOo

Commander David ‘Darth’ Vader of *HMS 'Lannister'* was concerned. With the current crisis in the Middle East bubbling (‘when *wasn't* there one?') the Irinistanis we’re being even more bellicose than usual. At least it kept ‘*Lannister'* being recalled for scrapping... but they *might* just figure she was a better target than tangling with the Yanks.

Still, the new chap Henderson seemed to know his job...

oOo

*Once again I felt the open sea flex beneath my keel as I headed south, my crew all bustle and anticipation. Yet I also sensed something was wrong...*

“It’s an echo alright. A sub”, Lieutenant Hay confirmed the sonar report. “I reckon ‘cos we’re doing full speed they don’t think we can pick ‘em up”.

“That suggests older technology?” Colin suggested. “The Baratines have a couple of older subs?”

“Thank you Number One...” Elizabeth mused.

“Action Stations, Captain?”

“No...” Elizabeth shook her head. “Let’s not let them know we know. But get the crew to remain alert”.

“Yellow it is”, Colin confirmed with a grin... his fondness for TV sci-fi idiom something he knew his skipper didn’t share...

“Target in sight”, Lieutenant Gonzales confirmed. “I have a firing solution”, he then added a suggestion.

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<sup>1</sup> RAS – ‘Replenishment At Sea’ (*Ed.*)

“They are at full speed”, Captain Sanchez rubbed his beard. “This suggests a tanker rendezvous... We will catch them then. No firing until we receive orders that hostilities have begun, clear?”

“Si!” the Lieutenant confirmed he understood the instruction...

#### SCENARIO

HMS *'Hood'* will rendezvous mid-Atlantic with RFA *'West Moors'*. The 'unknown' submarine will then attack...

#### SCENARIO

HMS *'Lannister'* will have to fend off an attack by 'unknown' attack boats in the 'Prosperity Guardian' operation in the Red Sea

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...

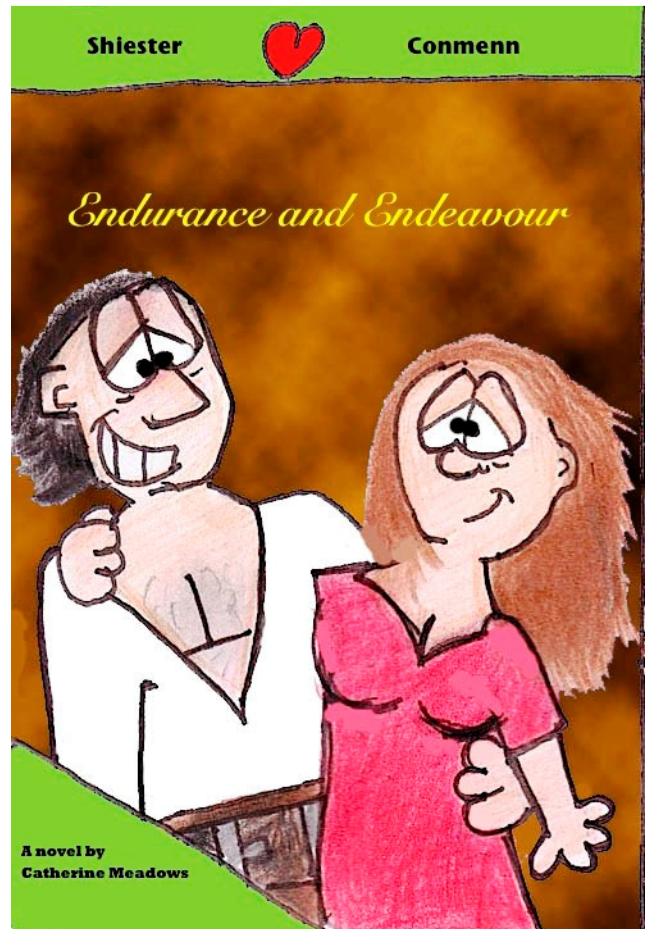
'*Endurance & Endeavour*' (currently  
Out of print)  
SET: 1804-6.

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



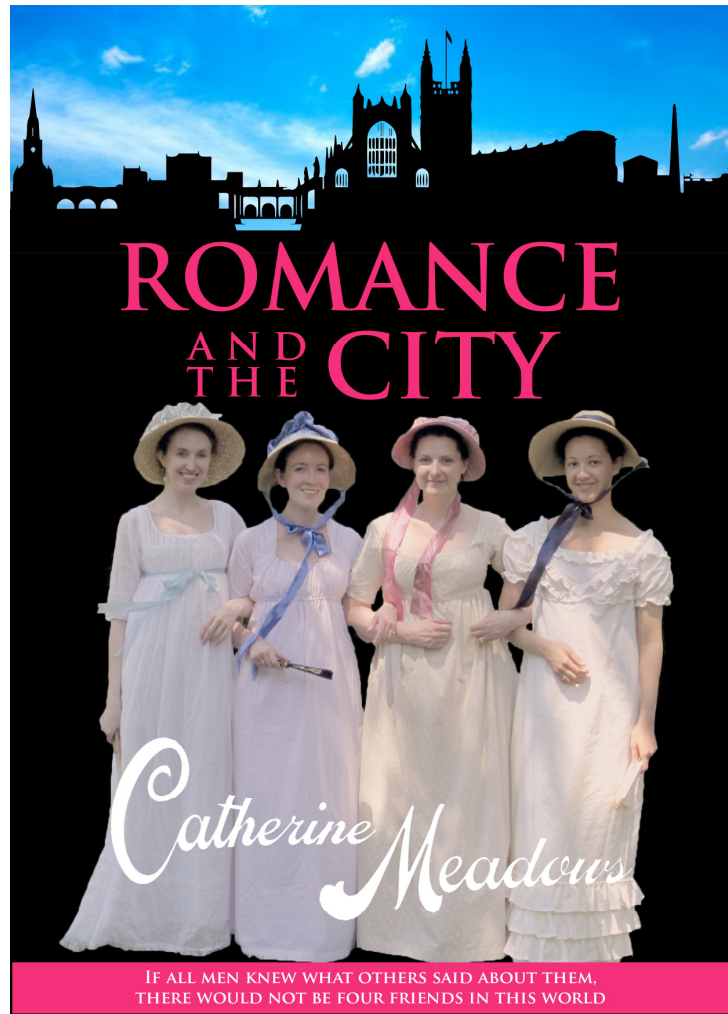
Austen sisters, the hapless Serena throwing herself into the weir from Pulteney Bridge, in despair at the love (and prize money) she has lost...

'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...