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To Love and to Cherish

Written by Lyn Andrews

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Chapter One



Liverpool, 1925

‘WILL THE PAIR OF you try and look as if you’re delighted that your da is home at last! He’s been away for the best part of a year!’ Sal Jenkins urged her two daughters while adjusting the fox fur that was draped around her neck and shoulders. All three stood with the small crowd of wives, mothers and girlfriends of the crew of the SS *Amazonia*, which had just docked. It wasn’t a very big ship; in fact it was tiny compared to the huge passenger liners of both the Cunard and Canadian Pacific Lines, but then ships as big as those could never have sailed up the Amazon. Sal knew from experience that its passenger accommodation was equally as luxurious as that of the big liners. Not that

she had ever sailed on the *Amazonia*, but as the wife of its Chief Steward she had been welcomed aboard many times.

‘Mam, why did we have to get here this early? You know it takes them ages to get tied up and clear the Customs formalities and then get a gangway down and it’s not as if we have to wait until the crew comes ashore. We’re always allowed on board. We could have stayed at home for at least another hour,’ Gloria, Sal’s eldest daughter complained. At sixteen Gloria was the beauty of the family: a tall, willowy girl with thick, dark hair cut in a fashionable bob and large brown eyes fringed with lashes that did not need the aid of Vaseline to make them curl. It was a dank, miserable November day and the wind coming down the Mersey estuary was freezing. Even though she had on her best royal blue wool coat and matching cloche hat over a knitted long-line jumper and pleated skirt she was already shivering.

Sal ignored her complaints. Harry’s arrival home after a nine-month voyage was the highlight in her year, an occasion to get dressed up to the nines and come down here to be admired and envied by most of the waiting crowd as she and her daughters were escorted aboard to greet Harry while everyone else had to stand and wait for their menfolk to come ashore. And there was always plenty of money when he got paid off too. Of course he left her a generous allotment,

which meant they didn't go short for the nine months he was away at sea, but he was always over generous while he was home and he always brought gifts too.

She considered herself to still be an attractive woman even though she was nearing forty, which was considered middle-aged. She was tall also, and she had kept her figure; her reddish-brown hair was thankfully devoid of any encroaching strands of grey. She took care of her complexion too, although she wore little make-up – just a faint dusting of powder, a touch of rouge and of course lipstick. She wore a mustard-coloured coat with a deep shawl collar and wide cuffs, which was the latest fashion, and a dark green cloche hat with a green and mustard striped ribbon bow attached to one side. She had matching gloves and shoes and her real crocodile handbag, which Harry had brought home for her last year, and of course her treasured fox fur. She knew she looked smart and elegant, which had been her objective; after all Harry had a very good position and she always made sure that both she and her girls didn't let him down, at least in the matter of appearances.

She tutted impatiently, leaning forward to tweak the collar of Betty's coat into place. Her younger daughter was a bit of a harum scarum, unlike Gloria, and always managed to look untidy.

Betty frowned mutinously at her mother. She was a

small plump girl of fourteen with Sal's blue eyes and reddish-brown hair and she hated having to dress up like this. Her hair, cut in a similar style to Gloria's, had a natural wave and would never lie flat and smooth like her sister's, and her small pink and brown hat felt tight and uncomfortable. It matched the pink and brown checked coat she wore but she would have felt more at ease in her navy gabardine school coat. She also hated the fact that everyone was staring at them, a couple of girls of her own age with ill-concealed envy. Neither did she think it very fair that they could just waltz on board while all these other people had to wait on the dockside in the freezing cold. She couldn't understand either her mother or Gloria's attitude. Her da was a member of the crew like everyone else. True, he was Chief Steward, but he wasn't the Captain or the doctor for heaven's sake, and they didn't live in a big house in a smart part of the city. They lived in a rented semi in Aintree near the Blue Anchor pub. It was a great deal nicer than many parts of Liverpool but it wasn't what you would call 'posh'. She pushed her hands deeper into the pockets of her coat. At least she agreed with her sister about getting down here so early. By the time they finally did get on board they'd be frozen stiff; she could hardly feel her feet now.

Sal checked her watch, hoping they wouldn't have much longer to wait. It was a thoroughly miserable

morning and they'd been up since six. Betty had done nothing but complain, saying she would have preferred to go to school, but Sal had refused to listen. She'd sent in a note to the headmistress earlier in the week, explaining the position, so there would be no concern over her absence. It was one day in a year, she had reiterated, a big occasion, so Betty could stop moaning and get a good wash and put on her best clothes. She'd had no such complaints from Gloria, who was happy to be leaving school in a few weeks' time. She had already had an interview for a job as a junior clerk in the offices of the Inland Revenue and was very hopeful of being taken on. Sal smiled to herself. The fact that Gloria had obtained an interview at all was entirely due to the fact that Richard Mostyn, Harry's sister's husband, was a member of the Masonic Brethren and had used his influence. Richard had his own business and was very successful.

'Well, thank goodness for that! It looks as if it won't be long now, Mam. They appear to be getting the gangway sorted out,' Gloria announced and they all watched as the gangway was manoeuvred into place.

'Customs will be first aboard but they usually don't take long,' Sal said thankfully, pulling her hat further down over her ears, which were starting to tingle with the cold.

'I shouldn't think there would be much of a problem

with the stuff they carry,' Betty remarked flatly. She couldn't see that sides of frozen beef or planks of mahogany would excite much interest in Customs.

'They have to check all the documents, you know that,' Sal reminded her, thinking that a hot cup of tea would be very welcome indeed.

It was almost another half an hour before there was any sign of the officials leaving and everyone was chilled to the bone. Betty's nose had started to run and she was sniffing audibly.

'For heaven's sake, where's your handkerchief?' Sal snapped.

'I forgot it,' came the sullen reply, accompanied by another sniff.

Gloria delved into her handbag. 'Here, use mine and stop making a show of yourself.'

'And us!' Sal added tartly, then, catching sight of a deck steward coming quickly down the gangway and beckoning to them, she smiled broadly. 'Right. Come along, the pair of you, and for the love of God put a smile on your faces.'

The two girls glanced at each other; Gloria shrugged and then smiled obligingly.

When she stepped aboard Sal sighed. The ship was so warm that she felt better already. She knew the way well enough, she thought as her feet sank into the deep pile of the carpet, but she dutifully followed the

steward. The walls of the companionway were lined with beautifully polished woods and then it opened out into a small circular lobby where carved and gilded tables and chairs were tastefully placed and firmly secured. On the tables were Wedgwood urns and vases, firmly stuck to plinths. Beyond this was a very elegantly furnished lounge, again panelled in polished woods with oil paintings of the ships of the Porto-Brasilia Line hanging on the walls; a large chandelier was suspended from the ceiling.

It wasn't at first noticeable but on closer inspection it was possible to see that the blue and gold brocade-covered chairs and sofas and the highly polished inlaid tables were all firmly anchored to the deck. The *Amazonia* sailed from Liverpool to Lisbon, crossing the notorious Bay of Biscay, then on to Madeira and the Canary Islands and finally across the treacherous Atlantic Ocean to South America before sailing one thousand miles up the River Amazon to complete the voyage at Manaus, the city in the heart of the jungle. Sal smiled to herself as she noticed that one of the tables was set with white bone-china cups and saucers and plates banded with gold, silver cutlery and thick white damask napkins. A solid silver sugar basin and milk jug were also set out. She knew they were solid silver and not merely plated for she had just such a set at home; Harry had brought them, informing her that one set wouldn't be missed.

The two girls had followed in silence; they had been aboard many times and were used to the opulence. Their father's working life was spent in far grander surroundings than the rented semi in Aintree. They were never taken to his cabin-cum-office, although their mother had visited it. She had told them it was very comfortable and neat but not really big enough to entertain his family in.

Harry Jenkins walked towards them smiling. 'Sarah, my dear! No need to ask how you are, you look wonderful!' He greeted his wife warmly and embraced her. He was a small, slight man with dark hair neatly slicked down, dark eyes that missed nothing, a small waxed moustache and deeply tanned skin. In his immaculately pressed uniform, pristine shirt and tie and highly polished shoes he was a dapper and some would say handsome man.

'Henry, it's so good to have you home again, safe and sound.' Sal beamed at him, kissing him on the cheek.

Betty shifted impatiently from foot to foot. She hated all this. It was all for show, this 'Sarah' and 'Henry' performance. At home they called each other Sal and Harry. Who was there to witness all this play acting anyway? The deck steward had disappeared and his place had been taken by a waiter in a white jacket and dark trousers, standing beside the door at the end of the lounge from which her father had emerged.

‘The girls have been so looking forward to today,’ Sal continued, turning and smiling at them both.

‘And don’t you both look so grown up. Gloria, quite a fashionable young lady now.’ Harry stepped forward and embraced his eldest daughter.

‘Welcome home,’ she said, smiling.

‘And Elizabeth.’

Betty was then embraced and muttered, ‘Welcome home, Da— Father.’ She quickly corrected herself, prompted by her mother’s frown of disapproval.

‘Was it a good trip, Henry? No bad weather or storms?’ Sal asked as her husband indicated that she should sit and the waiter rushed forward to assist her.

‘Nothing of any major significance. We had a few uncomfortable days on the Atlantic, which isn’t unusual at this time of year.’ He glanced sharply at the waiter who disappeared and then reappeared bearing a tray on which reposed a silver teapot, a silver hot-water jug and two plates of dainty little sandwiches with the crusts cut off. Another waiter followed bearing a three-tiered silver cake stand complete with a variety of fancy cakes.

The two girls said little, leaving their mother to make conversation, but both were glad of the tea and sandwiches and Betty had her eye on a cream and chocolate éclair.

‘And your passengers? Any difficulties there?’ Sal asked, sipping her tea.

Using the silver tongs Harry dropped two sugar lumps into his tea and then fastidiously rearranged his napkin. ‘We only had three ladies this time so Miss Ellis was well able to cope, although two of them were sick for a couple of days during the bad weather.’

Sal nodded. They carried only half a dozen passengers and the ladies were treated like royalty. Even Miss Ellis, who was the only stewardess, was treated like a lady. It wouldn’t have been her who had cleaned up after the two seasick passengers but a steward. She wouldn’t have been expected to soil her hands or her starched white uniform. Sal had met the woman a few times and had thought her insipid-looking and very stand-offish.

When they’d finished the refreshments Harry got up, smiling broadly. ‘Now, I think a glass of Madeira is in order for your mother while I show you girls what I’ve brought you this time.’

Sal sat back in her chair and relaxed; this was all part of the ritual. She would enjoy one or two glasses of the sweet wine served in Waterford crystal glasses and Harry would distribute the gifts. Then he would escort them to the dockside where a taxi would be waiting to take them home and he would follow later in the day. He was very generous and enjoyed giving them treats. Of course, like any man he had his faults, the main one being his quick temper.

‘You know how much he enjoys buying you things,’ she reminded her daughters.

Both girls nodded and looked excited as their father reappeared, his arms full of boxes.

Sal exclaimed in delight at the bottles of expensive perfume, the emerald ring in its velvet box and the beautiful soft leather gloves he’d given her. Gloria smiled and thanked him profusely for the half-dozen pairs of silk stockings, the gold pendant and bracelet and the real crocodile-skin purse. Betty also thanked him, uttering a cry of delight when she opened the intricately carved jewellery box, inside which was a brooch shaped as a butterfly and set with semi-precious stones.

‘You need somewhere to keep all the jewellery you no doubt will acquire in the coming years,’ Harry said affably.

‘Thank you, Father. It’s really lovely,’ she replied before turning her attention to the other two boxes on her lap. Of course she was pleased with her gifts but she would be glad when it was time to go home. She hated all this pretence.