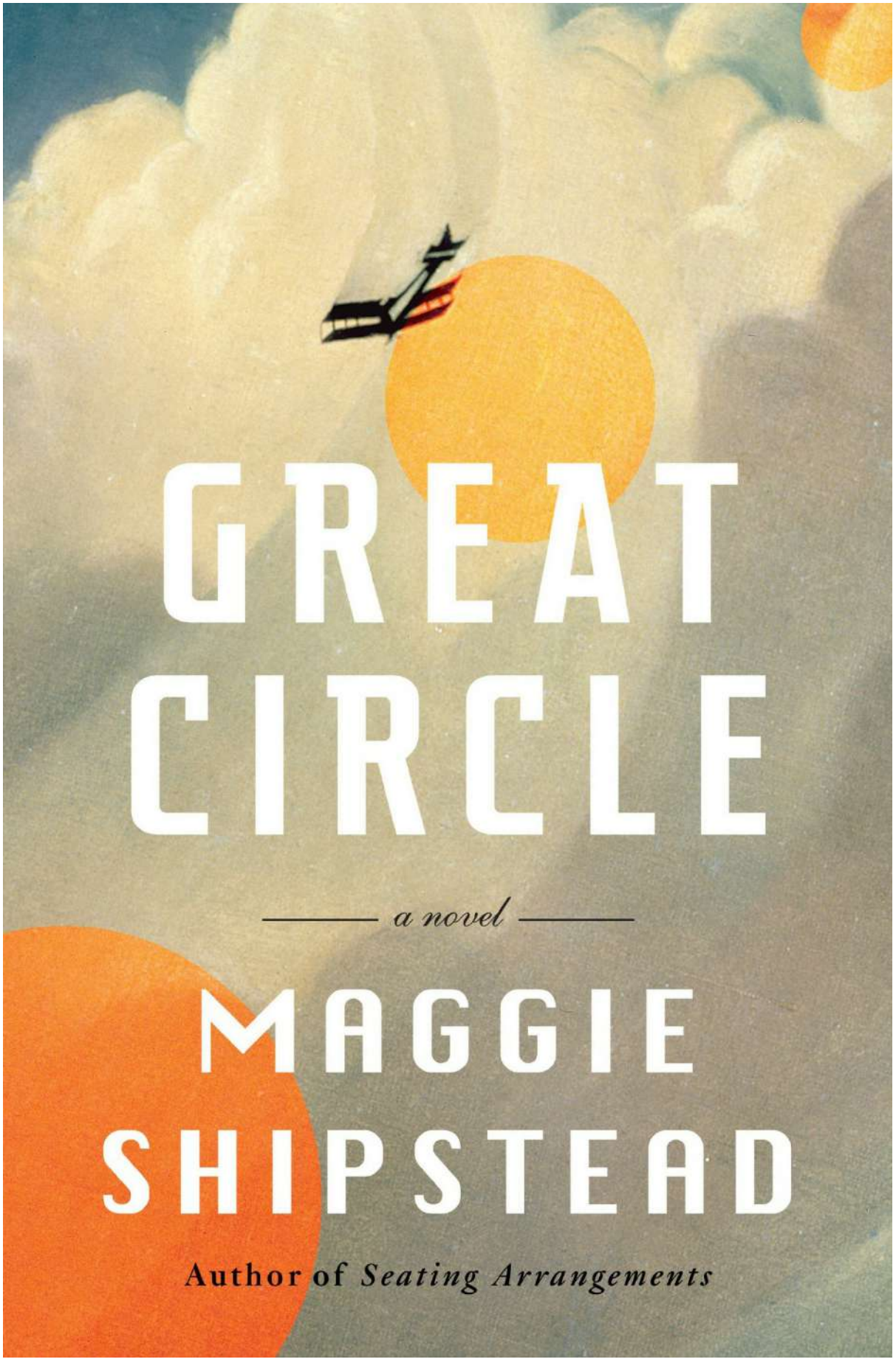
GREAT
CIRCLE
a novel
MAGGIE
SHIPSTEAD
Author of Seating Arrangements

ALSO BY MAGGIE SHIPSTEAD

*Astonish Me*
*Seating Arrangements*

# Great Circle

Maggie Shipstead

ALFRED A. KNOPF New York
2021

THIS IS A BORZOI BOOK PUBLISHED

BY ALFRED A. KNOPF



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# Contents

*For my brother*

I live my life in widening circles
that reach out across the world.
I may not complete this last one
but I give myself to it.

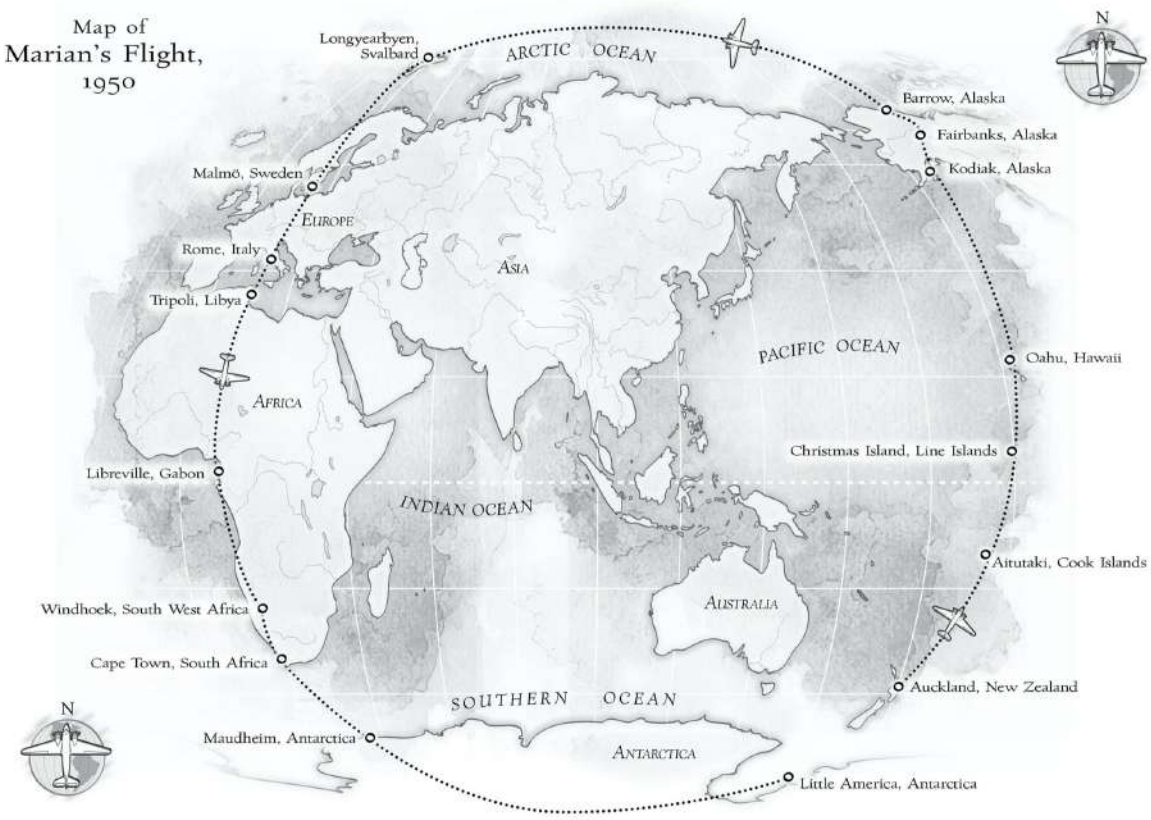
I circle around God, around the primordial tower.
I've been circling for thousands of years
and I still don't know: am I a falcon,
a storm, or a great song?

—RAINER MARIA RILKE, *The Book of Hours*

If you were to put a blade through any sphere and divide it into two perfect halves, the circumference of the cut side of each half would be a great circle: that is, the largest circle that can be drawn on a sphere.

The equator is a great circle. So is every line of longitude. On the surface of a sphere such as the earth, the shortest distance between any two points will follow an arc that is a segment of a great circle.

Points directly opposite each other, like the North and South Poles, are intersected by an infinite number of great circles.


Map of
Marian's Flight,
1950
Longyearbyen, Svalbard
ARCTIC OCEAN
N
Barrow, Alaska
Fairbanks, Alaska
Kodiak, Alaska
Malmö, Sweden
EUROPE
Rome, Italy
ASIA
Tripoli, Libya
PACIFIC OCEAN
Oahu, Hawaii
AFRICA
Christmas Island, Line Islands
Libreville, Gabon
INDIAN OCEAN
Aitutaki, Cook Islands
AUSTRALIA
Windhoek, South West Africa
Cape Town, South Africa
Auckland, New Zealand
SOUTHERN OCEAN
N
Maudheim, Antarctica
ANTARCTICA
Little America, Antarctica

*Little America III, Ross Ice Shelf, Antarctica*
*March 4, 1950*

I was born to be a wanderer. I was shaped to the earth like a seabird to a wave. Some birds fly until they die. I have made a promise to myself: My last descent won't be the tumbling helpless kind but a sharp gannet plunge—a dive with intent, aimed at something deep in the sea.

I'm about to depart. I will try to pull the circle up from below, bringing the end to meet the beginning. I wish the line were a smooth meridian, a perfect, taut hoop, but our course was distorted by necessity: the indifferent distribution of islands and airfields, the plane's need for fuel.

I don't regret anything, but I will if I let myself. I can think only about the plane, the wind, and the shore, so far away, where land begins again. The weather is improving. We've fixed the leak as best we can. I will go soon. I hate the never-ending day. The sun circles me like a vulture. I want a respite of stars.

Circles are wondrous because they are endless. Anything endless is wondrous. But endlessness is torture, too. I knew the horizon could never be caught but still chased it. What I have done is foolish; I had no choice but to do it.

It isn't how I thought it would be, now that the circle is almost closed, the beginning and end held apart by one last fearsome piece of water. I thought I would believe I'd seen the world, but there is too much of the world and too little of life. I thought I would believe I'd completed something, but now I doubt anything can be completed. I thought I would not be afraid. I thought I would become more than I am, but instead I know I am less than I thought.

No one should ever read this. My life is my one possession.

And yet, and yet, and yet.

Final entry from *The Sea, the Sky, the Birds Between: The Lost Logbook of Marian Graves*. Published by D. Wenceslas & Sons, New York, 1959.

*Los Angeles*
*December 2014*

I only knew about Marian Graves because one of my uncle's girlfriends liked to dump me at the library when I was a kid, and one time I picked up a random book called something like *Brave Ladies of the Sky.* My parents had gone up in a plane and never come back, and it turned out a decent percentage of the brave ladies had met the same fate. That got my attention. I think I might have been looking for someone to tell me a plane crash wasn't such a bad way to go—though if anyone actually ever had, I would have thought they were full of shit. Marian's chapter said she'd been raised by her uncle, and when I read that, I got goose bumps because *I* was being raised (kind of) by *my* uncle.

A nice librarian dug up Marian's book for me—*The Sea, the Sky,* etc.—and I pored over it like an astrologist consulting a star chart, hopeful that Marian's life would somehow explain my own, tell me what to do and how to be. Most of what she wrote went over my head, though I did come away with a vague aspiration to turn my loneliness into adventure. On the first page of my diary, I wrote "I WAS BORN TO BE A WANDERER" in big block letters. Then I didn't write anything else because how do you follow that up when you're ten years old and spend all your time either at your uncle's house in Van Nuys or auditioning for television commercials? After I returned the book, I pretty much forgot about Marian. Almost all of the brave ladies of the sky are forgotten, really. There was the occasional spooky TV special about Marian in the '80s, and a handful of die-hard Marian enthusiasts are still out there spinning theories on the internet, but she didn't stick the way Amelia Earhart did. People at least *think* they know about Amelia Earhart, even though they don't. It's not really possible.

The fact that I got ditched at the library so often turned out to be a good thing because while other kids were at school, I was sitting in a succession of folding chairs in a succession of hallways at every casting call in the

greater Los Angeles area for little white girls (or little race-unspecified girls, which also means white), chaperoned by a succession of nannies and girlfriends of my uncle Mitch, two categories that sometimes overlapped. I think the girlfriends sometimes offered to take care of me because they wanted him to see them as maternal, which they thought would make them seem like wife material, but that wasn't actually a great strategy for keeping the flame alive with ol' Mitch.

When I was two, my parents' Cessna crashed into Lake Superior. Or that's the assumption. No trace was ever found. My dad, Mitch's brother, was flying, and they were on their way to a romantic getaway at some friend's middle-of-nowhere backwoods cabin to, as Mitch put it, reconnect. Even when I was little, he told me that my mother wouldn't quit fucking around. His words. I'm not sure Mitch believed in childhood. "But they wouldn't quit each other, either," he'd say. Mitch definitely believed in taglines. He'd started out directing cheesy TV movies with titles like *Love Takes a Toll* (that was about a toll collector) and *Murder for Valentine's Day* (take a wild guess).

My parents had left me with a neighbor in Chicago, but their last will and testament left me to Mitch. There wasn't really anyone else. No other aunts or uncles, and my grandparents were a combination of dead, estranged, absent, and untrustworthy. Mitch wasn't a bad guy, but his instincts were of the opportunistic, Hollywoodian variety, so after he'd had me a few months, he called in a favor to get me cast in an applesauce commercial. Then he found my agent, Siobhan, and I got consistent-enough work in commercials and guest spots and TV movies (I played the daughter in *Murder for Valentine's Day*) that I can't remember a time I wasn't acting or trying to. It seemed like normal life: putting a plastic pony in a plastic stable over and over while cameras rolled and some grown-up stranger told you how to smile.

When I was eleven, after Mitch had stepping-stoned from movies of the week to music videos and was white-knuckle climbing into the indie film world, I got my proverbial big break: the role of Katie McGee in a time-travel cable sitcom for kids called *The Big-Time Life of Katie McGee*.

On set, my life was squeaky-clean and candy-colored, all puns and tidy plotlines and three-walled rooms under a hot sky of klieg lights. I hammed

it up to a braying laugh track while wearing outfits so extravagantly trendy I looked like a manifestation of the tween zeitgeist. When I wasn't working, I did pretty much whatever I wanted, thanks to Mitch's negligence. In her book, Marian Graves wrote: *As a child, my brother and I were largely left to our own devices. I believed—and no one told me otherwise for some years—that I was free to do as I liked, that I had the right to go any place I could find my way to.* I was probably more of an impetuous little brat than Marian, but I felt the same way. The world was my oyster, and freedom was my mignonette. Life gives you lemons, you carve off their skins and garnish your martinis.

When I was thirteen, after the *Katie McGee* merch had started selling like crazy and after Mitch had directed *Tourniquet* and was rolling around in success like a pill-popping pig in shit, he moved us to Beverly Hills on our shared dime. Once I wasn't stuck out in the Valley anymore, the kid who played Katie McGee's big brother introduced me to his rich dirtbag high-schooler friends, and they drove me around and took me to parties and got in my pants. Mitch probably didn't notice how much I was gone because he was usually out, too. Sometimes we'd bump into each other coming home at two or three in the morning, both messed up, and we'd just exchange nods like two people passing in a hotel corridor, attendees at the same rowdy conference.

But here's a good thing: The on-set tutors for *Katie McGee* were decent, and they told me I should go to college, and since I liked the sound of that, I weaseled my way into NYU after the show ended, with substantial extra credit for being a B-list TV star. I was already packed and ready to move when Mitch overdosed, and if I hadn't been, I probably would have just stayed in L.A. and partied myself to death, too.

Here's something that might have been good or bad: After one semester, I got cast in the first *Archangel* movie. Sometimes I wonder what would have happened if, instead, I'd finished college and stopped acting and been forgotten about, but it's not like I possibly could have turned down the colossal amount of money that came with playing Katerina. So everything else is irrelevant.

In my blip of higher education, I had time to take Intro to Philosophy and learn about the panopticon, the hypothetical prison Jeremy Bentham

came up with, where there would be one itty-bitty guardhouse at the center of a giant ring of cells. One guard was all you needed because he *might* be watching at any time, and the idea of being watched matters way more than actually being watched. Then Foucault turned the whole thing into a metaphor about how all you need to discipline and dominate a person or a population is to make them think it's *possible* they're being watched. You could tell the professor wanted us all to think the panopticon was scary and awful, but later, after *Archangel* made me way too famous, I wanted to take Katie McGee's preposterous time machine back to that lecture hall and ask him to consider the opposite. Like instead of one guard in the middle, you're in the middle, and thousands, maybe millions, of guards are watching you—or might be—all the time, no matter where you go.

Not that I would have had the nerve to ask a professor anything. At NYU everyone was always staring at me because I'd been Katie McGee, but it felt like they were staring at me because they knew I didn't deserve to be there. And maybe I didn't, but you can't measure fairness in a lab. You can't know if you *deserve* something. Probably you don't. So it was a relief, too, when I quit school for *Archangel,* to go back to having a million obligations I had no choice about and a daily schedule I didn't decide for myself. At college I'd flipped through the course catalog, as fat as a dictionary, in complete bafflement. I'd drifted through the cafeteria, looking at all the different foods, at the salad bars and the mountains of bagels and the bins of cereal and the soft-serve machine, and I'd felt like I was being asked to solve some monumental, life-or-death riddle.

After I'd wrecked everything and Sir Hugo Woolsey (*the* Sir Hugo, who happens to be my neighbor) started talking to me about some biopic he was producing and pulled Marian's book from his tote bag—a book I hadn't thought about in fifteen years—suddenly I was in a library again, looking at a slender hardback that might hold all the answers. Answers sounded nice. They sounded like something I wanted, not that I could ever quite unravel what I wanted. Not that I even really knew what wanting meant. I mostly experienced desire as a tangle of impossible, contradictory impulses. I wanted to vanish like Marian; I wanted to be more famous than ever; I wanted to say something important about courage and freedom; I wanted to

*be* courageous and free, but I didn't know what that meant—I only knew how to pretend to know, which I guess is acting.

Today is my last day of filming for *Peregrine*. I'm sitting in a mock-up of Marian's plane that's hanging from a pulley system and is about to be swung out over a giant tank of water and dropped. I'm wearing a reindeer-fur parka that weighs a thousand pounds and will weigh a million once it gets wet, and I'm trying not to let on that I'm afraid. Bart Olofsson, the director, took me aside earlier, asked if I really wanted to do this stunt myself, given, you know, what happened to my parents. *I think I want to confront that*, I said. *I think I could use the closure.* He'd put his hand on my shoulder, done his best guru face. *You are a strong woman,* he'd said.

Closure doesn't really exist, though. That's why we're always looking for it.

The actor who's playing Eddie Bloom, my navigator, is also wearing a reindeer-fur parka and has waterproof blood makeup on his forehead because he's supposed to be knocked out by the impact. In real life, Eddie usually sat at a desk behind Marian's seat, but the screenwriters, two aggressively cheerful brothers with Hitler Youth haircuts and Hitler Youth faces, thought it would be better if Eddie came up front for the death dive. Sure, fine, whatever.

The story we're telling isn't what really happened, anyway. I know that much. But I wouldn't say I know the truth about Marian Graves. Only she knew.

Eight cameras will record my plunge: six fixed, two operated by divers. The plan is to do it once. Twice, at most. It's an expensive shot, and our budget was never enormous and has now been exhausted and then some, but when you've come this far, the only way out is through. Best-case scenario, it takes all day. Worst-case scenario, I drown, wind up *In Memoriam,* wind up like my parents except in a fake plane and a fake ocean, not even trying to get anywhere.

"You're sure you want to do this?"

The stunt coordinator is checking my harness, all business as he digs around my crotch, feeling for the straps and clips among bristly reindeer hair. True to type, he's got a leathery face, a leathery wardrobe, and a stop-action way of walking from a few imperfect repair jobs.

“Totally,” I say.

When he’s done, the crane lifts us up, swings us out. There’s a scrim at the end of the tank that makes a kind of horizon with the water, and I’m her, Marian Graves, flying over the Southern Ocean with my fuel gauge on empty, and I know I can’t get anywhere other than where I am, which is nowhere. I wonder how cold the water will be, how long before I’m dead. I think through my options. I think about what I’ve promised myself. *A gannet plunge.*

“Action,” says a voice in my earpiece, and I push on the fake plane’s yoke as though I’m going to fly us down into the center of the earth. The pulleys tip the nose, and we dive.

# The *Josephina Eterna*

*Glasgow, Scotland*
*April 1909*

An unfinished ship. A hull without funnels, caged in her slipway by a steel gantry above and a timber cradle below. Beyond her stern, under the four impotent blossoms of her exposed propellers, the River Clyde flowed green in unexpected sunshine.

From keel to waterline she was rust red, and above that, specially painted for the launch, she was white as a bride. (White made for better newspaper pictures.) After the flashbulbs have popped, after she has been moored lonely in the river for her fitting-out, men will stand on planks hung down her sides on thick ropes and paint the plates and rivets of her hull glossy black.

Her two funnels will be hoisted up, bolted down, lashed in place. Her decks will be planked in teak, her corridors and salons paneled in mahogany and walnut and oak. There will be sofas and settees and chaises, beds and bathtubs, seascapes in gilded frames, gods and goddesses in bronze and alabaster. The first-class china will be gilt-edged, patterned with gold anchors (the emblem of L&O Lines). For second class: blue anchors, blue edging (blue, the line's color). Third class will make do with plain white crockery and the crew with tin. Boxcars will arrive full of crystal and silver and porcelain, damask and velvet. Cranes will hoist aboard three pianos, dangling in nets like stiff-legged beasts. A grove of potted palms will be wheeled up the gangway. Chandeliers will be hung. Deck chairs hinged like alligator jaws will be stacked. Eventually the first load of coal will be poured in through apertures low in the hull, down into bunkers below the waterline, far from the finery. The first fire will be lit deep in her furnaces.

But on the day of her launch she was still only a shell, a bare and comfortless wedge of steel. A crowd jostled in her shadow: ship workers in rowdy clumps, Glaswegian families out for the spectacle, urchin boys peddling newspapers and sandwiches. A brilliantly blue sky flew overhead like a pennant. In this city of fog and soot, such a sky could only be a good omen. A brass band played.

Mrs. Lloyd Feiffer, Matilda, wife of the ship's new American owner, stood on a platform edged with blue-and-white bunting, a bottle of Scotch tucked under her arm. "Shouldn't it be champagne?" she had asked her husband.

"Not in Glasgow," he'd said.

Matilda was to break the bottle against the ship, christening it with the name she could scarcely bear to think of. She was impatient for the cathartic shattering of glass, for her task to be done, but now she could only wait. There was some kind of delay. Lloyd fidgeted, making occasional comments to the naval architect, who appeared rigid with anxiety. A few unhappy Englishmen in bowler hats milled around the platform, and a pair of Scotsmen from the shipbuilding firm, and several other men she couldn't identify.

This ship had already been half built when L&O Lines, founded in New York by Lloyd's father, Ernst, in 1857 and inherited by Lloyd in 1906, acquired the failing English line that had commissioned it. (Commissioned *her,* Lloyd was always correcting. But, to Matilda, ships would always be its.) The sheathing had been under way when money ran out and was resumed once Lloyd's dollars were converted to sterling, then steel. The men in bowler hats, up from London, remarking morosely among themselves about the glorious weather, had conceived of the ship, argued over its blueprints, chosen a sensible name that Lloyd had disregarded. All that, only to have ended up obsolete: cuckolds in carefully brushed hats on a bunting-swagged platform, the brass band's rousing march bubbling around their feet. Tallow had been smeared on the slipway to grease the ship's path, and Matilda could feel its thick animal odor permeating her clothes, coating her skin.

Lloyd had wanted a new liner to reinvigorate L&O. When Ernst died, the fleet had been tired and outdated, mostly tramp steamers plying the

coastwise trade, plus some passenger-cargo ships chugging across the Atlantic and a few tired windjammers still running the Pacific grain and guano routes. This ship would not be the largest or fastest or most opulent liner crossing from Europe—no threat to the White Star Line monsters being built in Belfast—but Lloyd had told Matilda it would be a respectable ante at the fat cats' table.

"What's the news?" Lloyd barked, startling her. The question was addressed to Addison Graves, *Captain* Graves, who was standing nearby—looming, really, though his habitual hunch seemed intended as a preemptive apology for his height. He was thin, almost gaunt, but with bones as massive and heavy as cudgels.

"It's a problem with the trigger," he told Lloyd. "Shouldn't be much longer."

Lloyd frowned at the ship. "It's like she's in shackles. She's meant to be at sea. Don't you think, Graves?" He turned suddenly ebullient. "Don't you think she's absolutely magnificent?"

The bow towered over them, sharp as a blade. "She'll be a fine ship," Graves said mildly.

He was to be the ship's first captain, had come across for the launch with Lloyd and Matilda and the four young Feiffer sons—Henry, the eldest at seven, and Leander, the baby not even a year old, with Clifford and Robert in between, all being cared for somewhere out of the way by their two nannies. Matilda had hoped to warm up to Graves on the voyage. He was not unkind, never impolite, but his reserve seemed unbreachable. Even her boldest attempts to discover something of his inner workings had yielded nothing. *What drew you to the sea, Captain Graves?* she'd asked one night at dinner. He'd said, *Go far enough in any direction, and you'll find the sea, Mrs. Feiffer,* and she'd felt reproached. To her, he'd come to represent the basic impenetrability of male life. Lloyd loved him with a wholeheartedness he didn't seem to lavish on anyone else, certainly not Matilda. *I owe him my life,* Lloyd had said many times. *Your life can't be a debt,* she'd countered once, *or then it's not really yours, and nothing has been saved.* But Lloyd had only laughed, asked if she had considered becoming a philosopher.

They had crewed on a barque together as young men, Graves and Lloyd. Graves had been a working sailor and Lloyd, just graduated from Yale, was half pretending to be. Ernst, Lloyd's father, had said he needed to learn the ropes (literally) if he was to inherit L&O. When hapless Lloyd fell overboard off Chile, Graves was quick and accurate enough to throw him a line and haul him back aboard. Since then, Lloyd had always venerated Graves as a savior. (*But you're the one who* caught *the line,* Matilda said. *You're the one who hung on.*) After Chile, as Lloyd ascended through the firm, so, too, did Graves.

The platform was no longer in the shade. Sweat was making Matilda's corset stick and chafe. Lloyd seemed to think she'd been born knowing how to christen a ship. "Just break the bottle on the bow, Tildy," he'd said. "It's very simple."

Would she know when the moment came? Would they remember to tell her? All she knew was that she'd apparently be signaled (by whom, she wasn't sure) at the moment the ship began to slide, and she was to crack the whiskey against the bow, christening it *Josephina Eterna,* after her husband's mistress.

When, months before, at the breakfast table, she'd asked Lloyd what the ship would be called, he had told her without lowering his newspaper.

Matilda's cup had not rattled when she returned it to its saucer. At least she could be proud of that.

She had been young but not too young when Lloyd married her, twenty-one to his thirty-six, old enough to know she was being chosen for her fortune and breeding potential, not love. All she asked was that Lloyd behave with respectful discretion. She had explained this to him before their engagement, and he had listened kindly and agreed there was much to be said for individual privacy within marriage, especially since bachelor life had suited him so well for so long. "We understand each other, then," she had said and offered him her hand. Solemnly, he had shaken her hand and then kissed her, full on the mouth, for quite some time, and she had begun, in spite of herself, to fall in love. Bad luck.

But she would not go back on her word. As best she could, she made peace with Lloyd's wanderings, directing her passions toward her children and the maintenance of her wardrobe and person. Lloyd regarded her

affectionately, she knew, and was more tender in bed than she gathered some husbands were, though she also knew she was fundamentally not to his taste. He preferred temperamental, unappeasable women, usually older than Matilda, often older than even himself, older certainly than the ship's namesake, this Jo, who was only nineteen, dark and flighty. But Matilda knew enough to know it was often the lover who went against type who undid people.

The ship's name had seemed a poor repayment of her tolerance and generosity, and as soon as she'd found a moment alone, away from rattling china and servants' eyes, she had shed a few tears. Then she'd pulled herself together and soldiered on, as always.

On the platform, Lloyd turned to her, wrought up. "It's almost time."

She tried to ready herself. The bottle's neck was too short for her to get a good grip, especially not through her silk gloves, and it slipped from her grasp, landed with a thud perilously close to the platform's edge. As she picked it up, someone touched her shoulder. Addison Graves. Gently, he took the bottle. "You'd better remove your gloves," he said. When she had, he wrapped one of her hands around the neck and set the other palm flat against the cork. "Like this," he said, demonstrating a sideways arcing motion. "Don't be afraid to take a good swing because it's bad luck if the bottle doesn't break."

"Thank you," she murmured.

At the platform's edge, she waited for her signal, but nothing happened. The bow stayed where it was, the immense upturned nose of a proud and haughty thing. The men were talking urgently among themselves. The naval architect went rushing off. She waited. The bottle grew heavier. Her fingers ached. Down in the crowd, two men were shoving each other, causing a commotion. As she watched, one struck the other in the face.

"Tildy, for God's sake!" Lloyd was tugging at her arm. The bow was sliding away. So quickly. She had not expected something so large would go so quickly.

She leaned out and hurled the bottle after the retreating wall of steel. Awkwardly, overhand. It thudded against the hull but did not break, only bounced off and dropped to the slipway, shattering on the concrete in a

splat of glass and amber liquid. The *Josephina* receded. The river rose up behind the stern in a green bulge, collapsed into foam.

*North Atlantic*
*January 1914*
*Four years and nine months later*

*Josephina Eterna,* eastbound in the night. A jeweled brooch on black satin. A solitary crystal on the wall of a dark cave. A stately comet in an empty sky.

Below her lights and honeycombed cabins, below the men toiling in red heat and black dust, below her barnacled keel, a school of cod passed, a dense pack of flexing bodies in the darkness, eyes bulging wide though there was nothing to see. Below the fish: cold and pressure, empty black miles, a few strange, luminescent creatures drifting after flecks of food. Then the sandy bottom, blank except for faint trails left by hardy shrimp, blind worms, creatures who would never know such a thing as light existed.

The night Addison Graves came to dinner and found Annabel seated beside him was the second out of New York. He had descended without enthusiasm from the masculine quiet of the bridge into the dining room's trilling, sparkling cacophony. The air felt hot and moist, smelled of food and perfume. The ocean cold clinging to his wool uniform evaporated; immediately he prickled with sweat. At his table, he stooped in a bow, cap under his arm. The passengers' faces radiated a predatory eagerness for his attention. "Good evening," he said as he sat, shaking out his napkin. He rarely gleaned pleasure from conversation, certainly not from the self-congratulatory chitchat demanded by passengers wealthy or important enough to wrangle seats at the captain's table. At first he registered nothing beyond the pale green of Annabel's dress. On his other side sat an older woman in brown. The first of a long series of fussy dishes arrived, borne from the kitchen by tailcoated waiters.

Lloyd Feiffer had promoted Addison to captain as soon as he'd inherited L&O, when the turned earth was still fresh on his father's grave. Over a steak dinner at Delmonico's, Lloyd had given him charge of a ship,

and Addison had only nodded, not wanting to betray his elation. Captain Graves! The miserable boy he'd been long ago on that farm in Illinois would finally be gone forever, ground to nothing under the heel of his polished boot, tossed overboard.

But Lloyd had raised one small concern. "You'll have to be *genial,* Graves. You'll have to *converse*. It's part of what they pay for. Don't look like that. It won't be so bad." He paused, looking anxious. "Do you think you can manage?"

"Yes," Addison had said, his ambition outweighing the dread in his heart. "Of course."

Waiters swirled around delivering bowls of consommé. On Addison's right, Mrs. Somebody-or-Other in the brown dress was relating her sons' life histories in great detail and with such slow and deliberate enunciation that she might have been reading out the terms of a treaty. Lamb with mint jelly appeared and was eaten. Then roast chicken. Over the salad, during a brief intermission in his neighbor's recitation, Addison turned, finally, to the woman in the pale green dress. Annabel, she'd said her name was. She appeared quite young. He asked if it would be her first time in Britain.

"No," she said. "I've been several times."

"Then you enjoy it?"

At first she did not reply. Then, when she spoke, her tone was matter-of-fact. "Not particularly, but my father and I decided it would be best if I left New York for a while."

A curious admission. He studied her more closely. Her head was lowered; she seemed intent on her meal. She was older than he had initially thought, in her late twenties, and extremely fair, though the careless application of her rouge and lipstick gave her a blurred, feverish appearance. She had cream-colored hair like the mane of a palomino horse and eyelashes and eyebrows so pale as to be almost invisible. Abruptly, she looked up and met his gaze.

Her irises were light blue, filigreed with bright, pale interlocking rings like sun dapples. In them he recognized a proposition, brazen and unmistakable. He knew the look from women in the South Pacific lounging bare-breasted in the shade, from whores half hidden in the gloom of port city alleys, from *karayuki-san* ushering him into lantern-lit rooms. He