

Book 3

1

Merry slept not at all. Was ever a woman in such torment she asked herself as she went to the pump for water? It wasn't the first time she'd asked herself the question since receiving Steven's letter yesterday. The shingle roared, the waves endlessly rolled in and out as they would do until the end of time but now her future was in turmoil. Her life, her future, had changed now and forever; nothing would ever be the same again.

During the wakeful hours of the night she'd gone over and over the letter and its implications. If she hadn't met Tristan how would she feel *now*, now that her beloved husband was to return to her? If she'd already married Tristan what would have happened? Had the wedding not been delayed when Tristan fell she'd already be Mrs Tristan Tolker! All night these questions had whirled around in her head like pebbles on an ebbing tide. All night she'd searched but could reach only one conclusion. She loved two men, but could only ever have one.

Her husband.

She hauled the bucket from the pump and turned to the kitchen door.

'Meredith.'

She spun around recognising her husband's deep, baritone voice. He stood, hands stuffed in the pockets of his great coat staring at her as if he couldn't trust his own eyes. Without a second thought Merry ran into his arms.



Tristan was puzzled when he received Merry's note asking him to meet her at the boulder by the copse where they'd so often met in the early days of their courtship. Perhaps she'd prepared an al fresco meal for him as a surprise. She'd done so once before; she'd made his favourite pheasant pie and they'd sat together watching the sunset. He remembered it had been the perfect end to a perfect day.

He jumped down from Jem. Merry was already waiting for him even though he was early himself. She wore a haunted look on her face. He ran to her.

'What is it, is something amiss. Are you unwell?' He held her outstretched hands and searched her face for clues.

‘I don’t know how to begin Tris.’ She barely held herself in check. ‘You’ll never believe ... I don’t know how to tell you what’s happened since you left for Scotland.’ She drew a deep breath: ‘Steven is alive and is returned to me.’

There was a stunned silence

‘Alive! He’s come back?’

As she told him of Steven’s arrival in a calm, measured voice she tried to keep her emotions held in. She told him of Steven’s letter. ‘It arrived out of the blue and Steven hot on its heels. I barely had time to register he was alive before he came ... home.’

Tristan fell back against the boulder; his legs could hardly hold his weight. ‘Your husband is alive?’

‘And returned.’

‘Which means ... ’

‘I am not free, not free to marry you Tris. I don’t know what to say.’ Her eyes were wet with unshed tears. ‘Some women *never* find love, yet here I am with two of the most remarkable men, one who’s my husband and one who would be married to me now had he not suffered an accident. My love, I’m so sorry. Believe me when I say my heart is torn in two.’

Tristan thought about what she’d said. It was true enough, had he not slipped that day they would now be man and wife. He was too hurt, too shocked to even curse.

‘What can we do?’ He ran his hand through his hair. His world was falling apart and he couldn’t think straight. ‘Doubtless our marriage wouldn’t have been lawful now at any rate. It’s a disaster! Though not for your husband of course ... or you.’ Tristan took a deep breath. He asked the question she’d known he’d ask but had been dreading ‘You’ll stay with Steven?’

Merry’s legs collapsed beneath her, she fell in a heap on the grass.

She sobbed as Tristan wrapped her in his arms. ‘What else can I do? I’m married to Steven. When I agreed to marry you I thought death had separated me from my wedded husband but now ... He’s faced so many trials and dangers to come home to me, would you have me turn him away and how could I if I even wanted to? Shingle Roar is *his* home, he built it stone by stone.’

Tristan stood and stared straight ahead. He couldn’t bear to look at Merry’s beautiful face, look into those mesmerising eyes. She was no longer his, not free to marry him, love him, be the wife and mother she had been destined to be.

‘You have no choice. I understand. I free you from the obligation.’ There was a long silence.

‘Don’t look at me that way Tris.’

Tristan shrugged his shoulders. ‘We are all victims it seems yet no one is to blame, I see that. Not you, not your husband ...’

‘And not you.’ She said turning to look at him.

‘You’ve told your husband what’s happened in his absence? Does he know about us, that you’re engaged to be married to another?’

‘I’ve told him everything, as husband and wife we’ve never had secrets. It wasn’t an easy conversation, not the homecoming he was hoping for but he understands, he doesn’t blame us or judge us, he’s not pleased of course but Steven is a reasonable man. He knows I thought him dead. He said he would have wanted me to marry again - oh I can’t bear it!’

‘Have you truly told your husband everything? You’ve told him we lay together though it was on only one night?’

‘What husband wants to hear that, but yes I’ve confessed all. How could I not?’

‘Confessed! You make our love making sound like a sin. That’s not how I remember it. It was the greatest day of my life apart from the one when I met you.’

Merry hung her head. ‘Steven has known me many years and knows I’m not some jade, some loose woman who’d take up with any passing man. He knows I wouldn’t have given myself to you had I not been certain my husband was dead and I was to re-marry. We’ve talked frankly and although there’s anger and jealousy and some little torment between us he’s still committed to our marriage. He sees the trust between us is broken but it was unwittingly done. He blames no one.’

Tristan pushed his tricorne on his head and faced the woman who had broken his heart. ‘This cannot have been easy for you my love - perhaps I have no right to address you in so familiar a way now that our circumstances have changed. I’m so sorry for how things have turned out, for the conflicting thoughts and emotions you’re going through.’ He swallowed hard. ‘You know I would wish it otherwise but how can I wish him dead? He sounds a reasonable man. If the boot was on the other foot I would want to run him through.’

Merry put her arms about him: ‘Tris, my heart is breaking in two, I love you and I always will but how can a woman love two men? I feel as if I’m being torn, pulled in two directions. What I had with my husband was good and had I not met you I should have been content for the rest of my days but then you came along and showed me a different life ...’

‘All is altered.’

‘Yes, changed, our lives will never to be the same again.’

Tristan pushed her away gently. ‘I’ll always love you but now you belong to your husband once more; he has the prior claim. You belong to each other.’

‘I’m so sorry.’

‘I wish you both well, you deserve to be happy but there’s nothing more to say is there? There’s an end to it. I can still hardly believe it. When I rode here this morning I never imagined ... do you stay with him out of obligation? We once planned to run away ...’

He saw the look on her face.

He turned away quickly, mounted Jem and rode off not looking back.



Merry sat on the grass for a long while, she only made to leave because someone at home would be anxiously awaiting her return. Steven knew where she’d gone and what she had gone to do. He trusted her but she wouldn’t leave him to worry alone any longer.

It was a strange thought: she was now to pick up the pieces of her life as it was before. Over two years had passed and now she was to act as if nothing had changed.

But so much had changed. She’d changed.

Once more she’d be a housewife. She’d once again cook and clean and keep house for her husband. She could have laughed at the irony; she’d been contemplating what it would be like to have a personal maid and a clutch of servants to do her bidding! Now she’d be the one rolling up her sleeves. It didn’t frighten her, why would it? She’d worked all her life. She’d never given herself airs but she’d looked forward to an easier life, a luxurious life. What woman wouldn’t want that?

Now all was changed.

Two years ago she would have been the happiest woman alive with her loving husband returned safe and sound, now she must be that woman again. She rode back to Shingle Roar thinking how mercurial life could be. Both were good men, similar in character and values; honest, hard working and loyal. Both men were handsome, loving, caring and considerate. Was she cursed? It was no blessing to have two such men who loved her.

A lump in her throat made it hard to swallow. She struggled to hold back a sob. The physical pain, the hurt in her chest rendered her breathless. Tristan didn’t deserve this. She was the one who’d caused him this hurt, the look on his face as he rode off. She’d regret abandoning him every day for the rest of her life, but what could she do? The thought of not being his wife washed over her like a riptide pulling her down. Tears fell from her eyes obscuring her view.

Stone shook his head picking up on her mood. He tried to hurry the pace and lifted his head impatiently as she checked him. For a moment it was in Merry's mind to give Stone his head and fly after Tris, tell him she loved him, take him in her arms and kiss him, never let him go.

Steven's face as he stood in the yard yesterday flashed into her mind's eye. He loved her, she loved him. She should be riding home to her dearest husband who she'd thought lost forever. He'd returned from the dead, had endured many hardships and fought hard to be with her.

She was worn out, exhausted from thinking.

Her head pounded and her heart ached. Yet did one man deserve more from her than the other? She'd pledged herself to Steven in holy matrimony long before Tristan Tolker was ever in her sights. He'd cried tears of happiness as he held her in his arms yesterday not knowing what was to come.

She sighed deeply. Meredith had made her bed long ago and now she must lie in it. It wouldn't be abhorrent to her but perhaps it wouldn't be as comfortable as it once was. She had made her choice when she married. She must put the last two years behind her. From now on she had to think of one man and only one man.

Her husband.

2

Tamsin sat by her brother's side at Westcliff House. He had poured his heart out to her and she had listened growing more and more troubled as the story unfolded.

'My dear I'm at a loss as to what to say, how can I comfort you? You poor, poor thing. I see Meredith has no choice - she has to stay with her husband. As you say they're lawfully married. A few more days would have made an even bigger mess if that were possible. Had you married you would have been in trouble with the law.'

'Merry would have been a bigamist,' Tris shook his head ironically. 'Dear God, what have I done to deserve all this except love a beautiful, exceptional woman? I'm cursed it seems.' Tami didn't reply. She was at a loss what to say. Nothing she could say would be of help.

'Perhaps I'm being punished for marrying a woman I didn't care for, didn't love; I was hardly a good husband to Jane.'

'You made the best of a bad situation, you weren't cruel to Jane you didn't beat her or deny her anything. At least you have Constance. She'll be your consolation.'

‘How can any child bear such a heavy load? I was unfaithful to Jane. I, a married man, lay with another woman though not until Jane had passed. I suppose I should be punished.’

‘Stop being so dramatic!’ Tami tried for levity. ‘You couldn’t help falling in love with Merry, I know her to be a kind and beguiling woman, and she loved you too when all is said and done.’

Brother and sister sat in silence. Tamsin realised that worthless platitudes demeaned Tristan’s heartache but what was she to do? He deserved happiness; he *was* a good man despite what he said. She’d have to think of more practical ways to help him. A thought came to her.

‘Don’t worry about the wedding arrangements Tris, I’ll deal with it all, and the honeymoon. I’ll let everyone know there’s a change of plan.’

‘Yet again - another change of plan! But this time not a mere postponement.’ Tris shook his head in disbelief. ‘It’s like a nightmare. I keep hoping I’ll wake up and our wedding will have taken place and we’ll be together.’ He ran his fingers through his hair. ‘But I thank you for sorting out the arrangements, I would be most grateful, I hadn’t even thought ... but this time there is not to be a re scheduling. It’s finished, done with ... all over.’

‘Why not go away for a while, try to see things from a distance, make plans for yourself and Constance.’

‘I’ve already given it some thought. Perhaps I’ll go away - for good. Away from here. I cannot bear to see them together.’

‘You cannot! I’ll not allow it. You’re upset, please Tris don’t make hasty decisions you may later regret.’

‘Regret! I have so many regrets. Her husband has a prior claim but think of this.’ Tristan stood and paced the room. ‘What if we’d been married when her husband returned? Had it not been for my injury the wedding would have gone ahead. Would Merry have made a different choice? What if when Steven came back we were married and Merry had been with child. Who do you think she would have chosen then? Tristan walked about the room agitated, over whelmed with grief and anger.’

‘You cannot think this way; “what ifs” are no good to anyone now, we’ll never know the answers. All I *do* know is that she loved you dearly Tris. When she spoke of you her eyes lit up with joy and love. She couldn’t wait to be your wife even though she had misgivings about her rise in station. She would have done anything for you my love.’

Tristan slumped onto a chair and put his head in his hands.

Things had changed between them. Steven had been patient with her and she respected him all the more for it. He sat on the side of their bed. ‘This is a strange situation we find ourselves in. You’re my lawfully wedded wife yet things between us have changed.’ Merry noticed their time apart had changed him too. He looked older, thinner. It was to be expected with all he’d been through.

‘I don’t want to take what’s not offered freely Merry, I can see you’re troubled, not at ease, not the woman I left two years ago. That woman gave herself to me body and soul.’ He looked at her with sadness in his heart. He reached out to touch her; she couldn’t help but flinch.

‘Then again after all I’ve gone through I’m not the same man either.’

‘I’m sorry. I don’t know what to say. It’s not that I don’t want to - ’

‘We’ve always been close, loving. We were well matched. We suited each other and fitted together like a lock and key. We’ve always laughed easily and been comfortable in each other’s company. We thought alike, made plans for our future; we’ve been ambitious in our own small way but now what?’

It was true, they had always been in harmony but now things were different, strained. Now there was a barrier, a sense of edging around each other, there was uncertainty and doubt.

Merry set about brushing her hair and watching as her husband got into bed. It was familiar yet strange, she had slept alone for so long and yet ...

Each had experienced different lives since last they met, since the last time they’d shared a bed. One had known hardship and pain, the other had also suffered but had found herself to be loved by another and had been about to be raised up to a status she’d never thought possible.

‘I know things have changed. You love this other man,’ Steven sat with his back against the head board his brow furrowed. ‘I can’t expect you to turn your feelings off just like that, as much as I would want you to. I’m not an irrational man but I’m a jealous one, how can I not be? I’ve dreamt of you, thought of you, longed to hold you. Hoped you had stayed true but I’d no right I know, you thought me dead.’

Merry sat on the side of their bed and took his hand. Steven was a good, honest man and he was suffering as much as she was herself. As her husband Steven could have taken

what was his by right but he hadn't tried to force himself upon her. She knew he wouldn't and that meant she respected him even more.

'Any man would want what I had. Merry you're a beautiful, capable woman, admired by all who know you. It's hardly a surprise that you would be chased after by half the county; I've tormented myself many a time while I was away. Yet I know you well and know if I can be patient with you a while longer you'll return to me, give yourself to me freely like you used to do. Don't you remember how good it was my sweet? It's tearing me apart to know you even *think* about this other man.' This other *rich*, powerful man you were about to marry until I returned to scupper your plans.'

'It's not that I don't want to lie with you again Steven, but yet I can't seem to ... it's all too confusing. I would feel disloyal. To you, to Tris, to myself. My head is fit to burst, my body wants to yield to you as it once did, but I cannot explain the torment. It feels like being unfaithful, a betrayal, to all of us!' Tears slid down her cheeks.

Her husband recoiled at the sound of his rival's name. 'I'm trying to understand, truly I am.'

Merry got into bed beside her husband. Steven breathed out slowly and got out the other side and picked up a candle. 'I'll sleep in the other room. I can't trust myself with you lying beside me.'

'Please Steven wait.'

'I am waiting and I will continue to wait. I've waited two years. A little longer won't kill me. You're worth waiting for sweetheart.' He leaned over the bed and kissed her forehead then turned and left the room.

Merry blew her candle out and sobbed into her pillow.

The shingle roared long into the night.

4

Merry and Steven were sitting in the garden together. Steven had been talking about the future, making plans. He was keen to find work, but naturally not so keen to return to whaling.

'I cannot stay idle for ever, I must find work. Having returned to you sweetheart, I'm not over eager to leave you again for months at a time. I don't say that because I don't trust you. I know when you give your word you'd never go back on it.'

‘What will you do then, you only know the sea? Nothing will pay the same wages as a whaling mission but I could never be easy either if you went back to that way of life.’

‘You say we still have money put aside? You did well to earn while I was gone, you were always a good housekeeper. The money should give us a little time, some leeway. I should like my own boat, be my own master. That’s what I’ll try next.’ Merry arched an eyebrow waiting for him to expand on his plans. ‘Perhaps a little trading, carrying coal, timber anything. Ply my trade up and down the coast, like when we first met but working for myself, start small and work my way up, what do you think?’

‘Will that not require an outlay, where will you get such a sum of money?’

‘I’ll borrow it. The banks are looking to give loans to those that bank with them, if I deposit our savings and add to it as and when I can over the next year or so, they might look favourably on me and give me what I’d need to start up on my own. What do you say - will you be happy to take the risk?’

‘I think it’s a good plan so long as you don’t over reach yourself.’

Merry had been careful with money whilst Steven had been gone. She’d been saving so that when she moved away to become a cook she’d have some spare cash as a buffer in case it took a while to find work.

Since Steven’s return many thoughts had tossed about in Merry’s head. Both she and Steven were trying to be practical and were living life from day to day trying to find a way through the conflicting thoughts and feelings which eddied about them.

It was like being tossed on a stormy sea. She longed for calm.

Merry had been giving some consideration to how they could raise money for the boat Steven wanted to buy. They’d never been in debt before. She was reluctant to take on a loan if there was another solution. She thought there was an answer but she’d have to tread carefully.

The clothes Tristan had bought for her, the gowns, the day dresses, the riding habits, the silk slippers, the hats, all sat in trunks in the bedroom. They must be worth a pretty penny. She had worn them so few times, some not at all. Some were to have been her going away outfit and for her honeymoon. As much as it would grieve her to let them go, they were so beautiful, what use were they to her now? She wouldn’t be attending a ball any time soon she reminded herself and if she kept them they would only be a reminder of what would never be. In time they would be eaten by moths.

Soon she thought, but not quite yet, she must part with the clothes and put the money to good use in helping to build Steven's new venture. That would be the right thing to do. She would support her husband in any way she could.

But still her heart was heavy. Some days she doubted she could go on; the enormity of the situation was too hard to carry. Part of her was grieving as if Tristan had died. She was confused and lost and desperate to see him, to talk to him, to hold him. A wave of guilt would crash over her and she would remember Steven was returned.

It wasn't the net worth of the clothes that she wanted but the man who'd given them to her. Every second of every day she was reminded she couldn't have both men, she couldn't live two lives.

Steven was still talking about the future. She interrupted him. 'Maybe you should go to Champion's and see what the bank manager says. Best not make too many plans before we know how the land lies,' she cautioned.

Later, over dinner her husband continued to share his thoughts and ideas for the future. 'Will you ride into Whitby with me? Perhaps take a walk about, call at Champions and make enquiries, what do you think?'

Merry nodded. She agreed to accompany him although she was a little anxious. She'd have to risk seeing Tristan sometime but as yet it was still too painful. She couldn't hide away but ... if it were not for Shingle Roar she would have liked to move back to Newcastle, start again away from here where there would be no chance of bumping into her other love. She knew Steven would never leave the house he'd built. Why would he?

'I see how next to my lovely wife I look somewhat shabby,' Steven joked looking her up and down. She was wearing a dress she'd made herself. It wasn't new but it was pretty. 'I need to smarten myself up a bit if I'm to be a ship owner, dress the part. Happen I'll get myself a new jacket at least.'

There was a knock at the front door and Steven went to answer it. When he came back he had a parcel in his hand. 'It's addressed to you sweetheart, were you expecting something?' She was full of guilt; she remembered the Christmas gift Tristan had left for her in the porch. Of course it was well into the New Year before she'd been well enough to wear it. It was a simple gold chain with a tiny pearl drop. Now she wore it close to her heart every day.

Steven handed the package over to his wife. He watched her closely. 'Aren't you going to open it?'

Merry felt the heat in her cheeks. She recognised her lover's handwriting on the letter attached. She was flustered as if caught out in some terrible secret. The atmosphere was suddenly charged. She opened the letter.

Dear Mrs Baker,

On my last trip to Scotland, whilst we were still betrothed, I bought the enclosed wedding gift for you. I have thought long and hard about what to do with it and have at last decided it belongs to you. The jewels were intended for you and no one else so even my keeping them to give to Constance when she grows up seems anathema to me. I chose them with you in mind.

Of course it is entirely your decision what do with them. If you want to keep them all well and good but if you decide you have no need of ornaments then I understand if you sell them. They are yours to use as you see fit.

I hope my actions do not cause undue pain. It has never been my intention to cause you hurt. Please assure your husband I mean no ill will in the gesture. I only seek to give what is rightfully yours.

Rest assured I mean never to contact you again,

I remain your humble servant,

Tristan Tolker

Merry sheepishly passed the note to her husband. A box inside a velvet bag lay on the table between them. Steven read the letter.

'Are you going to open it?'

'I cannot. It feels wrong somehow.'

'He says they were bought with you in mind so he obviously wants you to have them.'

'I know but things have changed since then.'

She stared at the box longing to look at what Tris had sent her but she could feel Steven's eyes watching her and once more she was overcome with emotion. Guilt, sadness, anger again consumed her.

'You'll have to look sooner or later. Shall I leave you to undo the box alone? Would that make you feel better?'

She shook her head and slid the box from its bag. When she lifted the lid she could hardly believe her eyes. The most glorious gems glittered before her.

Steven swallowed hard. 'I could never hope to buy you anything a fraction as good as these if I worked every day for the rest of my life.'

Merry ran her fingers over the opals amazed at their brilliance.

'I can't keep them. How could I?' The stones were cold to the touch yet they sparkled with intensity and fire.

'That's for you to decide Merry.'

'I think I must return them.'

'As you see fit sweetheart,' he carefully took the box from her hands and put it back in the velvet bag. It was as though someone had blown out all the candles. The light was suddenly gone from the room.

'They must be worth a small fortune.' The thought of Tristan choosing such a wonderful wedding gift made Merry catch her breath.

'Aye, so they must. They'd fetch a pretty penny if you sold them.' Merry watched her husband put the box on the dresser. 'But it's up to you. I'd send them back if you want my opinion.'

'I agree. They must be returned. They're not mine to keep. Not now.'

Steven edged around the table. 'I might go to the Anchorage for an hour.' He was ill at ease. 'I shan't be long, maybe have a game of cards. The lads will think a ghost's walked in.' The false jollity hit a wrong note making them both feel awkward.

When he'd gone Merry took the jewels and went to her bedroom. She slipped them from their box and stared at them. She'd never seen anything so beautiful. She thought about her engagement ring sitting in the safe at Westcliff House. She was only surprised he'd not returned that to her also.

Perhaps he'd forgotten it was there.

She thought of Tristan picking out the opals and diamonds especially for her, thought about how he would have loved to give them to her in person. When he was choosing them he couldn't have foreseen he wouldn't put the ring on her finger himself. She slipped the opal and diamond ring on her middle finger. It fit perfectly. She lifted the necklace and draped it around her neck and looked at her reflection in the mirror. The opals flamed, the diamonds sparkled. The bracelet was tricky to fasten one handed but when it was secure she turned her hand this way and that marvelling at the rainbow of colours as the opals flashed green, blue and red.

Merry lifted the lid of the trunk and took out the ivory gown she'd worn to her betrothal ball. That night Tamsin had insisted she borrow some of her jewels as Merry had

none of her own. The silk taffeta rustled as she held it up to her. She stood before the mirror and remembered the night she'd promised to marry Tristan Tolker.

A door banged and she furrowed her brow. Steven would not be back so soon? He'd barely had time to reach the inn. Footsteps pounded up the stairs, the bedroom door flung open: 'I changed my mind I would rather be - '

Steven stopped dead in his tracks. He stared at her wearing the jewels and holding the magnificent gown in front of her.

She dropped the dress to the floor, her face on fire.

A long moment passed as Steven fought to compose himself. She'd never seen that look on his face before. She barely recognised him.

His voice was low: 'I've thought about you, my own wife, in this very room, in this very bed with another man. A rich, handsome man by all accounts while I, your loving husband was battling to return to the woman he loved. I've tried not to blame you. I've tried to see things from your point of view and tried to understand how lonely you must have been.' He shook his head. 'The part I cannot understand is how you came to choose him. Why not William Wheelwright or some other working man? Will you always feel resentment that we'll be poor in comparison? I think you will judging by this.'

'I'm sorry Steven.' She was aware how it must look to him. His face infused with pain. 'We cannot choose who we love. You should know that. I've explained how we met.'

'And you lost our baby. But now you're perhaps glad. Now you hanker not for a child but for fine clothes and -'

'Steven, don't say such things. You're upset, not thinking straight.'

'I've never laid a finger on you or any woman in my life, but I could knock you to the ground for wanting this.' He picked up the dress and threw it on the bed. 'The minute my back's turned you want what he and he alone can give you.' He breathed hard as sweat broke out on his brow. 'I can't compete. I can never give you what you want. I'll never be a wealthy man but I always thought I was a rich one because I had you. Now I feel a pauper because I see I've lost you.' He clenched his fists at his side and stepped away from her.

'Take them off! For God's sake take them off now - send them back before I throw the dam lot into the sea and myself after them.'

He turned and ran back down the stairs. The door slammed shut behind him.

A few days later Hester called at Shingle Roar. The atmosphere between husband and wife had been more than a little strained since the jewels had arrived and Merry was glad to have company.

Merry had called to see Hester a few days ago and told her of Steven's homecoming. Hester, a simple soul, was happy for them both. She'd witnessed firsthand how devastated Merry had been when she had lost Steven. Now he was returned she could see only the positives.

'Now me mam 'as gone I 'ave more time on me 'ands an' now you aren't at The Anchorage anymore - Steven had said he didn't want his wife working at the tavern anymore, he wanted her at home looking after him - I've had a thought.' Hester was drinking tea at the kitchen table.

'Oh yes and what thought would that be?' Merry was trying hard to sound interested but all she could think about was how desperate she was.

After their quarrel Steven had begged forgiveness, said he'd been overwhelmed with jealousy. She was trying to come to terms with their new way of life and she wanted to forgive him. She'd been the one to cause the problem in the first place by putting on the jewels. After all what man would want to see his wife flaunting herself wearing another man's gift and a wedding gift at that!

'I never bin much of a cook,' Hester went on, 'So would yer learn me 'ow to bake? Mebbe I could get a second job now I've time on me 'ands. If I could master pastry that is.'

'Of course I'll teach you. Have you time now?' Merry was glad of the distraction. She got out the ingredients when Hester nodded enthusiastically. 'Pastry needs cold hands, if it's a warm day I run my hands under the pump to cool them down.' She filled two bowls with flour and added salt. She put another bowl in front of her friend. 'Copy what I do.'

Hester cut the lard into cubes. 'You need to rub the fat into the flour and lift your hands high above the bowl to get air into it, like this.'

'The last time I made pastry yer could have nailed it to the soles of yer shoes.'

'Don't use too much water, just enough to bind it together, perhaps that's where you went wrong. Too much water makes the pastry hard.'

Hester followed Merry's instructions and at last the pies were baked and cooling on the racks.

Steven came into the kitchen. 'Morning Hester, how are you today?'

'Well thank you, Merry's been 'elping me make pastry.'

‘My wife makes the best pastry in the country so if you heed her you won’t go far wrong. They smell good, might I try a slice? I’m starving.’

Hester laughed. ‘You can be the judge. Take a bite from each and tell us which one’s Merry’s and which is mine. Bet it will be obvious ’cause I’m bound to ’ave done summat wrong, though they don’t look too bad I must say.’

‘They look identical.’ Merry smiled as she cut a slice from the first one which was hers.

‘Mmm light as a feather. Steven tried the second one pretending to concentrate hard. ‘Well that one is just as good. You’re having me on and Merry made them both. It’s hard to pick,’ he said winking at his wife. ‘One has a little more salt which is more to my liking but they’re both good.’

‘Which one are you going to choose?’ Hester grinned at the pair of earnest faces. ‘I think the second has the edge by a small margin.’ He grinned at Merry behind the young woman’s back. ‘That’s mine!’ Hester skipped around the kitchen. She grabbed Merry by the hand. ‘I’m off to Rabby Dick’s to offer ’im me services.’ She grinned.

‘To be young and carefree!’ Steven said as Hester ran down the path. He straddled the bench at the kitchen table and helped himself to more pie. Since the night he’d caught Merry wearing the jewels they’d both tried hard to behave naturally but it was so difficult. There was always tension in the air.

Merry liked it when Hester came to Shingle Roar; a third person helped ease the strained relationship which had grown between her and Steven. He was a proud man and had always been confident he could take care of his wife. They’d always had a good standard of living compared to some. Now he was unmanned. He could never provide for her like Tristan could. Merry had tried to reassure him but it was hard to convince him she was happy with her lot when she didn’t fully believe it herself.

It wasn’t the money she missed it was the man.

6

Tamsin and Theo were walking along Whitby quay. Theo was discussing their brother. ‘Tristan’s throwing himself into his work like a madman. He’s at the shipyard in the morning before anyone else is even out of bed and is the last one to leave at night. He takes every opportunity to be out on the road, offering to take parts or messages to customers, jobs a menial could do, but it seems he wants to be on the go and on his own.’

Tamsin shook her head. ‘He refuses invitations, dines at home and when he has spare time he spends it with Constance.’ Tamsin turned towards Tristan’s office. ‘I’m not going to

take no for an answer this time, he needs to move on. No good can come from mooning about like a lovelorn youth. I'm going to talk to him.'

'And say what exactly? Oh I agree with you and I wish you luck. I've asked him to dine at Pannett House, invited him to card parties, I even suggested he took himself off to Mrs Truelove's Bordello but you can imagine how that went down.'

Tamsin shrugged and left Theo on the harbour. She knocked and entered her brother's office without waiting for him to give his assent. 'Good morning stranger, are you trying to avoid me?'

Tristan stood and kissed his sister's cheek. 'Of course not, I've been busy with this new contract Theo secured.'

'Busy busy busy, that's you *all* the time.' She perched on the edge of his desk. 'I want you to dine with Francis and I at Nab House. You seldom visit us these days, every time I ask you make an excuse. You can see I'm the size of a whale so I cannot come to you as often I'd like. I'm not riding again until after the birth. My poor horse couldn't bear the extra weight,' she joked trying to make him smile. 'I will not be put off any longer.'

Tamsin had written a note asking her brother to dine twice before and had received polite refusals on both occasions. Today she'd come to the shipyard to try to persuade him face to face. She had promised herself she would not take no for an answer.

'I know I've been remiss of late, I have neglected my little sister and her large bump', he joked back.

'You could bring Constance on Sunday, stay to dinner, make some time for yourself. Father says he and Theo are redundant here at the shipyard, you're working so hard. Have a care you don't make yourself ill my love.'

'Yes, thank you, we'll come. It will be nice to see you and hear your news.'

Tamsin rolled her eyes. 'The invitation is to spend time with your pregnant sister and her husband not to have a tooth pulled! Oh Tris, I worry about you, try and sound happy about the prospect! Your life is passing you by and you're wasting it pining for something which cannot be.'

'I know you're right, I should know more about my sister's life now she's married and expecting her first child. I feel more than a little guilt for neglecting you.' He gathered up his papers and put them in his saddle bag. 'I'm sorry but you must excuse me, I've a meeting at Hawsker. We can speak on Sunday, I promise. I've been meaning to call and see you both. I'm afraid I'll be dull company though I warn you now, I've no news of my own.' He kissed her cheek as he left her standing alone in his office.

‘You’d better not let me down,’ she shouted to his retreating back.

As she watched him go she noticed the dark circles beneath his eyes; had he lost weight too? He wasn’t eating properly that much was obvious. He was working himself into the ground as a distraction. On Sunday she would try her best to cheer him up. She smiled to herself. An idea sprung to mind. She ordered her carriage to stop off on her way home. Her idea was now a plan.



Tristan carrying his infant daughter was shown into the sunny drawing room at Nab House, Tamsin and Francis’s elegant house on the cliff looking out towards Whitby.

‘Forgive me if I don’t get up my love. I should like to hold my niece but it’s too much effort. Look at the size of me.’

Francis did the honours instead, ‘Come to Uncle Francis my sweetie, how lovely you look.’ Tami exchanged a smile with her brother. ‘Francis hopes for a girl. When I eventually burst that is.’

‘Not at all my love, I’ll be happy with whatever you offer up.’

‘Not so my father,’ Tami laughed ‘If it’s a girl he may throw himself off Whitby drawbridge. Not that it makes the slightest bit of difference; the child will be a Wheeler of course and not a Tolker.’

Tristan sat beside his sister and watched Francis as he bounced Constance up and down on his knee making her giggle. She continued to be a sweet natured child. Since her illness she’d gone from strength to strength. It hadn’t arrested her development at all.

‘You’re blooming as they say Tami. Are you keeping well?’

‘Thank you yes, I’ve never been better.’ She patted her bump. ‘It’s been a good excuse to have more gowns made too.’ She smiled affectionately at her brother.

‘Of course she has to have matching hats! Unless her head has got bigger too I’m at a loss to know why my dear wife must have more millinery.’ Francis put Constance on the rug by the fire where she crawled and attempted to haul herself to her feet using Tami’s leg as a support. Tami held her chubby little hands and helped her to stand.

‘Such a lot of hair you have. It is so dark and curly, you’ll have all the boys chasing you I expect.’

Tristan smiled indulgently. ‘She has *this* man chasing her already, she’s a treasure, even though I say so myself.’

‘You’re allowed to be biased, you’re her father. I hope our child is similarly good looking.’ Francis teased his wife.

Tami rolled her eyes. 'How could it not be? It will be the best looking child on earth with us as its parents. I believe it's common that all parents think their own child is beautiful even if they're not.'

Betsy Craig, Constance's nursemaid, had ridden over with Tristan and Constance and now she took the baby for her dinner while the three adults ate a hearty meal.

'I'm pleased to see you eating better than I'd expected Tris. I made sure cook made some of your favourite dishes.'

'I sometimes forget to eat. I've been busy with this new contract.'

Tami frowned. 'Distraction need not only be about work. Having fun with friends and family can also help, I'm so happy you came today. I believe Josh is home. I saw his sister last week and she said he sailed in on Wednesday. He'll cheer you up.'

'No doubt,' Tristan said not sounding convinced.

After dinner Tris and Francis sat together over port. Neither of them favoured cigars or pipes. 'If you don't mind my impertinence you are looking a little drawn,' Francis offered. Tristan could think of no suitable response. 'Why not join me at Rupert Aversly's on Friday evening? He's having a gentlemen only games night; cards, backgammon, roulette, that sort of thing. You might find it diverting?'

'Thank you Francis, but I seldom go out these days. I've not the interest I once had, not that I was ever much of a card player, except when I played with Tami at Whitehall before she was married.'

'Josh Wild will be there. He said he called over yesterday to see you but you weren't at home?'

'I'm sorry I missed him. I seem to remember now he left a note, I've not seen him for a while.'

'That's because you've become a hermit. Think about Friday, you need to be with friends, not so much on your own.'

'Thank you Francis I'll give it some thought, let's rejoin Tami or else she'll complain we leave her alone too long.'

As they entered the drawing room they could hear laughter - ladies' laughter. 'Here they are at last,' Tamsin said to the lady sitting opposite her, 'Look who's called to pay us a visit Tristan.'

'Amy, what a nice surprise,' Francis said to his sister. 'Were you passing?'

Tristan smelt a rat. 'Good afternoon Miss Wheeler,' Tristan said as he kissed her hand. If his sister said "isn't this cosy" he'd know she'd contrived this meeting.

‘Isn’t this cosy,’ Tamsin said smiling at her brother who was standing looking awkward and anything but happy.

‘I’m sorry but Constance and I must be off. It’ll be past her bedtime before we reach home.’

‘Surely not Tristan,’ Tamsin said trying not to lose her composure, ‘Stay a while longer and take tea with us, I imagine you’ve not seen Amy in a long while.’ Tamsin looked pointedly at her brother with a look that said she would not be pleased if he left now.

A look that could have made flower’s wilt passed between them. He would have to stay or face her wrath at a later date. He deduced what she was about, but it would not do. She must know he was in no mood for matchmaking. Amy was a perfectly agreeable young lady, fair haired, blue eyed, shapely figure and an agreeable personality but he wasn’t in the market for a courtship, he doubted he ever would be again. Tristan reluctantly gave in and sat to take tea.

After a pleasant hour Amy rose to leave. ‘You’ll accompany Amy home will you not Tris? She rode here with her maid but I’m sure they would like an escort, one never knows who’s about these days.’ She had set the trap knowing he could hardly refuse. He was her puppet, she was the one pulling the strings but he would have the last laugh. He would do as he was bid but no amount of manoeuvring would induce him to lead the poor girl on.

Constance had gone ahead with Betsy as Tristan didn’t want his daughter out in the cool evening air. As they were at the door Tris leaned into his sister ostensibly to kiss her goodbye. ‘I know your game little sister and it won’t work,’ he half smiled. He could never stay cross with her for long; she was worried about him he knew. They waved as they turned towards Whitby.

It was a pleasant evening as they rode side by side. They chatted about the weather, the state of the roads and how her father’s business was progressing. They had come to a declivity where the path was barely wide enough for two horses. Up ahead two more riders, a man and a woman were already on the path; if Tristan had been paying attention he Amy and her maid should have waited. Now they would all have to ride in single file and squeeze past as best they could.

The lead rider was a fair-haired man; he pulled his black horse into the edge of the path to make room. It was then that Tristan noticed the second rider rode a grey horse. With her hair tucked under her bonnet, Tristan had not recognised Merry.

‘Thank you sir, it is a little narrow here,’ the man said smiling cheerfully as their horses passed. Tristan’s eyes met Merry’s and she coloured. Her husband, for that was who

the man must be, was ahead and was busy negotiating the path to get past Amy and her maid. He failed to notice his wife's discomfiture.

Merry was so close Tristan could have reached out and touched her. It took all his strength not to take her hand. They looked at each other for a long moment, both horses had stopped. They of course recognised each other and snickered a greeting.

'Mrs Baker.' Tristan smiled gravely.

'Please Tristan don't stop,' she whispered as she urged her horse on. She glanced at Amy.

'Good evening.' Merry recognised the lady as Francis' sister. Tristan was aware of his increased heart rate.

When they were able to ride side by side again Amy said: 'The lady we passed looks familiar, I should know her from somewhere but I cannot place her.'

Tristan let out a long breath. Of course he realised Amy had met Merry on two occasions previously. They had first met at a dinner given by his father and secondly they had met at their engagement ball. Of course Merry had been dressed in all her new finery, an ivory gown of silk taffeta he remembered and with her hair dressed she had appeared quite different to how she looked today. Clad simply but smartly in a green cloak and with a straw bonnet, it was no surprise Amy couldn't place her. Tristan didn't feel the need to enlighten her.

After he'd bid Amy goodnight and ridden home he went to the nursery to check on Constance who was already fast asleep.

Later, he lay in his lonely bed and thought of the encounter with his beloved. It had been a painful reminder Merry had a living husband.

He'd never laid eyes on him before. The man had an open, friendly, sunburnt face which gave him a healthy outdoor look. That and his hair was all he had had time to notice.

He would not sleep this night. It was a torture to him that as he lay here alone she lay with her husband. He attempted to banish the image but found it was not quite as successful as he would have liked, her face kept on swimming before him.

He had wanted so much to reach out to her; even now he ached to be near her. It was intolerable he should have to meet husband and wife again. One way or another he must get away from Whitby.

He wouldn't know a moment's piece unless he did.

Merry sat at Hester's kitchen table. 'Thanks fer bringing this, yer so thoughtful.'

'How did you get on with Rabbity Dick? Are you now the new cook at The Anchorage?' Hester cut a slice of cheese pie. 'Nah, he wants to talk to you. Ses if you 'elp me wi' sum 'er your recipes 'e might consider taking me on fer a trial. Will yer 'elp me out, will you give me sum 'er yer recipes Merry?'

'Of course I will. I'll write them down for you - I know them by heart. Come anytime for lessons.'

'Thanks, but you look that weary. How's things going, must be strange 'avin' yer 'usband back. Nice like but when yer never thought to see 'im again it must be a might odd.'

'As you say it's taking time to adjust - for both of us.'

'And 'ave yer seen ought of Mr Tolker?'

Merry told of their encounter the night before.

'It's about Tris I've called Hester, well not solely but I wanted to ask a favour.' Hester listened while Merry explained about the jewels. 'Would you take them back to Westcliff House for me, I cannot keep them of course.'

'Lor, I couldn't! They must be worth a King's ransom, what if I was set upon and robbed.'

Merry smiled. 'Then I should fear for the footpad, you can be fierce when roused!'

'Serious though, I would be scared. Can't you get somebody else to do it?'

'I shouldn't have asked you. I'm sorry but I didn't know who else to turn to, I couldn't go myself and I couldn't ask Steven of course although I know he's not happy about them still being in the cottage.'

'I'd gladly take a letter to Westcliff 'ouse, mebbe ask Mr Tolker to send a man servant to fetch 'em. That might be an idea?'

Merry agreed it might be the best solution. 'I'll ask him to send a servant but I don't want him to come to the house. That might be too provoking for all concerned. I'll ask him to tell the servant to come to the copse. If you could wait for a reply then I should know when to go to deliver the jewels.'

For three days Merry anxiously waited for an answer. When the reply came she set off to the copse at the allocated time carrying the precious jewels. Her heart almost stopped.

Tristan had come himself.

'Tris why have you come? I was expecting a servant. I shouldn't have come had I known.'

'I'm sorry Merry, at the last moment I couldn't help myself.'

He lifted her down from Stone's back and kept tight hold of her waist. 'How are you my love?'

'How do you expect? What do you want me to say?' She pulled away to get the jewel box from her saddle bag. 'You cannot address me in such a familiar way!' When she turned she was hurt by the pained look on his handsome face.

'I'm sorry Tris, I didn't mean to ... but you're making a bad situation worse by coming here today, surely you see that.'

'I know. I know but I miss you so much.'

She handed the jewel box to him. 'I cannot keep them even though they're magnificent. It breaks my heart to think of you choosing them for me but they wouldn't be safe in Kettleness. Forgive me for returning them. perhaps you could give them to Tamsin; she'd adore them I'm sure.'

Merry turned and refastened her saddle bag as she fought back the tears. Tristan stood behind her. He turned her around and pulled her to his chest. After a slight hesitation they kissed.

'Come away with me. Let's reinstate our plan to move North. We could be happy.'

'Could we? Or would we be eaten up with guilt? I for one would be. I have a husband and I cannot simply pretend he doesn't exist. He's trying so hard to be patient with me. He's trying his best to be fair.'

'It's tearing me apart thinking of you with him, picturing you in his arms, kissing him'

'Tris stop! I must go, we cannot be together. For your information Steven hasn't laid a finger on me,' she flushed, 'as I said he's trying to be understanding. He wouldn't understand us being here today and I wouldn't blame him. This has to end. We can never be together you must see that.' She strode to her horse then stopped suddenly. 'You go first I'd hate for someone to see us together. If Steven were to find out he'd be so hurt. Please don't contact me again. From now on we must be as strangers.'

Merry watched him tuck the jewels into his saddle bag.

'Like the other night? Must we be like two ships that pass in the night? How can that be Merry when we have shared so much?' He sighed. 'But you've made your choice and I must accept that. I do see that.' He mounted his horse.

'It's not exactly a choice, that's a little unfair but either way we must not meet again. It's over Tris.'

'Goodbye my love. You know I'll love you until the day I die. If you change your mind, today, tomorrow five years from now I'll be waiting.' He rode off.

Merry slumped to the ground and leant her back against the rock, tears coursed down her cheeks. Lost in her misery the time passed. She stared out to sea with unseeing eyes. Suddenly a shadow passed over her. Her husband was standing before her. He held out his hand to help her from the ground.

‘Forgive me, I followed you. I’m sorry.’

‘It’s not what you think, it wasn’t a secret tryst. I sent a note saying I needed to return the gems. He was supposed to send a servant, but came himself instead. Had I known I wouldn’t have come.’

‘I believe you, I know you wouldn’t lie to me but this situation cannot go on.’ He plunged his hands in his pockets. ‘I saw how you looked at him, saw how he kissed you. You’re still in love with him that much is clear.’ Merry couldn’t deny it. ‘I know you’re not deliberately trying to hurt me, you’re not the sort to play one man off against the other and anyway how could I compete with a fine gentleman like him? He’s not a better man than me but he can give you the kind of life I never could. I’m eaten up with jealousy Merry, I can’t help myself.’

‘There’s nothing to be jealous of. It’s over.’

‘It didn’t look over.’ Steven shrugged. ‘Come let’s go sweetheart, we need to talk.’ They returned home to Shingle Roar.



Josh Wild had called at Tristan’s office and almost frog marched him to Westcliff House to change for an evening of gaming at a mutual friend’s house. It was a wet and windy Friday night when the two friends were shown into the gaming room at Rupert Frasier’s house where tables for backgammon, whist, roulette and other games of chance were on offer. Skittles had been set up in the hall and the sound of wood hitting wood echoed around the high ceilinged vestibule.

Each had a glass of fine French wine as they partnered one another at whist. Josh was far too cavalier in his calling and they were soon down ten guineas. There was little point in trying to hold Josh back Tristan thought; he always played as if he had money to throw away. He was wild by name and wild by nature. After light refreshments and one or two spins on the roulette wheel where Tristan made up his losses, Francis, Josh and Tristan sat in the library sharing a bowl of punch.

Francis had become a father that day and the three of them were wetting the baby’s head.

‘A healthy boy you say. Finally a boy! Is Tami well?’

‘She’s as well as can be expected. He’s a grand big chap Dr Levy says, eight pounds two ounces.’

Tristan slapped his brother-in-law on the back. ‘And has a name been chosen?’

‘It has, Alexander Francis Tristan Wheeler.’

‘So my sister has broken with tradition, It was always on the cards. At least he’s not called Ulysses which she once threatened.’ He was pleased his name was amongst the ones they had chosen for the baby.

‘Your father arrived just before I left and is exceedingly pleased to have a grandson even though the boy isn’t a Tolker.’ Francis called for another bowl of punch and the three made in-roads into it.

‘You need a distraction my man,’ Josh told Tristan changing the subject.

‘I know what remedy you’ll prescribe Josh but it’ll not cure; it might alleviate the symptoms in the short term but I can assure you some harlot won’t heal me in the long run.’

‘Then I prescribe another remedy. What about a sea journey? Perhaps a change of scene may help mend your broken heart. It would put some distance between you and the lady in question.’

Tristan nodded. ‘I’ve had a similar thought myself.’ He told them how he had met Merry and her husband by accident on the way home from Nab House. Francis let out a low whistle. ‘Lord, that cannot have been an easy meeting; I can see how you’d want to avoid such a thing in the future. She’s a lovely lady, much to be admired. You must miss her.’

There was a moment’s silence. ‘I can recommend Italy - Venice is interesting too.’ Francis sought to fill the void. Josh added his thoughts. ‘A few months touring Europe seeing the sights would be just the ticket, who knows you may meet a pretty mademoiselle. At the very least you might meet some wench to whet your appetite for a while.’

Tristan shook his head. ‘I’d thought of something more permanent, not a holiday an emigration, America perhaps.’

Francis was astonished. ‘Tami won’t be pleased. She told me she worried you might think of such a thing and will do all in her power to dissuade you from such a move. Lord, I won’t be the one to tell her of the idea. It would mean my marital rights cut off along with other more sensitive parts of my anatomy.’

Josh nodded. ‘That’s what I would do in your shoes - leave these God forsaken shores. Indeed I’m thinking to do just that myself. There’s money to be made in the New World. What say you to a venture together? Perhaps we should set up a partnership?’

The two men discussed the possibility. Josh was far more enthusiastic and was full of ideas. Tristan listened but as he was only considering the idea as an escape route, he was more circumspect, not so eager to chance his arm.

‘Tami will play Holy hell! I hope you’ll tell her I had nothing to do with this.’ Francis was the voice of reason.

‘It would take all my grandfather’s inheritance to finance the move unless I sold up completely; sold Westcliff House that is.’ Tris had never really settled there since his failed marriage. And now with a failed engagement the newly refurbished sleeping quarters were still under dust sheets. The house was doomed to his eyes. A fresh start was beginning to look appealing.

After further discussion Francis interrupted: ‘What about Constance?’

‘I should take her with me of course, though I’ll be anxious for her wellbeing, I shouldn’t want to put her at any risk. Ideally it would suit me if I could go out there and see how the land lies, use grandfather’s money to establish a business, build a house, then send for her. I’m not sure however that when it came down to it I could leave her for so long; we’re so very close. She wouldn’t understand my going away and I should miss her.’

‘You know Tami and I would take good care of her, we’d look after her like she was our own. It would be our pleasure.’

‘Lord he’s making offers and has only today become a father himself. Perhaps you need to prove yourself capable first. Can you be trusted Francis?’ Josh laughed. ‘I remember one night after drink had been taken you forgot at which ostler your horse was stabled! What if you were to forget you were in loco parentis? I suppose Tami is more reliable so you need not fear Tris.’ Josh was in his cups and expansive.

As the evening broke up Josh and Tristan found themselves standing on a windy West Cliff discussing the plan further.

‘We would do well in business together,’ Josh concluded. ‘I like the idea more and more when I think of it. I’ve a mind to stop roving about the oceans and throw down the anchor for good, the sea is getting to be a dangerous place. It would be a new beginning for both of us and we at least would lend each other support, we’d be strangers in a new land together.’

‘Let’s talk of this again soon, when you’re sober. There’s a lot to consider. If it was just me I wouldn’t hesitate but I alone am responsible for my daughter’s well being.’ They shook hands and went their separate ways.

As Tristan tucked the cot blanket around his daughter's small, chubby body he knew at that moment whatever he decided he couldn't be without Constance; she was all he had left. He couldn't be parted from her even for six months.

Wherever he went she would go too.



On their return to Shingle Roar Merry found it hard to settle: 'I think I'll walk on the beach I need time to think.'

'Do you want me to accompany you?'

She shook her head. 'Do you mind if I go alone? I need to clear my head. I have a decision to make.' She heaved a sigh of relief as he let her go.

As she made her way down to the beach Ledge followed her. The cat's bent tail swished from side to side as she watched her mistress descend. Having once come a cropper on the cliff face Ledge had set herself a boundary. She would follow Merry only so far and not down the cliff to the beach.

Merry was walking away from Shingle Roar towards the incoming tide. She removed her shoes and bonnet. Her hair and cloak streamed out behind her. When she came to the water's edge the sea wetted the hem of her dress but she didn't notice as she set off walking in the direction of Sandsend.

She quickened her pace now; there was determination in her stride. The next time she stopped she turned abruptly and started to run in the opposite direction, running hard and fast like a young colt frightened by its own shadow then she dropped to her knees and put her head in her hands, her shoulders convulsing and shuddering.

The sky was gloomy as she walked back to Shingle Roar, her mind made up. She knew what she must do. Steven was waiting for her in the kitchen.

'I thought you might have followed me again,' she said without rancour.

Steven shrugged. 'Would you want me to witness your torment?'

'No,' she sat opposite him by the fire.

'Do you want my shoulder to cry on or would you prefer someone else's? I used to know your every thought but now,' he expelled the air from his lungs slowly. Merry peered into the flames. 'Have you made a decision? I know you and know you're not content since I returned no matter what you say.'

'It's not been easy for either of us.'

'True enough but you were about to be risen up in the world, be loved and adored by a wealthy, handsome man who would give you riches beyond anything I can provide. You'd

have been waited on hand and foot, had a life of comfort and ease. I can't compete with all that. You've had a small taste of that life and now you can never be satisfied with this.' He waved his arm about the parlour.

'I'm not the kind of woman to choose Tristan over you simply for the money. Without doubt you know me better than that.'

'I thought I did, I do know, you're right but still ... ' He sighed deeply and Merry's heart went out to him. Guilt washed over her seeing the pain she was causing him.

'That leaves only one conclusion: you must love Tolker more than you love me. Since I came back we've slept separately. If you loved me best surely you couldn't resist me? You never could refuse me before. We were always lovers, not just husband and wife.' The thought hit her like a punch to her stomach.

'While I was struggling to get back to you Merry I never seriously thought I would find someone else in my place. I thought what we had could never be broken. It sounds arrogant now but I truly thought you would stay single at least in the short term. I hoped you would have waited, grieved a little longer before once again giving your heart away.'

'They said you were dead. I was devastated, heartbroken. My grief was real and raw. And then I lost the baby ... those days were so dark and dismal. There was little to look forward to, little to cheer me. My life was all in the past, my future bleak and lonely. I didn't go looking for love, not even when William Wheelwright offered me marriage.' She'd told her husband about the proposal. The two men would bump into each other and she wanted Steven to be forewarned though later she suspected William would never have mentioned it.

'I wouldn't have wanted you to spend the rest of your life alone. I would have wanted you to have married again - in time. You're still a young woman, a beautiful woman with her life before her but now all is changed. My sweet I don't know what to do or what more to say. How do I win you back? Do I rant at you to see reason, show you I mean to keep you no matter what? Fight for you or keep on hoping you'll once again return to me, love me body and soul as you used to do?'

'On the beach now I thought long and hard. I set my mind to remember the good times we'd had and will have again.' She let the words hang in the air.

'Does that mean ... I wish I could be sure you meant it? I've seen the dresses, the gowns, the jewels, the love tokens given to you by *him* and they were just for starters; will you be content here with me when you could have riches? If you'd married him there would be a grand mansion to live in, staff at your beck and call, horses, carriages, parties and balls.'

You'd have been a lady. Can I deny you that life? Would I be that selfish? You say you have made the decision to stay but will you grow to resent me if you do?'

'Steven you're torturing yourself. Anyone would think you don't want me to stay to hear you talk. I thought you'd be happy. Why do you not believe me when I say I'll stay? You've just as much to offer; not the material things you seem intent on listing but what woman could be loved more than I am? You've never let me down and I truly love you. I'm a married woman, married to *you* Steven. If I left you to be with Tris I would do so as a mistress. We couldn't marry. I am already married - to you. In time we'll rebuild our lives and God willing move on.'

'Since I came back I've seen Shingle Roar with new eyes.' Steven sighed. 'It's no mansion I admit, yet it's been my pride and joy, still is if truth be told. Now at this moment I can see it for what it is ... not good enough for you Merry. You deserve more, you deserve a mansion. I know above all else you're loyal Merry. I know you'd deny yourself all those riches because you're married to me, you'd adhere to your marriage vows no matter what. You'd never have looked at another man, you only did because you thought me gone for good. You'd turn your back on the life you'd expected and carry on, supporting me in my new venture, selling those gowns and gifts and giving up your dreams to help me. Could I ask you to do such a thing?' He strode to the door. 'I'll feed and water the horses.' He waited a moment then said: 'This decision is not one you can make alone sweetheart. There are two of us in this marriage.'



Tristan refilled Josh's glass. They had been talking about the different sorts of businesses they might set up if they chose to go to America. Both had agreed that wherever they decided to go and whatever they decided to do they must stay by the coast; both men knew ships and shipping so they thought it best to start with that as an advantage.

They had been debating whether to buy a ship and sail it there themselves, taking a crew with them or to take a passage on another ship and see what was on offer when they landed. They saw there were pros and cons to both schemes.

'Leave it with me Josh, I'll ask about, there's an auction on Monday week here in Whitby. I'll look to see if there is a suitable vessel to buy.'

'If there was such a ship and we could get it for a good price that might help us to make a decision. I know you said it might limit our options when we get to America but if we took out a cargo to sell that would enable us to make contacts right from the off. If a better opportunity came along we could always sell the ship on.'

After Josh left Westcliff House Tristan sat back in his chair by the fire and sighed. The more he thought of the plan to leave these shores the more discontented he became. The reason was apparent of course.

It would feel like burning his bridges.

At the heart of him he was a man who liked nothing better than spending time with his family. He was particularly close to his sister and now she had a son - but if he went to America when would he see them again? He wouldn't get to see his nephew grow up and Constance wouldn't know her cousins.

He'd always imagined his own children, Theo's and Tamsin's being playmates, growing up together and being friends. Was taking Constance away from the only family she had selfish? Could he drag his daughter half way around the world to an uncertain future just so he might have peace of mind? The more time moved on the more his doubts multiplied. Would he ever be content again, no matter where in the world he ended up?

If he went to America Constance would never know the love of her grandpapa, her aunt, uncles and cousins. If it was only him leaving these shores, his beloved Whitby it would be different but did he have the right to separate her with an ocean from her relatives?

The need to get away from Whitby, away from Merry and her husband was still paramount. Even more so since he'd seen them together but could he not put distance between them by moving to somewhere closer to home? Scotland or perhaps to another east coast town? When he and Merry were running away together he'd done some research about Northumberland. Would this not be the better option? At least he and Constance would still get to see their family occasionally.

When he first thought of going to America he'd wanted to put an ocean between himself and Merry. When Josh was keen to join him the idea had quickly gained momentum. Tristan was now having second thoughts. It was different for Josh; he had no family ties to keep him here. He was a free spirit, a sailor and an adventurer at heart. Tristan resolved to speak with Josh again soon after he had given the matter more thought.

8

Having prepared supper Merry went outside to find her husband. She found him putting the chickens to bed.

'Supper's ready.' Her voice sounded lighter, calmer than she had a right to feel.

'I'm coming,' he said looking up and smiling warmly. Merry went back to the kitchen to lay the table.

Supper was a quiet affair with neither of them talkative, the atmosphere was still strained. It was hard to talk of everyday matters under the circumstances. It never used to be like this with the two of them she brooded. There had always been something to talk about, some light banter from Steven some teasing remark from Merry.

This was no companionable silence.

As Merry cleared his plate away Steven said: 'Thank you, I can't tell you what it's like to eat good food again. Sometimes in France the bread was edible but little else was to my taste.'

'Yet all the best chefs are French, but I don't suppose you had access to them. There's apple pie if you would like some.'

'No, thank you.' Steven took a deep breath: 'Sweetheart, we both know this situation is intolerable.' Merry stopped and put the plates she was clearing back down.

'Yes I know, but what more is there to say? How can we go forward without causing each other more pain? Time is what we need.'

'We need to be honest with each other, say what's truly in our hearts even though it may be hurtful.' Their eyes met for the first time since they had sat down to eat.

'Since I returned it's not been the same between us, how could it be when you thought me dead? You had started to make a new life for yourself with someone else. Now I'm back and you've had a turnabout in your head, in your future, and especially in your heart. We cannot continue as we are. No one's happy, I know for certain I'm not and I don't believe you are either even though you say you intend to stay with me.'

Merry sat down heavily and put her head in her hands. She couldn't think what to say.

It had all been said before.

There was no easy solution to their dilemma. 'I still love you Steven, you're my dear husband and -' He cut her off.

'You love him more - I can tell and it grieves me more than I can say - no please let me speak,' he said as she tried to interrupt. 'I don't blame you or judge you, as you rightly said we cannot choose who we fall in love with. I wouldn't give you up for anything but it breaks my heart to see how you're torn in two. I know you'd honour your marriage vows but do I want you on those terms? I want what we had before I went away, yet you can never be that woman again. I see that now.'

'Oh Steven it's true, my heart's ripped in half, I love you but I love him too.' Merry wiped her eyes on a handkerchief. 'I love him but I cannot be with him. Together we'll find a

way through this; you and I must come to terms with what's happened and move on. Try to reconnect. I need to be your wife again in every respect, I understand that.'

Steven shook his head. 'You'd make do with second best you mean. You'd come to resent me in the fullness of time? I don't want to be your husband by default.'

'Then what are we to do?'

'All I know is that I cannot go on like this, perhaps I should get a job on a whaling ship again, go back to sea?'

'How will that help? Is that not only deferring the problem?'

'I agree it is, but what else can I do? It's impossible. I want you Merry in every way. It's a torment to lie in the room next to yours yet not have you, hold you, love you like a husband should love his wife and sweetheart. Perhaps I was naive. When I came back I expected you to be the same person I left behind.'

'I admit I was lonely here all by myself.' She sat down. 'Kettleness is such a quiet out of the way place, especially in the wintertime. With the absence of you or any friends to speak of my life was empty and desolate. I had no present and no future, I had memories, happy memories but I couldn't live on them forever. I told you I'd thought to move away, start again somewhere with more life, get a job as a cook and then Tris came along and changed all that.'

'I would still have expected you to wait more than a year.'

'Wait for what Steven, to get old and grey? They told me you were lost for good, dead, at the bottom of the sea.'

Steven took her in his arms: 'I'm sorry. I said I wouldn't judge, how can I? I didn't know what you'd endured, forgive me sweetheart.' Her body relaxed against him as tears wet his shirt where her head lay against his shoulder.

'Can you see what's happening to us?' he said. 'We who've never had a cross word, never argued in our lives, not real arguments over important matters, have come to this.' He held her head against his shoulder and stroked her hair.

'I must give you up my love. It's the only thing to do.' Merry tried to pull away but Steven held her close. 'You told me the two of you had planned to go away together, when his wife was the obstacle, live as man and wife though he was still married. Now the boot's on the other foot. I'm the hindrance. He would still have you on those terms I expect.'

Merry broke free a look of astonishment on her face. 'What are you saying? You want me to leave you? Could I be happy knowing you'd sacrificed your own happiness for me?'

Steven shrugged. 'I don't know my love, all I know is we can't go on like this, it kills me to say it but together we're both miserable so if you went then at least one of us would be happy, eventually. Either way we must part.'

9

Tristan and Josh had been to the boat auction but had come away empty handed there being nothing suitable for their needs. As they couldn't agree on what their needs were it was hardly surprising.

'The lugger would have been too small if we were to take a cargo to America,' Josh said, 'it wouldn't have been worth the effort.'

'It would have been perfect however for plying a trade up and down this coast, but as you say too small for our purpose.'

'I think we should take a passage, start from the beginning when we get there, save ourselves the trouble.' Josh's eye had wandered to the serving wench who was unloading her tray at their table. They were taking dinner at The Angel on the harbour at Whitby. 'She might be worth the effort,' he inclined his head in the direction of the pretty server as she smiled at them.

Tristan took no notice and after a few mouthfuls pushed his plate away. 'This rabbit pie is barely edible.' He remembered how Merry's pies tasted.

'You'll taste worse than this on the voyage, this is like manna from heaven compared to the poor fare you'll have on board I'll bet,' Josh laughed.

'I don't think I can go Josh,' Tristan suddenly blurted out.

'What! Just because of the grub!'

'I'm serious; I've given it much thought, I don't think I've the right to take Constance away from her family. She has Jane's parents, my father, brother, sister, cousins. In America what will she have besides me?'

'Her Uncle Josh?'

Tristan smiled. 'Exactly! Not the role model I'd want for my daughter.'

'You'll begin again, meet a pretty young lady, marry, have more children. *They'll* be Constance's family.'

'You make it sound so easy, I cannot love another. My heart is already spoken for.'

'For now. In time you'll get over Meredith, you're a young man - with needs.' Josh winked, 'Go on get your hand in again over there,' He pointed with his riding crop at the serving wench. 'I'll let you have her, cheer you up; she's obviously interested.'

Tristan stood to leave. I'm sorry Josh. Make plans by all means but don't include me. I'll move away but not to America. I've made my mind up to start afresh and move to Northumberland, at least there won't be an ocean between Constance and her family.'

'You'll regret it! Man this is such a good opportunity.' Josh stood to walk out onto the blustery quayside with him. 'Well, you can always join me in a year or so when I've made my fortune. Who knows you may change your mind. I'm sorry you won't come old friend, but in your shoes I'd probably feel the same. Who knows I might meet someone out there and settle down?' He laughed heartily. 'Either way I'll see you before I leave.' He winked and went on his way.

9 - Six Months Later.

Life at Shingle Roar, on the surface at least, had settled into a routine. After endless discussions they had decided to give it a year and if at the end of twelve months things between them were no better they would reconsider.

Both were trying their utmost but there was a strain that sometimes became unbearable.

In the meantime, Steven keen to establish himself, had set his plans in motion and had been to Champion's bank and arranged a loan using Shingle Roar as collateral.

With the loan he bought a lugger with the view of trading between Whitby and Newcastle. It was a big commitment, taking on a loan, but Steven wouldn't hear of Merry selling her gifts from Tristan. He was far too proud for that. He was confident he'd made the right decision to set up on his own and worked hard getting the lugger sea worthy. He was eager to be his own boss. Keen to prove himself worthy to his wife.

He was now in the process of finding good men to crew for him. And as luck had it there were plenty of takers. Work was in short supply in and around Kettleless.

'Mabel's beau Daniel and his brother are to join your crew?' Merry asked as she sat under the apple tree with her husband. Steven nodded. 'It's good you're providing work for the locals is it not? Daniel's been out of work this last six months. Now perhaps with steady work he and Mabel will be able to wed.'

'Daniel will be a junior member of the crew. His pay won't be that great. I've to keep costs as low as possible for now. He's little know-how, unlike his brother Mark who's older and much more experienced. Mark will be my second in command. We've always got on well, I think him a sound fellow.'

'Speak of the devil and he shall appear,' Merry said smiling as she saw Mark at the gate.

‘Hello there. We thought to do some line fishing later if you’re interested Steven. The usual gang will no doubt come. The forecast looks good and the sea looks calm enough. What say you?’

Before Steven’s last ill fated mission he’d often joined other local men to go night fishing. It was a tradition on the North East Coast. These sessions served several purposes; to catch fish of course but also to get together around a camp fire on the beach drink ale, tell stories and unwind. All were reasons Steven liked to go. He raised his eyebrows at Merry to see what she thought.

‘Go,’ she said smiling. ‘You’ll enjoy it. It’ll be a chance to catch up with your old friends and to tell them of your new plans.’

Steven nodded. ‘I’m in,’ he called, ‘I’ll see you on the beach at sunset.’

Mark waved as he went on his way.

‘Will William go? He always did like night fishing but perhaps he’ll feel awkward in your company now. He’ll guess I told you about his proposal.’

‘I shouldn’t think that will put him off. We’ve spoken at The Anchorage since I came back so the ice is broken.’ Steven watched Merry’s face. ‘It feels odd he’d ask for your hand - not odd for I know there’s many a man who’d be honoured to marry you - but I’d not have been happy had you married such a surly fellow as he. I always got on with him well enough but he’s a curmudgeonly fellow. I can’t imagine he’d have made you happy.’

‘Which is precisely why I turned him down.’ Merry was emphatic. ‘I did rely on him to help with chores here at Shingle Roar and I was grateful but not that grateful. I always paid him one way or another.’

Again they had strayed into dangerous territory. William wouldn’t have been to her taste but Steven also knew that another man was.

Some details of this liaison were still too painful to consider and whilst he thought he understood why she’d taken up with Tolker, jealousy still grinded in his gut when he thought about them together. Tristan Tolker, handsome and rich, was a ghost between them haunting their marriage by day and by night.

Especially by night.

The closeness he and Merry once shared seemed lost, gone. Day to day they rubbed along well enough but the nights ... sometimes his patience wore thin and he thought to take what was his by right. The months wore on and still they were no closer. The last time he’d tried to kiss her goodnight had she flinched when he pulled her to him? Would she ever give herself to him again?

Steven changed the subject. 'Dick will come tonight I expect. He'll set his rabbit traps then join us. He'll bring the ale as usual.'

'And I'll pack up some pasties in case the fish don't bite, otherwise you'll all have sore heads in the morning.'



Later, after Steven had gone fishing, Merry was wide awake in the marital bed. Not that she'd shared it with her husband since his return. He was still giving her time to adjust.

He was a paragon.

She thought about Tristan all the time. She couldn't bring herself to regret her time with him. It made her feel selfish and undeserving of Steven's loyalty but now she would never be with Tris again the precious memories were all she had to sustain her. She kept them locked deep in her heart.

Nights were especially difficult. Alone in her bed Merry's emotions see-sawed about making sleep hard to come by. During the day she would keep herself busy. Try to tire herself out. Then she'd tell herself she'd allow Steven back to their bed. Why wouldn't she? They had always had a warm, passionate love life.

But every evening after supper she would change her mind. She's suddenly freeze at Steven's touch as Tristan's handsome face appeared before her.

Tonight in the empty house sleep once again evaded her. It felt eerily quiet. Even the shingle was silent. It was a balmy evening, the sea calm and a new moon giving little light.

Merry felt restless. As dawn's light penetrated the room she climbed out of bed and looked out of the window. A wave of guilt engulfed her as she looked towards Whitby - she had no right to think of another - she was a married woman.

As she peered out into the early morning gloom she saw lanterns bobbing up the side of the cliff. The fishermen were on their way back. The fish must not be biting for she wouldn't have expected them back so early. In the past she would be preparing breakfast when Steven returned from a night of fishing and carousing. The lights were steadily coming towards Shingle Roar. Why when the lines were always stored at Mark's cottage? As they got closer Merry could see two figures at the front, one she thought was Mark the other was certainly Rabbity Dick. They were carrying something heavy between them.

It was a body.

For the second time Meredith Baker was a widow.

This time there could be no mistake. The body of her husband lay in a grave at the churchyard, his funeral witnessed by the whole village.

The riptide had taken him, despite Mark, Dick and William's best efforts. That a freak accident should do for Steven when he'd survived the attack on The Mermaid was unthinkable.

Steven was aware of how the currents ran - all the locals knew; all had respect for the sea, none more than Steven. Why then had he risked all for such little reward? Meredith would never know the answer for certain.

But in her heart she knew.

Once more in widow's weeds she was left to contemplate her future. They had both tried so hard for the last six months but they had both changed so much and failed. They still loved each other but there was something, or rather someone always there between them.

Despite the inner turmoil she would not contact Tristan even though she longed to see him. It would feel nothing less than a betrayal to go to him now. She decided she would wait until a three month mourning period had been observed.

She would think what to do after that.



Tristan's plans to move to Northumberland were proving slow to materialise. This was mainly because he was still unsure whether or not he really wanted to leave Whitby.

On the one hand he saw the benefit of not running into Merry and her husband and on the other he feared starting again in a new county with only his daughter for company.

He had been disappointed when Constance's nursemaid said she would not be able to join them. She had ailing parents and would not leave them. That was another obstacle. It would mean finding someone new to take care of his daughter. Constance was devoted to the young woman and Tristan had thought it the one thing which would help her settle in a new place.

Another barrier had been that until he was in receipt of his grandfather's legacy he would have to take out a loan to establish the business he'd decided to start. It would be a big undertaking. After careful consideration he'd come to the conclusion he should stick to what he knew; ship building.

If he started a small shipyard he'd be able to gradually build from the ground up, gain orders and make a name for himself. His apprenticeship at his father's yard had been extensive and he had confidence in his abilities to not only build ships but to build a business.

He knew he was dragging his heels and when he saw Tami with her son it slowed him down still further.

How could he leave his family behind?



Hester stood outside the shipyard and took a deep breath. She was unsure whether she was doing the right thing but she wanted to repay Merry for all the times she had helped her.

Firstly, Merry had been a good friend to her when her mother was ill, helping to nurse her even when the old lady was dying. Secondly, she had spent much time teaching her to cook so that now she had a good job at The Anchorage which she enjoyed much better than sewing. At the inn she had company, people to talk to unlike when she was a seamstress working alone at home.

She had, of course, seen Tristan Tolker from a distance but he didn't know her from Adam. Perhaps he would refuse to see her? She entered the yard and looked about. There was a young man, a worker smoking a pipe and leaning against a barrel.

'Can you tell me which is Mr Tolker's office? Mr Tristan Tolker that is.'

The young man, who Hester noted was handsome, pointed with his pipe. 'His is the one on the left, the blue door but he's not in. I saw him leave about half an hour ago.'

Hester hadn't thought of this. She was disappointed not to be able to deliver her carefully rehearsed speech. Today was her day off and she had walked all the way into Whitby especially to speak with the ship builder. Now she had a long walk back to Kettleless and all for nothing. Perhaps it was a sign. She sighed. Perhaps she was interfering and stirring up trouble.

'He walked wherever he was going,' said the young man, 'he didn't take his horse so he might not have gone far. Perhaps wait a while if you have the time.'

'I do have the time. I'm not keen to set off straight back. My feet are killing me.' She told him where she had come from but not why.

'Do you know William Wheelwright, the smith? He's my cousin.'

'I do know him. We're neighbours.' Hester didn't want to say what she thought of his cousin as she liked the look of this young man. Good looks obviously ran in the family.

'We don't know each other well but I believe he's good at his job.'

The flaxen haired young man relit his pipe. 'He offered me an apprenticeship when I was twelve but my Pa works for the Tolkers and wanted me to do the same. I'm glad I work

here - at least there's life in Whitby. Kettlewess is a quiet place. I bet you'd struggle to find a sweetheart there. I imagine all the decent young lads have moved away.'

Hester was a little surprised at the young man's forthright opinion. She wasn't used to talking to men. She was at a loss what to say in reply.

He smiled but before she could think of an answer he said: 'There's Mr Tolker now. See, your trip's not been a waste of time.'

Hester turned. A tall, well dressed man had entered the shipyard.

'You've a visitor Mr Tolker,' the young man said looking at Hester and winking.

'Good day to yer sir. My name is Hester Thwaite and I'd like a private word if yer can spare the time.'

'Of course. Please step into my office Miss Thwaite.' He held the door open for her and she entered a room covered with books, ledgers, diagrams and models of ships in various stages of construction.

'May I offer you a cordial Miss Thwaite?'

Hester was far too nervous to accept. 'Thank yer kindly sir but I'll try not to take up too much of yer time I 'ope. I'm not sure what to say now I'm 'ere.' She could feel her cheeks flush and her mouth dry. She wished she had been brave enough to take the proffered drink.

'Have a seat and tell me what you want to say. Does a member of your family work for us? I don't think we have any Thwaites on the books.'

'It's a personal matter Mr Tolker. It's about Meredith Baker that I've come.'

The handsome man recoiled then turned to look down the estuary and out to sea.'

'You know Mrs Baker?'

'I do sir, we've long bin friends.' Hester took a deep breath and trying not to fall over her words continued: 'I don't know if you're aware sir, but her 'usband 'as met with an accident. A month ago 'e went night fishing and was drowned. Merry, Mrs Baker that is, is a widow for real this time. I thought yer might not 'ave 'eard and dint know that Merry is ... well I knew you and 'er were ... close. Any road I thought to come and tell yer and yer can decide yerself what to do with the information.' She took another breath. 'I mean no 'arm but it seems to me that -' Hester was rambling and stopped speaking abruptly.

'Thank you. This is quite shocking news. Poor Merry.'

Hester was surprised to see the colour drain from Tristan Tolker's face. 'It's very good of you to come to tell me. Mrs Barker has spoken of you before Miss Thwaite, I remember now. I believe you're one of her closest friends.'

Hester nodded. ‘She’s that flummoxed by Steven coming back after so long only for him to die in a fishing accident. The whole village is shocked.’

‘I can only imagine.’

‘I just thought you should know as you and her were friends like.’

‘Thank you for coming to tell me. I must think what to do.’ He passed his hand through his hair. ‘Did you walk here?’ Hester nodded. ‘Then allow me to arrange transport for you otherwise it will be a long walk home.’

Hester was about to protest, she didn’t want to be a bother, but he was already at the door. ‘Matt,’ he called to the young man Hester had been talking to earlier, ‘bring the trap around and take Miss Thwaite back to Kettleness will you?’



After Hester left Tristan paced his office in a state of high agitation. After setting off and then returning before he’d even left the shipyard, he decided to write to Merry. He couldn’t simply show up on her doorstep.

He needed to think carefully.

He wanted to go to Kettleness immediately but saw this wasn’t easy. Not only was Merry in mourning - he also had no idea what she thought of him now. After all she had stayed with her husband, not contacted him at all.

Had he the right to intrude?

There was much at stake. He paced the floor. He sat down. Poured himself a brandy to steady his nerves and thought long and hard.

At last he decided it wiser to write and pass on his condolences, offer help in any way he could.

It was an opening gambit.

11- One Year Later

Constance was chasing Ledge about the lawn. Ledge was far too wily to be caught by the child but they were both enjoying the game.

Tristan held Merry’s hand. ‘Constance likes animals,’ he said watching his daughter race around in circles.

‘I’m not sure Ledge is used to children but he’ll soon adapt. He’s a friendly cat.’

‘We have all had to learn to adapt have we not? The path to happiness has been a painful one for all concerned. We’ll never forget those who’ve gone but hopefully the heartache is receding now and we can begin to look forward to a happy life together.’

After Hester's visit Tristan had made contact with Merry by letter. He'd seen how Merry had needed time to come to terms with all that had happened. Being widowed, then Steven returning only to drown in an accident was a cruel thing to happen to anybody. He was in awe of her fortitude yet determined he wouldn't lose her again.

They had waited for a period of mourning and then decided they had to be together.

They both agreed they had waited long enough.

In light of what had happened they decided to marry quietly without fuss and with only close family and friends in attendance at the church and the small reception that followed. Tristan's father, still not fully approving of his youngest son "marrying down", did however, stick by his vow not to interfere again. Tristan was certain once his father really got to know Merry he would change his mind. With the help of his sister family tensions would soon ease he hoped.

After the wedding, along with Constance, Merry and Tristan honeymooned in York for a month or so. Now they were on the brink of moving into their new home situated on the moors between Whitby and Sandsend. It was a far cry from both Shingle Roar and Westcliff House being a low, solidly built sprawling building. Moorside sat comfortably in its surroundings, more a manor house than anything else.

'We'll be happy here,' Merry said turning her back on the heather clad moors that surrounded the house. There was no sea view and for that Merry was grateful. The sea had been a cruel, unforgiving neighbour.

She didn't miss the shingle roar.

12

'The house is not so big and grand as Westcliff House. I won't feel so out of my depth here.'

'You could never be out of your depth. You fit in wherever you are.'

Moorside and its renovations had been paid for from the sale of Tristan's marital home. He'd never liked the house his father had bought for him. The only good thing to come out of it was running about the garden now chasing a butterfly. Because of its connotations Tristan had been reluctant to start a new chapter of his life with Merry at Westcliff House.

Moorside had been decorated simply but cheerfully. The many rooms were cosy rather than large. The high ceilings Tristan had been used to were no more, replaced by a set of higgledy piggledy rooms which he thought would be warm in winter. Just as well as the wind which blew off the moors would be bleak.

They would be happy family here. He was at home already. Constance had no recollection of her mama but she already adored her step mama and was excited to have a new nursery. Betsy Craig had agreed to the move as Moorside was nearer to her ailing parents.

The last of Merry's belongings had arrived earlier. Tonight would be their first night in their new home.

'The kitchen is just the sort of place I'd hoped to work in when I was looking to be a cook,' Merry said smiling. 'I'm quite envious of Travers.' Tristan's old cook had also joined their staff at Moorside.

'Well I'm not keen for her to swap places with you,' he shuddered, 'I don't want her in my bed thank you very much!' Merry laughed. 'As a special treat for us both', Tristan said putting his arm around her shoulder, 'perhaps she'll allow you access to her new domain to make a rabbit pie from time to time. Get her to watch how you make pastry if you do - hers is not a patch on yours.'

Merry and Tristan stood in the doorway and looked out at the windswept moors. The sun was high in the sky and a curlew called from a nearby crag. 'I'm so glad Shingle Roar is occupied. I'd hate to think of it standing forlorn and empty. I was happy there for a time. Steven would approve of what we've done. He liked Hester.'

Hester's good deed of telling Tristan about Steven had resulted in her having a love affair of her own. After a six month courtship she and Matt Burns had married and now Merry had offered them Shingle Roar at a peppercorn rent. They had both insisted on paying even though Merry would have been happy for them to live rent free.

As a wedding present Merry had given the couple the lugger Steven had bought and now Matt had his own budding business. Merry was pleased her friend had found love, she deserved it.

Tristan took his wife's hand and led her into the parlour which looked out onto what Merry said she would make into a herb garden.

'I hope before too long we'll have a child of our own,' Tristan said. 'Isn't there an old wives tale that goes something like 'new house, new baby'?'

Merry smiled enigmatically. 'I think there's also something called a 'honeymoon baby'.

Tristan took her in his arms. 'Do you mean you're already caught?'

'You make me sound like a fish! Yes, I think I'm with child. Are you pleased?'

‘Very pleased indeed. A little brother or sister for Constance; that’s a perfect start to our new lives.’

After he’d kissed her Tristan said emphatically: ‘We’ll not be continuing the family tradition regarding names.’

‘Oh I don’t know,’ Merry’s eyes were full of amusement, ‘if it’s a boy I have the perfect name and it just so happens it begins with the letter T.’

Tristan narrowed his eyes. ‘Really, that would put you in my father’s good book. What is it?’

‘Isn’t it obvious? Why of course he has to be named after his father.’ She smiled.

He’ll be Tristan Tolker.’

The End