

Sails set to destiny

CHAPTER 1

Along the shore, where the river intertwined with the sea, stood an old wooden ship. Its hull, covered in a layer of moss and salt, told the story of many years, and the deck, soaked in the scent of the sea breeze, seemed to have witnessed countless adventures. This was the ship on which Adela had arrived from Lübeck, the ship that had started a new chapter in her life. For her, the memories of that voyage were a mixture of joy and pain, and now, as she looked at the burning wreck, she felt everything she had known disappear in clouds of smoke.

With glazed eyes, Adela stared at the fire that was devouring the ship. Images from the past ran through her mind: moments spent with Hans, their first glance shared, the warm voice that still sounded in her ears. Each of these memories was like a spark that fuelled her feelings, and she couldn't push them away. What's more, she didn't want to.

Despite the long time of separation, thoughts of her beloved never left her. With every beat of the waves that crashed against the shore, her doubts grew. Would their fates ever be reunited? Would the feeling that had blossomed so intensely before her return survive? With each passing day, with each memory, she doubted more and more that they would ever be together again.

Adela had spent almost the entire afternoon watching the ship disappear into the flames. She had hoped that with the last sparks and the pile of ash, her feelings for Hans would also die out, but when she returned home, the feelings only intensified. She knew she had to do something about it, but she couldn't afford to until her father's health situation had stabilised. She wouldn't leave without the reassurance that her dad was being cared for, something she felt only she could provide.

Since the illness began to worsen Adela knew she had to help her father recover. Every morning and evening, she checked to make sure he was not missing anything, that he had received the right medication, and made notes in her diary of the course of the illness and the further symptoms. Thoughts of her father and his suffering were unbearable for her. She felt powerless, yet determined to do her best.

She had seen their moments together on fire - the smiles, the warm looks, the promises. Now it was all burning. She looked at the burning wreckage and decided:

Let it burn along with the past.

As the last flame faded, Adela felt relieved. The ship was just an object, and the bond that had once connected her to Hans was now just a memory.

She knew she now had to live for her ailing father and brother, with whom she might soon be alone. The ship had burned to the ground, but Adela tried with all her might to let go of thoughts of the flame of affection for Hans. This memory was to guide her through life, like the boat that once sailed through the waves.

The flame that was slowly dying out was Adela's father. Heavily sick, he tried to fight his illness, but his fate seemed sealed. His body was refusing to obey him over time; all he felt was pain and fear. He was tormented by thoughts of leaving his children to fend for

themselves, with a small sum to cover their basic living expenses for a month or two. The high fever kept him awake at night, leaving more time for gloomy thoughts.

However, he was unaware of his friend's helping hand. Roland, fearing for the future of his friend's family, wrote a letter to his daughter, Adela. The letter was full of warm words and assurances of support. He was well aware of the difficulties that Adela and Conrad might face with the coming winter and the uncertainty of the epidemic, so he proposed that they live with him in La Rochelle.

Roland's proposal was an expression of deep friendship and concern for his loved ones. In the letter, he described his home as a safe haven where his siblings would be able to regain peace and security. He promised a job at the merchant port to Conrad, and offered Adela help in finding a position that suited her interests in nursing.

He also added that there would always be room for friends and family in his home and that his door was always open to those who needed help. Adela read the letter with great interest, feeling her emotions boiling inside her. On the one hand, she longed to be somewhere safe, but on the other, she felt that by leaving home, she would be leaving a part of her story behind.

CHAPTER 2

The evening was dark, father was laying in his bed surrounded by many flaming candles. Adela and her brother were holding his hands, his eyes were wandering around the room. Everything was calm and quiet, it seemed like time had stopped. Adela heard distant human screams, the carts were passing by the city. The Plague spared no one. Dying father was looking into his children eyes and was smiling weakly. His hands were cold, skin pale. They all knew it was the end. Adela was hugging her father and quietly speaking, "We will be all right dad"

Her father closed his eyes and surrendered to death. His soul was leaving his body with his last breath, everything seemed to lose colors and merge into sadness.

It was raining when he died, even the sky was crying with them. Graveyard was even darker, clouds were hanging just above tombstones. Conrad's small hands were gripping around rosary, his eyes were full of sadness and never spoken words. All he could do was to be helpful to his sister and to watch a wooden casket being lowered into the ground. It seemed like a part of his soul was lowered with the casket to be buried forever.

Adela was almost painfully holding her brother. Her eyes were red from crying but she tried to be strong. Everyone was soaked but nobody dared to leave. All of them wanted to spend the remaining time with dead father. Rain mixed with tears was running down their faces. Every drop was bringing back consciousness about their hard situation. They had no father from now on, but they had memories, memories so alive that almost painful.

And that's how children buried their father. It was not easy, but they knew that he will remain in their hearts forever. The rain was like blessing from heaven running down with tears. With the death of her father Adela lost all hope for their better future, all ambitions, and most importantly the meaning of life. All she know was that she has to carry on.

CHAPTER 3

Time passed, and the girl slowly regained her energy and motivation to uncover more of her life's story. However, as the weeks passed by, their savings melted. Adela, drowning in despair, struggled to find work, but she had to take care of her brother and give him a chance to go to school and study. Despite her efforts, she couldn't manage all she had to do.

Her brother, Conrad, watched everything unfold. He was no longer a little boy, he was growing up, understanding more, and realizing that he had to help his family. He made a decision, to sneak on a ship and earn money to help them survive. He knew he had to do this to ease his sister's burden. At the same time, he was aware that Adela would never accept his way of making a living. She would rather he pursued a merchant's career. Taking only the essentials, Conrad set out at dawn, walking through the familiar streets of Gdańsk toward the port. Memories flooded his mind. As he stepped onto the ship, he recalled every moment spent with his father and Adela. A wave of nostalgia and guilt washed over him, he was leaving his family behind.

Meanwhile, unaware of anything, Adela got out of bed and noticed that her brother was not in the room. Stunned, she looked out the window and saw Conrad heading toward the port. Without hesitation, she rushed after him.

As she neared the wharf, she noticed a crowd of people and a ship docked in the nearby harbor. Her heart pounded. When she finally reached the scene, her eyes locked onto Conrad just as he was stepping onto the ship. She froze, terror flooding her mind. Rushing forward, she called out loudly:

"Conrad! What are you doing?!"

Her brother turned, his eyes reflecting both determination and fear.

"I have to do this, Adela. We can't go on like this. I need to earn money to help us!" He replied, though there was hesitation in his voice.

Adela, growing more furious, shouted back:

"Don't you understand?! This is dangerous! You could die! And I can't lose you!"

Their voices grew louder, drawing the attention of passersby.

"I can't let this continue! I have to be strong, trust me!" Conrad insisted, trying to convince his sister of his plan.

Adela felt rage boiling inside her.

"I won't leave you alone! If you're going, then I'm going with you!" She declared, realizing there was no other choice.

Their argument escalated into an emotional battle, each trying to convince the other, their bond was tested like never before. Still tense, Adela and Conrad stepped onto the ship. The wooden planks creaked under their feet, the wind tugged at their clothes, carrying the salty scent of the sea and adventure. Uncertainty pulsed in their hearts, but they both knew there was no turning back.

The ship, though old but remained majestic. Its sails, despite the wear of time, billowed proudly in the wind. As the captain signaled for departure, Adela felt the ground beneath her vanish. Her heart pounded, and images of the home they had left behind swirled in her mind.

Determined to make sense of their situation, Adela decided that the first step in this new life on the ship was to gather information about their destination.

"Hey, you! In the blue shirt." She called out. What is this ship, and where is it headed?

"This is a Hanseatic warship. We're sailing to reinforce the fleet in its conflict with England." A sailor shouted back.

"Great. More blood and death. Just what we needed." Adela thought bitterly. Out loud, she managed something between a thank-you and a pained grunt. She wanted to throw up her hands and surrender to fate, but she knew that if she did nothing, her brother's health and life would be in constant danger, and that was something she couldn't allow.

"Alright, if we're stuck here, we might as well try to earn some money. I'm sure they could use an extra pair of hands to treat and care for the wounded" She muttered to herself, trying to focus on survival rather than the looming danger.

"First, I need to find that fool - my brother. Then, I have to go to the quartermaster for food rations, ask about work, and negotiate some kind of payment from the officers" Adela listed her priorities in her head, forcing herself to stay composed.

With a freshly formed plan in her mind, Adela set off to find her brother. It wasn't difficult—after all, a sixteen year old pretending to be soldier hadn't gone unnoticed by the sailors.

She found him in the middle of the crew's quarters, surrounded by a tight circle of sailors.

"Come here. Right now." She commanded, throwing sharp glares at anyone who dared to protest.

"We need to have a very serious talk."

Sensing the gravity of the situation, Conrad didn't even try to argue.

"I'm coming. Just let me grab my satchel." He replied, a note of apprehension in his voice.

The two of them headed above deck, searching for a place to talk without prying ears.

They made their way to the very front of the ship, near the bowsprit. There, while fighting the overwhelming urge to toss her brother overboard, Adela laid out her plan. She ordered him to find the quartermaster while she would go speak with the captain.

"And remember, no foolishness. We've had enough trouble for one day." She warned as she turned to leave.

"Meet me in the mess hall as soon as possible. And don't even think about making me come looking for you!" She snapped.

At that moment, Conrad wanted nothing more than to be as far away from his sister as possible, and to avoid provoking her any further. The idea of disobeying her didn't even cross his mind. With that resolve, he quickly set off toward the officers' quarters.

"Finally, a moment to breathe." Adela thought.

"Everything is planned and under control. Now, all that's left is to execute the plan and pray for the best."

With a slightly better attitude, she made her way toward the cabins. However, instead of stepping inside, she headed to the navigation bridge, where she found the captain hunched over maps and orders.

"Good day," She spoke up. "Since we've found ourselves on this ship with no way to leave, we've come to ask for work and negotiate our wages."

The captain, clearly thrown off by the girl's bold tone, replied that she could work as a nurse and should report to the infirmary at the stern, while her brother would find a place as a deckhand.

"As for payment, you'll both receive forty shillings at the end of the voyage." He said, his voice made it clear that he was eager to end the conversation.

Satisfied with how things had gone, Adela went to find her brother, who, as it turned out, had already secured his own duties.

"So? How did it go," Conrad asked hesitantly. "Will we get any money."

"Only after we make it to shore. For now, focus on your work and, please, don't do anything foolish." Adela's tone no longer carried the fiery anger she had felt just moments earlier when thinking about her brother's reckless behavior.

The two of them sat together at the stern, momentarily forgetting the hardships of the day as they huddled close, watching the fading silhouette of their homeland disappear beyond the horizon. The sea was calm, and a gentle night breeze softly filled the ship's sails. Neither of them could have imagined that the coming months would be some of the hardest and most terrifying they had ever lived through.

They had been sailing for many days and nights, carrying out the light duties assigned to them by the captain weeks ago. Their sun-darkened skin stretched tightly over their gaunt cheeks due to the limited food supply. As they passed through the Danish straits, tension aboard the ship grew noticeably, fueled by the looming war ahead. The wind and waves also intensified, causing sea sickness among several soldiers, including Adela's brother. However, aside from the discomforts brought by nature, the crew had not yet engaged in any serious battles, only a few minor skirmishes that were nothing more than warning shots.

All of that was about to change when Norna-the ship's name, inspired by the Norse goddesses of fate, was particularly favored by Adela, entered the waters of the English Channel. It was the early hours of the morning. At first, they could only see numerous lanterns floating over the water, making it look as if they were sailing into a port. But they knew the truth, these were Hanseatic and English ships, lying in wait before the impending battle.

As night gave way to dawn, the sounds of battle preparations reached them. The clatter of cannons being moved into position, the grunts of deckhands carrying cannonballs and crates of gunpowder, and the sharp commands of officers shouted from raised positions on deck shattered the peaceful routine of the past months at sea. It was clear, the battle was about to begin. The ship buzzed with activity as sailors and soldiers rushed to their battle stations. Adela, serving as a medical aide, took refuge in the infirmary, bracing herself for the inevitable wave of wounded. The sky was cloudless, and the blood-red sunrise seemed to mock the fate of many sailors, who watched in horror as the approaching English fleet, equal in number to the Hanseatic forces, loomed on the horizon.

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The tense wait was shattered by a sudden explosion and the splintering crash of a mast struck by an incoming volley. Moments later, from the starboard side of Norna, an English carrack emerged from the thick, milky fog. The massive ship's hull was lined entirely with gun ports, each housing the dark silhouettes of iron cannons and mortars. Every few moments, one of the openings flared with the yellow burst of ignited black powder, sending another rain of deadly projectiles toward the ship from Gdańsk.

Chaos erupted on deck. Artillerymen rushed to their positions, sailors hauled ammunition and barrels of gunpowder, while Adela and the other medics tended to the wounded. The captain and his officers struggled to maintain order amidst the growing panic. With great effort, they managed to coordinate counter-fire against the English, but their shots were no match for the sheer firepower of the enemy fleet. The only option left was to retreat.

The captain gave the order to flee, steering the ship west, the only viable escape route. Taken by surprise, the crew had no time to fully unfurl the sails, and the English war carrack relentlessly pounded them with volley after volley. More and more crew members fell to the storm of lead, and the deckhands struggled to bail out the rising water seeping in through the gaping holes in the hull. Only after more than half an hour of desperate, one-sided combat did they finally manage to raise the full rigging. Thanks to its superior agility, the smaller koga gradually began to pull away from its pursuer, cutting into the wind at an angle too sharp for the bulkier carrack to follow. After an agonizing hour of pursuit, the English ship abandoned the chase, swiftly turning about and sailing back toward its home port. Soon, it disappeared into the thick mist, leaving behind only devastated Norna, the once-proud Hanseatic vessel named after the Norse goddesses of fate. The Norna was in a wretched state. Its tattered sails, now little more than shredded rags, hung limply from the yards and booms. Leaks and holes in the hull, despite the crew's desperate efforts, continued to let water in, and there was no way to repair them while still at sea. The ship was no longer fit for battle, and finding a safe harbor was now a matter of survival. The westward escape had taken them so far that they found themselves at the entrance to the Bay of Biscay. From there, the nearest port capable of accommodating a ship of Norna's size was the old French harbor city of La Rochelle. Without wasting another moment, the crippled vessel adjusted what was left of its sails and set course straight for the now faintly visible shoreline.

Adela was in shock. Never in her life had she seen so much death and suffering in one place. Throughout the entire battle, she had worked tirelessly, sweating as she helped arrange the wounded and the dead in separate quarters, then tending to those who still had a chance of survival. At first, she couldn't understand why the senior nurse wouldn't let her treat everyone in need, but as more and more injured were brought in, it became painfully clear, there simply wasn't enough time or resources to help everyone. Several hours after the battle, when the captain gathered everyone on the stern to honor the fallen, Adela found her brother. The sight of him filled her with immense relief, he was alive and unscathed. At first, Conrad didn't recognize her; her face was smeared with blood-soaked dust.

"Are you hurt?" Adela asked through tears.

"I'm fine," Conrad replied, pulling her into an embrace.

"Soon, we'll finally be able to go ashore and look for Father's friends," Adela said hopefully.

"Nothing is certain yet," Conrad cautioned. "Look at the ship."

Despite the uncertainty, hope for the future filled them both with happiness. After all, they had survived a terrible battle. Overjoyed, they joined the remaining sailors and soldiers for what would be their last meal at sea.

By the following morning, they were expected to reach the port of La Rochelle. Everyone on board longed for solid ground and the distractions a port city could offer. That night, dinner was eaten in silence, and soon after, each crew member retired to their post, eagerly awaiting the dawn.

CHAPTER 4

La Rochelle. After a long, tiring trip, Adela and Conrad have finally arrived. They were full of hope, although their situation was not easy. The letter they had received earlier, however, gave them some hope for the future. Roland greeted them warmly at the port and escorted them to his estate.

He was their last resort, and they were grateful for his hospitality. His house, set among trees and flowers, had a warmth and security about it. Adela and Conrad felt like they had finally found a place where they could start fresh and make their lives their own. With Roland's support, they had a chance to rebuild their lives and realize their dreams. When they crossed the threshold, Adela felt the same warm, welcoming feeling she had experienced in Gdansk. She knew right away that she would feel at home here. Roland led her and her brother into the house.

"Hans!" "Show our guests around!" The man called out, and the spoken name made Adela remember her memories.

No, that's impossible," Adela quickly silenced her thoughts.

But then the impossible came true, and a familiar silhouette began to descend the wooden, slightly creaky stairs. The boy's hair glistened in the sunlight, and then Adela felt all doubt melt away. When their eyes met, his gaze also indicated that he also recognized her.

Adela, is it really you? - Hans' voice sounded different from the last time they saw each other. It wasn't a surprise, but Adela felt a tingle in her heart. She began to wonder if she still knew Hans.

"God, I really thought I would never see you again," he said, his voice warm with emotion. He ran up to her and gave her a hug, and all her worries just vanished. It was the same Hans she remembered.

Hans had only agreed to give them a tour of the house, but their meeting turned into a heart-to-heart about life, death, and everything else they couldn't say to each other during their separation. This stirred up a lot of feelings in Adela. At first, she was surprised to realize that Hans was related to Roland. She couldn't help but feel joy when she saw him again; even though they weren't together anymore due to circumstances beyond their control, the connection between them still remained. Hans, seeing Adela, also could not hide his emotion.

Meeting Hans felt like a magical journey back to a simpler time, when life felt more manageable. Adela and Hans quickly reconnected and reminisced about old times, and Conrad watched these scenes with a gentle smile, glad that his sister had found someone close to her in this difficult situation.

As time went on, the conversations between the young people became more and more personal. They shared their experiences, the difficult decisions they had to make, and their dreams. Adela shared her worries about what the future might hold, and Hans opened up about the challenges he faced in trying to survive in this changing world.

Adela was the one to break the news to Hans about her father and the tough times they had been through. In turn, Hans opened up about his own struggles and how he was trying to find his place in the world. As their bond was renewed, a new fire was lit in the hearts of both of them.

CHAPTER 5

Evening was falling over La Rochelle and the sky was full of stars. Adela and Hans decided to take a walk. They walked along the seashore, as they talked about their common past. The sound of the waves and the gentle wind brought back more and more memories. It was an amazing feeling to have someone you could only dream about for months finally by your side. Hans looked at Adela and everything they felt was reflected in his eyes. Their bond grew stronger and stronger, and their moments together were priceless for the both of them.

As time passed, La Rochelle became a new home for Adela and Conrad, a place where they could find happiness again. Adela, Conrad and Hans faced challenges together and their story gained new chapters, full of hope, love and determination.

One night, when the sky was clear and the stars were bright, Adela decided to carry out a plan that had been in her mind for a long time. She wanted to open a herbal pharmacy in La Rochelle where they could sell local medicines. She felt this would be her chance to start over, to rebuild her life after their loss.

She enthusiastically shared her idea with Hans, who was also excited. She was grateful that her idea was being recognized and that she had a chance to make it happen, to make her dream of helping those who have no chance of receiving help a reality.

"That's a great idea, Adela! I knew when I first met you that you wanted more out of life than comfort and your comfort," he said, his eyes shining as he noticed how his beloved had matured in such a short time.

Adela smiled.

But we have to find a suitable place and get the money to start the business, Hans nodded.

Roland can help us. He knows a lot of people in town, maybe he knows someone who could support us. Such an initiative won't work without a lot of publicity.

Soon Adela and Hans went to Roland to present their idea. Roland listened with a smile on his face.

This is a great initiative! I will be happy to help you," he said, his voice full of enthusiasm.

With Roland's help, Adela and Hans began planning their pharmacy. Together they looked for a suitable place to rent and talked to local herbalists to establish a partnership. With each passing day, they got closer to making their dream a reality.

As the store began to take form, Adela felt that her life was beginning anew. She was filled with energy and hope. Through hard work and determination, they were able to open a small pharmacy on Grand Rue that quickly became popular in La Rochelle. Residents appreciated the open and friendly atmosphere that Adela and Hans created.

But life brought its own surprises. Although the business prospered, Adela still struggled with thoughts of her father and his death. Often she would wake up at night with feelings of sadness and longing. She knew she had to be strong for Conrad and Hans, but sometimes she felt it was too much.

One night, as they were about to close the shop, Adela sat on the stairs and began to cry. Hans noticed that and sat beside her.

What is it, Adela? - he asked, his voice warm and full of concern.

I can't stop thinking about my father," she replied, wiping away her tears.

Sometimes I feel that I let him down, that I didn't do enough to help him," Hans put his arm around her shoulder. You did everything you could. Your father was proud of you and now you have to live for yourself and for Conrad. Adela looked into his eyes and saw understanding and support.

Thank you, Hans. Your being here means a lot to me," their eyes met, and Adela felt their bond grow even stronger.

As time passed, Adela began to find joy in her daily chores and even began to dream of the future. A world that once seemed gray and hopeless began to brighten. With the support of Hans and Conrad, Adela realized that life can be beautiful even after loss.

As the holiday season approached, Adela decided to throw a small party. She wanted to thank everyone who had supported her. With the help of Hans and Conrad, she prepared delicious food.

On the day of the party, the house was full of people. The people of La Rochelle came to celebrate this special time. Adela was happy to see the smiles on the faces of her clients and friends. In that moment, she realized they had built something special - a place that brings people together and gives them joy.

In the evening, as the guests scattered, Adela sat down with Hans and Conrad to recap the day.

It was a wonderful evening," she said with a smile.

I feel like we are really starting a new chapter in our lives. Hans nodded his head.

This is just the beginning. Together we can achieve everything we set out to do," Adela looked at her brother, who nodded with a smile. At that moment she knew that despite all the hardships they had been through, they had each other and that was enough.

As night fell and the stars lit up the sky, Adela felt that she was finally on the right track. Together with Hans and Conrad, they formed a family that supported each other in every challenge. Day by day, La Rochelle became their home, a place where they could find happiness and peace.

Adela, Conrad and Hans supported each other. Each of them could count on the other. They could laugh together, work together, but also cry in a difficult moment. The relationship that bound the young people was full of hope, love and support. Each new experience, each difficulty they overcame, brought them closer together, and their relationship grew stronger and stronger.

This is how Adela found her place in La Rochelle, where the river meets the sea. With time, she learned that her abilities have no limits. Her bond with her brother is unbreakable, and her love for Hans is her most precious treasure. Together with Hans and Conrad, she is ready to face the future, no matter what fate may bring.

Translated by Paweł Kotłowski und Piotr Kędzierski.