

Towing the Adele

by Sue Hitchcock

Ron rowed deftly between the mooring lines and small boats which encumbered the marina from the steps towards the Hermes. As they neared Elaine spotted the dinghy Len had borrowed, and had pushed away with his foot.

“Look, Ron, what’s that dinghy doing there? Do you think someone has boarded us?”

Ron craned around to see and frowned, “It may have just drifted across, but I’ll have a look. Hand me the torch.”

Elaine boarded cautiously and took the line to tie the dinghy while Ron did a circuit of the deck. Len, ill-equipped had squeezed himself into a nook behind the engine. It seemed likely he would have to spend the night with his legs cramped up and only half a bottle of water to drink, but when the motor started, he had to move away. Both Elaine and Ron were in the wheelhouse, concentrating on clearing all the obstacles in the marina, so he settled in his favourite spot aft.

Soon it became clear they were heading down the Swale, under the Sheerness bridge, surely to Conyer. That explained the timing, the creek being too shallow for the Hermes except at high tide. It was two hours before they turned into Conyer creek, having had to negotiate the twists and turns in the dark. The Adele was blazing with light and the girls were waving and cheering at spotting their arrival.

Elaine dropped the anchor midstream and Ron came aft, forcing Len to crawl along the opposite side. Once they were both engaged in attaching tow ropes, Len slipped through the wheelhouse down below deck. He gratefully made use of one of the six spare bunks, counting on their being too busy to check. Sleep was impossible. He was listening intently to the shouts of instructions, mostly from Ron, but he didn’t know the other voice, male, confident, not either Roma nor her little friend.

At last the Hermes was moving again, the engine growling with the extra load. He felt the turn to the west and assumed Queenborough was their destination. It was nearly dawn when they wound through the long reach up to Queenborough, but as time passed he realised they had passed on to the Medway where it joined the Thames estuary. Where were they headed? He might not have much longer to make his case to Roma, so he scrambled up to the deck, ignoring the remonstrations of the couple in the wheelhouse.

From the stern he shouted, "Roma, Roma!"