

Margie Woke Even Earlier Than Usual

by Sue Hitchcock

Margie woke even earlier than usual. Today was going to be her first voyage on a boat, never mind it was going to be towed, like a railway carriage. She looked forward to the day when she would pull up the sails and Roma would steer their beautiful boat wherever they desired, like pirates.

Roma was excited too for the fulfilment of her dreams, since she had inherited the Adele at her father's death.

Declan's nerves were more like fears. So many things could go wrong, from the anti-climax if Elaine didn't turn up, to the inadequacy of the repairs causing them to sink?

The mood even excited the dogs, who had no idea why they wanted to chase around barking.

At last they had packed spare clothes and food stores, locked the caravans, as if they were going on a long holiday and sitting in the car, checked they hadn't forgotten anything, especially not the dogs. This was it.

Of course nothing had changed on the Adele and they had the whole day to wait. Declan had called on Ted for advice and any bits and pieces which might come in useful.

Fancying a cup of tea, Roma realised they still had no calor gas.

"We left the Adele that night we broke into the Ship, because we had no gas and we still don't. Shall we just put up with coke?"

"How can we get some?"

"We'd have to walk down to the marina, but it's heavy."

"We've still got Ted's wheelbarrow. Come on."

After tea, they fussed around checking the rudimentary repairs and stuffing anything unnecessary into plastic bags. Roma went systematically around the deck checking all the metalwork was tightly screwed down, especially where the tow line would be attached. Running out of things to do, she wondered why Declan hadn't arrived.

"He's coming, and Ted. Look! What the hell are they carrying?" Margie had been watching for a while and ran down to meet them. She came back, excited. "They've got a mast!"

Roma looked doubtful, "I'm not sure the old girl is up to the strain. Maybe later when the repairs are complete."

It took all four of them to get it on board and it wasn't the right sort for a Thames barge anyway, but it fitted the tabernacle and looked handsome, with a bow sprit they had to duck under.

"I had it in my back garden – glad to get rid of it, to tell the truth." Ted had salvaged it before he sold the Chandlery and had hoped to sell it, "I've got some old sails in the garage, too. But they're probably useless now."

"I can come now and get them." Margie was bouncing with enthusiasm.

"Give me a chance, I need a rest."

"Cup of tea? Can of beer?"

Ted sat on the hatch while Roma fetched two beers. Declan sat on the deck and even Margie gave in to take a breather.

"So what's the plan?"

"Roma's friend has agreed to tow us over to Hoo, where we can do more complete repairs."

"Oh, I remember that place. It was big business once, repairing Thames barges. So what kind of ship has Elaine got?"

"It's a sixty foot pinnace, powerful motor."

"Deep draft, she'll only fit at high tide, not now, next tide?"

"Yes, after midnight."

Roma appeared and drinking made time for thinking.

"I'll miss you, girl. Your dad would've been glad to see you moving on, though."

Ted and Margie disappeared up the path with the wheelbarrow, Ruby unsure whether to follow.

"Here, Ruby, time for food." Roma gave Declan a look and they went below.

When Margie returned she noticed Declan giving Roma a small push on the bottom as she climbed the last step, and now she was sure. Could she still consider Roma as hers, exclusively? Was she ever the love of Roma's life, indeed, was Roma really hers?

"I'll need help with the sails," she grumped.

Declan came to her assistance with the shapeless lump of dark terra cotta coloured material, wound around with a tangle of lines. Margie stumbled under the weight and started to cry. "I'm tired – got up too early." Was her excuse.

Roma rescued her, "Have some lunch – it is ready – then you'd better have a nap. It will be a long night."

Of course, Roma was really playing her mother, not her lover, but it left a sour taste.

Impatience came with darkness. There was nothing to do but wait.

"Let's get fish and chips. We can drop off Ted's wheelbarrow on the way." It was a relief, like a game trundling the barrow over the bumps and trying to convince the dogs to ride. Bobby, older lay with his paws on the front, tolerating the lurching for all of three minutes, but Ruby could hardly be persuaded to sit. They left the wheelbarrow in front of Ted's garage without ringing his bell and went on to the row of shops. Dowsed in salt and vinegar their cod and chips were a feast, sustaining them as the tide rose.

Roma's lanterns shone dimly, while Declan's powerful torch lit the seawashed wasteland, until the distant rumble of a motor announced the approach of the Hermes.