

Miriam Georg

HANSEATIC RADIANCE - A FAMILY SAGA SET IN HAMBURG (Vol. I)

Elbleuchten

- 500,000 copies sold of *Hanseatic Radiance* (Vol. I) and *Hanseatic Storms* (Vol. II) altogether!
- Exciting era: industrialisation, women's rights and the battle of the workers.
- Fascinating panorama: shipyards and shipping companies in Hamburg at the end of the 19th century, rich villas on the riverside and slums near the harbour.
- Spellbinding love story connecting two contradictory worlds.



January 2021 · 640 pages

A turbulent era. An impossible love affair. A moving saga.

Hamburg 1886. Lily, whose father is a ship owner, dreams of becoming a writer. During a ship-naming ceremony, Lily gives a short speech during which her hat is blown off her head. One of the workers tries to get it back for her and is badly injured. Lily is shocked that no one sympathises with the young man's fate. Then Johannes Boltzen comes to the ship owner's villa to demand compensation for his injured friend. Lily wants to help and allows herself to be drawn into a dangerous game of hide-and-seek. She begins a passionate affair with him. But Jo, who comes from the notorious gangland area, has a secret that Lily must never discover ...

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MIRIAM GEORG

HANSEATIC RADIANCE

PROLOGUE

1886

The woman's eyes blazed with a feverish light. Sweat ran down her face, and her dress was torn and streaked with soot. She pushed her way through the crowd, elbowing people out of the way and pulling a red-nosed little girl along with one hand, the other hand clutching the infant pressed to her hip.

Alfred Karsten was the first to notice her. He had been scanning the assembled people for his daughter, Lily, letting his eyes wander over the crowd as he tried to pick out her distinctive red hair in the sea of bobbing hairpieces and gentlemen's top hats. When his gaze met the woman's, he recoiled. Something about the way she fixed those burning eyes on him told him instantly that her wild anger was directed at him. He hesitated, brow furrowing as he wondered what she could possibly want from him. She was obviously not one of the guests. By the looks of it, she had crawled here straight out of the mud in the narrow alleys of the *Gänge* quarters; he could practically smell the wretchedness on her. The appalled looks that followed her through the crowd, and the way people drew away when they noticed her only confirmed his suspicion. He was about to turn away and give the order to have her discreetly removed, convinced that she had only stumbled into polite society by mistake after all. But when the strange woman suddenly shoved a lady in a purple bustle dress to get her out of her way, and the lady gasped and almost dropped her parasol, Alfred shook off his inertia. This stranger had just publicly assaulted one of the most reputable commerce councillors in Hamburg! A criminal charge would see her sent straight to gaol, without trial. The fact that she would risk that, that she seemed not even to realise what she had done, showed that there was clearly something very wrong with her. She looked ill. Manic, even.

And she still hadn't taken her eyes off him for a single second.

He felt a shiver of unease run down his spine, the hairs on his arms standing on end as if he'd received an electrical shock. Acting on instinct, he pulled his wife, Sylta, back so that she stood behind him, looking up at him in bewilderment. He gave Franz a short nod. It took his son only a few seconds to grasp what was going on. Without losing his smooth demeanour, he barked a brief command at the dock workers they had hired as security for the occasion. The men stood lined up behind the platform, hands folded neatly behind their backs, gazes straight ahead.

Three of them immediately broke away from their formation and headed towards the woman. But before they could lay hands on her, she began to yell. 'Karsten! My husband came back from your ship a cripple! Seven children, and no father to provide for them. We'll all rot in our own misery. Ten years he worked for your shipping company, and then you chased him off like a rabid dog!'

One of the workers grabbed the shrieking woman around the waist and tried to drag her off while the others stood between her and the crowd, screening her from view. She dropped the girl's hand, scratching and screaming, tried to bite the man gripping her, almost losing her hold on the infant. The man grabbed her roughly by the hair and twisted her free hand, pinning it to her back. Realising she wasn't getting anywhere, her tone changed suddenly, her screaming turned desperate, beseeching. 'Please! How are we to survive?' she called out. 'My husband needs work! My children will die!' As if prompted by her words, both children began to cry.

'Get her out of here,' Franz growled even as he gave the crowd a placating smile and nodded at another worker, who hurried to help the others. Without hesitation, he picked up the little girl, threw her over his shoulder and carried her off. The other men followed, taking the woman by the arms and dragging her along. Soon, her desperate shouts and the children's crying were drowned out by the crowd's excited murmur.

Alfred wiped his brow surreptitiously with his pocket square. That could easily have ended very differently. It was good, in situations like these, to have Franz by his side. Franz, who never showed scruples when a firm hand was required. He offered the people gathered around him a reassuring smile. They seemed a little ruffled, but not truly bothered. They were all in a similar position to him, and knew that he could not be blamed for this incident. A thought flashed across his mind: the woman was right. She would likely starve. Her children, too. The infant had already looked more dead than alive. If the father could no longer earn a living, she would have no choice but to send the older children out begging, which would hardly sustain a family of nine. It was a cruel world, he thought, a cruel system that they lived in. But it wasn't a system of his making. What was he supposed to do, give all of his workers sick pay? He scoffed at the thought. Ridiculous. It would ruin him! There was no solution for these unjust situations, and this woman would just have to accept her fate, as did so many others like her. And yet ... there was something about the little girl holding on to the woman's skirt, something that wouldn't let him go. In a strange way, she reminded him of Lily, the shy but curious gaze, the pale dusting of freckles across her nose. He shook his head as if to cast off such fanciful thoughts and then, to his own surprise, leaned over to his son and whispered, 'See to it that the woman receives fifty marks as compensation.'

Franz kept his expression pleasant, but the look he cast his father was incredulous. 'Are you out of your mind?' he hissed.

'Just do it!' Alfred wasn't in the mood for discussions. He turned away, but Franz seized him roughly by the arm. 'If we give her something, pretty soon they'll all be crawling to us for money.'

Alfred considered. It was a valid argument. 'Very well. She'll get the money, but only on condition that she tell no one where it's from. If anyone else shows up here mentioning her, I will demand immediate repayment. That should keep her quiet.'

Franz was not appeased. 'Father, this is a completely insane...'

'Will you please just do as I say?' Alfred's sharp tone brooked no objection. At some point in the near future, his son would take over the company and thus his entire life's work. But for the time being, he was still in charge and making the decisions.

Franz gave him one last disbelieving look, then turned, disgruntled, to pass on the instructions.

Alfred heaved a small sigh and let his eyes wander across the *Titania*. The ship was a joy to behold, and he could not have been prouder. Built according to tradition and yet already equipped with state-of-the-art German technology. It had been built and launched in Liverpool, but the ceremonial launching had to take place here, with Hamburg water, following Hamburg traditions.

The sails had been hoisted across the tops, the Karsten flag with its pattern of blue and white stripes had been raised, and the bow was adorned with a large wreath of flowers. Everything was ready. There was only one problem: the ship's sponsor wasn't there. Without her, they couldn't start the ceremony. He pulled out his pocket watch and cast a nervous glance at it. She should long since have been here.

Where was Lily?

-- 1 --

Lily's hand rested, unmoving, on the sheet of paper. A droplet of ink had fallen from the quill onto the sheet, a blue, tear-shaped bead on the page. It was beginning to dissipate at the edges, where the paper's fibres broke up the surface of the ink. Lily did not see this, her attention was elsewhere. She was staring ahead, her brow furrowed in thought, creating that small circle above her nose which her mother always lovingly called her 'thinker's crease'.

The air above Hamburg was shimmering, the sky an endless ocean of blue. It was as if a dome of heat had been draped over the city and was stifling any and all movement within. Not even the water of the Alster, visible to Lily from her desk, glittered in its usual small whirling patterns. Instead, the river drifted along, sluggish, like a blue-green mirror.

The colours of the water, the heavy scent of the climbing roses outside her window, and the peculiar silence that enveloped the city triggered an emotion in Lily. It was an almost painful feeling, tugging at something inside her chest. She knew this feeling. She often experienced this on hot days, when the sweet breath of summer was everywhere. It was at its strongest in the evenings, when she sat on the terrace with her mother and Michel and they read to each other. She had been searching for a few minutes now for the right word to describe this feeling. She'd already crossed out yearning.

That wasn't it. Likewise, melancholy was not the term she was looking for. It was something similar, but she wanted to find the perfect word, the word that mirrored this feeling as precisely as possible. 'If you can express your feelings precisely in just a few sentences,' her old teacher, Miss Finke, had always said, 'then you are a true writer!' And Lily had taken this to heart.

But she just couldn't quite seem to capture it.

She wrote down premonition and studied the letters, slanting slightly to the right, with furrowed brow. This didn't quite fit, either, but at least there was some truth in it. She felt as if she were waiting for something, as if the air carried a promise of the future. Still, she resolutely crossed out the word. Half-truths were no good to her, she wanted precision.

A few weeks later, leafing through these pages in her journal, Lily would see that word and feel a shudder come over her. The events that were yet to come would give this word a completely new meaning for her.

Just now, however, all it described was the anticipation of a long, hot summer, which above all she wanted to spend writing. Writing and reading. And dancing. And kissing. Not necessarily in that order. That would depend on Henry. He was always so proper, always intent on following the rules as strictly as if his life depended on it. Officially, they were only permitted to meet in the presence of a chaperone, and instead of flouting this rule and continuing to court her in secret (as might have been expected), he insisted on complying. Sometimes she was almost offended at how little effort he put into wooing her. Yes, they were promised to each other, were even formally engaged. But surely that didn't mean that he could stop writing her letters or making her feel beautiful or desirable. 'You're already taking me for granted!' she had accused him, once. He had stared at her, aghast, and promised to be better. Which he had - by sending her chocolates and a poem.

Chocolates and a poem wasn't so bad, she supposed. It was something she could boast about in her seminar, at the very least, even if Henry hadn't composed the poem himself, just written out one by Brentano. She had always found Brentano's poetry too saccharine. What she wanted was passionate kisses in the hallway and romantic, nocturnal assignations she would have to sneak out of the house to make — like in the books which she borrowed in secret from Berta, and which she stashed away behind the volumes of Goethe on the bookshelf. But Henry just wasn't cut out for that. The thought that she would see him at today's ship-naming ceremony made her smile. There was no doubt that she was in love with him. He had intended, initially, to drive her there, but he was close to the end of his medical studies now, and impossibly busy. She could go with Franz, that was just fine. Their parents had left already, over two hours ago. There was a reception in the Alster Arcades prior to the ceremony, but Lily had refused to go along. She found receptions dreadfully boring. Thinking of the naming ceremony, she realised, suddenly, that she'd been sitting here for far too long. She had to get ready!

The air in the room was stale, heavy with the musty smell of carpet and old wood seeping out from the cracks in the walls. It was a taste of how stiflingly hot it would be during the naming ceremony, which was to be held outdoors and - as far as she knew - would have no means of shade to offer respite. Better not to apply any powder, it would only run down her cheeks, and she didn't have time for it, anyway. One dismayed look at the grandfather clock in the corridor sent her rushing to her chest of drawers. Thank God that Seda had already pinned her hair up this morning. Only a few red curls had escaped the elaborate coiffure and now had to be shifted back into place. A pointless exercise, as they would break free again as soon as Lily moved. Her new dress hung ready on the wardrobe, starched and perfumed. Lily scowled at it. White always washed her out and made her look pale, like a ghost, and she invariably felt like she was disappearing into the fabric. But her father had insisted. 'A ship's sponsor is like a godmother. She must look as young and innocent as possible, and how better to show that than a white lace dress?'

A hair pin between her lips, she hastily slipped out of her dressing gown and rang the small bell next to her bed. 'Seda, I'm running late!' she called into the corridor, hoping that Seda was already close by. She rang the bell again. She realised now just how late she really was. Franz would be here any moment, and she was nowhere near ready.

She sat down in front of the mirror, still in her chemise, reached for the rouge, and hastily dabbed some onto her cheeks. 'Oh drats, that's too much!' Now she looked as if she were running a fever. She dipped a cloth into the bowl of water and rubbed it across her face. That didn't make things any better, only left the rouge clinging to her cheeks in red streaks. She flipped the cloth around and used the dry end to scrub at the colour as hard as she could. When she was done, the small curls framing her face stood on end as if she had received an electric shock, her cheeks aglow. 'It's a good thing I don't have to make a speech in front of a hundred people today,' she told her reflection in the mirror and made a face. 'Oh, wait. Yes, I do!' She sighed and tossed the cloth into a corner. How on earth had this happened, again? She'd had so much time to get ready. The entire morning! But as always when she sat at her desk, her thoughts turning into words, words into sentences, sentences into characters and stories, time moved as it pleased. It became fluid, dissolved, and when Lily looked up, thinking only a moment had passed, the time had simply run out.

Her eyes fell on her new hat. She bit her lip. 'Absolutely not!' her father had said. 'Any other day, fine, but not for the naming ceremony!' Lily knew he had been serious about this. True, the hat was a bit bold. It was large, dark green, a huge feather swaying from where it was tucked into a wide band patterned with small dots. Extravagant, a little flamboyant, and in line with the latest fashion, which made her father dislike it on principle, no matter how it looked. But Lily loved the hat. And besides, it would offer her face a little bit of shade. While she was still deciding if she could muster the courage to disobey her father, Seda came in. 'We're running late, aren't we?' she asked, reaching for the corset laid out on the bed.

‘Very late!’ Lily stepped out of her underwear, lifted her arms and stood in front of Seda to allow her to lace her into the corset. Like the dress, the corset was in the latest fashion. It was long, flattening her stomach and emphasising her hips, bottom and bust. Even just seeing it in Seda’s hands, Lily thought it looked terribly narrow and uncomfortable. She had tried it on once, briefly, and after just a few minutes she’d had to ask Seda to unlace it because she had felt like she was trapped in a cage. How she was going to survive a stiflingly hot day like today in this was a mystery to her. She made a mental note to remember her smelling salts, lest she drop off the stage and into the crowd.

‘No beauty without pain, isn’t that right?’ Seda remarked, smiling encouragingly when she caught Lily’s grimace in the mirror.

Lily nodded, lips pressed together, and held on to the bedpost. The maid pulled the strings as tightly as she could to mould the spring steel stays to her body, cinching her into the modern long-waisted shape. Lily flinched with every tug as she felt her intestines pressed further and further inwards. It was as if she had a large rock inside her stomach.

Seda took out the measuring tape and looped it around Lily’s waist, face creased with focus. ‘Fifty-three centimetres.’ She nodded, satisfied.

‘You could earn good money on the street, looking like that,’ came a voice from behind her.

Lily whipped round. Franz leaned against the doorway, an expression of mild contempt on his face. Seda’s cheeks instantly flushed a hectic red, and she cast her eyes down shyly. Lily knew that the maid thought her older brother very attractive and was even a little infatuated with him. Franz, however, pretended she wasn’t in the room, as was his habit.

‘Charming, as always!’ Lily hissed in reply. The corners of his mouth twitched, mocking her.

‘The horses are hitched to the carriage. We need to go.’

‘As you can see, I’m not yet ready!’

‘You had all day.’

‘Yes, well, it’s going to be a while still. They won’t start without me, will they?’ As always when she was talking to Franz, her tone took on a pert, irritable note.

Her brother craned his head back from where he leaned in the doorway to check the clock in the hall. ‘So, you’re going to let the whole festive crowd wait for you?’ Typical. The earth revolves around Lily Karsten.’ He raised his eyebrows, unmoved and unimpressed. ‘I’ll give you five more minutes. The horses are waiting in the sun,’ he said, and, after one more disparaging look at her breasts spilling out over the corset, he was gone.

Lily sent a curse after him, rude enough to make Seda flinch in shock. ‘As if he cared about the horses! He just wants to humiliate me.’ There was no way she could be ready in five minutes. She still had to get into her dress, and her hair wasn’t done yet, either.

‘He wouldn’t dare...’ she mumbled, knowing that he very much would dare, would even enjoy leaving without her and so publicly embarrass her. Her thoughts racing, she turned to her maid. ‘Seda, run downstairs and ask Agnes to tell Toni to get the hansom cab ready for me. Franz will leave without me, I just know it!’

Seda dropped the measuring tape at once and hurried out the door. For a moment, Lily stood there at a loss, wondering what she could do on her own, without help, and eventually rushed to the mirror to tame her hair. It took only a few seconds for her to realise that this was a lost cause. The air was too humid, her hair curling wildly in every direction. Frustrated, she tossed the hairpins back into their bowl. Just then, she heard the sound of horses’ hooves on gravel through the open window. ‘What? It hasn’t even been five minutes yet!’ she called out, rushing onto the balcony just in time to catch sight of Franz’s top hat and his malicious grin as he gave her a small wave from the window of the carriage pulling out through the gate onto Bellevue. Furious, Lily kicked the balustrade, then winced as a searing pain shot up her foot and leg. ‘Bastard!’ she shouted after him, but the carriage had already disappeared into the trees lining the alley.

She hopped back into the room on one leg. ‘Seda! Where are you?’ she called out, desperate. Now she really, really had to hurry.

Fifteen minutes later, Lily Karsten rushed down the grand staircase into the foyer below. Her cheeks were still a touch too red, but the rest of her was perfectly laced and impeccably put together. Her waist looked, in the lacy white dress, like it might snap at the first provocation. She was casting one last look in the mirror above the mantle when Agnes, the housekeeper, came rushing towards her, face full of concern.

‘Oh, Lily,’ she cried, ‘there’s a problem!’ She faltered then, gaze trailing up Lily’s outfit. ‘But I thought... Your father, he forbade... my girl, that hat...’ Agnes slipped into informal address, as she usually did when there was no one else around.

‘Yes, yes, I know — I needed to cover my hair and there just wasn’t any other way!’ Lily had decided at the very last minute to go through with her little rebellion and was already regretting it, so she waved Agnes on hurriedly to avoid losing her nerve. ‘What’s the problem?’

‘The horse is lame,’ the housekeeper informed her, with the air of someone announcing a death in the family. ‘Toni only just noticed. It won’t be able to pull the cab!’

‘What?’ Lily stared at her in horror. Bright spots swam across her vision, and she reached for the banister to steady herself. It’s just the corset, she told herself, doing her best to take deep, even breaths. Or maybe it’s the prospect of an impatient gathering of Hamburg’s polite society, anticipating a celebration and waiting for her in the sweltering heat. ‘This can’t be happening!’ She gasped.

‘What are we going to do?’ Agnes said, wringing her hands with worry and looking, as usual when she was agitated, like a chicken who had had its feathers ruffled. Lily caught herself, took another death breath, then hastened past Agnes to get outdoors.

Outside in the circular driveway stood the small hansom cab that her father used when he rode out on his own. Silver, the black stallion they had bought last autumn, stood harnessed to it, snorting and nickering. Toni was by his side, bent over to inspect his front hoof. ‘What’s wrong with him?’ Lily asked, already struggling for breath after only a few steps.

‘Morning Miss Lilly!’ Toni raised his hat in greeting, never letting go of the hoof with his other hand. ‘I can’t be certain, but his fetlock’s swollen. He’s in no condition to be walking.’

‘Then quick, fetch another horse!’ Lily wiped away the sweat already gathering on her brow. ‘I’m already much too late,’ she said, verging on despair.

Toni nodded, his eyebrows scrunching in concern. ‘I’ve already given the order, but it’ll be a moment yet.’

Lily knew he was right. He would have to unhitch Silver, harness the new horse, which was not even in sight yet, maybe even curry him or clean out his hooves. ‘There’s no time for that!’

The stable master ran a hand through his hair, at a loss for what to do. Agnes, who had rushed out after her, stood twisting her apron in her hands. ‘What are we to do?’ She asked. Her cheeks had flushed a bright red under her bonnet. ‘If you don’t arrive in time it will be a disaster!’

‘I know,’ Lily groaned, casting about desperately as if she expected a carriage to appear in the driveway by some magic. ‘Damn Franz for leaving me in the lurch like this!’ She stomped her foot with childish petulance. She would have liked to tear her hair out. Then, suddenly, her gaze fell on something gleaming in the sun from where it leaned beside a pillar at the entrance to the house.

Franz’s new bicycle.

Lily frowned. A thought had occurred to her. An absurd, crazy thought. She worried her lower lip. Could she dare? No, it would be entirely unseemly.... Wouldn’t it? But she had seen pictures of women on bicycles. Granted, they had been pictures of races and sporting competitions, and they had been taken in Belgium and France. Certainly not in Hamburg. And in a dress like the one she was wearing? No, it was absurd! She knew how to ride a bicycle, had pestered Franz until he gave in, grumbling all the while, and practiced with her in the courtyard. She hadn’t been able to get on his old penny-farthing bicycle, but this was a more modern, low-seated model, only just come on the market and easily accessible for her.

It had felt glorious to ride it — the wind in her hair, the crunch of gravel under the wheels. Michel had bounded after her, laughing, trying to keep up with her. She had felt free. As if she could simply zoom down the driveway onto the Bellevue and disappear. The world was open to her; wherever she wanted to go, her legs could carry her there in no time at all. She was keenly jealous of her older brother for being able to ride it around town. He had ordered it specially from England, and paid a full three hundred Marks for it.

‘If I notice so much as a scratch on it, you’d best make sure you’re not anywhere near me,’ Franz had threatened, and she had no doubt that he meant it.

But she wasn't planning on scratching it up. Riding a bicycle was child's play once you got the hang of it. Ensuring her skirts didn't get caught in the gears might present a problem, but if she held them out of the way with one hand and held on to the handlebars with the other... She cast a glance at Agnes and Toni, who were still standing there with helpless expressions on their faces. 'I'll send a boy to the square for a hired cab,' Agnes suggested, but Lily waved her suggestion off.

'The ceremony will be over by the time he gets back!' She hesitated for only another second, then strode purposefully towards the bicycle. A cab wouldn't be faster than a bicycle anyway, and at least this way she could leave at once. She only had to make sure that none of the guests caught sight of her on it, else it would cause a scandal.

Alfred Karsten looked out at the expectant faces with a confident smile. Everyone had come — Hamburg's mayor and deputy mayor, Petersen and Kirchenpauer, the members of the town council, Gerhard Weber and Jens Borger, and his key investors.

He saw the bright flash of Ludwig Oolkert's yellow hair as it caught the sun. The fact that Oolkert had actually showed up was a surprise. He owned the Rosenhof, the first (and, as of yet, only) *Kontor* office in Hamburg — and, if you took his word for it, the most modern one in the world. The Karsten Shipping Company had moved its trading operations there at the start of the year, but he and Oolkert had never managed more than cordial relations at best, and their interactions had been markedly frosty, despite Karsten's efforts to warm to him. But it was certainly a mark in his favour that Oolkert saw fit to leave his office today and support the Karstens. Of course, this was not done without some manner of ulterior motive. Karsten knew this. Nevertheless, it was a noble gesture.

He looked around at the gathered crowd. Half of the Bellevue and the better part of the Elbchaussee were present, all sweating through their fine dresses and fashionable suits. Hamburg was baking in the sweltering heat. The ladies fanned themselves with feathers or painted fans, while the gentlemen dabbed discreetly at the rivulets of sweat gathering at their temples. Alfred Karsten was beginning to feel uneasy. It was only a matter of time before one of the ladies fainted from a combination of the heat and a tight-laced corset. Gerhard Weber's wife was already beginning to look a little green about the gills. The harbour didn't smell particularly pleasant at the best of times, but today the air seemed thick with a miasma of the foul fumes and odours of the city's exhausts, combining to hang over everything like a murky shroud that made even him feel vaguely ill, as if some weight were pressing down on him and disquieting his gut. He mustn't leave the people waiting any longer. If Lily didn't materialise at once, he would have to find someone else. Sylta couldn't take her place — according to custom, the ship's sponsor had to be a virgin. He looked about inconspicuously, noting his own temper rising. Lily couldn't be relied upon for anything, it was ever so!

Head always in the clouds — or rather, buried in a book. He approved of it, on the whole, but it had led her to become too dreamy. It was an honour to be chosen to act as sponsor for such a distinguished ship as the *Titania*.

A great honour, in fact. But Lily seemed not only not to hold this honour in high regard, she didn't even seem to understand it. He was aware that the company held little importance or interest for her personally, not like it did for the rest of the family, that she found ships boring and didn't understand what so fascinated him about them. Still. He felt like one ought to be able to expect her to uphold the bare minimum of propriety, at the very least. Just thinking about the discussion he had been forced to endure over her ghastly new hat had him grinding his teeth in agitation. To think she had wanted to wear green to a ship launching ceremony! Luckily, Franz had been able to talk some sense into her. He was often too harsh with his siblings, but at least Lily didn't argue with Franz for nearly as long as with him. Alfred sighed and looked about again. Sometimes he wondered whether he and Sylta hadn't been too liberal in their childrearing. Lily always made up her own mind and was never shy to say so. In principle he considered that a positive thing. Sylta was the same, though her manner was calmer, less defiant. He was all for women who could think for themselves.

But sometimes Lily forgot her place.

Just then, a murmur started up among the crowd. Heads twisted, people craned their necks and whispered behind cupped hands. He could tell something was wrong by the way the colour drained from his wife's face, her gaze fixed in horror on something he couldn't see.

'For God's sake,' she hissed. 'What on earth was she thinking?' Sylta grabbed for his arm, nails digging into his suit, and pointed, across the shipyard, aghast. Now he, too, could see what had so riled both the crowd and his wife.

Lily had arrived. Perched atop her head was that green hat with the enormous feather, and — his breath faltered. Had she taken leave of her senses? For a moment he thought he must not be seeing things right.

His daughter was riding a bicycle!

It took all of Lily's courage not to turn back at once. Her knees wobbled. She did her best to give the crowd now staring at her a winning smile, but the muscles of her face seemed determined not to obey her.

Her plan had failed completely and utterly. She had taken a few wrong turns on the way, had even fallen off the bicycle once, when her dress caught on the chain. Now her gloves were smeared with dirt and her dress had a tear. To top it all off she had forgotten where, exactly, the *Titania* lay at anchor. She had never had to make her way here alone before, and so had been unprepared for the dozen or so heads swivelling to greet her with horrified stares when she sped around the corner with all haste. And now it was too late to stash the bicycle somewhere in secret.

Lily would have liked nothing better than for the ground to open up and swallow her whole. Instead, she rolled to a stop and dismounted with her head held high, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. The murmur of the crowd raised the hairs at the nape of her neck. She felt sweat pooling in the hollows and trickling down the creases of her body. She couldn't seem to get quite enough air into her lungs, compressed as they were by the corset. She could hardly control her breathing in the tight dress. She glanced apprehensively up at the small platform on which her family stood. Even at a distance, she could tell that it was only with effort that her mother was keeping her composure. Franz's expression was stony, Henry's face had drained of all colour, and her father was seething with barely controlled rage.

Lily's mind raced. There was nothing she could do now but keep calm and smile. She looked about for a place where she might park the bicycle. There was a man, a dockworker by the looks of him, leaning against a lamp post a little to her side and watching her with a strange expression on his face. A mixture of curiosity, astonishment, and ... amusement. She felt her face turning an even deeper red under his scrutiny. He's laughing at me, she realised, infuriated. But then she pulled her composure back into place. 'Would you?' She asked him with exaggerated sweetness, and indicated the bicycle, holding it out to him by the handlebars.

A look of surprise flickered across his face. For a long moment, he didn't move. His piercing gaze sent a shiver down her spine. Then he lifted one eyebrow and wordlessly accepted the bicycle. She registered vaguely that he was very attractive, in a rough sort of way. Lily thanked him with a smile that he didn't return. She felt his gaze lingering on her like a physical pressure as she moved past him.

In the meantime, the crowd had parted, clearing the path for her to approach the platform like a bride to the altar. Or like Anne Boleyn to the scaffold, she thought, throat closing on a swallow. She felt as if she were walking through a den of wolves. False smile frozen in place, she made her way slowly towards her family, chin raised. Half her focus was on attempting to arrange her skirts so as to cover the tear with her hand, the other went towards doing her best to ignore the muttered comments that drifted through the crowd, some little more than whispers, some loud enough to ring out across the harbour.

'Did you see that, Millie? And with her legs either side of the bar!'

'Is that even allowed?'

'Truly shocking!'

'How ever can Karsten permit such a thing?'

Lily's stomach twisted as she thought that her parents would probably ship her off to a convent at the end of the world and never allow her back home after this stunt. When she dared a glance out at the faces in the crowd, however, she was astonished to find that not all of them seemed horrified. A few of the gentlemen appeared to be smiling at her in amusement, some even seemed impressed, and old Mrs Gerda Lindmann, her grandmother's best friend, was laughing with delight, waving at her with a little scrap of lace in hand.

Lily raised her hand shyly and returned the wave.

Lily's approach to the platform had given her family time to recover their composure. Sylta was the first to take action. 'It seems our little surprise worked!' She exclaimed, beaming out at the crowd. 'And it was certainly well worth the wait, ladies and gentlemen. The ship's sponsor has arrived! We were of the opinion that a special occasion calls for a spectacular entrance, and I hope we managed to impress you.'

Gerda Lindmann was the first to applaud. Her clapping broke the silence, and she elbowed the lady at her side, who hesitated a moment, then likewise began clapping. Isolated clapping quickly broke out into general applause. While some, especially the older ladies in attendance, still looked on in consternation, the general mood lifted.

Lily dared a glance at her father out of the corner of her eye. He, too, had joined in the applause, but she could see his displeasure simmering beneath the facade. Franz was not clapping. He was, in fact, gazing at her with something just shy of loathing, and only in response to Sylta's warning look did he draw his lips into a thin smile.

'Well then,' her father said, 'it appears we can begin! We must remain ahead of our times. That is the motto by which we thought to conduct this launching ceremony, and which inspired the unusual entrance of my daughter today — I pray you will forgive our audacity!' he declared, earning approving nods and a few laughs from some in the crowd.

Lily, realising what he was doing, couldn't help admiring his ingenuity. Her parents were both masters at concealing familial shortcomings from the public eye. They had had plenty of practice doing so, thanks to Michel. But this was an impressive turnaround, even for her father. She could see how his heartfelt words and winning manner were pulling people slowly to his side, until even the fiercest of frowns melted away. Nobody could resist Alfred Karsten once he put on his smooth charm. Her mother's ingenious idea to insinuate it had been their idea all along to have her perform such a daring entrance as entertainment for their guests seemed to have saved them from scandal.

'Our ships are traditionally manufactured, by the very finest craftsmen, but using the most cutting-edge technology found anywhere across the world's oceans,' he father continued. 'We are always thinking one step ahead, always endeavouring to go where others dare not.' His confidence seemed to grow with every word, and even Franz was nodding along approvingly now. Oh, people would still gossip about her, Lily had no illusions about that. But at least she could save face and would be spared public humiliation.

Her hands were still shaking a little by the time her father finally finished his speech and gestured for her to step forward. She snapped open the pearl clasp of her handbag, drew out her little notebook and smoothed the page with her notes. Her stomach gave a nervous flutter but she managed to keep her breathing steady, even as she felt her pulse racing.

'In the words of Titania, Shakespeare's queen of the fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for whom this magnificent ship is named,' she began, and heard a quiet groan from beside her.

Franz. But she refused to let him knock her off course. He thought it was ridiculous of their father to name his ships after Shakespeare's heroines. 'Why don't you give them a good, strong, German name,' he often grumbled when the topic came up.

'Our ships are made in England, just like most of the world's great literature,' their father would reply. 'Why shouldn't they have English names?'

'Goethe wrote great literature,' Franz would grouse, to which their father would retort that he had no idea his son was such a literary enthusiast, and wouldn't he like to quote some Goethe for them, if he was so convinced of his literary genius, effectively proving that Franz had no idea what Goethe had actually written, and ending the dispute.

Lily subtly elbowed her brother in the ribs, glanced down at her notes, then let her gaze wander through the crowd as she quoted by heart, still shaking slightly, but in a clear, ringing voice:

Full often hath she gossiped by my side;
And sat with me on Neptune's yellow sands,
Marking th'embarkèd traders on the flood,
When we have laughed to see the sails conceive
And grow big-bellied with the wanton wind.

She heard her mother's sharp inhale of breath, and a scandalised murmur ran through the crowd. It was a slightly risqué analogy, yes, but it was Shakespeare, after all! He was always a little scandalous, in a respectable sort of way. One could hardly be criticised for invoking Shakespeare, a fact which Lily was all too aware of. With a secret little smile, she continued her speech, finally concluding: 'So all that remains to be said is this: I christen you Titania. May the seas ever lie smooth before you and may a gentle breeze forever fill your sails. And now I christen you with a threefold hip hip hurray!' And with that, she took hold of the bottle of Champagne that hung attached to a long rope and clad in a fine net and swung it with all her might against the ship's bow. The bottle shattered, and Champagne glittered briefly in the air as it caught the sun in a shower of droplets which then melted into the dusty ground of the dock.

The crowd fell to hearty cheers and applause. Lily's father embraced first her, indicating to her by his raised brows that she wasn't off the hook for her stunt yet, then turned to embrace her mother. Henry, still looking somewhat mystified by the entire occasion, kissed Lily's cheek. Franz whooped boisterously along with the crowd, ignoring his family.

'A first-rate speech, my dear, though the quotation could have been chosen with a little more tact.' Sylta pressed a kiss to her daughter's forehead. 'I'm proud of you. The bicycle, though, we will have words about!'

Just as they were descending the stairs at the side of the platform, showered by congratulations from well-wishers on all sides, it happened: a sudden gust of wind whipped up the dry, dusty harbour air into little eddies, and shouts went up from the gathered people as the

gentlemen held fast to their top-hats to keep them from being whirled away, the ladies grabbing hold of their skirts.

‘A storm would be a blessing,’ Sylta commented, looking up at the sky with furrowed brow, then quickly turned her back to the wind to blink the sand out of her eyes.

‘Sure,’ muttered Franz, ‘but only once we’re home.’

Lily, who had taken Henry’s arm, likewise cast her gaze towards the purpling clouds where they were gathering ominously on the horizon above the spire of the St Michael’s Church.

‘Well, sister dearest, best hurry or you’ll get soaked on the way home!’

Lily met her brother’s sardonic smile with a look of alarm. ‘What ever do you mean?’

‘Come now, surely you don’t think I’m going to ride the bicycle home? And in this heat, too.’

‘But...’ Lily gaped at him. She hadn’t considered that.

Franz kept his expression cool, disinterested. ‘Well, there’s certainly no space in the carriage. I don’t care how you do it, but you will get the bicycle back to the villa by evening, or you owe me three hundred marks.’

‘But that’s not fair! You left me behind! I had to...’ Lily could feel her temper flaring, but Henry stepped swiftly between them. ‘Darling, I’m sure we can work something out. We might struggle to find a cab here in the harbour, but I’m sure we can find someone who will ride it back home for a small fee.’

Franz gave a disdainful laugh. ‘You’re not suggesting you give it to some dockworker, are you? That bicycle is worth more than any of them make in a year. No, Lily can take care of this hers—’ at that moment, another squall gusted down the harbour, whipping Franz’ necktie up about his face, interrupting his speech.

Lily felt her hair tugged curiously about in the wind and reached a hand up to touch it.

‘What is...?’ She looked around. Her hat had been blown clean off her head. Henry bent to pick it up, but just as his fingers would have closed around it, another gust of wind knocked it once more out of reach, towards the water.

‘My hat!’ She cried, then laughed aloud. ‘Hurry, Henry! After it!’ Later, she would think about how harmless, even funny the moment had seemed to her. Henry, stumbling after the little scrap of green while she cheered him on and observed with amusement how the fine ladies scurried about like headless chickens. She could hardly have guessed that it was this day — this moment — that formed the beginning of it all.

Just as Henry reached for the hat once more, it was blown, as if tugged by an invisible hand, down into the gap between the dock wall and the ship.

‘Oh, dear!’ Lily groaned.

Henry stood helplessly by the edge of the dock and looked down into the water. She rushed over to join him. ‘Now what?’ She asked. ‘It was terribly expensive! If I lose it I’m sure to be put under house arrest for weeks, after everything that happened today.’

‘Not to worry,’ said Henry, ‘I’ll take care of it!’ He waved over one of the workers hired as security guards. ‘Hey, you there! Climb down there and fetch the lady’s hat, will you!’ He said it not unkindly, but it was a command, not a request.

‘Henry, we can’t ask that of him!’ Lily cried, aghast.

‘Why not?’ He looked at her in surprise. Then he sighed. Frowning, he pulled out his wallet and dug around in it for a coin, which he held out to the man. ‘For your troubles.’

The man hesitated a moment, then reached out and took the proffered coin. Lily registered with a shudder that his hands were torn up, ragged with cuts and scrapes. He slipped his shoes off, took hold of one of the thick ropes hanging down into the water, and shimmied down it with surprising speed.

‘Isn’t that dangerous?’ Lily grabbed Henry’s arm. The enormous ship bobbed in the water only metres away from the dock wall.

‘What’s the worst that could happen? He might get a little damp but that’s hardly dangerous!’ Henry replied, laughing.

Lily felt anger bubbling up inside her again. Why don’t you climb down after it then, she thought, if it’s so easy? She shot him a look out of the corner of her eye. She couldn’t help but think that a hero from one of her novels would hardly stand idly by in such a situation. She often found herself comparing Henry to the men in her books. Most of the time he compared reasonably well — he was tall, handsome, noble, with his blonde curls, his impeccable manners, and his family came from good, aristocratic stock. And, of course, novels were decidedly not the same as the real world. If one went about expecting normal men to behave like heroes, one was liable to be sorely and regularly disappointed. Still, she thought, his behaviour was not very gallant.

Looking down, she noted with concern that the man had let go of the rope with one hand to reach for her hat. But it was too far away, and his grip on the rope slackened, plunging him into the water. It was at that moment that the soft rustling of wind started up around them, quiet at first, but growing quickly more intense. Glancing up at the sky, Lily saw that the dark clouds that had, only moments before, hung about the St Michael’s spire, were now rolling over the harbour. The wind picked up suddenly, howling around them like a wild animal, and within second they were being buffeted by a gale so intense that she had to press her skirts down with one hand to prevent them from being flipped over her head.

‘We should find shelter!’ Henry called, trying to pull her away, but Lily dug her heels into the ground.

‘Wait a moment!’ She shouted back, eyes trained worriedly on the man in the water who was fighting against the waves washing her hat further and further away from him. Strange, she thought, I could have sworn the water was higher just now. She realised with horror that the *Titania* was moving. ‘Watch out!’ she called down, ‘the ship!’

The man blinked up at her, but didn't seem to hear her words, because he just paddled further away from the rope, driving the hat further beyond his reach with his movements in the water. Panicked, Lily looked about for help, but there were barely any people left on the dock. Everyone was hurrying towards their carriages and hansom cabs, and she saw her own family hastily packing up their things and bidding the guests adieu. 'Henry,' Lily pulled him over to the water's edge. 'What if the ship crushes him against the wall?' She pointed at the Titania's hull, which was already listing significantly closer to the dock than even a few seconds earlier. 'The wind will drive the ship against the wall!'

Henry put a hand on his top hat to hold it in place and peered down at where she was pointing. 'Oh, Lily, that's what all the thick ropes are hanging off the quay for. They're there to stop the ship from scraping along the wall. Think about it, otherwise ships would be constantly dashing themselves to pieces!' He was shouting, now, too, in order to be heard above the wind. 'Now hurry up down there, the lady's waiting!' he yelled down to the man in the water, who had managed to recover the hat by now.

Relieved, Lily watched as he swam back to the wall and attempted to haul himself up using the rope. But it was no good, the rope was covered in a thick layer of rain-slick algae, and his hands kept slipping off, unable to get a proper grip on it. Lily saw fear flicker across his face. He needs to use the narrower rope, she thought.

'Over here,' she called anxiously, getting down on her knees and leaning over the edge. 'It'll be easier over here!'

'Lily! Your dress!' Her mother appeared, seemingly out of nowhere, and grabbed her elbow, pulling her up. 'Tell me, have you taken leave of all your senses today?'

'It's torn, anyway, Mama — but look!' Agitated, she pointed to the man, who had, in the meantime, shoved her hat onto his head so as to have his hands free for swimming. He was trying to get back to the spot where he had climbed down in the first place.

'Good gracious.' Sylta blinked down at him in confusion. 'What is the meaning of this?'

'The wind, it knocked my hat off and over the edge. I'm afraid the ship will...'

The Titania interrupted her with a loud, almost human groan, and dipped in the water so that there was no more gap at all between ship and wall. The man was nowhere to be seen.

'Oh God!' Lily cried. Sylta blanched, and both women dropped to their knees at the same time and peered over the edge. 'Do you see him? Where is he?'

'I'm here!' Came a muffled cry from the water.

'Oh, thank God!' Lily called back. 'From up here it looked as if we had lost you!' Bending forward over the edge still further, Lily caught sight of the man's head from where he was clinging to the dock wall. 'Do you think you can make it back to the first rope?'

'I'm trying. I'm sheltered under two ropes here, but if I move, and the ship rocks back against the wall...'

Lily exchanged a horrified look with her mother, who had pressed a hand to her mouth. 'For God's sake, Henry, do something!' Sylta called to him from where they both still knelt on the ground.

But the situation appeared to be too much for Henry. He joined them in leaning over the edge, clearly trying desperately to think of a solution, but not arriving at one. Lily was bent so far over the edge that she nearly lost her grip. She could see the man edging his way along the ship's hull, now, pressed into a gap so small that he struggled to squeeze himself past the thick ropes whenever he reached one.

Suddenly, Lily felt her neck prick, gooseflesh running over her body. The rustling noise came again.

She looked up in alarm. Dead leaves, dried out in the long summer drought, whirled in little eddies and the wind blew dust motes into her face. Suddenly, there came a bone-chilling shriek.

'Oh, for heaven's sake, he's being crushed!' Sylta was bent nearly double over the edge, face pale.

Seconds later, Lily felt herself shoved roughly aside. She fell face first into the dust, chin scraping harshly along the rough ground. She sat up, utterly bewildered, and saw a man wearing workmen's clothes and a cap leaning over the edge. He had knocked her down in his haste to get there. It took him mere seconds to grasp the situation, and he leapt to his feet, barking out something she couldn't make out and running over to a nearby pile of thick iron beams. Picking one up, he stemmed it, with all his might, against the ship, wedging the Titania away from the dock wall. Lily looked on in astonishment as the other security guards and dock workers hurried over following his shout and took up iron rods, copying his actions at intervals along the length of the ship, shouting out words to each other with grim, fiercely determined expressions.

It appeared, at first, as though the Titania would not budge. It's so massive, Lily thought despondently, what difference can a few small iron rods make against the might of a ship like that? She was still sitting frozen on the dusty ground between the men, white dress ruined. But after a few seconds of the workers pushing with all their might on the rods, twisting their weight into the task and huffing, red-faced with effort, the Titania began to tilt back away from the shore. Slowly, at first — so slowly, Lily could hardly perceive it at all, then moving much faster, until suddenly the men's rods were tilting the ship into open space, clearing the wall, and the roped tying her to the dock pulled taut, creaking.

'Now! Let's get him out of there!' The man who had shoved her aside didn't hesitate for a second. The moment the gap was wide enough, he grabbed one of the ropes and swung himself over the edge. In the instant before his face disappeared, his piercing gaze bored into her, his eyes full of rage, and she realised with a start that it was the man on whom she had so insolently pressed the bicycle not an hour earlier. She pulled herself to her feet and Henry, who had been frozen in place watching the scene unfold, rushed to assist her.

The man who had jumped down had reached the injured worker and was now coiling the thick rope around them both, tying the injured man to himself. At his command, the other men standing by heaved, pulling them up, and soon after they were dragged, panting, up and over the edge onto the dock.

Lily made to hurry over to the injured man but then stopped dead in her tracks, hand pressed to her mouth. The man who had been tasked with saving her hat lay there, leg twisted at an odd angle, face pressed into the dirt, moaning dreadfully in pain. Where his left foot should have been, his leg simply ended in a bloody mass of ragged, torn flesh, shards of splintered bone sticking out of the gaping wound. A wave of nausea washed over her and she had to look away from the gruesome sight. ‘Henry, quick!’ She gasped, but Henry was already kneeling beside the man.

He pulled up the man’s trouser leg and examined the injury, then took the man’s pulse, and, face grave, announced, ‘He must be taken to a hospital, immediately. He needs a surgeon.’

‘What’s going on here?’ Alfred and Franz had come to join them. Sylta quickly explained what had happened.

‘This day is cursed,’ Alfred muttered under his breath. He cast a quick look at the mangled remains of the man’s foot, blanched, and turned away, running a hand down his face. ‘Get him to the St George Hospital,’ he ordered the men still gathered around them. ‘I’ll cover the costs.’ Two of them hoisted the now nearly unconscious man up, while a third ran for a cart to help them carry him.

The injured man cried out in pain at being so suddenly jostled, and Lily pressed her hands over her ears to block out the sound. Never in her life had she heard such screams. As the other men dragged him away, her eyes caught on the trail of blood left in their wake, a bright crimson thread soaking slowly into the dust of the harbour.

‘Well, now that that’s all sorted.’ Her father bent over and picked up her hat, which now lay, soaked and filthy, on the ground beside them. With an expression of icy fury he pressed it into her hands. ‘I hope it was worth it.’ With that, he took Sylta’s arm and lead her away towards their carriage. Lily’s mother cast one last, troubled look at her over her shoulder, but allowed herself to be pulled away. Franz strode after them without another word.

Henry put an arm gently around her shoulders. Lily looked down numbly at the hat in her hands. The magnificent green feather was bent and tattered, but she knew she would never wear it again, in any case. She felt terrible. This had all been her fault. The agonised moans of the injured man echoed through her head, and she felt herself on the verge of tears. Turning her back on the water, she once more caught the gaze of the man who had jumped in to save the worker. He was in the process of gathering up the scattered iron beams and throwing them back onto the pile.

His eyes were cold, almost contemptuous, as he regarded her. Swallowing hard, she gathered her courage and took a few steps towards him. ‘I can’t thank you enough for—’ she started, stumbling over her words a little, but was immediately interrupted by Henry.

‘Hey, you there! I saw you knock my fiancé down! She fell in the dirt— just look at her!’

Lily looked down at herself. She was covered head to toe in dust, pure white dress discoloured, pearly white gloves torn beyond repair, and she had scraped open her palms, which were now skinned bloody. She hadn’t even noticed.

The man seemed undecided as to whether he found Henry’s outrage amusing or irritating. He stood for a moment, scrutinising Henry, one hand resting lazily on his hip. ‘She was in the way,’ he finally said with a shrug, and tossed the last of the beams onto the pile. When Henry looked about to fly into a rage, the man simply turned his back to him. He was about to stride off but then paused, turned back, and met Lily’s gaze. ‘I apologise if my actions caused you any injury,’ he said, after a brief hesitation. ‘I had to act quickly.’

Lily nodded, a little taken aback. ‘It was all my fault in the first place. Thank you so much.’

Her reaction seemed to take him by surprise, but he made no reply. She remembered suddenly that there was still the issue of her getting home. ‘Oh! You still have my bicycle!’

‘I secured it to a street lamp over there.’

‘Ah, wonderful,’ Henry cut in. ‘We need someone to ride it back, anyway. What’s your name?’

‘Jo Bolten,’ the man answered, shortly.

‘Well, Bolten, what do you say to extending your heroism a little further and earning some money for it? The lady needs someone to ride the bicycle back to Bellevue.’

‘She managed to make it here on her own, what’s to stop her riding it back?’ The man asked.

‘The rain, of course.’ Henry held out a coin to the man. ‘It’s sure to start pouring down any minute now. Do you want her to get a pulmonary inflammation?’

The man looked at the coin in Henry’s hand, then at Lily. He made no move to take it.

Lily felt herself blushing, once more, beneath his gaze. ‘You don’t have to...’ she stuttered. ‘Henry, we can find someone who...’

‘Why don’t you ride it back?’ The man said to Henry, without dropping Lily’s gaze. His tone was neither hostile nor challenging, but Henry reacted with indignation, as if the man had struck him.

‘And ruin my suit? What do you think? It’s about to start coming down in buckets, the whole city will be ankle-deep in mud!’

As if summoned by his prediction, the rain began to fall at just that moment. Large, cold drops fell around them, the cold shock of it burning as rain fell on Lily’s cheeks and down her neck, running under her collar.

‘Well?’ Henry asked. ‘What do you say?’ He slung an arm protectively around Lily and pressed her to his side. ‘We need it taken back to the Karsten villa. I’m sure you know it.’

The man didn’t even seem to notice the rain. It dripped down from his dark hair into his face. ‘The Karsten villa?’ He seemed to consider briefly. ‘I’ve got work to finish this afternoon. But I’ll bring it by this evening,’ he said.

'It had better be in perfect condition!'

'Henry!' Lily was dreadfully ashamed. 'He's doing us a favour!'

But the man didn't even bat an eyelid. He didn't deign to give Henry an answer, nor even look at him as he turned around and strode away. Henry was left standing there, hand still outstretched. It was only then that Lily noticed that the man hadn't even taken the coin.