



*Sailing  
to the far  
Horizon*



THE RESTLESS JOURNEY AND TRAGIC SINKING OF A TALL SHIP

PAMELA SISMAN BITTERMAN



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PAMELA SISMAN BITTERMAN

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*This book is dedicated to my father,  
who has somehow always trusted that I'd be all right*

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*It is in memory of my mother,  
who is holding my hand*

*And my brother,  
a real hero*

And the sea will grant each  
man new hope  
as the sleep brings dreams  
of home.

---

—CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

Make voyages. Attempt them. There's nothing else.

—TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

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# Acknowledgments

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The events in this book occurred nearly twenty-five years ago. That I am new-sectionsable to recount them in such vivid detail is due entirely to the faith that new-sectionsmy parents had that I would someday commit the adventure to print. They new-sectionspreserved my letters, journals, photographs, and newspaper and magazin new-sectionsarticles. My mother even transcribed the most worn and weather-beaten new-sectionspages, word for word, in her own graceful script. If I had retained possession of my records of the journey, they would have gone down with the new-sectionsship and been lost forever. My mom simply believed that my telling this new-sectionsstory was *bashert*, Yiddish for “meant to be.”

I gratefully acknowledge the following people for their support and inspiration; without them this manuscript might never have completed the long journey to publication:

Sheila McMahon, the editor who saw the book in my story

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Steven Milne, for creating the map of the voyage

Tom Barnett, for chapter 5

Tobi Sisman, for watching over the home front

Denise LeVine, my first reader

Rigel and Hallie, the reason

Joey, for the next great adventure

# Chronology

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20 AUGUST 1978 The author joins the schooner *Sofia* in Boston, where the ship is preparing for her second circumnavigation.

25 OCTOBER 1978 The author sets out of Boston aboard the *Sofia* bound for Martinique in the West Indies.

NOVEMBER 1978 *Sofia* makes Hamilton Harbor, Bermuda, after running from Hurricane Kendra.

NOVEMBER 1978–JUNE 1979 *Sofia* traverses the Caribbean, making port in Martinique, Dominica, Ile de Saints, St. Vincent, Bequia, and Barbados (where she hauls out) in the Windward Island Group of the West Indies before continuing on to the Isla de Margarita in the Lesser Antilles, Puerto La Cruz on the north coast of Venezuela in South America, Curaçao, in the Netherland Antilles and on through the San Blas Islands in the Archipiélago de las Mulatas.

JULY 1979 *Sofia* enters Panama in Central America at Cristóbal on the Atlantic side of the Canal Zone. The author jumps ship to spend the next several weeks back in the United States.

SEPTEMBER 1979 The author travels overland from Bakersfield, California, through Mexico and Central America, to meet the *Sofia* in Golfito, Costa Rica.

NOVEMBER 1979 *Sofia* sails up the coast of Costa Rica from Golfito to Puntarenas.

DECEMBER 1979–JANUARY 1980 *Sofia* departs Puntarenas and enters the Canal Zone at Taboga via the Bay of Panama.

JANUARY 1980 The Panamanian government charges *Sofia* and her crew with unauthorized entry and international trespassing. Later that month, *Sofia* hauls out in Vacamonte, Panama.

FEBRUARY 1980–DECEMBER 1980 *Sofia* crosses the South Pacific calling into the Archipiélago de Colón (the Galapagos Islands), the Marquesan Islands, the Tuamotu Archipelago, the Societies Islands of French Polynesia, the Cooks, the Samoas (where she hauls out), and the Kingdom of Tonga.

DECEMBER 1980 The author jumps ship in the port of Russell in the Bay of Islands, New Zealand, and again returns to the United States.

JANUARY 1981 The author rejoins the *Sofia* in Nelson, New Zealand.

JANUARY 1981–JANUARY 1982 *Sofia* rests in Nelson, New Zealand, where she undergoes two hauls out, the construction of a false keel, a failed mutiny attempt, and a significant crew turnover.

FEBRUARY 1982 *Sofia* departs Nelson, sailing “North About,” laying over in New Plymouth en route to Auckland, New Zealand.

21 FEBRUARY 1982 *Sofia* departs New Plymouth, New Zealand.

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23 FEBRUARY 1982 The schooner *Sofia* sinks off the North Cape of New Zealand.

28 FEBRUARY 1982 The survivors of the *Sofia* are rescued by the *Vasili Perov*.

AUGUST 1983 The U.S. Coast Guard Department of Transportation officially informs Evan of the charges being brought against him.

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*Sailing to the*

**Far Horizon**

# Introduction

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This tale is not ancient. It is just twenty-five years old, in fact. However, as part of the tradition of sailors whom it hopes to honor, its years number in the hundreds. And the legacy of the human spirit of which it strives to be worthy is timeless. Nonetheless, in the end, *this* is just my story.

I have written as complete an account as possible of a time long ago. There are many problems inherent in undertaking such an endeavor, and they give rise to questions that warrant answers.

I've constructed the book primarily around the journal entries I made during a nearly four-year voyage aboard the schooner *Sofia*. This journal comprised the bulk of my communication with my family. My mailings often consisted of great hunks of paper ripped from my notebook and sent in a bundle from some remote harbor; a single package could contain several pages detailing the events covering weeks or months, a succession of ports and hundreds of nautical miles. Other letters home were hurried notes scribbled on such random swatches of paper as antiquated charts and the backs of produce box labels. Many were not dated. Some records were lost or destroyed. Consequently, it was at times a challenge to establish specific dates and locations. I've made every effort, however, to ensure that the chronology is generally accurate, if not absolutely precise. And any errors are mine, results of the limitations of human memory.

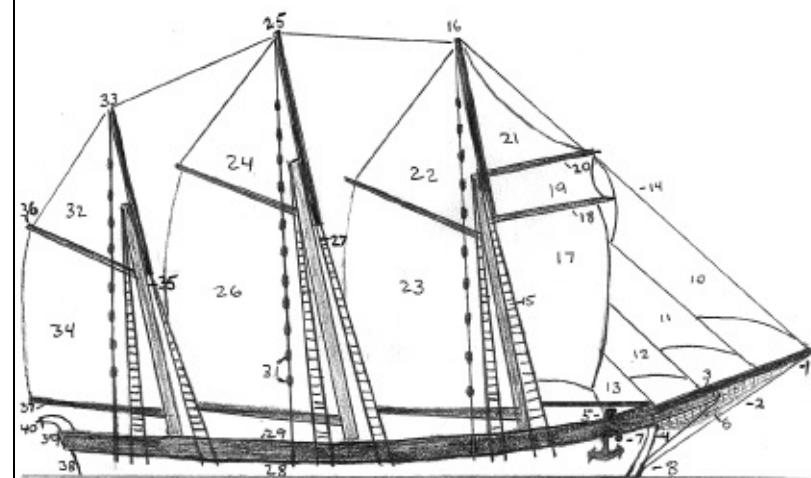
I have not recreated the journal verbatim; instead I have gone back into the entries and reworked them for the sake of the narrative. And although I haven't falsified any event, some episodes have gone the way of sea stories, told and retold until they became what I remember. I've selectively expanded and carefully crafted other bits to ensure their significance. I have simplified the nautical terminology to avoid sinking the story in a sea of technical detail. And, in reflection, I embellish upon vignettes merely alluded to in letters.

This narrative emerges as a memoir of intimate perception and sentimental retrospection. I do not apologize for this, nor do I consider it anyone's truth but my own. The writing was as much an act of catharsis at the time of the voyage as it became again a quarter century later when I transformed the adventure into a book. My hope is that the reader will empathize with the teller and gain personal insight from the tale. To sail an old tall ship across vast oceans and beyond is fundamentally an irrational act in which idealism conquers sensibility. Can such a journey be portrayed honestly in any other light? Should it be?

Why did I choose to write the book? In twenty-five years no one else has taken on the task. I must assume no one else will; so the responsibility fell to me by default. To never transmit the events of the final days of the schooner *Sofia* would be a betrayal of all she has meant to so many. And why now? In dealing openly with this last question, I come close to exposing a part of myself that I'd prefer to keep private. I did not choose the moment when the book would be written; the moment chose me. When personal tragedy struck, I discovered I was able to overcome a desperate sense of powerlessness by recalling my *Sofia* days. I could feel the strength of that fearless explorer again—the girl with the bright spirit and the indomitable life force. She resurfaced as I wrote and this book spilled out of me like a dance of redemption. It has been said that through writing we discover what we believe, and so I did.

## *Sofia*

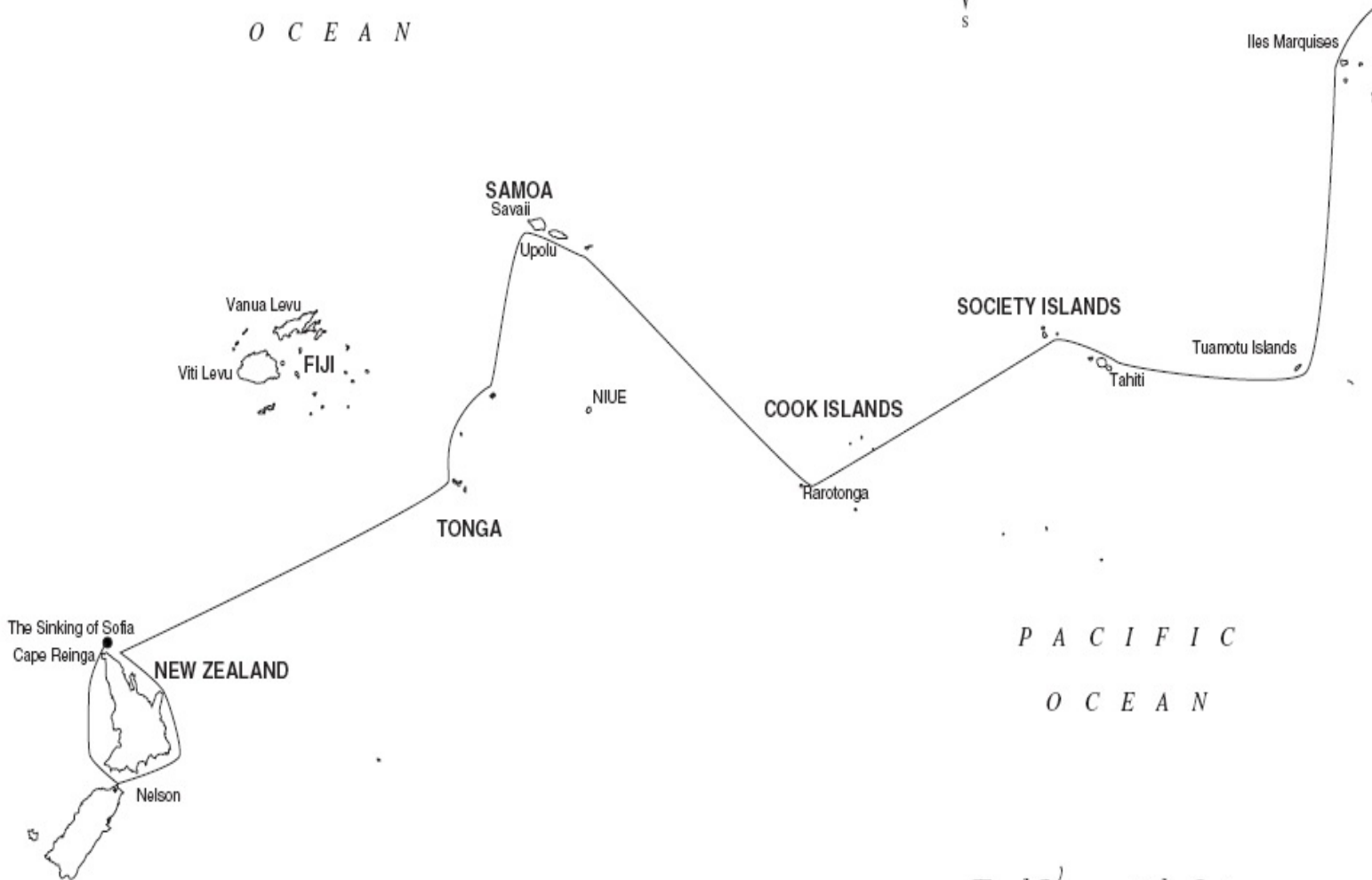
- |                                |                         |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Jib boom                    | 21. Raffee              |
| 2. Bobstay                     | 22. Fore gaff topsail   |
| 3. Bowsprit                    | 23. Fore gaffsail       |
| 4. Bow                         | 24. Main gaff topsail   |
| 5. Samson post                 | 25. Main topmast        |
| 6. Bow net                     | 26. Main gaffsail       |
| 7. Fisherman anchor            | 27. Mainmast            |
| 8. Stem                        | 28. Topsides            |
| 9. Waterline                   | 29. Cap rail            |
| 10. Flying jib                 | 30. Ratlines            |
| 11. Outer jib                  | 31. Baggywrinkles       |
| 12. Inner jib                  | 32. Mizzen gaff topsail |
| 13. Fore staysail              | 33. Mizzen topmast      |
| 14. Forestay                   | 34. Mizzen gaffsail     |
| 15. Foremast                   | 35. Mizzenmast          |
| 16. Fore topmast               | 36. Mizzen gaff         |
| 17. Course squaresail          | 37. Mizzen boom         |
| 18. Course square topsail yard | 38. Stern               |
| 19. Lower square topsail       | 39. Taffrail            |
| 20. Lower square topsail yard  | 40. Davits              |





*Voyage of the Sofia*

P A C I F I C  
O C E A N



P A C I F I C  
O C E A N

*Final Voyage of the Sofia*



# Joining the *Sofia* for Her Second Circumnavigation

## *Floating in Boston*

One doesn't discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time.

—ANDRE GIDE



*Boston Harbor*

*October 25, 1978*

*Early Dawn*

“Ahoy, mates, hands off your cocks and on your socks!” This raunchy charge is the ruckus awakening delivered by our ever-ebullient skipper. Although not an entirely appropriate command because women make up half the crew, we all leap from our bunks, infused with the captain's enthusiasm. This morning we go to sea. Casting off from Boston's tired old Lincoln Wharf and its relative comforts and securities, we will sever our ties to our past and any certain future. The United States will drop away in our wake as we leave behind everything familiar. In a most profound sense today we are leaving home.

During the rare moments of calm that invade the manic atmosphere of readying the ship for departure, it occurs to me to marvel at what we are undertaking. The dank, metallic gray of late autumn New England dawn lies heavily over the harbor; it is the kind of gray you can feel in your teeth. An impatient North Atlantic sucks and drags at our ship's massive hull, trying to draw her out. The proud sixty-year-old, 123-foot, threemasted gaff-topsail schooner *Sofia* answers the sea with an almost palpable yearning as she groans against her mooring, leaning her topmasts toward open water. She has been a long time in port, a thorough and extensive refit. According to those most knowledgeable, the *Sofia* is strong and seaworthy. The ship is ready. I wonder, “Am I?” and how is it that I am here?

## INTRODUCTION

The early spring of 1978 found me living a blissfully landlubbing existence, hunkered down in my cabin atop an unbridled meadow on the property for which I was caretaker. As resident naturalist for forty acres of a 180-acre nature and wildlife preserve in northern California, my daily pre-occupations concerned controlling the prolific growth of scotch broom and gorse, appeasing loggers, coexisting with farmers, and struggling to ensure that the property could support itself financially. From my lofty crib atop a curiously lush and fertile million-year-old sand dune, the landscape ambled down a lazy, terrestrial staircase to the sea five miles below. Great stands of ancient redwoods shuffled between layers of pygmy forest as the earth wound its way down to meet the retreating ocean.

Because the income generated by classes and tours proved insufficient, the land stewards implored me to figure out how to bring in more money. I wrote a grant proposal for an outdoor education program that would target the youth of local schools who were struggling in a traditional classroom setting. And in fact we got the grant, under the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA). Teachers throughout the area began to identify students who would be good candidates for the classes, while I busily began setting up shop on the property. However, California abruptly and systematically started shutting down its government-funded programs, and those funded by CETA grants were among the first to go. No grant, no money, no preserve. I would soon be homeless and unemployed. Foundering and in need of a new direction, I was leafing halfheartedly through the current edition of an alternative lifestyle publication entitled *Co-Evolution Quarterly* when I found one.

Being in my late twenties during the late 1970s provided me with plenty of opportunity for radical change. Here's what jumped out from the classifieds: "Tall ship *Sofia*, cooperative owned and operated 60-year-old schooner, returns to America to enlist crew for her second circumnavigation." According to the ad, \$2,800 would ensure part ownership and afford the vehicle by which one could endlessly travel the great oceans of the world. My resolve to become a part of the capricious history and evolving odyssey of the *Sofia* would ultimately prove to be one of the most profound and precipitous of my life. I adhere to this certainty today despite what happened, or, more accurately, because of it.



*February 23, 1982*

*1:30 A.M.*

*Tasman Sea*

*Off the North Cape of New Zealand*

Soaked, shivering, inert, I lie inside my body immersed in fatigue. Like the broken lens of a camera, my eyes stare straight up, frozen in incognizance. Something has changed. Look. For more than three years the *Sofia* has been my home. She has carried me across half the planet, cradled me through sweeping calms, raging gales, fair winds and following seas, hurricane. But not this. Never before have I had this feeling. The metallic grinding of the chronometer gears pierces the thick cabin air. It is dark, feels heavy. I adjust to see the clock face. Impossibly hard. I am straining to roll onto my side, turning up a steep incline. Gripping the edge of the bunk with both hands, I flex and lock my muscles to hold steady. Listen. Sounds too deep. The wash of the sea beside my head resonates bass, hollow. Not the

familiar swish, the rhythmical surge, but a drone, as though from a gully, vacant and sepulchral. I blink, cold water dripping down my face. From where? With bewildered eyes I follow its trajectory across the cabin to the open porthole set high, so high, on the weather bulkhead. The sea climbing the hull, gaining the quarterdeck, bursting through *that* porthole. Unfathomable. Never before. In all weather the *Sofia* maintains a cadence, a motion that is uniquely hers. She owns it. A torsional roll, a serpentine dip, a shush, and then a lurch countering her balance, revolving with a centrifugal grace. This is a dance now more familiar to me than my own because I adjusted to her step years ago. She leads, perpetually fluid and light and wispy, strong and controlled. Always. Always before. *Feel*. This night the *Sofia* lumbers drunkenly, obese. She is wallowing, careening, struggling to regain her elegant meter, her convoluted rotation. Something is terribly wrong.

*Oh, God. Oh, no. Get up. Go on deck. You know what's up there. You know. Move.* I press my hand to my chest. *Breathe*. My heart slams against my fingers with the force of a train racing out of control. thumb, thumb, thumb. *But I already know.*

September 1978  
Boston, Mass.

PUMP, PUMP, PUMP. AS I lean my bicycle into a sharp turn, weaving my way through the cobblestone streets of Boston's North End, once again I hear, "Hey, lady, shave ya' legs!" I'm late for work. I have a reprieve from the drudgery of manual labor aboard a tall ship so that I can report to my job as clerk and nutritional guru at a local health food store, and this hiatus is pure joy. Suffering the harmless taunts of the local hoodlums en route is small price to pay and one I'm getting damn used to coughing up. But, boy, do I ever know that I'm back East. In blissful rural northern California, where I spent the past several years, a razor was as much an oddity as a debutante. Local men there had long resisted trimming their beards. Women didn't bother to shave their legs. Everyone was loathe to shear their armpits. With smug superiority we proclaimed that we had evolved beyond the foolish need for such artificial beauty treatments. Our clan was sanctimoniously au naturel and proud of it. For the bohemian, coming to New England to join the crew of the tall ship *Sofia* was pure cultural shock. Returning to the East is literally like going back in time. I had forgotten that the United States of the 1970s still harbored cretins who would bother to comment on another's personal expression.

"Get a job, you slimy lowlife!" I bellow back, discovering a spark of my old, unevolved self skulking surprisingly close to the surface. Well, in any event, this is not an appropriate time for me to revisit my Lady Schick days. I have been informed that freshwater stores aboard the *Sofia* will be used exclusively for cooking and drinking, because water is a true survival commodity at sea. Bathing with it will not be allowed. Using it for shaving one's legs, I gather, will be entirely out of the question. I'm advised that a healthy squirt from a bottle of Joy dishwashing liquid into a bucket of seawater will lather up quite adequately, facilitating a proper bath. But shaving with it? Not bloody likely. Salting one's wounds won't be a facet of the tough-guy sailor persona we're expected to adopt while on board. For now the YWCA a few blocks up the wharf provides shower facilities, and, yes, ostensibly we could also shave

there, but why postpone the inevitable? Those who are still hopelessly attached to their razors will be required to relinquish them sooner or later. For my part, I'm well ahead of the game. I've already groomed a fine coating of soft fuzz that will soon be coveted by the bristled new unshaven aboard the *Sofia*. So my transformation to shipboard life, at least in this one respect, is less problematic than for many of the other new recruits. But in other respects, it is decidedly more troublesome.

I am having serious difficulty adjusting to the sprawling mob of bodies taking up residence in the limited space available on this funky old sailing vessel. In recent years I catered only to my own particular whims where home and hearth were concerned. I cozied right in to the self-indulgence of attending purely to my needs, those of my dog, and those of the intermittent human visitors or occasional farm animals. In Mendocino I floated in an herbal broth of delicious simplicity, compulsive neatness, and immense clarity. On board the *Sofia* my space is fermenting compost. All my physical and psychological bits are scattering helter-skelter to the four winds.

My dog, a great gentle bear of an Airedale, cannot go to sea with me. He'll be taking care of my parents and vice versa until I return. I feel lost without him. I have abandoned the generous, demonstrative attitude of the pastoral Pacific Northwesterner. Now I endure the stolid angry reserve of the New England city dweller. Nobody hugged me when I got to Boston. I have traded the clean open spaces of the Mendocino countryside for the sour cruelties of Boston's port district. And, last, I have forfeited my rapturous solitude for the communal throng of an ancient tall ship.

Tom, the skipper, comes to the *Sofia* with eminent qualifications. He exudes confidence. Good thing too, as his appearance might belie his credentials. He comes off more like an overgrown, overzealous, swashbuckling kid. Tom replaced Brad, who piloted the *Sofia* through much of her first circumnavigation but jumped ship here on the eastern seaboard to set out in search of "a boat of my own." Many old Sofians on board sit around discussing doing much of the same thing, far too much for my comfort. I find it disconcerting. It dredges up old insecurities, the ones best voiced by Groucho Marx as he wondered whether he really wanted to join a club that would consider having him as a member. I sense that the veterans toy with the notion of striking out independently whenever the *Sofia* falls into one of her lean periods of regrouping and redefinition. It must be mostly hot air, though, as many of the old crew are still hanging around.

Evan, the first mate, is one of these old-timers. He's been with the *Sofia* for several years and even made a bid for captain when the position opened up, but the resident crew soundly rejected his offer. I wasn't around during the process of his elimination, and I don't pay too much attention to the random snippets of gossip that float about the vessel, but I gather that the bulk of the resistance was rooted deep in clashes of personality. Not surprising. Evan is subdued and shrouds himself in mystery. He retires frequently to the relative privacy of his exclusive aft cabin, where he will deign to entertain the bevy of young women that follows him around. Also not surprising. Evan is the epitome of tall, dark, and handsome. With his curly hair, bushy mustache, lean muscular physique, Errol Flynn shirts, and large broad knife belted at the waist, he fits the image of the gallant, traditional sailor of a tall ship.

Norman, the Sofian of longest standing on board, is a funny duck. Thin, lanky, and sparsely of head hair, he sports a neatly cropped full beard and rubber bands the mousy fringe of remaining hair near his ears into a tight little knot of a ponytail that sticks straight out from the

nape of his long neck. His face is normally pinched into a stiff grin, and his laugh ejects like high-pitched rat-a-tat of forced air; it causes his arms to jerk and his body to bob with the effort. It always startles me a little. Norman is highly accessible but seems constantly tense, never angry but often frustrated. He is a wealth of useful information, everything from the finer points of the *Sofia's* functioning to an interesting and knowledgeable critique of her history and evolution. Nonetheless, I am confounded whenever I solicit instruction or advice from him. As Norman speaks to me, I stare hard into his earnest face, intent on understanding. Instead, I sink into a thick mire, a drone of meaningless sounds. Eventually, I become so lost and uncomfortable that I utter a dismissive "uh-huh" and just wander off. I'm baffled as to why this occurs, but I'd sure like to sort it out. I detect in Norman a fine man whom I could trust and respect if I could just figure out what the hell he's saying. He's a veritable encyclopedia—as if you ask him where the used diesel goes and you get a dissertation on the chemical breakdown of petroleum. Fail to move on and away fast enough, and you will be buried in a master's thesis on the politics of oil as well.

Mother Boats, the *Sofia's* radio operator and boatswain (the sailor responsible for maintaining the ship's rigging) is an absolute sideshow. He is large, loud, a little doughy, and a lot flouncy. In contrast to Evan, Boats could be the poster child for old queens who go down in the sea in ships. The guy is obviously a top-notch, marlinspike sailing veteran, but he is equally obviously gayer than springtime. He makes no attempt to hide either of these seemingly opposite aspects of his character. Offering a limp-wrist handshake, accompanied by his own trademark moronic giggle, he introduces himself straightaway as Mother Boats and announces that he will also answer to Boats, Mama, Mother, and, when he is feeling particularly exotic, Mama de Bateau. The women on board use all his aliases, but the guys refer to him only as Boats. There's just so much of his affect that the fellas are willing to buy into or admit that they accept. He doesn't seem perturbed. Boats dances on over however he's hailed, bouncing on the balls of his wide feet, his toes perpetually pointed skyward as if the nails have just been painted and are still a little tacky.

Davey, the ship's chief engineer, is a South African from a middle-class white family that he claims to have abandoned in order to avoid being drafted into the military. Where he stands on apartheid is unclear to me, but I'm interested to learn the perspective of one whose life has been so altered by the revolution in his native land. I'm not certain when Davey hooked up with the *Sofia*, but he already appears at home here. He is a hairy little man with wise twinkling eyes and a button nose that pokes through a shag of dark, unkempt full beard. His feet point left and right and look just like Fred Flintstone's. His front teeth and fingertips are discolored with the burnt yellowish stain of a long-time stogy smoker. But when Davey speaks, what comes out is at odds with this hobo-ish appearance. His accent is elegant. Obviously well educated, he comes off as self-possessed, even aristocratic, without a hint of self-deprecation in the way that he handles his diminutive elfish frame. In fact, he exudes dignity and immediately elicits respect. I get the distinct impression that this guy knows exactly what he wants and gets precisely what he's after.

These five fellows are the *Sofia's* resident elders, but a few other mates among us possess substantial sailing credentials as well. Patrick is a professional sailmaker, originally from England and presently employed in a highly reputable sail loft in Boston. He has quite a bit of sailing experience and has offered to stitch up some new sails for the *Sofia* in exchange for passage to Martinique. Patrick has been formally trained in British seamanship. I'm curious

observe how his strict background will blend with the *Sofia's* more relaxed style of sailing. He put on the ~~happy-golucky- young-man-in-a-commune~~ hat and almost make it look like a believable fit. However, I suspect that it's a superficial cover, because I've already witnessed his haughty edginess. When things are not done "right and proper," Patrick reacts as though he's been slapped in the face. Once, when I was told to perform a particularly distasteful task, the rudiments of which were not made anywhere near clear enough to me, I whined, "Oh, what do you mean?" Patrick got right up in my face, fixed me with an icy glare, and spit out, "A sailor does not ask why. A sailor does as he is told!" Scowling, I reminded him that I had yet to be a sailor myself, and that, as a rather reluctant resident swabbie, I felt justified in asking for an explanation. Patrick visibly shook off his arrogance, forced a grin, and nodded with resignation. He is definitely still bound by some damned straight laces. There's evidence of an overly large male ego buried just beneath his acquiescent shrug, and I can't help but wonder what might happen if it ever busts fully loose.

Anders is a young Swede who has already garnered an impressive raft of sailing experience for his tender years. He has traveled with the *Sofia* in the past and is so appreciative of the opportunity that she affords him that he reciprocates lavishly. At present, our ship is the grateful beneficiary of his extensive electronic expertise. I accompanied Anders to an abandoned airfield where the broken shell of an old plane lay crumpled and forgotten on the weed-blown tarmac of a deserted runway. Anders ostensibly had obtained permission to salvage any parts from the wreckage that he reckoned he could refashion into something useful for the *Sofia*. I watched enthralled as he meticulously unraveled a web of tangled wires and detached the aircraft's main control panel intact. He was later able to mount this bright shiny plate on the *Sofia's* shabby saloon bulkhead, connect the various toggles and switches to an elaborate jury-rigged stereo and cassette complex, and produce some remarkable tones. Thanks to a maze of leads that Anders then ran throughout the ship to an assortment of ancient speakers positioned just so for optimum acoustics, our traditional sailing vessel has become the residence of a high-tech sound system. I gather that this is considered a basic necessity on board, something on the order of the archaic refrigerator, which looms like a ridiculously misplaced monolith in the middle of the *Sofia's* saloon. The sole purposes of the fridge are to manufacture a daily supply of minute misshapen ice cubes and to keep the skipper's gin and olives properly chilled. The *Sofia* has neither running water nor bathroom, but can she boast fine tunes and a passable wet bar? Oh, you betcha!

Linda has the fresh young face of a high school cheerleader, is in her early twenties, and also possesses an impressive sailing résumé. She and Captain Tom share some vague history and even now appear to be something of an item. Linda is into this venture big time, gung-ho to get the work done and get going. She portrays herself as an accomplished tall ship sailor, bustin'-a-gut eager to get back out to sea and demonstrate her abilities.

Martina and Kathy joined the *Sofia* at around the same time and apparently buddied-up quickly, as they already seem to enjoy a well-established mutual support system. Kathy is blond and stout, a farm girl from Vermont, as I recall. I can see that she is cautious, reserving judgment, observing and evaluating rather than wholly buying into this venture. Kathy hasn't got a lot of sailing experience, but I credit her with the strength and intelligence to appraise this situation soundly. If she chooses to commit, I'll lay odds that she'll rise to the top of the *Sofia's* hazy hierarchy and grab hold of this experience with both hands. But my guess is that if she cannot achieve this, she'll humbly take her leave.

Martina impresses me as the more passive of the pair; she is lithe and pretty, with cosmopolitan sophistication beyond her twenty-one years but somehow repressed and emotionally dependent. She even looks out of place here—too refined, too soft, too vulnerable for the *Sofia's* rough edges. I've heard that she met the ship several months ago in New York where the *Sofia* was still hanging out after participating in the bicentennial tallship parade two years ago. Rumor has it that she and Evan struck up a romance back then. There are inklings of an on-again, off-again relationship between them even now but nothing clear-cut. (I have yet to discover much of anything on board the *Sofia* that is.) However, for the time being, Martina is a pleasant addition to the crew's social complement.

Then there's Barney. If ever there was a living, breathing person who inhabits the stereotype of a dude from Bakersfield, California (his hometown), it's him. Actually, Barney both looks and moves like the "keep on truckin'" figure portrayed on bumper stickers all up and down the West Coast. He is the proud owner of a "fully developed sense of humor" which he exercises freely. But within his personality also lies a great heart; his warmth spills over through puppy-dog eyes and gentle mannerisms. Barney's real name is Tom, which he obviously prefers, but he has agreed to allow us to call him a bastardized version of his last name in order to avoid confusion with the captain. "Barney" suits him. He grudgingly concedes this, although he's not thrilled about it. He just shrugs, cooperates, and with an endearing smile voices one of the more descriptive of a litany of already-famous Barneyisms—"Oh, well, . . ."

Barney is a closet public relations man, masterful in the arts of sarcasm and subtle irony to get his point across or sometimes just to ease the atmosphere on board. During a recent meal, when a heated argument erupted about the questionable quality of the dry goods that were being laid in, someone pointed to Barney. He was sitting quietly at the end of the saloon table. He had methodically separated his dinner into two heaping mounds—one of beans and one of bugs. The bean pile was larger but only just. Recognizing with an expert's sense of timing that he now had everyone's attention, Barney glanced up, shrugged an "Oh, well," and smiled placidly into the horrified faces of his crewmates. Point made. Point well taken. Barney is here on a more substantive mission than most. He's confided to me that he and his brother had always dreamed of sailing around the world together. His brother died, and Barney is fulfilling the promise.

The last of the new crew to join the *Sofia* here in Boston is Karen, and what an odd creature she is to find in our midst. Karen looks far more like a country schoolmarm than a tall-ship sailor. She dresses daily in dowdy knee-length skirts and old-fashioned blouses—attire wholly incongruous with the setting. I've witnessed several casual observers do a double take when, while scanning the work in progress on a normal *Sofia* day, they spot Karen—dressed much more appropriately for a Friday night barn dance—vigorously sanding a rail or slapping a coat of paint on a mast. Karen's personality, however, suits her strange appearance. She is effusive in her down-to-earth, homespun openness. To my knowledge she has no sailing experience whatsoever, but she is simply as excited as a small child to travel and to see the world. Karen is devoid of sophistication or affectation, and in this alien arena in which we all now find ourselves sparring, her presence is as refreshing as a prairie breeze after a summer rain. I like her immensely, but I am concerned about how well she'll weather this experience. She is clearly not representative of the *Sofia's* crew at large. In fact, if there was a single classification into which I might bundle the rest of us, it would be that we are a

well, nothing at all like Karen. I don't think she is a stranger to this distinction, though, and the strong will and fierce determination that come from experience are evidenced in her refusal to be intimidated. For instance, during meetings, when the debate concerns our proposed port of-call, she announces her agenda. And she doesn't hold back—quite the opposite, actually—when we are discussing sensitive issues regarding shipboard behavior. Karen is absolutely rigid in certain moral and ethical respects and completely dogmatic when defending her peculiar pet peeves. No one has openly rebuked her yet. However, I have observed enough exasperated smirks and vaguely veiled sardonic responses to suggest that it won't be long before someone challenges her. I fully expect to see the day when Karen will have to measure the strength of her convictions against the vacillating value systems of the *Sofia's* volatile crew. She just might surprise us all by hanging in here, though. This gal's got some grit.

The Varmit! Varmit is the *Sofia's* longest standing and hands-down the most fascinating mascot. The Varmit holds the lofty position of ship's mascot. He is a coatimundi, a rodent-like creature indigenous to the jungles of Mexico and Central and South America. Coatis resemble raccoons in size and coloring. They're about two and a half feet long with a brownish coat and a black mask, but they have a long, semi-prehensile bushy tail. The Varmit's nose is also much longer than a raccoon's, more along the lines of an anteater's. His feet have slender, tapered toes with razor-sharp claws. A coati's teeth also are longer and sharper than a raccoon's, more suited for ripping into the insects and tearing apart the reptiles that make up the bulk of its diet in the wild. Our Varmit weighs in at an impressive 10 pounds of either cuddly cuteness or pure orneriness, depending upon whether you're in his good graces at the time. He was acquired by the crew six years ago when the *Sofia* was sailing around Costa Rica. A local marketplace was selling him and his siblings as food, when an outraged crew member hid him in a stalk of bananas. Varmit was just a pup then. He has lived his entire adult life on board the *Sofia*.

Varmit's seniority stands him in good stead with the revolving cast of characters who enter his domain unprepared to cohabit. Our mascot doesn't know that he's a critter, and he definitely doesn't acknowledge that he is not in charge. In fact, I'm discovering that he is in charge. Anyone brave or foolish enough to take issue with this will soon regret it. The Varmit has a violent temper and an uncanny memory. His spitefulness is both painful and personal. Varmit's vendetta should never, ever be taken lightly, lest one cares to have one's sheets soiled, toiletries tampered with, or ankles gnawed upon. Among Varmit's less-than-endearing qualities is his unabashed love of anything that smells sweet—toothpaste, perfume, soap, shampoo, and the like. He will pursue these items shamelessly, sniffing out their whereabouts from the most clever and obscure hiding places, and then with amorous ardor swabbing them all over his tail and pretty much all over the entire surrounding area as well. Our little Varmit leaves absolutely no doubt that he has come a-calling.

Another of our mascot's more irksome idiosyncrasies is his bestial reaction to the tone created by the jangling of metal against metal. Varmit might be elusive—not spotted much for hours or even days at a time—but should someone casually rattle a row of wrenches or shake a sack of shackles, our amazing coati will materialize out of nowhere, single-mindedly launching the frenzied assault of a fierce hunter. Actually, Varmit waddles like an overfed house pet, and his claws tend to slip around ridiculously on the varnished cabin sole, but do not be fooled. He can still be lightning fast and deadly serious. The high-decibeled screech



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