

The stories and libretto of
The Ship that Lies at the Bottom

*Premiering April 22, 2001
at the lightship Frying Pan*

Presented here in no particular order



Deborah Whittaker • Joseph Wallace

Karin Slaughter • Aileen Schumacher

Lori Snyder • Jamie Scott • S.J. Rozan

John Pond • Kris Neri • Wendy Monk

Coyne Maloney • Jan C. Maher • F.R. Lewis

John Leech • Gwen Lauterbach

Ben Lieberman • Jane Haddam

Kathleen Haaversen • D.M. Fratini

Ken Cheney • Barbara Brown

Date: Mon, 18 Dec 2000 12:45:03 -0400

Subject: 1-page stories

From: Keith Snyder <keith@woollymammoth.com>

Dear Bright, Talented, and Exceptionally Attractive Friends,

I'm in a group of composers putting on a "concert theatre" show at the Frying Pan, an old lightship docked at the Chelsea Piers in Manhattan. The show is April 22. Would any of you be interested in contributing a one-page story for a spoken word & music piece? Essentially, I want to tell the audience a pack of lies about the history of the ship.

The stories will be recorded onto cassettes. Small cassette players will be mounted on the walls of one of the ship's cabins, as though they're the "voices of the past," embedded in the metal itself. First person, third person, past, present, mock news stories, things that happened to someone in that cabin, things that happened to the ship itself... I don't care what the form is. I just need as many little stories as possible.

There's most likely no pay. Even if it turned a profit (which I doubt), I'd be splitting it too many ways for anyone to make any money worth mentioning. However, everyone will get a CD of the finished piece.

The Frying Pan's web page (which includes both its *real* history and footage of it sinking) is at www.lightshipfryingpan.com.

I went through my address book and picked out people to send this note to. If you have suggestions for other people I should contact, or if you noticed that I missed somebody I should have included, please let me know.

Also, if anyone knows where I can get a lot of small, battery-operated cassette (or CD) players with built-in speakers for cheap...

Thanks!

Keith

<http://www.woollymammoth.com/keith>

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Yes, I Knew Her
D. M. Fratini
Read by David Dotterer

Garzelli was the one who heard it. He was new at the time, hadn't gone deaf yet. The two of us were on deck squeaking around in our rubbers, locking things down in the calm before the storm.

I'll battle a hurricane any day. It's the calm that rattles my nerves. Everything slow and subtle and quiet. That's not the ocean.

Garzelli grabbed my arm to hold me still and stop me squeaking. "What was that?" The horn blasted again, and we had to wait for our ears to stop ringing. "There," he said. I didn't hear anything, but after two years of that foghorn, I could barely hear Garzelli.

"It sounds like...." He dragged me to the rail, and the two of us stared out at nothing but foggy darkness. "... someone crying," he said, "... a woman."

"A woman... out there?" There wasn't another vessel within a hundred miles of us. What with the hurricane warning, the Coast Guard patrol had swept the area for daredevils and fools before dusk.

Garzelli's eyes groped the fog. Every shaved hair on his head, chin and neck stood on end. Every filament of him quivered to hear. He gave me the heebies.

I tried to tease him out of it, " That's how it starts. First you hear sirens, next you see mermaids, finally one day —" I pressed my palms together over my head and leaned out in a cornball arabesque as if to dive.

Like a divining rod, my hands started shaking. Straight out where they pointed, the fog parted, and there she was. Just a shadow on the shimmery surface, but I knew like I knew my own name, it was a woman.

Garzelli ran off, crashed around in the storage bin, and came back with the searchlight which he sighted down my hands.

She wasn't 20 yards off, red hair spilling over an orange life-vest and reaching its tendrils out across the surface. She looked natural there, a sea creature in her element.

Then everything went nuts. Garzelli and I were screaming our heads off without even realizing it. "Help!" "All hands on deck!" "Woman overboard!" Then all hands were on deck, and everyone was shouting.

Snyder and Justus made a kind of lasso with rope and a donut preserver, but no matter how close it landed, the woman made no effort toward it. "She's dead," someone said.

"Quiet!" I hollered, and we all froze, straining to hear. The foghorn blasted. Then... "There!" Garzelli shouted. An enormous thunderclap made us all jump. All except Justus who looked to Garzelli, "Mother of God." He'd heard her too. He started to climb over the rail, but hesitated, maybe thinking of his wife and newborn at home.

Now, I want to say that I saw a life in danger and thought only to save it, but in truth I was not so selfless; I was greedy. Greedy for the chance to be a hero and win the damsel. She was a miracle, a gift brought forth from the deep, the stuff of legends. And I was so young and starving to be larger-than-life and loved. So as Justus hesitated, I vaulted past him through the mist.

The storm seemed to start the instant I hit the water, as if I had been the required ingredient. The cold rang through my bones and blood, and I thought for a stunned moment that I would never move again. I forgot all about living and loving and was thinking only of dying, the weight of it, as I kicked and stroked my way over to her.

She faced away, out to sea. Between the fog horn blasts, over the rumble of the rising storm, I could clearly hear the whole crew and myself hollering at her, but she made no effort to turn to see us. "Frozen," I thought, "her limbs are too numb."

When my reaching fingers tangled in her reaching hair, I was finally close enough to hear her weak cry for myself. I pulled her toward me, meaning to wrap her in my live warmth as her hair was enwrapping me. I pushed water to turn her around, to see her face.

I had never seen a dead human being before. It defies your sense of reality. Flesh is pink and warm and pliant, not gray, not cold, not stiff. It made her appear, if not real, then ethereal, or extra-terrestrial. I think in life she had been only ordinarily attractive, but in death, she was so extraordinary, I almost forgot to swim.

Her final expression was not of pain or terror. Her eyes gazed not out across the roiling sea for help or curse. Her eyes rested peacefully and lovingly, at a spot no further than her own breast where a trembling cat, gray as the fog, clung and mewed a salt-scorched cry. The young woman's right arm circled under the cat keeping it mostly above the water. The cat was soaked to the bone, but not submerged, and therefore it had not yet died of hypothermia like its mistress.

By the scruff of its neck, I tried to rescue it. I caught myself squirming like a sissy to avoid touching the dead girl out of some instinctual dread or reverence. But the cat dug its claws into her turtleneck and hid its head under her chin, shutting its gleaming gold eyes against me. It was not going to abandon itself to me, the hero.

That cat had known that girl maybe all its life, and that brought the fact of her home to me. She had been a breathing, living, and thus fragile individual only an hour or so before. No more or no less fragile than myself. And like mine, her life would have been full of joys and fears and loneliness and love—if for no one else, at least for this cat who would not let go of the one person on earth it knew to be safe.

I watched the pair of them bob on the waking water and thought that that was it, the thing for which I'd dove into the storming sea. "Love." The one, in all the world, you know to be safe. There's nothing particularly human or heroic about it, but seeing it in the shape of a wet-skinny cat clinging to a dead girl made it seem all the more precious for that.

The crew was already tugging on my towline, reeling me in. No longer repelled, I pulled the girl against me and held her with her face tucked under my chin, the cat between us, shaking wildly.

They hoisted us up onto the deck, the storm, fully awakened, battered us all the way. When the crew closed in over us, only just discovering the situation, the cat finally let go and let me tuck it into my slicker and take it away to dry safety. The foghorn blasted all the while. Neither of us stopped trembling for a week.

We never found out who the girl had been. No boats or plane wrecks had been reported within 1,000 miles of us that stormy night. I kept checking in with missing persons for a few years. Nothing.

We named the cat Old Ironside, and he lived out the rest of his long life with us on the Frying Pan. He was a fat, happy, sociable guy, and I was, of course, his favorite.

But I used to catch him, perched in the sun, staring his cat stare out to sea, and I imagined he was still on watch for her. Imagined all the secret things about her he, and only he, would have known. The things she said or songs she sang when no other humans were listening. Ironside would look at me abruptly, as if he'd known I was watching him all along, and his eyes, so full of memories, seemed to say, "Yes, I knew her."

When he finally died, so many years later, I grieved for the loss of him, and for the loss of all he knew of her and took with him, and for myself, who, though I've loved many women in my life, have never been able to say, what he needed no English to say: "Yes, I knew her."

On the Waterfront
Barbara Brown
Read by Kathleen Haaversen

I'd like to say that as I pulled my collar up against the chill of the fog rolling in off the bay, I could see as well as ever through my glasses but that would be a lie, for they were badly-fogged up, as well as having a shattered right eye piece, not to mention that I'm border-line legally blind on the left. As I waited eagerly in the night I heard the sound of a small boat pulling into the harbor among the moans of foghorns and the clanking of bells on a pair of buoys. They warned of treacherously tall rocks and one shallow wreck that could turn hazard into doom for a person on a small craft innocently negotiating the quickly moving shallows. But he would have to enter this way in order to find me where I stood looking into the steam of the night roiling in off the unsettled waters. Waiting for the man in the sea captain's hat to climb up and give me the kiss of my life, I finally breathed

deeply the liquid air. As he approached the sea wall he just sat there grinning up at me. Then I saw his hand go deep into his vest for something in one swift motion, grasping something that glinted in the yellow light of the bar behind me on the waterfront. It was the kind of a bar that a gal like me might go for fish and chips and a long drink of something that might relax a man like him, if he would ever get up out of that damn boat. I waited breathlessly for him now as I stood there; I could dimly see that he was looking up at me, quizzically. Then suddenly there was something in his right hand, it was shining and pointed in my direction as if he was trying to remember something as he gazed up at me, like my name or what the devil I was doing there. I took my glasses off and squinted down at him, not sure what would happen next but ready for whatever the fates and this man dressed in midnight blue had to offer. Then he clicked a flame near to the shiny thing from his vest that was gripped tightly in his fist. Oh yes, I said to myself, "He is my love, my own!" I could see in the light of his blue eyes and the sheen of silver streaking each black tangled curl escaping from under his cap. His beard and mustache nearly covered the wet red curve of his bottom lip. As he lit the pipe curls of smoke rose to meet me ahead of him and I easily could recognize the mingling smells of Old Spice, Fisherman's Friend plus the deeply pungent aroma of a briar pipe full of his own special blend. There he was, my man: Captain Al Peters. Pete was returning from another sail around the Cape of Good Hope on a ship loaded with black men and diamonds. Contraband of the highest order, the plan was to trade the diamonds for some of the most deeply-colored rubies in Burma. That was the plan, and then he and I would settle down with the fortune that the gems would provide, in a hideaway somewhere deep within the island of Pago Pago, where we could make a new life. I thrilled to the thought of quiet moonlit moments with him on the beach and steady soft breezes within which we would caress one another. He was, however, wanted by Interpol, the FBI and several angry tribes of men from the Dark Continent whose single point of agreement was that he ought to go to jail or to die or both and horribly. But here he was and he was mine, I wanted him more than any organization on the planet and I was here to prove it.

Pete climbed the wood slats up the sea wall toward my waiting arms. He advanced with an unbearable slowness, his pipe clenched in his teeth. With each inhalation on the pipe the glow would flash a dull red even in the darkness and fog... his face seemed to reveal a puzzling eagerness. Pete is not one to show his feelings so readily, but I knew he was glad to see me. I was the last person he expected on such a night as this. When the wind is a low murmur indistinguishable from the fog horns in the distance. He knows me to be a homebody at heart, and he knows too, how much alike we are. We are like two peas in a pod, two birds in a nest, two people who have no right to find love like this after all these years, but we were about to defy all the odds. Our luck was about to change, the road to Pago Pago was a moonlit sea and a cruise ship outfitted with all the best.

Our life was just about to begin. The good life, the life we had always dreamed of...yes, beachcombing, pearl diving, clams, the whole kit and kaboodle.

At last he stepped over the stone ledge and looked hungrily into my eyes.

Then he kissed me and this is what his kiss said to me: “Come away with me to a world beyond the sunrise, to a place beneath the silent moon, where a thousand kisses await like unspoken words echoing a peace beyond understanding! Such words are not platitudes but rise up from a heart where two people cling together in a resplendent joy and a harmony resident within the music of the spheres!”

And my kiss had an answer for him, spoken eagerly from the flesh but originating in a place within my soul and from another time and place in a language that I did not know or ever hope to understand, it said:

“We cannot know what the future may bring, we only know that we must face it together, that the unknown holds no confusion when we are together, the heat of our love burning into the once lonely and eternal night.

Just at that moment a thud was heard in the bottom of the boat and when we turned we could see dimly there his duffel bag had rolled to the side of the small craft and was moving in such fashion as to indicate that there was something throbbing with life in there. Captain Pete raised his hand to his hat and said, “Well, I’ll be...she is in there! Just like the book said she would be....” When he turned to me his eyes were glittering with uncertain tears, and I knew, we both knew...there would be no more secrets for the little girl of Kaluah Bay, she was ours now. We would have to make provisions for her and her parrot, which she had wrapped in yarn and kept in a bag so he would not speak during the crossing from Africa to where we have now found ourselves, making a family of four, bound for the south seas in the morning of our happiness. But it was not morning yet, not by a long shot. Here we were at the side of the sea deep in a soupy night with no where to go but back to the city of bad words and a trustless humanity.)

The Frying Pan According to Two Old Salts

Barbara Brown

Read by Royal Huber and Bob Silber

Old Salt #1:

“They’s nary a man can tell you who really owns this here scow anymore, ‘cause it was SEIZED, I tell ya! Coast Guard done grabbed it in a DRUG raid. Yessir, they found it floatin free off Liberty Island, an nobody ‘board other’n a scrawny calico cat that had been messin all over this tin can. Musta been a whole nest o mice on this thing, er RATS! Could be they wuz RIVER rats on it. This here river is FULL of em, y’ know. Yessir. Unggnnn. (cough, sniff, COUGH.)

“Ayep, seized. Drugs...all kinds of em. They tell that they had HAIRO WINE on this boat, too, is what I heeard. Not no pretty young thing, now, I ain’t sayin there was no courageous girls on this boat. NOOo. not except for them girlies they was pickin up out in Long Island Sound that was brung in across the Atlantic on somma them tramp steamers. Ever’body knows that’s where all them tramps comes from, been tramp runnin’ from the Orient and from Europe, since way back, but mostly it were DRUGS, I tell ya. Scourge o’the earth, them drug dealers are...ayep.”

Old Salt #2:

“Nah! You b’lieve ‘bout anything you old fool! Here’s the truth of it: This here boat was stole’ outright from a reemote location way back in the Straits of Mackinac, between them two penninsulers (sic) of Michigan, where it was used to keep ore boats from crashin on the rocks around that there five mile long Mackinaw Bridge they built back in the fifties. “Say them currents’re always treach’rous in the Straits but got a hunnert times worse when they built that bridge. This here boat’s saved a lot o’ lives. Til’ them thieves took an’ brought it down the St Lawrence Seaway, with nobody the wiser. Brung a lot o’ them Deprived Michigan Yooper Ladies an all kind o furs from up there in the sticks, beaver and fox and racoon skins an’ took em away up to Montreal, on the St. Lawrence Seaway, where they traded ‘em for French contraband! an, then this here boat was took down through the Great Lakes Huron and Ontario or Erie, or all THREE and up round to the Port of NY that the DEA gave it to the Parks Department after confiscatin it out on Long Island Sound, cus’ it’d been a transfer point of Ladies of the Evening who’d been taken in the White Slave Trade from ‘cross the SEAS and then here into service in Manhattan!”

Old Salt #1:

“Wul, ‘ere you go...’ats what I was SAYIN. But there’s another story, course I don’t b’lieve this un: Some folks says it’s been around since the 16 hunnerts...yep, since the landin’ of the Mayflower up there...up north along the coast, there...say t’was a portage boat for explorin’ inland waterways, yep (“tsc the sound of after-lunch teeth sucking of an old codger hoping for bits of dessert between the cuspids “...tsch...”)...it was built by Squanto and his boys just in time for the First Thanksgiving. Hey, I almos’ half way b’lieve this. A lot of people don’t know ‘bout... They’s those ‘at think ‘at steel was INvented by the white man, an’ ‘ats mos’ folks. Nope. It was mined by them Indians, and that’s a facts as some folks tell it...”

Interrupted by an outraged Old Salt #2:

“Awwww HORSEpuckie....!”

The Tale of Argo McWhirtter
Ben Lieberman
Read by Jason Schuler

So...you're collecting stories about the ol' Frying Pan. Hmm...well, have you heard about Argo McWhirtter? No? Well then, you haven't heard anything about the Frying Pan until you have heard of her most, er... famous Captain.

I met Capn' McWhirtter for the first time in the winter of '32. I was down on my luck, needing any job I could find. Wondering the docks of Charlestown I was able to find some work as a Longshoreman, just enough to get by. One day I'm drinking with my fellows at a bar near the old Mellon cannery, know the place? No? Well never mind, burned down some years back as I recall. Now where was I? Oh yeah, so we're all flying with our halyards loose and our sheets to the wind when in walks Himself, larger than life. McWhirtter says, "I'm looking for a crew for the light ship Frying Pan. Any of you worthless sea slugs interested?" Although I didn't know it at the time, McWhirtter had a reputation. "One hand for the Boat, one hand for the Bottle" McWhirtter they called him. But an empty belly is like a lee-shore in a storm, so I signed up.

At first things got along easily enough. The first mate, a man named Thomas, was an agreeable sort. Our job was to warn off ships from the Carolina shoals, know by some as the graveyard of the Atlantic, so we anchored off the Carolina shore and lit our candle. The work was easy, my job just keep the generator running and the candle lit. The Capn' kept his generator running with ample amounts of scotch. And so it went, day and night, watch on , watch off.

Then the storm came. You remember the Nor'Easter of '33 don't you? Hell of a storm. Blew up from out near Nova Scotia and roared down the coast like a howling banshee. Never seen such a thing in my life. Ships were blown up and down the whole seaboard, never an idea where land was, where rocks were, nothing. On the *Frying Pan* we kept the lights running, to this day I don't know how. We slipped anchor five times that night, waves breaking over our bow and ice so thick that we needed skates to get from the deckhouse to the middecks. At one point the poor *Frying Pan* was taking water so fast that we were sure we were lost. And through the whole storm was McWhirtter, howling orders through the wind. Thomas, I and two other crew members tried to convince the Captain to take the boat into port, but McWhirtter wouldn't hear it. "Ya'll a bunch of lily-livered cowards, ye be! Ach, I seen worse weather than this walking to my little old grandmother's o'er the heath of Scotland! Here we be put, and here we be stayin'!" And so we stayed. Turns out that the St. Martin liner was steaming from Dover, England to Baltimore at exactly the time of the storm, and that they had been blown way off course with most of their navigation equipment lost. By a stroke of luck they were able to see our lights and so avoided the rocks along the North Carolina shore. If the Captain hadn't stood his ground, hundreds would have died that night.

I left the boat not long after, but you might want to hear what happened to Captain McWhirtter. Later that year he tripped and fell while drunk one night and was lost overboard. Some say that the great sweeping light that he had kept going though the worst of the storm, went out when he died. I wouldn't know for sure, but many who have served on that boat swear that they can still hear McWhitter's drunken song when a gale blows up from the north.

So how's about a drink....

Untitled
Coyne Maloney
Read by Keith Snyder

I was eighteen and out of high school and didn't know what to do. I had an uncle who had been in the Coast Guard. He always talked about it, his buddies and the rescues they made and all, and it seemed pretty exciting so I said to myself, "Why not try it."

I enlisted, went through basic training and I got assigned to the *Frying Pan* Lightship, out at Frying Pan Shoals. I was so excited. I was on a ship! I didn't even care that it didn't go anywhere. And the sea around there was beautiful. At first I would stare at it when I was on watch. After a while, though, it got as little boring. But that wasn't the worst. The worst was the fog. We had to rig ropes so we could find our way along the deck. Then there was the foghorn. It would blow for fifty seconds every three minutes. Nobody on board could sleep through it, even the old hands.

One other thing was a little hairy, That was when a freighter would navigate on the foghorn, then, when it was in range it would home in on the beacon, and sometimes, one of them would practically ram us. It only happened once in the two years I was stationed there, but it wasn't boring that night!

After my hitch was up I was ready to go back on shore and try something else. It wasn't the fog that got me though, it was boredom. Like I said to my girlfriend, "I spent two years at sea and I never went anyplace."

Call Me Ishmeow: The Story of a Lightship's Cat
Deborah Whittaker
Read by Blake Arnold

1.

Bygum, will you look her? It's been what...20 years? 30? No, closer to 40 I'd vow, but I can remember clear as a brassy spyglass the day I first bounced up the gangway, a crumpled furball inside Cappy's pocket, still milk-wet behind my pointy ears, knowing nothing about the life of a ship's cat or even why Cappy'd chosen me out of the squalling, tumbled litter. Did he see something in me that let him know I'd make an honest sailor, that I'd stand my watch true, that I'd give my lives to keep vermin out of the hold? Or did he guess even then that my own barnacled hide was a mask for a tender heart?

Not every cat is fit for life aboard ship – most of them run out of lives before they run out of swabbie mistakes. There are no life preservers fitted to the cat – no special safety harnesses. Come to think on it, there's no shore leave. No family of spouse and kittens to meet you at the docks after a hard tour of duty. It takes a thick hide to on men and cats to survive on a ship that's tender to those less seaworthy or less fortunate.

But belay all that. It's a hard life, but a satisfying one. Pulling lightship duty made me what I am, what I became—as stout a seaman as ever sailed this ship. So you can believe me when I say this is no yarn I'm spinning, but as true a tale as ever a sea-going cat has told. It was all some years ago, and as the old sailing master himself said, Never mind how many. Don't be counting on your fingers about the mast of this here tail, or you'll lose your way on time's shallow bars, as easily as ships at sea were lost on the Frying Pan shoals.

2.

'Respect to all the other lightships, there was no tougher duty than on the good lightship *Frying Pan*. This particular lightship, the very one you're standing on, was charged with shining a beacon warning sea-faring ships away from Frying Pan Shoals. Just the name sends a chill up and down the fur of my spine. It says something about the place that it's where the Atlantic merges with a river the local folks named Cape Fear. The souls of a thousand seafaring men have been lost in the Frying Pan shoals – and no small number of cats.

They replaced us with a platform, you know. Afraid we'd go down in a hurricane, and I guess there'd be some warrant for that. A hurricane was blowing up the night I first met Rose – saw the ship she was sailing on riding the troughs of waves twice as high as her mast. I didn't know then how far that ship had come, or what its coming would mean to me.

We were anchored at the farthest reach of the sandy shoal, both lights beaming, throwing a

warning to all the ships at sea. The wind had blown us around all day, and the waves had begun crashing over the deck – most of the crew was below, Captain Martin and his first mate in the wheelhouse. I was hold-up behind Cappy, my claws grasping for purchase on a metal shelf – we all stared out into the night as if our eyes could make calm those watery tentacles.

Cappy had the best eyesight I've ever known in a human – but I saw the lights of the distant ship long before he did. I called to him and stared out sharply to port through the gloom of the constant rain, and before long he saw it too. He pulled the radio's microphone out of the wall and signaled on an open channel – but there was no response. Only that ghost ship coming closer, throwing glimpses of itself to us through the troughs of those great billows, coming as close as if we were mating – and then sailing on again to the west, heading past us and further into the treacherous shallows, until we couldn't see her lights, even between the waves.

Cappy hailed and fretted – called a Mayday to the Coast Guard – but all we could do was watch the craft sail past us. And pray for the souls on board.

3.

At dawn the morning after the storm, the sea was calm as pudding. Cappy turned the Pan away from the big red ball of glowing sun and began a search along the only line of position we had for the passing ship. Anxious faces lined the rails. I took my post behind the Captain and let my gaze sweep the horizon. We proceeded slowly—the air felt heavy and smelled of diesel.

It was nearly 9am when a shout went up from starboard: "Ship ahoy!"

We stood off in deeper water, but we could see the scow had run aground, only 10 feet of mast were visible, pointing toward the Carolinas. Cappy sent a life boat, but the men were reluctant. No one wants to pluck bodies from the sea. At the last minute, I leaped from my perch and hid in the lifeboat's bow until we were rowing for the mast, and it was too late to send me back. As we came alongside, we could see it was useless. There was no sign of passengers or crew, except for the swollen and floating bodies of rats. Vermin, I thought, and good riddance to them. I felt the fur on my neck rising and my shoulders hunched in instinctive loathing.

But then my eye caught sight of a single live soul, small as a mite, clinging to the last strand of rope threaded along the top of the mast—and something in my heart melted at the site of that tiny rat, alone alive of all the ship's company. The men still rowed for the mast, and as they came near, I took another leap and shimmied up to the place where the little rat clung. There was shouting and commotion when they realized what I'd done. "Leave him!" shouted a sailor, but that the mate would not do, and he held the boat against the mast, as I backed down the pole, carrying the little wet beast in my mouth, like a rag.

From the time we plucked little Rose from the sea, the last survivor of a ship whose name we never knew, there was a permanent change in me. As a mouser, I was ruined. Most of the time I

spent below the decks, dragging bits of cheese or a rag dipped in milk to the infant who had become my charge. As she grew, I taught her ship's lore and at night we crept onto the deck to watch the stars. I still stood my watches, but my heart wasn't in it. The crew grew used to the sight of us together. She never made a large rat—she was always small enough to ride on my back, clinging to my neck like a possum. At night I made a nest of discarded burlap, and Rose slept curled in the soft fur of my belly.

When the lightship was decommissioned, and abandoned at the pier, I moved off and felt a father's pain when Rose decided to stay on, probably for some young Romeo. I moved in with a widow woman who fed me heavy cream and tuna as if she were fattening me for the stew pot, and I was arrogant enough to think I deserved it. But every day I'd slink down to the ship. Every day, Rose would make her way down the sodden ropes to where I stood, just about twilight. It was good for me to be reminded that I'd once been a working cat.

As for Rose, I think she liked my company, having gotten used to me all those years we spent anchored over the shoals. When the time came, it wasn't that Rose deserted the ship so much, as the ship deserted her. The *Frying Pan* lightship rolled over and sank into the mud beside its, died of neglect you might say, or maybe a broken heart. Rose moved up to New York, to live with a daughter in the city—such is the perfidy of the young. I thought maybe she'd be here tonight. But rats have such short little lives, you know. Never mind how short. Strange seeing the condition the old beauty is in now – her colors the same on the outside, but inside... Captain Martin would be rolling in his grave, if he'd had one. But that's another yarn, and I'll save the telling of that for another long night. Tonight I want to walk on deck under the stars and watch the lights glow one last time.

***Two Letters from Paul to his Girlfriend Dee Dee written in the Late Summer of
1965 on the Lightship Frying Pan with most of the Good Parts taken out***
Gwen Lauterbach
Read by Mark Lauterbach

August 31, 1965

Dear DeeDee,

I saw the most bitchin thing this morning. We get up at O five hundred, which is 5:00 AM to you civilians, and oh shit to most of the other guys. I just think about it as hey it's dawn patrol again only instead of County Line and the waves I got the USS *Frying Pan* and work. Haven't seen anybody surfing here yet but I haven't been here real long.

But this morning I saw the sun come UP over the ocean which was like amazing I just stood there thinking Paul you aren't in LA any more. That's the Atlantic Ocean and if you went across it you'd run into France not China. It was kind of exciting but kind of sad, too, because I thought Dee Dee's 3000 miles away and I don't know when I'll see her again or the sunset on the water like it's supposed to.

I miss you, baby girl.

This ship I'm on is a floating light house. I never heard of one before but it sits out here off the coast of North Carolina and keeps ships off these Frying Pan shoals. I don't know why the shoals are called frying pan but that's why the ship is called *Frying Pan*. So far, one day, it seems pretty okay and boring. It's noisy as hell cause the generator is always running to keep the lights going. Two light towers with lights going all night and in the day if it's foggy. The other guys say that's when it's bad cause the fog horn is always going off and you can't sleep.

Pirates used to come in here and plunder the ships that wrecked on the shoals. Even Blackbeard,

Somebody told me there's alligators here. Not on the ship but in the swamps and stuff here. Like the Alligator Farm by Knotts' Berry Farm. Maybe you could come out and visit? That'd be cool.

Could be worse too. I could be in VietNam, huh? Like my grandma says count your blessings.

Love,

Paul

September 19, 1965

Dear Dee Dee,

I saw a dead person today. Remember how I told you the guys here said it's hours and hours of boredom broken by a few minutes of sheer terror?

I'm still shaking. I didn't want the other guys to see me crying but I think some of them were too.

We saved the little girl but the mother died and we haven't found the father. It rains here almost every day for like 20 minutes and thunders and lightning like crazy and then it stops. Everybody just stops and then goes on like it was nothing.

But today we were battening everything down because they were predicting a real storm. Honestly, I was excited, Dee Dee. It's been so BORING here. Take care of the ship, scrub the decks, take care of the lights, eat, sleep, stare at the water and think about you. I thought I was going to see the world, but all I saw was the *Frying Pan* and the coast of North Carolina.

The waves came up and the wind, they were tossing over the decks and I could hardly hang on, but we had the lights going and the horn sounding.

It was like a awesome wave set when you can hardly stay on your board and you just feel so alive cause you're so scared. And then we saw it, just this shape of a boat and then it got lost in the waves, gray and green and foam. The guy next to me shouted that some rich guy just probably lost his boat from the harbor too bad.

And then—I thought I heard—we saw them. Someone in a life jacket—I saw the orange and it looked like they were holding something up. Joe launched the raft and took me cause I was young and could swim he said. When we got there it was a woman and she was holding a kid. A little girl. We got them in the boat, half in, the woman bent over the boat, her legs dangling and the baby in the boat.

They tried, we tried and tried, but the mother wouldn't breathe and so much water came out. Joe got the baby breathing and she was crying mommy mommy! Then she cried for daddy...pretty little girl with dark hair all wet and tangling, weeds in her hair stinking from salt water and where she threw up.

They covered up the mom on a bag and I thought she won't ever see her little girl grow up. She had blond hair so maybe the dad has the dark hair or maybe she dyed it.

Not that it matters, does it?

We took the little girl below deck and wrapped her up in a blanket and gave her peanut butter and jelly sandwich and some milk. I wanted to give her hot chocolate but you can't cook when the ship's tossing like that. She went to sleep in my arms, Dee Dee and all I could think about it she wouldn't ever have a mom.

And if we would ever find her dad and why he was out there in the storm with his family and what he was thinking when he knew they wouldn't make it.

I never saw a dead person before.

She was so still, the mother, Dee Dee. And so empty.

Love, Paul

Butter Beans and Corn Bread
Gwen Lauterbach
Read by the author

Butter beans and corn bread. I toted 'em with me out to the *Frying Pan*, 'long with some chicken I'd fried up. Which fact struck me kind of funny, in that I was carrying fried chicken to a Frying Pan. Rowing myself out to the lightship, listening to the clunk and chunk of the oars, water slapping

upside the boat, I found myself thinking maybe I shoulda just fetched the ol' hen out there and cooked her up fresh. You know, fry it up in the big *Frying Pan* itself. Wondered if any of them sailor boys ever even seen a chicken runnin' 'round with its head cut off. Laughed to myself just thinkin' about it, what them boys would make of an old hen spraying blood all round their swabbed up deck.

Of course, if they was country boys they'd think nothing 'bout it but maybe the moppin' they'd have to do, but the boy I was rowing out to see, I doubted but what he hadn't never seen a chicken 'til his mama put it fried up on his plate.

So went my thinking at the time. But like my mammaw says, in this life nothin's certain but dyin' and rain on wash day. Round any turn of the road something unexpected could be waitin'—or slippin up behind you—and you don't never know what'll float in on the tide.

That night bein no exception.

Oh, but the sky was so clear that night, no moon a t'all, stars like a million fireflies hanging overhead, so close you could just reach up and grab you a hand full. Down at water's edge, the fireflies in the sawgrass winked in and out like little lost stars. The light shinin' down from the towers on the *Frying Pan* lay acrost the water like a trail I had to follow.

Follow it I did. Little fish flip-flopped aside the boat as I went. The night was alive with critters callin one t' nother—bitty little tree frogs and bugs of all kinds, big ol' toads and the night birds crying. It was like the air was thick with yearnin' and I was breathin deep.

It had not been so easy as all that to get away. My daddy would not have liked me to be takin' his boat, not without I asked him. Which I did not. The way I see it, there is no point in askin' when you well know the answer will be one you are not wishin to hear.

But that night my luck was in and my folks were out, so, as you might say, I seen my chance and I took it.

Foolishness? It could be seen as such, followin my heart and not my head to a boy I did not know well and to a place I should not be. Somewhere someone was playin Foggy Mountain Breakdown, the music ridin over the water like the light from the lightship. Rowin in time to the banjo beat, I pointed the bow of my boat toward the Fryin Pan and Sammy.

Comin aboard, the noise hit me like someone throwed a bucket full of cold water over my head. My ears were ringin and I could not hear a word Sammy was saying. He pulled me forward a the boat where he ducked us under the canvas on a lifeboat and there we was in our own little hidey-hole, quieter and all hidden from the eyes of the world.

"It's the generators," he tol me—what keeps the lights a runnin and the ships warned offa the shoals. "You get useta it. But not the foghorns. They blast off every five seconds, not even the dead could sleep through them.."

I am supposin my face was a picture 'cause Sammy just busted out laughin. He had that kinda laugh where you know you just gotta laugh too. But laughing as I was my belly felt all hollow and

nervy like and butterflies was dancin in it. My bones were shimmyin to the shake of the generator and I was pretty sure where this was headin, which was not a place I hadn't been b'fore, but not yet with Sammy.

"Want some chicken?" I asked him.

I piled his plate high and passed the jar of ice tea. He poked his fork at the butter beans, asking what they was. When I told him, he said "Buuuutaah beeens? Buuuutah beeeeeeans? He took a bite like he thought it was going to bite back, then chewed em up real thoughtful like. "You southerners are all nuts, ya know. These don't taste nothin like butter."

"That's something comin from the man who was down at the five and dime driving poor old Mildred crazy asking for that egg cream thing."

"Hey, hey, hey—in a civilized town, every soda fountain...."

"Egg cream? No egg, no cream. At least our butter beans got beans."

I was jumpy as grease on a hot skillet. His hand was on my arm, the feel of his fingers sending the goosebumps runnin up and down my back.

"Poor ol Mildred was a hoot, wasn't she? Runnin round like a chicken with its head cut off—holdin up every bottle of pop in the place, trying to figure out just what it was you were wantin." My tongue was flappin like it was tied in the middle and loose on both ends, but I could not seem to stop myself.

"Bet that's something you never did see, city boy. Old hen with its head cut off runnin around all crazy—bet you don't see the chicken til your mama fries it up and puts it on your plate. City boy." My mouth just kept runnin. "Never had to kill your Sunday dinner, or watched your paw do. When we was kids we thought it was funnier than Fibber McGee."

His fingers was sliding down my arm and the chills were back. "My momma doesn't fry chicken."

I was finally quiet, trying to conceive of a mama who didn't fry chicken. "No chicken?"

Sammy laughed. "Lots of chicken. Boiled and roasted and chicken soup. Oh, and schmaltz."

"Schmaltz?"

"Chicken fat. Just not fried chicken."

"So what do y'all have for your Sunday dinner...that chicken fat thing?"

"Schmaltz is for flavor—no, maybe a roast chicken, a nice brisket. But not Sunday dinner—we have Sunday dinner on Friday. I'm Jewish. We have Shabbos—Sabbath. Sundown Friday, til sundown Saturday. My momma, my dad, aren't what you'd call observant, don't keep kosher, but we always have Shabbos dinner."

I couldn't think of nothing to say, he coulda been talkin Chinese at me and woulda made about as much sense.

He didn't say nothin to me neither for a minute and he took his hand offa my arm. "Guess you want to get back in your boat now. Maybe I shouldn't have said anything."

“If you want me to.” I was hurtin but was not goin to let him see.

“Nah, I just thought—because I’m...well, you know—”

“Well, yeah, you bein who you be—a city boy. You use words I don’t know, you drink stuff I never heard of—you eat diffren. I’m what y’all call a hick, I killed that chicken you eatin, I don’t know a shabbus from a, a, school bus an a kosher...?”

His arm was back around me. “My great uncle Yakob, he’s a shochem. That’s a kosher butcher. Yakob—that’s like Jacob. I’ve seen him kill lots of chickens. Helped him too. He cuts the throat quick because the Talmud says the animal must feel no pain. He says we must respect the gifts the creator gives and, well—I know what a chicken with its head cut off is like.”

“You do?”

“Yeah, it’s like Mildred at the five-and-dime.”

The goosebumps were back and my stomach was doin flip-flops and the rumbling of the generators was still in my bones, but the time was right and wadn’t scared no more. My hands tangled up in his hair, so curly that I was surprised at it’s softness and for a time the yearnin in my heart was satisfied.

Later we looked up at the stars from the lil boat, shovin the canvas back to see. We talked about stoops and porches and long twilight in summer and he tol me about kosher stuff and I told him about the revival tent down by the river.

Good-byes ain’t ever easy but this one was because we did not know it as such. He was sent elsewhere soon after because he sent me a letter and then it was December 7 and the world changed.

I named my son Doyle Jacob. Doyle for the boy I married right soon after and Jacob, well, Jacob because it comes from the Old Testament and being as my daddy’s papaw what fought in the War between the States was a Jacob, too, it required no explainin as to my choice. His—we mostly call him D.J.—hair is black and curly but Doyle’s grannie had natural curls and as to the black hair and dark eyes, it is no secret that I’m part Cherokee on my daddy’s side.

He was a good boy and a good man. You know where DJ is cause if he’s laughin everone else is too. And when he went to New York with his school class Itol him he should ask for an egg cream, an ol friend had tol me about ‘em, I said.

Not bad he tol me later. Not bad t’all.

Seafood Pie
F.R. Lewis
Read by Kathleen Haaversen

At some point she began to buy gifts for him that she meant for herself. Small things most of them—novels and cookbooks, a fishing rod, some lures—until the *Frying Pan*.

She purchased the *Frying Pan* months before a gift would have been expected and slipped the deed into a card made of silver foil and satiny white paper, one with blood red roses in a raised silver vase and the message in raised silver letters. She chose the largest card with the briefest message. Card and deed fit inside a rose-scented white envelope on which, she wrote "Happy Birthday," and, after nibbling her pen-tip, his name.

Times he claimed business in other towns, she lavished on feathering the little red boat. She built shelves for the books and made pies, seafood pies, from fresh meaty creatures she'd caught and gutted and sliced into her hand-rolled crusts and covered with her sherried sauce and baked for the freezer. Laplap, said the Bay. Creakcreak, said the boat.

His birthday came; he was ...gone. To the *Frying Pan* she brought card and deed—and the microwave oven put by for their next anniversary. Into the microwave went a pie from the freezer. Savoring a forkful of steaming oyster, she declared this slice of pie, of all the slices of all the pies she had ever made or ever tasted—no matter the sand-dollop grinding as she chewed—extraordinary.

Untitled
Jamie Scott
Read by the author

Ooooooooo! Gotta get on deck—no sleep for me. Every time this gal hits a trough, feels like my last three meals gonna spew outta my throat like Niagara Goddamned Falls. I hate the way she sounds when she's heavin' and jumpin around. All that groanin' and grindin', metal against metal. One bolt snaps, and we'll be Titanic Goddamned City. That water's goddamned cold. You can't drink it and you sure as hell can't breathe it. I've tried. Storms like this, you can't see anything but ocean, you can't hear anything but ocean, and you sure as goddamned hell can't smell anything but her green, nasty gut. Storms like this get that old bitch all turned upside down...stuff that's been lying on her belly for too goddamned long comes slippin' and slidin' up top. We get through this, my deck's gonna look like a swamp. Gonna smell like a salt-baked sewer. My boys won't even touch half the stuff that gets stuck in the lines—they'll be out there with knives and broom handles hackin'

away—we live through this. You gotta get that stuff cleaned off fast, before the sun gets a good look at it, or your ship turns into a garbage scow and all that stuff starts to burn your nose, it stinks so bad. That's why I run a tight ship—so she don't stink. Every time I watch her bow slam down, every time we get 20 feet of foam slappin' over the deck, I think, that's it! Next time we're goin' straight to the bottom. Not gonna stop 'til we're stern up in water so deep it's pitch black. And the only thing you'll hear is the sound of your lungs explodin', and the ship moanin' in her death throes. I've been workin' these waters for 4 years. There's no other place like this in the Eastern US, or any other place, for that matter. And I've never been so scared as I've been tonight. All my boys are green around the gills. I know they're half scared to death, too—they're not stupid. So I guess it's my job to look like everything's all right. Goddamn helluva job if you ask me. We get outta this storm alive, I'm getting' a shore job. I don't care if I have to drive a goddamned truck, this is it for me. I'll take a desk job, for God's sake! I'll push a pencil! Just get me outta this blow in one piece, Dear Lord, me and my crew and this tub, and I promise you I'll never come back here again. I'll stop drinkin' and I won't take your name in vain and I'll—I'll make an honest woman outta Betty, goddamnit. Just—Oooooooo! Good God A'mighty! Where the hell did that son of a bitch come from? I never seen a wave that big. Boys? Go check the anchor chains, make sure they're where they outta be! And hold on out there for God's sake! Goddamned Atlantic Goddamned Ocean.

Out of the Frying Pan
Jan C. Maher

Frying Pan #1
Read by Royal Huber

I was in disguise. Not as a man, not as a woman. As a ghost.
Not a ghost either, more like a spirit.
A remnant of a spirit, really,
bit of seaweed clinging to a rudder,
or maybe a barnacle holding the hull.
I was tiny and in disguise. But alive. Alive.
I heard everything, and I will report on what I remember,
which is precious little, because fish, tiny tinny fish, swam into my ears
and clogged my memories.

I remember the captain and mate —
a jealous rage over a faithless wife, etcetera,
so cliché. So cliché. Something the mate said, something the captain said, something they both
said. Blows were struck.

No, no. No, you see, that is why we sank. They were fighting, so when the ship tipped —
of course that's not the way you say it, but it is the way I say it because I'm not a sailer,
when the ship tipped there was no one with a good head on his shoulder to tell the men how to
get her right again.

Well, of course I meant to get out while I could, but I couldn't.

The captain, when he hit the floor, fell on the loose board under which I lived.

I was trapped.

In seeped water, out bubbled my air, in came the rush of river,

heavy lay the captain, and well sir, I just got swollen

and stuck and here I am to this day so I'll thank you to be careful where you step.

Frying Pan #2

Read by Barbara Bleier

We had something going. He would come ashore and spend his days half with me at Louisa's Bed
and Board before going home to his wife and children. He had three children and they was what
kept him going home at all. Then the day she tracked him down with an old hound dog like he was
a possum or coon or rabbit—with the oldest in tow, a little girl,—I ended up in the chifforobe. He
spun her a story of strong drink and respect, said he couldn't come home without stopping off first,
sleeping it off first, and swore to come straight from the *Frying Pan* after that. There's quite a num-
ber of fellows did that. Got tanked up, and slept it off at Louisa's, like as not with a lady friend.
Quite a number of wives with fire in their eyes. But she was the only one to come looking.

So the day he come back to active duty, I was here with him, all decked out in my sailor duds,
and with a wink and a nudge I was on board and installed in this cabin. Once. Only once. A couple
of weeks in this place with no woman's touch—that was enough for me. I'm no heroine of song or
story, I told 'im. And I'm a realist. No future for me with a man's devoted to his children and a wife
who hunts him down. There's a wide wild world out there, I said to him. I'm off to take my place in it.

Frying Pan #3

Read by Kathleen Haaversen and Keith Snyder

Voices, probably a man and a woman:

V1:Shhhh!

V2:Don't worry.

V1:You've had too much.

V2:Ah, no. Not enough yet.

V1:Put it down, now.

V2:Mean captain.

V1:Foolish captain's mate.

V2:Kiss me, then.

V1:Put it down first.

V2:Down the ol' hatch?

V1:Just down.

V2:And you'll kiss me?

V1:Of course.

V2:Where I like it?

V1:Where you like it.

V2:Do you think they know?

V1>About you?

V2:Who I really am?

V1:No one does. I don't.

V2:Guess, then. Who am I?

V1:You are a mermaid.

V2:Oh, but there's no fish tail. To be a mermaid, I'd need a fish tale.

V1:Shhhh. Come here now.

V2:D'ya know the old song?

V1:Let me kiss you. Where you like it.

V2>About the mermaid.

V1:Never heard it. Come on now.

V2:(singing) The captain spied a pretty mermaid...

V1:Yes? And then what?

V2:The ship sinks. To the bottom of the sea.

Frying Pan #4

Read by Barbara Bleier and Keith Snyder

Things that have happened on this ship:

Things have been hidden: liquor, women, maps.

Fates have been sealed, unsealed, read, stuffed back into envelopes, and sealed again.

Fires have been ignited, flames have been extinguished.

Courses have been charted. Hands have been shaken, and have shaken, like confidence in hurricanes.

A president of the United States held a secret meeting here with the enemy.

A president of the United States held a secret meeting here with his lover.

Secrets of the atom bomb were discussed here. Einstein slept here.

Men have died of boredom here.

Men have died of terror here.

Sincere resolutions have been made here,

sincere resolutions have been broken.

And yet, some were kept. Some lives were changed. Some.

Frying Pan #5

Read by Barbara Bleier

Was it a choice? Perhaps not. Perhaps if I could have roused myself I would have rushed with my sons, daughters, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, grandnieces and nephews, great grand everythings and so forth to the deck, leapt into the icy drink, found some flotsam to float upon, reached the shore, told stories ever after of the night our homeland sank. I was born on this boat, mated, nursed my babies here, taught them the wily ways of ship rats. Found the secret pathways to the kitchen. Lined our den with the best cotton scraps.

Saw my family grow and prosper.

I couldn't see starting over. Couldn't envision pushing my stiff old paws through that unforgiving cold, forcing myself to swim. Couldn't imagine gnawing another hole, setting up another house.

I wished them well, and stayed in my nest. Till the water came, it was actually quite nice.

I had the place to myself for a change.

The End of the World
Joseph Wallace
Read by the author

It was a beautiful June day, confetti whirling upward toward the peaks of the skyscrapers, a quick wind chasing the last clouds away, the sun gleaming in the puddles left by a vanished rainstorm, flocks of trained pigeons flying overhead, wings snapping like an echo of distant gunfire.

I'd never seen the city so full of joy. Strangers hugged on the streets, children rode laughing on their fathers' shoulders, a young man and woman, barely more than teenagers, kissed passionately outside the Automat, then ran hand in hand across 42nd Street and kissed again outside the doors of Grand Central Station. I shoved them out of my way as I went past, sending them stumbling into a puddle of grayish water by the curb. That helped a little, but not enough. I knew that this was going to be my last view of New York City, and it made me sick to my stomach to see my beloved city sullied by such innocence and excitement.

Twenty minutes later I was aboard the *Frying Pan*, me and the clothes on my back and nothing else. Jack McCully had carved out a space from me in the corner of the galley. It cost me every penny I had, but the Ferret would have taken that anyway, and then he would have killed me. So it was worth it. Not that it was my money to start with. That was the problem.

Even though I wasn't included on the manifold, everyone on board the lightship knew I was there, even Captain Simpson. They just pretended I wasn't. I guess Jack spread my cash around to buy their silence, but I didn't ask questions. I just crawled into the corner of the galley and spread out the battered old blanket Jack had scrounged up for me somewhere. And sat, listening to the thrum of the engine and the happy shouts out on the pier, and waited for the boat to take off or the Ferret to find me, whichever came first.

I'd met Jack at Lady Rose's place on West 55th just three days ago. I'd drunk enough rotten gin to make my tongue loose, and along around three A.M. Jack and me were sitting on the stoop and started talking. I told him that I had two, maybe three, days before the Ferret caught up with me and sliced me into two even halves with that blade he used for taking the skins off oranges.

"Stay in one piece," Jack said. "Go someplace."

"There's noplacethe Ferret won't find me," I told him.

"Sure there is," he said. "The *Frying Pan*."

I looked at him.

"It's the lightship I crew on."

"A lightship?" I laughed. "What, I get to hide out off New Jersey, watching you flash your lights at fishing boats, till we come back in for your next leave? I might as well let the Ferret get me now, save myself all the boredom."

But Jack was shaking his head. “You got it wrong,” he said. “We been decommissioned. We ain’t heading for Jersey. We’re taking the old Pan across the Atlantic to Dakar. It’s gonna get refitted and used as a ferry across a big river they got there. They already using some old Staten Island ferries for the job.”

Now he had my interest. “A big river, huh,” I said. “The Gambia?”

He stared at me, then nodded. “Yeah, I think so. How you know about that?”

“I always wanted to go to Africa,” I said.

Jack leaned forward, his face full of gin-fueled friendship. “Well, sometimes you get to do what you want in this life.”

The journey took more than a week. By the fourth day the Ferret had stopped taking over my dreams. During the day albatrosses scudded across our bows and dolphins rode our wake. Once, just as the sun was setting, it revealed a destroyer on the horizon, steaming home at the end of the long war. Heading back to the homeland I would never see again, back to a world full of new opportunities that would be denied to me forever.

At night I stood on deck, looking down at schools of phosphorescent squid glowing like drowned rainbows below the surface. On the ninth day the air smelled like sand. As a flock of tiny birds, blown off course by the stiff wind, fluttered to the deck, I saw Africa for the first time, a low brown line in the distance.

We landed on Goree Island at dawn. The ground seemed to roll under my feet as I stepped off the *Frying Pan* and walked among the crumbling stone buildings, the rotted ropes and rusting iron loops that had once held countless slaves about to begin their long journey to America. This was their last foothold in Africa, and they had spent it in chains.

I looked across the shallow straits to the mainland. The wind had blown a sandstorm over from the Sahara Desert, and the air was suffused with brownish haze. The rising sun, red and tired, hung low over the vast continent. My eyes were gritty, and the windblown sand seemed to cling to my hair, my skin, my clothes. Jack stood beside me. “Christ, look at that,” he said. “It’s the end of the world.”

I took a deep breath, pulling the first rich smell of Africa deep into my lungs. Through the dusty air, I almost thought I could see the gold mines and cattle ranches and trading posts that were waiting for me over there.

“You got that wrong,” I said. “It’s the beginning.”

Untitled
Kris Neri
Read by Laura Thompson

In 1931 high-spirited young men were expected to have adventures. They joined the circus or went to sea. But adventures were off-limits to girls from proper Southern families. Even those girls who had seen their older brothers engage in daring escapades, as I had, could only dream.

But our lives had changed in 1929, when the market crash crippled Papa's cotton mill, the business that had kept our family in comfort for generations. After Mama started doing the books for the business at home, I could easily slip through the cracks, telling Mama I'd gone to stay with my brother and his wife, while I convinced my sister-in-law I had stayed home.

It was during one of those stolen times that I began to dream about stowing away on the *Frying Pan* Lightship. The *Frying Pan* was one of a number of ships the Coast Guard used as floating lighthouses to protect other ships from running aground on shoals or submerged rocks, in areas too far from shore for traditional lighthouses. The *Frying Pan* guarded its namesake, the Frying Pan shoals, off the shore of Cape Fear, North Carolina. I spent all my free time on the docks and came to know the crews that passed through, though none of them suspected I was a girl. I was a smallish age eleven then, and in my brother's cast-off hooded jacket, with my long hair tied back, I passed as a little boy. I learned there were rarely more than nine or ten crew members aboard the *Frying Pan*, and sometimes less. The crews, who rotated every two weeks, were ferried out to the ship by the seagoing tug, the *Chilula*, along with fresh supplies. I felt sure I could hide in one of the storage crates bound for the *Frying Pan* and simply leave it to the *Chilula*'s crew to carry me aboard.

What I could not work out was the problem of time. While I had sometimes slipped free of my family for four or five days, I knew I couldn't disappear as long as two weeks. And the crews never rotated more often.

I'd been about to give up on my dream—when an opportunity arose. I overheard the *Chilula*'s crew discussing an emergency that had occurred in the family of the *Frying Pan*'s Captain. The *Chilula* planned an unscheduled trip to bring the Captain back to shore, and would return him to his ship only two days thereafter.

Finally, my chance! I nearly gave the whole show away by shouting for joy. Only by clamping my hands over my mouth did I manage to contain my excitement, though my heart still danced in my chest. Stowing aboard the *Chilula* went without a hitch, as did my goal of being carried to the *Frying Pan*'s hold. But North Carolina was not only in the grip of the Depression in the fall of 1931, but also a terrible flu epidemic. If that wasn't bad enough, it threatened to be a destructive storm season.

With the Captain away and three sailors already down with the flu, the rest of the overworked skeleton crew was assigned to keeping watch on deck, allowing me to roam freely in the ship's

hold. My adventure was as much fun as I imagined. I even loved the fog horns that blew a two-tone blast every minute or so around the clock. The only downside was the violent roll of the ship as an ocean storm built up steam. But I'd always been a good sailor, and I simply allowed my small body to move with the swaying ship, rather than fighting it.

That night the hurricane reached horrendous proportions, as the flu crippled the last of the crew members. The violent roll grew worse, bouncing the ship over the waves like a piece of debris. Never had I expected that saving the *Frying Pan* from disaster would come down to me, but I feared it had.

I crept to the bridge, where I found a feverish sailor passed out on the floor. The waves must have been nearly fifty feet high. Far more of an adventure than I had bargained for! But there was no time to lament my decision. My life—and the lives of the crewmen—depended on me.

Someone had tied a line through the interior of the vessel, running fore and aft. The weak and feverish men had donned life jackets, but they hadn't all latched their jackets to the line before the waves had thrown them to the deck. Some of those men were going to be washed overboard if I didn't attach them. I put on the smallest vest I could find, and attached my vest to the line. I went from man to man making sure they were all securely fastened. Some of those battered men came awake as I worked on their jackets. A few recognized me as the little boy from the docks. But after my hood flew off, and my long hair was exposed, the feverish crew of the *Frying Pan* swore that I was a mermaid who had come aboard to save them.

I manned the bridge for the rest of the night. It was too much to hope to steer the vessel in that storm, but once again, I worked with the waves rather than struggling against them. Though my frail arms trembled from the effort, I did manage to keep the ship afloat.

Before dawn, with the seas calming once more, I crept back to my hiding place before the flu-ravaged, storm-battered men awoke. And I waited there until it was time to be transferred back to the Chilula. I chuckled when I heard the feverish crew report to their Captain about the mermaid who had saved their lives. Not just an adventure—I'd become a legend. And no one but me knew the truth.

You would have thought my adventure aboard the *Frying Pan* might have cured my love of the sea, but it only fueled it. After returning home, I persuaded Papa to sell our struggling mill and use the proceeds to buy a bankrupt shipping company. He wasn't accustomed to taking business advice from his young daughter, but he was so desperate, he would have tried anything.

Our new shipping company prospered over time. Well, how could it not? It was practically an omen. The name of that bankrupt shipping company we bought was—Mermaid Shipping.

And though I loved all the ships my family would own over the decades that followed, none would ever mean as much as the *Frying Pan*, the scene of one young girl's first great adventure.

Balancing Gray and Blue on a Frying Pan
Aileen Schumacher
Read by Keith Snyder

My name is Josef Kunz, and my family immigrated from Yugoslavia to New York in 1887. We're all American now, and no one has an accent except my grandmother. My grandfather, he never learned how to speak English, but he's dead now.

I serve on board the *Frying Pan*. The rest of the crew, they are all American from many years ago, too many years. They remember the War Between the States like it was yesterday. Some still mourn the Confederacy, and some hate it with a hatred that we know in my country.

In Yugoslavia, my people lived under Turkish rule. The Slavs who embraced the ways of Islam were favored with land and power. My people are Catholic, and we know what it is to be persecuted, to hate, to fear. But we have memories of many wars, many evil leaders, not just one war, and so many years ago.

See, the *Frying Pan* is a lighthouse ship. Somewhere called Cape Canaveral in Florida, there was a lighthouse and a man named Captain Burnham, too. Burnham took the lenses out of the lighthouse upon orders of the Confederacy, and he buried them in a field. He was praised for his efforts in preventing the landing of federal troops.

After the war, he dug up the lenses. The *Frying Pan* was built during the depression, and the government was trying to save money any way it could. So, they had those lenses sent from Florida to be put on the *Frying Pan*, while a new light house was built at Cape Canaveral, with new lenses.

And that is the problem. We have a crew of fifteen men. Exactly half are Yankee Doodles Dandies, the other half think that the South should rise again. The Yanks think that the *Frying Pan* should have gotten the new lenses, and that Cape Canaveral should have used the old ones. Florida should have been punished for being a Confederate state.

And so the arguing goes on. It starts about the lenses, then it progresses to family history, and from there, we are fighting the War Between the States all over again.

I am the only neutral member in the crew, and therefore they will give me no leave. I want immigrants put on this ship, people who care about their own historical enemies and not the North and the South.

Mainly, I want some shore leave. Or maybe I will have to smash the lenses and the discussion will be at an end.

Untitled
Wendy Monk
Read by Karin Slaughter

It was in the spring of 1929 that my daddy got the job as night watchman at the Drydock Machine Shop in Charleston, South Carolina. Whenever I hear the bagpipers march by my windows, parading north up Fifth Avenue on St. Patrick's Day, I remember that April.

Daddy was a musician, but times were hard then and there wasn't much call for a group of immigrant Scots, especially so far south. No call at all really. It was my birthday the night he came home with news of the job. There was no money for the dress I had my eye on in the Apparel Shoppe window, but I didn't care. It was my twelfth birthday. Daddy had promised that when I was twelve my lungs would be big and strong enough for him to teach me the bagpipes. We had a real celebration that night. The line between Mother's eyebrows got shallower, and she laughed and sang with Daddy. I hadn't seen her do that in a long time.

The next day I realized there was a problem. Daddy had the midnight to eight shift. I had school and then helped Mrs. Mason with her five children until after supper. That left only a few hours in the evening, but we rented the ramshackle cottage behind the parsonage and Mother said playing bagpipes at night was out of the question. I didn't protest, I wouldn't have dared in those days, but I mourned those lessons for weeks.

Daddy usually went home straight from the shipyard, when I had already left for school, so I didn't see him except for a little bit after I got home from the Masons, before I went to bed. One morning I was surprised to see him on the path I took to school. We called it the lilac path because the lilac bushes on each side grew taller than a grown man's head, and in the spring when they bloomed it was like being a lilac, walking that path. Well as I say one morning Daddy was there waiting for me. He said he had a surprise: I was going to go to work with him that night. It being Friday Mother had said it was all right for me to be up late, but I should lie down and rest after I got home from the Masons.

I was curious all right but I knew better than to ask. It was dead dark that night. We walked back along the lilac path, the long way. Daddy held my hand. We walked carefully. He was carrying a big canvas duffel bag. The lilac smell gave way to briny rotting seaweed. When shells crunched under my shoes I could see the gates of the shipyard up ahead, lit by a spotlight.

Daddy unlocked the gate. It was spooky, the immense ships looming around us, bigger even than when they were afloat. Daddy said they had just finished the Lightship *Frying Pan*. It was a big metal ship that would be anchored miles out to sea, a kind of floating lighthouse. We climbed a wood ladder up to the deck. It was hard, in the dimness, and I felt pretty scared. More scared than curious I would say. I got a splinter in my left thumb from the dried out rungs. Up on the deck Daddy opened up the bag. He took out his bagpipes, and then another set he had borrowed.

That's where I learned to play the bagpipes. High up like that in the darkness at the edge of the water the sound went shooting out around us. Later when the Lightship *Frying Pan* had been launched we played on the decks of whichever ship was finished, but I remember the *Frying Pan* best, and I wondered, when they were out to sea, did the crew hear the echoes of the bagpipes, did the metal walls carry within them some memory of our playing that would be released to the sea with the blasting of the foghorn?

Panatopsis
(with apologies to William Cullen Bryant)
Karin Slaughter
Read by Mary Askew

To those who in their love of the sea hold
Communion with her salty creatures, we speak
In soothing tones of the mighty Pan's last watery hours.
Graciously they recall her bright light
That welcomed men across the choppy Hudson
And how she did glide into the darker waters
With a gentle disposition that belied her steeled loins.
The minnows sing of the majestic way she displaced the
Swelling sea across her mighty bow, and the calming
Ebb that followed in her wake as she slid across the water.
The sharks who bite still their jowls, and whisper in hushed
Reverence about her slivered fin that dipped too briefly
Into their cold and liquid world. Though the ocean would boil
In unseen turmoil, the rocks beneath reaching out their
Gray tendrils to trap an unsuspecting tug, the octopuses
Tell the tale of the light ship that illuminated the
Perils of the sea with the sweep of her one mighty hand.
The starfish shudder with horror in memory of the night
She stared with her unflinching beam into the heart
Of the dark blue sea and did not light upon the insensible rock
That ripped into her wooden spine, allowing entrance to

Creatures who dared not think themselves her equals.
While the sun in its vanity shall speak of better days with
A ship who never knew her rays, the Pan will mix forever
With the elements; a sister to the insensible rock that brought her
To the green gray plains of the ocean floor.
So shall she rest—and what if she falls unnoticed
By the living, and has no companions with whom to share her
Watery plight? The gay will laugh and the world will turn.
Her favorite spot will be marked no more but the sea will ensure
That not to her eternal resting place shall she retire alone.
Nor couldst the sea couch more magnificent a guest.
She shall lie with the Patriarchs of Neptune's world—
The shellfish, the starfish, those five-headed kings of the
Underworld. The minnow will sing of her bravery, while
Above the waves will flick their silky tongues into the air.
The biting sharks who bite no more will swim through
Her broken flesh and think only of her glory as she slid above.
And now, the hills of the ocean floor supply a resting place
For this once gracious boat, scourged to their dungeon floor.
She did approach her grave with an unblinking eye,
And her light did shine til it could shine no more.

Untitled
Jane Haddam
Read by Denise Broadhurst

My name is Shana Mary Cole, and what I really want to do with my life, and what comes after my life, is to haunt. That wasn't what I always wanted to do, of course. When I was growing up, I never thought of it, not even when Liza Brompton said there was a ghost in her family's attic, and took up Show and Tell time for two weeks to tell us about it. Liza Brompton always was a show off, and I knew—then—that I would be able to do much better when we all got older and moved away. I knew that I was going to be a model, or maybe a famous actress, and live in New York. I knew that I was going to marry Steve McQueen. It didn't occur to me that Steve McQueen would get older

when I did, or that he would marry that actress who looked just like Liza, or that he would die. A lot of things never occurred to me, including the fact that New York City is a very big place. That's how I ended up living out in Brooklyn and being 42 years old. I should have realized how desperate my life was long before that, but I wasn't paying attention. I was working as a secretary in Long Island City, in a company that made shell casings for handgun bullets. There was never any ammunition on the premises, but we got broken into twice a week anyway, just in case.

I first heard about the Lightship *Frying Pan* when my company gave its Christmas party there, and I almost didn't go. I didn't much like the company Christmas party. The sales manager always got drunk, and the secretaries always ate too much, and the Big Boss showed up for three minutes and gave a little speech about Team Spirit and Putting the Company First that made about as much sense as Liza Brompton's stories for Show and Tell. I went in the end because the woman who worked at the next desk from me begged me to go, and all the way out to Pier 63 in the cab I promised myself I would leave early, without having had anything to drink at all.

Of course, I didn't get away early. The ship was full of people, and I had to be polite. I let the sales manager tell me about his vacation in Bermuda. I listened to the production manager's personal assistant give her talk about how the girls at Katie Gibbs aren't what they were in her day. I had three canapes and a glass of punch that must have been spiked with enough gin to preserve meat. Then I wandered away, where I thought it might be quiet, into a long passageway that seemed to be encrusted with shells and weathered beyond belief, as if the boat had been underwater forever, instead of sitting at a Manhattan dock.

I think it was the shells—barnacles, I learned to call them, later—that made me think there might be a place for me in history after all, a niche only I could fill. I went back up to where the party was and looked through the literature on the table near the bar, the pamphlets that told all about the boat and what had happened to it. In no time at all, I realized I'd been right—there was not a single mention of a ghost on the Lightship *Frying Pan*, not ever, not anywhere. It was ridiculous, really. It was as if they'd left off the mast, or the engine. How could you have a boat that had sunk at least once, and been in a hundred hurricanes, without a single ghost?

I went back down to the lower deck again, and looked around. I found a place in no time at all, suitably small and protected and out of the way, so that nobody would ever know I was there, unless I told them. I wedged myself in there and waited. In a little while, I fell asleep. The next thing I knew, it was morning. Nobody had found me. Nobody had seen me. Nobody had thrown me off.

I know it's not really possible to be a ghost until you're dead, and I'm in no hurry to die, but I do want to make sure it will be me and not somebody else when a ghost does finally come to haunt the Lightship *Frying Pan*. That's why I gave notice to my landlord this morning, and packed my things into this small suitcase, and threw out everything I owned that wouldn't fit.

When I get settled in the Lightship, I'll spread out a little more. I'll get myself some books and adopt one of the cats you see around the piers, and maybe I'll get a kettle and the things I need to make tea so that I can brew something for myself when the ship is empty and everyone has gone home.

Fifty years from now, they'll tell stories about me, about how I always came out when there were parties and sat having canapes and punch, as if I were still alive. I'll be a very gentle and accommodating ghost, and famous from one end of the country to the other. Maybe they'll do an episode on me on a television program like *The Unexplained*, and bring in a camera that won't quite catch site of me moving from one deck to the other on a rain-dark night.

The only real problem is going to be the commute to my job out in Long Island City, but I'll work that out later, when I've had some time to settle in.

Solitude
Kathleen Haaversen
Read by the author

I wasn't meant for this.
I wasn't meant to lie here, alone,
in this deep water,
Forgotten

I can hear the sounds of other boats, other men
As they travel through my grave
Bringing with them my memories,
Those sounds I heard and felt every day
The happy cries
The angry words and grunts of effort
As my men worked.

Was there a storm?
A collision?
What happened to me?
How did I wake here, alone, cold,

No one yet living with me?
Where did my family of men go?
Why have they left me here?
I am cold, so cold
I hear the sea lap upon the shore
Marking time for me
A steady pulse

They built me to guide them,
To shine an answering light up
To those shining brightly from above.
I can still see the one I call
My constant brother
He guides men to their fates
I guided them home
To the cries from the shore
The welcoming arms
The rest of home.

Now I am here, in this half-death
I want to struggle, to rise again
I hear my old bones groan in answer
To the sea's movement
It's so still now
The men have passed
Just the sounds of the sea
And my memories
Echoing within me
As I lie here
Forgotten

The Principles of Mooring Ship, Gear Used, Leads
Bluejacket's Manual, US Navy, 1927
Courtesy of John Pond
Read by Thomas C. Dolim, USMM

A vessel in mooring uses two anchors separated at such a distance that her bow is held practically stationary in the line joining the two anchors. The vessel will swing around her stem as a pivot. The chief advantage of anchoring in this fashion is that a ship will swing in a much smaller space than if one anchor were down. Ships are moored in places where the channel is narrow and the current strong; for example, in the Hudson river.

The steps of mooring ship will be briefly detailed here. Assume the tide-running ebb, with orders to use the two bower anchors, 45 fathoms on each chain, the port anchor to be let go first and port chain allowed to run out. The ship steams slowly to the berth assigned and the port anchor is let go. The port chain is veered as the ship forges ahead. At the command from the bridge, the starboard anchor is let go, when about 90 fathoms of port chain is at the water's edge. The ship's headway is now stopped and the ship allowed to drift downstream as the port chain is hove in and the starboard chain veered until the 45-fathom shackles on both are a short distance abaft the forward chain stoppers. The ship will now ride to the starboard chain.

The forward chain stoppers are put on both chains. One section of the crew unshackles the starboard chain at the 45-fathom shot and shackles on the mooring swivel cup aft. As soon as swivel is on, the forward chain stopper is removed and the starboard chain veered until the swivel is just about aft the hawse pipe. In the meantime, another crew has been securing the port chain, preparatory to unshackling it and heaving the end around the stem of the ship, in through the starboard hawse pipe and shackling it to the swivel.

The clear hawse pendant is led out through the port hawse pipe and secured to the port chain by means of the pelican hook. The slack is then taken in and the clear hawse pendant securely belayed. The preventer hawser is then led out through the port sheet hawse pipe, made fast to the port chain below the clear hawse pendant by means of a rolling hitch, the slack taken in and securely belayed. The preventer, as its name implies, prevents the chain from going adrift in case the clear hawse pendant should part. This is a necessary precaution, as the chain is heavy and once adrift will be hard to recover. The easing-out line is now hooked to the end link of the port chain, the hook moused, and the line taken to a bitt, where several turns are taken preparatory to easing out the chain. The dip rope is now led out through the starboard hawse pipe around through the port hawse pipe and made fast to the third link on the port chain. The other end of the dip rope is led to a gypsey on a winch or to the capstan, preparatory to hauling the end of the port chain out through the port hawse pipe and up into the starboard hawse pipe. When all is ready, the port chain is unshackled and the chain

stopper removed. The man on the easing-out line gradually slacks away on his line as the dip rope is gradually hauled in. When the port chain enters the starboard hawse pipe, the easing-out line is kept slack, but with several turns on the bits, so that, in case the dip rope parts, the end of the chain can be easily recovered. As soon as the end of the chain is at the swivel, it is shackled to the swivel and the starboard chain then veered until the swivel is just outside of the hawse pipe. The loose end of the port chain is usually shackled to the sheet anchor so that anchor will be ready for letting go, or else it is hove in near the wildcat out of the way.

All gear is then secured.

Missed the Boat
John Leech
Read by Keith Snyder

“Looks like we missed the boat” I said to Joe LaBoeuf as the *Frying Pan* pulled away from the dock.

“Never mind,” Joe said, “I’ll make us some more donuts.”

We went back to the beach house and Joe did just that.

“Say, these are creamy on the inside!” I said, to get his goat.

“You’ve still got it backwards, Vernon! First thing you know when you bite, they’re crisp on the outside!”

That’s how we’d gotten into the fight, that left us dockside when the *Frying Pan* pulled out. Joe was showing me his “crisp-creamy” donut recipe and we got to arguing—crisp, creamy, crisp, creamy, you know.

“Oh the hell with it,” said Joe. “I’m going back to Kentucky.”

He was from Paducah, where he’d been working for the Army Corps of Engineers before we got this job.

“Want to come along? I’m going to be first mate on the *Belle of Louisville*. Settle my folks near Anchorage.”

“No thanks, Joe. I think I’ll settle down here in North Carolina (and work on this donut recipe).”

Nooks and Crannies
Lori Snyder
Read by Larry Picard

Hey, Hey, you!

Yeah, you. C'mere! I'm talkin ta ya!

Here's how it goes, see. Most ev'ry ship's got us. Some worse'n others. Or better, kinda depends on your point of view, ya know what I mean. Never nothing bad too much, mind ya, just yer gen'ral mischiefmakin. Ya know, like the time we stole all Cap'n's pillows from the bunks an hid em in the galley. Mighten been nicer if we'd not poured the whiskey on'm, but sure was a riot of an evenin! Or that time we fixed up the mirras in the heads so's they'd make them goggle eyes back atcha. Had a few sailors swear off the drink after that one, thinkin that would fix things, and didn't we have us a fine time tellin bout it fer weeks after! Ole Barsnoppe, why, he almos fell right off the top a that wheel house laughin on it ev'ry time he told it. And all them storms [crazy laughter]. We love a good storm, don't we, fellas? [thunderstorm sounds]. Or that time...[outraged elf voices from behind] ...what? Oh. Oh yeah [laughs], I did promise not to tell that one, didn't I.

Anyways, that's what we do, it's our job, like. So I don't go wasting my time thinking should I fell bad or what. Hell, if you'd seen those sailors in the heads, you'da laughed too. [crashing of silver from kitchen] Yo! Keep it down! I'm talkin here!

Thing is, long as no one gets hurt but ev'ryone stays kinda riled, we're doing our jobs okay. Only thing about this here boat is we all went kinda deaf with them damn foghorns. Good side even t' that, though – made us not bound to any special requests, like them sissy finder elves are. We was truly free, free to do whatever we wanted, an did we have us a good time!

Then she went and sunk, and it was back t' the Shoals with us, and man! Borin dry land elvin like sourin the milk an switchin babies an stuff. Made me want to vomit. No originality whatsoever. But then somethin happens, an the Fryin Pan, well, she's up and about, and we all move back aboard with, as I'm sure you can imagine, much carryin on and partyin, and then we find out the best thing of all; we find out what she's gonna have on her fine ole decks in this modern day an age when don't no one go in much fer pranks, and we all be thinkin, heh heh, now yer talkin, let's have us some fun!

She's gonna have her a concert, with lots of electronics....[maniacal elf laughter and static]

Donna
Ken Cheney
Read by the author

They named her Donna.

A proper name for a lady. It calls up memories of the quintessential 1950's mom, maybe. Always good humored and gentle. Or maybe it suggests the Madonna, the very embodiment of peace and grace.

But this Donna was different. She was no lady. And she grew up fast. Born on August 29, 1960, she was a full-fledged category-5 hurricane by the time she slammed into the northeast Caribbean on September 4th with winds up to 160 mph. From there she roared across Puerto Rico and the Bahamas and crashed into northern Cuba. By the 8th she'd glanced off the Everglades in southern Florida with sustained winds of 135 mph and gusts up to 175. Everywhere in the projected path of the onslaught bright red flags with a black box, signaling an hurricane warning, strained against their halyards.

Gaining strength as she raged up the Keys, Donna hit the mainland of Florida like a runaway freight train on a steep downgrade. By September 9th she'd curved to the northwest, pounding the west coast. On the 10th she turned northeast and tore across the central part of the state, finally breaking out once again on the east coast on the afternoon of the 11th, having ravaged the entire length of the Florida peninsula.

The warm Gulf Stream waters off Georgia and South Carolina reinvigorated Donna, spawning small, destructive tornadoes along the coastline. Moving now at 30 mph with winds at a steady 115 mph she reached North Carolina in the early evening of the 11th.

There, at the joint of the dog-leg that characterizes the southern coastline of North Carolina known as Cape Fear, anchored thirty miles off the mainland, twenty miles southeast of Oak Island, the Coast Guard Lightship *Frying Pan* was on station, her crew of ten bracing themselves as best they could for what they knew was coming.

Precisely how hard the winds were that smashed against the 133-foot red-hulled vessel is not known. The anemometer stopped registering at 100 mph when it literally got blown off the ship. Those on the bridge, riding out the storm like rodeo riders unable to dismount from a raging Brahma Bull, estimated the waves at 50 feet—10 feet taller than the 375mm electric lenses atop the two masts. At the worst of the storm, the ship rolled 70 degrees and for a few breathless moments it wasn't certain whether she would right or not. It may be that the only thing that saved her was the 10,000 pounds of fuel on board acting as ballast. The remainder of the crew clung to a line, jury rigged to run the length of the ship below decks, in a desperate effort to keep from being thrown, willy-nilly, from this bulkhead to that beam. These were experienced sailors. All wore life jackets.

All knew that momentary death was a very real possibility. All were afraid. Most prayed.

By midnight the worst was over. The seas, while far from calm, no longer threatened the lives of those on board the *Frying Pan*. Donna, by mid-afternoon on the 12th, having brushed the Atlantic states from the Virginia Capes to Maryland to New Jersey, once again roared onto Long Island with sustained winds over 100 mph. It was her last hurrah. As she continued on to batter the coast of New England, she gradually lost strength until at last, in Newfoundland, she whimpered into a broad frontal low.

Hurricane Donna was one of the most destructive storms in American history and the only one to give hurricane force winds to the entire eastern seaboard—from Florida to Maine. In just North Carolina she did \$25 million in damage and took eight lives on the mainland. How close she came to adding ten more lives to that total is best known to the crew of the *Frying Pan* on that day, September 11, 1960. It's not incidental that within five years, an unmanned lighthouse platform had been erected to protect shipping from the Frying Pan Shoals. And the Lightship *Frying Pan* had been retired.

These are the Places
SJ Rozan
Read by the author

These are the places I've been:

Cape Fear, New York, Halifax, Toronto, Menomonee, Sault Ste. Marie, St. John's, Nutak, Sisimiuk, Reykjavik, Alta

These are the places I've been:

Bergen, Dover, Calais, Lisboa, Barcelona, Palermo, Sebastopol, Istanbul, Antalya, Tripoli, Casablanca

These are the places I've been:

Dakhla, Dakar, Freetown, Accra, Cape Town, Dar es Salaam, Mombasa, Djibhouthi, Dubai, Mumbai, Madurai

These are the places I've been:

Chittagong, Yangan, Ye, Tavoy, Padang, Bogor, Singapore, Phnom Penh, Da Nang, Kowloon, Taipei

These are the places I've been:

Shanghai, Qingdao, Mokpo, Kagoshima, Wakayama, Kushiro, Kolonia, New Hanover, Port Moresby, Bowen, Brisbane

These are the places I've been:

Wollongong, Suva, Tarawa, Honolulu, Chignik, Kodiak, Juneau, Victoria, Vancouver, Seattle, San Francisco

These are the places I've been:

Santa Barbara, Acapulco, Chiclayo, Mollendo, Antofagasta, Valparaiso, Concepcion, Darwin, Montevideo, Osorio, Rio de Janeiro

These are the places I've been:

Salvador, Natal, Cayenne, Colon, Belize, Tampico, New Orleans, Havana, San Juan, Nassau, Savannah

These are the places I've been.

###



The Ship That Lies at the Bottom

Pictures from the premiere, April 22, 2001
Aboard the lightship *Frying Pan*

Larry Picard as BOAT
Kathleen Haaversen as OTHER

Music: Keith Snyder
Libretto: Keith Snyder, *et al*

Saxophone & Bass Clarinet: Marcel van Rootselaar
Contrabass: Hal Onserud
Klonggeur: Dan Acquisto
Synthesizer, audio, signal processing: Keith Snyder

Conductor: Denise Broadhurst

Costume: Mary Agredo



The Ship that Lies on the Bottom

*Libretto by Keith Snyder,
taken partially from contributions by others.*

The walls whisper their stories. The sound coalesces onto the stage, and BOAT appears. As a naiad is the spirit of a lake, BOAT is the spirit of this sailing vessel. He is corroded.



BOAT

I've seen red-haired girls dead in the fog,
carried heroin, been nearly rammed by freighters

Seen sailors smuggle girls.
Seen captains smuggle slaves,
go through a storm with a green crew,
beg for a job ashore.

I've seen them strike their mates in a jealous rage,
and trip and fall overboard.

An endless procession of
cats, rats, rescues, and romances,
and boys who thought they'd see the world
but saw the North Carolina shore,
and I saw the girls who stole aboard
to bring the boys fried chicken.

I've been a lightship, a warship,
a place for playing bagpipes,
and a birthday present for an unloving husband.

I've seen mermaids!

And hurricanes.
Crossed the ocean to Dakar and Djibouti.
Ghosts that were; ghosts to be.

And then there was the nonsense with the lenses.

OTHER enters. She is his opposite, uncorroded and beautiful.

OTHER

You are sinking slowly.

BOAT

(Aside to Other, dismissive) I'm not sinking slowly.

Now I'd like to tell you a little more about myself. You already know my name. During the war, I was an intelligence outpost, intercepting and performing preliminary decryption on German coded messages.

OTHER

You are sinking slowly.

BOAT

(Aside to Other, irritated) If I were sinking slowly, these people would not be here.

I served during the Cold War, as well, doing the same thing, more or less, and it was my great privilege to be included in the Apollo Capsule Recovery Team.

OTHER

These people are not here.

BOAT

(Aside to Other, beginning to lose patience) Don't you think I'd know if I were sinking?

So anyway — after that, I drifted for a while.

OTHER

How do you—

BOAT

(Enraged, turning to confront) Enough! That's enough!
Enough! I'm not sinking slowly!

OTHER

How do you—

BOAT

I said enough!

OTHER

How do you know you'd know if you were sinking?

BOAT

I'm—

OTHER

—Slowly?

BOAT

(To audience) I'm not listening to this. I did odd jobs for a while— fishing trips, SCUBA divers, tour groups, sunset dinner cruises.

But I'm not the nine-to-five type, and soon I was a smuggling vessel. Drugs and white slavery. Did you see "The Long Ordeal of Mary Sue?" Not to brag, but I was the actual boat.

A huge, deep KLONGGGG! The ships lights begin to dim.

BOAT

What was that?

OTHER

You are no longer sinking slowly.

BOAT

I'm on the bottom!? I don't understand!

OTHER

You sank slow—

BOAT

Why didn't you do something?

OTHER

You were too busy lying.

BOAT

What!?

Begin sample playback. of "Lies," a musical sequence in which parts of the story readings are played back. BOAT maintains that they were true; OTHER insists that they were lies and eventually prevails.

OTHER

(finished, softly) Lies.

The ship's lights dim.

And now you lie alone at the bottom of the ocean.

BOAT

But those people.

OTHER

You lie alone.

BOAT

Who are you?

The ship's power fails. The walls go silent.

OTHER

You lie alone.

BOAT

I wasn't meant for this.
I wasn't meant to lie here, alone,
in this deep water,
Forgotten

OTHER

While the sun in its vanity shall speak of better days with
A ship who never knew her rays, the Pan will mix forever
With the elements

BOAT

They built me to guide them,
To shine an answering light up
To those shining brightly from above.
I can still see the one I call
My constant brother
He guides men to their fates
I guided them home

OTHER

The ship sinks. To the bottom of the sea.
Without a single ghost.

Above the waves will flick their silky
tongues into the air.

Tell the truth.

BOAT

Some of it was true.

OTHER

Tell the truth.

BOAT

I was built in 1929, Lightship #115, one hundred thirty-
three feet, three inches long, a thirty-foot beam, six hun-
dred thirty-two gross tons. I sailed practically nowhere for
thirty-five years and sat there with my light on.

Then I was abandoned.

OTHER

What do you want now?

BOAT

I want to be a lightship.



OTHER

Rust everywhere. You'll never be a lightship again. What do you want to be now?

BOAT

Some of it was true.

All those people—were they a vision?

OTHER

What do you want to be now?

BOAT

Were they a message?

OTHER

What do you want to be now?

Long pause.

Two huge KLONGGs—the boat is being grappled and raised. Light gradually returns.

BOAT

What is that? Am I being recovered?

I know what I want to be.

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