

Out to the Island

Written by Cappy Paxton

Bursting forth against the early morning chill, huge clouds escaped from the oarsman's lips with each exhale. Large callused hands gripped the handles, muscles bulged, oars dipped into the water, sweeping the skiff toward its destination. Glancing up at his only passenger, Lucas could not help but admire the handsome woman that was delicately perched on the bow plank.

Lucas had made this journey several times at the behest of his employer, the Earl of Northumberland. He usually gave no notice to his passenger. He simply put his head down and his back into the task, steeled against the long journey ahead. As was most often the case, he transported a servant that would be working in the castle on the island. His fare would be anyone who his Lordship, Algernon Percy, did not find worthy enough to purchase a more comfortable passage. This particular passenger perplexed Lucas. He could see she was not made of servant stock. Her attire was not much to speak of. Her coat was sturdy enough, as though she knew what to expect on the channel at this time of year. Her dress was handmade. It was not the clothes that perplexed him. There was something about her bearing; while not regal or pretentious, neither was it humble. He could not quite put his finger on it.

Daring to take a breather, Lucas stopped his rowing. He could see that his attention made her nervous. In an effort to put her at ease, he beamed a crooked smile and inquired, "Have ya made this crossin' before?"

With a nervous start, the young woman bravely returned his smile and replied, "No kind sir, this is my first crossing."

Her soft, lilting voice caused the oarsman's heart to flutter, just a little.

"I suppose you have made the trip many times before?" she added.

"Yes'm, I have lost count as to how many times I've made the crossin'."

He began rowing in earnest.

Lucas was certain by the set of her jaw that she was no servant. This made him even more curious about the reason she was headed to the very remote

castle that was so far away you could barely see the mainland from the island. In his way of thinking, it was a mystery why more people did not die of complete boredom on that island.

As a soldier in the King's army, he had his share of excitement. If it were not for the enemy lance that crippled him, he would be leading a hero's life, or more likely, be in an early grave. At least in the Earl's employ, he had a better chance of living to forty-five, maybe even fifty.

It was not more than a few pulls on the oars that his curiosity once again got the best of him. Lucas stopped his rowing.

"M'lady, are ya comfortable sittin' on that hard plank?"

"Yes, this is fine."

Lucas resumed his rowing.

"M'lady", Lucas blurted as he yanked the oars out of the brine.

"Yes sir?"

"M'lady, would ya mind too much me askin' yer name?"

"Darling, Grace Darling. You may have heard of my father, William."

"Nay, I can't say as I have", as he put oars to water.

Stopping, he queried, "William Darling is yer da?"

"Yes, William is my father."

"Nay, I can't say as I've ever heard of him," the grizzled soldier muttered as he dropped his oar towards the water.

"He is the keeper of the lighthouse at Longstone."

"In Longstone, ya say," shaking his head from side to side, "I don't know him."

"My father kept the lighthouse at Brownsman for years before that", Grace continued before the oars made contact with the water.

"Ya don't say", a half dozen strokes were completed before he stopped, then added, "Is yer mum with him now?"

At this question Grace became very still and Lucas feared he had gone too far. Worrying the kerchief in her hands, Grace looked out to sea. Lucas resumed his rowing.

Where is this going? Why is Grace going to a desolate island? Is Lucas an honorable man? To learn more go to <http://www.billpaxton.net/writing/outtotheisland.html>.

Out to the Island is a Historical Period Short Story, written by Cappy Paxton.