

## LIFEBOAT

Lara Fergus

*A utopic tragedy in several panicked voices*

- So what do we do now?
- I don't know. Row, I suppose. Everyone got an oar?
- Ouf! This is going to take a while. Can we try and get a rhythm going?
- Why aren't you rowing?
- I'm thinking.
- Can't you think and row at the same time?
- Not properly.
- Do we know which way we're supposed to be rowing?
- Not really—let's sort it out. Who's got a compass?
- A compass! We're not falling into that old "technology will save us" routine already are we?
- OK. We'll go by the stars then.
- Right. Which direction do we row until it gets dark?
- Until we know where we're actually going it doesn't really matter does it?
- Stop being so defeatist.
- I'm not being defeatist. I was just stating a point.
- Sarcastically.
- What are you, the tone police?
- I think the situation is stressful enough without us getting negative.
- What's stressful about it? It couldn't be any better. This is exactly what we wanted.
- I don't know. I sort of miss the Big Ship.
- What! How can you miss it? It was horrible.
- All those inane people by the pool, so full of themselves.
- Being served cocktails, don't forget. Being waited on hand and bloody foot. I mean the exploitation!

- But I miss the cocktails.
- I couldn't afford them. But I liked the idea of them.
- How can you say that? I mean "cocktails"? Even the name.
- The cinema, then. Don't you miss that a bit?
- Mind-numbing propaganda.
- I don't miss the Big Ship at all. I don't miss anything about it. I hope I never see it again.
- Me neither. I was so happy to finally jump ship.
- See I didn't jump—I was pushed.
- Well, we were all pushed, more or less. I jumped at the last minute.
- Just keep rowing would you—you're slowing us down.
- But where? Where?!
- She's right—we've got to sort out where we're going.
- Did anyone bring any fresh water?
- I mean, we need direction. To have one.
- And to row towards it together. All of us. In a synchronized fashion.
- Hang on, that's real Big Ship thinking that. I don't think we need to be synchronized. We can just row.
- Or we can just sit here. Or we can just lie back and stare at the scorching sun as we waste away and are wiped from memory . . .
- You think we'll be forgotten? You think this will come to nothing?
- Maybe we should have stayed on the Big Ship. We could have mutinied, taken control by force. Then we could have gone wherever we wanted much quicker.
- Oh, come on. Nice idea, but what about all those people who don't want to go where we want to go?
- Well, then we take control by ideas. We educate them, we gradually occupy positions of power until one day—  
Captain! Then we can set the course we want.

- Are you kidding? It would take ages, and even if you eventually got a hold of the wheel, do you have any idea how long it takes to turn one of those things around?
- Whereas with something small like this you can do really tight circles—look.
- Would you stop it! I feel sick enough as it is.
- Me too. I think I'll go back.
- What are you talking about? You can't go back—it's miles away by now.
- No, it must just be over the horizon—we're still attached to it.
- What?!
- We're still attached—look at these ropes just under the water.
- Oh, my god, she's right. What do we do?
- Cut them—who's got a knife?
- First I'd like to confirm that someone has fresh water.
- Forget the water. Who's got a knife?
- But what if there's no land? What if there are no other ships? What if the Big Ship's all there is?
- Pull yourself together, woman! Of course we'll find land.
- What if it's already inhabited? I don't like where this is going.
- Me neither. Help pull me in—I want to go back.
- No way—we've got to cut these ropes.
- I've got family on the Big Ship.
- We've all got family on the Big Ship.
- I wonder if they've noticed we're gone?
- Not mine. I made a clone of myself before I left. Looks like me, sounds like me, but only talks about the weather.
- You made a clone! How on earth can you justify that?
- To stop people getting hurt!
- Let her go back then. If she doesn't want to be here, she clearly doesn't belong here.

- Oh, so it's you who decides who belongs here and who doesn't, is it?
- She said she didn't want to be here!
- I said I wanted to go back! I didn't say permanently.
- Well if you're not a hundred percent committed to the lifeboat, I don't see what your interest is in it at all.
- It's all or nothing, is it?
- No—just that you're either with us or against . . .
- Oh! You know who you sound like!
- This is different.
- Why?
- It's a matter of intention. It's a matter of context.
- Everything's relative?
- How dare you!
- Hang on, wait. Let's think about this. Maybe it's better that we stay attached just while we're sorting out what to do. I mean we've got no water and we don't know where we're going.
- I know where we're going. I just don't know how to get there.
- If we had some tools from the Big Ship we could work out a course.
- Would you stop this childish reliance on the Big Ship! We can work it out without them.
- But we might get there quicker with some of their stuff.
- Not while we're being dragged along! I can't believe we're even considering staying attached.
- You know what? I don't think a lifeboat's really what we want.
- What are you talking about? It's not a matter of what we want, it's a matter of what we don't want.
- I don't want the Big Ship.
- I don't want to die! Where's the water?
- What we don't want is hierarchy. We don't want any one group dominating any other group. Did you see the way

those cabins are organized on the Big Ship? And the slave holds below?

- No cabins here.
- No.
- You know what we should have got? A tug boat.
- What?
- Not a lifeboat, a tug boat.
- Oh, boring! Who wants to spend their life trying to pull some heavy thing around?
- Well, I don't want to spend my life in a four-meter-squared prison, exposed to the elements.
- But in order to tug them you've got to get them to cut the engine, and how are you going to achieve that?
- I read that there isn't an engine—we've just been led to believe there is.
- Oh, there's an engine. And we'd need an engine powerful enough to pull them. This is worse than the mutiny idea.
- Well, excuse me for trying. But you'll admit this isn't ideal?
- What isn't?
- This lifeboat! Out here in the middle of nowhere. Being pulled along.
- You're right. That's why we've got to cut the ropes.
- But in that case we either drift, or we decide on a direction and we row towards it.
- Right.
- But what are we rowing towards? I mean, is it an island, a land mass, another Big Ship? Will there be other people?
- I don't know.
- No, no other people—at least we're not going to colonize anyone.
- And I suppose we're not going to get colonized.
- Not again, no way! We'll be on the look out this time.
- So no other people.
- Well, that's OK isn't it? We get along, don't we?