

Eternal as the Sea

By Catherine Freymond

One moment Australia's salty surf roared above my mates and I; the next, we were pried, plucked, polished, packaged and perched on a shelf in an English home. We nestled amidst straight pins and bobbins while a young mother-to-be happily hummed and sewed. Ribbons and rosettes adorned a tiny ivory gown. We were sewn down the front in a lustrous line. She proudly showed the gown to her husband, who kissed her soundly and exclaimed, "It's a fine creation Bella, but not your finest!," as he tickled her expanding abdomen.

Love and laughter deepened over the years as baby Mary was quickly joined by Emma, Peter, Harry and Kate. Every christening day I glowed with pride. Between times, the little gown was wrapped in tissue paper and stored in a large trunk. After Kate, years passed. Childish feet gave way

to deeper voices and sedate steps. The gown yellowed, but we pearls never lost our milky luster.

Sudden sunlight startled me out of quiet sea dreams. Mary and Emma were sorting through the trunk. Soft chuckles and recollections stopped when Emma lifted out a long dress, exclaiming, "Ooh Mary, look here! And this lace tablecloth would make a smashing veil!"

Mary turned to her mother with shining eyes, and Bella smiled at her daughters. "Mary, I'd love to sew you a new wedding dress, but with this war rationing..."

The girls brushed away her worried sighs. "This'll be elegant, Mum."

"We'll gather lace like this ... See how it goes with her hair?"

"Look at these pearl buttons - they'll add the perfect touch!"

War worries faded as they prepared for the wedding. Mary was radiant; I felt her heart beating with youthful love as she and her soldier exchanged vows.

For a while, joy drove away war's shadow. William trained; Mary turned their little flat into a cosy home. One evening, Mary casually inquired, "Do you remember my wedding dress?"

"Indeed I do," stated William, "You were a vision of beauty!"

"Would you mind if I snipped those pearl buttons off?"

William looked puzzled and Mary giggled. "I need to sew them back on that christening gown."

William jumped up from his chair. "A baby - you - us?" He wouldn't let her lift another finger all evening.

War ground on; the inevitable day arrived. After one glance at William's face, Mary cried, "You're being sent off!" He nodded somberly. Their remaining hours were filled with small talk and silent tenderness. Mary knew she'd be fine with her parents, but her lips quivered when William said goodbye. She pressed a tiny package into his hands and gulped, "Come home to me - to us." I was off to war in William's pocket.

Nightmare days congealed into muddy, bloody months. Sometimes William rubbed me between his fingers; sleep came easier then. One day he marched up a gang-plank; soon swells rolled beneath us. Night, silence ... suddenly, darkness splintered into white light. Screams, hot groaning metal, icy rushing water - then silence once more. William drifted downward. Clouds of silt rose, veiling steel and flesh.

I gleam in the darkness, and over me, the salty surf roars.

Catherine Ruth Freymond is a member of the Victoria WI, Lennox & Addington, Kingston Area. This story was the Ontario winner of the FWIC Tweedsmuir Community History Competition - "The History of a Button."

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