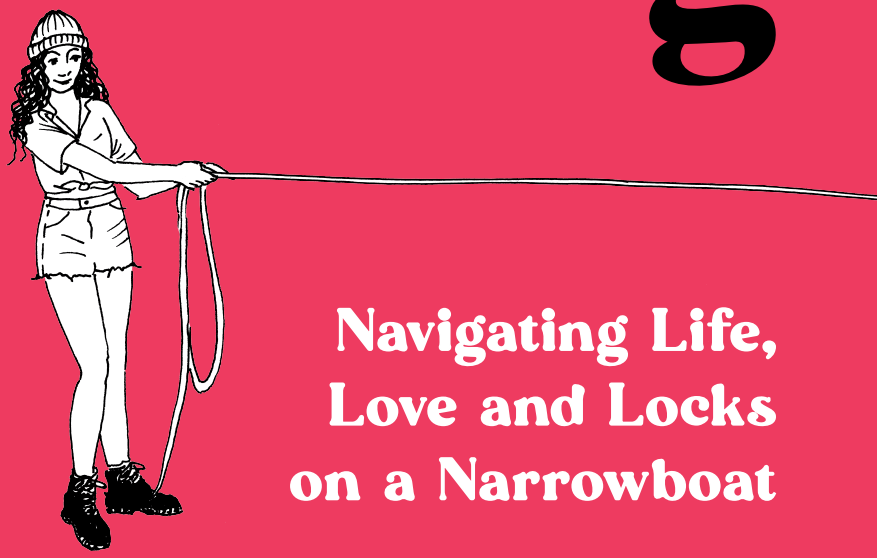
all boats are sinking

hannah pierce



Navigating Life, Love and Locks on a Narrowboat

ALL BOATS ARE SINKING

Copyright © Hannah Pierce, 2024

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced by any means, nor transmitted, nor translated into a machine language, without the written permission of the publishers.

Hannah Pierce has asserted their right to be identified as the author of this work in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

Condition of Sale
This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

An Hachette UK Company
www.hachette.co.uk

Summersdale Publishers
Part of Octopus Publishing Group Limited
Carmelite House
50 Victoria Embankment
LONDON
EC4Y 0DZ
UK

This FSC® label means that materials used for the product have been responsibly sourced

MIX
Paper | Supporting responsible forestry
FSC
www.fsc.org
FSC® C104740

www.summersdale.com

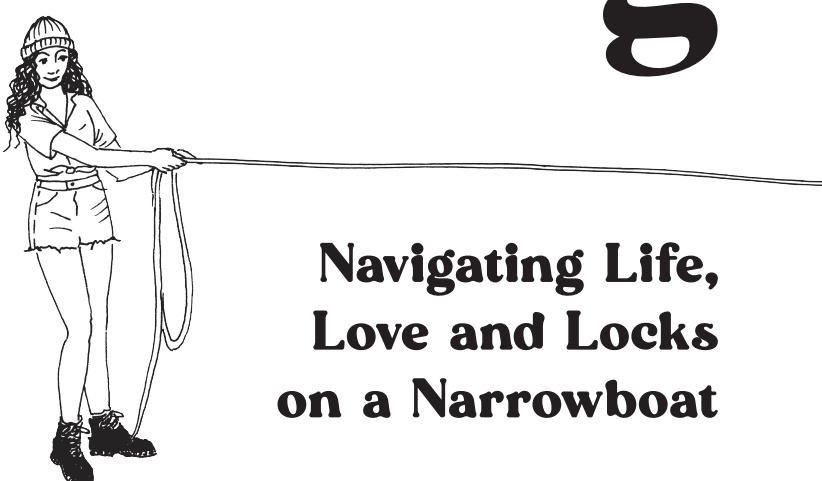
Printed and bound by Clays Ltd, Suffolk, NR35 1ED

ISBN: 978-1-83799-401-4

Substantial discounts on bulk quantities of Summersdale books are available to corporations, professional associations and other organizations. For details contact general enquiries: telephone: +44 (0) 1243 771107 or email: enquiries@summersdale.com.

all boats are sinking

hannah pierce



Navigating Life, Love and Locks on a Narrowboat

summersdale

For Mum and Dad

Author's note

Some names and personal details have been changed to protect people's identities

Contents

Prologue: January 2021, Todmorden 8

Part 1: All Boats Are Sinking 11

Part 2: Adventures on *Argie* 100

Part 3: Locked Down 178

Part 4: Down a Lock 224

Part 5: Are You Winning? 334

Acknowledgements 363

About the Author 365

Prologue

January 2021, Todmorden

We sat inside our respective boats, braced for the worst.

It had been an extreme winter, even by West Yorkshire standards, and the snow up at Stoodley Pike would be rapidly melting by now. With rain forecast overnight, the volume of water coming down the hills and entering the River Calder put those of us on the canal at risk. It was cold rain. Hard and loud against the steel. My neighbours' boats were tied onto mooring rings attached to concrete slabs at intervals along the towpath. *Argie Bargie*, my sturdy companion and home these past three and a half years, containing all my worldly possessions, was secured in place with pins I had hammered into the drenched ground myself.

In the afternoon, Dave arrived with several bags of coal. The owner of a local hire fleet, he had been delivering fuel to me these past few months with a cheery disposition and propensity for local gossip. He dropped the 20-kilogram bags onto my roof and recounted a tale from the last known floods on the Rochdale Canal. A boat had become unpinned and been swept downstream and onto the towpath, where it remained as the water levels subsided. I had visions of waking in the night to find I was wedged atop the lock gate below, my home swinging like a seesaw 19 feet above the canal.

That evening, as the downpour intensified and my phone pinged with notifications from FloodAlert about the rising water levels and imminent risk of flooding, my neighbour Jimmy knocked on the side of my boat. Wearing a waxed trench coat, he stood in the lashing rain with a saw in one hand and a large sheet of ply in the other.

"Hi, Jimmy," I said, laughing at the sight of him: a washed-up pirate with his enormous beard and leather boots.

PROLOGUE

He leant forward with the piece of wood and spoke over the rain and wind. "Do you want me to put this across your door?"

"How come?" I said from inside my dry cabin.

"You've not been in a flood before, have you?" His two spaniels were circling him, their brown fur like mopheads that had yet to be wringed out. "When that overflows" – Jimmy pointed to the guillotine lock above – "a tonne of water will come over your deck and in through your doors like a wave."

I looked at my doors and at Jimmy's thin bit of ply. Even if he was right, I wasn't sure it would do much.

"I think I'll leave it, Jimmy. But thank you anyway."

"Not to worry. Are you okay?" he said.

"Yeah, I think so. I just don't really know what to expect."

"Take my number," he said. "You can call or text if you're worried."

Jimmy returned to the other side of the canal. His historic working canal boat *Kyle*, dusty red in colour, was as handsome as any boat I had seen on my journey up here. Moored below the Golden Lion pub, it sat low in the water, wrapped in smoke circles that spun merrily from its iron chimney. The pub above was bright yellow in the rain. Its owners had painted its facade in the spring, in preparation for the Tour de Yorkshire. The race had subsequently been cancelled due to Covid and the new paint job had caused a rift with the council, who demanded they revert the Grade II listed building back to white. To me, this irreverent spirit was the heart and soul of Todmorden, the town I had called home these past two months.

Once Jimmy and his spaniels were safely inside their vessel, I closed up the front doors to my own floating home, a space I had been holed up in since the start of the pandemic, with its rusted and battered exterior, its battle scars. An inside neat but confined, with all my jumbled and eclectic belongings. Plants that hung from hooks and swayed with the movement of the boat. Kitchen appliances on display where no more space could be found in drawers. Piles of books and jars of homemade lockdown jam. Cushions, rugs

and blankets of every colour. A black stove in its centre, with patched-up holes in the flue and markings on the floor from sparks and hot ash. An imperfect and muddled home. An extension of me, in every sense.

I sat on my sofa in the comfort and chaos of *Argie Bargie* and waited for the flood to come.