

The Wives of Henry Oades

Johanna Moran

Published by HarperPress

Extract

All text is copyright © 2010 by Johanna Moran

This opening extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

Tena, ki te riro ko ta te teina ki mua whanau mai ai, hei muri ko ta te tuakana whanau ai, na, he iwi kino taua iwi hou, ina tae mai ki tenei Motu.

But, if it happens that the child of the younger is born first, and of the elder afterward, then the newcomers will be an evil people, when they arrive in this Land.

—A Maori premonition of disorder

PART ONE



The Newcomers

1890

A COMMON BAT on the other side of the world elects to sink its rabid fangs, and one's cozy existence is finished.

Margaret Oades knew her husband was up to something the moment he came through the door with a bottle of wine. It was late. The children had gone up hours ago. "What's the occasion?" she asked, laying out a plain supper of shirred eggs and lardy cakes.

Henry kissed the nape of her neck, giving her a shiver. "I've an announcement," he said.

Margaret expected him to say he'd found a collie for their son. John, nearly eight now—her big boy, her pride—had been wheedling without letup for weeks. She took down two goblets, hoping the dog was an old one and not some frisky crocus lover.

"A senior passed in New Zealand," he said instead. "Of a bat bite, poor bloke. I'm to complete his stint. We're due as soon as possible. You'll want to prepare."

Margaret set the goblets aside. "Henry."

"Two years, sweetheart." He'd proposed marriage with the

same pleading look. "The time shall sail by, you'll see. It's a grand opportunity, a flying leap forward. I could hardly say no thanks."

Three weeks later, boarding the steamer tender that was to take them down the Thames and bring them up alongside the *Lady Ophelia*, Margaret could not recall what she'd said next. Nothing perhaps, stunned as she'd been.

On board the crowded tender, a child each by the hand, Henry and Margaret jockeyed for position at the rail. Already the narrow boat was moving, spewing gray smoke. Margaret waved to her parents on the quay below, flapping her hankie, straining to pick them out through tears and drizzle. She'd not told them she was expecting again, thinking it too soon. She regretted now not making an exception, cutting the sadness with a bit of happy news. Henry wrapped an arm about her, kissing her brow, his beard grazing her cheek. He'd been made a ship's constable, issued a red-lettered guernsey too small for him. The bulky knit pulled across his broad shoulders and chest. Pale knobby wrists jutted between glove and cuff. He was to be paid seven pounds for patrolling the single-women's section, which appealed to the latent cop in him. He'd had other aspirations before settling upon an accountant's stool. There was a time when he thought himself bound for the opera stage, but that was years ago, before he knew what it took.

He kissed her again. "It's not forever."

"The new baby shall be walking," she said, rising up on her toes, waving wide arcs.

Behind her a woman said, "They cannot see us anymore. We're too far off."

Margaret turned to face the lady in the gaudy checked cape, a pixie of a woman with a sprinkle of reddish brown freckles to match her hair. Earlier, Margaret and her father had been standing on the wharf, monitoring the loading of their trunks. The

cheeky woman sashayed up like a long-lost relation, saying, "Your wife has such a serious look about her, sir."

"I beg your pardon," Margaret had said. "You're addressing my *father*."

"You don't remember me," the woman said now, fingering a dangling ear bob.

"I do, madam." How could she forget?

"Where's your lovely da?"

"My father isn't sailing," said Margaret. "He was there to see us off."

"A pity," she said, turning to Henry, smiling, dimpling. "I'm Mrs. Martha Randolph, Constable. One of your charges. Who might the wee lady and gentleman be?"

Henry introduced the children, clapping a proud hand to John's shoulder, prying six-year-old Josephine from Margaret's leg. Margaret turned back to the watery haze that was her parents, spreading her feet for balance, her pretty going-away shoes pinching. She'd been told the river was calm. "Smooth as glass," her favorite uncle had claimed.

"Your children are charming, Mr. Oades," said Mrs. Randolph. Meaning, presumably, *Your wife is utterly lacking*. The woman sauntered off not holding the rail, flaunting her superior sea legs, a cockiness won by being on one's own, no doubt.

London was behind them now, the hawkers and filth, the soot-belching chimney pots, the piles of manure in the streets, the raw sewage in the black water. Margaret had visited once before. It's good to get to know other things and places, Henry had said on the train. She'd agreed aloud, but not in her heart. At thirty-two she was a contented homebody, John and Josephine's mum, Henry's wife. It was enough, more than enough. She knew all she needed to know about other things and places.

The tender rounded a rocky promontory. A row of small cot-

tages went by, lighted from within, the mothers in them tucked away, minding their worlds, starting their suppers.

Henry spoke close to her ear, his breath warm as toast. "Think of the grand stories we'll tell in our sapless dotage."

She laughed a little. "Assuming we've the sap to see us to dotage."

He laughed too, releasing pent-up excitement. "That's my girl." He was as keen to go as she was not. He hoisted John and put a fist, a make-believe telescope, to John's eye. "Now watch for our ship, boy. She'll come into view any moment now."

A shout came from above. "Ahoy! There she is!"

The passengers stampeded toward the bow. Henry and the children fell in, joining the stream. Margaret stood rigid, the blood quickening in her veins. The *Lady Ophelia* was enormous, majestic. She came with sails as well as steam. Four towering masts swayed against a pewter sky, as if unstable.

Henry called to Margaret. She scanned the throng, spotting them ahead, larky children shrieking, Henry waving her forward. She gripped the burnished rail and began to inch her way toward them, the deck seesawing beneath her feet, her insides turning. "Like walking about in your own best room," the prevaricating uncle had said.



THEY'D NOT BEEN on board the *Lady Ophelia* five minutes when John stumbled over a coil of rope and fell, scraping his knee. A uniformed officer was on him immediately, setting him to. The deck was positively littered with ropes, with winches and chains, drums and casks, all manner of object designed to draw a curious boy close to the rail. She'd need to watch the children every second of the day.

"There's some confusion in the ladies' section, sir," the officer said to Henry. "You're wanted straightaway."

The ship's doctor came up, offering Margaret and the children a tour in Henry's absence.

Henry cheerfully accepted on Margaret's behalf, before she could decide or get the first word out. They were led down a narrow corridor and shown the maple-paneled library, and then a card room, and yet another social room with a piano, an Oriental rug, and plush velvet drapery.

"It's all quite impressive," said Margaret, calmer now. It helped to be inside, away from the rail. By the time they reached the hectic dining hall she was feeling rather human again. The roast lamb smelled delicious. How novel to sit down to a meal she hadn't so much as pared a potato for.

Dr. Pritchard escorted them to their cabin afterward, passing the animal pen along the way, where chickens mingled with pigs, and sheep stood with sad-looking dewlappy cows.

"We've the best of butchers aboard," said the doctor.

"Nice piggy," said Josephine, squatting, putting herself face-to-snout with a homely sow having her brown supper.

The grizzled old sailor inside the pen approached her. "You mustn't ever utter the word *pig* on board a ship, lassie. 'Twill bring the worst of luck. You're to say *swiney* instead."

"Come away, Pheeny," said Margaret, giving the frightening man a stern eye.

At the opposite rail two young African sailors struggled to unlatch a wooden lifeboat. "They're required to practice," said the doctor, "before each sailing."

The inept lads looked no older than twelve or thirteen. She would have to study the latching apparatus and teach herself how to unlock and release a boat. God help them should they need to rely on tots.

The women's section was located just behind the animal pen. Male passengers, the doctor said, were strictly forbidden here. Margaret looked for Henry, but saw only women coming and

going, old and young and in between, all laden with sacks and baskets. Off to the side, four women stood in a close huddle, Mrs. Randolph obviously presiding, one hand holding her fancy cape closed, the other gesturing wildly.

"Your husband will have earned his stipend," said the doctor, reading Margaret's mind.

She asked, "Do you have any idea when we might expect him?"

"I don't. Sorry." He brought them as far as their cabin door and left, saying that he was overdue.

She entered thinking, *Henry, Henry, wait until you see*. They'd both imagined a fairly spacious cabin, anticipated a small sitting area at least. In fact, the room offered only three places to sit: upon one of the two lower berths or upon the stool beneath the writing shelf. Lamps and washstand were bolted to the wall, virtually promising heavy seas. A shout came from outside, along with a grating rattle of chain. The ship shuddered and began to move. John begged to go to the bow, but Margaret said no, Father wouldn't find them in the crowd. They waited for Henry inside, the dim little cabin rocking like an elephant's cradle. When he didn't come, she prepared the children for bed. "It's been a long day, hasn't it?" She changed into her nightdress and climbed the six-rung ladder to her berth, crouching at the top, proceeding on her hands and knees. There was no other way. The Queen herself would access the bed with her bottom in the air. Below, John kept up a steady stream of chatter.

"We're bound to see whales tomorrow," he said. "And sea pigs too."

"The wobbly man told us not to say pig," said Josephine. "You're to say sea swiney instead."

"Porpoise then," said John. "That's their other name." Margaret fell asleep to their voices, dreaming that Henry had snuck off the ship and gone home on his own.

He showed up just after ten, whispering apologies. The captain

had detained him, along with the other constables, treating them all to brandy and cigars. "The skipper's a dyed-in-the-wool bachelor," he said, "with no appreciation of a lovely girl waiting." He attempted to squeeze his large self in beside Margaret, but even with her backside flush against the wall, the berth would not hold them both. He climbed down and then up again, settling in the opposite upper with a loud sigh. They were to sleep like celibates for the duration then, something they'd never done. A lonely, hemmed-in feeling came over her. In the dark, she touched the ceiling, calculating the distance—eight inches, ten at the most. A near-term woman wouldn't fit. "Night, Henry."

"It'll be all right, Meg," he said.

She closed her eyes. "It will."



HENRY WAS CALLED away to duty the next afternoon, missing the last spit of England. Margaret bundled the children and took them up top. A few dozen others stood somberly at the rail, a westerly whipping their clothes, blowing hats from heads. Cornwall's jagged cliffs rose somewhere off the stern, no longer visible without a glass. Ahead lay nothing, absolutely nothing but an alarming expanse of churning sea and dull winter sky. A man began to play the anthem on his flute, slow and mournful. Some of the passengers locked arms and sang. The women sounded especially sad, their voices cracking. Margaret wasn't the only one, then. There were others whose bones wouldn't warm, others thinking: *What in God's name have we done?*



THEY ENTERED the Bay of Biscay that evening and came along the edge of a storm. An hour into the weather, Henry complained of dizziness and blurred vision. Margaret went to fetch Dr. Pritchard, finding his tight quarters filled with patients. He gave

her an orange and instructions to have Henry go up on deck. "I think you should come have a look," she said. The doctor promised he would first chance. But he didn't, and Henry was left to rally on his own.

On the sixth morning, in sight of the African coast, the seas placid, Margaret awoke feeling queer herself, quaky and nauseous. The doctor gave her an exasperated look when she came in, one that said: *You, again*. He asked straight off, "Are you in a family way?" Margaret said yes, and he shrugged, as if to say the symptoms were to be expected. He advised her to keep a full stomach.

"Much easier said than done," she said.

The doctor laughed, showing another side of himself. "You're a droll one. I like that."

Mrs. Randolph was passing the infirmary just as Margaret came out. "Mrs. Oades! You're well, I hope?"

"I am." The lady's eyes were glassy, fevered-looking. She was younger than Margaret first thought, probably Margaret's own age, give or take a year. "And you, madam?"

Mrs. Randolph put a hand to her middle. "The lamb stew of two nights ago nearly killed me. Mind what you eat."

"I shall," said Margaret. "Pardon my saying so, but you appear a bit peaked still. Perhaps you should see the doctor."

"I've seen the no-good," said Mrs. Randolph. "Once was enough, thank you. A baby died last evening, you know."

Margaret's eyes filled. "Oh, dear God. Of what?"

"Whatever the cause," said Mrs. Randolph, "the quack inside made not the first bloody attempt to save it. He's a dentist, by the by, not a bona fide *doctor*. The purser informed me." She touched Margaret's hand with trembling fingers, her voice softening. "The child was the mum's one and only. She is beside herself with grief, poor wretch. She's not left her berth even to relieve herself. Some of the others and I plan to attend the service at four. Will you come, Mrs. Oades?"

"Of course."

"We'll show she's not alone in the world, won't we?"

"Yes," said Margaret. "Though we won't begin to solace."



THE BABY'S NAME was Homer Brown. Someone whispered, "Barely a year old."

Prayers were said, and then the shrouded child was let over the rail, into gray water, beneath a gray sky. The bereft mother faltered as the baby was released, grasping the rail in lieu of a husband. There was no man present, no kin at all.

Above, Margaret could hear the rowdy drunks in the men's hatch, Norsemen, a good many of them. Someone shouted in English, "Show a bit of respect for the baby's mum." But they did not let up for a moment.

Kindness Itself

MARGARET BEGAN to miscarry on the eleventh morning out. A strong wind had come up during the night and was only now abating. A keen howl continued, along with straining-timber noises, hideous, ungodly sounds to die by.

Henry brought her down to John's berth, and then went for Dr. Pritchard, returning instead with Mrs. Randolph. She carried a sack and something wrapped in blue flannel.

"Dr. Pritchard is ill," said Henry.

"He's utterly worthless is what he is," said Mrs. Randolph, placing the flanneled package upon Margaret's abdomen. "A brick hot from the oven," she said. "Just the thing."

Mrs. Randolph turned to Henry. "Take the children up top, why don't you?"

"Yes, do please, Henry," said Margaret.

Henry began snatching the children's clothes from pegs. He dressed them, consoling all the while. "Mum is fine, Mum is perfectly fine." With sleepy Josephine riding his hip, he bent and kissed Margaret's forehead. "I'm sorry, sweetheart," he whispered.

The ship rolled to port. A stir of odor rose from the chamber

pot. Margaret turned to the wall, cramping still. The heat from the brick helped some. She drew up her knees, the sheet falling away, exposing her stained nightgown.

John cried out, "Mum's bleeding!"

"Lady's blood," said Henry in a low voice, though not so low as to frighten John with seriousness. "Nothing more natural, boy."

"Her eyes are closed," wailed John. "She's dead."

"She's not, son, she's not. She's resting. Let's let her be now."

She'd marry him all over, Margaret thought vaguely, for his fathering alone. "Go look for whales, John," she murmured. "This may be your lucky day."

Mrs. Randolph went to work the moment they left, preparing a basin of cool water and fishing a bar of scented soap from her bag. "Were you very far along?"

"Not quite three months." She'd lost two others. It never got easier. The first, a full-term boy, was stillborn. That was the unspeakable worst.

Mrs. Randolph sighed. "It's a terrible bleak feeling, isn't it?"

Margaret sat up and began to wash. "Have you children?"

"None living."

"I'm sorry."

"Tut, tut, Mrs. Oades. No need for the long pussy face. I've not dried on the vine quite yet." Through the wall came a male groan, a ghoulish sound. "So many ill," said Mrs. Randolph. "Especially down in the women's hatch. It isn't right the way they have us situated alongside the animals. The girl under me is ailing. Spinster sisters both have a fever."

"They should be quarantined," said Margaret.

"The ship is chock full. Where would you have them go?"

"Hammocks might be slung in Dr. Pritchard's quarters."

Mrs. Randolph swatted the air. "And have the quack incommoded? He'd force oranges on the poor women and then fault them for dying, the same way he blamed Homer's mum."

"He didn't," said Margaret.

"He did," said Mrs. Randolph. "The baby was fed tinned milk instead of mother's. He'd be alive if not for that. The charlatan said it straight to the grieving woman's face. I was there."

"How cruel," said Margaret.

"Men are."

"What would a dentist know about babies?"

"What would any man, Mrs. Oades? Now where might I find a fresh nightgown?"

Margaret pointed toward the corner. "In the trunk. Near the bottom."

Mrs. Randolph crossed the rolling floor, her arms spread for balance. She wore big, bold rings on both hands. Margaret had never owned a ring other than her wedding band. Her grandmother had been the same plain way, her mother was, all the aunts and cousins. Each generation bequeathed the austerity to the next, passed it sideways.

Mrs. Randolph knelt and opened the trunk, picking up the porcelain ginger jar inside. "Here's a lovely thing."

"A parting gift from my mum," said Margaret. "A keepsake from home. It's been sitting on her chimneypiece for as long as I can remember."

"My mum was the sentimental sort, too," said Mrs. Randolph. She gently returned the jar to the trunk, pulling out the other nightgown and bringing it to Margaret. There were bloodstains on that gown too, flecks of Margaret's mother's, thanks to a lost thimble. They'd both sewed furiously preparing for the journey, talking without respite as they worked, trying to get everything said.

Margaret slowly dressed herself. She and Henry had thought of names—Anne for a girl, after Margaret's mother, Walter for a boy, after Mr. Whitman. "The dentist couldn't have known for certain," she said, setting the cold brick on the floor and lying back again. "Any number of ailments might have taken the child."

Mrs. Randolph said softly, "Just rest, Mrs. Oades."

Margaret closed her eyes. Never name a child before the christening. She'd heard it said often enough, but didn't see how it mitigated the loss. Name or no name, Margaret loved them completely from the moment she knew. She fell asleep weeping, waking an hour later to Mrs. Randolph's close whisper.

"How is it now?"

Margaret turned to face her. "You are kindness itself."

Mrs. Randolph arched an eyebrow. "You didn't think so at first. Mounting your high horse the way you did down on the docks."

"Oh, forgive me, please. I shouldn't be so touchy about my age. My husband is nearly two years younger. He likes to tease."

"I assumed the gentleman was your da," said Mrs. Randolph. "I was merely making certain."

"Why?"

"I took a slight fancy to him."

"You don't mean it!" Margaret's unsuspecting papa would have fainted dead away had she made an overture. "He's an old man."

Mrs. Randolph shrugged. "I prefer a mature gentleman."

"My mum would have run you through with her umbrella."

They laughed a little, Mrs. Randolph's hand brushing close, her dazzling red-stone ring glinting. Margaret felt an odd urge to try it on for size. "Captain Burns would be more your sort," she said. "I happen to know he's an eligible bachelor."

Mrs. Randolph waved off the suggestion, pulling a hankie from a side pocket, wiping her perspiring brow and neck. "No, thank you. His breath is foul, and he has a tremendous backside for a man. It's every bit as broad as my own." Her watery eyes shifted about. "The wind has died down, hasn't it? Perhaps it's time I fetched your husband."

Margaret sat up a bit. "Please visit a moment longer."

The cabin air was inhospitable, as warm and muggy as a coop's. Still, Mrs. Randolph didn't hesitate. She pulled the stool close and

sat, buffing the ring with a sleeve and splaying her fingers. "Pretty, isn't it? I noticed you looking."

"It's lovely. A ruby?"

"A garnet, actually. You should see how it does in a good light." She tugged the ring free and pushed it down Margaret's middle finger. "There now. Hold your hand to your cheek." Margaret shyly complied. "Yes, like that. Isn't it striking next to your dark hair? Christmas is coming. I'll make a mention to Mr. Oades."

"He'd think us both daft," Margaret said, studying the ring. Henry was always saying that she was a natural, a born beauty. She denied that she was, though of course she liked to hear him say it. Oh, she wasn't a scare. Her features were arranged nicely enough. She was a tall woman, a bit too tall, though she walked erect as she'd been taught, in fear of growing a hump. Her wasp waist, considering the children, drew the occasional flattering comment from other women. Her eyes were clear, more gray than blue, and her complexion was even, unblemished. But her manish hands weren't right. The knuckles were too large, unworthy of the ring's glamour.

"You may borrow it one evening," said Mrs. Randolph.

Margaret removed the ring and returned it. "Oh, I couldn't possibly."

"It was given to me by a circus performer," said Mrs. Randolph. "A wild-animal trainer, a Persian living in Paris, a splendid masculine specimen."

"How romantic," said Margaret. "And the blue ring? A sapphire, is it?"

Mrs. Randolph nodded, smiling as if with fond memory. "An English gent surprised me with this one, a charming old dear from London. Rich as Midas. George. I don't recall the surname. We'd just been to the Lyceum to see Sarah Bernhardt onstage."

"Sarah Bernhardt. Really."

"It was the highlight of my life. She sleeps in a satin-lined coffin, you know."

"I didn't know."

"Am I tiring you, Mrs. Oades?"

"Not in the least," said Margaret. "Was she as vulgar as they say?"

Mrs. Randolph leaned in. "She was *sensual*. She embodied the *complete* woman, if you know what I mean." She closed her eyes and threw back her head, embracing the air, an invisible lover. A warm flutter passed through Margaret. She felt herself blushing. Mrs. Randolph let out a dreamy moan, her back arching, the stool teetering. She toppled off sideways, hitting her head with a solid thud.

"Mrs. Randolph! Are you all right?"

The cabin door flew open. Storming in ahead of the children, clumsy Henry nearly stepped on Mrs. Randolph's outstretched hand. She rolled out of his range and stood awkwardly, brushing herself off, starting to laugh. Margaret laughed too. She couldn't help herself.

Henry stood staring, looking as if he'd happened upon a cell of loons. "I heard the noise. What are you up to here? I thought my wife had fallen out of bed."

"It was nothing," said Mrs. Randolph, breathing hard. "Just a bit of cheer."

She left a moment later, with a sisterly kiss to Margaret's cheek and a promise to look in on her later. When Mrs. Randolph knocked at two, Margaret was sleeping, and Henry didn't wake her.

"I hadn't the heart," he said.

They put in at Malta the next morning. Margaret looked for Mrs. Randolph at breakfast, but then the ship began taking on coal, a filthy process. A dry black dust rained down on the decks,

their faces, their clothes. She and the children were forced below because of it. Soon after leaving tranquil Malta they were in rolling seas again. Henry ventured out toward the end of the day, bringing back cheese and warm milk that was to be their supper. The captain had ordered the decks cleared and the hatches closed.

"It's expected to get worse before it gets better," said Henry, breaking up the cheese with his hands.

They remained penned for the better part of two days. It fell to Henry to dump the pot and fetch the food. Margaret stayed with the children, entertaining them with stories and spillikins, a simple game when played on land. Players take turns selecting a jackstraw from a scattered pile, losing if another straw is disturbed. Margaret should have known that the ship's movement would spoil the game, although the children didn't seem to mind. They spent hours playing, riding John's lower berth together.

On the third morning Henry returned later than usual from his constable's duties. "Your Mrs. Randolph is gravely ill, I'm afraid."

Margaret stood to leave. "You'll mind the children?"

"I'm sorry, Meg. I cannot allow you to go. She might be contagious."

"Think of all she's done for me, Henry. I'll stay no more than a minute, I promise. I'll simply peek in to show I've come."

He shook his head. "I'm sorry."

She kicked the stool instead of him. "Imagine my preventing *you* from going to a friend in need!" John quit playing suddenly, gathering up the jackstraws. Josephine began nibbling her thumb, her wary eyes darting from parent to parent.

"Never mind," Margaret said to the children. "Carry on with your game. Or would you rather a story? Shall I read some *Tom Sawyer*?" Henry hovered too close, looking infuriatingly contrite. There was no place to turn with her anger.



MRS. RANDOLPH DIED the next day. Margaret left John and Josephine with Henry and attended the service alone, joining a clutch of women on the lower deck. The cause of death was internal convulsions. So said the dentist. He volunteered the information straightaway, before anyone might think to inquire.

"I did everything within my power," he said.

Margaret spoke up. "She didn't respond to the orange cure?"

The dentist turned, glaring at her, drawing up his collar. As if her remark had sharpened the day's gray bite. "I beg your pardon?"

"Mrs. Randolph complained to you of a stomach disorder early on, did she not?"

The dentist cupped a hand to his ear, feigning deafness. Margaret was about to repeat herself when Mrs. Randolph's sailcloth-wrapped body arrived. She made a heartbreakingly paltry package. Margaret wept. There was so little to her in death.

Two African sailors brought her. The somber, broad-beamed Captain Burns—the bounder who'd allowed the dentist to pose as physician—followed behind, Bible in hand. Margaret bowed her head and prayed curses. *God blast them both.*

When she lifted her eyes, the sailors were in position at the rail. The Africans shivered in the damp air, awaiting their cue from the captain, who appeared impervious, both to weather and death. Almighty Burns began with a great heave of his shoulders, a world-weary glance skyward. A minute was given Mrs. Randolph, two at the most.

"We therefore commit Martha's body to the deep. . . ."

The mourners were forced aside to allow the crew room. Her body fell with a flat splash into the choppy sea, floating only a moment inside the weighted shroud.

"Looking for the general Resurrection in the last day, and the life of the world to come, through our Lord Jesus Christ, at whose second coming in glorious majesty to judge the world, the sea shall give up her dead. . . ."

All sails were full. She was already gone, behind them. Somewhere off the stern, in the Mediterranean Sea, east of Malta, out of sight of land. Margaret imagined meeting Mrs. Randolph's relations one day, or George from London, and having only these few unlovely facts to offer.

A week later, approaching Aden, Margaret pulled her own aching tooth with a string. She'd extract every tooth in her head, she told Henry, before she'd betray Mrs. Randolph by seeking out Dr. Pritchard.

"What does one have to do with the other?" said Henry. "Besides, you hardly knew the poor woman."

Margaret tried, but she couldn't make him understand an affection forged in a single morning. The small transactions between women, particularly mothers, cannot adequately be explained to a man. Some, like hers with Mrs. Randolph, will bind women for life.



CHRISTMAS CAME. Carols were sung. A plum pudding was served. They were nearly halfway quit of this wretched, murderous bark.