

When Karen found the journals she did not at first realise what she had. There were six of them, badly stained, bound up with ribbon that fell to pieces in her hands. Some of the pages appeared to be almost glued together, and she prised them apart with misgiving in case she should damage them. Some of the writing was indecipherable at first, though all the journals appeared to have been written in the same hand. It was just that on certain pages the author appeared to be in a position to write neatly, and sometimes he (for it quickly transpired that it was a he) seemed to be writing in extremis and his letters became misshapen and unattractive.

The first journal she opened seemed to be nothing more than accounts of various society gatherings at which the author (signing himself 'William Mallory, Gent.')

had attended. He was clearly pleased with himself, and crudely intimate, too. But despite that, there was a life to Mr Mallory's pen that was more immediate than the dust which blew from the old pages might have suggested. He was a silversmith of sorts, but it was what he did when not pursuing his craft that would come to interest her. A typical entry from the first book read

Thursday the fifteenth.

To Lady Harrowsmith's and there did indulge myself, quaffing more wine than was capable of being held in. Finding myself thus desirous of urgent pissing, and that quickly, I made my way to the base of the steps below her ladyship's ballroom, and there did gain the greatest relief, hidden in the shadows behind the statue of Diana, the huntress.

Being in the process of fastening myself, and being eager to rejoin the festive throng, I did hear light footsteps behind me, and turning I beheld a vision of great pulchritude, a beauty of exquisite temptation whom I had espied not thirty minutes before in the great parlour of Lady Harrowsmith's fine house.

The young lady laughed at my confusion as I sought to cover my exposure and disguise my mission and I would have been affronted and doubly chastised by my disclosure, but the sweet sound of her merriment

was as a tonic to me and so we fell to talking and she, being dismayed of her treatment by a gentleman whose name I dare not set down on these pages, and I still grievously smarting from the death of my beloved Dorothea after the unfortunate accident on the river, we did, in short, find something in common. So that, when we did both together remark upon the cooling weather, we immediately agreed by mutual suggestion to rapayre ourselves to a more intimate hostelry. And in short without wishing to recall the details more than where they lie already in my memory for use at some more appropriate time, we did quit that place without bidding our farewells (for which unpoliteness I must soon make amends) and found ourselves at a tavern where I am known but discretely, and after quaffing more ale we did go upstairs, and there we practised upon each other's bodies the greatest pleasure, her form being more pleasing to me than I might have imagined possible before she did remove all her garments every one. I do believe that I satisfied her in the like manner she did welcome and purify my incensed desire. And thus we amused ourselves midst much endeavour and laughter until morning when, bidding adieu with much promising of future assignations (which I doubt of their veracity) I brought myself home and fell into a deep sleep from which I have but recently awakened. I must now to the home of Master Cheapstall, for a night of skill and gaming is promised and I find my senses revived by the apprehension of, God willing, winnings to tide me over in my present impecunity.

Karen set the journal aside and stared out of the library window at the flat green countryside that stretched away into the future beyond her. Was William Mallory, Gent, worth bothering about, she asked herself? There was an undeniable smell of authenticity about what she was reading, but she was not at all sure that she wanted to wade through various accounts of his whoring and gambling - a very real prospect to judge from her first encounter with his writing. She decided to give him until lunch to persuade her that he was worth getting to know better.

She leafed through the stained yellowing books trying to decide where she might read next. In the end she chose, at random, a page where the calligraphy was of a much lower standard than his normal writing. She wondered if he would divulge the reason for this, and was instantly rewarded.

Friday at two-thirty of the morning.

I know not what drives me to commit to paper in such a situation, but that I can not stop myself from the need to set down my predicament even in this swaying carriage, too harshly sprung, in my opinion, for the paved streets of this great city. The candle has blown out more than once since I left the gathering, but my heart is heavy at what I know now that I must do, and my wrist trembles with the fear of what may befall me if I do not escape my predicament.

But what is more sad is that the evening started well. I had hoped to win back enough at the gaming tables to repay some of the debt into which I am, to speak with what our poets style metaphor, most assuredly drowning. I therefore entered the building with hope of enrichment and was further pleased to discover in that company, a dear friend from my youth, George Clapstow, who went to sea as a young man and who is now, I discover, risen to the rank of Captain through his industry and general bearing which is hearty and compounded of good fellowship and earnest application, both mixed in a most comely manner. We fell to talking, the tables being presently all occupied so that I might anticipate my pleasure more keenly.

My friend the captain did talk to me of his sailing upon the world's great seas such that I believe an idea was planted in my mind most especially when he talked with excitement of a mystery that many of his seafaring folk were in perplexion over but which, it soon became clear, was of continuing interest, and the cause of much excitement and speculation. It concerned an infamous privateer, one John Manley, whose name I do remember from some years back for the tales of his barbarity. And the fascination, for my boyhood companion Clapstow and his like, was to discover what had become of this monster of the sea called 'Mad' for his most prodigious acts of cruelty and virulence. There had been no news of him for ten years. Rumour, that many-tongued harlot, said that his ship, the Bloody Mary, had foundered. There was even a story, brought in from who knows where, that he had been put to death by furious townspeople, victims of his menace, in some far corner of this large and wonderful world. Nobody knew for sure. Clapstow opined that he was still alive and that his disappearance was more like a hiding from the world in some unknown place from which he would soon emerge to wreak havoc, again, upon honest seafarers and dwellers at the ocean's edge.

But this idea of disappearance from society (curse these uneven flags of stone beneath us!), this mystery of voyaging to some corner of this realm of the open world where I may disguise my presence from those who are currently pursuing me, has taken hold in my imagination. I would fain ameliorate my many tribulations here at home for I do love my native earth and am afeared of the many perils I might face if I were to venture far away from the land where I was made and delivered to this vexatious life. Yet the trouble I find myself in seems without sensible remedy. Master Cheapstall did tell me, not two hours since, what I had most feared to hear, in short, that barring my appearance at his house at one of the clock this very afternoon carrying with me the monies I owe him in normal coinage, not writ on promisory notes (this he was most urgently specific about), he is to have me apprehended by the king's men and thereby thrown into the darkest prison until I might make good my financial inadequacy and this I will most assuredly be unable ever to do, no means being available to me, my silver business having been sold from underneath me, my house about to to be taken from me, and all my sources of temporary credit being now and forever exhausted. And tho' I did appeal to Master Cheapstall's sense of brotherhood, he having been at one time a man I might well have called 'friend' still he is in a choler with me such that my entreaty fell upon deaf ears, the unfortunate business of my discovery with his sister being partly, I am persuaded, to blame for his cold-hearted treatment towards me.

I will not to a prison from which I may never walk away upon my own good legs. I will not submit mine own person to the depravations of that stinking world with all its disease and threats against very life itself. I do furthermore love my liberty too devoutly and fear the depravity of the men I would perforce find myself arse to arse with in some foul-smelling dungeon too much to permit mine own destruction. And thus, with dark foreboding, I am resolved to quit this home of mine, this land, my friends, such as they are, and my family, who have not desired of my company this ten years (and may not apprehend my absence, for it is all they craved).

To be brief, dear journal, since the carriage approaches, for the last time, my friendly door, I am to run into mine own house and gathering what few possessions I may comfortably carry with me, I will immediately depart again and I will meet with good George Clapstow and be taken with

him to the water's edge to join his ship and sail on the evening tide for God-knows-what adventures may befall me and I call upon the most merciful God the father, son, and Holy Ghost, to protect me in this bold enterprise.

"Karen," Iris Chatterjani said, coming into the room where her friend sat surrounded by the journals that she had spread all over the table, "are you going to come and have some lunch?" Receiving no reply, she moved closer and placing her hand on the history woman's shoulder she tried again. "Lunch?" she said, "you know, eating, drinking? In the middle of the day? Are you going to join me?" But Karen only grunted, looked up and smiled vaguely at a point behind the librarian's shoulder before burrowing again into the journal she had found, one that had quickened her interest, so that her curiosity was now aroused at a greater level than she had anticipated. She had come across a passage in which William Mallory, on board his friend's ship, was in the teeth of a terrible gale, his handwriting almost indecipherable, yet to Karen's eyes, strangely transparent.

If I live, which I doubt, I will give thanks to God to whom I have prayed constantly these last many hours, hoping that where my person is concerned, at least, he may shew more indulgence than ever He did when I petitioned Him for His help as I was ensnared at the Devil's table. I have, to be blunt, spewed my guts upon the boards of my cabin floor, soiled myself grievously with fear, and cursed the thought that brought me out upon these inhospitable seas which do rise above us as if they were magic mountains until they do fall upon our poor vessel as if it were some colossal hand of judgement. One man we have most surely lost already, snatched from the mast by one monstrous wave and we did hear him scream, his voice puny against the howl of the tempest.

Poor William Mallory, gent. Karen smiled to herself, knowing, because more journals remained, that he survived the gale she had been reading about. And yet she was coming to enjoy the company of this weak man, precisely the kind of person who, if he was translated forward some three hundred years, she would ignore completely if she came across him in her daily life. There was something about the time he described, something about the mess he had got himself into, something about the blind panic of his escape which spoke directly to her and, without becoming too fanciful, she told herself, it is as if I smelled the salt water soaking into

the groaning planks, that I can even breathe in the unseemly odour of men in terror of their lives. Besides, she had been intrigued by the mention, two hours ago in reading time, of John Manley, a pirate whose name she had come across once before in a piece of research, but about whom she had not yet found more information.

She looked up. Iris had come into the room again with a wrapped sandwich and a carton of orange juice. Placing her hand lightly over the pages Karen was reading, so that she was forced to look up, she put her offerings onto the table. "Woman does not live by historical research alone," she said and they both smiled. The librarian was pleased that her planned distraction seemed to be working well after all. Her friend's grin, at this moment, was blended of friendship and joy at the narrative which was unfolding before her.

Once, later in the afternoon, it occurred to Karen that she was behaving in a ridiculous manner, lapping up the meanderings of a second-rate storyteller and treating them, moreover, with the respect she might normally give to trustworthy historical documents. She was certainly observing within herself a complete lack of intellectual rigour, but instead of this alarming her, she was amused by it. She was enjoying the act of enjoying herself. Maybe Mallory would, eventually, tell her something verifiable, cross-checkable, with real facts and places to help her in her continuing research, but even if he did not, she knew she would keep reading. Absent-mindedly she emptied her orange cartoon and started to read again.

Approaching land two days ago, having survived all our many and manifold tribulations, the terrible storms, the revolting sickness that took off three of our men, the drowned sailors left behind us at the bottom of the bottomless ocean, we beheld a coastline of great beauty to our weary eyes. We have, perforce, been blown much off our intended course, such that even George Clapstow was unable to disguise, at first, his own confusion as to the precise nature of terra firma that had appeared, DG, before us. See how I have become so pious, my prayers having been so beneficially answered.

Under the calmest of breezes and a hot sun we soon found ourselves in the most pleasing of bays, perfectly curved and with a long crescent of sanded beach upon which to place our unsteady legs. But what was surprising to us upon arriving at so natural a harbour, was the dilapidation that met our eyes when we beheld the habitations that rose before us. Nor was the welcome we received anything which arriving travellers might reasonably expect. We were neither feted, nor met with

hostile intentions, but only with a blank indifference which was all the more confusing for its coming from so pleasing-looking a people.

And more surprising yet was the awkwardness of the architecture which I have already remarked upon. For here are buildings of elegance and charm fallen into a most unjust neglect. Here are streets of vile confusion, and fallen casements and pedestals, lying where they may. There can be no pride here, as if the inhabitants of paradise had been suffering from the dreadful consequences of some celestial debauchery which their polluted humours had not yet cleared themselves of.

No one of us speaking their language with any facility, we were at first at a loss as to where we were. Our captain finally gave it of his opinion that we were at a place marked upon our chart as 'B.d.Sur', the name being strange to us, and it was not until this morning that we discovered what this might mean.

On our first two nights, ourselves and all the men being desirous of an escape from the dank humidity of our good vessel which we do dearly love for having brought us here, we were obliged to trade with part of our cargo, armaments and new-made machinery for help with printing which we bring with us for a landfall several days sailing to the north and which we would have longed to be at, had not the inclement fierceness of the weather brought us hither. But when we had exhausted all the means of communication beyond the procurement of the means whereby we might satisfy some of our more pressing bodily needs (myself curbing my almost unquenchable desire for the look of uncleanness amongst the women who were offering of themselves to our men, and who were partaken of), George Clapstow, who is like a brother to me, but whose low opinion of me because I am not obviously made for seafaring I do fear, did begin to worry about how we might repair our battered craft, no one being available to see to our obvious needs. But they have brought to us an old man, but partially sighted, and somewhat lacking in teeth so that his broken language is made more difficult to understand. Still, we have been able to get from him an idea of what this place is.

He is called Eufemio and led us to believe that once this place was a great port where he worked, which is most difficult to believe, though there are rotting wooden jetties and destructed sheds roof-naked to the sun which give some credence to his story. Further, he has told us that this place was once called 'Bahia del Sur' meaning 'Bay of the South' or

'Southern Bay', but that now, since the events of some twenty years ago, it has changed its name. Upon pressing him further he told us that we were now in a place named 'Siete Vientos', that is 'Seven Winds' in our language. When asked why it was so named, he did say that this bay was notable for the particular breezes that blew here, though he, not being a seaman himself, was not able to describe them fully. But at least he could claim to have given the town its new name since it was he who had translated the words of the devil pirate John Manley as he died in front of their eyes, and it was his description of the place of his death as the place of seven winds which had remained.

At this George Clapstow let out a delighted yell such that the poor old man was likely to die of fright. But our captain, being shortly calmed down sufficiently to allow Sir Eufemio to continue, did clasp me on mine arm. "You see William," he said, "you see master Mallory, this is the very same John Manley I did tell you of before. It is the pirate whose disappearance did surprise us all, and now it is I, George Clapstow, who has uncovered the mystery of how he came to vanish from this world!"

Karen's heart rate was increasing as she read on. John Manley! Again. And what of Siete Vientos? Could this be the place she had only recently become aware of as a tourist attraction? She had seen a piece about a place of that name on a travel programme. She and Ken usually took their holidays in the north if she could persuade him to take time off work at all. Still she liked to watch travel programmes to imagine what it could be like and she had been struck by the beauty of Siete Vientos' filmed bay and had thought, momentarily, of the fun she might have if she were ever to go there.

As the afternoon merged inexorably into evening she read at a rapidly increasing speed, discovering through William Mallory's excited account, how the once proud town of Bahia de Sur had been overrun by the terrible privateers (before being reduced by its new military commander to a ruin of what it once was). And of how, in the midst of much destruction the pirate Manley had been put to death and his ghastly crew put to flight. She looked at her watch and realised, suddenly, how late it had become. Ken would be waiting for her, patient Ken, kind Ken, worrying, longing to get the supper started.

Perhaps that was the moment when the knowledge of her husband's ordinariness began to register insidiously in her consciousness. For without wishing it, she now felt the drag of his reliable presence pulling her away from a new world of

magic she was being invited to discover. Then she felt guilty because her husband would never keep her waiting without warning her that he was to be delayed. But the suburban comfort of their normal home was now being challenged by the rolling swell of the Pacific, the rumble of the past, the crack of musket shot, the shouts of victory and defeat, and by the journals of a flawed man she was beginning to like despite his awfulness, and whom she felt she could almost reach out and touch.

She looked at her watch again. Another twenty minutes would make no difference now. She supposed she would make it up to Ken somehow when she finally got home. She started to read again

Old Sir Eufemio, for thus we have christened him, is growing daily more comfortable in our presence and through him, the mood of the people has improved somewhat such that the locals they do acknowledge us with smiles when we pass upon the streets, and have even prepared for our company, yester evening, what they had supposed was a great feast, though I declare I have eaten better in the humblest of kitchens down by the dockside at home. Most pernicious is their habit of putting into their food small green vegetables looking most good to eat, yet when you put them into your mouth it is as if a thousand devils had assaulted your throat with burning coals. It makes your lips to be aflame, and every part of you, tongue, cheeks, the whole cavity of your head in great discomfort. Yet these 'chiles' as Sir Eufemio calls them, are here afforded no special mention, being a normal part of the diet. I can find no reason why this should be so, their effect upon me (as I did find out later, to my cost) being even more extreme upon leaving my body than when they did enter it.

But I am loathe to complain about the poor food we did eat there, since the preparation of the inhabitants here was most kindly meant, so that despite the heat of our faces and the sweat that poured from our brows, we did thank them most profusely.

At the meal's end I made to leave with some of our company who, having slaved all day in the business of our ship's repair were desirous of an early return to their bedding. But Sir Eufemio held onto my arm, he having taken a liking, so it seems, to me especially. And after taking more wine he started again to tell his stories of the history of the place, which do, from his mouth, become more fantastical with each telling. For now, as we sat in the balmy night with the stars of God's Heaven glittering bright against the darkness of the void above us, he did talk of a beautiful

girl, a virgin, the daughter of the governor of this place at that time, whose ruined palace I have already seen and commented upon in these pages, the inhabitants of which having but recently perished, it stands empty to the damage of nature with no one to care for it. And Sir Eufemio said that people had forgot this great beauty for some reason of her being a talisman for a better time, perhaps, who they had no wish of recalling for a memory of what they had lost, but that he held her image most dear, having once seen her pass him by at the water front and being overcome with her pulchritude. And that this same girl was the victim of an attempt upon her virtue and her very life, and of how she fought off a multitude of lascivious brigands set upon her ravishment, the same being Manley's pernicious crew, this being but one event in the disastrous arrival of the pirate upon these shores. But the same pure girl, her virgin honour intact, vanished during the battle that was raging, her whereabouts being never discovered after. And I do believe, Sir Eufemio said, that when she doth return, for return she will one day to this place (I give the tenor of his remarks only, being unable to reproduce his fractured grammar) she will save us from some wrong or she will restore Siete Vientos to its future glory. This I believe most fervently, but keep my belief to myself for fear of others' scorn.

I was touched by this, of his many stories the most sentimental he had yet put upon me. When, some minutes later, the old man fell into a doze at my side, I did leave him gently, and making my way back to the shore with the intention of rejoining our ship, I did come across a young woman of the place, and suffering from some delusion of the day's sun and the evening's wine, I did think her beautiful, like the young daughter of the old governor whom I had been taken with the idea of. And so I passed the night with this woman, the morning's light shewing me to have cruelly deceived myself, yet she was sweet and generous with her person, for which I did thank her most handsomely. And so to our ship and rest.

When Karen did finally get home, Ken was waiting impatiently, as she had expected. But it was not anger or frustration she saw on his face. Only the sympathy which he was so capable of giving. For when Karen had managed to clear her head of pirates and virgins, when William Mallory's ramblings had been temporarily banished from her awakened imagination, she was finally able to hear what Ken was saying; that Richard, poor dear brother Richard, was dead.