

SAMPLER

The Sorry Tale of the Mignonette

ALSO BY ANGELA GARDNER

Some Sketchy Notes on Matter (Recent Work Press, 2020)

The future, unimagine (chapbook, with Caren Florance, Recent Work Press, 2017)

The Told World (Shearsman Books, 2014)

Thing&Unthing (Vagabond Press, 2014)

Interference (chapbook, with Caren Florance, Ampersand Duck, 2014)

Of Sky (chapbook, Ampersand Duck, 2012)

Views of the Hudson (Shearsman Books, 2009)

The Twelve Labours (with Gwenn Tasker, lighttrappress, 2009)

The Night Ladder (with Lisa Pullen, lighttrappress, 2009)

Parts of Speech (University of Queensland Press, 2007)

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Angela Gardner

*The Sorry Tale
of the
Mignonette*

Shearsman Books

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Front and back cover from *A Sorry Tale* folio by Angela Gardner
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THROUGH THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL, ITS ARTS FUNDING AND ADVISORY BODY



*for my brothers and my sister
Richard, Peter and Jennie*

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the lights of the lamps
in the windows, call back the day and the dead that
have run away to sea

Dylan Thomas
Under Milk Wood

‘Cannibalism is both a terrible transgression and a
strange communion, a human body feeding and sus-
taining another body.’

Rebecca Solnit
The Faraway Nearby

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CAST

IN ENGLAND & AT SEA

SARAH PARKER cousin of Richard 'Boy' Parker
BOY / RICHARD PARKER Ship's Boy
DANIEL PARKER older brother of Richard
CAPTAIN TOM DUDLEY Captain of the racing yacht *Mignonette*
MATE EDWIN STEPHENS
ABLE SEAMAN NED BROOKS
PHILIPPA DUDLEY wife of Captain Dudley
JIMMY MORRISON and JOHN BURTON, Residents of Falmouth

AT THE TRIALS

SEARGEANT LAVERTY Falmouth Docks
ROBERT CHEESEMAN Collector of Customs Falmouth
SAMUEL JOHN LOUTTIT TRESILDER Clerk
ERICH WIESE German Sailor from the *Moctezuma*
RICHARD HODGE Licensed Waterman Falmouth
GUSTAVUS LOWRY COLLINS Trinity Pilot Falmouth
MR COLLINS FOR THE DEFENCE Barrister Old Bailey
JUDGE BARON JOHN WALTER HUDDLESTON
THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE
THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE'S ASSISTANT
THE JURY FOREMAN and JURY

IN AUSTRALIA

JACK WANT owner of the yacht *Mignonette*, Barrister and Politician
MARY DUDLEY Captain Dudley's Aunt
TOM DUDLEY'S YOUNG RELATIVE

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returned and put on trial*

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and Captain Dudley suffers an
unexpected fate in Sydney*

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Part the First

in which
the characters are introduced

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Thin shingle foreshore
between the Mead two buddleia acres
rotting with Bailiff's rent, ragwort
in pence, adding up to mere tidal shillings.
Boats hauled up onto the sloped hard
bass and grey mullet in the estuary
oyster dredgers in their punts
: the dead-end marsh, late our various industry.
Bounded boats to old Wharfs and drained
a broken pump makes-do, waters feeding
Smith's Mill from the Engine of the Solent.
Storms, tides and shipwrights. Quay and Yard
fishermen, heirs to stumps, nets and oars.

The marsh that lies behind liable
to be flooded and imperfectly drained.

Richard Parker has been in the shipyards since his parents died. Sarah, his cousin, lives in the middle of Back Lane, Itchen Ferry, where her father is a general dealer. It is a poor huddle of dwellings on the edge of the river mainly occupied by fishermen and their families. The Parkers are both seventeen with dark-hair and olive skin in a sea of Anglo-Saxon bloneness.

From where she stands Sarah can look across to the docks and shipyards of Southampton where Richard works at Fay's Yard, a smaller shipyard that specialises in building racing yachts. Her brother works as a plate-layer, building the new iron vessels. Before her on this side of the Itchen River: mud and industry, the timber pool, the slipways and the shipwright's yards, a new railway. The year is 1884.

RICHARD

I never saw the treasures you saw at school Sarah
I could never sit still but needed to be doing.

I want to sail the open promise of the world
to unfenced miles of silver wheat in waves
to a strange sun that streams its pan of gold
to a land that's filled with misfit creatures
and the coloured parrot birds

SARAH

All that's here is tidal salt
its furbelows and bladderwracks in gaps
of buddleia, dandelions and ragwort.

RICHARD

And what do I have? From Fay's Yard
past Millstone Point, between the Moulding Loft
and the Galvanising Works.

SARAH

Shards and discards, the make-dos and
the re-makes. On a dead-end broken road
strewn with the rotting and rusting.

RICHARD

Every day I walk past the open warehouse
and drying floors of Elliot Bros Lime, Brick, Tile & Slate
at Millbank Wharf Hooper and Co. Cement Works
and the petroleum tanks of Jasper Barringer & Sons.

SARAH

All I know of the world is contained
in a box the school mistress showed us.

RICHARD

Scattered oak, elm and beech, the stacks
of Baltic pine and Indian teak, the disused yard
with covered slip and empty launch-way.

SARAH

Gold-leaf & silkworm skeins, broken
cocoons coarse unstoppered. Grained.
Stained Flasks and clear bolls
reels and threads that pile glass, coin the wads
rope felt washed dark of wire, parchment
and motes, wax and silver bubble.

RICHARD

I want riffraff in horn hats and weskits.
Handsome skeletons in jade shoes
and Chinese fingerguards, painted elephants
and telescopes.

SARAH

More likely worsted dull and stiff
than polished plush.
Lustrous, the crystal world's flood fine ebb
ore sawn silver and twisted wool.

RICHARD

Truly Sarah I need more
than the Cement Works' metal crane

and the scrape from the sawpit and the slipway;
the Gasometers and the Coal Yards
the stacks of cement lathes on timber stages
the steam streaming from the joinery.

There's a shimmering land
and sails bound blue
and radiant. Do not tell

but I am to be ship's 'BOY'!

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LETTER TO CAPTAIN TOM DUDLEY
FROM HIS AUNT IN SYDNEY 14th March 1884

Such good news that you may come, I felt I must write immediately! We think it a grand plan. We long to see you and your family and being well established here in Redfern can help you settle. I send you some news from Australia: Edward Hanlan, the Canadian oarsman, has arrived here, while Miss Geneviève Ward, the English actress, has made her first appearance in Melbourne, apparently with remarkable success. The Government has commenced an inquiry into Sanitation in Sydney schools. Does Mrs Dudley intend to get work as a teacher when she arrives?

Captain Tom Dudley, red-headed and sturdy, a married man, an Essex man, is in his early thirties. He is God-fearing and tee-total, confident and sober. There has been not enough time for him to have received his aunt's letter. As is often the case their letters will cross in the post.

LETTER FROM CAPTAIN TOM DUDLEY
TO HIS AUNT IN SYDNEY 16th March 1884

Mr Jack Want from Sydney wishes me to sail his new purchased yacht *Mignonette* from Brightlingsea in Essex to Sydney. He is from there but has been sailing the season in England. The money he offers is generous and in truth I am tempted, but the vessel is old and I must engage the crew at my own expense. 52 foot in length and 12 in the beam, she was built by Aldous and her sails are Laphthorne, so that is good. Philippa is teaching in the local school and the children do well. In news from further afield I imagine you read that Major-General Gordon made an unsuccessful sortie from Khartoum, his force being routed and 200 killed while the remainder fled in disorder. It is a bad business.

Here is John Henry Want of Sydney, the registered managing owner.

JACK WANT

Harbour-side as a pirate bold
with pickled head I'll seize their hats
then battle brave in this Golden Age
I'll plunder and I'll pillage.

Good roguery, single-handedly

a Barrister-turned-Buccaneer
I have the greatest Want, with
polished pistol and my cutlass clean
I'll make 'em walk the plank!

MY MIGNONETTE

Port line gleaming
Her, upon delight, soft waves.
Her. Shelter of line gleaming. Her.
Mignonette. Lifting foam to the ! water !
and her pull on, thrusting
upon bright-work. I, she, resistance
: such spring of (old rails)
her line aswish delight. Stripped
feel her resistance.
Her a Her. Yawl I foam against
my giddy breath and soft she
launches great gleaming breaths.
She that swash sea foam her flanks offer
water wake water, wake up!
Streamlined every towards her silk
scantling water to a delight

prow you, resistance line towards yachts
tell the Oh! beauty Oh!
God dances water deck of breath
Oh and at a lifting the wake of when
Oh stiff Even her soft!
Waves towards sea water.
Shelter when Her silk! Wind of rails of hull
She's the prow line wind.
Silk resistance. Pull shipshape, my breath giddy
She takes! God! I clad starboard.
Mizzen, that is how wind awkwardly her.
She sails the sea. But the gleaming
Take of and Oh! Like a gleaming.
She's thrusting, when
against even silk starboard resistance
offers delight. Shipshape the rigged mast.
Oh ! prow. *Mignonette*, that God Willing, may bear
the spring of human life.

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THE SUMMER RACING SEASON ON SYDNEY HARBOUR

*no guns be fired
no hailing between yachts
no bells rung
no fireworks displayed*

At a signal in a single open line
the yachts sail both picturesque and beautiful.
We round a buoy to fly before the freshening wind
down harbour to the turning point. Through
Sow and Pigs reef, around Pinchgut
and the bombora or sunken reef off Dobroyd Point.

The sailors smart in a plain dress coat and fine waistcoat.
By Royal warrant trousers blue or white according to season
on the water with whatever sails the owners please.

Such a wealth of sailing to the day's finishing line:
there are dock owners
and doctors, directors of banks, of coal mines. Colonial
sugar refiners, successful city merchants, the secretaries
of Marine Assurance companies and barristers.
And for the winners a handsome purse.

On Anniversary Day and Hunters Hill Regattas members
are piped down to lunch and to fortify themselves below.
At Hunters Bay below the Nurses Cottage the boat crews
bathe naked. Seen through field glasses the ladies arrive
under steam and refreshments served with dancing.