



Sail Me Away Home

Ann Clare LeZotte

AUTHOR OF *Show Me a Sign* AND *Set Me Free*



Sail Me Away Home

Ann
Clare
LeZotte

SCHOLASTIC PRESS / NEW YORK

Text copyright © 2023 by Ann Clare LeZotte
Jacket illustrations copyright © 2023 by Julie Morstad
All rights reserved. Published by Scholastic Press, an imprint
of Scholastic Inc., *Publishers since 1920*. SCHOLASTIC,
SCHOLASTIC PRESS, and associated logos are trademarks and/or
registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not
assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or
their content.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a
retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means,
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or
otherwise, without written permission of the publisher. For
information regarding permission, write to Scholastic Inc.,
Attention: Permissions Department, 557 Broadway, New
York, NY 10012.

While inspired by real events and historical characters, this is
a work of fiction and does not claim to be historically accurate
or portray factual events or relationships. Please keep in mind
that references to actual persons, living or dead, business
establishments, events, or locales may not be factually
accurate, but rather fictionalized by the author.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Number:
2022044151

ISBN 978-1-338-74250-3

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 23 24 25 26 27

Printed in the U.S.A. 37

First edition, November 2023

Book design by Marijka Kostiw

WHEN I WAS YOUNG

I SEARCHED LIBRARY SHELVES

FOR STORIES ABOUT THE DEAF.

SIGNS OF OUR PAST AND WHAT

IT MEANT TO ME IN THE PRESENT.

FOR THOSE FOLLOWING

A SIMILAR JOURNEY—THIS

BOOK IS FOR YOU.

“In other times you wandered lost in the world . . .

Your joys and sorrows were locked in your hearts . . .

But now, what a change!

It has come to you because you have become a nation.”

—CLAUDIUS FORESTIER,

DEAF FRENCHMAN

Part One

America

This journal is to be returned to the family

of Mary Elizabeth Lambert, Chilmark, Massachusetts.

to be retrieved at a later date.

Her whereabouts are currently unknown.

Chapter

One

Honeybees are happily drowsing in blooms before returning to their hives. *A swarm of bees in June is worth a silver spoon.* We'll have stores of honey for winter. The plovers, with their orange beaks and black squiggles across their foreheads, are nesting contentedly on the beach.

Meanwhile I'm grounded, like a rusty anchor sunk in a seabed. Brightly colored fish swim quickly around it. An old humpback whale passes overhead. Looking down, the great beast admires the grappler's patience. The reliable metal is waiting for someone to haul it to the surface and take off full speed.

While the students practice their penmanship, some yawning or falling sideways in their seats, I shut my journal and wipe my brow. I rise and try to pry open a window painted shut in the Meeting House classroom. I'm careful not to cuss.

Townfolk believe if I could manage a child rendered feral by abuse on the mainland, I am a good

match for their offspring. Not all the school's teachers have been deaf but it's an advantage. Papa says my signing is most expressive.

Oh, I have tales to tell! But I'm relegated to the standard teachings dictated by our stuffy town council. If I had wind in my sails, I could push beyond them. I had such resolve when I last returned from the mainland, but without any new opportunities, it's dribbled away.

My encouraging mentor, Mrs. Pye, wasn't nearly as short-tempered as I am. I was her pupil in the traveling school that lands in Chilmark during the months when children unlace their boots and stare longingly out the windows.

They don't need me, I secretly think. I fold my skirt under me and sit at the desk. The students are mainly woolly-headed and meek like our sheep. They like to trick me but fortunately, not too often. No Wampanoag children are allowed here for learning, and I sneak in the three young Irish boys working at our farm when they show interest. I am determined to treat all—no matter their dress, parentage, or how many acres their family owns—as equal. But I long for a challenge,

someone to reach and be inspired by, like Beatrice.

She was my first pupil, the girl locked on the top floor of a well-respected manor outside of Boston. When we first met, she was filthy and seemingly without language. She frightened me. It wasn't because I didn't realize the deaf outside of my village—where a high percentage are born without hearing—were treated monstrously. I did. But before I saw her as her own person and learned her history, I viewed her as what I might have become if I had been born anywhere but Martha's Vineyard. The most important thing she showed me is that we needn't be exactly alike, even in communication, to understand and support each other. I don't use oral speech as she does, but we have much in common.

For a moment, Beatrice's name seems to linger in the air, written in the dust the children produce by happily banging their erasers to clean them. I hope she's at home with the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe on Cape Cod, not taken back to . . . *Stop fretting over what you cannot change!*

I'm broken from my reverie by movement in the classroom. The half dozen pupils all turn to look toward one of their own, puzzled.

Liam, a nephew of Papa's farmhand Eamon, is proving himself more observant than I first imagined. When he arrived with his brothers from County Galway, he would provoke me at every turn. He learned our island sign language easily as soon as he chose to, so quickly that I knew he'd been absorbing it all along.

He sits in the back and raises his arms to spell with both hands.

"Beltane," he signs. His dark eyes are mischievous.

Zounds! Just what the council warned me against. I imagine Reverend Lee shaking his head at the pulpit.

"May, last month," I sign, my hands turning back the invisible pages of a calendar. The other students look between us.

"No school before," he insists. "We celebrate now."

At the sign for "celebrate," the children put aside the slates I haven't yet checked and corrected. They jump up out of their boredom. I feel a stirring too. I'm sure Mrs. Pye would agree that it's the students who bring the lessons and an otherwise bare teaching space to life. Though I've been slack in my duties.

Can I teach what he's asking?

Chapter

Two

I march ahead of the children. Swinging arms and broadening smiles, they're glad to be outdoors. It was a short spring, and the heat is coming on.

Is someone behind that white oak watching us? I catch a glimpse of a figure, who appears distorted, like looking through a drinking glass. When I startle, the students look at me oddly. I gather myself and move forward. Such visions—bloodred and hard to shake—are a regular occurrence lately. Luckily, nature gives me succor and often sweeps them away.

We walk under the shade of trees. Our path has not lately been trod but is safe from nettles and other stings. I turn back to clap, waving my hands over my head, and make sure they're all following.

We reach a field behind Mr. Butler's property. I can't remember if it has a name, but it's large enough to have celebrated May Day in times of old. In all my life, I've never seen a colorful pole here, with villagers dancing around it.

I begin my ancient history lesson. “During the Roman Republic, a festival was held every year. It was a celebration of the coming summer. The Latin poet Ovid reports goats and hares were released as part of the festivities.”

“What sort of festivities?” Liam asks, smirking.

“Paganism,” I sign grimly, determined to ruin his fun.

The other children look at one another with wide eyes and gaping mouths when I make the sign of a wild goat man. I have only ever used it with my childhood best friend, Nancy, never in polite society. It’s made by indicating a beard with your fist on your chin, and then two fingers as horns on your forehead. It’s best (or worst!) if you include a rude sneer.

They will likely tell their parents, but I can say it was a warning against activities opposed to the church’s teachings.

That is, if Liam is content to let it go.

He stands back to give room for his storytelling. “Bonfires are lit in Ireland and cattle driven between them to protect them from disease.”

I'm beguiled by this information. I'll add it to my written record of our town. But I must keep the promises I made.

"We don't speak of those things here," I reprimand him. "They are against God."

As if he were staring at those dancing flames, he continues, speaking without signing.

"Beannaich, a Thrianailt fhioir nach gann."

"What did he say?" I ask a girl named Caroline.

"I don't know, miss," she signs. "It's a language I've never heard."

Liam signs and speaks: "There is another god called Bel!"

At this, several children shriek and look much disturbed. Caroline takes my hand, and her younger sister, Kate, clutches my skirt.

I grab Liam's arm and shake him, signing with my other hand. "You little devil, you!"

He wriggles free and begins to dance skillfully on bent legs.

"Let's all be goats!" he signs. He twirls off in the field's waving grass.

I do the only thing a teacher can under the

circumstances. I laugh, clutching the stays at my side with one hand and slapping my knee with the other.

Even little Kate, who has tears in her eyes, smiles to see me so gay. Have I been such a scold lately?

Michael, a cousin of my former schoolmate Sarah Hillman, decides to follow Liam's example. He doesn't have the same grace or slyness, but he's expressing himself.

"I want to be a hare!" Caroline signs in a flurry. She jumps rabbitlike, straying farther from our path. Kate toddles behind, skipping as best she can.

I won't dizzy whoop among them. But my heart feels free, and I wait to gather them. Too long I wait. We are seen.

ORDER YOUR COPY!

