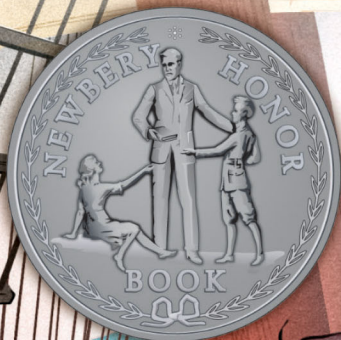




the TRUE

CONFESSIONS OF

CHARLOTTE DOYLE



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*The True
Confessions
of
Charlotte Doyle*

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Who Was That Masked Man, Anyway?

PREFACE

Every book has its own history. With *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*, I can trace its genealogy very clearly. I had been living in Los Angeles, California, when life took me across the country to Providence, Rhode Island. It was like going back in time: from a sprawling, modern, west-coast city to the compact, antique, east-coast town.

The house I came to live in was quite old enough to make me wonder about the many people who had lived there. I also wondered if there might be a surviving ghost or two. Out of those speculations came the book *Something Upstairs*. It's a story about history, with much to do about a ghost and time travel.

When I first wrote the book, Kenny, the main character in the story, time traveled to different moments in Providence history in order to solve a crime. When I rewrote the book, Kenny went back to only one point in time. But during one of the time trips he made in that first version, there was a visit with Edgar Allan Poe. Poe not only had a connection with Providence; he was the man who invented mystery stories.

Writing about Poe intrigued me so much that I set out to write a book about him: *The Man Who Was Poe*. A detective tale set in Providence, Poe tries to help a boy find his lost sister even as he plots a new story of his own.

Since Poe had invented the mystery story, I gave much thought to the form. One of his early mysteries came to be called a "locked-room mystery" — that is, something happens in a room which appears to have no entrances or exits.

One day, as I was thinking about this, it occurred to me that there could hardly be more of a locked room than a ship at sea. Why not — I asked myself — write a mystery on a ship?

That decision is recorded right in the middle of *The Man Who Was Poe*. In Chapter 14, an old sea captain is talking to the boy hero of the book. He says, “Now, Master Edmund, if you’ve time to hear a good yarn, I’ve one for you. You see, *The Lady Liberty* had a sister ship. *Seahawk*, her name was —”

That was the moment I began to think out *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*. And while I don’t think of the book as a mystery, there are certainly mysterious parts to the story.

The book has proved to be very popular — so popular I have been asked to write a sequel many times. I won’t. Here’s why:

In the course of the story, Charlotte learns to think for herself, to choose her own destiny. I like to think that unfolding openness is a key part of the tale.

My writer’s job was to set Charlotte on her life’s voyage. I say, may she be given a different life by everyone who has taken her to heart. And may each reader go forth with her.

AVI
September 2002

AN IMPORTANT WARNING

NOT EVERY THIRTEEN-YEAR-OLD GIRL IS ACCUSED OF MURDER, brought to trial, and found guilty. But I was just such a girl, and my story is worth relating even if it did happen years ago. Be warned, however, this is no *Story of a Bad Boy*, no *What Katy Did*. If strong ideas and action offend you, read no more. Find another companion to share your idle hours. For my part I intend to tell the truth as *I* lived it.

But before I begin relating what happened, you must know something about me as I was in the year 1832—when these events transpired. At the time my name *was* Charlotte Doyle. And though I have kept the name, I am not—for reasons you will soon discover—the *same* Charlotte Doyle.

How shall I describe the person I once was? At the age of thirteen I was very much a girl, having not yet begun to take the shape, much less the heart, of a woman. Still, my family dressed me as a young woman, bonnet covering my beautiful hair, full skirts, high button shoes, and, you may be sure, white gloves. I certainly wanted to be a *lady*. It was not just my ambition; it was my destiny. I embraced it wholly, gladly, with not an untoward thought of anything else. In other words, I think that at the time of these events I was not anything more or less than what I appeared to be: an acceptable, ordinary girl of parents in good standing.

Though American born, I spent the years between my sixth and thirteenth birthdays in England. My father, who engaged in the manufacture of cotton goods, func-

tioned as an agent for an American business there. But in the early spring of 1832, he received an advancement and was summoned home.

My father, an ardent believer in regularity and order, decided it would be better if I finished out my school term rather than break it off midyear. My mother—whom I never knew to disagree with him—accepted my father's decision. I would follow my parents, as well as my younger brother and sister, to our true home, which was in Providence, Rhode Island.

Lest you think that my parents' judgment was rash in allowing me to travel without them, I will show you how reasonable, even logical, their decision was.

First, they felt that by my remaining a boarder at the Barrington School for Better Girls (Miss Weed, eminent and most proper headmistress) I would lose no school time.

Second, I would be crossing the Atlantic—a trip that could last anywhere from one to two months—during the summer, when no formal education took place.

Third, I was to make my voyage upon a ship owned and operated by my father's firm.

Fourth, the captain of this ship had acquired a reputation—so my father informed me—for quick and profitable Atlantic crossings.

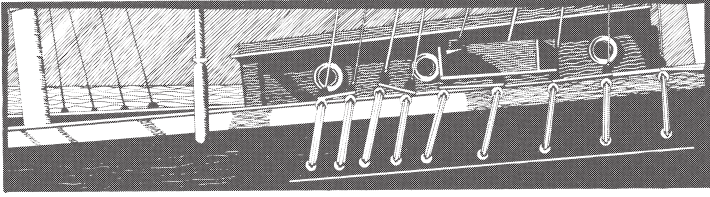
Then there was this: two families known to my parents had also booked passage on the ship. The adults had promised to function as my guardians. Having been told only that these families included children (three lovely girls and a charming boy) I had looked forward to meeting them more than anything else.

So when you consider that I had but dim memories of making the crossing to England when I was six, you will understand that I saw the forthcoming voyage as all a

lark. A large, beautiful boat! Jolly sailors! No school to think about! Companions of my own age!

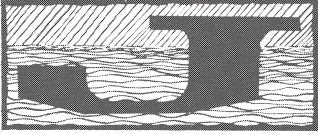
One more point. I was given a volume of blank pages—how typical of my father!—and instructed to keep a daily journal of my voyage across the ocean so that the writing of it should prove of educational value to me. Indeed, my father warned me that not only would he read the journal and comment upon it, but he would pay particular attention to spelling—not my strongest suit.

Keeping that journal then is what enables me to relate now in perfect detail everything that transpired during that fateful voyage across the Atlantic Ocean in the summer of 1832.



Part One

CHAPTER · ONE



UST BEFORE DUSK IN THE LATE AFTERNOON OF JUNE 16, 1832, I FOUND MYSELF WALKING along the crowded docks of Liverpool, England, following a man by the name of Grummage. Though a business associate of my father, Mr. Grummage was, like my father, a gentleman. It was he my father delegated to make the final arrangements for my passage to America. He was also to meet me when I came down from school on the coach, then see me safely stowed aboard the ship that my father had previously selected.

Mr. Grummage was dressed in a black frock coat with a stove pipe hat that added to his considerable height. His somber, sallow face registered no emotion. His eyes might have been those of a dead fish.

“Miss Doyle?” he said as I stepped from the Liverpool coach.

“Yes, sir. Are you Mr. Grummage?”

“I am.”

“Pleased to meet you,” I said, dipping a curtsy.

“Quite,” he returned. “Now, Miss Doyle, if you would be so good as to indicate which is your trunk, I have a man here to carry it. Next, please oblige me by following, and everything shall be as it is meant to be.”

“Might I say good-bye to my chaperon?”

“Is that necessary?”

“She’s been very kind.”

“Make haste then.”

In a flutter of nervousness I identified my trunk, threw my arms about Miss Emerson (my sweet companion for the trip down), and bid her a tearful farewell. Then I rushed after Mr. Grummage, who had already begun to move on. A rough-looking porter, laboring behind, carried my trunk upon his back.

Our little parade reached dockside in good order. There I became instantly agog at the mass of ships that lay before us, masts and spars thick as the bristles on a brush. Everywhere I looked I saw mountains of rare goods piled high. Bales of silk and tobacco! Chests of tea! A parrot! A monkey! Oh yes, the smell of the sea was intoxicating to one who knew little more than the smell of the trim cut lawns and the fields of the Barrington School. Then too, the surging crowds of workers, sailors, and merchants—all rough-hewn, brawny men—created an exotic late afternoon hubbub. All in all it was a most delicious chaos, which, while mildly menacing, was no less exciting because of that. Indeed, in some vague way I had the feeling that it was all there for me.

“Mr. Grummage, sir,” I called over the din. “What is the *name* of the ship I’m to sail on?”

Mr. Grummage paused briefly to look at me as though surprised I was there, to say nothing of asking a question. Then from one of his pockets he drew a screw of paper. Squinting at it he pronounced, “The *Seahawk*.”

“Is she British or American?”

“American.”

“A merchant ship?”

“To be sure.”

“How many masts?”

“I don’t know.”

“Will the other families already be on board?”

"I should think so," he answered, exasperation in his voice. "For your information, Miss Doyle, I received word that departure was being put off, but when I checked with the captain directly he informed me that there must have been some misunderstanding. The ship is scheduled to leave with the first tide tomorrow morning. So there can be *no* delay."

To prove the point he turned to move again. I, however, unable to quell my excited curiosity, managed to slip in one more question.

"Mr. Grummage, sir, what is the *captain's* name?"

Mr. Grummage stopped again, frowning in an irritated fashion, but all the same consulted his paper. "Captain Jaggery," he announced and once more turned to go.

"Here!" the porter exclaimed suddenly. He had come up close and overheard our talk. Both Mr. Grummage and I looked about.

"Did you say Captain *Jaggery*?" the porter demanded.

"Are you addressing me?" Mr. Grummage inquired, making it perfectly clear that if so, the porter had committed a serious breach of decorum.

"I was," the man said, talking over my head. "And I'm asking if I heard right when you said we was going to a ship mastered by a certain Captain *Jaggery*." He spoke the name Jaggery as if it were something positively loathsome.

"I was not addressing you," Mr. Grummage informed the man.

"But I hears you all the same," the porter went on, and so saying, he swung my trunk down upon the dock with such a ferocious crack that I feared it would snap in two. "I don't intend to take one more step toward anything to do with a Mr. *Jaggery*. Not for double gold. Not one more step."

"See here," Mr. Grummage cried with indignation. "You undertook . . ."

"Never mind what I undertook," the man retorted. "It's worth more to me to avoid that man than to close with your coin." And without another word he marched off.

"Stop! I say, stop!" Mr. Grummage called. It was in vain. The porter had gone, and quickly at that.

Mr. Grummage and I looked at each another. I hardly knew what to make of it. Nor, clearly, did he. Yet he did what he had to do: he surveyed the area in search of a replacement.

"There! You man!" he cried to the first who passed by, a huge laboring fellow in a smock. "Here's a shilling if you can carry this young lady's trunk!"

The man paused, looked at Mr. Grummage, at me, at the trunk. "That?" he asked disdainfully.

"I'll be happy to add a second shilling," I volunteered, thinking that a low offer was the problem.

"Miss Doyle," Mr. Grummage snapped. "Let me handle this."

"Two shillings," the workman said quickly.

"One," Mr. Grummage countered.

"Two," the workman repeated and held his hand out to Mr. Grummage, who gave him but one coin. Then the man turned and extended his hand to me.

Hastily, I began to extract a coin from my reticule.

"Miss Doyle!" Mr. Grummage objected.

"I did promise," I whispered and dropped the coin into the man's upturned palm.

"Right you are, miss," said the porter with a tip of his hat. "May the whole world follow your fashion."

This commendation of my principles of moral goodness brought a blush of pleasure that I could hardly sup-

press. As for Mr. Grummage, he made a point of clearing his throat to indicate disapproval.

“Now then,” the porter asked, “where does the young lady require this?”

“Never mind where!” Mr. Grummage snapped. “Along the docks here. I’ll tell you when we arrive.”

The money pocketed, the man lumbered over to my trunk, swung it to his shoulder with astonishing ease—considering the trunk’s weight and size—and said, “Lead on.”

Mr. Grummage, wasting no more time, and perhaps fearful of the consequence of more talk, started off again.

After guiding us through a maze of docks and quays, he came to a stop. With a half turn he announced, “There she sits,” and gestured to a ship moored to the slip before us.

I had hardly looked where he pointed when I heard a thump behind. Startled, I turned and saw that the new man—the one we’d just engaged—had taken one look at the *Seahawk*, set down my trunk in haste, and, like the first, run off without any word of explanation at all.

Mr. Grummage barely glanced over his shoulder at the hastily departing worker. In exasperation he said, “Miss Doyle, you will wait for me here.” And with rapid strides he took himself up the gangplank and onto the *Seahawk* where he disappeared from my view.

I stood my place, more than ever wanting to get aboard and meet the delightful children who would be my traveling companions. But as I waited on the dock for something like half an hour—all but unmoving in the waning light of day—I could only gaze upon the ship.

To say that I was unduly alarmed when I examined the *Seahawk* would be nonsense. I had not the remotest superstitious notion of what was to come. Nothing of the

kind. No, the *Seahawk* was a ship like countless others I had seen before or for that matter have seen since. Oh, perhaps she was smaller and older than I had anticipated, but nothing else. Moored to the dock, she rode the swell easily. Her standard rigging, tarred black for protection against the salt sea, rose above me, dark ladders to an increasingly dark sky, and indeed, her royal yard seemed lost in the lowering night.* Her sails, tied up, that is, reefed, looked like sleeves of new-fallen snow on lofty trees.

Briefly, the *Seahawk* was what is known as a brig, a two-masted ship (with a snow mast behind the main), perhaps some seven hundred tons in weight, 107 feet stern to bow, 130 feet deck to mainmast cap. She was built, perhaps, in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. Her hull was painted black, her bulwarks white, these being the ordinary colors. Her two masts, raked slightly back, were square-rigged. She had a bowsprit too, one that stood out from her bow like a unicorn's horn.

Indeed, the one unique aspect of this ship was a carved figurehead of a pale white seahawk beneath the bowsprit. Its wings were thrust back against the bow; its head extended forward, beak wide-open, red tongue protruding as if screaming. In the shadowy light that twisted and distorted its features I was struck by the notion that this

*I shall of necessity use certain words during my account that might not be readily familiar—such as *rigging*, *royal yard*, or *reefed*. They were not words I knew when I first came to the ship, but rather terms I learned in the course of my voyage. Since many people today have no such knowledge, I have included a diagram of the *Seahawk* in the appendix at the end of this account. You may consult it from time to time so as to better understand what I refer to. The diagram will, as well, spare me unnecessary explanations and speed my narrative.

Regarding time aboard a ship, a fuller explanation may also be found in the appendix.

figure looked more like an angry, avenging angel than a docile bird.

The dockside was deserted and growing darker. I felt like taking myself up the gangplank in search of Mr. Grummage. But, alas, my good manners prevailed. I remained where I was, standing in a dreamlike state, thinking I know not what.

But gradually—like a telescope being focused—I began to realize I was watching something clinging to one of the mooring ropes on the ship's stern. It reminded me of a picture I once had seen of a sloth, an animal that hangs upside down upon jungle vines. But this—I gradually perceived—was a man. He appeared to be shimmying himself from the dock up to the *Seahawk*. Even as I realized what I was seeing, he boarded the ship and was gone.

I had no time to absorb that vision before I heard angry voices. Turning, I saw Mr. Grummage appear at the topgallant rail, engaged in an argument with someone I could not see. My gentleman repeatedly looked down at me, and, so I thought, gesticulated in my direction as if I were the subject of a heated discussion.

At last Mr. Grummage came down to the dock. As he drew near I saw that his face was flushed, with an angry eye that alarmed me.

“Is something amiss?” I asked in a whisper.

“Not at all!” he snapped. “All is as planned. You have been expected. The ship's cargo is loaded. The captain is ready to sail. But . . .” He trailed off, looked back at the ship, then turned again to me. “It's just that . . . You see, those two families, the ones you would be traveling with, your companions . . . they have not arrived.”

“But they will,” I said, trying to compose myself.

"That's not entirely certain," Mr. Grummage allowed. "The second mate informs me that one family sent word that they could not reach Liverpool in time. The other family has a seriously ill child. There is concern that she should not be moved." Again Mr. Grummage glanced over his shoulder at the *Seahawk* as if, in some fashion, these events were the ship's fault.

Turning back to me, he continued. "As it stands, Captain Jaggery will accept no delay of departure. Quite proper. He has his orders."

"But Mr. Grummage, sir," I asked in dismay, "what shall I do?"

"Do? Miss Doyle, your father left orders that you were to travel on *this* ship at *this* time. I've very specific, *written* orders in that regard. He left no money to arrange otherwise. As for myself," he said, "I'm off for Scotland tonight on pressing business."

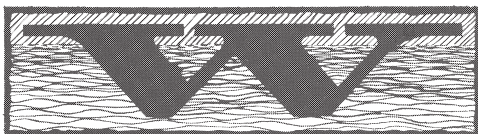
"But surely," I cried, frustrated by the way Mr. Grummage was talking as much as by his news, "surely I mustn't travel alone!"

"Miss Doyle," he returned, "being upon a ship with the full complement of captain and crew could hardly be construed as traveling *alone*."

"But . . . but that would be all *men*, Mr. Grummage! And . . . I am a girl. It would be *wrong*!" I cried, in absolute confidence that I was echoing the beliefs of my beloved parents.

Mr. Grummage drew himself up. "Miss Doyle," he said loftily, "in *my* world, judgments as to rights and wrongs are left to my Creator, *not* to children. Now, be so good as to board the *Seahawk*. At once!"

CHAPTER · TWO



WITH MR. GRUM-
MAGE LEADING
THE WAY I
STEPPED FI-

nally, hesitantly, upon the deck of the *Seahawk*. A man was waiting for us.

He was a small man—most seafaring men are small—barely taller than I and dressed in a frayed green jacket over a white shirt that was none too clean. His complexion was weathered dark, his chin ill-shaven. His mouth was unsmiling. His fingers fidgeted and his feet shuffled. His darting, unfocused eyes, set deep in a narrow ferretlike face, gave the impression of one who is constantly on watch for threats that might appear from any quarter at any moment.

“Miss Doyle,” Mr. Grummage intoned by way of introduction, “both Captain Jaggery and the first mate are ashore. May I present the second mate, Mr. Keetch.”

“Miss Doyle,” this Mr. Keetch said to me, speaking in an unnecessarily loud voice, “since Captain Jaggery isn’t aboard I’ve no choice but to stand in his place. But it’s my strong opinion, miss, that you should take another ship for your passage to America.”

“And I,” Mr. Grummage cut in before I could respond, “can allow of no such thing!”

This was hardly the welcome I had expected.

“But Mr. Grummage,” I said, “I’m sure my father would not want me to be traveling without—”