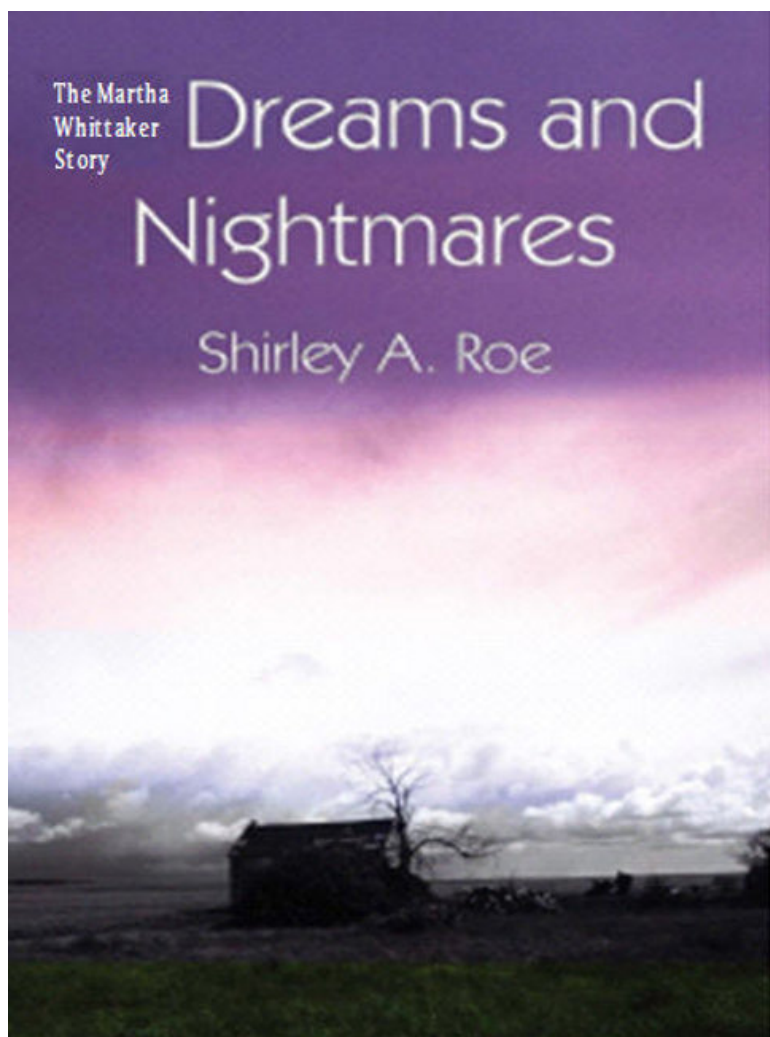


The Martha  
Whittaker  
Story

# Dreams and Nightmares

Shirley A. Roe



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## ***Dedication***

*This book is dedicated to my family: Jim, James, Kelly and  
Laura  
for whom I am eternally grateful.*

*A special note to Haley, Shyanne, Erik, Zack,  
John and Angela:  
“Never stop believing in magic.”*

***There is in every true woman's heart a spark of heavenly fire,  
which lies dormant in the broad daylight of prosperity; but which  
kindles up, and beams and blazes in the dark hour of adversity.  
Washington Irving (1783-1859, American Writer)***

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, establishments, places and incidents are either a product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead is entirely coincidental.

Actual places and historical references have been used only in order to place the location and timeline. Any interaction of the fictitious characters in these places or these actual events is pure fantasy.

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## *Chapter One - Graystone Manor*

A gentle dusting of snow settled on her purple cape as Martha's carriage approached the manor house. She adjusted the wool tartan blanket around her legs, feeling quite warm in spite of the late night chill. The horses' hooves made a steady clopping sound as they contacted the frozen ground. The air was crisp and cold.

"Going to be a cold night, Miss," stuttered Clyde, the hunched wrinkled coachman, snowflakes alighting on his hat and shoulders. "Reminds me of the night you and that young scallywag, Austin Wells took off when you was twelve to spy on the folks at that fancy ball."

"Oh Clyde, I'd almost forgotten that night. There we were, peeking in the windows listening to the wonderful music, totally lost in our own enjoyment. It was a cold, snowy night just like this but Austin and I hardly noticed. Father was very upset, however it was worth the punishment." Martha smiled as her thoughts returned to that night long ago. The entire staff had been out searching for her and Austin. They sat transfixed by the music, the dancing and the beautifully clad guests attending the Gala event of the year. She and Austin had been on many exciting adventures together as children, many of them ending with stern punishment.

"Your father has had quite the time with you Miss, but he always seems to get his way in the end." Clyde gently reined the two large horses in the desired direction. The hot air from their nostrils created a misty fog around their proud equine heads; a blanket of snow covered their dappled backs.

"Yes, he always does but I certainly put up a good fight, don't I Clyde?" Martha, grinning impishly, reached up and caught several white fluffy snowflakes in her gloved hand.

“Yes, you sure do Miss, you surely do. Ah, here we are.” The carriage slowed in front of the large and stately house. The imposing front of a solid stone mansion with three stories bearing twenty shuttered windows, greeted the carriage as it came to rest. The soft amber glow from the windows promised a warm and cheery welcome.

“It is cold indeed Clyde and I’m glad to be home. You know I have lived in this house all of my eighteen years and I never fail to be impressed at the sight of it. Good night, Clyde.”

“Good night, Miss.”

Martha bundled herself into her cape as the carriage stopped at the steps leading to the solid oak double doors. Slowly, she ascended the stairs taking in the beauty of the ice sparkling like jewels on the trees and the soft white snowflakes blanketing the manicured lawns. Graystone Manor, a majestic home built by Martha’s grandfather William McGuire fifty years before. The house and grounds had been maintained much the same as her grandmother, Anna had designed them so many years ago. Large hedges of Holly and Rhododendron lined the drive and majestic trees were spotted throughout the formal gardens. The ice and snow transformed the gardens into a magical, bejeweled world that Martha viewed with childlike appreciation.

Entering the enormous hallway, she deposited her snowy cape and bonnet on the mahogany bench. She shook her long, thick chestnut hair causing tiny droplets of water to fly in every direction, then immediately smoothed her long locks as she stared at her reflection in the gilded mirror. Moving silently with soft ladylike steps, her floor length gown brushed the polished wooden floors as she walked. As she reached the arch to the great room, loud voices could be heard from the study at the end of the hallway. She paused and listened, resting her hand on the

polished dark mahogany trim as she cocked her head towards the study.

Martha recognized her father's raised voice and as past experience dictated, decided to go straight to her room. Martha's father, John McGuire was a well-respected and successful businessman. At the moment, he was obviously in a heated argument with one of his business associates. She knew that it was best not to interrupt; she had simply wanted to say good night. As she proceeded up the grand staircase she overheard her father say that the money would be available in a fortnight and that he would make the other arrangements as soon as possible. Martha thought he sounded strained and wondered, *Who is he talking to?*

"Money, other arrangements? Odd." she spoke aloud while quietly opening the door to her bedchamber.

Martha loved this room. The soft, burgundy velvet chaise, the delicate French lace curtains and her huge canopy bed made a striking impression, that always reminded her of her mother. Lillian McGuire passed away when Martha was twelve. Burgundy had been her mother's favorite color and the room had not been changed in all these years. She automatically picked up her mother's crystal perfume decanter, removing the lid and sniffing deeply. The scent of summer roses filled her nostrils. How she missed her mother and her wonderful sense of humor. Martha could almost hear her tinkling laughter as she envisioned her smiling face. Perpetually happy was the way Martha remembered her. Her eyes moved to the portrait of her mother that hung over her bed. Her father had argued long and hard about moving it from the great room to its present location above her bed. That was one argument Martha had won and the portrait was her most valued possession. People that had known her mother said that she looked very much like her, with her round face, chestnut hair and deep, sky blue eyes. Her stubborn nature and tall stature apparently came from John McGuire. Her father

had been very good to her and gave her anything she wanted: excellent tutors, piano lessons and beautiful clothes. There was even a full stable of horses, although she was never fond of riding and could remember several heated arguments with her father about her lack of interest. Father loved the hunt and the horses but Martha had no inclination to learn to jump or any interest in animals of any kind. Yes, her Father was good to her, but her need for her mother was intense. How her mother would have loved discussing the upcoming Gala ball, the guests and the beautiful gowns they would wear. It was the time of her life when she had many questions of love and desire that only a mother could answer. She appreciated dear Emma, who did her best but it just wasn't the same.

After hanging her clothes carefully in the near to overflowing wardrobe and washing her face, she climbed into bed. Clothes were foremost in Martha's mind at the moment. She was looking forward to tomorrow when she would be fitted for her new gown for the upcoming spring Gala. She fell asleep with visions of designer gowns dancing in her head.

The next morning Martha entered the dining room after stopping at the mirror to smooth her hair into place. Her father was seated in his usual chair at the head of the long dining table. Emma the cook, large and rotund, served the tea and greeted Martha with a wide grin. Her gray eyes twinkled at the sight of this impetuous young woman. Emma was as close to a mother as anyone could be to Martha, but she was still a servant, and certain lines could not be crossed. Often, more through sheer boredom than a genuine desire to help or learn, Martha would wander into the warm, cheery kitchen and watch Emma bake the delicious pastries and cakes that she was famous for in Northumberland. Many of the aristocratic ladies of the town would vie for the right to borrow Emma when a large gathering was planned. Although parties, ball gowns and

afternoon teas were the prime interests in Martha's life, Emma persisted in tutoring her in the duties of a mistress of the manor. In spite of herself, Martha could produce a decent pie and did learn the basics of running a household. Emma told her she would soon be able to perform her duties as Mistress of the house and govern the staff with some degree of authority and skill. Martha did not relish the idea of doing anything so mundane.

"Good morning Father, you are looking well this morning." She placed a kiss upon his cheek and thought to herself that his gray hair and slim build made him a very handsome man in spite of his 60 years. Martha inhaled deeply; the delicious, sweet scent of apples and cinnamon filled the room. "Good morning Emma, I see you have made my favorite apple muffins." Martha pecked the cook's chubby red cheek before taking her seat.

The dining room was large and many portraits of the McGuire ancestors decorated the walls. The portrait of John McGuire, recently finished, hung over the fireplace; replacing the relocated portrait of Lillian. The dining table held many happy memories of the days when Lillian McGuire had hosted her elegant dinner parties, seating as many as twenty guests. The silver tea service glistened thanks to Emma's loving hands. Emma always made sure the table was set with fine bone china and silver cutlery. Crystal water goblets sparkled in the morning sun.

"Martha good, I have something very important to discuss with you this morning," John replied looking very somber. He stopped eating and placed his fork and knife on the table. Emma, noticing the seriousness of John McGuire's expression, finished serving and left the room. Not being as intuitive as Emma, the immature Martha did not notice her father's somber mood and chattered incessantly.

"Oh, I hope the invitation has arrived for the Gala ball. I'm so looking forward to it. As a matter of fact,

Charles Worth is arriving today for a final fitting. I just love his gowns and I know mine will be the loveliest at the ball. I have chosen a deep burgundy taffeta that I know Mother would have loved.” Martha chattered as she lifted her delicate china teacup, the warm scent of tea and lemons filling her nostrils. She broke a section from her apple muffin with her other hand. “I only wish Austin were here to escort me, he is my best friend in all the world.”

“There will be no Gala ball for you this year Martha, you are to be married to Jebediah Whittaker in a fortnight.” John raised his voice, interrupting Martha in mid sentence.

“Father, you are joking. But what kind of a silly thought has entered your head. I have no intention of marrying anyone right now. Besides Jebediah Whittaker has three children and is much too old for me.” Martha stopped sipping her tea and stared over the rim of the cup at her father in disbelief. As an afterthought she added, “Plus he is a pompous ass!”

“Martha, do not use that stable language in this house and I’m not joking. You are eighteen years old and he has requested your hand in marriage. I have given my word and you will do as I say.” Angered by her reaction, John McGuire slammed his fist on the table sending the cutlery flying in all directions. Water flowed down the side of the teetering crystal goblet.

“No. I won’t do it, I won’t. I will go to the Ball and I’ll not marry anyone.” Martha screeched at her father, bounding from her chair. She ran from the room as her mother’s fine china teacup hit the floor, shattering into a dozen pieces.

She avoided her father for the rest of the day. Martha convinced herself that he would change his mind. She would argue with him until he gave in. The tutor arrived for her piano lessons but her mind was elsewhere. She was angry that her father had cancelled her fitting with

Charles Worth, who was becoming a very famous designer in England and it was difficult to reschedule. She played the piano mechanically, an angry pout on her face. Her fingers pounded the keys, taking her anger out on the ivory black and whites. *I won't do it, I won't.* Sensing her distraction and realizing he was wasting his time, the tutor packed up his things and left. Relieved to be rid of him, Martha stacked up her music sheets and returned them to the cabinet next to the piano. She paused in front of the hall mirror, primping and patting her soft hair into place before attempting to return to her room unnoticed. Ascending the staircase, she found herself face to face with her father. Martha immediately launched into her rehearsed debate but John McGuire was having none of it. "Martha, this time there will be no discussion. You will marry Jebediah Whittaker and that is that." He continued down the stairs leaving her staring after him in shocked silence.

Later that night, cheeks stained with tears, a fearful Martha plotted to leave the house in the middle of the night and run off to Aunt Phoebe's in London. She had given a note for Phoebe to Clyde who was traveling to London in the next few days. Lying on her bed, the soft velvet of the duvet offering no comfort, Martha stared at the portrait begging her mother for guidance. She had to think, she must plan to leave in the next few days. The very thought of marrying anyone at this wonderful time of parties and grand balls was one thing but Jebediah Whittaker, well that was out of the question. Having attended several operas and gala balls, always escorted by handsome young gentlemen, her future was just beginning. Even her dear childhood friend, Austin Wells, escorted her on visits home from college and life was blossoming for her. Jebediah Whittaker was more than ten years her senior, with thinning dark hair, deep-set eyes and a long pointy nose on his gaunt face. Her impression of the scowling widower, on the few occasions they had been in the same company was that he

was abrupt and a loner. Martha paced the room; frustrated and angry she threw her silver hand mirror against the wall, where it shattered into hundreds of pieces.

Shocked at her own unladylike behavior, she settled on the bed. Even in this time of crisis, years of tutoring and instruction won out. She struggled to regain the air of sophistication and refinement that she had been taught. She hugged the pillow to her ample breast, long legs tight to her body and rocked on the bed in frustration. What could her father be thinking? Clyde's remark echoed in her head "*Your father has had quite the time with you Miss, but he always seems to get his way in the end.*" She mustn't let him win this time, she must think of something. She didn't want to marry anyone, let alone such an unappealing stranger. The fact that he had three children made matters even worse. *Imagine me with someone else's three children, preposterous!* She scoffed at the thought, knowing she was fond of neither children nor animals.

Martha's head was spinning with dread and thoughts of escape when hours later, she finally fell asleep. She tossed and turned on her damp pillow. She dreamt that she was running and running, a menacing, faceless figure in close pursuit. The faster she ran, the closer the dark figure followed. Terrified she ran on, her feet felt like lead; fear filled her very soul. Her body thrashed on the bed, blankets scattering with each anxious, frightened movement. The dark, nightmarish figure growing ever closer descending like death itself. She screamed, calling to her mother to help her; but to no avail, in her heart she knew there was no escape.

## *Chapter Two - Sea Voyage*

How naive Martha must have been, plotting to steal away to Aunt Phoebe in the night. Did she really think that her father would not discover her plans and force her to marry Jebediah?

“Dearly beloved, we are gathered together in the presence of God, to join this man and woman in holy matrimony.” The somber elderly reverend slowly spoke the words that she dreaded to hear. She saw the bible shaking slightly in his wrinkled hands as she stared at the floor. *Oh God, don't let this be happening. Let this be a nightmare that I will wake up from.* Her hands clasped tightly in front of her, she squeezed her eyes shut and willed herself to wake up.

The marriage took place in the great room of Graystone with only four sullen people, John McGuire, Martha's determined father, Emma the cook, the smirking widower, Jebediah Whittaker and a very angry Martha. In spite of all her tantrums, all of her tears, Martha became Mrs. Jebediah Whittaker on that fateful day. After the wedding vows were complete, a greatly distressed Martha ran up to her room where she promptly locked the door and remained until the next day. Jebediah returned to his home, seemingly undisturbed by his new wife's obvious rejection.

Emma sat in the kitchen where she contemplated Martha's bleak future. Emma loved Martha as if she were her own flesh and blood and anyone could see that Jebediah Whittaker was the worst possible match for the impetuous, stubborn young woman. A girl's wedding day was supposed to be something dreams were made of, not the tense angry farce that had just taken place. Emma did not understand why John McGuire would have chosen such a mismatch for his only child. Unfortunately, there was nothing Emma could do about the situation, she picked up

her mop and with quick rough strokes, took her frustrations out on the already spotless floor.

Three days later on a dark and rainy morning, the Whittakers boarded a ship for the Americas. The gray clouds hung low in the sky making the morning seem more like late afternoon. Rain pelted the crowd; the dockyard fast becoming a muddy shallow lake that engulfed the stacks of trunks and crates. Open umbrellas battling for space, the crowded passengers made their way through the water, women's skirts raised and children perched on men's shoulders. In her dark, sullen mood Martha found the name of the ship to be ironic. Freshly painted on the bow were the words, *The Salvation* and although she looked at them with scorn that first day, they soon became her inspiration.

Even as they boarded, Martha plotted her escape. She contemplated running down the gangplank just before the ship sailed. She would get lost in the crowd on the wharf and be free at last. Somehow she would get away from Jebediah.

The ship was loaded to capacity with most of the passengers traveling steerage; only a dozen cabins were available to the small number of wealthier travelers. Martha, dreading the sea voyage, was relieved to hear that they would have one of the cabins. She could not imagine spending weeks crowded together with these tattered commoners, sleeping in hammocks. She tried to avoid the envious glances of the poor women as she proceeded past. The other women's well-worn clothes were soaking wet, tattered children huddled close to stay warm. Her designer gown was out of place on a ship full of immigrants hoping for a new life in the New World. Martha could not understand why they had not taken one of the more modern ships. Surely Jebediah was not without sufficient funds to make them all as comfortable as possible. She kept her eyes fixed straight ahead and her head held high under her umbrella, as Jebediah led them through the maze of bodies

and trunks. She had her first glimpse of the children this morning and she was not impressed. They were unnaturally quiet and sullen for young boys. All three of them refused to look at her and not a word passed between them.

*Jebediah had better find a Nanny quickly*, she thought to herself.

As soon as they located their tiny cabin, Jebediah ushered the three young ones and Martha into the cabin, quickly exiting and locking the door behind him. A surprised Martha heard the lock slam shut. “You won’t keep me locked in here forever, Jebediah Whittaker.” She shouted through the locked cabin door, frustrated fists pounding on the hard wood.

Fury filled her as the seriousness of the situation began to dawn. She turned and took stock of the sparsely decorated room. She soon realized there were only two narrow bunks and a single straw mat for sleeping. The boys would have to sleep on the floor. A tattered dressing screen stood in one corner, a small table accompanied by a small faded mirror in the other. She wandered over to fix her hair in the tiny mirror. The furniture was rough and basic. Questions whirled around in her head. *Where can I hang my clothes? Do people really sleep on such tiny uncomfortable cots? Does he really expect me to live in such primitive conditions? This is unbelievable. Did my father not check Jebediah’s financial situation before marrying me off?* The possible answers to her questions filled her with dread.

Jebediah was worse than she had imagined. He was tall, extremely thin and his face held a perpetual scowl. His black suit was several years old and showed his lack of interest in fashion. She had been relieved to learn he would leave Graystone right after the ceremony and not return for two days. This morning was the first time she had seen Jebediah since their marriage and the only sounds he had uttered had been orders. He was eerily silent and seemed to

be surrounded by a dark cloud wherever he went. His dark, heavily browed eyes sent chills of fear down her spine whenever she looked at him. Her body shuttered involuntarily just thinking about him. Her mind drawn back to the tiny cabin, she realized the three boys were sitting on the cot staring at her as if she were a monster. She glared back, seeing them as a troublesome burden that she would soon be rid of. *Soon you three will be the nanny's responsibility.*

Her days and nights were filled with thoughts of escape. She stood on deck staring into the vastness of the deep blue ocean. The cold, damp steel pressed against her palms as she gripped the railing. *Who can help me get off of this ship?* Martha was married to a man whom she despised, a man who did not speak even to his children, except to relay orders. She was beginning to think that Jebediah had very little money. He showed no sign of abundance. She now had full responsibility for Jebediah's young sons, which in her opinion was the only conceivable reason for the marriage. She angrily remembered how Jebediah had laughed in her face when she inquired about the nanny. It was now obvious he expected her to look after the children, with no help at all. *Why would Father condemn me like this? What did I ever do to deserve this?* "I must not give up, I must think," she reflected aloud with stubborn determination. Her knuckles turned white as she gripped the cold railing. The salty spray from the sea splashed her face; she tasted salt on her tongue as she licked the tiny droplets from her lips. Her body set in a determined stance, she stared at the ocean contemplating her dilemma.

On the deck just beyond her sight, the boys were playing checkers with some of the other children. Back in the cabin, Jebediah sat alone counting the money he had won in the card game. A mere pittance compared to the countless thousands he had in England and hidden away in

his luggage on ship. Nonetheless, he admired each coin as if it were his last. He thought back to the earlier confrontation when Martha suggested a nanny be hired to care for the boys. The look on her face was priceless when he told her there would be no nanny. She had a lot of surprises coming to her. A cynical sneer crossed his face as he realized the irony of her statement. Weeks ago, he had wrestled with the possibility of simply hiring a nanny for the boys and making this trip however, he soon realized that poor homesteaders would not easily identify with a man who could afford a nanny. That would not suit his plan. No, the idea of marrying and traveling as an immigrant family was much better. A wife would have to obey her husband; besides, why pay a nanny when a wife would care for the children and do his bidding for free. He laughed to himself as he placed the coins in his pocket, patting them lovingly with his hand.

The ship continued its voyage, passengers seldom seeing land or other ships. Porpoises followed the ship, playing in the bow waves and providing entertainment for the children. A pod of whales was seen migrating north; the huge creatures broke the surface, terrifying the women and amusing the children.

About a week into the voyage, Martha and some of the other women were on deck attempting to prepare a meal of porridge and potato soup in two large cauldrons. She had been shocked to learn that she was expected to cook food at all, never mind on deck with the commoners. The first mate handed out provisions to the women, while the steward and cook minded the fires while supervising the cooking. Martha was no help, having never prepared a meal in her young life. Her negative attitude did not win her any friends amongst the weary women. Most of them were traveling to an unknown land as a last resort, frightened and unsure. This upper class woman represented everything that they would never have or the oppressive masters they were

leaving. Martha did what she could, keeping her eyes down to avoid the stares of the other women. *I hate you Jebediah Whittaker. I will get away from you as soon as I can.* Her shoulders were tense, her movements abrupt making her suppressed anger evident to everyone. After an hour on deck, the waves were increasing in height and the wind was starting to roar. Boiling food splashed over the deck as water gushed over the side extinguishing the fires. The sea became a rushing monster, with the ship lying first on one side and then on the other. It was as if the ship were first on top of a great hill and then down in the valley, constantly pitching from side to side. Looking up at the waves, a terrified Martha thought they appeared as high as mountains looming over the ship. Panicking she grasped at anything that was secured to avoid being washed overboard. Sails were pulled down and the ship was left to the mercy of the waves. The wind howled and the water rushed across the deck, boxes and contents rattling, men and women staggering and falling in all directions. The men quickly gathered the women together and shoved them down into the hold. The body of the ship cracked and groaned with the strain and passengers did their best to stay in their seats or cots. Children and the elderly were tied to their cots or to support posts to prevent them sliding across the floor with every pitch of the ship.

Martha was terrified. The ship's tossing made walking almost impossible. Martha found Jebediah and the boys and was ordered into the cabin by her husband. She grabbed at Jebediah's coat to steady herself as the ship pitched. He pulled his arm away abruptly, instructing her to stop her squealing and keep moving. Her hand dropped to her side in rejection. As soon as they arrived at the tiny cabin, he thrust the door open and ushered her and the boys inside. Slamming the door, he left them alone, ordering her and the three youngsters to remain there for the rest of the squall. The boys seemed unaffected by the storm, playing

together on the floor ignoring her as usual. Removing her wet cotton blouse and wool skirt behind the small screen, she changed into dry clothing. Her lips pursed critically as she smoothed the wrinkled garments. Martha inspected the stained wool skirt, wondering if it would ever be right again. Carefully she hung it on the hook and smoothed the wet fabric with her hands. *Ruined, my clothes are ruined.* Thinking she would be happy to get off this ship and give her clothes the attention they deserved, she adjusted the round collar on her blouse in the tiny faded mirror. For the time being she was relieved to be off the deck and away from the chore of cooking. *Who could cook on a pitching rocking ship and those disgusting women smelled foul, what next?* Although the storm was distracting, with items that were not fixed rolling and pitching with the ship, she sat in the only chair contemplating her situation. She tugged at the lace on her sleeve, ignoring the boys completely. Martha thought back to the first night on the ship when she learned that incredibly, it was she that would sleep on the straw mat. Jebediah settled all three boys in one cot and climbed into the second cot himself, leaving her standing open mouthed in the middle of the room. She argued that the boys should be sleeping on the floor instead of her, but he would have none of it. He simply gestured to the mat and then with a cynical grin nodded to the narrow space beside him. She chose the straw mat. Jebediah was a force to be reckoned with. She could put up a good fight and often win an argument with her father but Jebediah was another story. For now, she simply complied.

The ship's pitching from side to side was causing his stomach to rebel but Jebediah remained calm. Taking this immigrant ship had been a brilliant idea. He had saved hundreds of pounds over the cost of the more luxurious ships and it gave him an opportunity to observe the behavior of the poor peasants. He would blend in very well by the time they arrived in the Americas. It would also take

some of the polish off his new wife. He had not realized she was quite so stubborn and troublesome when he chose her for his plan. It just seemed so easy to include her hand in the deal with McGuire, but she would need considerable discipline. He was determined to look the part of the immigrant family, arriving in the new world to seek a better life and she would have to shape up or else. He felt nothing for her one- way or the other. She was simply a means to an end and he would not stand for any nonsense. Leaning against the creaking post, he listened, as the men talked of acres and acres of land available for next to nothing to families willing to travel into the uncharted territories of the Americas. Acres and acres of land for next to nothing sounded like just the thing for Jebediah, especially when he had also heard that a railway was being considered through the very land they wanted to settle. There was gold in the west all right and Jebediah intended to get all he could.

Blackness filled the cabin as night fell. Jebediah and the boys were snoring loudly in the cots. The sea continued to toss the ship to and fro. The floorboards were hard and uncomfortable and sleep was impossible. Martha dozed for a few hours out of sheer exhaustion but woke often during the long night. Her nerves were frazzled, not only from lack of sleep but also from this uncomfortable, trying journey. Her mind was overflowing with thoughts. Never in her pampered life had she lived in such primitive, crowded surroundings. Hands, red and chapped from the lye soap pushed her hair from her face. She looked around the dark cabin. Her beautiful dresses hung stained and wrinkled. How desperately she wanted a hot bath. The boys were troublesome and she wanted nothing to do with them, let alone play at being their mother. Although she was obsessed with it, a reasonable plan of escape avoided her. The only thing she was sure of, was that she would escape. She had no intention of staying in this farce of a marriage.

This sea voyage was turning out to be more of a nightmare than she had imagined.

The second week of the voyage, a sudden and deadly illness overtook the ship. Many of the passengers and crew were stricken with violent seizures and vomiting. Feverish, weak and ghostly white passengers were confined to the cramped, crew's quarters, which soon became the infirmary. Most of the women, including Martha were called upon to aid the only doctor onboard. Dr. Wheeler, a kindly gentleman of about 50 years of age, worked long and diligently to thwart the spread of this unknown illness. People were housed in bunks and hammocks and the smell of vomit and urine was thick in the air. The cries of the delirious patients could be heard above the roar of the ocean. The ship was tossed so violently at times, they were sure that it would tear in two. Many dead patients, young and old, were buried at sea in the following dread filled weeks.

Martha did her best to help but with very little experience in the care of the sick, she really thought that she was of little consequence. However, she was thankful for the distraction. Dr. Wheeler was supportive and encouraging as they labored long into the dark and dreary nights. He showed her how to tie roasted kidneys or raw potatoes to the soles of the patient's feet to break a fever. Camphor cakes secured in flannel bags were tied around the necks of those who were vomiting uncontrollably. A mixture of coal soot and sugar was administered to those with diarrhea and Martha gained a great deal of knowledge from the kindly doctor during those nights.

Dr. Wheeler could not help but think that a beautiful, young woman like Martha should not be condemned to life with a man like Jebediah Whittaker. In his opinion, Whittaker was miserly, ruthless, and perhaps even cruel. The doctor happened to be in the corridor the day the Whittakers arrived on board. He watched as

Whittaker locked his family in the cabin, hearing Martha's protest and her fists pummeling the inside of the cabin door. He would never forget the icy stare the man delivered to him as he passed. Whittaker was always pleasant and friendly in the company of the Captain or the other men, yet he was rude and demanding with ship's crew. Dr. Wheeler observed, he was ruthless in card games and never hesitated to take a fellow passenger's money in what was supposed to be a pleasant pastime not a serious game of chance. Whittaker almost seemed oblivious to the fact that he had a wife at all. He had even witnessed the man brutally striking one of his boys for some minor disobedience. Dr. Wheeler could not fathom why Martha was married to such a scoundrel.

Depression was beginning to set in. Sitting in the dimly lit hold, the smell of sickness all around, Martha's spirits sank lower and lower. Every request she had made of her husband was rejected. Even simple things like a request for hot water to bathe in, were denied. Try as she might she could not figure out how to escape. Every day her situation grew worse. She was unaccustomed to having no control. In the past she had always come up with a plan to get what she wanted. Martha was beginning to realize just how serious this situation was. Her body, unaccustomed to labor, ached from lack of sleep combined with long hours tending the sick. The other women avoided her. She had no one to talk to other than Dr. Wheeler and he was busy with the sick and dying. As she tended to a deathly ill woman not much older than herself, Martha was overcome with a sudden desire to simply leap into the freezing, violent sea. "*I can't endure another day of this miserable existence,*" she thought in desperation, tears running down her cheeks, a terrible throbbing in her chest. Her entire situation seemed hopeless and at that moment she envied the young woman dying in her arms.

Just then Dr. Wheeler void of color, sweating profusely and looking extremely tired interrupted her thoughts, "Come quickly Martha, we've many sick children that need attention." It was then that she decided that Dr. Wheeler might be her liberator. Her hand moved to her hair, smoothing the out of control tendrils into place. At this point she knew she was grasping at straws but she could not give up. That night, she discussed her situation with him and she learned that it was his intention to depart the ship at the first stop. The doctor suggested that, perhaps they could fabricate some story that would allow her to accompany him while in port and then execute her escape. Although completely exhausted, she returned to her cabin elated with some tiny glimmer of hope for the first time in weeks. Martha lay on the scratchy straw mattress, the hard floor beneath, oblivious to the rocking of the ship and fell into a deep sleep. She dreamt of freedom. She was back in Graystone, dancing the Viennese waltz with Austin, dressed in her most beautiful gown. Music played and champagne flowed.

Upon waking and finding herself alone, Martha allowed herself a few minutes lying on the hard straw mat, to compose her plan of escape. *Freedom, what a glorious unappreciated thing it is.* Never did she think she would be in such a position where her every action was filled with her obsession to escape. Her life in England had been one of privilege and contentment. *How could my life have changed into such a horrible, nightmare?* Her heart was beating rapidly with anticipation. Doctor Wheeler had been very sympathetic and kind. Jebediah could rot in hell for all she cared; she was leaving for good. For the first time in weeks she felt like her old self again. She almost smiled as she left the cabin.

As she entered the infirmary, the smell was overpowering, more bodies were being carried to the side of the ship and a horrible premonition of doom descended

over her. Two shipmen almost knocked her over as they carried yet another dead man from the room. As they passed, Martha looked at the body and there she saw the white, lifeless face of Dr. Wheeler. “Nooo...God, noo...” she screamed, every ounce of strength draining from her, as her body and her dreams, crumbled to the filthy, wooden deck.

Jebediah spoke to her more that evening, than in the entire time they had been married. “ I’m deeply disappointed at your show of weakness. Fainting like a commoner, you have caused me great embarrassment. I was not happy about being called from my card game because my wife fainted.” He paced as he shouted, a frown permanently etched on his face. “I’m telling you now that I’ll not tolerate such displays. You will perform as my dutiful wife and from now on, you will control that impulsive behavior.” He ran his hand through his thinning, dark hair; his dark, piercing eyes staring right through her.

Martha faced him, crying that the doctor was dead and did he not have an ounce of pity. Her stance, hands on hips, was one of defiance. But Jebediah leaned close, his face inches from hers, he shouted at her, “Silence woman, you will speak only when spoken to. I am tired of your constant arguing.” Feeling his spittle on her face, she backed up, her arms moving protectively, hugging tightly to her bosom. He advanced, backing her into the corner. She was frightened for her safety, cowering in the corner of the cabin, she started to tremble. “Starting now you will care for the boys first and go to the sickroom only after they have been tended to. I know you are up to something. I am no fool.” She watched as he clenched and unclenched his fists; the veins on his neck straining as he shouted. “You will speak to no one and you will do as you are told. I suggest you heed my warning.” The look in his eyes turned her blood to ice. Jebediah had never been physically violent towards Martha thus far, but his words were like razors

slicing to her very soul. “Your days of fancy dresses and dances are over. You are a soft, pampered, spoiled child. Life will be hard from now on so you had better toughen up.” He glared at her; the look in his eyes could only be described as hateful. “I’m your master and you will do as I say without voicing your objections. From now on you are a simple, obedient wife and step mother.” He took another step towards her, his raised hand balled into a fist. “Do you understand? Do you?” Martha could not reply. Words stuck in her throat as she stared terrified at his fist. She crouched down making her shaking body as small as possible, hands over her head. Her muscles tensed for the blows she expected to fall. “You are a pitiful creature.” With that he marched from the cabin, slamming the door behind him. A terrified, heartsick Martha crumbled to the floor with relief where she stayed until her husband and his sons returned hours later.

That night Martha cried silently all through the night. She cried for the deceased Dr. Wheeler; she cried for her foiled efforts and most of all, she cried for her desperate inescapable situation. After this evening, she knew that not only her freedom, but also her life, was in jeopardy.

In the days that followed, the illness seemed to subside and ship life started to return to normal. The weather calmed and the sea was flat and eerie. A thick mist settled over the water giving it a surreal appearance. It was as if the slower ship, now without the wind, was being swallowed by the mist and the sea. Martha filled her days with the endless needs of the children and walked around in an emotionless fog. She thought of writing to Aunt Phoebe for help but knew that there was no way for the letter to be sent until they reached the Americas. It would then be put on another ship and would not arrive in England for another three months. Besides she would be on the other side of the world by then and what could Aunt Phoebe or even her

dear friend, Austin do to help her. She now believed escape was impossible. Jebediah had terrified her that night in the cabin. She knew it was only a matter of time before he would resort to violence. Depression and resignation were beginning to take over. The spark in her had been smothered and she was sinking deeper and deeper into darkness. One night as she stared blankly at the endless sea from the deck, she thought she heard her Mother's voice. "*Martha, remember the emerald necklace.*" Startled, she looked around but found she was alone. She repeated the words over and over in her mind. *Remember the emerald necklace.* Suddenly the thought dawned, the necklace, the one she had sewn into the hem of one of her gowns just before leaving. Her intention had been to bring just a small memento of her mother. Now, perhaps it was to be her salvation. She silently thanked her Mother for giving her some hope. As she turned to leave, the lifesaver ring, painted with the ship's name hanging from the rail caught her eye. The words 'The Salvation' jumped out at her. She smiled.

Plan in mind, Martha waited until she found just the right seaman, someone who she thought would be reliable. Her energy returned and she focused all of it on her plan. After several conversations and many observations, all out of sight of Jebediah, she made her choice.

The scenery was never changing with only the occasional ship in the distance and miles and miles of water with little else to focus on. Passengers were growing weary of the never-ending sea. Sensing their boredom and distress, the crew attempted to provide some much needed entertainment. One evening several of the men appeared topside with fiddles, pipes and drums. People danced and sang on deck and the mood was lighter than it had been in weeks. The distraction gave Martha her chance to seek him out. The seaman, Richard, who's handsome but rugged appearance appealed to her, had been considerate and

helpful during the epidemic on ship. On the many occasions they had been in the same sickroom, he appeared sincere in caring for the welfare of the passengers. She was beginning to feel confident again. That evening, clean dress, long chestnut hair hanging loose to enhance her appearance; she broached the subject of needing some assistance. Martha was sure to include the fact that she was willing to pay as long as she could trust him completely. Richard observed the shapely, vivacious woman before him hungrily, thinking he would certainly like a night with her. He admired her ample bosom, peeking above the neckline of her bodice. Her waist was narrow and he could only imagine what she would look like without the gown. He agreed to provide whatever assistance she required. Once she was sure he was willing to help her, she produced the necklace. While Richard appraised the shimmering emerald greedily, she offered up a prayer of thanks. In her heart she knew it was her Mother that had given her the idea. Richard, realizing the emerald's value and hoping for more on a personal level, was more than willing and eager to help her and put together a most ingenious plan of escape.

At the first port, they would meet in the dark of night, just before the ship received permission to dock. Permission could take days because the ship had experienced a mysterious illness and would be kept offshore until granted docking privileges. Richard would take her ashore in the small dinghy and then return to the ship to avoid suspicion. Later that morning he would say that he observed her by the handrail during the night while he prepared the dinghy for fishing. Hopefully this would lead everyone to believe that she had fallen or perhaps jumped, to her death.

Anticipation filled her days and nights. She didn't see much of Jebediah who spent his time playing cards and conversing with the other men on board. How critical and unfeeling he was; even with his own sons. She would be

glad to get as far away from him as possible. The ocean stretched before her. Only the occasional ship could be seen on the vacant sea. Soon they would be close to port and Richard would help her to finally be free. She had only seen Richard a few times, carefully steering clear of him to avoid suspicion. Her only concern was the lecherous look in Richard's eyes every time he looked at her. Hopefully he would be satisfied with the emerald necklace and not expect more than she was prepared to give. Refusing to acknowledge any negative thoughts, she concentrated on her freedom. She could barely contain her excitement. Once she was free, she would hideout on shore and then return to England never to see Jebediah Whittaker again.

The night of the escape came in a blanket of fog. Darkness descended over the anchored ship and the taste of salt was heavy in the air. As she crept out on the deck, her small bag containing only a few possessions in hand, she took her position behind the post as arranged. She thanked God for bringing this heavy fog to hide her escape. Jebediah and the boys had been sound asleep when she crept from the dark cabin. Martha was to wait until Richard signaled her from the dinghy, then they would lower the boat and escape into the night. She pulled her cloak tightly around her to ward off the damp night air. Her body shivered with anticipation. After what seemed like hours, but was in fact only minutes, a small flicker of light appeared. Her heart was pounding; her palms wet with nervous perspiration. She pulled the cloak over her head and advanced quickly to the small boat that would be her salvation. *At last, I will be free*, she thought as her feet connected with the wooden deck; each step moving her closer to freedom. Coming from behind, she could see that Richard was swinging the brilliant necklace back and forth. This was no time to be admiring his newfound wealth; perhaps she should not have given it to him until she reached the shore.

As Richard turned towards her, Martha gasped in horror. There in front of her, holding her mother's necklace was Jebediah Whittaker, looking like the devil himself.

"Going somewhere, Martha?" he sneered. "You know, when your father agreed to include your hand in marriage for the land that he wanted desperately, he warned me you were high spirited. I'm afraid we'll have to break that spirit, my dear Martha." she lunged for her mother's necklace, but Jebediah just laughed putting it in his waistcoat. He threw the seaman's hat he had been wearing to the deck. "Come along, Mrs. Whittaker," he snarled as he roughly gripped her arm and propelled her forward. "There will be no escape for you. You will not embarrass me or cause me any further problems. After this night, Martha, you will know who is in charge here."

Four weeks later, Mr. and Mrs. Jebediah Whittaker and the three young Whittaker boys, arrived in the colonies.

**End of Sample.**