

# The Song of the Lonely Sailing Yacht <sup>1</sup>

by Lynn Andrew

Must I dream always? Oh, how I wish he would return! <sup>2</sup>

Just the thought of your touch on my helm intoxicates me; how I long to sail with you. I pine for the fragrance of your oils in my cabin. You know that, don't you? Wine parties do nothing for me.

But I have neither! I am abandoned: no reveling in my saloon; no wine on my deck. They've let my brightwork get dull and dry. It awaits your anointing!

I understand why every new boat wants to sail under your banner.<sup>3</sup> Your name is revered, like fragrant oil poured out, like the finest perfume. I hope you have not forgotten me. Day and night I listen for you. Come, draw up my anchor and let us run before the wind!

The king once had me in his royal marina.

*We all rejoice in the king. Rightly do they adore him.*<sup>4</sup>

I am dark with grime but still lovely, O daughters of the royal

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1 This is an interpretation by analogy of the biblical *Song of Songs*. The primary application is the mystery of love between male and female; secondarily it pictures the King in his love affair with Israel.

2 The ancient custom involved an indeterminate time of separation after the betrothal, which could last a year or more. The bride was expected to be prepared for the return of her husband, who may come unannounced in the middle of the night to take her to his home.

3 Up front she acknowledges that she has competition; Israel must acknowledge that the God of Jacob loves other nations too.

4 There are various ways of reading verse 4b; this one leans heavily on the context. The speakers are the "daughters of Jerusalem." They seem to represent local gossip or opinion leaders of the day having some influence in the palace. Essentially they are a literary device.

city.<sup>5</sup> Do not stare at my faded canvas, just because the sun has looked upon me. My keeper's sons were rough with me; they rented me out to friends. They were not sailors; they just used me for parties, and they abused me. They did not keep me clean.<sup>6</sup>

Tell me, you whose feet my sole<sup>7</sup> adores, where do you send your fleet? Where do you harbor them after the day is spent? Why should I be kept apart, never allowed to sail with your companions, confined in this lonely spot?<sup>8</sup>

If you do not know, O most beautiful of vessels, follow my sails and see how they anchor at night. I have not forgotten you, my love. I think of you as a schooner among shrimp boats. Your frames are acacia wood in sockets of silver, and your mast is overlaid with gold.<sup>9</sup>

*We shall make for you ornaments of gold, studded with silver.*<sup>10</sup>

I leaped from wave to wave, leaving behind streaks of white when the king was at my helm. He is to me like the fragrance of myrrh in my cabin. He is a crimson sky at sunset and a steady

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5 The bride defends herself, the first of many conflicts. Most of them involve jealousy.

6 Trouble in her family. Her father is never mentioned. In arranged marriages the fathers struck an agreement stipulating the payment for the bride as compensation for the loss of a contributor to the family economy. A payment is mentioned at the end of the book, but it does not appear to be the result of prearrangement. Perhaps her brothers were angry at her for not demanding payment from the king and so were forcing extra work on her. Jacob's brother was not happy about losing his inheritance, and the Edomites, Esau's descendants, were enemies of Israel but subjugated to Israel in Solomon's day.

7 Like the sole of a shoe: the nautical term for what would be called the floor in a house.

8 Being unhappy in her present circumstances, she is threatening to run away from home rather than simply bringing her case before the king. The answer she got presumably released her from the abusive situation by attaching her to a harem, isolating her from her homeland.

9 Not practical yacht construction: just waving the flag of allegory.

10 After hearing the king's own testimony, the women are eager to participate in the romance however they may.

breeze by night.<sup>11</sup>

Behold, you are beautiful, my love; you are beautiful even in the dark of night when your moonlit sails sweep the sky—or in a peaceful bay when your ports<sup>12</sup> glow like eyes.

I dream of being with you: our couch is the sea, the beams of our house are the beams of the moon, and our rafters are the stars beyond.<sup>13</sup> Did you say I am your lily of the sea?

As a lily among kelp, so is my love among the royal yachts.

As a bright varnished mast among dull gray poles, so is my beloved among the young sailors. In great delight I lay in his shadow, and his loving care was sweet to my sole. He took me to the yacht parade, and his banner over me was love.<sup>14</sup>

Sustain me with sweet promises; refresh me with words if nothing else. In my dreams I cry for you.

His left hand on my helm keeps my head to the wind, and his right hand holds my sheet.<sup>15</sup>

I adjure you, O daughters of the royal city, by those vessels whose skippers love the sea: do not stir up his desire to sail if he is not delighted with them.<sup>16</sup>

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11 Her answer is that she neither needs their support nor does she need more jewelry in order to be attractive to him.

12 Port-lights, or port holes in the sides of the cabin.

13 A nature metaphor or a literal reference to natural surroundings?

14 Depending on her personality, one might say, this could be a boast to the Jerusalem maidens or else her trying to reassure herself. Are not both typical of anyone? Yes, but here it is unmistakably feminine.

15 "Sheet" refers to the line that controls the angle of a sail. It needs adjusting from time to time. When sailing close to the wind, a deft hand on the helm increases the speed.

16 What would be more natural than jealousy in these circumstances? But here is an attempt to manipulate the king, asserting authority the women have apparently bestowed on her.

What do I hear? Is it the voice of my beloved? Has he come—leaping over mountains, bounding over hills? Is that him standing on the shore?<sup>17</sup> Does he see me through his glass? I think I hear my beloved singing to me:

"Up with your anchor, my beautiful one;  
come sail away with me.

The winter is past, the storms are gone;  
the days are sunny again.

The time of the singing of birds has come;  
the flowers are blooming on land.

Up with your anchor, my beautiful one;  
come steal away with me.

"O my dove in the secret pass, in the crannies on the coast, let me see the sun on your jib; let me hear the wind in your rig. For your humming is like a song to me and your drawing sail like a bloom. By the way, avoid those foxes, those noisy little speed-boats that spoil our rendezvous."<sup>18</sup>

Shall we cruise among the islands until the day breathes and the shadows flee? Be a skipper who cares for his craft, and come back to me tonight.<sup>19</sup>

In my dream I sought him whom my sole loves; I sought him but found him not. I said I will slip my mooring and ghost along the waterfront; by the docks and the marinas I will seek him whom my sole loves. I sought him but found him not. Then the watch-

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17 This could be a daydream on the part of the bride. There is no result other than words.

18 The "little foxes" that ruin the vines. *Vineyard* is almost a metaphor for Israel. It represents at least an aspect of the nation, its ability to bear fruit. The bride has already used it as a metaphor for the appearance of her body. (No apology to the operators of noisy motor-boats.)

19 Notice how bold and confident she is in her heart. Is it a good thing, or not?

man hailed me, and I said, "Have you seen him whom my sole loves?" Scarcely had I passed him when I found him whom my sole loves. I took him aboard and would not let him ashore until he sailed me under the stars, the very place where my designer conceived me.<sup>20</sup>

I adjure you, O daughters of the city, by the vessels whose skipper love the wild sea: stir not up his desire to sail if he is not thoroughly delighted with them.<sup>21</sup>

*What is this coming up from the wilderness like columns of smoke? Behold, it is the motorcade of the king! With it are sixty guards, all of them armed. The king had his limousine specially made. Its posts are silver, its back is of gold, its seats are of royal purple. The interior of leather we fashioned ourselves, inlaying it with our love.*<sup>22</sup>

Remember, O daughters of the city—remember the king as he was when his mother crowned him, on the day of the gladness of his heart, before his name was poured out abroad. Is he happier now?<sup>23</sup>

Behold, you are beautiful, my love; indeed you are delightful. Your ports are eyes of peace, peeking over your rail. The planks of your deck curve and nestle like ripples under a gentle breeze. Your bobstay is a silver blade for slicing mighty seas; your bow is arched and graceful like the stem of the lily you are; the curve of your

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20 There is a pattern in romance.

21 This is her refrain. She wants to be queen.

22 We get a bold picture of the king in contrast to the bride. She is obviously not queenly material. Why was Israel God's choice?

23 A departure from the usual reading: the bride suggests, in defense of her lowly state, that she can make him happy by returning him to a simpler lifestyle.

sheer is lovely—what can I say?—you captivate me. I can see a hundred flags from clubs of renown fluttering like gulls about your mast.<sup>24</sup> In your cabin a cozy berth awaits me. Until the day breathes and the shadows flee we shall sail under the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense. You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you. Come with me from exile, my bride; come with me from your harbor in the wilds.<sup>25</sup> You captivated my heart, my ship, my pride; you captivated my heart after one glance at the sweep of your sheer. How much better than wine is a nap in your berth. And how I prefer the fragrance of your wood to the smell of diesel!<sup>26</sup>

A secret garden is my ship, my pride, a spring locked, a fountain sealed. Your ways are an orchard of pomegranates with choicest fruits and spices, a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from the north. Awake, O north wind, and come O south wind! Blow upon my beloved that her aroma may come to me.<sup>27</sup>

Let my beloved come to his garden and enjoy his choicest fruits. My ways are reserved for him, for he has promised his love for me.

I sailed my garden, my ship, my pride—buried her rail,<sup>28</sup> I did,

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24 In the original text grandiose metaphors abound, especially when describing physical features of the bride. Though it may have been good artistic taste in that day to invoke what to us are outrageous similes, there is a suggestion of a wider meaning, and one can see elements of the whole land of Israel in those pictures.

25 The references to wild and distant places are taken as metaphors for her distance from nobility while suggesting an application to the future exile of the nation.

26 Queens obtained for political purposes would not necessarily be to his liking. (Laugh or cry, whatever suits you.)

27 A potent paragraph that could stand as a poem by itself, speaking simultaneously of womanhood, the betrothal period, and the source of man's and mankind's salvation.

28 A sailor's expression meaning that the vessel is being sailed hard into the wind without shortening sail when the edge of the deck becomes submerged.

and not a reef<sup>29</sup> did she keep in her sail. I ate the honeycomb with my honey; I drank my wine with my milk.<sup>30</sup>

*Eat, friends of the bride; drink, and be drunk with love!*<sup>31</sup>

I slept, but my heart was awake. I heard a voice crying! My beloved has come, I said; he has come for me!<sup>32</sup>

"Open for me, my ship, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night."

My sole was encumbered—all sorts of sails. How could I clear them quickly? I was not ready!<sup>33</sup> My beloved put his hand on the latch, and my heart thrilled within me. I scrambled to open to my beloved, and I found my hands dripping with myrrh from turning the handles of the bolt.<sup>34</sup> I opened to my beloved, but he had turned and gone. My sole had failed me in the moment in which he called for me. I flew to the city and sought him but found him not; I called him, but he gave no answer. The watchmen found me; they rammed me and bruised me badly when they came aboard. They took away the ensign of my beloved—those watchmen over the royal city.<sup>35</sup>

I adjure you, O daughters of the royal city, if you find my beloved, tell him I am sick with love.<sup>36</sup>

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29 A tuck in the sail to reduce its area.

30 In his mind the wedding has been consummated.

31 The brief, informal celebration befitting a concubine.

32 She dreams of having the formal wedding celebration to prove she is more than another member of the harem.

33 Why was she not ready? Is it a nightmare? Or is there something essentially feminine about it that Solomon had in mind?

34 The parallel to Israel's rejection of Jesus Christ is stunning.

35 Persecution of the Jews.

36 She is desperate now.

*What is your beloved more than another beloved, O most beautiful among yachts? What is your beloved more than your young sailors, that you thus adjure us?* <sup>37</sup>

Among ten thousand you'll know him: handsome, strong, all aglow. Behold, his head is noble, surpassing the finest gold. His locks, black as ravens, are wavy, glossy, and full. His eyes shine with wisdom, like doves both mild and quick swimming in pools of milk. His beard is a garden of spices, sweet-smelling, round and trim. His lips—oh the flowers dripping with myrrh. His arms, strong, golden, brandish twelve bands of jewels. His waistcoat is polished ivory, overlaid in gems of blue. His legs are pillars of marble set in bases of gold. The words of his mouth are sweet—and true after all has been told. He's the choicest cedar in Lebanon, a man to desire and hold. This, I tell you, is my beloved—and this is **my** friend—O daughters of the royal city. <sup>38</sup>

*Where has your beloved gone, O most beautiful among yachts? Where has your beloved turned that we may seek him with you?*

My beloved has gone down to his marina, to his other beds of spices, to graze in his gardens and to gather virgins. I am my beloved's and he is mine; yet he grazes among those lilies. <sup>39</sup>

You are my delight, my love, lovely as the royal city, awesome as an armada with banners. Turn your eyes away from me, for they overwhelm me. Your sails are like a flock of geese winging against

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37 Sarcastic taunting: the women have turned on her.

38 She tries to convince them that she knows him well. The masculine ideal from the feminine point of view; Israel trusting in the heroic aspect of her savior. The metaphors she uses in describing him are tied rather closely to a human form. When he waxes eloquent about her, the metaphors he uses to describe her beauty reach far and wide.

39 She has to admit that there are others.



the wind. Your decks are like halves of golden mangoes glistening under the sun. There are sixty look-alike luxury yachts, eighty noisy cruisers, and numberless newbie boats; but my dove, my favored one, is the only one of her design, perfect in the eyes of her designer. When the virgin vessels saw you they called you blessed; the queens and the motorboats praised you too: "Who is this who looks down on us like the dawn of day, beautiful as the moon, swift as the breeze, awesome as an armada with banners?"<sup>40</sup>

I was curious, and I inquired about the island of the nut orchard, to see whether the yachts of the Prince had been launched. Before I was aware, I found myself desiring to be among them, those yachts of my kinsman, a prince.

*Return, O estranged one, return that we may look upon you. Why should you wait for your espoused? Do you think you are Helen of Troy that he will wage war over you?*<sup>41</sup>

I love your forefoot even entwined in idle seaweed, O noble daughter! Your rounded buttocks are perfect jewels, the work of a master hand. Your cabin is the way a seaman likes it, warm and functional. Your bowsprit is an ivory pulpit for watching porpoises play. A king is held captive in your cockpit, every sheet and hal-yard leading to his hand. Your layout makes everything convenient: I love to swing down into your cabin and grab a handful of grapes. And when we come to harbor, your sails slide smoothly down, and the wind flows gently over you and keeps your anchor firm as we spend the night together.<sup>42</sup>

It comes down smoothly for my beloved, gliding over clips and

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40 She still has his testimony to cling to.

41 The Jews being minimized by the "Greeks."

42 The message the world needs to hear: God loves Israel!

reefs. I am my beloved's and his desire is for me.

Now I have a proposal to make: When you come again, let us sail out and moor in the coastal towns. Then we shall go early to sea and see whether the winds are fair so that I may give you my love. Imagine, the romantic breeze folding us in its fragrant bosom. On that voyage will be every choice anchorage in the world, undiscovered ones as well as familiar spots I have in store for you.

Oh that you were like a brother to me. If I found you here in my harbor, I would take you aboard, and none would despise me. I would bring you into the house of my maker under the stars. I would give you spiced wine to drink, and you would stay with me and enjoy the nectar of my feminine ways.<sup>43</sup>

His left hand on my helm keeps my head to the wind, and his right hand holds my sheet.<sup>44</sup>

I adjure you, O daughters of the royal city: do not stir up his desire to sail those other yachts if he is not delighted to do so.

Some day I will come up from exile, piloted by you, my master and king. Under a lonely night sky it was I who aroused you; <sup>45</sup> for your mother conceived you on a starlit night, and at sea she labored for you.

So remember my seal is upon your heart and set it on your arm. Love is as strong as death, but jealousy too is fierce—fierce as the grave: its flashes like fire, the very flame of the Lord. Lonely days cannot quench love, neither can storms overpower it. If another

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43 Does she long to be tied to him as family? No! She wants to tie him to herself.

44 Her other refrain is to remind them (and herself) how close she is to the king.

45 A hint of primordial femininity and that a study of the feminine in relation to the masculine was on Solomon's mind.

sailor offered me all the wealth of his house, I would utterly despise him.<sup>46</sup>

*We have a little boat, and she has as yet no cabin on her for a king. What shall we do for this sister on the day she is put up for sale?*<sup>47</sup>

If she repels young sailors, build on her a battlement of silver. If she attracts them, make her cabin of boards of cedar. I despised the young sailors, but my cabin's berth is cozy, and the king found peace in me.<sup>48</sup>

The king had a marina in Diablo-harem; he let it out to a keeper who returned for the rentals a thousand pieces of silver. My marina is my own. The king may keep the thousand and pay my keepers two hundred. Love cannot be sold.<sup>49</sup>

O you who dwell in the wilderness with your brothers' companions listening for your voice ... Let **me** hear it!

I cry for you every night! Come back to your garden of spices, for my sole I have flooded with tears!



Popular expositions of "Solomon's Most Excellent Love Song" are like the nail soup in the story where the hobo started with a nail laying in the bottom of a pan of water and went around asking for contributions: "Just a little slice of onion, ma'am, if you can spare it for my nail soup," and so on until he had accumulated a nourishing collection of vegetables and a bone of ham to boot. The only thing the nail contributed was the intriguing

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46 This is the climax of the poem. How could Israel not be jealous—even justly jealous?

47 The question is whether physical beauty is essential—put to one who attracted a celebrity husband for no other apparent reason.

48 The answer is yes and no. Initially yes, but ultimately the attraction goes deeper.

49 She adds that money plays some part but is not the essential thing.

premise and the name.

Just so, everything under the New-Testament sun is dumped into Solomon's Song to make of it a palatable and nourishing stew. Christian commentators seem to care little about the point of the nail, and fewer Jewish rabbis would allow that it somehow happens to foreshadow the cross.

Or you can exercise your right to chronological snobbery and fit a story line to it that makes a sentimental romance of it. To avoid offending fans of Solomon in that case you best make the author anonymous. This is where a lot of commentators end up. Since I take it for granted that Solomon is the author, I have to avoid such condescension. (To doubt that it was written by Solomon undercuts more than I am willing to allow.)

Solomon certainly had his own purposes, which are blushing ignored by many for one reason or another. In my book, the sage has credit that he can never exhaust, so I don't mind giving his poem any amount of leeway to get its point across. Everyone knows nails don't belong in soup. The Song has another purpose, and I can't believe that it was a trivial one. I had a suspicion, which led me to count the verses that have to do with expressing admiration or longing vs. those indicating physical contact that actually took place. It came out 97:7, and most of the seven are debatable as to whether they were fulfilled. It seems that the poem is rather a study of perseverance than a celebration of love. The sensual language celebrates the attraction of one particular woman. But what makes her exceptional to the poet? The elegant answer is in 8:10.

However, Solomon's legendary wisdom and wit were backed by experience that no one can duplicate, and so it would be no surprise if the meaning of the thing were beyond us. Nevertheless, it is there by God's choice, presumably for anyone to read who cares to meet the mind of Solomon and the Holy Spirit on a subject which is at the heart of everything.

To carry on with the homely metaphor, the nail is a peg on which is hung more than one would expect. But unlike Eliakim's peg, all the king's horses and men (and women) were not enough to pull it loose.

