

BLUENESS

Book 2 in the Aquamarine Sea Series

Karen Stensgaard

~ BLUENESS ~

Blueness is the quality or state of feeling blue, sad, and down in the dumps.

The color blue, often associated with the sky and sea, provides a beneficial calming effect and symbolizes truth, intelligence, and confidence.

Aquamarine, a pale bluish gemstone, is believed to protect travelers at sea, ward off laziness, and bestow energy.



~ INSPIRATION ~

“The Victoria is said to be the finest boat on the P. and O. Line, still it could not be more unsuited for the trip. It is very badly planned, being built so that a great number of cabins inside are absolutely cut off from light and air. It is a compliment to call them cabins as they are really nothing more than small, dark, disagreeable, and unventilated boxes.”

From Elizabeth Jane Cochrane’s memoir, *Nellie Bly’s Book: Around the World in Seventy-Two Days*, published in 1890. Ms. Cochrane was one of the first American women investigative journalists. Despite some competition, she unexpectedly won and beat Phileas Fogg's fictitious 80-day journey in the novel, *Around the World in Eighty Days*, and met the novelist, Jules Verne.



“I have watched patients stand and gaze longingly toward the city they in all likelihood will never enter again. It means liberty and life; it seems so near, and yet heaven is not further from hell. Do the women pine for home? Excepting in the most violent cases, they are conscious they are confined in an asylum. An only desire that never dies in the one for release, for home.”

From Elizabeth Jane Cochrane’s memoir, *Nellie Bly’s Book: Ten Days in a Mad-House*, published in 1887. Ms. Cochrane wrote an account of her voluntary undercover visit to Blackwell Island’s Lunatic Asylum. Her expose resulted in New York City distributing another million dollars annually to better care for the poor unfortunates.

The first three chapters ...

Chapter 1 ~ First Night at Sea

“You have got to be kidding me.” I looked around puzzled at the sight of my small dark cabin on the old clipper sailing ship. This was my new ‘home away from home’ for up to three months.

I raised my oil lantern illuminating the room in a golden haze. My travel agent lacked a cruise brochure, so this was my first look and downright discouraging. I frowned at the holes forming in my bucket list voyage from Denmark to Hong Kong.

“Are you sure this is my cabin?” I switched to Danish so Uffe Petersen, my young cabin attendant, would understand. He carried another old portable lamp to show me around.

Uffe said, “Yes, M-M-Madam Jensen.”

Maybe his stutter would disappear once he got to know me. I stomped my feet on the wooden floor to warm my legs. My mandatory re-enactment costume needed some extra layers against chilly Northern Europe in November.

I reached along the wall next to the door for the light switch and felt something unusual. With help from my lantern, I stared at a strange metal bracket. With a click, Uffe latched his lantern into it and reached for mine.

I handed it over hoping this didn’t mean what I feared. “No electricity? Only lanterns?” Clipper ships ruled the seas in the nineteenth century, but this was 2016. Small sailboats had electricity.

He looked solemn while still holding my lantern. “Yes, Madam Jensen.”

A sudden whoosh of wind from out on the deck lifted my 1860-style hoop skirt as if someone had thrown it up to hide underneath. My long hair twisted around my face and eyes temporarily blinding me.

The bed’s headboard rattled against the wall until the door slammed shut with a deafening bang. I nearly jumped out of my skin but instead bumped into Uffe.

“Sorry,” I shouted, while I pushed my hair from my eyes.

Uffe stumbled with his lantern. Luckily, he regained his balance and held on preventing a disastrous fire at sea. He shivered and wiped his brow. “From the wind,” he said. As if to reassure me that a ghost didn’t cause this.

Halloween pranks ended last month, but I smiled at his polite self-control. “Hate to disappoint you and the rest of the gang, but I don’t believe in the paranormal.”

Uffe pointed to where he stored my carpet bag suitcases on top of some old trunks. After studying my plain cabin, I took a deep breath to stay calm. This must be a storage room for an initiation ceremony for newcomers. Any moment now, someone would yell surprise, and show me my real cabin.

“Uffe, please, not so formal. Can you call me Kat? It’s short for Kathryn or Katrine in Danish.”

He didn’t respond but nodded. Uffe was an unusual Danish name for a teenager, but it suited his role on this old ship.

“Can you understand my Danish?” I had been so excited to settle into my cabin. Now I grew worried. This must be a language issue.

“Your accent is d-d-different.”

“I am an American, but I was an exchange student in Denmark for a year. My husband was Danish.” With the crew and ship from Denmark, I was prepared to speak Danish all the time. Unless they got into technical stuff or nautical terms, I would get by.

“*Javel.*” Uffe used an unusual but polite Danish term that meant he understood.

An ache in my gut told me this cabin was no joke. I considered complaining and yelling, but I didn’t want to scare poor Uffe. Based on his general behavior and stuttering, he must be nervous. I was the first passenger to board and the only woman on the ship until England.

Now I regretted not checking into my cabin before we left. But the captain let me watch our dramatic departure. With the ship powered only by sails, my dreams had come true. Our night-time departure, including sailing past Hamlet’s Kronborg Castle, was unforgettable.

“Will your h-h-husband join us in England?” Uffe asked.

“No, he died last year from cancer.”

He looked down at his shoes. “So, sorry.”

“Thanks. I am trying to move on with my life and starting with this adventure.” I winked at Uffe, and he smiled.

“Are family meeting you in England?”

“No, flying solo on this one. All the way to China.” I grinned at my bravery. Despite being an experienced world traveler, I was new at making all the decisions and arrangements. But I was determined not to wait around to find a travel buddy.

“My last cruise was also from Copenhagen. We sailed through the Norwegian fjords on a mega-ship. Have you gone there, Uffe?”

He shook his head.

I smiled remembering a wacky snowball fight in the Norwegian mountains in May. That was our last vacation together. My husband, Axel, splurged for a deluxe cabin with a private balcony - the exact opposite of this place.

I surveyed my surroundings again. My cabin included the basics - a bed, a small table, and a chair. An oversized armoire for a closet filled the corner of the room along with another bigger chair, and a squatty dresser. Two long wooden trunks stood against the walls. A single tiny porthole adorned the wall. Nondescript and plain furnishings were what I expected and completely acceptable.

The ship rocked, so I softened my knees to absorb the movement and remain balanced.

“Where is the bathroom?” I only saw the one door where we entered the cabin.

“B-B-Bathroom?” His nervous stutter was back in full force.

“Yeah, you know, the toilet.”

“Madam, I mean Kat, here.” In a few short steps, Uffe stood by the small table with his lamp. He raised the top of a wooden chair stationed against the wall to show me.

In one giant stride, I stood next to him and stared down at the dark hole in horror. This toilet lacked a handle or flushing mechanism.

He showed off a poorly disguised porta-potty. On top of the low dresser, he pointed to a metal bowl and pitcher. The makeshift sink apparatus fit snug into a wooden frame to prevent them from falling.

“That’s not a bathroom. How d-disgusting!” I could barely speak from stress. “I can’t have that in my room. This can’t be hygienic. What if it leaks or falls over?”

Uffe shrugged his shoulders but didn’t respond.

My panic grew. I threw my hands into the air and moaned. An experienced sailor in New York City told me all these old sailing ships had been modernized. I wanted the romance of the sails and the wind and didn’t mind reimagining the days of old without electronics. But I never dreamed this meant no electricity or modern plumbing.

I didn’t expect or want upscale benefits like a fitness center, pool, or a hot tub. But I couldn’t

function without my daily hot shower. On the rare occasions when my apartment building in New York City had plumbing repairs, I showered at the gym across the street.

Uffe shuffled his feet and struggled to speak. His stutter got worse, and his words were unintelligible.

The ship rocked, and we almost fell. I slumped down on the bed, and Uffe braced himself against the small table by the wall. He pushed his hair out of his eyes.

I hated to overstress Uffe but not having a real bathroom was a deal-breaker. Now I understood why my travel agent in New York City who sold me this cruise lacked a brochure.

I should have insisted on more information. But I was in a rush to leave town and start my once-in-a-lifetime vacation while I had some time off between jobs.

I moaned. Should have, could have, won't help me now.

"Where do I take a shower?" I never expected a bathtub since cruise ships had small bathrooms. But all had showers.

Sadly, I received only a blank look. I twisted my windblown hair into a temporary knot eager to control something.

"You know, a shower for taking a bath?" A community bathroom for all these men must exist somewhere.

Uffe shook his head and didn't respond.

"Great. Here I am on this ship for months without a real toilet or bathroom. Utterly fantastic."

I propped my head on my hands to figure out what to do. My blonde hair fell out of the loose bun, but I ignored it to stay focused.

I consented to wear an 1860-style costume for this odd re-enactment cruise. But never in my wildest dreams did I imagine living as they did back then for months. My long-awaited break from an unbalanced work-life routine in Manhattan hit its first major snafu.

Only the officers and crew were on board, so there was no one else to compare notes on the accommodations. The other passengers won't board until our first port of call in England three or four days from now.

"This is a joke. Right? An initiation ceremony for new passengers?"

I yearned for a shy grin from my cabin attendant as if he only had to play this game a few more minutes.

"Are all the cabins like this?"

"I b-b-believe so Madam Kat." He sat on the small chair with a grave expression on his face.

My stomach ached with the realization I might be living without a real bathroom for months. This cabin wouldn't even merit a half star rating. Employees on a cruise ship had better accommodations.

I racked my brain for a solution like analyzing an internal audit issue at work. From many trials and even more errors, I had learned to go to the most senior person to save us all the extra aggravation.

I didn't want to scare or offend Uffe. He wasn't to blame for this mess.

"Uffe, please tell the captain I must discuss this with him. This cabin isn't what I expected. I can't live like this." Lower level staff like Uffe lacked enough authority or information.

"This is a t-t-top quality cabin."

I shook my head. "This most definitely is not top quality. Please tell the captain to stop by when he has a free moment."

I might have to wait hours to see him and switch cabins. We were sailing around the northern tip of Denmark past Sweden and Norway towards England powered only by the wind.

Earlier on the deck, the captain had said, “The Kattegat is a shallow sea and perilous with stony reefs and shifting currents.” He had urged me to settle in for the night.

Uffe hung his lantern on another hook and left in the darkness. The poor guy might be upset, but he will thank me later for saving us both a lot of time and trouble.

Sitting on the bed, I remembered Annette, my Danish travel agent liaison, and her parting words of advice. “Your first port is about three days away. Get off there if you don’t like it.” But that would destroy my exciting, adventurous plan to see more of the world by sea.

Some unconvinced friends at home predicted problems. They said, “Your vacation sounds too extreme. Not your kind of trip, Kat. Do something easier.”

But all those non-believers were wrong. I was tougher than they realized.

One of my managers long ago used to compliment my persistent auditing style. He had said several times, “You’re tenacious. Digging like a pit bull and sinking your teeth into tough issues.”

Finding solutions to issues was part of my daily existence. And, I’d never give up without a fight.

Chapter 2 ~ A Witchless Wardrobe

While I waited for the captain, I leaned back on my elbows on the tan-colored bedspread. The ship creaked and rocked in a soothing motion while the lanterns cast everything in a dim yellow light.

Stretched out, I scrutinized the wooden ceiling. My cabin had every imaginable shade of brown with nothing on the walls or floor to break the monotony. The Pantone Color Institute experts in New Jersey would have a field day with all this brown.

The cabin reminded me of bruised and rotten fruit and even worse, cat poop, not more pleasant browns such as chocolate and coffee beans. Everything looked like genuine wood without any plastic or other artificial materials.

If only I hadn’t agreed to follow their stupid rules and left my electronics behind. Just a few hours into my first digital detox, I was already suffering from withdrawal. If I had my phone, I might still be in range to call or email the travel agency. But long-term, without a power outlet, I couldn’t charge them anyway.

I experienced a different tinge of grief. Minus my phone, I wouldn’t see my screensaver of Xena, my four-legged soulmate. But I had a Xena photo I used as a bookmark, and I dug around to find it.

Inside some old classic novels packed in my bags, I found two photos. Xena, my tabby cat, made my heart ache for a moment, and I gave her face a quick kiss. I stuck her picture back inside Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, confident I’d soon move to a better cabin.

The other photo was of Axel, my former husband. His condescending smirk tempted me to tear up his picture. Instead, I stuck him back in the appropriately titled book *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens. Now I knew not to expect much from the men in my life.

Another re-enactment rule was only to bring books published before 1860. Dumb requirements begged to be broken, so I had snuck on board a more recent book. But I was too stressed to read.

After about fifteen minutes, I paced around the perimeter of the cabin touching the walls. This could be one of those escapism games with a secret button to open a hidden door to a real bathroom. But if there was a way out, I couldn’t find it.

My carpet bags lay on top of one of the wooden trunks. I unbuttoned them to confirm my smuggled toiletry bag, and modern-day clothes made it safely. To follow their weird rules, I’d leave my period costume on for now.

I pulled out an old cashmere sweater, rubbed the warm wool against my cheek, and put it on. Moths had created small holes, but I had patched them up as best I could with my rudimentary sewing skills. Recently, I'd sworn off buying any expensive clothing to save money. My failing business tore a hole in my nest egg.

Glancing around my bare-bones cabin, here was proof you get what you pay for. This discounted cruise was a bargain. In my quest to save money for a longer trip, I had gone too cheap.

I opened the metal latch on the other trunk and peeked inside. It held towels, linens, and extra period clothes provided as part of my vacation package.

I raised my long skirt and loosened the ties around my waist to release my hoop petticoats. The metal ring made an angry clank when it hit the ground. I stepped over it and said, "Good riddance," to the empty room.

The wide hoop skirt had made it impossible to pass through the cabin's narrow doorway. I lifted my long dress above my knees and tilted it to the side to enter the cabin. Besides the dress code policy, the officers and staff were friendly and seemed laid back.

My friends were right. This crazy idea to go on this odd cruise was stupid and impulsive. When I finally return home, I will be exhausted, run down, and dirty. I sat on the bed and stared at the floor as it gently rocked.

I could have afforded a fancier cruise for a few weeks on board a modern mega-ship somewhere. Right now, I'd be warm and afloat in the Caribbean Sea. The picture before me was vivid and tantalizing. My legs were stretched out on a lounge chair with a piña colada in one hand while serenaded by a live band playing Jimmy Buffet songs.

But I'd be surrounded by people I wanted to avoid - couples and even worse, honeymooners. Besides, where was the challenge and true adventure on a trip like that?

By starting in Denmark, I'd crossed one more nagging reminder from my to-do list: scattering Axel's ashes in his homeland. And, I didn't have much of a choice. My small audit consulting business closed last week, and this ship was the only one leaving Denmark in November for an exotic destination.

I threw my undergarment layers, including the miserable hoop skirt and petticoats, into a trunk and slammed the lid shut. I needed to convince the captain to limit the fancy dress code ordeal to weekly formal nights.

After grabbing a towel from the trunk, I poured some water from the pitcher into a bowl. I dipped a corner into the cool water and wiped it against my forehead to freshen up after a long grimy day.

A small mirror hung above the sink, and a wild-haired person stared back at me. I looked unhinged and menacing. No wonder Uffe made such a quick getaway. I dragged a comb through my hair. Refreshed and more presentable, I studied my options.

Over by the dresser, a wide armoire closet dominated one corner reaching up to the ceiling. Could the armoire hide a secret passageway to a real bathroom? Wherever it went, I was ready. I flung open the doors and pushed aside the loaner period clothes hanging in my way. After I climbed inside, I had a bit of space to spare and felt along the back for an opening. The armoire's back paneling didn't give, but I was just as stubborn.

I tapped on the back panel to find the pressure point and opening. The wood was solid and not supplemented with thin veneers or particle board. I knocked harder, but still nothing.

The ship rocked to the side again, and I stopped to listen. Once we rounded Northern Denmark, we would enter the North Sea. The captain had warned me the waves would be rough.

I couldn't fall with the clothes supporting me in this cramped area, so I continued searching.

"Come on, open!" My knuckles ached, so I slammed my palm against the back panel.

A man called out in Danish, “Kathryn, what are you doing?”

Hidden in the armoire, I froze, wondering what to say. This armoire might be an antique and valuable. Fortunately, my hammering had not damaged it.

This meeting was not starting well. I needed to be in a position of strength, or an equal when dealing with a senior guy like the captain.

I pushed wisps of hair behind my ears, straightened my dress costume, and poked my head out from behind the hanging clothes. The captain and Uffe stared at me - their strange new passenger.

Speaking Danish was now becoming second nature. One plus from practicing and memorizing their lingo for my annual vacations in Denmark.

“Thank you for coming. I was checking the strength of the armoire.” I avoided making eye contact eager for this lame excuse to pass inspection.

“Is it strong enough for your purposes?”

“Yes, sir. It is.” I climbed out of the armoire, shut the door, and faced him. With his height towering over me by about a foot, I craned my neck to look him in the eyes.

The captain’s blond hair shone in the lamplight, and he chuckled. His tall, uniformed presence in my small cabin was intimidating, but at least he had a sense of humor.

I placed my hands on my hips to look as forceful as possible. I cleared my throat to begin telling him my litany of problems with this cabin.

Uffe peeked out from behind the captain and stared. Captain Madsen placed his hand on Uffe’s wavy hair as if petting a huge dog.

“Kathryn, Uffe said you were displeased with the cabin and wanted to discuss this.”

“Yes, I do. This cabin is not acceptable. I mean it is, but I expected a bathroom with a real toilet. One that flushes.” Under the captain’s intense scrutiny, I stumbled over my words and somehow forgot what to say. “And you don’t have electricity either.”

The captain sighed and brushed some lint from his suit. “This is a commercial sailing ship, not a luxury hotel. As such, we do not require newfangled equipment. Your booking agent should have been explained all these matters.”

He stopped for a moment at what must be an obvious look of distress. “In the morning, you may see the other passenger cabins. If you find one more to your liking, you may move elsewhere. However, this is one of the nicest.”

His Danish language was rapid and formal with an unusual dialect. When I translated his response, I was speechless. My run-down cabin wasn’t a joke.

The ship jolted throwing me off-balance, and Uffe landed on the floor. The captain grabbed my arm to keep me standing, reached around, and with one hand pulled Uffe to his feet by his collar.

The captain chuckled amused by our antics. “Kathryn and Uffe. Your first night and our accommodations are all new. You shall adapt and gain your sea legs soon enough.”

I sat on the bed to keep from falling again. This conversation had led nowhere.

“Now if there is nothing more, I must hurry back to the bridge. The waters around the north of Jutland can be turbulent.”

I sighed not wanting to argue further. “Sure.” Exhausted, a yawn escaped. I chose to be here on this ship. Scraped from what must be the bottom of a bucket list. For now, I would have to make the best of it.

“It is late and past midnight. You should rest after a busy embarkation day, Kathryn.”

“Okay, Captain Madsen.” My enthusiasm fizzled out from the shock of my current situation.

“You may call me Captain Mikkel. I know it is unusual. At sea, we are an extended family.”

I nodded. If I got to know him better, I might suggest my nickname, Kat.

“Please do not forget to turn off the lamps before going to bed. The most critical rule on the ship. Come along, Uffe.”

Uffe took a lantern from the wall, opened the door, and stood at attention. “*Farvel og god nat, M-M-Madam Kat.*”

I repeated his Danish farewell and good night greeting.

Before shutting the door, Captain Mikkel said goodnight. Over his shoulder, he added, “*Faites de beaux rêves.*”

French? He must mean ‘pleasant dreams.’ Picasso’s famous painting was called *Le Rêve*, The Dream. The door shut so I was finally alone. I had not planned on deciphering French. Speaking Danish would be hard enough.

After rummaging through my stuffed carpet bag, I found my nightgown and slipped it on. I regretted not being more forceful with the captain. I should have refused to stay here and walked out. But where would I go? I would need a key for another cabin.

Three long months were ahead of me with no electricity or plumbing. That explains why the ports of call and dates were all uncertain. Without an electric power supply to load and unload cargo, it would take forever.

Tomorrow, I’ll be more prepared, see the other cabins, and find a better one. If necessary, I will search the ship.

Uffe took the lamp by the door, but the second lantern still hung over the table. I jiggled the little metal switch, and to my relief, it flickered and went out. With all this wood everywhere, no wonder they worried about fires.

In complete darkness, I found my bed and climbed under the thick comforter. The bed’s mattress was comfy and warm under the thick covers.

Glancing around the pitch-black room, I tried to relax after such a long and stressful day. If the ship had not stopped at a second port north of Copenhagen, I wouldn’t be here. I had checked into a real ship, not a hotel.

A tear rolled down my face, and I wiped it away. My husband broke my heart the first time with his cancer diagnosis and death. Learning earlier today from his brother how he had planned to leave me for a life in Denmark with his former girlfriend was the final wound deep in my soul.

“Axel, I hope you’re happy now. You wanted Denmark, and now, you got it.” Where was he exactly? His ashes could have floated in the current and ended up near Germany, Poland, or Sweden. Or, he may have sunk to the bottom of the muddy shoreline north of Copenhagen.

I curled my legs up to my chest under the warm comforter. Despite everything, I’d never forget the good times we had together. After twenty years of marriage, he would always be part of my life.

To forget about this crummy room, I hummed the upbeat song, *Always Look on the Bright Side of Life* from the Monty Python film. I had not seen a clock or radio in the cabin. Even one that ran on batteries. I stopped humming. There was no bright side here.

The smell of polished wood mingled with the scent of salt water. The bed swayed accompanied by creaking sounds. I closed my eyes and relaxed remembering other cruises.

The faint sound of the sailors’ voices mixed with commands from the officers slipped under my cabin’s door. Their voices sounded strangely soothing. But I couldn’t relax. This was too close to camping and roughing it.

I can manage one night. Tomorrow I’ll figure this out, come up with a plan, and things will be back to normal.

Chapter 3 ~ Boxed In

I slid out from my warm nest under the thick layer of blankets to stop the pounding on my door. Some light from the cabin's porthole illuminated my discouraging brown box cabin still unchanged from last night.

This room had seen better days but not during my lifetime. Hadn't they seen HGTV or heard of the concept 'renovate and upgrade'? Even a can of paint and some cheap decorations would do wonders.

I yelled, "Coming," to stop the constant knocking. With my robe still packed away, I hid behind the door and peeked out.

Uffe stood there with another sailor. "M-M-Madam Kat. Good morning." He held a tray. "Here is your breakfast. I can show you the other cabins now."

I opened the door to let him in and shut it quickly to keep out the cold. He had excellent night vision since he found the desk in the faint light from the porthole and placed my breakfast there.

"Thanks, Uffe. I need some help lighting the lantern. I've never done this before." I unhooked the lamp not caring if he saw me in my blue nightgown. A beach cover-up was more revealing.

"Yes, of course, M-M-Madam Kat."

He peeked at me and then the other direction. I guess he didn't expect to see me in my nightgown.

I braced myself against the wall and held the lamp while he struck a matchstick and opened the glass covering to light it. He offered me a set of matches from his pocket.

"Give me about twenty minutes, and I'll be ready." I didn't need extra time for my usual hot shower. The reminder made me want to scream or at least growl.

Uffe nodded and shut the door.

I slumped in the chair famished. My last meal was a late lunch with a Danish friend. He helped me get back on the ship after I chickened out. I doubt he expected this. However, he might be the rugged mountain man type and enjoy it.

The cup of hot tea, rye bread, and cheese were edible but nothing to rave about. The basic menu was the least of my problems. I enjoyed eating but was far from a connoisseur or into the Michelin-starred hype. I craved variety and adventure in food and drink more than anything else. But this situation was a cautionary note for the next time I booked a vacation.

After finding some tissues, I made a quick stop on the portable toilet. Afterward, I poured water from the pitcher into the bowl to wash my hands with the courtesy bar of soap. I washed my face and did what I learned camping in the Girl Scouts. Wipe your underarms and crotch. There was no way this would work long-term.

After I unpacked my toiletries, I washed my hair as best I could in the shallow bowl with limited water. I needed another pitcher with hot water. This was serviceable for a few days, but I didn't feel clean or awake. Brushing my teeth worked fine without a cup of water.

I debated pulling on my comfortable jeans and a sweater, but not before the captain gave his okay to break the re-enactment rules. I slipped back into the long dress I wore yesterday minus the impractical round hoop.

Uffe knocked, and when I opened the door, I froze.

"Man, it's cold." I squeezed my arms against my chest and pulled on a sweater coat before following him.

"Passenger cabin number two," Uffe declared with a flourish of his hand and invited me inside.

I hoped for newfangled electricity, but he had to use his lantern to illuminate the room. This

cabin was not one iota different except for my clothes and mess.

We went to the next cabin and another. At the fourth and last one, I didn't bother entering but peeked in from the doorway. Why would anyone play such a mean trick?

"How could they expect anyone to live like this? It's so damn uncivilized." The chilly wind blew hard so Uffe couldn't hear my string of complaints.

I scanned the water surrounding the ship in dismay. How could I reach the travel agency? Even if the rules allowed me to bring my cell phone, we had sailed too far from shore, and by now, we were out of cell phone service.

If Axel were here, he'd laugh at my stupidity and go along with it. He'd argue, "This is better than being dead." Barring some painful days from cancer, he was upbeat most of the time. But his real feelings were a façade like this damn ship.

"Madam Kat, would you like to swap c-c-cabins?" Uffe lingered politely waiting.

"No. I am going back to my damn cabin."

I jammed my hands in my coat's pockets to get warm and felt a plastic bag. I pulled out a bag of Danish licorice. I'd traded my modern polyester filled down coat for my travel agent's more time-period appropriate sweater. Annette must have left it in her pocket.

"Do you like salty licorice?"

"Salty licorice?" He said it twice as if he had never heard of such a thing. My Danish was rusty but not that bad.

"You know. Licorice with the salty flavor that most Danes love?"

He didn't respond as if considering his options. I liked licorice but couldn't abide the salty stuff. They even had salty licorice-flavored chewing gum.

"Here, all yours. If you don't like it, give it away. Or throw it overboard to the fish."

He accepted the plastic bag with small black chunks of licorice, put one in his mouth, and mouthed a thank you. At least someone on board was happy.

Listless in my cabin, I was at a loss. My schedule at home was always jam-packed. Beyond the porthole, I reflected on the vast blueness of the North Sea. Those blue colors matched my mood.

My breakfast tray was still on the table, and like in a cafeteria, I should turn it in. Motivated by a real goal, I left to find the kitchen, or what's called a galley on a ship.

I picked up the tray and concentrated on keeping it level since the ship's movements threw me off balance. Sea legs might take years to develop. I passed some sailors on the way and said good morning in Danish but didn't linger to prevent dropping anything. They nodded and said good morning but stared at me. All because of this silly costume from the 1850s. I should wear pants and look like them.

The ship's galley was easy to find since my nose led me straight to the baking bread. I poked my head into a small room lined with barrels. Bags of food balanced on top of each other and leaned against the walls. Wooden benches by the cast iron stove sagged under duress from demanding burdens.

A heavyset man in an apron swung around and grinned. He wiped his hands off and took my tray, placed it behind him, and shook my hand.

"Good morning, Madam Jensen. Welcome aboard. I am Simon Svendsen, the chef and baker. As you can see, not much of a surprise."

He was about my height with a broad grin. A chubby chef was a positive sign.

Simon showed off loaves of bread ready for the oven as proof of his work. "I trust my small breakfast was satisfactory to start your day?"

"Great," and added thank you in Danish. "*Tak for mad.*"

Danes said thank you at the end of every meal. Even children thank their parents but only when a meal is over. Once I told my mother-in-law early, after the first course, and she was worried I wasn't eating anything else.

"Please call me Kat. My name is Kathryn Jensen, but I go by Kat."

"Cat? Like the animal? Meow?"

"Yes, it's my nickname. I was always rescuing lost or injured animals and most often cats."

"You should like this."

He crooked his finger to show me something. A small black kitten was sleeping in a little box packed with white towels on the floor.

"We always have a cat or two aboard."

I nodded, but this was a first. Cunard was the only cruise line I knew that allowed animals on board. But pets were isolated in separate caged areas with strict visiting hours.

"Adorable. What's her, or his, name?" I crouched down to pet the kitten.

"Her, I think. No name. Not yet. Perhaps you would do the honor?"

The fur was baby soft, and the small kitten opened her eyes. As if not wanting to leave her dream world so soon, she shut them again and turned away.

"I would love to. I will think of a something perfect for her."

"She is worn out. Her first night aboard. She wandered the entire ship."

"She's curious about her new home like me."

"Are you hungry? Lunch will be served ..." He stopped to look at a pocket watch hanging from a small hook on the wall. "In about an hour."

"No, I can wait." I had nowhere else to go, so I sat on a stool next to his work table. The galley was cozy, warm, and light as opposed to my blah, cold, and dark cabin.

"Can I help?" I hoped I wouldn't regret my offer after recalling my friend Kathleen's warning. She was convinced I would be on permanent kitchen duty.

"Help?"

"With the cooking or ..." I was slow at peeling vegetables and visualized bags of potatoes surrounding me. Danes ate potatoes as part of most of their meals. Boiled with brown gravy was the most common and my least favorite version.

"Oh, no, no. Some crew members assist with those duties."

A sailor walked in but stopped in his tracks when he saw me. Simon introduced me to his assistant Henrik Dalgaard, and we shook hands. He was the sailor at my door this morning with Uffe.

"A cup of tea or coffee, Madam? I mean Kat. You are English, so tea?"

"I like both, but I prefer coffee in the morning. I'm an American."

"Not from England?" His eyes grew round in surprise.

"From New York City." I was proud of my new hometown.

"You have had a long journey to board our ship."

"Pretty easy. A piece of cake." The flight from New York City to Copenhagen via London was uneventful. Even the airplane had better bathrooms despite no shower.

In the pantry next to the galley, Simon showed me some provisions which consisted of potatoes and smoked fish. Marinated herring and pickled vegetables occupied large barrels. Bags of flour, rice, and kidney beans leaned against the walls next to cartons of salt and sugar. Some tin containers of nutmeg and unknown spices filled a shelf next to jars of homemade preserved fruit and relishes.

Simon moved some food around and looked busy. "Excuse me. I must get lunch ready to keep

the crew happy.”

Henrik placed a steaming cup of coffee in front of me. I poured in some cream and watched them work while it cooled down.

Simon and Henrik were busy, so after finishing my coffee, I thanked them and petted the kitten goodbye.

I wandered around the ship to see my new home. On a mast, I found a brass nameplate with *Anne Kristine*, the ship’s name, and the year 1852. I had expected a modern replica so was in awe this old ship was still seaworthy. Three huge masts towered above with sails furled.

The vessel moved fast, at a clip, and lived up to its name. A fast, sleek clipper ship was what I had searched for. Such a shame the cabins remained so out of date. Next time I would get a brochure and confirm they took the time to install electricity and plumbing. But I bit my lip knowing there would never be a next time.

Are you interested in reading the rest of the novel? Thirty-nine more chapters are ready and waiting. *BLUENESS* is available as a trade paperback or ebook from Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and other book retailers.

About the Author

Karen Stensgaard is the author of the novel *Aquavit*, the first book in the Aquamarine Sea series. She grew up in San Antonio, Texas and after high school graduation, was a foreign exchange student in Denmark. After completing her MBA in Texas, she moved to San Francisco and through a series of unexpected twists became a bank examiner and later an internal auditor consultant. Karen moved to New York City and held many senior audit positions at financial firms. She lives in Philadelphia with her husband and two rescued cats.

To find out more about this book and stay up to date on new ones, visit her website blog on karenstensgaard.com. Sign up for updates or join her Facebook Novelist page. On Pinterest, she has created boards which visualize key characters and some scenes. Karen also blogs about her travels, libraries, and other fun topics on her website.

If you enjoyed reading *Aquavit* or *Blueness*, please share the word with your friends. Send feedback to me or even better, post an online book review on Goodreads, Amazon, or another site. Your support is incredibly valuable in today’s busy world.

Let’s stay connected on social media!



Karenstensgaard.com



@karenstenzy



Karenstensgaard

Blueness is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's vivid imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to living or dead persons, events, or locales is coincidental.

Copyright © 2019 by Karen Stensgaard

All rights reserved. Published in the United States by Sandefur Metz Publishing Company, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA.

ISBN 9780999219720 (ebook)

For more information, please contact the author through her website: karenstensgaard.com.