

Creative Writing Group

Collaborative Story: The Dress Rehearsal

Kitty glanced at the sky nervously. It was suddenly looking rather threatening, and she had been hoping to get a sail in before the light faded. She smiled to herself. She had barely arrived home, and she was already contemplating being out on the water.

She loved London, loved the excitement of the bustling city but her heart was here. She loved the sea spray in her face, the thrill of skimming across the water, the danger of... She stopped herself for a moment. Yes, she must never forget the danger of the sea. She had lost too many family and friends to the sea. So she went down to the sea, to her mooring in Burlesdon, opposite *The Jolly Sailor*. She got into the little dinghy she kept there and rowed out to her boat. The sky was still threatening but she disregarded it. She would take the weather as she found it. As she climbed aboard the yacht she felt the first drops of rain.

As the rain intensified, Kitty, dressed in foul weather gear, revelled in the bracing salty sea air as it whipped around her. She set course for the *Seahorse Bistro* hoping to make it in time for lunch. With the wind behind she was making good time when she spotted a yacht off to the port side, its movements oddly erratic. Curiosity and a sense of duty found her steering closer to take a look. If someone needed help she couldn't ignore it, sailors looked out for one another.

Approaching from the leeward side, she dropped anchor at a safe distance. Lifting her vhf radio, she called out, "This is *Blithe Spirit*, do you need assistance?" The clanking of the loose rigging was the only reply. The eerie silence was unsettling.

She contacted the coast guard who instructed her to stay where she was and under no circumstance to try and board the drifting boat. Another emergency meant their arrival would be delayed, possibly an hour. With nothing more to do Kitty went below to make tea. Trying not to spill her drink as she picked her way carefully back up the steps from the galley, she became aware of a high-pitched screech. Was it the sound of the wind, which had suddenly increased in speed, whistling through the sails? Kitty listened more intently. No, the sound was coming from the drifting yacht.

"Help me!" – a young woman was visible on the deck now, dressed incongruously in the storm in a dark green evening dress. She was clutching the guard rails and clearly in a great deal of distress, blood pouring from a wound on her head. "Please help me!" she screamed again. "He's gone".....

Kitty promptly ignored the Coastguard's instructions to 'stay put'. Someone was in serious distress. She raised anchor, hoisted a scrap of sail and moved towards *Blithe Spirit*, where the girl in the green dress became calmer as she watched Kitty drew nearer. 'Please hurry', she called, and as Kitty's boat bumped alongside burst into tears of relief. 'Thank God', she sobbed.

'What's your name?' asked Kitty, practical as ever, 'And who's gone?'

'I'm Sally - and It's John, my husband. He got the most awful crack on the head when we were hit by a big wave, and...' Her voice cracked. 'I Think he's dead.' She burst into tears again.

'Sally... Sally... Go below and see if he's got a pulse. And in the meantime, I'll tell the Coastguard to send out a lifeboat with a doctor. Sorry, there's no way I can come on board, but we'll get help as soon as possible. Now, see to John.' Sally went below, while Kitty called the Coastguard, telling them that she was now alongside Blithe Spirit, and what seemed to have happened.

Sally appeared, a ghost of a smile on her face. 'He's breathing, he's breathing.'

'Good. Now Have you got any blankets? Then just keep John warm. Help is on its way.'

'Cut. Cut. Cut.' The director's voice boomed over the tannoy, and the technicians immediately powered down the effects in the tank: the blades on the wind machine ceased to revolve, the rain stopped falling, and the team hauling on the ropes attached to Blithe Spirit's tall masts collapsed back onto the quayside.

Back on the boat's deck Kate stood up. Being cast as Kitty in this new story was an excellent break for an aspiring actor keen to make a career in the Book World. Before being cast in this story she'd endured 35 unsuccessful auditions, but the good time she'd enjoyed since being cast as Kitty made all her earlier heartache bearable. The heavy rain effects had soaked her clothes, but the wetsuit underneath had ensured she remained dry and snug. She glanced over at the actor playing Sally and the pair exchanged a warm smile. They'd only played a short scene together, but Kate had impressed with her performance in the supporting role.

After a moment the generic playing John ambled up onto the deck, stretching and yawning. His role required him to do nothing more than lie still and play unconscious. The unique distinction for this role was that his character actually had a name, although his performance was unlikely to lead him onto more demanding roles.

Cast and crew all left the set and assembled in a Meeting Room adjacent to the Great Library where the director briefed them on the schedule for publication. With the u3a Open Morning due to take place on Saturday 10th October, they all knew they'd have a busy weekend.