



# *SAIL* your WORRIES AWAY

PART I: THE INVITATION

Carol Newman Cronin

by Carol Newman Cronin

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**Author's Note**

*Sail Your Worries Away* takes place one month before the start of my fourth novel, *Ferry to Cooperation Island* (June 2020). It's about two sailors who circumnavigate the island on the first sail of the season. Enjoy!

## *Part I: Invitation*

The ferry backed away from the Newport docks right on time. Anna gazed out the window, but instead of admiring the charter boats already preparing for summer, she closed her eyes and choked back a sob. Her afternoon ashore had barely netted enough to pay the March grocery bill.

Moving back to her summer childhood home on Brenton Island had been perfect—until the stock market crashed. One week she had all the money she needed from selling her London gallery; the next began a fire-sale of valuable art from her walls, just to get through the winter. Pressing thumb and forefinger into eyes hot with unshed tears, today's loss appeared inside her head: just a small canvas, but her favorite. Because the man sculling a small skiff back to shore looked so much like James...

"Drink, Mrs. Crosby?" the ferry's deckhand asked. The commuters up forward already clutched their own plastic cups.

Ignoring the incorrect title for once, Anna cleared her throat. "Rum on the rocks." She paused. "Actually, Billy—make it a double."

By the time he delivered it—hovering, hoping to chat, until she turned away to face the window—the ferry had left Newport Harbor and climbed to full speed, bow wave glinting in the afternoon sunshine. Anna took her first sip—ah, that was better. The hot rush down her throat and into her belly would burn away all those silly tears.

What colors would she use to paint Narragansett Bay? A favorite distraction on this forty-minute ride, because the answer was different each time—especially once they reached open ocean. Mesmerizing blues and greens, topped with darting dashes of white that today would require a tiny squeeze of chrome yellow.

When Brenton's rocky breakwater appeared off the port bow, she handed Billy her cup and gathered her leather tote bag against her side, wishing it still contained the framed canvas she'd carried over this morning. What's done is done, she told herself again, as the ferry slowed down to idle across empty harbor. The weather had finally turned, and the air tickling around her bare ankles was surprisingly warm for mid-April; out here, spring usually whimpered its way right into June. That meant summer tourist dollars were just around the corner.

And look! Dad's boat had been launched today, as promised. *Her* boat, she corrected, admiring the old girl's fresh varnish and polished white hull. She'd have to sell yet another painting to pay the boatyard bill, but now she could escape for a sail anytime she wanted.

As soon as the ferry docked, the five commuters rushed off. Following more slowly, Anna paused outside the wheelhouse door to admire Captain James. This boat was much bigger than the skiff in *Evening Return*, of course, but his craggy profile still took some of the sting out of today's loss.

"Nice warm day for a change," she said, when he glanced over at her. Even squinting into the sun's glare, those blue eyes were so much darker than her own. This morning, his curly brown hair (burnt umber, or raw umber?) had grazed the collar of the white captain's shirt; now his neck showed a stripe of pale skin between hair and tan line.

"You've had a haircut," she said, before she could stop herself.

He turned back to the chartplotter in front of the wood-spoked wheel, bristly eyebrows scrunching together. *James prefers to keep himself to himself*, her father would've said.

Through the ferry's salt-sprayed windshield, she spotted Dad's sailboat tugging at the mooring. As if saying: *ask him*.

Ask James to go sailing? She couldn't do that!

He shut down the engines, but kept his right hand on the throttles and his gaze forward, as if still underway. Waiting for her to shut up and go home.

Then again—this was the rum talking now—why *not* ask him? If she didn't, the answer would definitely be no.

"I'm going out for a sail," she said, swallowing hard. "Want to join me? Perfect afternoon. But... she's a bit much for one person in such a strong breeze. And I'm probably quite rusty, after such a long winter..."

She clamped her lips together to stop any further chatter, and

waited. Surely even James—not known for his conversational skills—could answer a simple yes or no question?

Three years ago, when she and her paintings had first moved back to the island, she'd thought there was a chance at something with him. Then his mother died and he moved in with Barb the baker—right across the road from Anna's own house. But all Barb did lately was grouse about James. So maybe he was still fiddling with his instruments and rubbing at a stain on that counter because he didn't really want to go home?

When she turned to leave—cheeks aflame with her boldness, and his silent rebuff—he spoke at last.

"Bit early in the season."

"But warm enough. And I can't wait to get out on her again."

He scooped up a navy sweatshirt and stepped toward her. "Okay then, lead the way."

"Oh—but I need to go home first—change my clothes?" She waved down at her thin blouse, peach skirt, and embarrassingly chipped toenail polish peeking out of wedge heels. "I'll only be a few minutes..."

Nodding, he tied the sweatshirt around his waist. "I'll top up the engine oil, meet you right here."

"Super, James! See you soon."

She clomped up the gangway and wooden dock, trying to contain her grin. He'd said yes!

When gravel and dirt ferry landing met shiny macadam she turned left, practically running now, daring her unsupported ankles to carry her up the incline as fast as possible—and feeling much younger than she had an hour earlier. To hell with her unpaid bills, she thought, striding right past Prime's Grocery. To hell with today's lost painting. To hell with the shitty half-finished canvases piling up in her home studio. Time to sail away from her worries—and maybe begin something new.

Fifteen minutes later, dressed in sneakers, stonewashed jeans, and a cobalt blue wool shirt that matched her eyes perfectly, she carried a canvas tote bag down the hill again and out onto the dock. "Ready?" she asked. "I brought us some sandwiches, too. Oh—I forgot drinks."

James strode up the ramp, rubber-soled shoes squeaking. "I'll grab some beers—Mack won't mind." He disappeared into a ramshackle building and came out, left fingers entwined in a six pack.

Canned beer; now that brought her right back to her twenties.

## SAIL YOUR WORRIES AWAY

Smiling, she led the way around the outside end of the bait shack to the far side of the pier. Sailing with James Malloy! The afternoon was definitely looking up.

*Thanks for reading-1*

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**About the Author**

**Carol Newman Cronin** is an award-winning author and a 2004 Olympian. Her fourth novel, *Ferry to Cooperation Island*, is out June 16, 2020.

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*Cape Cod Surprise*

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