

# *The Running*

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*Books by Esther Forbes*

O GENTEEL LADY!

A MIRROR FOR WITCHES

MISS MARVEL

PARADISE

THE GENERAL'S LADY

PAUL REVERE AND THE WORLD HE LIVED IN

JOHNNY TREMAIN

AMERICA'S PAUL REVERE  
*{with Lynd Ward}*

THE BOSTON BOOK  
*{with Arthur Griffin}*

THE RUNNING OF THE TIDE

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*The Running of the Tide*

~ To ~  
*Ferris Greenslet*

## Chapter One

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**H**EWN LOGS spliced and bolted formed a spine which rested upon bed-blocks. In turn this rested upon the gray gravel of her mother, Salem. Upon the keel, the keelson. At the bows, the stem. At the stern, the stern post. Ribs of oak sprang up and out. The unborn thing had a skeleton. Anyone could see this was to be a ship.

As the embryo grew, so also grew the gigantic womb that formed it. Guy ropes, like delicate membranes held it to land. A multiplicity of ladders bound her to her mother. Like all unborn things, she was parasitic and fed from all about her. The locust for her trunnels came from no farther than Salem Neck. Her white oak from over Danvers way. Yellow pine for her inner skin from round Ipswich. The hackmatack for her mighty knees from along North River. So she sucked the forest into herself.

At three months she had decks, steerage, forecastle, poop, quarterdeck bulwarks, cabins. Then the shipwrights' work was done.

Iron workers followed the caulkers. They set chains and pumps. Joiners and carvers followed. There was gingerbread upon her stern, bright quick-work upon her bows, delicate paneling in her cabins. Before she was even born, she had certain pretty perfections—as a child may have eyebrows, lashes, fingernails.

Painters began when the joiners left. Lemon-yellow waist against blue-black topsides. Pale blue inside the bulwarks.

One day an ox cart lurched down bustling Derby Street. On it was enthroned a goddess—the figurehead of the new ship "Tirey Becket" was building for Old Ma'am Inman.

The red ox moved with the slow majesty of its kind. Merchants stepped out of counting-houses to see her; clerks stared with invoices in their hands. Wharfingers and seamen, porters, riggers, sailmakers—with their thimbles strapped to their palms; women and fancy girls, urchins yelled and ran after her. She was beautiful to see—the bold wooden woman, blocked and chained to the cart. She was poised to fly forever forward, without one backward glance. Her white and gilt draperies blew behind her as though she already fought the storms. She had a lifted head, thrust up and out in the manner of figureheads, and a passion-swollen neck. Her nostrils were disdainful; her bitter lips parted. The wild, beautiful staring eyes were fixed on something that never was and never would be. Not one downward glance did she have for the merely human Salem which ran to cheer her. In fact, she had such a lofty crook in her neck, she would never be able to look down at the green wooden wreath she held before her in stiff hands.

As the cart lurched over the littered cobbled street, it tilted the flying figure. Sometimes she seemed about to give her wreath to her admirers upon her left hand. Sometimes to those upon her right. Nevertheless, she held it fast.

It was the day the figurehead arrived at Becket's Yard that the ship received a soul, and one might say she quickened. This was her fourth month.

At last her time was completed. Now she must break from the gigantic womb, leave the matrix of her New England town. She trembled as the blocks were knocked from beneath her but would not start. It was a winter day, cold and lowering. There was broken ice in the harbor. She was still a thing of land, forest, and workshop, and seemed loath to move from the safety of snug town for lonely sea.

The audience assembled for her launching grew cold and bored. Some went home. Her midwives tried one trick of their trade after another. She would not move. They whispered together, scratched their heads. Then, suddenly, as if she had made up her mind to risk it, she took the ways with a rush, and the owner's youngest grandchild hurled a bottle after her careering prow.

"Ship! In the name of God I call thee *Victrix*."

It was her stern hit the water first. A wave rose as she flashed out into the icy harbor. It rushed up over the beaches, rose and

sucked at wharves. It set moored dories a-bobbing, and great East Indiamen, decked all over with flags and bunting for this day, rose and fell in grand obeisance to her—the youngest daughter of the Salem fleet. But the *Victrix* looked ready to turn beam ends. She shot out so far into the ship channel, she barely missed the *Belisarius*. As her tidal wave subsided, she came about, acknowledged her audience with a bow so deep her prow plunged into the sea. Slowly, calmly, it rose again. The woman with the wreath had for the first time tasted bitter salt.

She was still a helpless thing. Her first gesture to her new environment was a timid one. Her anchors feebly grasped the shallow muddy bottom.

Although launched and baptized, she still had no masts and no rigging, no sails, no guns; but she was already an entity and she was in the sea where she belonged.

## ~2~

THE YOUNG *Victrix* lay off Inman Wharf. Every mast was set. Her rigging tight and black with tar. Her deck holystoned to white. Now she was complete and laden, her people signed, her papers cleared. All she needed was a breeze.

Some at their anchorage, some tied up at wharves, were eleven other great ships waiting for a wind. Twelve Salem ships heading out beyond the ends of the world and now becalmed, not to mention assorted small craft, sloops, coasters, heeltappers.

The old ships, like the good *Belisarius* at Crowninshield's Wharf with their *Minerva* beside her, the *Amazon* and the *Brutus* at Derby's, the *Hazard* and the *Ulysses* at anchor—all these eleven other ships seemed philosophical about their imprisonment, but the young *Victrix* was fretty at her anchorage—at least, so it seemed to Dash Inman. He stood at the far end of his grandmother's wharf and watched her soberly. Now she is reconciled to a sea life, he thought, remembering her launching. Now she wants to go. He, as much as Becket, had designed her. Every piece of wood that had gone into her he had passed on. He had watched the sailmakers at their sewing. McIntire had carved her figurehead to suit his fancy.

On either side of Inman Wharf were others stretching like fingers out into Salem Harbor, each striving to reach deeper water than its rival. Orne's, Crowinshield's, Derby's, Union, Forrester's, and White's. At some of the wharves returned ships were hove down for cleaning. At Becket's Yard a new ship was rising. At the Inman's was the *Mermaid* fresh back from St. Petersburg. Standing about on these wharves sober-eyed men stared at the becalmed vessels, studied upon the weather. Dash knew the talk going round — when the calm broke, the wind would come up nor'east, so it was said. You couldn't move a ship out of Salem Harbor when the wind was in that quarter. And nor'easters are apt to last three days.

Yet he had a feeling — nothing but a feeling — this was not to be so. He fell to pacing the wharf, back and forth. Unconsciously the amount of space he allowed himself was the exact length of the average quarterdeck, for he had been a mate at sixteen and a captain five years now — ever since he was nineteen. He had a smart, quick step — no landlubber's careless loungings. Even on the stout cob wharf he seemed determined that no sudden pitch was going to land him on his beam ends. He was a strongly built young fellow of little more than average height. The set of head, shoulders, and chin suggested authority. Men do not get that particular carriage from taking other men's orders all their lives, nor had he. He had an impressive face, bold and blunt-featured, with fine hazel eyes and a curiously muscular mouth. That mouth had been formed by all the yelling he had done from quarterdecks — and even more by the times he hadn't yelled but said nothing. By the times he had gritted his teeth and spoken quietly when God knew he wanted to swear. The times he had kept his hands in his pockets — so afraid he might bash in some fool's head. It was a strong, almost hard, very disciplined face. But the discipline had come from himself — not from any superior here or in Heaven. It was years since he had been out of sight of land without complete say-so over everybody in reach of his voice.

But the obviously young face looked white and worn. A girl might think it romantic — here at last was one of those passionate souls that can die for love or honor, such as one found more often in novels than in life. To a clergyman it might suggest cards, wine, and women. To a medical man a tropical disease with which sea-



men sometimes returned home but to die. But the overtightening of the face, the wearing away of flesh showed the fine structure underneath of the cheekbones and emphasized the brave set of the mouth—a broad mouth, the upper lip thinner than the lower, which had a way of thrusting itself out upon occasions. Now, as he walked, it was thrust out at the weather. Such mouths were known locally as “Inman mouths.” Again he stopped at the end of the wharf, brooding and thinking of nothing. Slowly he licked his fingers and held up his hand. There was not a sign of a breeze. He studied the shore along Marblehead. Fishermen are smart to guess weather. As far as he could see, they were as becalmed over there, with their little high-haunched heeltappers, as Salem merchants were in their great full-riggers. No sudden darkening of the harbor suggested as much as a cat’s paw moving. The flag to his left hung limp on Fort Pickering’s staff. The sounds of the waterfront came to him clearly through the soft sunny May air. The creak of a moored dory, the suck of tides about slimy piers, porters rolling casks, a winch unloading and men he-hawing as the cargo came out of a hole. The caterwauling of gulls and the music of shipwrights’ adzes and hammers.

His dark head lifted, the nostrils stiffened. He could not feel it, nor see it, nor hear it. But he knew a wind was coming up. And it was coming fresh and perfect—from the west. It was the uncanny sixth sense of the good seaman that had told him—his very blood and bones; for he carried within himself finer navigating instruments than any he could buy.

The broad mouth relaxed into a smile. He wanted to yell out, “Hurrah! We are off!” to all the waiting ships. But on general principles he “didn’t say much.” He was a somewhat taciturn young man, and for better or worse took and kept his own counsel. There was little of the jolly tar in his somewhat complicated nature.

Over the bulwarks of the *Victrix* a lank gray-bearded face had been watching him. It was old Jemmy, the shipwatcher.

“How’s that, Captain Dash?” he yelled.

“I didn’t say nothing,” Dash called back.

“How’s that again?” The old fellow was pretty deaf.

Dash had no idea of telling all Salem what nobody but himself had had the wit to guess.

He cupped his mouth with his hands.

"Look like three-day nor'easter to you, Jemmy?"

His voice rang out marvelously, every syllable pitched exactly right to cross the hundred feet of water and penetrate the half-sealed ears on the anchored ship. The old man looked delighted. Perhaps he had been hounding Captain Dash so he would have to yell loud enough to make him hear.

"Yep, it does, Captain. Yep, it does."

Dash turned and walked confidently back to the head of the wharf and his grandmother's counting-house. It was a comical building. The lower story was left open so a dray could drive under it. Outside stairs led to the offices above. Within, he knew his widowed grandmother sat at her desk in the inner office and his youngest brother Peter and old Fessenden, the clerk, in the outer office. He knew what he should do. Tell Ma'am time had come. Ask her permission to consult with the captain (for the captain chose the exact moment for casting off), ask first her and then Captain Magee if it wasn't time to summon the ship's people aboard and put on last things. He stood and fingered the limp house flag that hung before the counting-house. It was navy blue cut by a broad white diagonal. How could you tell an owner that you had an idea time had come? You can't talk about such secret knowledge to a woman—especially to one who also happened to be your employer and your grandmother. He might have told young Peter—but Ma'am? No.

Under the stilted-up counting-house were three crates of live chickens. He had bought them—for every detail of the *Victrix* voyage he had taken upon himself. He had been feeding the smelly things for a week. Over against the big brick warehouse—a bit empty and he knew it—was a pen holding Bouncing Bet—a sow who had been twice to India and back. By the looks of her, the people of the *Victrix* would be eating piglets before they got to Good Hope. He'd have to remind Magee to hunt up a proper mate for her in, say, Batavia, so the supply of piglets would be good for the voyage home. Also there were a few sheep shut up in a warehouse. That warehouse had just been sold to Billy Gray. The whole wharf was mortgaged. He gritted his teeth, for it was his fault.

Only the living things, men and live eating animals, remained to go aboard. Well—while he was figuring what to do next he'd

get these chickens aboard. He picked up a crate and took it down a ladder to a moored dory. Went back for the other two crates and looked at the sow. She and the sheep were too tarnation noisy. He didn't want Ma'am sticking out her cute little head — asking him as she always did, all day long, whatever he was about. Standing in the dory he sculled the little way to the *Victrix*.

The old shipwatcher was there at a gun port taking in the crates as he handed them up. The *Victrix* had eight real guns and four "quaker" or wooden ones. England and France were going at each other hammer and tongs. They didn't leave much space between them for a "peaceful" neutral trader. You had to fight for what you got in this world — and Congress had said armed French ships could be attacked on sight.

"Captain Dash, it ain't fitting for you to carry chickens aboard yourself, sir."

"It's fitting for Clerk Dash," he yelled back. "Put 'em in the longboat, Jemmy, for now."

"You moving livestock aboard now, sir? You fixing on getting out of here — no matter the wind? You going to kedge out — use sweeps?"

"Oh, hell — I'm tired of feeding these things. You can mind them now. Grain's in the galley."

He swung himself on deck and the shipwatcher, a hermit by nature, scuttled forward with his cud of tobacco. Dash looked suspiciously at the decks. No, he had been spitting downwind and straight as a seaman should.

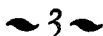
He went up the gangway ladder to the poop deck. From here he got a pretty view of her — the varnished masts, the black lace of shrouds against the delicate girlish sky of May. She was 99 feet long, 28 wide, and 336 tons burthen. This was as large a ship as shallow Salem Harbor accommodated with ease or was expedient in the uncharted waters of the Pacific. It was ships of this size that were by 1800 making Salem the wealthiest city in the world.

Here by her wheel, facing the binnacle before him, her captain would stand, watching the helmsman at the steering wheel and the stars, keeping the sails set every moment to best advantage, listening for the singing chant of men with the sounding lead, the cry of the lookout, the half-heard dangerous roar of surf. He could almost feel the ship surging beneath him. His stance broadened.

His feet seemed to grip the planks as a hawk grips a bough, and he was swaying slightly, thus unconsciously his body produced for his delight the ancient rhythms of his calling.

But — no more of this brooding. He wasn't her captain. He wasn't good enough — even yet. He did not deserve her. He had done wrong, and deep in him was the old New England belief that the man who had done wrong had better suffer for it. This was apart from any law of God's or man's. Long accustomed to his own say-so, he was perfectly ready to be his own judge and his own culprit. Not for him any running to a priest — "Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned." He was proud as Lucifer and looked to neither God nor man to tell him what he ought to do. His pride took him full circle and came out in manners so modest as sometimes to seem diffident.

But he longed for the *Victrix*. Tomorrow at dawn — that's when she was going to sail. In his pocket (not on his grandmother's desk where it belonged) was her portledge bill, giving the names of her men, the advances most of them had drawn, the ventures allowed to each. There were nineteen names in all. His grandmother had picked Captain Magee, and the rest were men Dash wanted. His younger brother Eleazar, or "Liz," would be first mate. Dan Obrian, a rough, capable fellow he had taken from a Derby ship where he had been a foremast hand and put in as the *Victrix* second. Handled right, he believed Dan would make a clever officer. Handled wrong, a big-mouthed bully. He left the wharf and stepped off down Derby Street. First thing he'd tell Magee, then the mates, and send someone to call out his crew. Maybe Mr. Africanus would show up. He was a knowing old fellow and had a way of presenting himself exactly when Dash wanted a messenger, thus earning a few pennies. The *Victrix* must catch next morning's high tide — due at four-thirty. At low tide she was actually sitting on mud. He wasn't going to wait for afternoon tide — see the whole boiling of them stepping out ahead of her. No. He walked quickly, wrapped in concentration. He always walked like a man who knew exactly where he was going — never looking back, never looking to see if anyone followed him. But ever since boyhood people had followed, for he was born to walk first and a little alone. Even now admiring eyes and a whisper followed him, but he did not know it.



MA'AM INMAN sat in her inner office with a letter in her hand. She had a good view of the *Mermaid* graving in the yard, but none of her wharf and the *Victrix*.

Mercy Inman, Esquire  
Salem, U.S.A.

Dear Sir,

The old lady took off the spectacles one grandson had brought her from France and tried a pair another grandson had brought her from London. She had a darning-basket full of them on her desk before her. She sat tidy and little on her high stool, her feet neat as a young girl's in heelless slippers curled about the stool legs.

"Me, as Senator of Orloff and Marbury," she read. Of course he meant representative. Those poor "Rooshuns" didn't know much about representative government——She put the letter down. You couldn't fix your mind on anything today—not with twelve great ships waiting for a wind: a wind that would not come. And when it did—"O dear Father in Heaven—it will be a year, two years, before I know how she's fared. O Heavenly Father, give your poor impatient servant the strength to wait." Her head (mostly covered by a large cambric cap) was bowed. How would she prove—that *Victrix*? Would the new ship be the salvation of the old House of Inman—or the last nail in the coffin? She herself was well over seventy, and she had at last been such a zany as to put all her eggs in one basket. Dash—that crazy Dash! Eight months ago, when he had lost her her *Antelope*, she had been so angry with him she had told him he'd not have another ship of hers to throw away for a year at least—if ever. She had told him he was to sit right here in the counting-house and clerk it. She was going to get more ballast into him to counteract all the sail he had always carried. It was time he learned what failure looked like—for there had been little but success before in his life, but usually on other men's ships. When she died, she wanted her grandsons trained as good sensible careful captains and merchants. Dash was oldest of the four—and she admired him most and trusted him

least of all. He'd make or wreck anything—a ship or a woman or a country. He was born to make or wreck.

Seemingly he had sat on his stool and clerked it as modestly as his youngest brother, Peter. He hadn't complained—any. He had just grown whiter and more worn-looking—as though he was injured and bleeding inside. He had bought and sold cargoes, seen to the upkeep and lading of the ships, seen to crews—and the building of the *Victrix*. And utterly corrupted her. For it was he who had made her want the new ship more than anything on God's earth. Made a gambler of her, the most cautious merchant in Salem. She might as well face it. He had become the merchant—and she the clerk. And for the life of her she could not see how he had done it. He had not pushed her aside—made her feel old and useless the way Liz did. He had made her feel his own age, young and eager. Crazy as himself. No, he had not gone against her, but swept her along with him. And that's magic for you, she thought. They used to hang people in Salem who weren't half the witch that fellow is.

Ah, well . . . Perhaps he was right. Her cautious management of the House had not been too successful. If things had been going real well, they could have absorbed the loss of the *Antelope*. Folk said she did wrong to stick so to Baltic trading. The money was in the Far East. Folk said she did wrong to hire her captains so often among the older men—let her grandsons command Derby and Crowninshield ships or go so often as mates on her ships. She wasn't quite ready to trust them. But the first time she had given Dash an East Injunman to command, he had lost her. He had never lost a ship before, and he had commanded the Crowninshields' *Belisarius* at nineteen.

"Peter," she called.

From the outer office a boy of seventeen or so, with a quill pen stuck in the black curls over his ear, sauntered in. He was still a little gangling. Although his long arms and legs did not look well composed, his face was, for his expression was strikingly clear and serene. It was an expression more often found upon an elderly face which can look back upon a long well-spent life and look down a little upon young folk still struggling against the inevitable sorrows and frustrations of life. He smiled at his grandmother with benignity. His three older brothers—famous Dash, doggy Liz,

and capable Tom — were primarily her employees. Peter was really a grandson and the very apple of her eye. They called her Ma'am. He usually Grandma.

"Peter, what's Dash up to?" She had a lively young voice.

"Dash?" Peter looked as puzzled as though he had never heard his brother's famous nickname. He was working for a split second in which to decide how much of what he had seen Dash doing these last few minutes was fitting to tell. He'd seen him scull out with the chickens. And he guessed he was now out summoning the ship's people. As long as he hadn't chosen to tell the owner, Peter was not going to.

"Why, I think I saw him a few minutes back, sort of fiddling about the wharf. Then he sort of roamed around a bit, and finally just now he was heading west on Derby."

"You shouldn't waste so much time hanging out the window, Peter."

At this reproof Peter smiled kindly from ear to ear. He had the "Inman mouth." It sat better upon a man than a woman. Anyone could guess he was Dash's young brother, but he was an attenuated version. Nobody had ever said Peter was handsome.

"I want him to be sure Captain Magee understands a few changes some of our neighbors have made in their ventures. That Susan Pickman! Never saw an old party change her mind so often. She's entrusting to us another cask of ginseng. And fifteen boxes of spermaceti candles, not five as first she said. Mr. Knapp has added to his venture. He wants Indy shawls. I've told them the *Victrix* may never go out farther than Isle de France—but I trust Captain Magee's discretion completely." She was studying the slate she used for memoranda.

"Dash has added all those changes. Captain Magee will get them all right."

"What about the ship's boy — Billy Bates?"

"Dash took him to Doctor West. He cut open that felon. He's fine."

She herself could think of nothing more she might tell Clerk Dash, but it irked her that she never knew "what he was up to."

She tapped her teeth with her slate pencil.

"Where's Liz?" It was Liz who had just brought the *Mermaid*, laden with Russian hemp canvas and Swedish iron, back from the

Baltic. It had been his first command of any ship of hers. Now he was to go as mate to the Far East.

"Liz?" Peter repeated calmly, looking thoughtfully at the ceiling, taking all the time he needed to decide whether there was any covering-up he had better do for Liz. "He's out in the carriage with Mother — making his farewells."

"Farewells? Why, those ships are going to be stuck where they are for five days more."

"Mother's taking him over to Derby farm and round Danvers way."

"Oh, Liz and his mother!" the old woman said impatiently; "sometimes I pity Liz."

"You needn't, Grandma. He doesn't mind being a mother's monkey ashore — just so he can get him a good command at sea."

"Well, I never see him anywhere except ashore. And those pantaloons of his — tighter than a frog's skin. And waistcoats — three deep. He never looks like a serious seaman to me."

She knew Liz had been disappointed, when he came home with the *Mermaid* (and a good decent voyage he had made), to hear his grandmother had already signed Captain Magee to command the *Victrix* — and all he was to be was mate. He had already gone as mate on the Crowninshields' *Astrea* to India. He was twenty-one, and he thought his grandmother might trust him as master of the new ship. He had still been in his sea clothes when he had suggested this. She had almost relented. And next day she had seen him in those pantaloons of his — the beau of Salem.

"If Liz only looked more serious, I might have entrusted the *Victrix* to him. I know he is a very sharp young man. And I do hate — once more to see captains' shares going outside the family."

Peter gazed at her soberly. He had none of his oldest brother's intensity, and his eyes were much darker without any of those hazel flashes in them which could set a lady's heart rocking or a lazy foremast hand trembling. But like Dash he had an expressive face. Now the dark eyes reproached his grandmother because she had not said, "I might have given the command to Dash."

She went on: "Tom is very competent. All the merchants tell me how competent Tom is. But Cousin Crowninshield does not expect his *Nautilus* back from India for four or five months yet. I wanted Tom to have that chance to serve as mate under Captain



Jake. Yet I think if Tom had been to hand, I *think* I might have trusted him. He wasn't. And I can't feel Liz is real serious. I hadn't any choice but pitch on Captain Magee — once more."

Peter said nothing, but thought of Dash, white and broody, these last eight months — ever since he had got his "shore leave" for losing the *Antelope*.

His grandmother, feeling the reproach in his eyes, said: "Captain Magee would just as soon not go — I'm afraid. Not at his time of life. It's a boy's world — sailing our ships — and he's a man turned forty. He hasn't the heart for adventuring that the younger men have."

"Isn't that why you like him?"

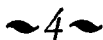
"Well, at least he's sensible. Steady. I've been employing him for years — waiting for my own young captains to grow up. But sometimes I do wish I had kept Tom closer to hand. Or could forget what Liz looks like ashore."

But Dash? Peter's eyes reproved her.

She said abruptly: "Dash Inman lost the *Antelope* and stove in our fortunes. He's going to have a year to think that over. And when I say a year, I don't mean any eight months either. If he don't like this decision of mine, he can get him a command from some other house. And don't you go throwing it up against me that I won't give him the *Victrix*. He's a-going to have twelve months in which to cool his heels."

"Grandma, I haven't even mentioned Dash."

"Oh, go away, Peter! I can read you like a book."



AT THE CHARITY HOUSE on Pickering Hill, overlooking the harbor and close to the graveyard, a group of inmates sat about enjoying the sun. It is hard enough in the best of weather to be poor, but fair misery in winter. The suns of May lay like warm shawls on their shoulders. Here were a few old seamen, too decrepit to finish their lives as clamdiggers or shipwatchers; a silly fellow soft-headed from birth. Old women whose wits had dulled by time and rum. A young slattern with an odd assortment of children. A few black folk.