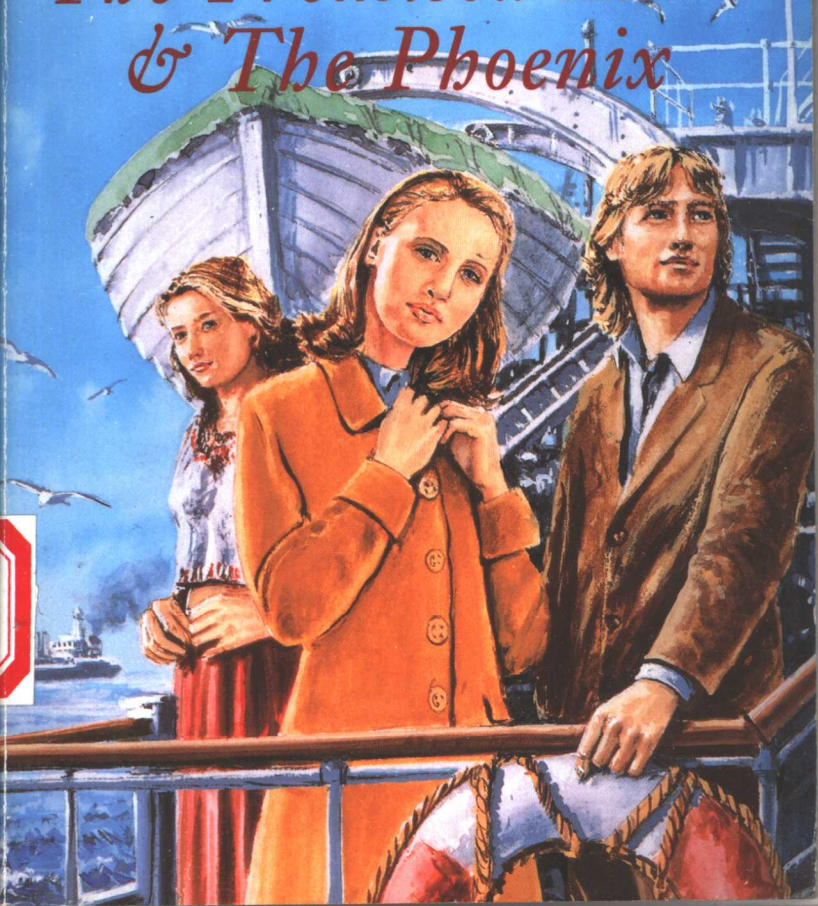


# CAROLINE GRAY

## *The Promised Land & The Phoenix*



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# **THE PROMISED LAND**



## Prologue

"Oh!" Miriam Grain gasped, as the ship seemed to fall away from beneath her. "Oh, my God!" she screamed, as the bunk came back up and slammed into her body. "We should have flown. Oh, we should have flown."

"Now, Mums," Matilda said severely. "You know we couldn't afford to fly."

Miriam groaned as the ship hit another wave with a shuddering jar. "If we were on a bigger ship . . ." William ventured.

"We'd be in second class," Matilda reminded her brother, brutally. "Gosh, that was a big one."

Once again the ship came to a shuddering stop, and spray splattered across the cabin windows. Joanna rolled out of bed, reached for her robe, and staggered to the door. She didn't think she was going to be sick; she just didn't want to hear them wailing and complaining any more.

She dragged the door open, lost her footing as the ship rolled, and landed on her hands and knees. Gathering her nightdress almost to her thighs she pushed herself back up. The cabins on board the *Caribee Queen* opened directly in to the saloon, and there were lights on in here, although thankfully at two in the morning it was empty of people; Joanna staggered across the heaving deck and reached an armchair, into which she collapsed, gasping. It was bolted to the deck.

It was remarkable, she thought, how small the ship suddenly felt. The *Caribee Queen* was eight thousand tons, one of a line of freighters that traded between England and the Caribbean, which took twelve passengers; she had seemed quite large enough when they had boarded her in Georgetown, five days before. Now she seemed just a plaything, her engines racing as her propellers cavitated, more spray rattling across her windows.

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Joanna wondered if she was going to die, was surprised at being less afraid than curious, and somewhat disappointed. She was sixteen, but big for her age, both in height and body; William, two years younger but a keen student of the female anatomy, used to annoy his older sister Matilda by telling her that Jo's boobs were as big as hers. Matilda, at eighteen very much the grown-up, had no sense of humour where figures were concerned; hers was the best.

The door to the deck opened, and Joanna hastily sat up, scooping her long yellow hair back from her face, dragging the robe over her shoulders. The man who came in didn't notice her for a moment as he took off his oilskins, draping them across the bar. Then he turned towards her, and grinned. "Good morning."

Joanna nodded, unable to frame an adequate reply. He came across the deck towards her, apparently able to maintain his balance with perfect ease. "Not scared, are you?"

Joanna pulled the robe tighter around her shoulders. He sat in a chair beside her.

"You're Joanna Grain," he remarked. Well, he would know who she was, as all the passengers ate together at the big table at the far end of the saloon. He had not taken any notice of her before, though, apart from smiling at her when they had been introduced the previous day; he had joined the ship in Barbados.

It had been an impressive occasion, the officers standing to attention and several of the crew, too, as he had come up the companion ladder from the launch. He was not a big man, hardly taller than herself, with slim build and strong features to go with his black hair. But he was the owner of the Shipping Line. His name was Howard Edge. Now he was frowning at her. "There really is no need to be afraid," he said. "This ship could drive through a hurricane."

"Isn't this a hurricane?" she asked, faintly.

"Good lord, no. This is a gale. We'll be out the other side in a couple of hours. You go back to bed and sleep sound; when you awake, it'll all be done."

"I'd rather stay here," Joanna muttered.

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"Bit crowded in there, eh? I'm sorry about the accommodation. Especially having your brother in there with you."

"Oh, we want him there," Joanna protested.

"I know," he said sympathetically. "You need to be together." She glanced at him, suspiciously; how much did he know?

"You're going home to relatives?" he asked.

She nodded, and he held her hand. Her instinct was to withdraw it, then she let it lie. How old was he? There were little touches of grey at his temples, but his hands and eyes were young. Forty, perhaps. Old enough to be her father. "What's it like, to own a shipping company?" she asked, desperate to make conversation.

He grinned. "In the middle of a gale, concerned."

"You said there was nothing to be afraid of."

"There isn't. But there's always the possibility of damage to the ship, and that costs money."

"Do you sail on every voyage?"

"Chance would be a fine thing. I love the sea. But I can only sail when I can spare the time. Would you like to sail all the time?"

"Oh, yes," she said without thinking.

"Who knows, maybe one day, you will." And to her consternation he kissed her.





## **Part One**

# **The Man**

**'England – a happy land we know,  
Where follies naturally grow.'**

**Charles Churchill**



## Chapter One

# Coming Home

"There!" Mother pointed. Like most of the passengers, the Grains had been on deck since dawn. It was a fine summer's day, with little wind and calm seas through which the freighter was ploughing at full speed, her wash creaming away from her bows to meld with the wake that drifted astern and out of sight; the mid-Atlantic storm was, as Mr Edge had promised, nothing more than a bad memory. Because of the calm weather there was mist.

But the sun was up, and the mist was burning off. And in front of them, suddenly, were low green hills. "Could be Barbados," William said.

Matilda squeezed Joanna's hand. "The Promised Land," she whispered.

The three siblings were remarkably alike, given the difference in their ages. Matilda was tall and willowy, small-breasted and slim-hipped. Her face was too aquiline to be pretty, but was certainly handsome. Her hair was a pale gold; unrestrained this morning by her habitual Alice band, it floated in yellow profusion about her head in the wind created by the ship's speed. Joanna was an improved model, as if the Creator, having considered Matilda, had determined that He could make some advantageous improvements. Joanna had the same blonde hair, but hers was a deeper yellow and more thickly stranded; it moved together instead of scattering. Her features were more rounded than her sister's, and promised genuine beauty. She was somewhat shorter than Matilda, but was still growing, as was her figure, equally more rounded and promising – but she had the same long legs.

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In her more intense moods, which were common enough, Matilda was jealous of her baby sister. But recently, since the tragedy, they had grown closer together. Mother was sometimes a most practical, capable person, but she needed protecting, in their opinion. And they both adored William. He was already as tall as Joanna. He had the sharp features of Matilda, but the thick yellow hair of the younger sister. His body was muscular – until recently he had attended a school in which he had been one of only twelve white boys in six hundred blacks, Indians and Chinese, he had needed early to cultivate a self-assurance, an assumption of inherent superiority, which was all the white races had really possessed for so long, in their dominance of the dark.

But those days were surely behind him, now.

"Good morning, ladies." Howard Edge came down the ladder from the bridge. "At last, eh?"

"Good morning, Mr Edge," Mother said, effusively.

He smiled at Joanna, and passed on.

"He fancies you," Matilda whispered, enviously.

"Rubbish," Joanna said, remembering that kiss. But it had been a quick, chaste kiss, and nobody else knew of it. And since then he had treated her like any of the other passengers. Except that when he looked at her . . . "He's old enough to be my father."

"They're the worst," Matilda said. "Middle-aged men with ants in their pants for young girls. He should be locked up."

Joanna stuck out her tongue at her. Wouldn't it be marvellous, she thought, if he were to ask for my address in England. That would drive Tilly out of her mind.

"Aunt Ethel said she'd drive down to meet us," Mother said. This was important. Miriam Grain had no idea what her children were going to make of this country they had all been brought up to regard as 'home', but which none of them had ever visited before.

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Even she had not been home – and it was her home – for twenty-two years. When, in the summer of 1938, she had accompanied her husband back to British Guiana, where he had been a police inspector, she had been assured that there would be ‘long leave’ every four years; his terms of contract were in four year tours, renewed, except in exceptional circumstances, after each tour. The war had put an end to that. Together with her pregnancies. They had enjoyed a long honeymoon for the first four years, preferring to consider a family as a distant prospect. But when it had become obvious that the War was there to stay, and thus long leave gone for the foreseeable future, the condoms had been thrown away, and Matilda had duly appeared in the spring of 1942. Joanna had come a year and a half later, and William two years after that.

By then the War had been over, but long leave remained a distant prospect. England had not seemed very attractive in those grimly austere days, money had been tight, and there had been a lot to do in the colonies, with talk of independence filling the air, and civil unrest filling the streets. Leave had been postponed again and again, and she had been resigned to watching her children grow up as total colonials, to whom England was a myth, perhaps to become reality in adulthood. That had been before a vengeful Indian, arrested and charged with murder by Superintendent Grain, but acquitted by the courts, had crept up to the window beyond which the police officer had sat at his desk, and blown away his head with a single shotgun blast. This time the assassin *had* been convicted of murder, and had been hanged. But that had meant an abrupt change of status for the policeman’s widow and family.

There was a widow’s pension, but it was not very great. There had been nothing else; police officers lived in houses owned by the Government, as they were regularly moved from one post to another in the huge colony, itself the size of England. England had beckoned, in circumstances Miriam Grain had never envisaged. At least, in England, William would be able to complete his schooling, free from racial tensions, and with perhaps more congenial companions. And

the girls should be able to find jobs which would not entail possibly having to work beneath bosses of different races and creeds. Miriam Grain would have angrily rejected the suggestion that she was a racist; she had merely been re-educated, during her years in Guiana, to the belief that the white man, or to be more accurate, the British white man, was the superior of any other living creature. This belief was an absolute necessity where an officer like Gordon Grain, with the assistance of perhaps one other junior white inspector, had to rule a district the size of Yorkshire, containing to be sure another score of white men, perhaps, overseers on the sugar plantations, but which also contained more than fifty thousand blacks and East Indians – even his policemen were nearly all black men. It was an assumption that had ultimately cost Gordon Grain his life.

England also meant that she would be back with her family, in the person of her sister Ethel. Ethel, some years older, was also a widow, but a relatively wealthy one, and, herself childless, she had written suggesting that she would welcome a ready-made family – Ethel had never really cared for Gordon, and even less for the concept that her baby sister should be swept away into the wilds of South America. Most important of all, removing the children to England meant that she would be relieved from the greatest fear that any English mother in the colonies could have – that one of her children might marry ‘colour’. Miriam had seen this happen to other families, and had thus watched over hers with especial care, but she could not be with them twenty-four hours a day. They were naturally gregarious. They went to school with black boys and girls, and Indian boys and girls. They made friends. Gordon had never allowed them to bring their dark friends home, but they had been to their friends’ houses. And they appeared to be totally unaware of the colour question; if they paid lip service to it when at home, Miriam knew it was with the mental reservation that ‘Mummy and Dad were always going on about these things’. That too was a problem now behind her.

“Plymouth Hoe,” William said, as the ship nosed her way up the

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Sound to her berth. "Where Drake played bowls before beating the Armada." William prided himself on his knowledge of history, as was to be expected in the son of a man who had been so history-minded that he had named his three children after medieval kings and queens.

The women were less interested in Drake's feats than in the land on which they would be setting foot after ten days at sea. And in the people who would be there. Miriam shaded her eyes and looked for Ethel in the crowd on the dock. Matilda studied the various women, considering fashions, and was amazed, but excited, at the shortness of the skirts.

Joanna just stared. Never before had she seen such a sea of white faces. Suddenly she felt concerned for the other passengers on the ship, most of whom were black. They were immigrants, seeking a new home, and perhaps prosperity as well. She was coming home! Then she saw three people standing apart, a woman, and two small children. The woman was short, slim and *svelte*; she wore a genuine fur coat and dark glasses. It was difficult to tell if she was good-looking or not, but she stood with an aura of permanent superiority. Suddenly Joanna knew who she was. She felt quite sick.

Getting through Customs and Immigration took a very long time, and it was nearly noon before the Grains were finally allowed into the huge exit hall, where, happily, Aunt Ethel was indeed waiting for them. Ethel was an older edition of Miriam, and had somewhat severe features, but these softened as she embraced her nieces and nephew. "What lovely children," she remarked, which didn't go down very well with Matilda. But they were all still trying to stop staggering about as their feet insisted on allowing for movement that was no longer there.

"We'll eat on the way," Ethel said. "It's a long drive. In fact, we won't make it today. But I know a neat little hotel where we can spend the night. I've booked us in."

*Caroline Gray*

Joanna hardly heard her. Howard Edge had said goodbye to them, as he had said goodbye to all the passengers, formally, before joining his wife and children for a huge hug and a kiss; he had then got into a waiting Rolls-Royce and driven off. He had kissed her that night on the ship. Matilda was right, after all; he was just a dirty old man.

Now she stared out of the window of the little car – they were very tightly packed in the back – as they left the city behind and drove into the Devon countryside. This was unlike anything she had ever seen before in her life. In Guiana, if one travelled several hundred miles inland, either by aircraft or river – there were no roads in the interior – one came to very high mountains; she had made two such trips. But the coastal strip, a couple of hundred miles wide and some four hundred deep, was flat alluvial plain. Once it had all been forest, but on the coast itself the trees had been felled to make way for the sugar estates and rice plantations. Outside of the capital city of Georgetown, one could go either east or west; there was only one road in either direction. And the road itself was composed mainly of burnt earth, liable to wash away or pothole in the wet season – which continued for most of the year. In places there were eighteen-inch-wide concrete strips, laid an average car width apart, which provided a smoother passage – providing one could keep the tyres on the strips. One drove endlessly past waving cane or flooded paddies, with the courida swamps which kept out the sea filling the other side, through scattered villages crowded with naked children, while the journey in each direction was punctuated by river crossings which involved driving across two planks laid over the rushing water, much narrower than the concrete strips, onto the deck of a ferry – and driving off again on the other side.

Joanna had looked forward to getting her licence in the coming year, before Daddy had been murdered. She had no doubt it would be easier to obtain over here, because driving was so much easier. The road was wide, and metalled, and smooth, and it was only one of a hundred roads which wound in every direction, intersecting and writhing to and fro. There were no animals. Occasionally there was



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a sign to beware of leaping deer, which she found entrancing, never having seen a deer before, whether leaping or still. In Guiana one was fortunate to drive ten miles without killing a chicken, or being halted by a herd of pigs or a flock of sheep, or a straying cow.

"It's so grand having you here," Aunt Ethel said. "Now we must talk about what you're going to do. I've spoken with the headmaster of our local school, and he is sure a place can be found for William. What form were you in in BG, William?"

"I was in the Fifth," William said, importantly.

"Oh, splendid. You'll have to take an entrance exam, of course, but there shouldn't be any trouble about that."

"I shouldn't think so," William agreed.

"Now, Joanna . . . you don't have to go back to school if you don't want to."

"I'd rather get a job," Joanna said.

"Are you trained in anything?"

"Well, I was doing secretarial . . ."

"That's the ticket. We'll get you into a secretarial college for a year, then you'll be ready to take on the world."

"Won't secretarial college be very expensive?" Miriam asked.

"We'll sort something out," Ethel said. "And what about you, Matilda. What is your special talent?"

"Dancing," Matilda said.

"Dancing?" Aunt Ethel took her eye off the road for a moment to look at her sister.

"Matilda's brilliant," Miriam said. "She won a competition, last year."

"In British Guiana," Ethel said, doubtfully. "You mean, ballet?"

"Oh, no," Matilda said. "Well, I've done ballet, of course. But my speciality is tap."

"Tap." Aunt Ethel was more doubtful yet. "I'm not sure there's much demand for tap dancing in England, at the moment. But we'll see," she added optimistically.

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