

LYDIA ALGRIN & BÉATRICE BEZZINA

Beyond the ocean



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Lydia Algrin & Béatrice Bezzina

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Angelique's departure for the Americas, or the consequence of an arranged marriage (Angelique, April 22, 1801)

Sent on June 29, 1801, from Boston-Massachusetts-USA

Receipt on September 11, 1801, in Lacaune-Tarn-France

Read on October 20, 1801, in Lacaune-Tarn-France

My dear Babeth,

Here I am, embarked for four days on this ship, despite my willingness. Edouard accompanied me as you know, he arranged everything, as usual. The carriage journey was long, three endless days; Bordeaux seemed to me to be at the end of the world! It was monotonous, lasting sight fields, visions only interspersed of stops from time to time and nights in inns. I was not a very good partner for Edouard: I couldn't stop crying, my eyes are still swollen and very red. Moreover, since I came on board, I am sick, I am seasick, even though I eat little.

However, I shouldn't complain, there are other people on the boat, less well settled, who have left everything for a better future in the New World: whole families with children, all crammed into the lower level of the cabin. Edouard paid and made sure that I would travel in good conditions, like the devoted butler he is. To tell the truth, I don't care about these privileges, I feel bad, physically and morally, I feel lost.

And yet, I know that I must face this reality, because a new life is expecting me. I wonder what my husband looks like: is he handsome? Is he nice? Rich? I do know that grandmother and father Fusiès knew his parents, that previously their business was thriving in our region, but I don't know anything about his personality, his way of living and working in the Americas. Above all, I am wondering why did he want to marry me even if he doesn't know me? There

must be some nice women in Boston who would like to marry him, if he is a "good match" as Edward told me (words he would take from Grandma). I can't help from thinking that, whatever his situation in this new country, he received my dowry after our marriage by proxy, a very substantial dowry, as you and I know. I hope he will make good use of it. Grandmother never spoke to us about inheritance, probably because she thought it didn't concern us directly.

I wonder if you've been doing well since we separated. You were so bewildered the day I left, when I saw you going away in a carriage with your fiancé. If I followed you on horseback, it was to see you one last time, to talk to you, but I wasn't strong enough. I hope you understood and that you don't blame me. It seems to me that we have been separated forever and I can't stand it. But I also know, my dear cousin, that we will always write to each other, we will always stay together despite living away..

The day you read this letter, you will certainly be preparing for your wedding and your upcoming departure for Lyon. For you as for me, the unknown awaits us, so far from our Lacaune and our estate! I would never have thought of leaving it. To tell the truth, this is quite naive from my side, because for grandma, finding a husband around who would meet the family's requirements wouldn't have been that easy! Maybe if we didn't belong to the Du Frêne family, things would have been easier. I know that Grandma did her best, by arranging our marriages, but the choice to make me leave France is a hard one, to marry a man without a title, in addition! It is true that my husband is French, truly, his father is a long-time family friend, and he apparently has a business in Boston that seems to be thriving. But these are not the only reasons why Grandma made this choice. You and I know this indirectly, since Grandma confided partly in us the family secret, namely our mothers' betrayal for their participation in the revolutionary movement: no son of a noble family would have wanted us. When I think about it, she was in such a mood when she talked about it, do you remember how much she was crying But Grandma didn't tell us everything. I have to confess, I went back to her for more explanations I wanted to understand. I learnt things that let me stunned. I'll tell you them as soon as I find the strength, because I think you'll be as shocked as I am.

Since our departure, I have talked from time to time with some crew's members who speak French. I know that the captain doesn't like this, he asked me not to disturb the men who are working. There are only three of them

speaking French. The others, about twenty people, speak English. I try to remain discreet but I stay as much as possible on the deck, I really feel cramped in my cabin. I sit on the trunks, especially mine. That's a pity the luggage is tied up outside, subject to the rain, the wind and the waves. I thought that these would be at my disposal, in the cabin, to let me change my clothes regularly.

Because of this situation, I have always worn the same dark green velvet dress since my departure. It is unbearable. From what I could understand, we are on an English merchant ship, a former war frigate it seems, which delivers American tobacco to France. On the sailing back, passengers for America are embarked. I don't understand why my husband booked a ticket for me on this type of aging ship, which does not inspire me confidence. I shared this thought with the captain. According to him, my husband was "lucky" to reach to an agreement with him because he could not reserve a seat on one of the French ships. The latter would no longer be allowed to return to Boston harbor. The same would be for American ships, which would not be allowed to dock in French ports. For two years, there has been a trade war between the American government and France. The commander stated, with a sneering and haughty way that the French, corrupt, would have wanted to harm English-American trade relations, which would have finally turned against them. This is maybe one of the reasons for being on this ship, for no other possibility. My husband probably didn't have the opportunity to do otherwise.

This voyage will be long, but maybe it is an opportunity, to have time to accept this change of life as well as possible.

I miss you dear cousin, I kiss you,

Angie

**An exhausting Atlantic crossing: the embarked
misery
(Angelique, May 02,1801)**

Sent on June 29, 1801, from Boston-Massachusetts-USA

Received on September 11, 1801, in Lacaune-Tarn-France

Read on October 20, 1801, in Lacaune-Tarn-France

My dear Babeth,

Today, at last I can write to you. Not having my things at my disposal, I had to ask the captain once again to provide me with something to write my letters. He is a rough man but not a bad one, I think he agreed to my request because he knows that time seems very long on this ship, for most of us. Also, being busy seems to reassure him. I am invited every night to his table, I think that the meals have also been paid by Edouard. There are two men who have dinner with us who hold important positions, both of them have a respectful and polite behavior. But I speak little to them. They speak English and I'm not fluent yet in this language. Besides, I'm not sure they want to converse with a woman, especially an eighteen-year-old woman....

I keep my discussions for the three crew members who I can exchange in French with; first of all, Marc, a 16 years old young man who is assigned to the sail deployment, his ability to climb the masts and his agility impress me! Despite his young age, he is an experienced sailor, he started at twelve years old. His parents were farmers in Brittany. They died of illness and Marc had to find work quickly because he was alone in the world. This is why he embarked on a ship in the port of Nantes. He is a clever and thoughtful boy, and yet he has not received any education, he can neither read nor write.

The other two men are older. Jean-Pierre is about thirty years old, he is the captain's cook. He is a friend of Marc's, they have known each other for a few

years and are still working on the same ships. I think Marc considers him an older brother. I love conversing with him, he knows a lot of things, and tries to learn whenever he can. He can read, write and speaks English well, which let him interact with the other members of the crew. He learnt a lot from scholar people for whom he has worked since he was young (his parents were servants), who conveyed desire and curiosity to him. He is interested in European political life, but especially in the New World's. As soon as he is on land, he buys several newspapers, which provides him with reading on the boat. I learn a lot being with him.

He often goes down to the lower level to look for food. This is mainly living sheep and lambs. He is in charge of slaughtering them on the deck, which avoids blood running off and rotting in the hold. Even though we have large farms on our property, I must say that I can't bear this regular sight of animals being slaughtered in front of our eyes! The meat still fresh and barely cooked ends up on our plates. It makes me nauseous. I don't eat it. By the way, I don't think I'll ever eat mutton and lamb again! Maybe it reminds me too much of our sheep grazing in our pastures. I remember with nostalgia our shepherd, Martin, that we often met at the "Stone", he always had a kind word for us when we rode a horse near him. The most amazing thing is that he recognized us by the horse steps, because as we know, his hearing replaced his failing eyes. Have you seen him again?

To go back to my travel companions, there is also Fernand, a man who already looks very exhausted. He is about forty years old, not more. He is mainly in charge of cleaning, the deck, the kitchens, the upper and middle levels; the lower level, where the animals are stocked and the poor families are housed, is never washed. Fernand cleans the deck after each slaughter. This usually consists of pouring sea water, sometimes brushing the floor if there are blood stains.

Fresh water is rare and charged, if you want to get some to get washed (because we all have a daily ration to drink).. I learned that my husband had paid for a jar of water for my personal use for one time only, scheduled for my arrival day in America. I can't help from thinking that he gave priority to his comfort than mine! What if this man was a rascal? You can see my dear cousin, dark thoughts are running through my mind....

Edouard paid for only one more washing service, probably because he didn't have the money to do more. This one is scheduled for the end of May. In the meantime, I had to figure out another solution. I get washed with sea water. Every day, Fernand brings me a bucket of water he has just recovered from the sea; thus I can wash very roughly, without soap. A particular smell this water makes, got inside my dress, which is not very pleasant but I have no other alternative. Despite those voyage conditions I try to keep spirits up, it is not always easy.

As you will have understood, apart from these few discussion moments with my new acquaintances, I take shelter in my memories to support this daily life. I think about the good times we had on our estate. They seem so long ago, the time when we used to ride our horses galloping across our property to meet our lovers! Jacques' face is always present in my mind. I remember his radiant smile, his golden curls, his muscled shoulders. I remember our farewell day, the intense love that we made on the ground in the “pailher¹” his anger when he knew I was leaving to join a husband I didn't know, but also his dismay that we couldn't be joined together because of our social difference. For my part, I accepted that as an obvious obligation even though I still love him as you know. I'm beginning to think today that maybe he was right, we could have run away, got married against all odds and been happy....

As you get married in only a few months, I suppose you still have to see his brother Alfred. I'm happy for you. I know that your time at the estate is limited because soon you will have to leave to join your husband, but at least you are still enjoying it a little bit. I hope you will give me news from home when you can answer me. How are our servants doing? How did they feel about the sale of the estate? Will they stay? And above all, how is Jacques? I kiss you dear cousin.

Angie