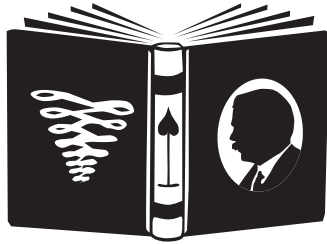


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H.G. WELLS  
~ FESTIVAL ~



FOLKESTONE  
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Runner-up

# Love-ties and Longings

by Amy Seager

Age 16, Folkestone School for Girls, Folkestone

Simon Mackett could scarcely imagine that Folkestone, such a small, dilapidated town was ever a top tourist attraction as he stood upon the dirty Stade, staring out past the few remaining deteriorating trawlers, to the open sea. Past the harbour arm was an expanse of water, stretching the distance to France, more vibrant in colour than the muddy water presently filling in to the harbour. Anything seemed more vibrant than Folkestone. Anything seemed more attracting and fulfilling than this place that he was forced to call his home.

Fishing was an age-old tradition in the town, but it had declined significantly throughout the previous century. Countless books, beaten and yellowing with antiquity show scenes of the harbour in Victorian times, bursting forth with fishing trawlers, amongst other varieties of boats, populated by hard-working and eager fishermen. But this scene no longer existed; signs of decay were everywhere.

Simon heaved a sigh and hung his head to look down at his little sister, Marie, who was busy collecting scallop shells of varying sizes to add to her ever increasing collection, her wellington boots caked in thick brown mud. The sight of his sister's enjoyment caused a brief smile to appear on Simon's face: she was young, free, yet to discover the cruelty of life and the low value of what it had to offer. Seeing Marie's beaming countenance as she waved up at him gave Simon hope. Surely there must be something profitable in life.

Looking up towards his old primary school mounted high on the hill, towering over the harbour, he remembered a time when he was as carefree as his sister now was. He never had a problem or a care while he was at primary school. To be the son of a fisherman was normal there; he did not have to pretend to anyone, as he often felt obliged to do at his current school, and he was never the butt of any cruel mockery. He felt safe in that small community, enclosed within the cold metal bars that acted as a cage, keeping most of the children from escaping the playground.

Just then a scrawny young man a few years older than Simon appeared from one of the side streets joining The Stade, interrupting Simon's meditations; his arms were laden with ropes and nets. The smile that had begun to take root on Simon's face faded.

"Simon," the young man mumbled, nodding his head in greeting as he passed him and began his descent to the anchored trawlers.

"Toby," Simon replied, his gaze again fixed stiffly on the surf.

"Just fitting her out for the tonight's trip. Dad says they're working on a new plan for plaice!" Simon nodded in recognition. He had heard his own father rambling excitedly on the subject. "I'm surprised you haven't been out with us yet this year, Simon. I were younger than you when I joined the crew full-time."

"I've...got a lot of studying," Simon answered hesitantly.

"Studying! What's studying other than a waste o' time?"

"I don't understand your hate for learning, Toby!" Simon scowled. "Don't you ever get tired of preparing the boat all day? Wouldn't you rather study now for an easier life later on? I know I would."

Toby looked rather alarmed at this speech and placed his burden on a small rowing boat so that he could scratch his head with one hand; thinking methodically was not something that came naturally to him. Simon was certain that not all of what he had said had been entirely understood.

"I'm proud o' me dad...!" Toby began. "And I want him to be proud of me too! Do join us soon Simon." With that he picked up his ropes and continued with his task.

Simon thought that he understood Toby. His father, Mr. Doyle, was widowed and Simon understood that Toby might want to in the harbour for the sake of him. However, he could not understand how someone faced with as much choice as their generation was, could deny education and training in order to live a menial life. He knew that Toby was not wonderfully intelligent, but with the number and variety of courses on offer in the town now, he could almost certainly choose a more fulfilling career path.

He glanced at his watch.

"Come on Marie!" Simon called down to his sister. "Mam'll want us home for tea!" At this summons, Marie made her way up the cool metal stairway and on to The Stade, carefully carrying a worn-looking blue plastic bag of the inexpensive sort that are given away with groceries from a shop in Tontine Street, bursting forth of her white and orange treasures. Simon took her hand and they crossed the deserted street, climbed the stairs, and turned into their house. The door was wide open, and the smell of their mother's speciality, crab stew with dumplings, wafted out into the street.

Mrs. Mackett was hastily setting the table. She was an energetic woman, though she was plumping slightly now with age and her love of dumplings, but she was a most attentive mother and supportive wife. To her, fishing was the greatest career in existence. What could be better than to have such a physical job that brought with it both provision for the family and adventure? Tonight, Mr. Doyle, her husband's fishing partner was coming for dinner, and despite their low budget, Mrs. Mackett was intent on providing a feast.

“Wash your hands and sit down at the table, kids, Mr. Doyle'll be round in a mo” she said, bustling quickly back in to the kitchen to fetch the huge brass pan which contained the stew. Sure enough, just as she was returning, Mr. Doyle entered through the open door. “Evening, Mr. Doyle,” Mrs. Mackett said. “Do take a seat, I'm just dishing up.”

“Thank you,” he said, taking the seat opposite Simon, and hanging his bright orange mackintosh on the seat behind him. “Sorry I'm late, had to tell Toby what we needed for tonight.”

“No worries, Mr. Doyle, I'll just call Pete,” Mrs. Mackett replied. She stood in the doorway of the hallway and called out to her husband, who rapidly appeared in the room, cheeks rosy and an animated look on his face. He closed the front door and then shook his colleague's hand, sitting down beside him, as his wife served up the dinner. The two men spoke excitedly about their new strategy for catching plaice, something that bored Simon greatly. He sighed and scooped up a large dumpling from his bowl.

“What are you sighing about, young Simon?” Doyle asked, noticing Simon's morbid expression. “There's nothing to be sighing about when you have your whole future in front of you. The world is your oyster, as they say. Or rather, in your case, the sea is your oyster!” He chuckled to himself, parting his lips to reveal a set of yellow teeth.

“I...don't like...the sea,” Simon stammered slowly, in between mouthfuls. His face immediately darkened in fear of the response. He had never made his feelings about his future in fishing known to his family before; he had never had the opportunity to, but he was indeed correct in fearing a response.

Silence fell upon the table, and Simon heard four spoons drop into four china bowls, even little Marie's.

“Don't...like...sea?” Doyle gasped in incomprehension. “Don't...like...sea! Why, boy, you've never known anything but the sea!”

“I...well...that's it exactly,” he faltered, “I've never known anything but the sea, none of us have, and I just feel I would like a change.” His father coughed violently, as though he had swallowed a prawn whole, and banged his fist on the table.

“A change? I've spent seventeen years providing for you, training you in the trade, and now you want to turn your back on that?” Simon's face turned from scarlet to white as he gulped back a sob. “We've always been fishers in this family. Me dad was before me, and 'is dad before 'im and so forth. Even on your Mam's side they was fishers! It's a family tradition going back to the first fishers in this harbour! I blame this regeneration lark! It's brain-washed you into wanting to be some namby-pamby artist!”

Simon stared at his plate. He could see his mother shaking her head in shame. Folkestone had been subjected to a regeneration plan in order to brighten the town up and give the local people more opportunities and training. Many artists had rented studios in the Quarter these plus the new university seemed to slowly be engulfing the town. Simon was a fan of this work, despite his father's antagonism. He enjoyed attending evening classes and lectures at the university: he felt more cultured by it. None of his father's friends really paid much attention to the redevelopment. They felt this re-education that seemed to come with it was taking their children further away from the sea and the traditional jobs.

“I don't want to be an artist. I just don't want to be a fisherman! Mr. Doyle said the world is my oyster...why can't it be? Why do you want to make me stay here all my life and be just like you? Why won't you let me make something of my life?”

“Make something of your life?” Mr. Mackett boomed, rising in indignation. “Have I not made something of my life? Have I not got a successful job and a family? I don't see that from none of your artist friends in the Quarter! Their shops are here one minute gone the next. If that's the way you're going to talk to the person who has brought you up and provided for you since you were born you might as well leave...go and make your living out of art, rather than having a real man's job!” Simon now dropped his own spoon to the china. His ears glowed red and he stood up to face his father.

“Perhaps I will!” he said, charging to his bedroom.

He flung open the wooden door to his room and pulled out a gym bag from under his bed, beginning to fill it, furiously, with clothing. Adrenaline pumped rapidly around Simon's body; his head was throbbing in confusion. Yet in what should have been such a sad moment, when he was being severed from his family, he was unusually happy that he had been given his long-awaited cue to freedom. He knew that his father would not apologise and plead for him to stay. In fact, he did not believe that he had ever heard his father apologise. His mother, on the other hand, was different: despite her commitment to her husband and her support of him, her children were the world to her. Almost immediately she appeared at the door.

“You don't have to do this, you know Si? You know what he's like. Just say you're sorry and he'll forget about it soon enough.”

But Simon could not forget: this was his break for freedom, his only chance, and he could not ruin it. He shook his head. A tear rolled down his mother's cheek. She stepped forward, towards him but he continued packing. “Simon! You can't leave! You can't! Where will you go? What will you do?” She held out her arms to him.

“I can't stay here all my life,” he said, entering into his mother's outstretched arms. “I'll find something.” Mrs. Mackett began to weep, so quickly left the room, heading for her own. Simon picked up his bag, delved into the bathroom to pick up a few essentials, and went into the kitchen to get some food to take with him. He opened a cupboard.

“No you don't!” bellowed his father. “You don't want to live off what I provide any longer! You're not taking any of my food!” He leapt across the room, like a lion pouncing on an unsuspecting wildebeest, ripping a packet of biscuits from Simon's hand and throwing them back in the cupboard. He then shoved Simon past the dining table where Doyle sat shocked and stunned, and Marie wept. Simon kissed his sister on her forehead, and then another violent shove found him outside, the door slammed shut behind him. For a while, Simon stood rooted to the spot. He had never had such freedom before and he needed to work out how to use it. He began to march through the harbour area for what he hoped was the last time.

### III

Simon walked and walked. His mind was not entirely engaged into where he was going. All he knew was that he needed to escape the harbour. He finally ascended into the town and meandered through the swarms of people inspecting the market stalls. The town was not somewhere he was very familiar with, his parents only venturing into it occasionally. Clothing was generally not bought in the town but inherited from older relatives and sons of his father's friends, so the few clothing shops in the town overwhelmed him. Still, he could not afford any new clothes now; the only money he had was a fifty pence piece.

It suddenly occurred to Simon that he could go to Hythe; his mother had a sister in Hythe and her husband was not a fisherman, he had his own accountancy firm. Although it was also a seaside town, the fishing industry in Hythe had dwindled much more than in Folkestone, and it was ultimately more sophisticated. It would not take him that long to walk there.

He chose a route to Hythe which did not run alongside the sea, a scenic route, in order to stare at the huge hills towering over the town and think about how he might now be as free as these. After almost two hours of travelling, and numerous confused feelings of regret and anger, Simon arrived in Hythe town centre exhausted. He chanced upon a small shop selling all sorts of nuts, spices, cereals and sweets, including yoghurt coated banana, something he found quite unusual. He measured out fifty grams of this extraordinary new food and gave the jolly woman behind the counter his coin. In return she came him seventeen pence change, and this was all the money that he had in the world.

### IV

Simon was welcomed warmly by his aunt and her family into a cosy house on Tanner's Hill. However, he was slightly aggravated that they insisted on letting his mother know he was there. The daily routines that he was asked to participate in also began to annoy him after a few days, particularly as the family met together for prayers and a Bible reading each morning; Simon did not fancy himself as the 'religious type'. Yet he was thankful for their hospitality, and even more so that his aunt's husband had promised him a job in his office: he was to work four hours on a Saturday and eight hours in the week which coincided with his free periods at school. This alone more than

compensated for any problems he had in accepting their habits. He would endure the Bible readings so long as he attained his freedom in the end.

His two cousins, both girls, were extremely spoiled, and were most annoyed at the news that they would have to share a bedroom to accommodate Simon; he often heard them complaining of him. Despite the similarities in appearances between them and Simon-the bright blond hair and green eyes, their personalities clashed severely. They were boisterous and loud, always striving to be the centre of attention, and this agitated Simon, who was more reserved. He was glad to finally be shown around the office in which he was to work and finally start his job.

The office was square, stuffy and plain, and Simon was not given the most interesting tasks: filing, answering the telephone and making tea. Nevertheless he embraced it fully, his only alternative being a life of fishing. The job was not that bad; the other people in the office-three women and one young girl-were always friendly, and the many hours of filing often gave him time to think about his future and reflect on his past. He did feel somewhat at fault when remembering how he had left his family, how he had left Marie brother-less, but he often suppressed this plaguing of his conscience.

For three months Simon spent his Saturday mornings and Wednesday and Friday evenings working in the office. He rarely spoke to anyone, having to invent games to keep himself amused, such as finding out how far away he could get from the bin without missing it with a screwed up piece of paper, and how quickly he could make a cup of tea. When he was at the house he generally kept to his room, avoiding unnecessary contact with his cousins. His mother had often rang him on the telephone but their conversations had been brief and unproductive: her begging for his return and his refusing. Regardless of how much Simon tried to convince himself that his life had significantly improved since his leaving home, he was beginning to doubt himself. He missed having interesting conversation with his family. He missed the feeling of being loved.

However, soon enough, Simon began to find himself intrigued by the young girl who worked in the office whose name, he had learned, was Miriam. She was quiet and mystifying in addition to being somewhat pretty, with her long curling dark hair and ruddy complexion. He started to search for an opportunity to talk to her, to get to know her better, something that he found very difficult. Both were shy by nature and Simon often panicked when he had a chance to speak to her, leaving the room with an excuse.

Eventually he gathered courage and began to make conversation with her by hearing fragments of her conversations with the others and learning some of her likes and dislikes, conversation topics. He was very excited to hear one afternoon that she did not like to live so close to the sea, a view that they shared.

"I agree," he said, seemingly to the air.

Miriam spun around.

"I don't like living near the sea either," Simon stated.

Miriam appeared to be shocked that he had invited himself into her conversation, and consequently it took her a while to reply.

"Why's that then?" she finally asked.

"I've spent too many years of my life in it, on it and hearing about it," he replied. "I'm just sick to death of it! Why don't you like it?"

"Oh...I just don't think it's as good as people make it out to be. My parents seem to love the beach- I was often forced to spend what seemed like my whole summer on the sand in Folkestone when I was younger, and unfortunately I only remember the bad things, getting trapped under rubber rings and the dirty water for example."

Simon smiled.

From that day onwards they spent more and more time together, often talking about their aims and aspirations, and what they thought about issues in the local press. However, Simon failed to share any details about his family. He began to find his job increasingly enjoyable and looked forward to Saturday mornings all week.

One morning in July, Simon entered the office clutching the local newspaper, to find Miriam reading a guidebook on universities.

"Do you know where you want to go yet?" he asked, sitting down beside her.

"No, but so long as the course suits me and there's no sea I'm fine!"

"Do you want to go far?"

"As far as I can get!" she exclaimed. "I want to go somewhere vibrant and fun, somewhere where a regeneration plan is actually working."

"I take it you're one of the few who don't believe in the regeneration plan then," he smiled.

“No I don't!” she laughed. “I don't see any problem with building bright new schools and buildings, if the money's available, but I can't really it profiting the district in the long-run.”

“I'm not sure that I agree with you here. I think there are lots of new opportunities for people of all ages now, which means that they can be better educated and so improve the area with their cultivated intelligence. I do think, though, that the bright buildings themselves can do nothing. If they brought back the ferries and trains to Folkestone harbour as well, I'm sure the town would benefit more.”

At this mention of the harbour, Miriam began to fidget, a look of concentration on her face, as though she had just remembered something and wanted to grip on to it tightly before it was lost. Simon had already come to recognise this expression.

“That's what I've been meaning to ask you,” she began. “Are you doing anything next Saturday after work?”

“I'd have to check with my aunt, but I'm not sure I am,” he replied slowly, his heart beginning to beat faster.

“It's just that I'm going to the Harbour Festival in Folkestone with my family,” she explained, her cheeks blushing crimson. “You can come with us if you want.” Simon's countenance sunk, and he turned almost as red as Miriam, but not simply due to his embarrassment. He was tremendously surprised and fearful that in getting closer to Miriam he would have to be close to his family: they would never miss the Festival, his father featured in the trawler race every year. “You don't have to come,” Miriam said, sensing his sadness. “I just thought it'd be fun. And quite frankly, I think I'd be bored spending all that time with my family.”

“I'll come,” Simon said, wincing inside at the fact that he would have to face his father.

V

“It'll be good to see your father again!” his aunt exclaimed when Simon revealed his anxieties about attending the Harbour Festival over dinner. “And I know for certain your mum and sister are missing you. They'll be more than glad to see you!”

“I know,” Simon replied, “but I feel so guilty about leaving them now. I just...” He stifled a sob and quickly took some bread from the centre of the table to occupy his attention; he did not want his cousins to see him upset, they would only mock him.

“Don't worry, Simon, I'm sure everything will be fine.”

Somehow he was not convinced.

The following Saturday arrived quickly, much to Simon's annoyance. And at one o'clock he found himself on his way to Folkestone in a car that seemed too small for him, Miriam, her parents and her younger sister. Simon began to feel apprehensive. The prying questions thrown at him by Miriam's father only made it worse, and he was only capable of stuttering replies.

They parked in the car park on Tram Road and made their way towards the noise coming from the harbour. Simon could hear music, and knew that men would be dancing on the cobbled streets, forfeiting their dignity for their favourite event of the year. Swarms of children littered the streets, dashing between their parents and the ice cream van. His eyes scanned the heads of the children, searching for Marie. He had not even spoken to Miriam since leaving the car.

Suddenly Simon heard his name being called:

“Simon! Simon! Mam, look! It's Simon!”

It was Marie. She was waving vigorously at him.

“Is that your sister?” Miriam asked.

“Yes,” he shouted, running towards Marie. He embraced his sister, lifting her high in to the air. She squealed with laughter.

“Simon!” Mrs. Mackett called from behind crowds of people. She too ran over to meet him. “Come and see your father!” she beckoned. Simon let Marie down to the ground and took a step away from her.

“I'm here with a friend,” he said heartlessly. “Perhaps I'll come and see you later.” Mrs. Mackett hung her head, and at the sight of this, a shiver ran up Simon's spine.

Simon hesitantly drew away from them and followed Miriam as she strolled through the busy street, glancing at market stalls as she passed them. He had better memories of the Festival. Sickening mixtures of panic and anxiety gripped him; he was afraid of meeting his father. He tried to stifle his feelings as he sat down to a portion of chips

with Miriam and her family, but Miriam could see something was wrong.

"I'm sorry I invited you," she said. "It obviously hurts you to be here. Why didn't you tell me your family live here?"

"It's complicated," he responded, "but I haven't exactly spoken to them for a long time."

"Well, maybe you should. I don't know what problems you have but I'm sure they could be solved."

He appeared to be in deep meditation for a few moments, failing to move or to speak. But then he rose.

"You're right," he said, leaving his chips and walking towards the pleasure beach. Miriam looked devastated.

## VI

As he drew near to the end of The Stade, a loud wailing came from within one of the bouncy castles that were on site. Simon paused to listen. It was a sound that made him wince. He began to make his way to where the gigantic pink and white monstrosity had collapsed in a disorganised heap and was surprised to find his mother stood facing it, looking haggard and fearful. He frowned in incomprehension.

"Marie's trapped! They can't find the door and it's punctured so won't go up" she shrieked.

Simon's heart pounded in his chest. He felt foolish and neglectful. He had been content knowing that his sister was alive and well, but what sort of brother had he been to leave her to whatever harm may have befallen her without his protection? He sprang forward and began frantically searching for the entrance in the bouncy castle.

"Marie!" he shouted. "I'm going to get you out!"

In his frenzy, Simon had failed to notice the other pairs of hands assisting him.

"It's here! Someone help me lift it up!" he yelled, finding the doorway.

Simon was helped by another man as he lifted the doorway. Both of them called to Marie who rushed towards them, tears streaming down her face. She looked to Simon and then to his assistant, not knowing who to embrace.

"Simon! ... Daddy!" she exclaimed.

Simon's face fell. He did not know how to react. He knew that it was his father who had helped him rescue Marie. For a moment he stared silently at the ground, not daring to look into his father's face.

"Simon!" Mr. Mackett sobbed. "I'm so glad to see you!"

At that, Simon's anger was lost. Despite the deceptions of his own heart, he had missed his whole family terribly. Seeing his father break down before his eyes was witness to him that behind his rough fisherman's exterior, he really was compassionate. He felt a sensation of extreme remorse for leaving them, for being so arrogant.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled weakly.

"No. I'm sorry, Simon," his father replied. "I was wrong to expect you to follow in my footsteps. You're a cleverer man than me, and you should use that intelligence. I envy you that you can take it on yourself to make a different life. I do wish you had told us how you feel before. Only... don't run away again Simon. We've been so lost without you!"

Simon knew that it had taken great courage for his father to say that, and that it was the result of much deep thought. He had wrongly underestimated his own father's intelligence and neglected all that he had done for him. But he was so glad to be welcomed back into his home, regardless of how friendly his hosts had been; their home was just not his. He was very happy to leave his cousins and the Bible readings behind. He thanked his aunt's husband for his generosity, but felt obliged to hand in his notice at the office, saying that he would rather help his father on the sea. Miriam was quite taken aback by this; she was indeed sad that she had ever invited him to the Harbour Festival.

But Simon was glad to have taken up that invitation. He had to admit that he had gone to the Festival purely to get closer to Miriam, but he had found something more valuable: his family. It frightened him to think that, had he not been there, some other man, completely unknown and unconnected to the family might have rescued his sister, and he would not have known his father's concern for both him and Marie. It frightened him to think that in his neglectful activity, he could have lost his family.

Still, he did not want to spend the rest of his life working in the harbour, but nevertheless he wanted to stay at least until he had finished his studies; his father understood this. Through his experience he had come to truly understand why Toby felt it necessary to remain with his father, he had learned the true meaning of a family. And as he helped his father on the sea, he came to admire the effort put into fishing. It required a great deal of skill, strength and determination, characteristics that Simon himself had, but in different respects.