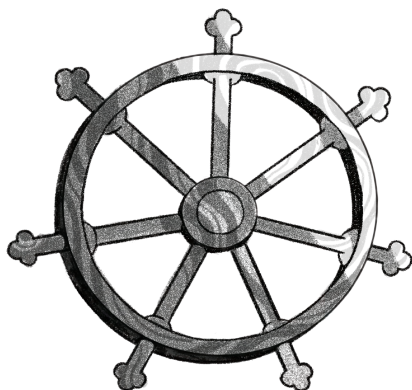


# CALL ACROSS THE SEA



KATHY KACER

# CALL ACROSS THE SEA



**KATHY KACER**



**annick press**  
toronto + berkeley

© 2021 Kathy Kacer (text)

Cover art and design by Wenting Li  
Interior spot illustrations by Wenting Li  
Designed by Paul Covello  
Edited by Barbara Berson  
Copyedited by Catherine Dorton  
Proofread by Adrineh Der-Boghossian

Annick Press Ltd.

All rights reserved. No part of this work covered by the copyrights hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical—without the prior written permission of the publisher.

We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council, and the participation of the Government of Canada/la participation du gouvernement du Canada for our publishing activities.

Canada



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL  
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO  
an Ontario government agency  
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Call across the sea / Kathy Kacer.

Names: Kacer, Kathy, 1954- author.

Series: Kacer, Kathy, 1954- Heroes quartet.

Description: Series statement: Heroes quartet

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20200331248 | Canadiana (ebook)

20200331256 | ISBN 9781773214788

(hardcover) | ISBN 9781773214795 (softcover) | ISBN 9781773214801

(HTML) | ISBN 9781773214818

(Kindle) | ISBN 9781773214825 (PDF)

Classification: LCC PS8571.A33 C34 2021 | DDC jC813/.54—dc23

Published in the U.S.A. by Annick Press (U.S.) Ltd.  
Distributed in Canada by University of Toronto Press.  
Distributed in the U.S.A. by Publishers Group West.

Printed in Canada

[annickpress.com](http://annickpress.com)

[kathykacer.com](http://kathykacer.com)

Also available as an e-book. Please visit [annickpress.com/ebooks](http://annickpress.com/ebooks) for more details.

For Gabi, Jer, Jake, and Ness—  
may they always be brave.

—K.K.

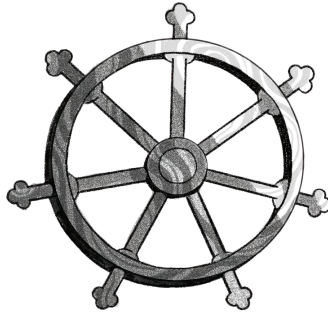


*The future depends on what you do today.*

—MAHATMA GANDHI



## CHAPTER 1



Salty sea air filled Henny's lungs. She tightened her grip on the steering wheel and made a sharp turn downwind, taking the boat in a wide circle to avoid the waves swelling in white-capped peaks. A strong wind rushed by her face, blowing her blond curls nearly straight back. The warm summer sun beat down from a cloudless blue sky.

"How does it look out there, Far?" she called out to her father, who stood at the bow of the boat, clutching one of the masts and gazing out at the water. He turned, raised his thumb in approval, and pointed her onward toward their destination, the Drogden Lighthouse sitting at the south end of the channel in open water. Far was a naval officer in Copenhagen,



Denmark. As head of the Danish Lighthouse and Buoy Service, his job was to bring supplies out to the lighthouse on a weekly basis—sometimes twice a week, depending on need. Henny, now sixteen, had been accompanying her father on these supply runs for years.

Far had taught her to sail almost before she could walk. The channel they sailed, between Denmark and Sweden, was Henny's playground. When others wanted to go shopping or to cafés, or even to school dances, Henny wanted to be on the water. She was as comfortable and capable at the wheel as she was riding a bicycle. This boat, the *Gerda III*, was Henny's home away from home. She knew every inch of its forty feet and twenty tons: the double-mast sail, the hold below the deck where supplies were stored, each wooden beam and gunnel, each brass knob. *Gerda III* was like a sister to her—more human than many people she knew. With a gentle nudge upwind or downwind, she could coax Gerda in any direction. She could ride her out to the sea, fast and far. But she wasn't always the one in full control. When the channel was very rough, Gerda was the one in charge, taking Henny up and up to the crest of a wave, and then dropping her down the other side, her heart diving into her stomach. *Like riding a wild horse,*

Henny thought. At those times, all she could do was hang on and trust that the boat knew what she was doing and would keep her safe. So far, Gerda had not let her down.

Otto entered the small cabin at the helm of the boat where Henny was standing behind the wheel, Gerhardt right behind him. The two crewmembers, both hired by the navy as engineers, had been sailing aboard Gerda for almost as long as her father had held his position, and at least as long as Henny had been taken along on these runs. They had watched Henny grow up on the boat.

“A little rough out there,” Otto said, pushing his cap back off his forehead and scratching at his chin. “For a moment, I thought I was going into the sea.” He mimicked rocking back and forth on his feet, raising one leg and falling backward while his arms spiraled in wide circles.

“It would have been man overboard for sure, if I hadn’t been there to save him,” Gerhardt added, reaching out to steady Otto. Gerhardt was at least a foot shorter than Otto. It was comical to watch him try and catch his taller crewmate. “You’re losing your touch, Henny,” Gerhardt added as Otto fell on top of him and both men nearly crumpled to the floor.

Henny laughed and quickly swerved the boat

upwind in response, surprising the two and jolting them forward. Otto banged into the wall of the cabin. Far, from his position at the bow, turned and frowned at Henny. She quickly straightened out her course and waved to him. He returned to watching the water.

“I know what I’m doing, and don’t you forget it,” Henny said.

“Doesn’t look that way to me,” Otto replied, rubbing his arm. “I think we’re going to have to teach her to sail all over again, don’t you agree, Gerhardt?”

“All over again!” Gerhardt echoed.

Henny ignored them. The two men teased her all the time, but she really didn’t mind. If Gerda was like a sister to Henny, then Otto and Gerhardt were like big brothers—annoying at times but as close as family. Henny was an only child, so it was fun to pretend that this was what it would be like to have siblings. Even Far referred to them as “the boys,” though they were both at least ten years older than Henny. But they had been working side by side on Gerda for so long that they were like one person—cleaning the deck, polishing the brass, raising the sails, repairing ropes, and doing whatever else was needed. Henny had learned as much about sailing Gerda from these two as she had learned from Far, though she would never admit that to him!

Far suddenly appeared in the cabin by Henny's side. She gazed at him—tall and distinguished looking. He cut an impressive figure in his blue naval uniform with its shiny gold buttons and his dark hair tinged with gray tucked under his sailor's cap. His eyes were turquoise and attracted the light like two magnets. Henny had inherited the same deep blue-green eyes. She loved that she shared that feature with her father. Staring into his eyes was like looking at a calm sea. But not in this moment. Far's eyes looked troubled, and his brow crinkled.

"Sorry about that, Far," Henny muttered. "We were just fooling around." The crewmembers stood behind her like two guilty schoolboys, heads lowered, hands behind their backs.

Far didn't respond. He continued staring out at the horizon, his eyes fixed on some spot in the distance.

"What is it, Far?" He was never distracted or unhappy out on the water. The sea was his peaceful place. Other things might agitate him, like balancing the accounts for the lighthouse, but never out here. "What's wrong?"

Far still didn't respond, so Henny followed his gaze out onto the water, and that was when she saw it. Up ahead was a small boat, and at its helm, the flag

of the Nazi Party—a black swastika against a blood-red background. The flag appeared and disappeared as the waves rose and fell, as if it were playing a game of hide-and-seek.

The swastika was not an unfamiliar sight to Henny, or to any Dane, for that matter. The Nazis had been in Denmark since 1940, when their army, under its leader Adolf Hitler, had marched into Henny's homeland and occupied it. The Danish government led by King Christian X had surrendered immediately, knowing that any kind of resistance against the powerful Nazi army was pointless. In return, Nazi Germany had "rewarded" Denmark for being so cooperative by allowing the country to keep its government in place. King Christian was still in charge. Far said that as long as the king was still in command, everything would be fine. And the king still rode his horse through the city streets on an almost daily basis, waving to his subjects as if to reassure them that all was well. So, even though Nazi troops had roamed the streets of Copenhagen for the last few years, and their flag could be seen flying from many buildings, Henny had mostly ignored them, and they ignored her and the rest of Denmark's citizens.

But now, three years into the occupation, Henny

could tell that things were changing for the worse. Here in Copenhagen, more Nazi troops could be seen marching through the streets, clomping their boots onto the pavement, and carrying their rifles out in front of them. Henny didn't really know what their increased presence meant. Nothing had happened to her personally, and she hoped it would stay that way! She just knew that, whenever those troops showed up in the streets, everyone tried to avoid them, retreating to the sidewalks or hurrying into shops. Most Danes had come to hate the Nazis and everything they stood for. Far was no exception, and Henny had learned to hate them as well. And she knew enough about what they were doing in other countries—ransacking homes, killing innocent people, overrunning governments—to be afraid of what they might do here.

So now, to see a Nazi boat out on the channel—*her* channel—scared her. The boat up ahead continued to bob up and down as if beckoning to her. A strange feeling crept through Henny, like a shiver in the dark. It was as if her personal home had suddenly been invaded. Is that what was making her father so uneasy?

“What are the Nazis doing out here?” Henny asked.

"I have no idea," Far replied. "It's bad enough they're in the city." He spat the words out as if they left a bad taste in his mouth.

"I think we should stay back from that boat," Otto said.

Henny frowned. "Why? What will they do?"

"You never know. A friend of mine had his apartment searched by a group of soldiers who practically broke down the door to get in. He was lucky he wasn't arrested. They said he was part of a group that was protesting against them."

"Was he?" Henny asked. "Protesting, I mean."

"He went to a rally, with hundreds of other people. He just stood there, watching."

"We haven't done anything," Henny said.

"Neither did my friend," replied Otto.

"I think it's best to stay out of their way," Gerhardt added.

"Agreed!" said Far. "Henny, cut the motor."

Henny slowed Gerda and let the Nazi boat take a further lead in front of them.

Far seemed to relax as the distance between the two boats increased. His shoulders dropped from up around his ears where he had been holding them, and he exhaled.

"Good riddance to them," Otto muttered.

With that, they all turned their attention back to their destination. The lighthouse was just up ahead, its tall tower, white with unmistakable red stripes, visible at a distance of forty nautical miles. For years, this lighthouse had been a traffic-control center for boats entering and leaving the Baltic Sea. It had helped steer sailors through this busy channel in all kinds of weather, night and day.

“Steer downwind,” Far called out. “That’s it. Now straight ahead.”

Otto and Gerhardt rushed out of the cabin to ready Gerda for her arrival. Otto stood at the bow, a thick rope in his hand, while Gerhardt took his position at the stern. Henny steered the boat through the shallow, rocky entrance to the lighthouse pier, biting her lower lip and keeping her gaze on the water, searching for the perfect path to take the boat through. She finally eased Gerda up to the dock, waiting for just the right moment to cut the motor completely. Otto and Gerhardt jumped off together and quickly secured Gerda, turning the thick ropes around the base of the big metal cleats and bringing the lines up over the top, then repeating this a second time and then a third. They finished securing the boat at the exact same second, standing and grinning at one another, hands up in the air as if they had just



crossed the finish line of a race in a dead heat.

Otto smiled up at Henny, who had moved out of the cabin. "You nearly missed the dock."

"I thought we were going to have to swim in," Gerhardt added.

"I'd like to see one of you two do a better job," Henny replied. "Especially in these choppy waves."

Far interrupted their banter. "Boys, help me get the supplies off the boat and up to the lighthouse." Otto and Gerhardt quickly jumped back on board. Gerhardt pulled open the door to the hold and descended the small staircase into the storage area at the bottom of the boat, emerging a moment later carrying a box. Henny followed him back down. This storage space, measuring about six feet by ten feet and only four feet high, was lined with wooden planks and dampened by the seawater that sometimes leaked in. It smelled down here, often of gasoline and sometimes of crates of fish that they carried to the lighthouse. Henny wrinkled her nose, then bent over to avoid hitting her head and reached for a box as well.

"Anything special for the lighthouse this week?" Henny asked Far, as Otto, the last one to go into the hold, emerged with a box.

"Just the usual canned goods, along with some blankets and maintenance supplies. Plus, we're

bringing some newspapers. They're a few days old, but the men out here love to get caught up on the news. Henny, why don't you stay with Gerda. The boys and I will take the supplies up."

"Are you sure you don't need me?" Usually Henny carried boxes along with Otto and Gerhardt. She never minded helping.

"We can manage on our own today."

Henny handed her box over to Gerhardt and watched as he, Far, and Otto made their way up the narrow path from the pier to the lighthouse. Once they had disappeared around a bend, she sat down on the dock next to Gerda and lay on her back, staring up at the sky, shielding her eyes from the sun's glare. She had a fleeting thought about the Nazi boat, wondering if they would see it again on their trip back to the mainland. But she quickly put that thought out of her mind. This day was too beautiful to ruin with those kinds of worries. Up above, seagulls held aloft by the wind dipped and dove in coordinated circles, as if they had rehearsed this dance.

Henny was just starting to drift off to sleep when she heard footsteps dropping onto the pier, gently rocking the platform underneath her. She opened her eyes and sat up to see Far and the others approaching. Far had that same worried look on his

face that he had had out on the channel—the same furrowed brow, the same troubled eyes, and the same shoulders that were beginning to creep up to his ears.

“What’s wrong?” Henny jumped to her feet, looking first at her father and then at Otto and Gerhardt. The two crewmembers shook their heads simultaneously and shrugged their shoulders.

“Just some business with the staff here,” Far replied. “Nothing important.”

Henny didn’t believe him. She wondered if it had anything to do with the Nazi boats. But before she could ask, Far changed the topic.

“Should I even ask you if you want to skipper the boat back? Perhaps one of the boys should take the wheel.”

Henny jumped on board and reentered the cabin. “Gerda and I have got this,” she called out.

Otto and Gerhardt ran to untie the boat from the pier, jumping back onto the boat as the motor sprung to life.

“Hold on for dear life,” Otto shouted as Henny eased the *Gerda III* out into the water and headed back home.