

## TERRY SANVILLE

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### Two Boats

*Barkley's Girl* wallowed in the backwater of Harmony Bay, tied to a pier. Barnacles and seaweed clung to her red-bottomed hull. Sea lions often slept on her open deck, and pelicans sunned themselves on her wheelhouse. She'd never been pretty, fast, nor built to motor beyond the harbor's mouth. But all the other boats in the bay needed her, although they never let her know it.

On sunny days when the wind blew from the north, the captains of the sailboats depended on *Barkley's Girl* to ferry them supplies and passengers from onshore. She'd haul away their trash, and help them navigate the channel. Her exhaust stack belched black smoke from an old diesel engine. She could barely make eight knots. Barkley had been her captain for twenty years. She'd watched him change from a laughing young sailor to a quiet man who didn't talk much, except to himself and to her.

One moonless night, a two-masted schooner sailed into the bay. With running lights blinking, *Barkley's Girl* guided the ship to an open mooring. The schooner followed silently through the quiet water, her sails furled neatly against their booms. She was bigger than any of the other boats, at least a hundred feet from bow to stern, and had a crew of seven.

"Now there's a real ship," Barkley said. "Listen to those engines purr. She could make Cabo without raising a sail."

Her name was *Johanna* from Sydney, Australia. She'd come out of the west, on a fast run from Hawaii, dodging storms, her sheets full to the wind. But her crew needed to rest. For the following week, *Barkley's Girl* tended to the sleek beauty as she readied for her northern passage to Anchorage, chasing the humpback whales on their spring migration. She admired the schooner's graceful lines and dreamed of exploring the open sea with waves breaking across her deck. For a time, Harmony Bay felt like a little pond that she longed to break free from.

"*Johanna* can sail anywhere," Barkley said. "But the Pacific is dangerous. During a blow, I'd rather be right here, tied to our sturdy pier."

Yet *Barkley's Girl* could sense her captain's dream, and it became her dream too – to venture into the waves, to feel the roll of the sea, and to take a chance.

One morning, an hour after dawn, *Johanna* set sail for Anchorage. A squall came up, and the wind whistled through her rigging. Barkley had just come aboard his boat when he saw the schooner slip her mooring.

"She should have waited for us," he said. "The harbor mouth will be tricky in this wind. We'd better follow her just in case."

He hurried to start her engine and throw off the lines. *Barkley's Girl* groaned as she entered the channel, the storm surge pushing against her hull. With her throttle wide open, they chased after *Johanna*. The big ship sliced through the waves while *Barkley's Girl* crashed through them, throwing her captain around the wheelhouse. Slowly, they gained on the schooner.

A long breakwater, made of gigantic boulders stacked in a line, protected the harbor's entrance from the ocean's waves. But in the squall, mountainous combers broke over the barrier.

"She's sailing too close," Barkley yelled.

The pull of the breakwater drew *Johanna* toward the rocks. A towering wave rose above the boulders and thundered down onto the schooner. She rolled onto her side, throwing two sailors into the water. They swam toward *Barkley's Girl*, trying to get clear of their stricken ship. *Johanna* righted herself, but another wave crashed onto her deck, spinning the boat. Her rudder smashed into the rocks.

*Barkley's Girl* pushed forward, then slowed to a stop. He ran to the rail and pulled the sodden sailors from the sea. They huddled at the stern. One favored an arm. He tossed them blankets before returning to the wheel. A new set of waves pounded *Johanna*, threatening to break her apart. Barkley steered his boat close to the schooner's bow where a crewmember clung to a safety line. He threw the sailor a rope and the woman tied it to a deck cleat. *Barkley's Girl* reversed her engine and towed *Johanna* off the rocks and beyond the reach of the thundering breakers.

The two boats crept into the harbor, to the mooring that *Johanna* had just left. One of the crewmen who had tumbled overboard had fractured his arm and was taken ashore to the hospital. The storm broke up quickly. In a few minutes rays of sunlight made the bay sparkle like diamonds.

It took weeks to repair *Johanna's* mangled stern. *Barkley's Girl* brought carpenters and engineers from shore and supplies for the schooner's crew. As spring gave way to summer, the seas calmed. One morning Barkley came aboard with another man that she recognized as the injured sailor. He wore a cast on his left arm.

"She's all yours," Barkley said. "She's an old boat, but dependable...never let me down."

"I'll take good care of her while you're gone," the sailor said.

"You know, I might never come back," Barkley said.

"Yeah, you will. But take your time. Enjoy the sea. You deserve it."

They started her engine and motored across the bay to *Johanna*. Barkley climbed aboard and disappeared below deck. Within the hour, the schooner set sail for Alaska.

Months passed, then years. The sailor named Walter scraped, caulked, and repainted her hull and wheelhouse, and rebuilt her old engine. He installed a colorful sunshade over her deck to protect the sightseers he took on guided tours of Harmony Bay. But he never changed her name. *Barkley's Girl* enjoyed her safe life inside the harbor. But on winter nights she'd dream of her old captain, out there somewhere on the open ocean, pulling sail on *Johanna*, and slicing through the waves. In her own way, she traveled with him.

**Terry Sanville** lives in San Luis Obispo, California with his artist-poet wife (his in-house editor) and one plump cat (his in-house critic). He writes full time, producing short stories, essays, poems, an occasional play, and novels. Since 2005, his short stories have been accepted by more than 180 literary and commercial journals, magazines, and anthologies including the Picayune Literary Review, Birmingham Arts Journal, Shenandoah, and The MacGuffin. He was nominated for a Pushcart Prize for his story "The Sweeper." Terry is a retired urban planner and an accomplished jazz and blues guitarist – who once played with a symphony orchestra backing up jazz legend George Shearing.