

# **The Lifeboat Study Guide**

## **The Lifeboat by Charlotte Rogan**

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# Plot Summary

Grace and 38 other people climb aboard Lifeboat 14 as it is launched from the sinking ship. At its helm is Mr. Hardie, a veteran seaman and the only crewmember among those on 14.

With 39 people on board Lifeboat 14 (alternately called "14"), Grace and the others are surprised to see how low in the water the boat is riding. It is only later learned that the size of the lifeboats were diminished in order to save money, but the plaques denoting them fit for forty people were never changed. As a result, survivors in 14 must constantly bail out water from the bottom. They later discover a hole which they have difficulty keeping plugged.

Initially, Grace and the others on board are happy to have Hardie at the helm. He is resourceful, fiery, and experienced, all things which the survivors on 14 appreciate. He keeps order, assigns tasks, rations food and water, and keeps the hopes of the others alive. When the initial shock of the sinking wears off, the survivors settle into a strained but orderly routine which helps them to cope. Grace constantly worries about the life of her husband Henry who was also on board the ship. They have been married for just a few short weeks. She hopes he has survived the sinking.

Cracks in the order quickly appear. Mrs. Grant, a large and imposing first-class woman, along with some other passengers, begin to question some of Hardie's decisions. For example, while pulling away from the wreck of the Empress, Hardie fights to keep other survivors from trying to climb onto 14. He says this is to stop the boat from being swamped. Hardie also opposes linking up with other lifeboats, including the one headed up by Second Officer Brian Blake. The other passengers wonder why Hardie would go out of his way to avoid Blake and the boats.

As days pass, the passengers begin to grow on one another's nerves. They are living in close proximity, have no privacy, and as a result, rumors and gossip spread quickly. Food and water begins to run short, fueling tempers and passions. Passengers also begin recalling bits of memories from the voyage that have a bearing on the present. For example, Grace worries whether or not people are aware the Empress has sunk, because the Marconi machine was broken prior to the sinking. Other passengers remember hearing heated arguments between the ship's captain and Hardie, and they claim that the captain was prepared to fire Hardie.

Questions are raised by Mrs. Grant, Hannah, and others, believing that either bad blood or a conspiracy between Blake and Hardie existed. They come to believe that Blake and Hardie wanted to steal valuable gold from the ship—something which Hardie does not deny or confirm. Many of the passengers on 14 come to believe that Hardie avoided Blake's boat because Blake's boat was laden with gold.

As food and water supplies dwindle, people grow ill, weak, and many begin to die. Some willingly throw themselves overboard to save the others, including a deacon.



Hardie's own resolve weakens. As Mrs. Grant grows in power and stature among the occupants of 14, Hardie's own status vanishes. Grace herself begins to wonder if survival is possible anymore, or if Hardie truly is fit to lead now.

Grant finally challenges Hardie's fitness to command 14. She calls for a vote on removing Hardie from command and throwing him over the side. With the exception of Grace, who abstains, and Anya Robeson, who votes no, all the women vote to remove the delirious Hardie. The handful of men on board vote to keep him. Hannah immediately attacks Hardie. Grant orders Grace to assist Hannah. Grace unthinkingly follows orders, though she is not exactly sure what she is doing. Only when Grant orders Grace and Hannah to throw Hardie overboard do Grace and Hannah do so.

A week later, the survivors are picked up by an Icelandic fishing ship, and transferred to a mail ship bound for Boston. Back on land, Grace, Grant, and Hannah are arrested and charged with murder. Three lawyers are hired for Grace by her new mother-in-law, including Mr. Reichmann, who is able to prove that Grace acted without deliberation or premeditation, and under fear and duress in a terrible situation. While Grace is freed, Hannah and Grant are found guilty and imprisoned.

After the trial, Grace meets Henry's mother for the first time. It both begins and ends a chapter in her life. She later marries Mr. Reichmann, and sees a psychiatrist for a while. Grace refuses to send money to help Grant and Hannah in their appeal.

NOTE: Due to the structure of this novel, this guide specifically refers to the 2012 Reagan Arthur/Back Bay Books paperback edition.



## Pages 3 – 62

### Summary

Prologue – It is 1914. Grace Winter is twenty-two, has been married for ten weeks, and has been a widow for more than six. She, Hannah West, and Ursula Grant are on trial for their lives. Grace exits the court in a downpour, and opens her mouth to the rain as she did in the lifeboat with Mary Ann and Hannah. Grace's three lawyers, including William Reichmann, Mr. Ligget, and Mr. Glover, hired by Grace's mother-in-law, are confused by her behavior. Reichmann questions if Grace has gone mad. Mr. Glover puts his jacket around Grace as they head to lunch. The lawyers contemplate an insanity defense, and think they should meet with Dr. Coleman. They also tell Grace to write down a diary of the twenty-one days she was at sea in the lifeboat.

Part I, Day One – Grace and numerous others take seat assignments in Lifeboat 14 based on weight because there are so many people onboard. John Hardie, the able-bodied seaman and the only crewmember, is in charge. The people of the boat carefully row it through the wreckage of their sinking ocean liner, the Empress Alexandra. Explosions can be heard, and many people die. As Lifeboat 14 continues on, Hardie collects supplies from the floating debris. Hardie refuses to take on any survivors because the boat is already overloaded with 39 passengers, though wealthy Mrs. Grant protests this.

Grace's husband, Henry, had to fight to secure a spot for her own Lifeboat 14. They had paid more than five-hundred dollars for their first-class room to New York from London. She worries about where he now is. Hardie does his best to make sure people are comfortable, but there is little that can be done. Mrs. Fleming's wrist is broken, while Spanish nurse Maria is in shock. Grace knows in retrospect that if Hardie had not beaten away survivors to the lifeboat, she would have done it herself.

Part I, Night – Using the bathroom is done by way of using buckets intended for bailing out water. Grace uses a bucket as night falls. Whenever someone must use the bathroom, everyone else politely pretends not to notice. Meanwhile, Hardie takes account of the supplies they have. There are five blankets, a life preserver and rope, two tins of hard biscuits called hardtack, two tin drinking cups, three casks of water, loaves of bread, a lump of cheese, and the lifeboat's canvas cover. Most people in the boat have life vests. Through the night, many of the women cry. Hardie warns them they'll dehydrate if they cry. Most people get some sleep.

Part I, Day Two – The next morning, Hardie appoints shifts to the men rowing. Mrs. Grant, the strongest woman, also helps to row, while Mr. Turner, elderly and frail, is not made to row. There are thirty-one women on board, three of whom are given two hours of rest at a time in an area of the boat that is covered over by the canvas to keep the blankets dry. Men are allowed to use it when the women do not. This is dubbed the dormitory. Mr. Nilsson, who works for a shipping company, worries about the food



supply. Hardie fully expects to be rescued sooner rather than later because they are in well-traveled shipping lanes. A deacon leads everyone in prayer, which comforts them.

Mr. Hoffman notes that the boat was obviously not designed for so many people. Colonel Marsh points out a brass plaque which says the ship has been designed for forty people at capacity. It confuses everyone because the boat is barely afloat. Lifeboat 14 is 23 feet long, seven-feet-two-inches at its widest point, and three feet deep in the center.

Suggestions are made for people to swim for stretches of time to take pressure off the boat. Mr. Nilsson and Mr. Hoffman believe an emergency plan of some sort is needed. The talk worries some of the females on board including a young German girl named Greta Witkoppen, whom Mrs. Grant comforts. Only Maria is inconsolable. Grace only later learns that the lifeboats were diminished in size to save money, but the plaques ordered for them were never changed.

Part I, Day Three – The people on board wonder about God and their current situation. Some, like Mary Ann, take faith in God; others question His ways; Mrs. Grant says she does not believe at all. Grace calls herself a practical Anglican, believing in God but taking little stock in the Bible or in religion. Hardie explains that the Empress Alexandra had launched ten or eleven of twenty lifeboats, meaning that at least half of the eight-hundred passengers are saved. Colonel Marsh and others suggest communicating with nearby lifeboats. Hardie doesn't want to go near them, saying something is off, but consents.

They learn that one of the two boats is also overcrowded, and that the other, which is damaged, is headed up by an officer named Blake who seems to have come mentally unhinged when he threw two men overboard. These men were picked up by the other overcrowded boat. Lifeboat 14 and the other overcrowded boat agree to remain in sight of one another, but Hardie will not approach Blake's boat. It was Blake who sent Hardie on Lifeboat 14. The people on 14 are happy to have Hardie and not Blake at the helm. Hardie now figures there are enough supplies for four days at most.

The people in the boat do their best to keep their spirits up by talking about anything and everything, including the Russian Empress Alexandra, after whom the ship had been named following her wedding at the Winter Palace. Mary Ann reflects on Grace's new last name being Winter, which seems an ill-omen of doom to Grace. People reflect on the Titanic, and do their best to reassure each other that their loved ones are safe. A single sunset beam illuminates the boat, making many on board feel as if God is with them.

Part I, Night – While Grace and Hannah begin to befriend one another, the first-class passengers gossip about the Cumberlands, who they say are social climbers. They believe that Penelope Cumberland was in the other overcrowded boat. Mr. Sinclair, a learned man, speaks of Aristotle's ideas about memory—perception of past experiences—and recollection, a process of investigation that leads to memories not immediately recoverable. Grace later knows she is undertaking recollection with the task assigned



her by the lawyers. That night, Mr. Preston believes he has seen lights in the distance, but this is unconfirmed by the others.

Part I, Day Four – It is overcast. Preston’s belief in having seen lights subdues the people onboard 14. Mrs. Grant organizes watch shifts to keep an eye out for ships. Desperation begins to set in, with people anxious for more food and water. Some passengers including Hoffman say they saw Mrs. Fleming’s daughter, Emma, hit her head on another lifeboat and fall into the water. Grace tries to comfort Fleming, who responds that her daughter, and not Grace, should have been on the boat. She contends that Henry worked out a deal with Hardie to get Grace on, but Hardie denies this. Grace only remembers following Henry blindly, and Mary Ann defends Grace. Fleming goes on to say that Hardie will cause them all to be lost. That night, she drinks seawater and dies.

## Analysis

“The Lifeboat” is an historical novel of survival by Charlotte Rogan. It recounts the experiences of 22-year-old Grace Winter over 21 days on a lifeboat following the sinking of the ship *Empress Alexandra* in 1914. When the novel begins, Grace is on trial for their lives in a murder case. This case is related directly to the sinking of the *Alexandra* and the time that Grace and her codefendants spent in *Lifeboat 14* during the ensuing three weeks. Immediately, the themes of Survival and Morality can be seen as Part I begins.

With the *Alexandra* sinking, survivors still on the ship and those who are in the water are desperate to make it to lifeboats. A number of boats have been launched, including *Lifeboat 14* (hereafter alternately referred to as “14”). As 14 is steered away from the wreck by Hardie, Hardie orders the occupants to fight back survivors because 14 is already overloaded and barely afloat. As several of the passengers of 14 recognize, it is sink or swim, survival or death. In order for them to have a chance at survival, they must deny the chance of survival to others.

This brings into play the theme of Morality, which will be found consistently throughout the novel. Many of the occupants on 14 have serious moral qualms about not letting others onto their boat, including Grace. Grace feels horrible about not having let other people on board, at giving them the chance of survival as well. She only later comes to realize that, if Hardie had not beaten away swimmers, she would have done so herself.

This is a morally questionable position to take, despite the reality of the circumstances. The reader should note that is not a position that Grace takes easily. Indeed, the reader will see how Grace’s moral understanding of her situation evolves over time as morality and survival move from being in agreement with each other—that every life matters—to being in opposition with one another—that survival is paramount.

The chances for survival appear to be good initially. There is enough food and water for several days. The lifeboats launched from the *Alexandra* are in well-traveled shipping



lanes, making rescue a sooner, rather than a later prospect. Hardie's experience at sea also serves in favor of the occupants of 14. Nearly all of them are very happy initially to have him at the helm. Despite the diminished size of the lifeboat, the passengers are organized well enough to handle bailing of water being taken on.

Other themes emerge in this section of the novel in subtle ways, which will have profound importance later on. First, there is the theme of Feminism in which Mrs. Grant quickly positions herself as a counterbalance to Hardie, questioning his decision-making, organizing a watch, and taking on some of the rowing with the other men when no other women will do so. While many of the passengers on 14 are women, not all are. Secondly, there is the theme of Mystery. The initial source of the sinking of the Empress Alexandra, in addition to the source of the secondary explosions which help to sink the ship faster, are both unknown.

Perhaps the strangest mystery of all so far in the novel is Hardie's reluctance to approach other lifeboats. At first, this may be that Hardie, an experienced seaman, knows that desperate men do desperate things, as may be the case with Blake, who threw two of his own people overboard. The potential for fighting between boats is possible if Blake is willing to throw people out. Yet, why Blake threw others out, and what Hardie wants to go nowhere near Blake present two more unsolved mysteries. This serves as an ill-omen for later chapters as Hardie's decision-making process will come under scrutiny.

The theme of Sacrifice can also be noted early in this section of the novel. Many of the women have their seats on 14 because other men were unwilling to allow women to go into the water in their place. There is a sense of honor, decency, and chivalry in the sacrifice that they make. Indeed, it is Henry who personally secures a place for Grace on Lifeboat 14. Grace has no idea as to his fate, but prays he is alive because she knows he has made a tremendous sacrifice to give her the chance to survive.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Do you believe Hardie is justified in refusing to allow more people onto Lifeboat 14 as they pull away from the foundering Empress Alexandra? Why or why not?

## **Discussion Question 2**

How do the passengers of Lifeboat 14 feel about Mr. Hardie initially? Why?

## **Discussion Question 3**

How does Hardie attempt to keep law and order on Lifeboat 14. Why does he do this? What are the early effects as a result?





## Vocabulary

vigilantly, scientifically, exonerating, forbade, pervaded, congested, fait accompli, bedraggled, flailing, gunwale, stoic, brusque, retrospect, invariably, gumption, refractive, introspection, camaraderie, vouchsafe, extravagant, selfless, autocratic, conspiratorial, mnemonic, recollection



## Pages 63 – 120

### Summary

Part I, The Empress Alexandra – Many on the boat begin to grumble about Hardie, saying they knew all along on board the ship that he was evil. Grace recalls a strange incident on board the Alexandra where Captain Sutter called his men fools for not taking something straight to the safe room. Grace learned from Penelope Cumberland that two chests of gold for which Blake kept the key were stowed in the safe room. Penelope's husband had been appointed to accompany the shipment to New York for the war effort. Grace also recalls how her father committed suicide after being defrauded by business partners over patents, and how her sister Miranda went to Chicago to become a governess to survive.

Grace recalls how only Henry saved her from a similar fate. As they left New York for London to elope, World War I began. She also remembers quarreling with Henry about keeping their marriage a secret until he could tell his parents face-to-face. She convinced him to agree to send home a wireless message announcing his marriage instead.

Part II, Day Five – Fleming is buried at sea. The lifeboat passengers notice they can now only see one of the other lifeboats. Hardie fishes to secure more food. Only some, like Grace, manage to stomach the raw fish. Nevertheless, Hardie's fishing cheers everyone up, but he is unable to repeat the event which makes everyone angry at him. The deacon speaks of the Bible account of the fish and loaves, and is able to comfort people by relating their situation to events of the Bible. Mr. Sinclair contends that much of the Bible is based on myth, which angers some. Grace knows though that much in life, such as the future, must be taken on faith.

Part II, Night – Stories, gossip, and rumors spread through Lifeboat 14. A story of how Grace intended to endear Henry's mother became a story about how Henry's mother refused to receive Grace. A rumor persists of Captain Sutter intending to fire Hardie. Another rumor of the ship's owner being indebted leads to a conspiracy that the owner intended to sink the ship to collect insurance money. Grace focuses on good memories of Henry, while Mary Ann speaks of having sex with her fiancée though they are not yet married. Mary Ann thinks she is being punished by God by being put in a lifeboat as a result. Grace, who had premarital sex with Henry, tells Mary Ann that God would not punish all of them for one person's sins. During a discussion about God, Hardie contends that when he dies, he'll have a few things to say to God about the way God handles Earth.

Part II, Day Six – The weather begins to get a little rough, and bailing out water becomes a nonstop task. Thirst, hunger, and lack of personal space wear on the lifeboat passengers. When three women approach Hardie to increase their daily food allotments, a large wave knocks one of them overboard. Only after bailing can the



woman, Rebecca, be rescued. Some think Hardie hesitates and delays the rescue. Grace does not think so, but does think that perhaps Hardie was attempting to teach a lesson about order and authority. A fog sets in, and when it lifts, the other lifeboat is gone.

Part II, Days Seven and Eight – During two more days of fog, a foghorn can be heard. The occupants of the lifeboat make as much sounds as possible to attract attention. Preston believes the other lifeboat with Blake must have been rescued, with 14 being abandoned. Hannah questions Hardie's judgment, thinking they should have gone over to Blake's boat. Mrs. Grant agrees. She thinks bad blood existed between Hardie and Blake. Hardie fashions a makeshift sail out of the canvas and an oar to give the boat better speed. This brings on more water and requires more bailing. Rough seas also put more water into the boat. Rebecca takes on a fever and dies. Grace remembers how her rival for Henry, Felicity Close, whom was expected to marry Henry, told Grace that Henry never did anything rashly so his marriage to Grace was unusual.

Part II, Henry – Grace remembers how her father's misfortune led to a physician breaking off his relationship with Miranda. Grace remembers how she first saw Henry in the society pages of the New York Times, and how he had then been engaged to Felicity Close. When they met, Henry believed Grace was his one true love, and later proposed to her though he had not broken off his engagement to Felicity. Breaking off the engagement would have to be done delicately, Grace remembers, as the Winters and the Closes are old friends. Grace remembers being okay with the fact that she had to be kept a secret for a while.

## Analysis

As the novel continues, the people onboard 14 begin to suffer from lack of privacy. Rumors and gossip swirl as there is little else that can be done to pass the time. The rumors and gossip lead to questions of survival, and to Hardie's fitness to lead on 14.

The growing dissension on the boat, depending on the person, either begins to undermine chances of survival or helps to ensure it. Mrs. Grant takes every opportunity to challenge Hardie, believing survival does not lay with him. Most of the men, and many of the women (including Grace initially) believe that survival rests wholly with Hardie. Hardie's inconsistency at fishing, however, leads many to doubt his capabilities.

However, the one thing that continues to fuel dissension is the unknown. Here, the theme of Mystery swirls to the fore as the occupants of 14 begin to question not only Hardie's efficacy as a leader, but also his character as a person. This comes about by way of a remembered argument between Blake and the ship's captain, and by the rumor that the captain intended to fire Hardie. If the captain intended to fire Hardie, some wonder, how can Hardie possibly be competent for his command of 14? Mrs. Grant also believes that bad blood existed between Hardie and Blake, though what it was, or what the source was, is unknown.



Other mysteries, such as the purpose of the gold on board, also arise in this section of the novel. Among them are mysteries related to Grace's marriage to Henry. Henry's former betrothed, Felicity, contends that Henry never does anything rashly, so why he is rushing into marriage with Grace is unknown.

Grace herself begins to wonder at both the speed at which he sought to marry her and why he sought to prolong letting others know about his marriage. Initially Grace is okay with the secret being kept, believing that Henry has good reasons. But still, she cannot shrug the thought that something is not right. It is possible that Henry rushed into marriage with Grace to avoid marriage to Felicity, but there is little evidence to support this. If Henry had truly wanted to avoid marriage with Felicity, he could have found a way besides marrying another woman. The rush to marriage may also be explained by the strength of feelings between Henry and Grace, but this too does not seem wholly satisfactory to Grace. The real reason for the rush to marriage, whatever it may be, is left unanswered in the novel.

As the days continue on, the chances of survival become slimmer and slimmer. Food and water runs low while Mrs. Grant demands rations be increased. Grace and the other occupants not only begin to lose heart, but their health as well. Some passengers begin to die, and are buried at sea. The constant reminder of death also serves a constant reminder of the increasing desperation of the situation of the people on 14. Near-misses at being rescued, such as with the foghorn in the fog, also lead to a sense of agitation and desperation among the people of 14.

The growing power Mrs. Grant wields to challenge Hardie is further evidence to the theme of Feminism in the novel. In many ways, the boat has come to serve as an equalizer and leveler of the rights of man and woman. The women outnumber the men on the boat, and the equalizing nature of the situation gives them a power and leverage they do not have back on land. Mrs. Grant is quick to seize upon this.

Other questions of a moral nature arise in this section of the novel, bringing the theme of Morality to the fore once more. The scene with Rebecca going overboard is of particular interest to the plot, for Hardie's slowness in rescuing her either serves to teach those on board a lesson, or demonstrates how fragile the situation is. The boat must be steadied before Rebecca can be retrieved. Hardie's moral culpability in her death is brought to question: Either he is wholly guilty for her belated rescue and death, or he is not responsible at all. The former contends that he was trying to teach the occupants a lesson about their decisions and choices. The latter contends that individual choices and decisions threaten everyone in that Rebecca's own recklessness caused her to go over.

## Discussion Question 1

Do you believe Hardie or Rebecca is responsible for Rebecca's death? Why?



## Discussion Question 2

Do you believe that Mrs. Grant is correct in her growing opposition and increasing challenges to Hardie? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Why do you believe that Grace and Henry rushed into marriage in lieu of Henry's reputation of sound and steady decision-making? What evidence is there to support your position?

## Vocabulary

pontificate, equilibrium, naïve, fundamentally, appallingly, subjugate, incantation, heresy, proliferated, fabrication, embellish, edict, provocative, exuded



## Pages 121 – 179

### Summary

Part III, Day Nine – The morning after Rebecca Frost is buried at sea, her cap is found floating on the waves. This upsets some of the women. Mary Ann wails, and Grace wants to smack her for it but does not. Grace knows that in other circumstances, she may have been friends with Mary Ann, but in that moment, Mary Ann is of no use on the lifeboat. It is the first day there is no food. 14 is still taking on water. Grace enjoys bailing because it gives her something to do, and provides order. Only Anya Robeson is excepted from bailing, for she has her son, Charlie, with her. With the sail being too dangerous to use anymore, the passengers revert to rowing. They are not able to row for long.

Part III, Night – Hungry, weakened, and with their feet constantly in water, the people on the boat find the nights very cold. Mrs. Cook develops a bad cough. Grace remembers how, on board the *Alexandra*, Henry had become more agitated the closer the ship got to New York, and how he had spent much time with Mr. Cumberland, presumably on bank business. She also remembers how Henry delayed sending a message about his marriage to Grace until he finally said he took care of it. Grace also recalls how Mr. Cumberland said the wireless Marconi machine had been in disrepair, which causes Grace to wonder if Henry had sent a message at all, or if the machine had been operational upon sinking.

Part III, Day Ten, Morning – There are large, rolling waves. Hardie refuses to put up the sail, and Grace smiles at him to encourage him, knowing he too is growing weary and desperate. Grace continues to reflect on the time before the sinking. She thinks about Hardie saying Second Officer Blake had been in the radio room until the fire had forced them up on deck. During this time, Blake had told Hardie that distress signals had been sent out. Grace knows that either Blake had lied about the signals, or Hardie is lying now about the incident. She doubts Hardie would lie, otherwise he would not be so insistent upon rescue being possible.

It begins to rain, and everyone opens up their mouths to drink rainwater. After sleeping in the dormitory, Grace learns that Mrs. Cook has thrown herself overboard. Others think Hardie ordered her over. Grace cannot confirm or deny this. A squall comes on. Hardie tells the occupants to pray. The occupants believe someone should sacrifice themselves to give the boat greater buoyancy. It is disagreed as to who will do this.

Mary Ann cannot believe this, causing Grace to lose her patience and tell Mary Ann that she will die anyways, so it might as well be Mary Ann who jumps over. Preston believes only the men should draw lots for the task. Hardie agrees, and even draws to demonstrate equality. Mr. Turner must jump over. The deacon blesses the occupants, then voluntarily jumps over in sacrifice to 14. Mr. Sinclair, who knows the deacon jumped to save him from drawing a short lot, jumps over as well.



Part III, Day Ten, Afternoon – The storm comes on. The men fight to keep the boat's nose pointed to the wind and to deal with forty foot waves. The women and other men work had to bail out water. When Mr. Hoffman loses his bailing barrel, Hardie gives him an oar and resorts to using the final empty barrel to bail water. Hardie only does this after removing a small box from the barrel, and putting it inside his jacket. Grace and the others constantly pray. At one point, they hear a thud against the boat but do not know the source. As the storm lessens, Hardie orders rainwater collected to be used for drinking.

Part III, Night – Overnight, Mrs. Forester goes mad, ultimately passing out and later dying. Grace reflects on right and wrong, good and evil, and how choices are rarely one or the other but are somewhere in between. She wonders if Hardie had been right or wrong to allow the lottery. Mrs. Grant assures Grace that what is done is done. Grace then tells Mrs. Grant about the Marconi machine. That night, two sisters quietly throw themselves overboard. Mary Ann fears they will all die, but Grace fights to keep up hope.

Part III, Day Eleven – There are now thirty-one people left. Hardie is wearing down. Grace feels they are all dying. With a lighter load and a hole in the boat plugged, the sail is put back up. They head toward Europe. Preston relates that a person can live from four to six weeks without food, but not without water. Preston wants to live so he'll see his wife, Doris, again. Hannah. thinks Hardie rigged the lots. Grace says if this is true, it was done to save the greater number of people in the boat, for the men who went over could not have weathered the storm. Mrs. Grant tells Hannah not to worry about Grace, because Grace will be of use. Mrs. Grant believes they are sailing in circles. Hardie denies this. Hardie begins to see Grant as a rival for command.

Part III, Day Twelve – A flock of birds falls from the sky, taken as a sign of life from God by some, and a sign of death by others. Hardie says the birds have died of sheer exhaustion being so far away from land. The birds are collected and eaten.

Part III, Night – Mary Ann and Grace wash one another's faces with seawater. Grace later learns this is only to make Hannah jealous, for Mary Ann dislikes the idea that Grace and Hannah may be friends. Grace prays for deliverance and for Henry.

Part III, Day Thirteen – One of the other lifeboats comes back into view. Hardie opposes rowing over to it, but he is overruled by everyone else. Before rowing can begin, Hannah grabs one of the water barrels and pulls out the box that Hardie has again hidden away inside. She wonders aloud if the box is why Hardie is afraid of Blake. Hardie pulls out his knife. A wave rocks the boat, knocking Hannah into Hardie, causing Hardie to accidentally cut her face. The knife and box go overboard.

Hardie delivers an ultimatum: either they stay away from Blake, or they will lose him. A discussion ensues. Grant believes Hardie has misused his power. Lisette believes Blake's boat is carrying gold. Grant believes that Hardie is a co-conspirator, keeping their boat away from Blake's over the gold. Hardie says that if he and Blake stole something which would have otherwise sunk to the ocean floor and been lost, what



concern is it of people who have always had their basic needs met and done without. Hardie says he wishes he would have stolen something. Mary Ann then suggests that Henry paid Hardie with whatever was in the box to get Grace on board, for the lifeboat stopped lowering to let her one. Grace denies knowledge of any payment.

## Analysis

Survival continues to be the dominant theme through this section of the novel. Death continues to serve as a constant reminder to Grace and the others of both the frailty of life, and the desperation of their situation. Death can come at any time. Eight people have died since the first day aboard Lifeboat 14.

There is now no food or water, and Grace and the others do what they can to survive. This includes eating a flock of exhausted birds that just happens to fall in the area. The birds are taken to be a good sign—that survival is possible, that the people will be free to fly to life back on land—or as an ill-omen, that the dead birds are representative of the coming death of people on 14.

The number of dead also, ironically, increases the chances of survival for the rest. With a lighter load, the sail is able to be put back up. Preston relates that people can live four to six weeks without food, a difficult but reassuring observation. The chances of survival are also ensured by acts of self-sacrifice. Three people—two willingly, and one by requirement—throw themselves overboard in order to give the rest of the people on board a chance. Despite the growing power of the women, and the obvious equality playing out between men and women, the men take the chivalric and noble position that no woman will be permitted to enter the lottery for sacrifice.

There is certainly a moral sense of chivalry and honor in the decision that the men take. Likewise, that Hardie and the deacon would also willingly participate in the lottery speaks to the sense of equality among the members of the raft. That the deacon should be unwilling to live while others die in his stead is unacceptable to the deacon, who chooses to go over the side. Hoffman voluntarily goes after the deacon, honoring the deacon's sacrifice.

Interestingly enough, the feminism and equality that have broken out on board the ship do not lead to any of the women offering to participate in the lottery, or take the same burden upon themselves that the men do. There is a sense of hypocrisy inherent in this instance. Instead, the nobility of the men helps fuel the growing power of Mrs. Grant and the other women. Mrs. Grant increasingly comes to challenge and undermine Hardie's authority.

In large part, Grant draws on more rumors and mysteries to help erode Hardie's control, bringing the theme of Mystery back to the fore. Hardie's jealous guarding of the small wooden box lead to suspicions and jealousy by many of 14's occupants. Likewise, they doubt that Hardie had a fair hand in drawing lots, since it was he who held out the lots to





the other men. (Incidentally, what Hardie's box contains is never revealed, either, a mystery he carries with him to his death in the next section of the novel.)

Other women, including Hannah, vocally challenge Hardie. Some of the rumors they attack Hardie with are even inconsistent, but serve their purpose. They assert that Blake is hiding stolen gold in his boat, which is why Hardie does not want to go near Blake's boat. They assert that bad blood exists between Hardie and Blake, but also assert that Blake and Hardie are coconspirators. Hardie is forced to deliver an ultimatum: if they attempt to reach Blake, Hardie will go over the side. It is Hardie's final card to play and only temporarily averts disaster.

The diminishing window for survival means that the occupants of 14 are now turning on their own. Everyone is suspicious of everyone. Factions are forming based on fear rather than reason. The largest faction seems to be forming around Grant, who is able to command others, including Hannah, with a mere touch or a few words. Whether the splintering of the people on board will be a benefit or a detriment toward survival remains to be seen.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do Mrs. Grant and the other women increasingly seek to challenge Hardie's role as leader of 14? Do you believe they are correct in doing so? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Throughout most of the dramatic parts of this section of the novel, including Hannah's near altercation with Hardie, Grace remains passive. Why?

## Discussion Question 3

Despite the theme of Feminism in this section of the novel and how despite the fact that the women on board are growing in power and influence, the women do not readily attempt to participate in the lottery. Do you believe this is hypocrisy? Why or why not? If it is hypocrisy, do you believe the women should have entered the lottery? Why or why not? If it is not hypocrisy, why not?

## Vocabulary

profound, capriciously, emaciated, protrusion, ravage, vexation, tumultuous, inevitability, arrhythmic, innate, lurched, rebuffed, dissembled, gaunt, vehemence, cynically, zenith, brazenly, imperil, animosity



## Pages 180 – 232

### Summary

Part III, (Day Thirteen) Night – Tension is high that night. Grant has openly challenged Hardie's leadership while rumors abound. Barely anyone sleeps, and nightmares are common.

Part III, Day Fourteen – Grant calls for a vote on whether Hardie should go over the side. Only Anya Robeson takes a middle ground, saying that Hardie should go into the other boat, though it is now out of sight. Even Grace comes to wonder if Hardie is now making poor choices. She cannot vote for his death, so votes to abstain. All the men vote to keep Hardie. All the women except Anya and Grace vote to kill him. Hannah immediately goes after Hardie. Grant orders Grace and Mary Ann to help Hannah.

Hardie shouts that no one will get him if he gets them first, making Hannah declare Hardie insane. Grant orders Grace and Hannah throw him overboard. Grace is unsure but commits to the act. Grace is both horrified and exhilarated at what she has done. Hannah is thrilled. Grant then sets the people of the boat to work cleaning, bailing water, and organizing. It is later discovered that Hoffman also jumps overboard. A small stash of dried fish is found wrapped in oilskin and distributed to everyone on board. The oilskin is then used to patch the boat.

Part IV, Prison – In jail, Grace speaks with a woman named Florence who could not feed her children, so she killed them rather than let them live with their physically abusive father. As the trial looms, Henry's mother sends a letter to Grace seeking a meeting, which gives her hope. It is also made public that the Marconi machine was broken at the time of the sinking of the Empress Alexandra. Grace believes Henry's mother first learned about her son's marriage from the list of survivors published in the papers. Grace also suspects that Henry's mother is paying for her defense. Reichmann visits and collects Grace's account.

Part IV, Dr. Cole – Dr. Cole is a psychiatrist hired by Grace's lawyers to examine her each week. He draws from Grace's written account to ask her questions and understand her experience. He asks her about relating anyone in the boat to Miranda, to which Grace replies that Mary Ann was in some ways like Miranda. He also asks about things that irritate Grace, to which Grace responds that Cole reminds her of her father who was no match for the schemes of his business partners.

Part IV, The Law – Grace attends a hearing before Judge Potter. She, Mrs. Grant, and Hannah are charged with first-degree murder. The lawyers argue for a dismissal of the charges, as the conditions were about survival, not cruelty. Further, no bodily harm was directly done to Hardie, as he was thrown into the water. Reichmann argues that there was another lifeboat in the area, so it was not as if Hardie was without options. The



question of whether some or all shall die unless action is taken means that action must be taken, Reichmann explains. Grace, Hannah, and Mrs. Grant chose to act.

Hannah's lawyer also argues that Hardie's willingness to draw lots indicates he had become a danger to the lives of those on board. The prosecutor counters that Hardie's refusal to consider women for the lottery mean he is not a threat to everyone. Judge Potter contends that there is no general principle for such a case, and that the case must be decided by only the facts of the case itself.

Part IV, Innocence – Rumors swirl that Hardie is still alive. Jewels from the *Empress* have supposedly surfaced in New York. Mr. Glover is tasked with determining the truth of this. Reichmann questions Grace specifically on the act of throwing Hardie overboard, believing Grace did not intend until the last minute to assist in throwing Hardie overboard. She admits she did not exactly know what she was going to do when she first approached Hardie. Reichmann then declares they will plead innocent.

Glover brings Grace articles from the papers about the wreck. She learns that Captain Sutter is among the dead, but that Second Officer Brian Blake is among the survivors. An article details how Sutter once cleared Blake's name of false accusations of receiving stolen property, showing the evidence pointed to another man. Grace believes this other man is Hardie. She thinks that Hardie and Blake were a little bit both conspirators and enemies.

## Analysis

In the final section of Part III, the penultimate action of the throwing overboard of Hardie by Grace and Hannah at the command of Mrs. Grant occurs. This is also the ultimate act of feminism on board, as all of the men vote in favor of keeping Hardie, but also refuse to intervene when Grace and Hannah physically combat Hardie. With the elimination of Hardie from the boat, it is now clear that Mrs. Grant is in command, and women rule the day.

The theme of Survival also remains consistent with the elimination of Hardie. Hardie's own fight for survival ends in failure, and Grace notes that his elimination means the loss of the only experienced seaman among the passengers of 14. Hardie's removal thus means there is a lessened chance of survival, but the take-charge attitude of Grant and the cleaning and straightening out of 14 speak to a degree of efficiency and competency, at least within the boat. Grant intends to run a tight ship, and this improves the chances of survival.

Back in the United States, the fight for survival does not end with a return home. Grace is now to be tried for her life, as are Hannah and Grant. The fight for survival is now not a question of surviving the wilderness of the open sea, but the justice system. Everything Grace's lawyers embark upon now—between meetings with Dr. Cole, their arguments during the hearing, and getting her to recount her experiences in writing—are aimed at making sure she survives.



Now back on land, the time spent at sea must be questioned through the lens of the novel's Morality theme. The actions of those on board 14 now have consequences, especially for Grace, Grant, and Hannah. During the hearing, the lawyers of the three women drive straight to the heart of the morality of the situation. They contend that it is moral to ensure that action must be taken in order to save the lives of others. While the killing of Hardie in and of itself may not have been a truly moral action, the context is necessary to understand, and is therein morally justifies the act.

Grace's situation is contrasted with the case of Florence, a woman who occupies the jail cell across from her. Florence murdered her children rather than allowing them to live with an abusive father. The morality of Florence's act is just as questionable as Grace's part in throwing Hardie overboard. Sometimes, the reasons why are simply not good enough, or moral enough to justify the act. This is the challenge that Grace's lawyers must seek to overcome.

That Grace was not in a stable frame of mind, and that she did not intend to actually kill Hardie upon first approaching him, means that the lawyers will plead innocent. At the same time, Grace's decision to kill Hardie may have been attributable to her own desire to survive. It is clear that Grant was the dominant power in the boat by that time, and to defy Grant would probably mean that Grace herself would also be thrown over. If this is the case, it is not a question of morality but of survival that dominates Grace's part in things.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do you believe Grace participates in the throwing Hardie overboard? Do you believe that her action is moral or justifiable? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

What is Grace's fight for survival like back on land in the United States? What is at stake for Grace? How do her lawyers plan to go about freeing her?

## Discussion Question 3

Reichmann argues that the question of whether some or all shall die unless action is taken means that action must be taken. Do you agree or disagree with this assertion? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

articulated, imperceptible, equanimity, succor, culpability, ostensibly, coalesced, insubstantial, invective, domesticity, pantomiming, stupefied, convulsed, implications, corollary, pallid, oblique



## Pages 233 - 274

### Summary

Part IV, Witnesses – The trial begins. Traveling to and from the courthouse, Grace, Hannah, and Mrs. Grant speak little with one another. One such thing they discuss is their approval of how two of the jurors lost relatives on Titanic. In court, the prosecutor makes a point of wondering how the three women survived, why they didn't become sick or weak, and why they wouldn't have done the noble thing by sacrificing themselves for the others.

Colonel Marsh and Mr. Preston act as witnesses against the three. Marsh lies about wanting to protect Hardie but being afraid he would be overwhelmed by the women. Of the fourteen female survivors able to be contacted, twelve argue in person or in sworn statements that without Grant or Hannah, they would be dead. The females also remember questioning if Grace would be loyal to them or to Hardie.

The prosecution produces a letter sent to Grace by Greta, in which Greta says all the girls know what to do. Reichmann uses this as evidence that Grant has powerful sway over all the women, and that there is a conspiracy afoot. Anya Robeson is called upon as a witness, who recreates the positions of everyone on the boat at the time of Hardie's being thrown overboard. Anya's sole goal was to save her son, a task at which she was successful. Anya also reveals that Mary Ann died with her head in Grace's lap. Reichmann is thrilled because the questioning of Grace's loyalty distinguishes her from Grant and Hannah. Grace tells Reichmann she barely remembers the day Mary Ann died.

Part IV, Decisions – Grace doesn't mind being characterized as indecisive during the trial, knowing she only threw in her lot with Grant when Grant emerged as the dominant power. In court, Reichmann questions Grace, getting her to admit that she was in fear for her life throughout the ordeal. He plays this off as fear of Grant and Hannah, directly. Grace deeply misses Henry, and wonders how things would have been different if he had been in the boat. Hannah and Grant are found guilty of premeditated murder. Grace is freed. As the courtroom clears, she meets Henry's mother for the first time.

Part IV, Rescue – The narrative switches back to the days in the lifeboat. The day after Hardie's death, there are only twenty-eight occupants in the lifeboat. Grant stopped talk of potential cannibalism. Colonel Marsh speaks of Thomas Hobbes, who said that people were motivated primarily for desire for power or fear of others. Rain brings them a new round of drinking water. They are finally picked up by an Icelandic fishing vessel. By then, a few other women have died. The Icelandic fisherman do everything they can to care for the survivors. Grace recalls Mr. Sinclair saying that only in lonely and challenging times is a person's true nature revealed. The survivors are transferred to a mail packet and taken to Boston. They are thrilled by the sight of it. Grace knows now that some transaction must have occurred between Henry and Hardie.



Epilogue – The story returns to New York. Though acquitted, Grace continues to see Dr. Cole. She does not feel guilty about her experience, though he thinks she does. Likewise, she does not have survivor's guilt, though she feels both lucky and unlucky for surviving. Grace ends up engaged to Reichmann, and knows that sooner or later, she will have to visit Henry's mother. She refuses to send money for an appeal for Hannah and Mrs. Grant.

## Analysis

Back on land, with order restored and the power of the women once again marginalized, the men disgustingly lie in order to see Grace, Hannah, and Grant executed. The men contend to being afraid for their lives, including Marsh. Marsh, quoting Hobbes, contends that power and fear are the primary motivators of people. Fear certainly helps to motivate Grace in the boat; power motivates Marsh in court. Marsh's own morality is thus highly suspect.

That Grant's allies from the boat conspire together to protect Grant, Hannah, and Grace ends up helping Grace's lawyers to contend that the other women feared Grant. Further, the dire situation faced in the boat, coupled with Grace's fear of Grant and her lack of premeditation mean that Grace is not truly to blame for the death of Hardie.

Because morality in conjunction with survival serves to be the core of the case as it is argued, no guilt for Grace can be found given the context of her situation. In other words, because the murder was not premeditated, and because there were other extenuating circumstances, Grace can only be freed. Morality and Survival thus remain dominant themes through the end of the novel.

Interestingly enough, while Grace's decision to help do away with Hardie over the side of the boat was clearly calculated on her part during the act—her life itself being at stake—she has no moral regrets about what she did later on regardless as to the morality of the act itself. To Grace, morality doesn't factor into her decision because it was truly a life-or-death, sink-or-swim situation. There was no time to think. There was only time to act to survive.

The reader will remember Mr. Sinclair's reference not only to Hobbes, but to the true nature of human beings coming out in times of loneliness and challenge. A handful of people, like the deacon and Henry, show their true nature by sacrificing themselves in a moral fashion for the others. Grace, who has been sweet and passive for much of the novel, only lately resorts to dramatic action when it truly counts, both in dealing with Hardie, and in protecting herself in court. The human penchant for survival comes to trump the human penchant for morality in the end, at least when it comes to Grace.

## Discussion Question 1

Do you believe that Grace should be held to account for her participation in throwing Hardie overboard? Why or why not?



## Discussion Question 2

If you were the prosecutor, how would you set about disproving the arguments made by the lawyers of Grace, Grant, and Hannah?

## Discussion Question 3

Despite her traumatic experiences between the lifeboat and the murder of Hardie, Grace has no moral regrets or guilt about what happened. Why do you believe this is?

## Vocabulary

juxtaposition, somberly, cumulative, disjointed, belabored, solicitous, suffused



# Characters

## Grace Winter

Grace Winter is the main character and narrator of the novel “The Lifeboat” by Charlotte Rogan. At the age of twenty-two, Grace is a gentle, mild-mannered New York native who worries for her future. Of an upper middle-class background, Grace’s father has committed suicide after being swindled by his business partners. Grace, her mother, and her sister Miranda are left to fend for themselves. Miranda becomes a governess in Chicago. Grace does not want to end up in the same kind of position, so she takes to the society pages of the New York Times. There, she finds a photograph of wealthy Henry Winter and determines that he is the one she will marry.

Although Henry is engaged when they meet, Henry and Grace quickly fall in love. Henry arranges to elope with Grace in London, negating his engagement to Felicity Close. Grace is eager for Henry to announce their marriage, but Henry is reluctant, saying it must be done tactfully. This upsets Grace, who succeeds in getting Henry to send a telegraph to his mother. Grace and Henry are returning to New York on the Empress Alexandra when the ship is sunk, presumably by a German U-Boat. Henry appears to make some sort of arrangement with Mr. Hardie to ensure Grace has a seat on Lifeboat 14.

Grace, as well as the other occupants of 14, are glad to be alive, though they worry for their situation. Grace and some of the others also worry about the moral implications of pushing away other survivors so 14 does not swamp, but Hardie reminds them all that they are now fighting for survival. As the days wear on, patience runs thin. Gossip, rumors, no privacy, and a lack of food and water plague the survivors. One by one, they begin to die. Rescue seems impossible. Over time, Mrs. Grant comes to head up a faction of survivors on the boat, and they challenge Hardie’s personal character and fitness to lead. Grace is confused by the unfolding situation, since Hardie is the only one who has any real sailing experience. Yet, she also begins to fear the growing power of Grant.

When Grant calls for a vote to do away with Hardie, Grace abstains. When the vote ends in the affirmative, Grant orders Grace and Hannah to throw Hardie over the side. Grace knows if she does not comply, she too will be targeted. Grace thus makes a calculated decision based on survival to help dispose of Hardie. A week later, Grace and the others are rescued. Back in the United States, Grace, Hannah, and Grant are charged with murder. Grace reflects on how a survivor named Mr. Sinclair remarked that times of challenge reveal a person’s true nature. Grace’s true nature is one of calculated survival. When she is found innocent, she marries her lawyer in order to continue to survive.





## Mr. Hardie

Mr. John Hardie is an Able-Bodied Seaman who serves on board the Empress Alexandra. He is put in command of Lifeboat 14 by Second Officer Blake and is the only crewmember on board 14. Hardie is a weathered, no-nonsense man who immediately sets about keeping order on the boat. His experience leads to him fishing some extra supplies from the wreckage of the Alexandra, and causes him to make difficult decisions to save 14, such as fighting off additional survivors or going near other lifeboats. Hardie does his best to keep the spirits of the people on board up, and to keep them disciplined. However, desperation sets in, leading many to challenge Hardie's personal character and fitness to command.

Much of the critique focuses on whether Hardie can be trusted. Some believe that the captain was about to fire Hardie. Others believe that Hardie and Blake were enemies, which is why he refused to approach the other lifeboats. Still others contend that that Hardie and Blake were coconspirators in the midst of a gold-stealing scheme. Challenges to Hardie's command increase until Hardie loses control against Mrs. Grant. Mrs. Grant orders Hardie over the side, and he is thrown by Hannah and Grace. Hardie, from all appearances, ends up drowning, though rumors later circulate he may be alive in New York.

## Ursula Grant

Mrs. Ursula Grant is a large, widowed woman who is a first-class passenger on board the Empress Alexandra. When the ship sinks, she becomes an occupant on board Lifeboat 14. Her large presence is intimidating to the other women, as well as her penchant for challenging Hardie's decision-making from the very start. An atheist, Mrs. Grant appears in the novel as a very feminist character, motivated by a desire not only for survival, but for power as well. Her independence and her ability to compete with the men are denoted initially by her assisting the men with rowing the lifeboat. As time passes, a faction forms around Grant, who continues to challenge Hardie, ultimately becoming a rival for power in 14. Eventually, Grant organizes a mutiny in which Hardie is thrown overboard by Grace and Hannah. Back on land, Grant, Grace, and Hannah are put on trial. While Grace is acquitted, Grant and Hannah are found guilty of premeditated murder.

## Hannah West

Hannah West is one of the survivors of the sinking of the Empress Alexandra and is one of the occupants of Lifeboat 14. A married woman, Hannah is in her twenties and takes a quick liking to Mrs. Grant, eventually becoming her right-hand. She assists Mrs. Grant in sowing dissension, and helping to circulate rumors against Hardie. When the vote comes to jettison Hardie, Hannah and Grace become the two ordered by Grant to carry out the task. Back on land, Grace, Hannah, and Grant are put on trial. While Grace is found innocent, Hannah and Grant are imprisoned.



## **Anya Robeson**

Anya Robeson is one of the survivors on board Lifeboat 14. She is a young mother who shelters her young son, Charles, through the course of the ordeal after the sinking of the Empress Alexandra. Anya is a very kind, very determined woman, whose sole purpose is to keep her son alive. When the vote comes to kill Hardie, Anya is the only woman to vote no. She and Charles both survive the ordeal safely and return home at the end of the novel.

## **The Deacon**

The Deacon, never named, serves as a source of moral authority on Lifeboat 14 and also serves as a source of comfort to the people onboard due to his closeness to God. However, the Deacon does not hold his religious rank above anyone. When it is determined that lots shall be drawn to see which men will go overboard to sacrifice themselves for the others, the Deacon voluntarily goes over rather than allowing another to die in his stead. In so doing, he resembles Christ in his sacrifice.

## **Mr. Sinclair**

Mr. Sinclair is an occupant of Lifeboat 14 and is a very learned man who comments on two important philosophical ideas during the course of the novel. First, he asserts that people are motivated primarily by fear or power. Secondly, he asserts that in times of trouble or loneliness (or both), the true nature of people ultimately comes out.

## **Colonel Marsh**

Colonel Marsh is a veteran military member who is one of the survivors on Lifeboat 14. He is incredibly calculating. His loyalties ebb and flow with changing events and power shifts on 14. When the vote comes for Hardie to go over, Marsh votes in favor of keeping Hardie but then does nothing to save Hardie when Grace and Hannah throw him over. Back on land, Marsh acts as a witness against Hannah, Grace, and Grant, lying that he was afraid of the women and did not want to intervene on Hardie's behalf out of fear.

## **William Reichmann**

William Reichmann is the principal attorney hired by Henry's mother for Grace's time in court. Reichmann is a very intelligent lawyer who incisively argues for Grace's innocence. He contends that Grace acted under duress, out of fear for her life, and did not plan on killing Hardie the way that Hannah and Grant did. He is able to get Grace acquitted, and later marries her.

## Henry Winter

Henry Winter is a wealthy young New Yorker, whose family is heavily invested in banking. Henry himself is directly involved in banking. Engaged to Felicity Close, Henry decides to elope with Grace after meeting her, having fallen for her instantly. He believes she is his soulmate. He keeps the marriage a secret, however, out of tact and the need to gently let Felicity down. Henry is finally persuaded to send a telegraph to his mother about the marriage from the *Alexandra*. When the ship sinks, Henry arranges a deal of some kind to get Hannah onto Lifeboat 14. Henry himself dies, whether in the initial sinking or afterwards being left unclear.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Birds

A flock of birds, having traveled too far from land, drop dead of exhaustion in and around Lifeboat 14. The birds become a meal for the survivors, and bird meat is set out to dry for later consumption. The birds are taken by the occupants of 14 as both a symbol of hope and an ill-omen. Birds symbolize flight and freedom—the ability to fly away and survive. Thus, some see them as a symbol of survival indicating that the passengers on 14 will survive. Others see their deaths as proof they are too far away from land to survive, as are the occupants of 14. The death of the birds are therefore reflective of the deaths that the people in the boat will die.

## Marconi Machine

A Marconi machine is used to send wireless telegraphed messages from the Empress Alexandra to New York, London, and other ships. The Alexandra's Marconi appears to be only occasionally operational, as word of its consistent breaking down filters out among the passengers. Henry manages to send out a telegraph to his mother that he has married Grace before the sinking. At the time of the sinking, the Marconi has broken down. Word of ship's sinking cannot be sent out or received.

## Oars

Oars are stored in lifeboats, including Lifeboat 14. The oars are manual means of propelling the lifeboats through water. The survivors on Lifeboat 14 use the oars to paddle the boat forward, taking turns to do so. An oar is later used to help construct a makeshift sail in order to move the boat along more quickly.

## Canvas

A canvas cover for the boat is used to create a small shelter for three people at a time to nap in, and also to cover the food, water, and blankets. A piece of the canvas cover is later used to construct a makeshift sail with an oar. The canvas sail works well, but can only be used regularly once enough weight has been jettisoned from the boat.

## Hardtack

Hardtack is a very hard biscuit that can remain fresh and edible for years. Two tins of hardtack are kept onboard lifeboats for emergency situations. Hardie determines there is enough hardtack on board to last the people on Lifeboat 14 between three and six



days. It is the primary source of food for the people on board, who learn that the human body can survive from four to six weeks without food.

## Water

Water is stored in small casks onboard Lifeboat 14. The water is rationed by a third of a cup per day per person by Hardie. The water runs out quickly, leading the survivors on board the boat to drink and collect rainwater. Each storm that brings rain is both a blessing and a curse, for it provides life-sustaining water, but soaks everyone.

## Fish

A large fish is hooked by knifepoint by Hardie early on in the novel. It adds valuable protein to the diets of the survivors in Lifeboat 14. The survivors are thrilled that Hardie is able to hook a fish by knife, and this endears most to him. However, Hardie's inability to repeat the event leads to disapproval.

## Letter

A letter is written to Grace from Henry's mother during the lead-up to the trial. Henry's mother seeks a meeting with Grace, for she wants to meet Grace for the first time. The letter gives Grace hope. It also reinforces Grace's belief that her mother-in-law is paying for her defense.

## Gold

Gold is being shipped from London to New York in two chests aboard the Empress Alexandra. It is being overseen by Mr. Cumberland, who apparently has some sort of business arrangement with Henry and his family's bank. Whatever this arrangement is, and whatever the arrangement is for—most probably dealing with the ongoing war—is never fully revealed. Many of the passengers in Lifeboat 14 contend that Blake and Hardie have stolen the gold, and that Blake is keeping the gold in his lifeboat. The true fate of the gold, like its original intent, is never ascertained.

## Small Box

A small box is jealously guarded by Hardie, often being kept in an empty water casket. The true origin and contents of the box are never explicitly revealed, though many believe Henry gave Hardie the box as payment for getting Grace onboard Lifeboat 14. Other passengers contend that the contents of the box have to do with a conspiracy between Blake and Hardie to steal gold.

# Settings

## North Atlantic

The North Atlantic is the northern reach of the Atlantic Ocean. It is in the North Atlantic that the Empress Alexandra sinks, and launches 11 of its lifeboats before going under. The North Atlantic becomes the wilderness in which Grace and the other members of Lifeboat 14 seek to survive. The North Atlantic is prone to all kinds of weather, including rain, storms, and squalls. The North Atlantic proves inhospitable to a flock of birds who fly too far from land and drop dead from exhaustion. The North Atlantic also becomes a place for burial at sea for numerous passengers of Lifeboat 14 who either die or sacrifice themselves over the three weeks spent adrift.

## Lifeboat 14

Lifeboat 14 is a 33-foot-long lifeboat, and is 7 feet in length at its widest point. Lifeboat 14 is one of 11 lifeboats launched from the twenty aboard the Empress Alexandra as it sinks. The lifeboats, originally designed and tested for forty grown people, are diminished in size by the ship's company in order to save money. Nevertheless, they are still stamped with plaques denoting them as being fit for 40 people. Lifeboat 14 becomes a miniature country for the thirty-nine survivors on board, including Grace. The boat all at once comes to represent safety, shelter, hope, opportunity, and despair, danger, death, and destruction. Grace and the other survivors spend 21 days in Lifeboat 14 before being picked up by an Icelandic fishing vessel.

## The Empress Alexandra

The Empress Alexandra is a large steamer bound for New York from London. It is a well-designed, well-built ship carrying some 800 passengers and crew. Outfitted with 20 lifeboats, the lifeboats themselves have been diminished in size to cut costs, and so do not properly hold 40 people. The Alexandra carries a wide variety of first, second, and third-class passengers. Grace and Henry themselves have paid more than \$500 for a first-class room. The Empress Alexandra, among its many aspects, features a wireless Marconi machine for communication with both land and other oceangoing vessels. The Marconi machine is only sometimes operational, as it consistently breaks down. At the time of the Alexandra's sinking on the fifth day of its voyage, the Marconi machine is not working. The Alexandra's safe room is also home to two massive chests of gold being overseen by Mr. Cumberland. The true fate of the gold, like the cause of the sinking and subsequent explosions, is not known.

## **New York**

New York is the destination city for the Empress Alexandra when it sets sail from London through the North Atlantic. New York City is the hometown of Grace, Miranda, their mother, and their father. It is also the hometown and place of business for Henry and his family. New York becomes the setting for Grace, Mrs. Grant, and Hannah's trial when they return to land.

## **London**

London is the capital of Great Britain and the capital of England. It is where Henry and Grace travel to elope. Once married, they spend something of a honeymoon in London, including going to different shops. They later book passage aboard the Empress Alexandra, which departs London for New York.



# Themes and Motifs

## Survival

Survival is an important theme in the novel "The Lifeboat" by Charlotte Rogan. Survival appears in three primary ways in the novel, including survival of the sinking of the Empress Alexandra, survival on Lifeboat 14, and survival during trial. Each appearance of survival in the novel is predicated on two philosophical ideas spoken about by Mr. Sinclair. In the first, owing to Thomas Hobbes, Sinclair explains that human beings are motivated in life primarily by fear or power. The second, Sinclair explains that only in times of loneliness and challenge is the true nature of a human being revealed.

The first appearance of survival in the novel comes through the sinking of the Empress Alexandra. The sinking is more than likely attributable to a German U-Boat attack. The ship sinks fast enough so that only 11 of the 20 lifeboats aboard the Alexandra are able to be launched, and even then, the launching is done in a frenzied rush. As a result, passengers scramble for lifeboats. Henry's true nature as a man comes through as he leads Grace to safety, making some kind of arrangement with Hardie not for himself, but for his wife. Henry's arrangement with Hardie guarantees Grace's chance at survival. She owes her initial survival of the wreck to Henry.

The second form of survival comes in the form of Lifeboat 14. From the first oar strokes away from the wreck, Hardie fishes supplies from the water, knowing that their survival depends upon it. Safely away from the wreck, all of the decisions Hardie makes are pursuant to survival. He organizes the passengers into roles, functions, and tasks. He rations the food and water. He maintains that survival is a given due to the fact that they are in well-travelled shipping lanes. But as time wears on, Mrs. Grant and others challenge Hardie's position, believing their survival depends upon themselves, and not Hardie.

As a result, most people on Lifeboat 14 mutiny against Hardie. Grace's decision to help Hannah throw Hardie overboard comes in a last-second, calculated move. While she has abstained from voting against Hardie, she knows that Grant, Hannah, and other women will probably turn on her next, so she secures her place in Lifeboat 14 by assisting in getting rid of Hardie. Grace's decision truly is an act intended for survival. The reader notes that her true nature shows through her sweet, passive, and ladylike exterior. But when she is forced into extreme and desperate conditions she will act however she must in order to survive. She later has no regrets about this at all.

During the court case, Grace is on trial for her life. Surviving the lifeboat has not meant survival on land is a given. Whereas Grace's survival on the lifeboat was in her own hands, her survival is now primarily in the hands of her lawyers. Reichmann is able to argue that Grace, given the context of the situation, fear of Grant and Hannah, and Grace's lack of premeditation, is innocent of murder. Accordingly, Grace is acquitted.





Yet, she makes one last calculated decision of survival, and that is to marry Reichmann. As a result, she will be wealthy and will not be forced to work.

## Sacrifice

Sacrifice is an important theme in the novel “The Lifeboat” by Charlotte Rogan. Sacrifice involves giving up something for the benefit of someone else. In the novel, the sacrifices made are those of one’s life for another, all relating to the sinking of the Empress Alexandra, and the time Grace and the survivors spend on the lifeboat.

The first major sacrifice made in the novel is by Henry as he and Grace travel aboard the Empress Alexandra, bound for New York from London. When the ship begins to sink, Henry’s manliness and chivalry, his true nature, take hold. His first instinct is to make sure that Grace has a chance at survival. He forms some sort of arrangement with Hardie, thus securing a spot on Lifeboat 14 for Grace, not for himself. He knows there is only enough room for one of them, and he makes sure that one is Grace. Henry thus sacrifices his own chance at survival for a chance for Grace at survival. Hundreds of men do the same so that women and children have a chance to live.

Other sacrifices soon follow. The people on board sacrifice their freedom and full rations so that others may have a similar chance to survive. For example, the people of the boat accept (if some grudgingly accept) heavily rationed water, being given only one-third a cup a day as opposed to a full cup. However, patience wears thin as panic sets in, and people of the boat openly talk about the need for some to sacrifice themselves for the rest, though no volunteers are readily forthcoming.

Only ultimately is the decision for such a sacrifice made. The men refuse to allow the women to participate in drawing lots to determine who will sacrifice themselves. Owing to tradition codes of masculinity, honor, and chivalry, the men have no qualms about participating in such a lottery. Indeed, Hardie underscores the point by declaring that women will not participate.

Even the Deacon and Hardie participate in the lottery, though neither the Deacon nor Hardie draw short lots. Elderly Mr. Turner draws a short lot, and without complaint, plunges into the water. The Deacon cannot abide someone else dying in his stead, so the Deacon voluntarily sacrifices himself for the others. Hoffman also sacrifices himself, knowing that he would have drawn a short lot. As a result, three men sacrifice themselves for the other people on board, giving them greater buoyancy and a greater chance at survival. Indeed, the true nature of those who sacrificed themselves is apparent through their actions.

## Feminism

Feminism is an important theme in the novel “The Lifeboat” by Charlotte Rogan. Feminism—the equality, rights, and abilities of women to determine their own paths—begins subtly, but becomes overt by the end of the second week on board Lifeboat 14.



When the novel begins, there is little evidence of feminism as chivalric and courageous men like Henry voluntarily sacrifice their own chances at survival to women and children by allowing them onto lifeboats instead of taking spots themselves.

However, hints of equality between men and women are apparent immediately after the lifeboat is launched. Not all of the passengers on Lifeboat 14 are women or children. Eight of the 39 passengers are men. The very presence of men on lifeboats when the popular and chivalric idea of saving women and children first speaks to a sense of equality. Elderly Mr. Turner is not made to row, while only Mrs. Grant among the women participates in a task assigned to the men. Likewise, Mrs. Grant herself is almost a female version of Hardie, as she becomes his female counterpoint, challenging his decisions. Her very challenging of Hardie's decisions is likewise a break from the passive female archetype of the time.

Interestingly enough, despite the growing power of Mrs. Grant, and the growing say that the women come to have on board the boat, the women themselves do not take an equal hand in the drawing of lots when it is decided that sacrifices must be made. Hardie has the final say in disallowing women to participate, but no women overtly argue to be made a part of the drawing of lots. Coming into control of the boat seems to be one thing, but participating in the drawing of lots is something quite different for the women.

The greatest form of feminism occurs when Grant calls for a vote on Hardie's life. All the women, except for Anya who votes no, and Grace who abstains, vote to kill Hardie. All of the men vote to save Hardie. In so doing, Grant has effected a mutiny, and has established herself as the truly dominant power onboard. Feminism in the form of equality has given way to a radical feminism where women now clearly dominate the hierarchy in the boat. Indeed, the very act of Grace and Hannah, two women, throwing overboard a man, coupled with the fact that the other men themselves become passive and do not try to save Hardie, speaks to the level of change experienced in the conditions on the boat.

## Mystery

Mystery is an important theme in the novel "The Lifeboat" by Charlotte Rogan. In the novel, mystery involves that which is unknown and that which is never truly revealed. There are multiple instances of mystery in the novel, with each one of them adding to, or fueling the plot in some way.

The first major mystery of the novel deals with the sinking of the Empress Alexandra. The true source of the sinking, though it is never revealed, can be surmised to be targeting by a German U-Boat. Secondary explosions occurring while the ship is sinking also serve as a mystery, for their true origin is never revealed. It is possible, in a situation like the 1915 sinking of the Lusitania, that the Empress Alexandra carried ammunition and other explosive ordnance which detonated after the ship was initially attacked by the Germans.



The second mystery of the novel comes by way of the box that Hardie jealously guards against all others. Occupants of Lifeboat 14 argue that the box is a payment of some kind given to Hardie by Henry Winter in order to secure Grace a seat on 14. Others contend that the box contains something which makes either Blake and Hardie coconspirators, or enemies. Whatever the true origin of the box, and whatever was in the box, are never known as the box is knocked overboard when Hannah grapples with Hardie.

Other mysteries abound. Some include Grace and Henry. Grace comes to wonder why Henry, so sure and confident about all his decisions, would rush into marriage with her when he rushes into nothing else. It is possible that Henry rushes into marriage with Grace to avoid marriage with Felicity, but the true reason behind the rush to marriage is never revealed. Likewise, one mystery that is solved has to do with the Marconi machine, which works and is in disrepair at various times. Grace later learns that the machine was not operational at the time of the sinking, making distress calls impossible, and making rescue much more improbable.

The other mystery has to do with the relationship between Blake and Hardie. At various times, they are considered either coconspirators in the theft of gold from the *Alexandra*, or bitter enemies. It is a mystery never solved. Likewise, the captain's threat of sacking Hardie is never fully explained, either. Likewise, the true purpose of Cumberland's gold shipment aboard the *Alexandra* is never truly revealed. One can surmise, due to the war unfolding, that the gold has something to do with the war effort of Great Britain against the Central Powers.

## Morality

Morality is an important theme in the novel "The Lifeboat" by Charlotte Rogan. Morality—what is considered right and wrong—is seen at great length in the novel through the choices that the characters are faced with making. All of the choices the characters must make are in conjunction with the sinking of the *Empress Alexander* and the survival of the people on Lifeboat 14. The question of morality may best be summed up by Reichmann when he argues that the question of whether some or all shall die unless action is taken means that action must be taken. Grace herself contends that choices do not always boil down to right and wrong, but often lay somewhere in between.

In the first minutes following the launching of Lifeboat 14, action is indeed taken when Hardie denies entry to other survivors attempting to pull themselves onto 14. Not only does Hardie deny them entry, but he and several other occupants beat away the swimmers. This is a morally questionable act as life is being denied to some. However, without having beaten the swimmers away, 14 would have been swamped and gone under, giving even fewer people a chance at survival. While Grace acknowledges the moral question of the act, she knows that if Hardie had not ordered the others to beat away swimmers, Grace would have done so herself.



Later, Rebecca's going overboard, and the slow rescue of Rebecca also warrant moral consideration. While some argue that Hardie is morally culpable for Rebecca's death—letting her stay in the water for too long in order to assert his dominance and teach 14's occupants a lesson—Grace contends that Hardie needed to right the boat before going to pick her up. Nevertheless, the delay is long enough for Rebecca to end up catching a chill, which leads to fever and to her death.

There is later a moral sense of chivalry when the men decide to participate in a lottery in order to determine who will sacrifice themselves for the others by going into the water. Interestingly enough, despite their growing influence on 14, the women do not struggle to participate as equals in the lottery. The reader may consider that there is either a level of moral hypocrisy in their inaction, or a level of honor in the moral choice of the men to do something that they would not allow the women.

However, even among the men themselves there is moral concern, as the men do not like the idea of others dying in their stead. For example, the Deacon wonders if it is moral to willingly give up his life for others in what is essentially suicide; yet, the Deacon will not allow another man to die in his place. Likewise, the involvement of Grant, Hannah, and Grace in the killing of Hardie also brings to question the moral justifiableness of the act.

It can be argued that by the time that Hardie is put into the water that he is no longer in control, nor does he present a real threat to anyone on board. Nevertheless, he is thrown overboard. The act of throwing him overboard in any condition is certainly morally questionable. The passengers believed he presented a real threat to them, and Grace acted to save herself by participating in throwing Hardie over. If Hardie presented a threat to survival, then Reichmann's assertion that action had to be taken could be seen to be morally justifiable. But if Hardie did not present a threat, then no action is justifiable. In addition to Grace's moral culpability, Hardie's questionable status as an imminent and dangerous threat is something that can only be decided by the reader.

# Styles

## Point of View

Charlotte Rogan tells her novel “The Lifeboat” in the first-person reflective omniscient perspective from the point of view of Grace. In the prologue, Grace explains that what she is now recounting is the written experience surrounding the time spent on Lifeboat 14. This is being done at the request of her lawyers, who hope that recollecting the past will help Grace to remember it more fully, and to recall important details. As such, writing after the fact, Grace is able to spend time thinking about, describing, and explaining her thoughts and actions during the encounter. She is also able to provide contextual information not available to her at the time. For example, she is able to explain that the lifeboats are barely afloat even though they are not at capacity because the ship’s company cut costs by diminishing the size of the lifeboats but never changing the safety plaques.

## Language and Meaning

Charlotte Rogan tells her novel “The Lifeboat” in language that is straightforward, educated, and historical. Historically-accurate terms and situations are also used. This is reflective of the historical setting, age, class, and education level of Grace. For example, the term “life ring” is used instead of “life preserver,” and the company name “Marconi” is used in place of “wireless” or “telegraph.” When it comes to Grace, for example, instead of simply saying she needed to feel something besides being scared on the ninth night on 14, she says “I wanted to feel something besides the fear that enveloped me.” The turn of phrase has a level of sophistication that situates her as an educated woman in this historical time period. As a result, the language employed throughout the book adds a sense of historical depth and realism to the plot.

## Structure

Charlotte Rogan divides her novel “The Lifeboat” into a prologue, epilogue, and four major parts between them. Each part deals with a specific general part of the plot. Each part is further subdivided into unnumbered chapters, which are titled with either the day of the event, the night of the event, or the specific contents of the chapter. For example, while the chapter “Henry” deals with Grace’s relationship with Henry, the chapter “Day Ten, Morning” deals with the events of the tenth morning in Lifeboat 14.



## Quotes

What kind of trick was that? Whatever were you doing, Grace? Have you gone mad?  
-- William Reichmann (Prologue, pg. 4 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** In the prologue, Grace stands out in the rain to drink from it. Reichmann and the other lawyers think that Grace is mad, but she is not. Grace's opening of her mouth for rainwater is a reenactment of an event experienced on Lifeboat 14, where rainwater became lifesaving for the people onboard. It demonstrates how something done for survival in the wild of the ocean could be considered insanity on land in a civilized place.

Mr. Hoffman was the first to mention what we all were thinking: the boat had not been designed for so many.

-- Grace (Part I, Day Two, pg. 25 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** Immediately upon entering the water, Lifeboat 14 barely remains above the water. This is important for two reasons. First, the boat's size has been diminished to save money, though the plaque denoting capacity has never been changed. Second, the overloaded boat is an omen for coming death: for some to live, others must die. There are too many people on board.

For one naïve moment, I had all that I needed—more than I needed; but that, too, had only been a pleasant illusion.

-- Grace (Part I, The Empress Alexandra, pg. 71 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Life never works out the way that people intend. Grace believes that everything is working out well for her early in the novel. She is married to Henry, her station in life is secured, and her future is set. However, Grace's happiness is fleeting as the sinking of the Empress Alexandra means that everything Grace had struggled to gain has been lost.

It was only the third time we met when Henry suggested the theory that each person was destined for one great love and that if he was lucky enough to find it in his lifetime, he ignored it at his own risk.

-- Grace (Part II, Henry, pg. 112 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Henry, despite his previous engagement to Felicity Close, is stunned when he meets Grace. Henry quickly falls for her, believing that she is the one. Grace, too, feels as if Henry is the one. Her love for him has transcended her initial mercenary considerations. Henry was at first a means to an end—to save her station in life—but now she sees Henry as an end in and of itself. Henry is worth everything to Grace. Henry is the real reason she is happy.

I am trying to be honest... In other circumstances we might have been friends, but there in the boat, I had no sympathy for her. She was weak, unlikely to survive or to be of use



in prolonging the lives of others.

-- Grace (Part III, Day Nine, pg. 122 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** As the situation becomes increasingly desperate on 14, Grace herself begins to harbor utilitarian thoughts. She ceases to look at the others as people whose lives are worthy in and of themselves, but begins to look at them as to whether they are a benefit or a detriment. Such is the case of Mary Ann, who Grace comes to consider as useless.

Am I to be blamed for this? We do not ask certain ideas to enter our heads and demand that other stay away. I believe that a person is accountable for his actions but not for the contents of his mind, so perhaps I am culpable for occasionally letting those thoughts turn themselves into words.

-- Grace (Part III, Day Ten, Morning, pgs. 139-140 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Eventually, the strain of the boat causes Grace to snap at Mary Ann. She cruelly tells Mary Ann she should kill herself, though she does not force Mary Ann to do so. These things, which Grace had been thinking but did not act upon, nevertheless came out in words. Grace holds herself accountable for saying these things, but not for thinking them. It is further proof of the increasing desperation of the people on board Lifeboat 14.

The thing that preoccupied me that night was the notion that a person's choices are only rarely between right and wrong or between good and evil. I saw very clearly that people were mostly faced with much murkier options and that there were no clear signposts marking the better path to take.

-- Grace (Part III, Night, pg. 150 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** Here, Grace has a prominent and prescient thought relating to the idea of morality in the novel. She contends that few decisions are either right or wrong, but that most decisions rest somewhere in between. This is incredibly important going forward as Grace comes to be one of the women who ultimately throws Hardie overboard, a morally questionable act that exists somewhere in between right and wrong according to Grace.

I knew we were dying. The only surprising thing was that we were not yet dead.

-- Grace (Part III, Day Eleven, pg. 154 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Without food and water, the situation seems hopeless. People have died, and the horrible and wretched condition of those still alive reinforces in Grace's mind the idea that they are all dying. It isn't a question of if at this point, but when. This underscores the increasing desperation of the situation of Lifeboat 14, and which ultimately leads to the act of throwing Hardie over the side.

Then, with a great concerted heave, we threw the only person among us who know anything about boats and currents into the boiling sea.

-- Grace (Part III, Day Fourteen, pg.193 paragraph 1)



**Importance:** Fearing for her own life, Grace acts to help throw Hardie overboard as Mrs. Grant claims power. Grace is fully aware of what she has done, not only in that she has contributed to killing someone, but that she has thrown overboard the only person who has any experience about the ocean. It is arguable that, rather than increasing their chances of survival without Hardie, the people on the boat have now diminished their chances of survival.

It is only in lonely and challenging circumstances that our true natures show through.  
-- Mr. Sinclair (Part IV, Rescue, pg. 264 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** Here, Mr. Sinclair reveals a very important fact about human nature, about survival, and about morality. Grace, prior to her experiences in the lifeboat, has been a relatively passive, gentle girl who deferred to others. But when things become desperate and her own life is on the line, her true nature shows. She is willing to do very cold and calculating things in order to survive. This is true of stealing Henry, of throwing Hardie overboard, and of marrying Reichmann in the end.