

PART 1



‘What will become of me?’

Diary entry, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, 1824



BRISTOL EVENING POST, 19TH JULY 1843

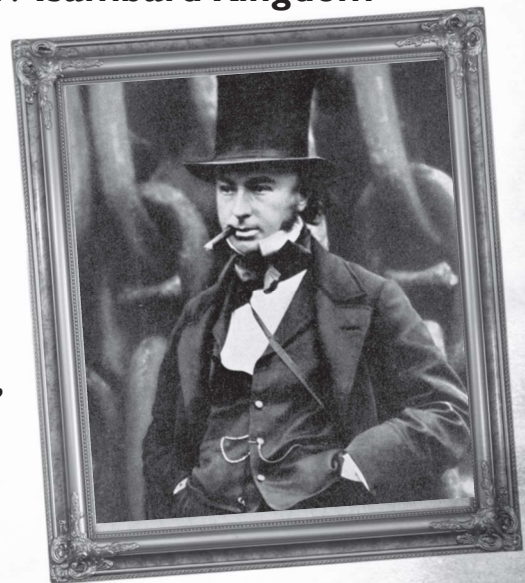
THE SHIP OF DREAMS SETS SAIL!



THEY CALL HER 'THE SHIP OF DREAMS'. The men who built her call her 'the Mammoth.' Others are calling her 'the greatest experiment since the Creation'. But her name is the **Steamship Great Britain**. And today thousands gathered to see her maiden voyage from Bristol's harbourside.

She is the largest, fastest, lightest ship the world has ever seen, and a credit to the man behind her: **Isambard Kingdom Brunel**, the most famous British engineer of our time, as daring as the ship herself, rapidly making a name for himself, despite his shortness of stature, as a giant of the Victorian age.

Brunel said: 'I put so much care into this ship, I believe she will last for ever, and never tire, never hesitate, never break.'



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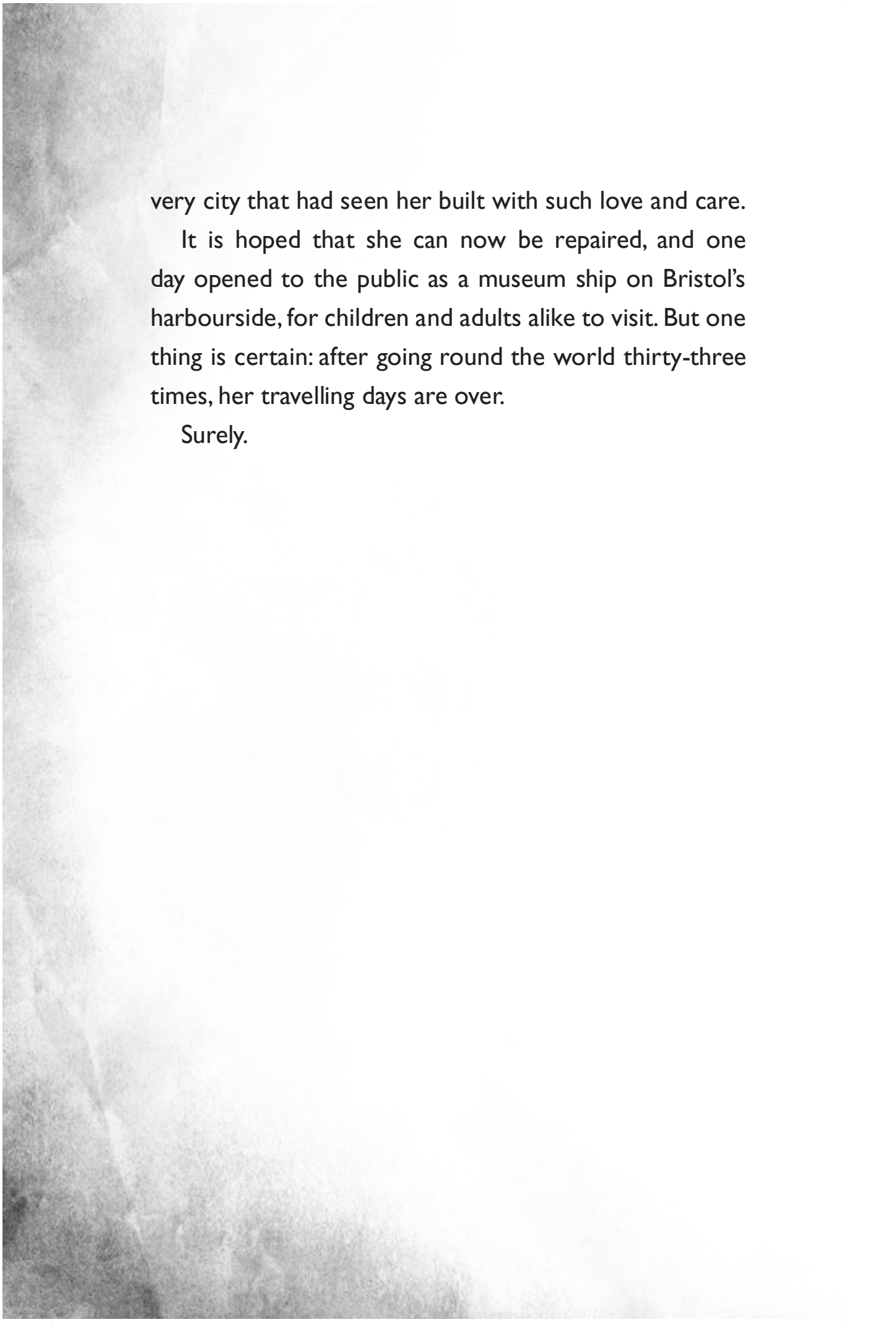
THE SAILING TIMES, 19th JULY 1970

**SHIP OF DREAMS RETURNS TO BRISTOL
A BROKEN WRECK**



How the mighty have fallen. The once celebrated SS *Great Britain*, at one time the world's largest, most glamorous ocean liner, has returned to the docks of Bristol a shadow of her former self. Eighty years of neglect and mistreatment have left her broken, mutilated, nearly done for.

The engineer behind her, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, is long dead. She also came close to a lonely death in a watery grave out in the Falkland Islands. Only the efforts of a few saved her from certain ruin, and brought her home. But it was a sorry ship that returned back to the



very city that had seen her built with such love and care.

It is hoped that she can now be repaired, and one day opened to the public as a museum ship on Bristol's harbourside, for children and adults alike to visit. But one thing is certain: after going round the world thirty-three times, her travelling days are over.

Surely.



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PRESENT DAY, BRISTOL

TUESDAY

LIKE A LOT of people, Kirsten Bramble had no idea what was missing from her life until the moment she came face to face with it. But it wasn't her usual sort of accessory, like a delicate bracelet or a tiny backpack. It wasn't pocket-sized, for starters.

It was a ship.

A big, old, gleaming ship.

An *iron* ship.

And it tugged at Kirsten's heart like a magnet.

Normally, when Kirsten saw something beautiful that she liked, she bought it. Up until recently, that had been easy to do because she was a reality-TV star. A much-loved one, with a glittering TV career ahead of her still (despite what some people were saying) and a generous pocket-money allowance. (Perhaps not as generous as it had once been admittedly, but Kirsten had a plan to fix all that, so everything was *totally* fine.)

But this ship looked out of reach. She wasn't sure it was

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even for sale. Yet her hands twitched a little with all the wanting.

The ship's name was the **SS *Great Britain***. Kirsten had thought this was quite funny back at school, when Mrs Walia, her class teacher, handed out sheets explaining where they were going on their next school trip.

*The SSSS **Great Britain**?* she'd thought. *We're going to see a snake?*

But Mrs Walia had explained that it was pronounced Ess Ess **Great Britain**, and the 'S's stood for Steam Ship, and there were no snakes involved. She said the ship was full of history, and had been round the world loads, and now she was a museum ship, and they were going to explore her.

Kirsten's class boarded the school coach and an hour later they were in a car park by the harbourside. When she got out of the coach, Kirsten saw something gleaming and massive just beyond a gate and her heart beat faster, even then.

The back of the ship faced the car park and the ticket office. The only way to approach it was through the gift shop. So, when you first came face to face with the ship, it was actually face to bottom. But even that was a thing of beauty.

Why were golden unicorns stuck on to the ship's backside? Who knew? *They look wonderful*, thought Kirsten

Bramble, walking underneath them, imagining she almost saw one of them give a proud snort.

The ship rested on a thick pane of glass that looked a little like water. And it shone in the sun like a huge black swan.

Kirsten slowly walked round the left side of the ship. It radiated a mysterious power. It made her stop walking. It made her hold her breath. Her eyes couldn't properly take it in all at once. Her eyes felt utterly useless, even though she had two of them. Two weren't *nearly* enough to see this ship properly. She wanted to look at it for ever. Even at the end of that, she suspected she wouldn't be quite finished.

It was so glossy. It seemed to drink in all the light around it and radiate it back so that it was practically glowing. Her fingers twitched again. Kirsten looked around. All of her classmates had gone on ahead. None of them had waited for her. She looked back up at the ship's shiny hull and sighed.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the sound of someone coughing. 'Looks like you've got it almost as badly as me,' said a short man abruptly. 'Marvellous, isn't she?'

'She?' said Kirsten, spinning round to look at the man. Where had he come from? He hadn't been there a moment ago.

'Oh yes,' he said, staring at Kirsten with dark, clever eyes.

'*She*. It's the first and most important lesson of seafaring: all ships are *she*. And this one, I'm sure you'll agree, is more *she* than most. All 3,847 tons of her.'

'Right,' she stammered. 'Um, have we met before?'

The man had a face she could have sworn she'd seen somewhere. It was his eyebrows and sideburns. Not to mention his tall black hat. Very familiar. He looked significant. He glanced at her, and Kirsten had a sense of ferocious daring.

'Have we met?' he said. 'Anything is possible with the right calculations. I don't like to rule anything out.' He tucked his hands into the pockets of his waistcoat, rocked back on scuffed brown boots and looked up at the ship. 'Almost alive, isn't she?'

Kirsten said nothing, because that was *exactly* what she'd been thinking. She half expected to see the ship's sides gently moving in and out. Together, she and the funny, short little man gazed at the **SS *Great Britain*** in silent appreciation.

In the pages of Kirsten's history book in class, the ship had seemed - well - almost forgettable and a bit dull, if she was honest. Just a black-and-white photo from another century washed up on the page, like driftwood from the past. But now? Now that Kirsten was actually *standing by the ship itself*? It seemed almost impossible the vessel in front of

her was the same one in the book.

They *were* both black and white - that was true. But *this ship* had a glossy black hull that shone like satin, and a delicate white trim that went round her middle like a ribbon. The ship in the book was easily held within the photograph. But in real life she looked like nothing could ever contain her at all.

There were six tall masts sticking out from the ship's huge deck. They had flags strung between them. As these fluttered and flapped in the breeze, it was honestly as if the ship was tossing her hair and peering around for someone to dazzle and charm.

This ship seemed to flick away the ship in the book as easily as a panther swatting away a fly, as if to say: 'Me? History? Are you sure?'