

The Suit

Lyme Regis, 1795. Sarah shut her eyes and held a fragment of the navy wool material against her nose. In it she could smell both the musk of her lover and the salt of the sea. She shut her eyes momentarily to intensify the experience. The ship sailed out of the harbour, the Lieutenant resplendent in his new finery. His heart straining with the agony of seeing his true love fade, his face tense for the battle he was about to face on the high seas.

Her thoughts raced as she scrambled up to the cliffs to get a better view. 'Oh, my darling if only you knew the joy when those golden threads arrived. I wanted that embroidery to remind you of the stars that shine in the night sky, and our love entwined in the magic of creation. This is a coat for an Admiral, my Admiral.'

She remembered his amazement when she handed him the finished article days before the ship sailed. He loved the waistcoat best, with its line of cream and golden beech leaves round the edges, somehow he knew that one day his son would be able to wear it in court.

Sent from Bombay four months before, the threads arrived in wrinkled paper, undecipherable script and smelling of spice. Every day until today she had spent stitching her passions onto the suit he would wear until the end of his life.

Sarah and her infant child spent day after day watching, waiting for the return of the ship that defeated the French at the battle of the Nile. Eventually it limped home. When it did eventually pull into the harbour, the battle worn Captain handed her a parcel.