

Wandren: The Adventures of Lulu, Birdie, and Henry

“The months and days are travelers of eternity. Just like the years that come and go. For those who live their lives on boats, or lead horses towards old age, their lives are travel, their journeys are home.” – Matsuo Basho, *Oku no Hosomichi* (1689)

Prologue

There were two. Blood covered the bed. Even the midwife was whimpering and pitiful by the end. “A night and day,” she said. And they were born, one the night, one the day.

People remarked on this for a long while afterward, though no one knew which was born in the night, which the day save the midwife. Nor would anyone have been able to tell you what difference it might have made. Still, the story followed them. It followed them like the whispers that had always followed the family. The whispers were a wind, one that blew them sometimes where they wanted, sometimes not. Seafaring people must live with that.

The whispering wind followed them out of the town where they spent their winters, across the sea, running the easterlies to the mouth of a river, the wide open flood plain where they spent their summers on the shore, amongst the great pines. But the whispers came with their neighbors working the cod offshore. It came on shore like the August winds that whistled the pines. A whisper that blew harder every year, as if a storm were gathering.

Their father spent all summer, a cold summer, sitting in the evenings, outside the tent, stroking his thick black beard and studying the wind and waves. There are storms worse than the sea, he said.

That year, when the last the southerlies blew out and before the northerlies turned fierce and cold, they loaded the small boat and slipped out of the old story.

They kept to the coast, giving wide berth to the places men gathered. When they came upon the marshy lowlands of London, they put in for a time. A

brother arrived, his mother too left as he came. Their father grew even quieter for a time, then he disappeared altogether.

When he returned the winds blew favorably again and they left, hugging the coast until there was no coast left. And they were gone again. To a new world where people said the soldiers were fewer, the winds warmer, the possibilities wider.

By the time they arrived all the twins had left was a memory of trees. The deep darkness of the forest floor where they would lie as babies, staring up at the trees, the branches reaching like thick fingers to scratch at the light of the sky above.

Main

Chapter 1: Aboard *Wanderer*

The scent of the world crept into her hammock even before she opened her eyes. The smell of wet wood and salt. The soft sweetness of cedar too long at sea. The bright briny smell of the wind. She opened her eyes and looked up. A sliver of purple twilight peeked through the canvas of the hammock, wrapped up around her. She craned her head back to look at the dark brown mast, crusted with salty white patterns that looked like the drawings of snowflakes in Papa's big book, which was wrapped carefully in walrus leather and stored somewhere in the hold beneath the deck.

The wood creaked. Some of the salt blew loose. The water slapping the hull told her the waves were small. Her hammock, strung between mizzen mast and taffrail, swayed hardly at all. She lay without moving, trying to feel the boat as her father had taught her. She closed her eyes again. The boat was lifting and rolling slightly. They were moving with the current, but not as fast as the light swell rolling past them. At this latitude, this time of year, this close to shore, that would be south, as it had been for days now, although a swell moving south was called a northerly swell, which always mixed her up.

The sail snapped like a whipped wet towel. That meant the wind was light. If the wind were heavier the sail would be stretched tight and silent. She listened again to the sound of the water. It pulsed, rushing by the boat in surges, quiet, then loud. The boat was moving fast enough that the wind probably wasn't light she reasoned. That meant they were running before the wind, otherwise the sail wouldn't have snapped.

"We're running south, riding a northerly swell, the wind is 15 knots" She announced from the hammock. She heard her sister groan, "show off". Her father chuckled. "You're close Birdie. I'd say dead on with speed and swell. More of a broad reach though. I fell off to snap the sheet so you two'd wake up. Sun will be up soon"

Birdie smiled in her hammock. She stretched, lifting her arm out to feel the air. It was still cool, though wet and heavy. The sodden heat would come even earlier today, as it had every day for the last week. They would make camp the next day, maybe the day after, Birdie reasoned. She pulled her head up out of the hammock to scan the deck.

Wanderer was 62 feet from her bow sprite to aft rail where Birdie's hammock was tied. She was a gaff rigged Jamaican sloop. Built of strong cedar, sweet smelling. There were two masts, one just fore of midship and another in the cockpit at the rear, where the other end of her hammock was tied. Her father was vague about her origins, or at least how Wanderer came to be his. As Birdie understood it, she was built in a place called Jamaica, sailed all the way to the coast of a place called France where she ran aground. Her cargo was offloaded and she was abandoned to the waves. That was not Poseidon's plan though. The tides had pulled her back out to sea. And her father, who happened to be on watch on another ship had spied her in the night. Sensing his chance, he'd woken two companions, sailed alongside her and the three trimmed the sails of their vessel, pointed her in the opposite direction and jumped ship for the new one.

One of those companions, Tamba, was walking toward Birdie. Tamba was a tall, powerfully built man who had sailed most of the way around the world with her father. They had sailed together long enough that neither of them seemed to remember a time when they did not sail together. Tamba was her second father, though she never called him Papa. She hopped out of the hammock, her feet landing on the smooth oak planking of the deck with a light thud.

"Morning Birdie." Tamba was from Gambia, across the ocean. An even hotter place, he had told her, which Birdie found difficult to believe.

"Good morning Tamba."

He laid his hands on her shoulders and bent down to press his nose against hers. "Yes." he said and then he straightened up and spun her around to face the east where the sky was already grown red and orange from its faint purple beginnings. "See. It comes."

"Yes. The sun is rising. Again"

She heard her father chuckle. Tamba laughed in a way her father never did, deeply, with a kind of rumble like a wagon on a washboard road. He shook her gently by the shoulder. "Appreciate. Always."

"I do. I promise. But I'm hungry. Do you want rice Tamba?"

He shook his head. A sleepy voice from a hammock on the other side of mast piped up, "I do."

She could see her brother's unruly mop of hair sticking out the side of the hammock. She never understood why, but he slept very high up in his hammock, almost as if he were standing up.

“What about you Lulu?” She grabbed the lines of her sister’s hammock and swung it gently.

“Yes.”

“Papa?”

He nodded to her and then turned back around to watch the sun rise. Birdie ran aft, ducking under booms, and hopping over the coiled lines and small barrels stacked along the gunwales, a name she did not understand since there were no guns on Wanderer. Well, none on the gunwale anyway. Below deck, in the stern, were two small cannon loaded with forks and knives designed to shred an enemy’s sails. “Wanderer is small,” Tamba once told her. “We would be blown to bits by a cannon, but we’re fast, we can outrun them all. We have just enough fire power to convince any other small, fast ships not to chase us. That’s all we need.”

She ducked into the small doorway that covered the ladder leading below decks. Keeping her hands on the rails – always keep one hand on the boat was her father’s mantra – she flung herself down with a single leap, bypassing the wooden ladder completely. It was much darker below, it took her eyes a moment to adjust. She could see the glow of the stove and Kobayashi’s form bent over, stirring a pot. He never looked up at her thud. He kicked a clay pot by his feet so that it slid slightly toward her. She grabbed a basket hanging from the rafters and scooped rice out of the pot and into it.

He spooned broth from the boiling pot on the stove, and handed her several strips of dried fish, which she balanced on top of the pile of rice. “Aiiie. You eat everything.” Kobayashi smiled.

“It’s for everyone,” she said tucking the lid on.

“Make sure your brother eats some, that boy is too skinny.”

“You sound like Aunt Māra.”

Kobayashi frowned at her, but she hardly noticed. Just the thought of Aunt Māra and Birdie’s cousins made her heart flutter like a bird’s wings. Only a few more days and they would be at Edisto. They’d have the forest to run through, the dunes. They’d have space again. Birdie loved the sea, the way it held and rocked them, the way the boat glided through it, and it buoyed the along, still, it was the shoreline that she watched most often. It was there at the shore, the edge, the space where the sea met the land that she felt most herself.

She managed the basket of food with one hand, careful to keep the other on the ladder as she ascended back into the light of the deck. The rolling motion of the swells moving beneath them made it difficult to walk evenly.

She lurched and stumbled her way to stern where everyone was waiting for the rice and dried fish. She’d be happy to eat some fresh meat again. She hoped Papa and Tamba would go hunting as soon as they made land. She hoped this

year she'd be able to hunt too. Her father had promised her last year that this year she could hunt. But for now she'd settle for something besides fish.

They'd run out of Pemmican two weeks before when they were held up in the outer islands by a late season storm. They'd spent the better part of two days beached, living almost entirely below deck, huddled out of the wind and rain, wishing for sunshine. When they finally floated Wanderer again after the storm had passed, a few days of rough seas seemed like nothing. Anything was better than being wet and cold and chewing sand in the ceaseless wind.

The remains of that wind had borne them south quickly though. They'd hugged the shoreline, out of the strong northward current that ran further offshore. They saw sails only twice and both times the ships were too far over the horizon to see more than a top sail. They were big her father said.

Yesterday the wind had finally let up and Birdie had her first good night's sleep in a week. This morning they were using a favorable offshore breeze to ride out further to sea. They wanted some distance from the land as they passed Charlestown. To anyone with a spyglass standing on the shore at the mouth of the Ashley river they would only be a tiny bit a sail on the horizon. The pilot boats that helped merchant ships navigate the narrow shoals up the river into Charlestown harbor kept a sharp eye out for sails. And not every ship in these seas was welcome on the land. Birdie's family liked to keep to themselves, they gave cities a wide berth most of the time.

Running downwind, as they were, meant they were moving at the same speed as the wind. So even though there was wind all around them, it felt still. Dead still. The warm humid Carolina air was like sitting inside a wet wool sweater. Birdie sat in the slight shade of the sail, with her back against the mizzen, alternately watching the shoreline for signs of Charlestown, and whittling a whistle she was planning to use to find duck nests when they got to the island.

Her father, Tamba, and Kobayashi sat in the stern, taking turns tending the wheel. She did not turn around to see who was at the wheel, she could feel the boat and knew it was her father. The other two were probably smoking their pipes, and scanning the horizon for any sign of sail. They'd done close to the same thing every day since they'd rounded the cape, but now it felt different. Birdie sensed a tension that had not been there when they were farther north. A tension that had not been there, she stopped whittling for a moment and considered it. Had she ever sensed a tension? She could not recall every feeling the tightness in her chest that she felt now. It felt like something was swelling in the air around them, squeezing them somehow. Her father's voice brought her back to the ship.

"You two should relax."

Tamba grunted. "Easier for you to say."

"Well then at least put your glass more to the north, They'll not cross the stream where we did, they'll stay out longer. They're provisioned better, have more

sails. Why would they sail these shallows?”

“Because the people they are hunting sail these shallows.”

“They aren’t hunting you Tam. They aren’t hunting anyone. They’re hunting imagined glory.” Her father laughed softly.

“You think they’ll head all way to the islands?” She heard Kobayashi tapping his pipe out on the taffrail with sharp clicks.

“No.”

The rumors from early in the summer, up in the north, were that the British were planning to retake the Bahamaian port of Nassau soon. Once abandoned as useless, pirates had found a use for Nassau and for two seasons running they had openly controlled, administered, governed, and otherwise run the port of Nassau. The entire western coast of the Atlantic talked of nothing but pirates. Birdie and her family had overhead plenty during their summer stay on Block Island, a small, nearly bare island off the coast of the colony of Rhode Island. It had no good harbor, little land worth farming, and almost no one went there, making it a popular destination for ships with cargoes that could not sail into Boston proper and expect a warm welcome.

Wanderer was not a pirate vessel, and did not sail with pirate vessels, but it, and Birdie along with it, definitely knew and spent time with ships and crews that were often called pirate by those that spread rumors up and down the Atlantic coast of the colony. Rumors were always saying the British are coming, her father said, and the British never actually came, or came to the wrong place, or not enough of them came. Birdie had lost track of what it was the British did and didn’t do. They were about as real as the black and white birds that couldn’t fly that Kobayashi swore he had seen on a trip around Cape Horn.

“You don’t think they’ll come at all, or you don’t think they take Nassau.” Tamba’s voice was low, as if he didn’t want Birdie and her sibling to here this part of the discussion.

“I don’t think they’ll come at all. Not this year. They’ll retake Nassau someday. They can’t let Hornigold have run of the place forever. But they aren’t coming this year. Or the next.”

“How can you be so sure”

“Have I ever steered us wrong before?”

“Yes” Tamba and Kobayashi spoke in chorus. Birdie laughed. She heard her father laugh too.

“Okay. But on this one you’ll have to trust me. No British warships coming to take Nassau this year.”

Neither of the other men said anything. The silence stretched out until Henry came running from the bow, careening the length of the ship without ever

touching a railing or handhold, yet somehow never losing his footing. She watched him shove his hand in the basket, pull out a handful of now dried out rice, and then turn and run back the length of the ship, again without touching anything or seeming to stumble, and then disappear into the hold where he was playing with Lulu. She envied him, those sea legs. Even her father seemed somewhat taken aback by Henry's sea legs. But he usually just shrugged and said, "I guess that's how it is when you're raised on the sea."

Birdie had been two and a half years old, when Henry was born. She had only a few fuzzy memories of Henry's mother. Dark hair leaning over her. The sunset in a window behind her. They had lived for a time on shore. Near the Thames. Her father worked on ships. A woman watched Birdie and her sister during the day. Sometimes her father would hire on a ship and be gone for several weeks. The last of these trips was nearly two months. Birdie remembered sitting under the table with Lulu, both of them crying, while the woman who watched them spoke to a harbor master about storms and her father's ship going down.

Two nights later, there had been a tap at the window and there he was. Birdie had picked Henry up out of his crib and they had all disappeared into the London night. The next day they were aboard Wanderer and well out of the Thames, bound for the Colonies.

Neither she nor Lulu had any memories of their own mother, save the stories she had heard her father tell, memories she inherited and clung to sometimes when she felt the tightness in her chest grow too much to bear.

She was startled out of a midday drowse by Tamba's shout from the bow. "I see the bank." Birdie jumped up and ran to the bow (grabbing on the way the mizzen mast, rails, lines and other hand holds, as normal people do on a ship), racing past Lulu and Henry coming out of the hold. She nearly slammed into Tamba, but managed to hit the rail next to him instead. She followed his finger and saw the light green patch that marked the bank.

The bank was a deposit of sand and silt that started a few hundred yards out from the north fork of the Edisto river and stretched between half a mile and a mile out to sea, depending on the year. It was high tide, the bank was still under water, but this year it looked to be shorter than usual. The bank was where they did most of their fishing, and last year they'd even careened a very large ship on it. Birdie had not been allow to come on that ship, but she, her siblings, her cousins, and some of the local kids had all sat on the end of the island and watched as three smaller ships careened the largest ship Birdie had ever seen, a ship called Revenge.

Birdie ran astern to tell her father what they had seen, but he was already standing on the Taffrail, glass to his eye. "Bit smaller this year, eh Birdie?"

"I thought so, but I wasn't sure."

"Must've 'ad some weather this summer." Her father hopped down. "Hope we're done with that," she heard him mutter to himself. He pointed to the wheel.

“Bring us out a wee bit.” Birdie turned the wheel a quarter to port and Wanderer’s nose edged out toward the open ocean, carving a wide berth around the bank.

Orange-headed gannets and brown pelicans dove at the outer edge of the bank, their sleek wings pulled back until they looked like harpoon tips thrown from some unseen ship sailing in the sky. They sliced through the air and hit the surface of the sea with such a quiet, tiny splash, transformed in an instant from bird to fish. When they surfaced the gannets always with a fish in their beak.

Birdie turned to her father, “Papa can we fish?”

“Sure, throw in a line, see if you can grab dinner for us.”

Birdie dashed forward and down in the hull. She fumbled around in the darkness near the stack of water barrels where she kept her line. She felt the iron hook and pulled it gently until the spool of catgut revealed itself. Next to it her fingers felt for the burlap she used to wrap her hand. Once she had everything, she grabbed a piece of dried fish hanging from a rafter, and climbed back up on deck.

At the stern she baited the hook, tied it off on the rail, and threw it out. It jerked in her hands as it skipped across the waves, sinking down as she fed out the slack. Before it even sank, she saw the distinctive black and gray stripes of a porgy fish coming for it. “Papa!” she squealed. He glanced back and nodded as the line went taut in her hand, but he turned back to watch the sea in front of them, hunting for the river mouth they would follow into the marshland, where they would secure the boat for the season.

Birdie pulled in the porgy, which was big enough to feed them all in a stew. Lulu held it for her while she severed its spine with her knife and tossed it in a barrel to let the blood drain out. She baited the hook and tossed it out again. This time, just as she was getting ready to bring her second porgy on board, a gannet dove hard at it, the line jerked and all but the head of her fish was gone. Birdie frantically pulled in the empty line and breathed a sigh of relief when she found the iron hook still there. The hook was, after the doll Aunt Māra had sewn her, her most prized possession. She took it as a sign, and began to coil up the line. It was far easier to fish from the smaller bateau she and her cousins sailed out to the bank. It was a slower boat, which meant their lines sank deeper and the birds rarely had a chance to steal their catch.

“Coming about,” Her father yelled. Birdie instinctively ducked as the booms creaked and groaned and lines whirled and the ship pitched from starboard to port and pointed her nose at a sharp angle to shore.

Wanderer was light, fast and maneuverable. She had a short keel that made it possible to bring her nearly a mile up the Edisto river if they needed. Their winter home was nowhere near that far up river. They made their camp on the island, a mere quarter mile from the Atlantic shore. Wanderer would be kept further up in the marsh though, protected from storms by a massive stand of loblolly pine that sheltered the marsh.

The worst part of winter camp was arriving. Every year they had to beat upwind, while also fighting the current of the river and constantly sounding to watch for shallows in the muddy brown river mouth. Even now, still a quarter mile off shore, Kobayashi and Tamba were hauling up the sounding lines while her father shortened the traveler so they could beat closer to the wind.

All Birdie wanted was to get ashore and see Aunt Māra and her cousins. She went below and stowed her fishing gear. She and Lulu climbed to the crows nest on the main mast and began watching for light patches of water that meant shallows.

Their father tacked Wanderer back and forth up and down the windward side of the island for most of the day, waiting for the tide to begin streaming in, since this would give them the added momentum they needed to make it into the river mouth where, for a time, it was too narrow to tack.

Last year they had to paddle in using two oars that her father had carved from great thin pine trees. It had taken two days of waiting for the wind to die and another half day of paddling. This year the gods smiled on them. The wind shifted to the north enough that they could take right into the mouth of the river where they dropped the main sail and landed just as the sun was disappearing in the tangled trees that was now their western horizon.

Everyone on the island had seen them come in, but they were still too deep in the marsh to make it to camp before dark. They made the last meal of the season on the ship with Birdie's fish and hatched plans to get Wanderer unloaded the next morning. Birdie, Lulu, and Henry fell asleep making plans for what they would do when they saw their cousins the next day.

Chapter 2: Edisto Landing

Lulu flicked her fingers and felt the rough sand fall away and the smooth skin beneath. She was inside a pale white cocoon of sheet. She stretched her arms up over her head, feeling for the edge, for the sand. She found it and pulled it down over her head. The world was already bright. She sat up to look around.

She was named Linnea after her father's friend in the old country, but her mother called her Lulu the only day she saw her. Like her twin sister she'd been easing sheets and tightening lines since she could walk, crossed an ocean before she'd seen five winters, and survived the burning sun and flaming fevers of the Carolina swamps to reach her ninth year.

Her skin was brown from long days in the sun. She was thin, but strong. Her body all bone and taut ropey muscle. Her hair was brown bleached to blond by the summer sun. She licked her lip, pulling beads of sweat into her mouth and savoring the salty flavor. *You are the sea, you sweat the sea all day every day.*

She sat on a low rising dune a hundred yards from the shoreline. The eastern sky was pink and rapidly turning orange. She knew her father would already

be awake back at the boat. Lulu hadn't wanted to sleep in the marsh. She preferred the seaside. Near where their camp would be, where she would sleep all winter. She didn't mind the hammocks of the boat, but there was something about the sand that made Lulu sleep easier. It conformed to you, it hugged you. Like floating in the sea, but firmer.

She wrapped the sheet, which had once been Wanderer's foresail, around her shoulders and walked down the beach toward the wreck of *Arkhangelsk*. The *Arkhangelsk* was the second best thing about winter camp, after her cousins and the other children of the island. The *Arkhangelsk* was her ship. Well, *their* ship. The island's ship really, but Lulu thought of it as her ship. Wanderer might be her home, but *Arkhangelsk* was *her* ship.

Arkhangelsk was a 42-foot Bermuda sloop that had been taken by the *Whydah* and put ashore with a small crew to careen and re-tar the hull. Unfortunately for the *Ave Marie*, as she was known at the time, her hull was too worm eaten and leaky to be repaired. Even a coat of the quality tar that Lulu's family was known for making wasn't going to save the *Ave Marie*. This had been the subject of some dispute between her father and the would-be captain of the *Ave Marie*, but in the end, the boat was abandoned on the beach.

Two years ago a huge storm that Lulu had fortunately not experienced personally had washed the *Ave Marie* up and into the dunes. Her main mast was destroyed, but the rest of her, somehow, remained mostly intact. The next year another storm had brought a huge tidal surge that swamped the dunes, lifting *Arkhangelsk*, as Lulu and Bridie had by then renamed her, and spinning her around, pointing the bow to the sea in the process. Most of her stern had been torn off that time but as she settled back into the shifting dunes, the top deck leveled out and she wasn't hard to climb.

Lulu stood atop a dune studying her now. She still listed a little to port, but not much more than last year, and not so much that you couldn't race around the upper deck just like you could on Wanderer, but you could race around *Arkhangelsk* as much as you wanted and no one would give you a job to keep you busy like they would on Wanderer. Well, Captain Birdie might try, but just let her. Lulu always ignored Captain Birdie's orders anyway.

Lulu walked around the *Arkhangelsk*, comparing her memory of it to the way it looked now. If there had been a storm over the summer it didn't seem to have affected the wreck at all. She stuffed her sheet in the hold so it wouldn't blow away and climbed up to the top deck. The wood was dry and brittle but so far it had not broken up as much as she would have expected. She and Birdie had begged their father to tar it, that it might last but he refused, the tar was too valuable.

She watched the sun rise over the sea from the deck. The wind was already blowing strongly offshore. White peaks churned in the wind tossed sea, blending white and green and murky brown waters into the kind of messy chop no one wanted to sail. It looked like the winter sea. It was technically still summer, but

clearly the sea was already thinking of winter. She was glad they'd made it in last night. If they were trying this morning they'd have never made it.

She sighed and went to retrieve her sheet. Wanderer was waiting. She already knew she'd be yelled at for not helping out. She was always being yelled at for not cleaning up, not helping load, not helping unload, not helping keep the ship ship shape. She hated those words. Ship shape. It sounded stupid. Who wanted something ship shape? And why was swabbing even a thing? Normal people mopped. Why did sailors have to swab? Even the word made it sound harder. And it was, it was like mopping while standing on the back of a horse. The thought of horses made her want to get back. Her father had promised her he would teach her to ride this year. She jumped off the bow into the soft sand and began walking back toward the marsh where Wanderer waited to be unloaded.

On the way she walked over the dunes into the area that would become her home for the winter and took stock of it. The fire pit would need to be dug out again, the bamboo frame of the little hut that would be their winter home was nowhere to be seen, but she assumed her father or Tamba knew where it was buried. Or would claim to. There were already two barrels plopped unceremoniously in the middle of what would eventually be camp. Not very ship shape she thought as she started down the trail to the marsh.

When she got to Wanderer everyone was already up and unloading barrels. There was no breakfast in sight and her stomach was growling. "Lulu, good of you to join us again" Her father smiled, but his tone of voice told her she was late. Papa did not suffer anyone not pulling their weight. She looked around. Henry and Birdie were bringing things up from the hold and stacking them as best they could with the deck listing hard to starboard. Wanderer was aground now that the tide was out.

Her father and Tamba were alongside Wanderer, looking over the pirogue, which had been stored for months now in the hold. They seemed satisfied with it and set it in the muddy water next to Wanderer. The pirogue was small, narrow boat, like a canoe but with a sail. They called it *Delos*. It could comfortably hold three people and load of cargo. It could hold more if you didn't mind being uncomfortable. It was what they used to fish the bank, get upriver to the trading post, and get back and forth between shore and any ships anchored offshore.

She was about to ask her father were Aunt Māra and her cousins were when she felt herself grabbed from behind and swept off the ground into her Aunt Māra's arms. She was squeezed tight against a warm soft chest. "Lulu. I've missed you so much." Aunt Māra kissed her cheeks before she put her down and spun her around. Lulu wrapped her arms around her. "Māra, I missed you."

"Hi Lu." said a shy voice behind her. She slipped slowly out of Auntie Māra's embrace and turned to face her cousin Francis. He looked older. She wondered if she did too. His front teeth had finished growing in and he looked somehow

like an adult. Lulu wasn't sure she liked this look, but she hugged him anyway.

"The *Arkhangelsk* is still in good shape."

"I saw."

"You already went there?" He had a look of disappointment on his face that made her instantly regret saying anything. But it was too late, she nodded, "I slept on the dunes."

"By yourself?"

She looked at him like he had two heads. "Of course." She could see the way he withered under her looks and it made her feel guilty. She didn't mean to make him feel bad, but he asked such silly things sometimes, and she had no time for questions which seemed to her to have obvious answers. It made her dislike him a little for making her feel like she was a mean person. She was pretty sure she wasn't a mean person. Why did Francis seem like he thought she might be?

Henry and Owen saved her from further awkwardness by zooming by at top speed, chasing each other with wooden swords. "Hi Lu!" screamed Owen as he dodged around her and dove into the oak shrubs after Henry, who hadn't even acknowledged her existence.

Francis took the opportunity to go back to where he and Birdie were helping unload stores from the ship. Lulu watched him go, feeling that sinking feeling she got every autumn when her brother and sister abandoned her. They didn't mean to. They didn't really, especially Birdie, who always went out of her way to make sure everyone was included in everything. Still, Birdie and Francis were like a little team. And Owen in Henry were another little team. Lulu did not have a team. There was just Lulu. In some ways she liked this. It left her free to do the things she wanted without anyone interfering. She could spend her time with Aunt Māra, or go exploring the rivers and marshes in Delos. She loved sailing the muddy, reedy shallows. She loved to drift along under the big oaks that stretched out over the river. She loved to beach the little boat and use the vines hanging down from the oak branches to swing out over the river and drop midstream, into delicious cool pools of black water. Sometimes she would spend the afternoon hunting plants in the thickets. Other days she raided birds nests of their eggs. Maybe she reasoned, she had the biggest team of all. Maybe the whole island was her team. This thought made her smile.

Lulu went back up onto the ship to help gather up the cooking pots, taking extra care with Kobayashi's precious rice steaming baskets. Kobayashi was Japanese and while he would eat the rice that was grown in the Carolinas because he wasn't about to starve to death, whenever he could he bought rice from ships returning from Asia. He never boiled it, he shook his head at the way the Africans and Lulu's family boiled their rice. Instead he boiled water and put the rice in a woven basket over the boiling water and let the steam cook it. It took longer, but even Tamba admitted it was the best rice he'd ever had. Lulu would never tell Kobayashi, but she liked the Carolina rice better. It was mushier,

nuttier. It became part of the fish stews in ways that Kobayashi's rice never did. Although she liked his better when they were eating dried fish or Pemmican at sea. Maybe, she thought as she walked down the path to camp, she liked both kinds of rice. Maybe there wasn't a best rice, maybe there was the best rice for each thing. That was what Papa always said, there is no best, best for this, best for that, best for now, but no best always.

All morning Lulu helped haul food and gear out of Wanderer and down the trail to the cluster of dunes at the south eastern tip of the island. Here, alongside the mouth of the southern Edisto river they used a sheltered area of dunes to make camp. It had been their winter home for three years now, ever since the northern end of the island shifted and the water turned too salty to even cook with. Her cousins continued to make their camp at the north end of the island.

Kobayashi, Tamba and her father set about constructing their camp, which consisted of little more than a thatched hut, built to a design the native people, most of whom were now gone, had showed them. It was, as all great shelters are, ingeniously simple. First they set up a pole structure made half of oak timbers, which gave it strength, and half of pine timbers, which were bent to give it shape. The structure was then covered with thatching made of reeds. Her father and Tamba had the basic structure done by mid afternoon. For the time being they draped an old, but freshly tarred, sail over the top to stop the rain. In the next few weeks everyone would chip in to make the thatching, which would slowly take the place of the sail cloth. Eventually it would cover the entire hut, down to the sand, except for one spot toward the rear, which her father called the back door. No one ever used it, but you could, if you lay down and wormed or rolled your way under the last layer of thatch, slip outside.

With the structure up, Lulu and her sister set about cleaning the inside, picking sticks and other debris out of the sand they'd be walking on, sitting in, and sometimes sleeping on for the next five or six months. Aunt Māra helped them hang the hammocks, which they'd use for beds when the weather drove them inside. Most of the time it was warm enough to sleep outside with a sheet and one of Aunt Māra's quilts, which is how Lulu, Birdie and Henry preferred it. The hut was better than being rained on, but the rest of the time they would rarely be in it for more than a few minutes at a time.

Lulu stepped out from under the sail cloth her aunt was busy tying down and into the sun. It was hot, humid still. She guessed it was early September, but she didn't keep track of the date the way her father did in the ship's log. She knew the position of the sun and the phase of the moon. Those were the only useful accountings of time in Lulu's world. The moon told her what the tides would be like, how many stars would be visible, and whether or not it was a good night to hunt turtles. The position of the sun told her how much longer it would be hot, and when it was safe to stop worrying about storms. It was still hot and humid. Storms might well still be coming.

The first thing she saw stepping out of the hut was their communal cooking

area, which consisted of a fire pit, along with several old, weathered trunks of palm trees they used for sitting or as tables if they sat next to them in the sand. This was where the days started and ended, where guests would come to sit and talk, where visiting ship crews would tell the news from Boston, London, Kingston, Madagascar, Nicobar, Manilla. It was where Lulu and her sister would fall asleep at night, watching the fire listening to tales of storms, close calls in the rigging, sand bars where they should not have been, and cruel captains cursed in language their father told them not to use. The fire was the center of their world and the best thing in it.

When they had to they could cook on a small fire inside the hut, and around winter solstice it would be cold enough for a few weeks that they'd use the fire place inside for heat, but mostly, life was lived outside, under the sun and moon.

Birdie and Henry were down by the shoreline gathering small stones to fill some gaps in the fire pit. Her father and Kobayashi took the pirogue upstream to find larger stones to brace the iron tripod, which was where they did most of their cooking. It was their father's doing, though Kobayashi did much of the cooking. Papa had forged the tripod using iron scrounged from a shipwreck many years ago.

When her father and Kobayashi returned Lulu went to help unload the stones, but they were too heavy for her to carry. She contented herself gathering wood for the fire. It wasn't hard. The past summer's storms had brought down plenty of dry oak branches that lay amongst the sandy leave debris of the forest floor. Lulu ducked into some thickets of palmetto to see what had made its home in them this year. She flushed a few quail, and started a dozen squirrels angrily chattering and twitching their thick fuzzy tails at her. When she had enough twigs and small branches to fill the leather thong, she looped it tight, heaved the bundle onto her shoulder, and headed back to camp.

Her father arranged the tripod and tested its balance with a kettle full of water. They carried a number of large kettles, far larger than they needed to cook for the six of them, for occasions when a ship came to careen. Then whole crews of men, sometimes as many as a hundred would eat with them. Usually Tamba would kill a few pigs on those occasions. Last summer some sailors had managed to kill a bear.

Lulu sat now and watched as Papa lit a fire. He said a prayer thanking Hestia, goddess of the hearth, and threw some Frankincense resin on the flames. The sweet, light scent of Frankincense filled the air in the dunes. It smelled like home to Lulu.

The long afternoon shadows began to race their way across the clearing they'd be calling home for the next six to eight months. Lulu turned and looked west. A little back from camp there was a line of oak trees that then gave way to the marsh where Wanderer would be anchored for the season. In the shade of those oaks they would soon construct great kilns that would be used to make the tar that brought them to the island in the first place. Across the flat reedy world of

marsh was another line of oaks and then a no man's land of cypress swamp and brackish water that slowly, as you moved south, resolved itself into the southern fork of the Edisto River. Beyond that were the great pine forests of the low country where they would dig stumps and then haul them by barge and horse out here to the beach where they would burn them, slowly extracting the sap and then boiling it down into a sticky resin that sealed wood against the sea.

They ate dinner as the sun set through the trees behind their half-finished hut. Lulu went down to the shore and rinsed her abalone bowl. The air had a hint of chill at the edge of it. The sea was cold on her feet. When she came back her father and Kobayashi were laying oak logs on the coals that had cooked dinner. It wasn't long before the fire was roaring and light filled the circle of dune. Lulu sat on a log of gray driftwood and watched her Uncle Cole play the fiddle while Birdie and her father danced in circles. Henry and Owen sat on a log next to her Aunt Māra and directly across the fire. Lulu smiled. She like winter camp, she liked her family. She knew enough of the world to know they were different. Perhaps even odd to most people. But she didn't care. She was glad they had a place to live their lives the way they wanted to, a place they could fish, a place they could weather storms.

Birdie sat down beside her breathing hard. Her father pulled Henry up and danced with him and then he switched to Lulu. After a while Uncle Cole professed he was tired and put away the fiddle and sat down by the fire. There was catching up, plenty of poking fun, a rather long story about planting rice that Lulu lost track of in the middle when she began to doze off. It wasn't a made up story like the ones her father told around the fire on winter evenings. These were the stories Lulu wanted to hear. The stories that felt like they were real. Like the worlds he described were out there somewhere, waiting for her to discover. Worlds of pirates and ships and storms, talking animals, strange mythical creatures. Her father never failed to take what would always start as a normal story and turn it in some way that you never saw coming but afterward couldn't imagine turning out any other way.

Later she found a blanket in the pile of still unsorted belongings in the hut and went partway up a dune where she could still feel the heat the fire, but also see the stars and the sea. She fell asleep watching Castor and Pollux twinkle in the night.

Chapter 3: Wandren

It was hard to believe it would be cold in another turning of the moon. Birdie sat sweating in the sweltering afternoon heat, weaving swamp grass with Aunt Māra and Lulu. They were making the last five or six mats that would serve as the walls to their house. Birdie and her father had already set up the inside of the hut. Birdie loved to organize things, to find a place for everything and put everything in its place. Her father loved the result, but not the process. He left that to Birdie, only stepping in from time to time to point out something

that needed to be in a particular place. Pans by the fire for instance. Birdie had wanted to hang them from the rafters in the hut, keep them away from the sand so their food wouldn't be sandy. Her father said no, pans by the fire. Where we use them. Besides, if they're on the ground they'll never fall on someone's head.

She settled for hanging her bag from the rafters. Birdie made it the previous year. It was woven from spare hemp line and scrap fabric, with the occasional reed to make it more water proof. It held her sketchbook, which went everywhere with her. She loved to sketch the world around her. Shells, plants, birds, boats, the shore, the clouds, the sea. Birdie drew everything. When she wasn't drawing she was imagining the next drawing she would soon make.

She would lay in the dark of the hut at night, listening to the soft sigh of the others breathing, while shapes danced in the darkness behind her half closed eyes. She would watch them until she made some sense out of them and then arrange them into scenes, organize them, find where each belonged. Sometimes, when the moon was waxing, she could creep silently out from under the warmth of the covers, and slip outside to draw by the moonlight, or firelight if her father was still up, as he often was. He would stare at the glowing coals, she would draw, and they would be together silently in some way that felt to her deeper connected than when she was talking to someone, despite the fact that neither of them ever said a word, or even acknowledged each other's presence.

Drawing as much as she did required Birdie to make her own ink. She did it the way her father taught her, blending octopus ink and pine tar to make a dark grayish purple ink that was good for drawing outlines which she could fill with color. She made paint too. Green could be had from just about any plant, and she'd discovered how to make yellows and reds by experimenting with flowers that grew around the island. She needed a good blue though, blue had thus far eluded her. Paper and brushes were harder to come by, those she had to buy in Charlestown.

She still had two of the three brushes she'd bought last year in Charlestown using the money she'd managed to make by drying fish with Lulu and Francis. They fished and dried all through the first Autumn moon and managed to preserve enough of their catch that they were able to trade in Charlestown. They spent some of their money on enough peppermint sticks for everyone back at camp, and then they split the leftover money evenly between them. Lulu bought a doll, Birdie bought horsehair paint brushes, and Francis bought a small compass which Birdie did not have the heart to tell him, was not very accurate.

One of the brushes she'd lost somewhere on the voyage north to summer camp on the cape. She thought she had packed them carefully away after she'd struggled to paint the ship's rigging one day. The next day when she went to get them out there were only two. She'd searched the entire hold, everyone had pitched in, but they never found it. Wanderer claimed that brush as her own. Luckily it was her least favorite brush anyway. Still, she had already built a new rack to dry fish on again. As soon as their camp was set up, the hut thatching finished,

she was planning to get out to the bank to start fishing. She was going to get more brushes, and this time they weren't going to get lost, she was going to sleep with them if she had to.

"Birdie?" Aunt Māra was looking at her with a curled smile. "Your mind moves much faster than your hands."

Birdie looked down and saw that she'd been holding the same strand of reed for, how long? She did not know. She had been thinking of drawing, painting. "Sorry, I was thinking."

Aunt Māra laughed, "How old are you Birdie, already lost in thought?" She shook her head. "You are your father's child." She laughed again.

This last comment startled her, did she disappear like her father? Was that what it was like for other people when she was thinking? Was that what it was like for her father when he disappeared from the present?

Aunt Māra laughed again, "Right back to it. Go girls, go and play, I will finish this."

Birdie looked up at her to see if she was serious. Birdie had a momentary pang, she was abandoning her to work on her own house. She should make her own house.

"Don't worry," said Aunt Māra, "Go and play you two. This is almost done anyway."

Birdie and Lulu jumped up, blurted out a thank you and took off down toward the dunes where they knew Francis was digging up last year's stumps and spreading cut reeds to dry. Birdie reached the top of the dune and stopped so abruptly she nearly toppled over. Francis was down below, spreading reeds along the side of the dune and weighting them down with driftwood gathered from the beach. Judging by the pile near him he had about ten minutes of work left. Birdie shouted in the wind, "Hurry up, and meet us at the ship."

He looked up, squinting at her, smiling. He nodded. Birdie turned and walked out to the harder sand near the shoreline and made her way down to the *Arkhangelsk*. She saw Henry and Owen playing on the rear deck. For reasons she did not understand no one ever made either of them do any chores, though both were perfectly capable of helping out. Somehow they both got a pass. Birdie was pretty sure she'd had chores at their age. She tried to set aside the anger she felt rising in her chest when she realized they'd done nothing but play on the ship all day. Her ship. She stopped herself. Everyone's ship. Poseidon's ship. The island's ship. The ship that the island had been so kind as to preserve so they could use it. She thought of Tamba. Be grateful Birdie, always be grateful for the gifts we have.

It wasn't long before Francis arrived and they began to play. As with most of their adventures, it started with Lulu creating a back story. They were a family of sea gods who had been cast out of the high temples where their mother and

father had disowned them for some reason that Birdie wasn't entirely clear on. From that time they were doomed to wander the seas for forty years, and woe to any ships that crossed their path for they would devour them and all their sailors. As captain it was Birdie's task to find a new homeland, but since they could not find it for forty years she mostly just conjured ships for them to attack.

Lulu had a back story for every one of those ships too. Birdie sometimes complained to her that half the time they were playing they were just listening to Lulu tell stories, but everyone else seemed to really enjoy these outlandish tales. Too outlandish for Birdie's taste. Who had ever heard of sea gods cast out of somewhere? How did a god get cast out of something? What was the point of being a god if you can get cast out just like a person?

"Because Bee, Gods are like us, they have to deal with other gods. They get in fights and stuff. They have to work things out."

"My dad says there's only one god." Owen looked at Lulu accusingly.

Lulu, Birdie, and Henry exchanged a glance so quickly neither of the other two noticed it. "Well," said Birdie, "that may be. Who knows? We're just playing anyway."

Lulu climbed up on the railing of the ship, balanced for a moment there, and then, with a wild yell, leaped off and started running down the beach, shrieking like a banshee. Birdie climbed up and looked after her. "Well," she said slowly, "I have heard that Poseidon used to drive some people mad."

"What?" said Francis. "Does this mean the game is over?"

"I guess so." Birdie smiled helplessly.

"Come on Owen," Francis shook his head. "Let's see if we can find some duck eggs in the marsh."

They left. Henry sighed. "You think she'll come back?"

"Of course."

"Should we go get her?"

Birdie studied her brother. He could be completely infuriating sometimes, but Birdie realized for the first time that her Aunt was right when she called him "the sweetest boy I ever met."

"Let's go find her. I want to know what she was yelling about."

They climbed up on the railing just as Lulu had and, though neither of them said anything they both knew what they had to do. They jumped off the railing, hit the sand running and began to shriek like banshees as they ran down the shoreline after Lulu.

Lulu was laughing by the time they caught up to her. Laughing and throwing seaweed at the gulls. Birds were thick down the shoreline from where they were

standing. Birdie saw the silver flash of a fish as a school attempted to get away from the swooping gannets and pelicans. She wished she gone out to the banks to fish.

Lulu and Henry walked up the beach and sat on a ledge of sand, inching themselves forward until their weight made it collapse and sent them sliding down. They kept getting up and doing it again. Birdie went over to join them.

“Bee,” started Lulu when they all sat down to catch their breath. “Do you like Francis and Owen?”

“What? What do you mean like them? They’re our cousins, of course I like them.”

“Even when they’re fantastically dense and clueless about the world around them?” Lulu had a triumphant look on her face, as if she’d just somehow trapped Birdie.

Birdie considered this for a minute. “Well, yes, I still like them. It’s like Papa says, you can like someone even if you don’t agree with them.”

“Ugh, he would say that.”

“Why?”

“Because he’s so *nice*. blabidy blabidy blah” Lulu stuck her tongue out and imitated their father’s voice so eerily well that Birdie had to laugh in spite of herself.

Henry fell back in the sand laughing. “Do it again. Do it again.”

And so she did. But then the scowl returned to her face. “Well I don’t care if they’re our cousins, I don’t like them. I think they’re dull little boys with no imagination.”

“Owen has a good imagination,” Henry said from the sand behind them.

“When he’s with you maybe.” Lulu did what Birdie called her hrumph, and hrumphed into silence. They sat side by side, legs drawn up, arms wrapped around them, staring out at the sea. Papa was right Birdie decided, we’re different. She did not really know why or what the difference was. It wasn’t something she wanted. But it was there. She knew Lulu felt it too. She wasn’t sure if Henry did yet or not, but she thought so. He would eventually anyway. Still she felt sorry for Francis and Owen more than anything. They didn’t get to sail much. They had to live in town half the year. And they had to live with their father.

Kobayashi was digging up a roasted boar when they got back to camp. He and Tamba had killed it with a single arrow the day before. “Lucky shot,” Tamba had said when he told her father the story. They butchered the animal, splitting it between their camp, her cousin’s camp down the beach, and a family of tk

that were camped across the river mouth. Kobayashi, who claimed to have been a cook in the emperor's household before he was Shanghai'd from a Hayama bar, had buried their portion of the boar the day before in a pit of coals. He pulled it up and gently unwrapped it from the great leaves of seaweed he'd wrapped it in.

Her father and Henry dragged some driftwood up from the shore and soon they had a good blaze going. Her Aunt Māra and Uncle Cole came with their cousins. The incident on the beach was forgotten. The boar was sweet and salty and possibly the best thing Birdie could remember eating. The fat and juice drained into her rice and she ate until her belly ached.

The sun disappeared to the west, an orange glow in the tree line. Birdie hunted around the eastern sky for the first star, but as it always seemed to be, Venus was the first light in the sky. Should I wish upon a planet? It's a god right? Can you wish to a god? She wondered what she should wish for and then it came to her, she saw it in her mind and focused on it until it seemed almost real, and then she silently asked Venus, grant this one wish, if you like it, if you think it's a good idea. If not, it's okay.

She wasn't sure what you were supposed to say. The rhyme her father had taught her didn't really have instruction on precisely how one wishes, just that one could wish on stars. And maybe planets, hopefully planets.

Across the fire Aunt Māra and Tamba were talking quietly together. Her father was lying back on his elbow, listening to Kobayashi tell stories of Japan, but she also saw him watching Uncle Cole out of the corner of his eye as he drank from a bottle of rum he'd brought. Lulu came over with a sheet for Birdie. She laid down by the fire and listened to the crackling wood as the darkness closed in around them. Far off in the distance she could hear the waves breaking on the shore. She faded in an out of sleep, but then woke up to hear her father say, "Tamba's people have been sailing these waters longer than ours probably." Her father nodded at Tamba, but he shook his head.

"I do not think so."

Birdie glanced back and forth between the two them. Her father raised his eyebrow.

"The Egyptians perhaps. There are stories I have heard from the northern tribes about trading for copper that came from over the seas. But my people were coastal cruisers. Why cross oceans when everything you need is right here?" Tamba stretched his arm toward the shore. "If you want to have food, you need to be by the shore. Maybe you sail out of sight sometimes, you follow the currents and migrations of the fish, but you do not need to go too far. Where I come from there is plenty of food to be had without even setting foot in a boat. You grow rice on the shores. We have yarrow and yams on the higher ground, and you cast a net in the shallows for fish. We have palms and a tree that is not here. It is very strong. Like the teak we traded in Siam. We have these trees for building shelter. Everything is there, we use it. It is only crazy people who

would leave this.” He smiled and gestured at her father.

Her father grunted. “I didn’t leave anything. I was driven out.”

“So you say?”

“Our people have been hunted down and driven out for centuries. The lowlanders do not like us.”

“Why?”

“Yes, why?” Birdie blurted it out before she could stop herself. They all glanced over at her.

“I didn’t know you were awake little one.” Her father shrugged. “I don’t know why. I think on this all the time. I think perhaps it is because they cannot stand the idea that not everyone is as miserable as they are.”

Tamba laughed. “You may be on to something there. These people came to our shores too and seemed unable to leave us alone. And look what they do to the people on these shores. Some people Birdie, I don’t know, they won’t leave you alone. It is a great mystery.”

“How did they drive us out papa?”

Her father sighed. “Drive might be the wrong word.”

Tamba burst out laughing. “Yes, I think it would be. I have no love of the British or any of the rest of the people you call lowlanders, but I know you well enough to know that no one could drive you out of anywhere. You’d die in a hole before you’d be driven anywhere.”

Birdie expected her father to join in Tamba’s laughter, but he did not. He ignored him completely. “We left Birdie because I was tired of the place we were. I wanted to go somewhere no one knew my name, somewhere I didn’t have to do anything, so I could choose what I wanted to do. So I could be free of the obligations that places lay upon you.”

Kobayashi was nodding. “I too left to be free. It is a hard thing for some. For me it was easy because when I am here, I can breathe, I am free, no one looks for anything from me. I am able to be who I am. Your father can be who he is,” Kobayashi’s eyes twinkled, “he can wear his loin clothes and do his dances by the seashore.”

Now her father laughed. “I will never live down the loin cloth will I?” Everyone shook their heads. “That’s what I wanted too, a place of possibility. A place individuals can do as they wish, no matter how eccentric that might be, so long as it doesn’t harm anyone else or try to force anyone else to pay their bills.” He shrugged. “You wouldn’t think that would be so hard to find really, but it is, by god it is. I’ve been nearly around the world and this coast here, this is close as I have come.”

“That seems silly. Why would anyone care what you did? That would just make them stupid.”

Tamba raised an eyebrow at her. “Strong talk in this one Nicholas.”

Her father smiled. “Yes, they are strong. They will have to be. Stronger than us I fear. I fear they will be living through much more than you and I have had to deal with this time.”

Tamba puffed on his pipe and said nothing.

Kobayashi leaned back against a stack of driftwood and packed his pipe. “This country is wild, it will not be tamed.”

“I hope you are right Ko, but I worry that line of thinking will lead to trouble. People who believe they can do no harm are the most dangerous people of all.”

Kobayashi grunted. “True.”

Aunt Māra leaned forward and stirred the fire until a log caught and flame flickered orange light on all their faces. Lulu and Henry were asleep, their heads in Aunt Māra’s lap. Birdie yawned. Her father looked over at her. “You got us all serious Birdie, should I pull out the guitar, lighten up the night?”

She surprised herself by saying no, that she was tired. Besides, there was too great of a chance he would play the sort of lonely sad songs that his guitar seemed to like on quiet evenings like this one.

She gathered up her quilts and walked up the rise of the dune, away from the fire and lay down in the sand, spread layers of quilt over her until she could feel a cocoon of warmth begin to form around her. She laid her head back and looked up. The dusty spray of the Milky Way spread across the sky. The hunter stood tall and strong, his bow ever at the ready. He must be with us she thought, he must be Alban. Maybe he too is looking for a place to be who he is, a place he can hunt and run free. As her eyelids drooped the stars seemed to gather up, and pull together, to rain down around her and keep her safe and warm, beside their brother the sea, where she was free.

Chapter 4: Among the Stumps

Lulu hopped from stump to stump. Crouching down, her knees bent like coiled springs and then sprong, she exploded toward the next stump, landed, teetered, stopped there. There were plenty of stumps. The whole forest was gone.

“Unbelievable what these people will waste.” her father had grumbled earlier as he poled the pirogue through the marsh. Tamba sat in the bow. Lulu in the middle. They were headed inland to inspect stumps. “They probably cut them all down for some waterfront mansion.”

Tamba turned around carefully, keeping his weight in the center of the boat for balance. He smiled at her. “Rice Lulu. They cut em down for rice. They

sell the timber to the city.” Tamba smiled again, rolling his eyes toward the sky. They both knew her father, who was standing in the stern of the boat, pushing them through the marsh with a long pine pole, could not see Tamba’s rolled eyes beneath his hat. But they both waited and heard him grumble again, “stop rolling your eyes behind my back Tamba.” They all laughed.

“The rice will give them food. And we can buy it.”

Lulu heard her father grunt and mumble something about diggers. Tamba turned around again.

The boat slid silently along the edge of the marsh, where a thin line of trees still stood, offering some shade from the already brutal mid-morning sun. The water ran out right before the line of great oaks started. There were clumps of prickly, fan-leaved palmetto trees growing beneath the oaks. The muddy bank of the marsh quickly gave way to the dark coloured clay, mixed with sand and hundreds of years of leafy humus. This was the soil, rich in nutrients, that would grow rice.

“For a time at least,” her father said as he beached them on a small sandy bank. They climbed out and her father tied the boat to an oak. “But you take away the pine and it all goes, nothing will hold this soil.”

“Rice will hold the soil.” Tamba stood under the shade of an oak, arms crossed, nearly invisible in the depths of shadow.

“You know this?”

“My people know this.”

Her father shrugged. “I’ll take your word for it then.” He climbed up the bank and reached down to lift Lulu up as well. “I tell you what won’t hold it. Potatoes. Turnips. I’ve seen that.”

“Turnips?” Tamba looked quizzically at her father.

“Like a potato, thin skin, waxy, but bitter.”

“Ah, like you.”

Her father smiled at Tamba. “I am not bitter.”

“No, not you.” Tamba shook his head slowly, a sly look crossed his eyes, “But you are waxy. Skin like tallow. So white.”

Her father laughed. They walked through the oak and palmetto forest toward the bright clearing ahead. Lulu puzzled over why her father and Tamba argued about rice, why they cared at all, since neither of them farmed. Her father hated farming and made no secret of it, though he was happy to live by farmers. The Geechee, the people who farmed inland from here, were good farmers. Lulu and her family made periodic trips upriver to trade with them and the Waccamaw.

Tamba and her father walked out into the field, leaving her at the tree line. They stopped every so often to dig at the roots of the stumps with their sharpened staves, marking choice stumps as they went. She could hear them still arguing about rice as they worked. “Mind the gators Lu,” her father called over his shoulder. “And the snakes. Fresh cuts and all.”

Cutting trees stirred up the forest. Stirred up the animals of the forest. The plant eaters lost their homes, the insects lost their homes. The animals that ate the insects lost their food. Only the animals at the very top stood any chance. Snake might get the homeless mouse, but eagle got snake. Nothing got the alligator though. Nothing ever got the alligator.

Her father always said not to fear the alligator, but to respect it. Give it a wide berth and do what you can to make sure it doesn't see you as meat. She sat down on a stump and wondered what made you look or not look like meat.

Lulu didn't think alligators were scary anyway. She'd once been sitting on a tree trunk that had fallen out over the river. It made a good jumping platform, but this day she was just dangling her feet over, gnawing on a stick of dried fish when a small alligator swam up. It stayed a little ways back and seemed to watch her.

At first her heart leaped into her throat and beat so hard she could feel the blood pounding in her ears. But then some part of her reasoned with the fear, it was in the water, she was on a tree trunk a good five feet above the water. If it was going to try to jump at her, it would not have swum up on the surface. She turned over the situation in her mind for several minutes and eventually her heart slid back down into her chest, her breath began to come again, and she found herself strangely relaxed as the aftermath of fear, and the relief of not being eaten, washed over her. She and the alligator sat like that for some time, eyeing each other. Lulu reasoned they were probably close to the same age. Maybe not in years, but the alligator was probably about the equivalent of a seven year old, which was how old Lulu was at the time. This made her feel closer to it, they had that at least in common. It was not easy being seven. Lulu knew that. The alligator probably knew that too. What did a seven year old alligator have to do? Did it have a moody father? Was its mother alive? Did it have cousins and aunts and uncles? Did it have to stand watch? Probably not, she reasoned, alligators don't sail. Then she pictured an alligator trying to sail, an alligator propped up on its hind legs, one hand (or claw?) on the wheel, one holding a spyglass to its eye.

The ridiculousness of this image helped relax her even more and she went back to eating her dried fish. The moment she took a bite though, the alligator's eyes flinched. She couldn't describe it, but she saw something almost like hurt flash through its eyes, the same sort of thing she'd seen in the eyes of her cousins' dogs, the pain of a pack animal whose pack isn't sharing its food with them. Except that alligators weren't pack animals. Or were they? Lulu wasn't sure, but she didn't think so. Still, did one need to be a pack animal to feel hurt

when someone doesn't share their food? She momentarily thought of Birdie and how she always took the last bowl of food, letting everyone else have theirs first. She waved the stick of dried fish at the alligator, "you want some of this?" "Of course you do."

She bit off a decent sized piece and held it up. "This is all I have, and I have to paddle all the way back to camp." She regarded the dried fish in her hand again. "Still, I know what it's like to want something and not be able to get it. So I want you to have it." Having made up her mind to do it, she tossed the fish in to the water quickly before she could change her mind. The alligator swam quickly toward it and in a movement so deft and fast Lulu barely saw it, it swallowed the stick of dried fish.

Now it was closer to Lulu, nearly at her feet. And once again they stared at each other for a long time. Lulu took another bit of fish and broke off a smaller piece and tossed it to the alligator. This time it knew what it was, and it snapped it up without hesitating. Lulu saw its teeth and for a moment she was afraid again. What if it followed her to the bank when she walked up the log and back down to the pirogue, which was tied just upstream? What if she was a fool to feed an alligator and it wasn't thinking she was nice, but trying to decide why dinner was feeding it dinner?

She pushed these thoughts out of her head and decided she liked her original story, the alligator was cute, maybe even cuddly in some strange way, and they were friends. Until something happened to make this seem wrong, this was the story she was sticking with. She took another bite of fish and flung some to the alligator, but this time she threw it behind the creature so it had to turn around and swim the other way. She liked her story, but she also liked to cover herself. As the gator turned around and circled back to get the fish she noticed its other eye was gone. She'd been so transfixed by the eye it had kept on her she had not noticed that its second eye was gone. Before she had much time to think about it the gator swam off downstream.

Eventually Lulu walked off the log and back to her boat to make her way home. The alligator never showed up again. Apparently it had not seen her as dinner. Or she'd given it enough dried fish that it had changed its mind.

Remembering the alligator made Lulu want to see one. Sort of. A small one again. But it was already mid afternoon and she hadn't seen anything but biting flies and mosquitoes. The sun was directly overhead and felt like it had been worked with bellows. Lulu could just barely see her father on the far side of what had once been a forest of broom pine. Slash pine the sailors called it. Whatever you wanted to call it, it was gone. No more tufts of green above to filter the harsh clean light of day, no more long thin needles to whistle in the wind when the onshore breezes started. It was a dead still afternoon, the world starkly highlighted in a glaring light that made it difficult to see. Lulu decided she would not like to be a rice plant or anything else that tried to get along in this place. She liked it better back at camp. By the sea, in the wind. What was

life without wind?

She jumped to another stump and looked down. It had her father's mark on it. A square inside a diamond. "Two squares really," he had once told her and her sister, "one is just rotated 90 degrees. It's easier to draw than four interlocking circles, which is what I used before."

Lulu shielded her eyes from the sun and lifted a gourd of water to her mouth. It was bitter and hot, but it coated her throat for a moment and kept her tongue from feeling so swollen. She was hot and bored. She wished she'd stayed with her sister and her aunt in camp. Even cleaning and drying fish would be better than this stillness and heat. Anything to escape this relentless sun.

Lulu was glad she had her straw hat. It had been a gift from a woman who came with a careening ship the year before. It was too small now though, it perched on her head rather than fitting snugly as it used to. She had tried soaking, stretching and pulling, but nothing worked. It was just too small for her now. "At least your head is growing," her sister had teased her that morning.

Birdie was nearly a head taller than Lulu and whenever she pointed out their difference in size Lulu wanted to punch her in the mouth. Instead she took off her hat and hit her sister over the head with it and growled at her like a panther. Then she ran before Birdie could retaliate. Sometimes it was intolerable to have a twin. Usually though these moments were just that, moments. They were gone as quickly as she felt them. Though she wasn't above drawing them out for a while to get at her sister.

Sometimes Lulu needed to get away, to be alone. That's why she had come today with her father and Tamba out into the scorching midday sun to find stumps to dry for next winter. Her father made carvings in each stump, a square within a diamond, the beginning of wisdom he told her when she asked what it meant. Whatever that meant. They'd come back here next full moon to work in what light could be had, digging stumps and hauling them back to the beach. They would pile them in to the dunes just beyond camp, where they would lie for a year, drying like great white bones bleaching in the sand until they were so weathered they were gray. Soon Tamba and her father would repair the kilns and start making tar with the stumps they'd gathered last year.

Lulu and Birdie and Henry, along with their cousins and friends, would gather moss and dry grass to feed the slow heat of the kilns. As the wood burned the dark pitch drained down to the bottom of the kiln and dripped into buckets set below the catch it. This was the *Arkhangelsk* tar. The way her father's people had made it for generations he said. The archangel tar that kept the ships afloat, the rigging tight, the sailors safe and bought Lulu and Birdie and Henry a place in the world, clothes to wear, food to eat and sometimes even peppermint treats or dolls or new ribbons for her hair. These stumps were the reason Lulu's life was possible.

But that didn't make the day any cooler or her patience any greater.

Lulu hadn't been able to see her father or Tamba for at least an hour. They were resting in the shade on the far side of the clearing she guessed. Which meant another hour before they'd be back.

When they finally did return, both were pouring sweat and no longer bickering about farming rice or anything else. They drank the gourd of water and sat a while in the shade in silence. Lulu sensed that asking anything at that moment would only have earned her grunts. After a few minutes her father motioned with his head and they all set off, back through the trees to the pirogue.

Her father ruffled her hair as he stepped over her into the boat. He pushed them out again, following the trail through the reeds, back to the deeper waters of the marsh, toward the river. Lulu watched the little black snails, which had climbed ever so slowly up the reeds as the tide had come in while they were hunting stumps. It was nearly time now little snails, nearly time to slide back down, nearly time for the tide to return to the sea.

The moon was nearly full so she doubted they'd gather any stumps this moon. There was still too much to do. They hadn't yet been to Charlestown. Although she wasn't sure they'd go this year, with the rumors of the British around her father would probably prefer to save their trip to town for spring, when they were leaving. That was fine with Lulu. She hated town because she had to wear a dress. Most of the year she wore the clothes of the Waccamaw, a deerskin skirt that reached midway down her shins and was fringed with shells. Lulu was extremely proud of it and forever changed shells when new ones washed ashore. Unlike her sister she often wore a cotton shirt if she was going to be in the sun all day, but she had not today. Her long blond hair was pulled back in a single braid that reached nearly to her waist and had shells woven into it. She looked, aside from her slightly lighter skin, like everyone else on the island they called home.

The Waccamaw have lived here for hundreds of years, probably more, her father said. There were few of them left, but enough still that her family traded with them. Her father changed their camp from a canvas tent to one of the circular pole structures he'd seen the Waccamaw use and it was still what they called home. Her father had also taken to wearing a deerskin loincloth for a while. Lulu thought he looked ridiculous with his thick black beard and hairy chest and then the little flap of deerskin which reached right above his knees and looked, no matter how long it might have been, too small on his rather large body. At nearly six feet their father towered over almost everyone on the island. Tamba shook his head and walked away when he'd seen her father in the loin cloth. Later he told Lulu, "You should have seen when he tried the grass skirts." Kobayashi threatened to sign on with the Royal Navy if her father didn't go back to wearing pants. Her father became rather indignant. "They've lived here longer than we have, I expect they know what's best to wear," he said. But after a few days, and a badly sunburned butt, he had returned to wearing pants.

This was how he looked in her earliest memories and how she preferred he look

all the time. Lulu looked back at him now, pushing them slowly along, still sweating, eyes fixed on some point in the distance. Lulu loved her father, but often felt lost around him. He could be stern, or even cross with her or Birdie or Henry, at times, but more often he just seemed to be elsewhere, lost in depths of thought no one, not even Tamba seemed able to plumb. The worst was that he often returned from wherever this far away place was quickly with startling bursts of temper. Just as often though it was laughter. What was hard was figuring out which it would be at any given moment. When they were at sea, it was always laughter. On the land, it was hard to tell.

Lulu thought about this, about the mother she never knew, about things she barely remembered, different rivers, different marshes, different shorelines with the cold smell of wet mud and salt brine, the barnacle crusted rocks that had cut her feet until they bled. She could still feel them sometimes when she stared into the fire in the evenings or when she watched the stars at night, lying under her sheets in the soft cradle of sand. She did not miss it exactly. She did not remember enough to miss it. But she did think of it sometimes on the edge of sleep, she'd hold it in her thoughts, turn the memories over and around, looking for details she'd missed in all the times before. It had been a long time since she'd found a new detail she didn't already hold in her memory, still she did it almost every night, letting those old visions usher her into sleep on the early autumn nights when the mosquitoes dove at her all night long, even through the smoke of the smudge fires.

Lulu could feel the water pulling them now, partly the tide of the marsh, partly the current of the river, it was drawing them to the sea. The boat rocked slightly as her father laid the pole down and took up the paddle he used to steer. She looked back and he was sitting, smiling now as they drew nearer to home. Stern and distant though he might sometimes be, her father was almost always smiling when his face was turned toward the sea and the wind was on his cheek.

By the time the pirogue finally nosed onto the sandy shore of the island, shadows of the great hanging moss lengthened across the ground like fingers stretching out of the oak trees. It was a half mile walk to camp. Lulu hopped off the side of the boat and into the water, wading ashore. She glanced back at her father who nodded once. She needed no further encouragement, taking off down the path that led back to camp.

Lulu rounded the corner at full speed, through the tall field of sea oats that formed the southern border of their camp, bursting out of the grass like a lion. She smelled the warm sweetness of fish stew. Her aunt was stirring a kettle over the fire. Her sister and Henry came running from the other side of camp, calling her to come to the dunes, but she was hungry. She ran over and hugged her aunt, who pulled the stray hairs from her face, tucked them back behind her ears and scooped her up a bowl of stew with a piece of cold fried bread. Lulu slurped at the hot stew, earning her a frown from her aunt. "Don't slurp Lu."

"Did you mark stumps?" Birdie watched her eat.

“Papa did.” She took another bite of bread. “Squares.” Her sister did not seem to care. Birdie had never liked stumping.

“Aunt Māra gave us a pot for the kitchen in the *Arkhangelsk*.”

Lulu stopped chewing. “Really?” A smile came over Birdie’s face, all she could do was nod faster than Lulu had ever seen a head move before. “It’s the best” blurted Henry.

“I started to carve spoons for it they aren’t done yet but do you want to see?” Birdie was already pulling on her arm, dragging her away from the fire.

Birdie was always making things for them to play with, she’d fixed the wheel of the ship, carved a pole for the flag, made fish hooks out of deer bone, and was always helping Papa repair the fishing nets. Sometimes Lulu hated the way Birdie was so good at making things, but mostly she loved to use the things when they were finished. She scooped up some sand and wiped her bowl out. She dumped it all at the edge of the fire and handed the bowl back to her Aunt. “Going to the ship,” she said as the three of them ran out of camp.

They slowed when they reached the dunes, they all knew from experience that running in the dunes was a waste of effort. From the top of the rise they could see the single mast of the *Arkhangelsk*.

“How come Māra gave us the pot?” Lulu had been trying to come up with reasons for a gift in her absence ever since Birdie had said it, but she had come up empty.

“She said we could use it if we her left alone.”

“Were you bad?”

Birdie nodded at Henry, who scowled. “Was not!”

Henry was five, and as their father said, clever as a lynx and innocent as the doves. Henry had a way of twinkling his eyes when he smiled so that adults were immediately less angry at whatever had attracted their attention in the first place. It did not, naturally, work on Lulu or Birdie, though they both secretly, and not so secretly, admired this ability. In fact Lulu and Birdie had practiced this twinkle for hours, Lulu thought they were pretty good at it. But it never seemed to come off right when they tried it on adults.

Despite his twinkle, Henry never got away with anything. He was too naturally mischievous and yet not sneaky. If something was amiss in camp, some prank played, some calamity caused, everyone always came looking for “the little brown imp.” The only other possible culprit was their cousin Owen, but he was a year younger, actually quite sneaky, and lived a mile down the beach with their aunt and uncle, which generally absolved him.

They crested the last dune and from the top the *Arkhangelsk* came into view lying in a gully just beyond the beach, listing slightly to port. The three ran

down the slope of the last dune in great bounding leaps, sinking deep into the soft sand and leaping out again great whooping war cries rising from their lips.

Lulu ducked under the crumbing beam that had once supported the deck, following Birdie down into the hold, where the new pot sat on their makeshift stove. It was a world of black and white, dark shadows punctuated by bleach white light streaming in the occasional holes in the deck. The damp sand under the shadows was a cool luxury after the heat of the swamp. Lulu sat down and Birdie passed her the pot. She felt it cool and smooth in the darkness. She ran her finger along the lip feeling the nicks where metal tongs had banged into it. She passed it back to Birdie who put it on the stove. They all went out to gather crab shells and seaweed for a stew.

It was dark by the time they walked back to camp. The air had turned cold as the sun set. Not cold, but cool enough that Lulu brought out her blanket and lay down in the sand, pulling it over her. She lay for along time whispering with Birdie about plans for the next day, watching the thin sliver of moon drag its light across the shifting ripple of the sea.

Chapter 5: Fishing the Bank

Birdie woke early, before first light. She sat up on the dune where she had slept and looked off toward the sea. She saw the silhouette of her father down by the shore, his back to her. His hand went up and pulled down to his head with a movement so sharp and sudden she felt as if the starlight itself bent down to him. She watched at he turned to each direction, and then back to the center where he stood still, facing east.

She lay back in the sand and stared up at the stars. They began to fade as the pre-dawn blue crept up from the edge of the world, turning the black night sky first to blue, then to pink, to orange and then the stars were gone. A new day.

Her father came walking up from the ocean, swinging his arms and stretching his back. He saw that she was awake and plopped down in the sand next to her. His beard was still wet and droplets of salt water sprayed her as he sat down. They did not say anything. They sat together and watched the dawn paint the sky in front of them.

Birdie's people were sea gypsies. Alban, was what her father called himself. Got lost on our way to the old valuta grounds her father would say, laughing. Birdie wasn't quite sure what this meant. He never elaborated. He was a man of few words, comfortable with silence. He expected everyone else to be comfortable with it as well, especially his.

The lowlanders, as he called anyone who didn't live on the sea (which again made no sense to Birdie: how could people who lived on the sea not be the lowlanders?), "talk to hear themselves, talk about what they don't even know until they're half way through talking about it," he said. "I know I am the only one of our people you have to judge by, but we are not that way. If there is

something to say, say it. But mark your words Birdie, pay attention to them, think on them, choose them well. Find the best ones you can and don't speak until you have found them. The lowlanders think they can learn by talking, by asking questions, but you must listen first. Listen and watch the world around you. If you have a question, ask it first of yourself, see what answers you can come to. Once you have those, ask someone else and see what answers they have. Compare yours with theirs. This is how you learn."

Her father sat silent now beside her. She wondered where he was. Was he here, next to her? Was he on some other shore? As if reading her mind he turned to her and smiled. "It will be a good day." He rose and walked back toward camp.

Lulu sat up. "I was dreaming of pine trees." Birdie glanced sharply at her. She too had dreamed of pines. She wondered if they both were thinking of burning stumps or if there was something more.

Birdie still remembered the forests of the old country, or thought she did, or perhaps her father's stories had worked their way into her head until they became her memories. Maybe her dreams too. Lodged there as if she had seen them with her own eyes. And now she dreamed of her imagined memories, layers and layers of story peeling back to reveal at the end. . . what?

She stood up. "I'm going to get some food." She skipped down the slope, feet squeaking in the dry sand.

They followed her though. Memories of cold salt air, fog and pines, a place where it was always cool and soft breezes blew did not help her here. This land of swelter and storm had none of that coolness. What she wouldn't give for a cool soft breeze stirring the pines of some rocky northern shore.

She stopped at the top of the dune and watched the disk of the sun break the horizon. She stood, rooted like a sago, feeling the first warm orange rays, savoring the brief moments when it seemed like perhaps it would not be murderously hot by mid morning.

Then she uprooted herself and walked toward the hut. Inside it was dark, she blinked as her eyes adjusted to reveal the thin slivers of light from the windows, the rafters hung with dried fish and herbs, woven bags of drying roots and tubers that Lulu and Birdie dug the day before. Tamba had learned of them from the Waccamaw. There was plenty to eat in the marshes and pine forests if you knew where to look. Still the hut smelled as it always did, of the sea and fish. There was a fishy smell inside that rarely left since most of what the family ate came from the sea, fish, clams, mussels, oysters as big as Birdie's head, seaweed and sea oats, even salt dried from the sea. There was always a bit of the sea in the stew pot. This morning it smelled of dried fish and onions. Her father smiled at her, asked about her dreams while he ladled the leftover stew into Birdie's bowl, a coconut shell sanded and polished smooth, carved with a scene of mermaid rising from a clam shell, something her father had seen in London. It was in fact the one and only story of London he had ever told her.

Birdie sat in the shade of a sago palm. It was the last palm, the scout at the edge of camp. After the palm was the beach. She watched the ocean from the top ridge of the small, shaded dune, squinting in the bright light of the midday sun. Birdie's real name was Māra, after her mother's sister, her Aunt Māra who was down at the shoreline, pulling in a fishing net with Henry. Birdie had helped them cast out the net and secure it to the buoys earlier in the morning. Now they were pulling it in.

Birdie was waiting for her cousins to be done with their chores. She glanced up the beach toward their camp but there was no sign of Francis or Owen. Aunt Māra had said they were helping their father with the boat. Birdie sighed and plucked at a sea oat, slowly breaking up the stem and letting the breeze pick up and carry the crumbs off down the shore.

She could see the *Arkhangelsk* nestled in the dunes. Most of the time she loved seeing the boat, but sometimes it reminded her of the awful day it arrived. After her father had told the captain of the *Ave Marie* it could not be saved, the rest of his crew shrugged and went off hunting the wild boar that were forever rooting in the jack pines of the island interior. The captain sat on the beach and stewed in anger. He drank rum all afternoon until finally he'd strode into camp shouting for her father, who eventually appeared. There was a good bit of quarreling in several languages until at some point Birdie remembered the captain drew his sword and her father had gone very quiet. Aunt Māra pulled all the children inside the hut, but Birdie had stood by the door and watched as her father walked very slowly forward until he had placed his neck against the captain's sword, a move that had been so unexpected that the captain did not appear to know what to do. He stammered something Birdie could not hear, though she heard her father's voice quite clearly, I know how I will die and it is not by your hand. The captain had dropped his sword, spun on his heel and marched right out of camp in the direction of Charlestown. No one ever saw him again.

A few hours later the crew of six returned from the woods with a wild boar so huge they staggered under the weight of the pole it was slung out on. Birdie's father had informed them of their captain's departure, the news of which they barely acknowledged, bent as they were to the task at hand, namely butchering and roasting the boar. There'd been a great feast in camp that night, with music and dancing that didn't stop until long after Birdie was asleep. The crew had stayed on for a quarter of a moon, until the rum ran out and they too headed off down the road in the direction of Charlestown.

Birdie had been worried that the angry captain might return. For several nights she refused to sleep outside until her father finally coaxed the problem out of her. "My girl, you don't need to worry," her father had said, "he's gone." No one seemed to know what became of him, but he never bothered them again.

And so the little ship had been commandeered by Birdie and her siblings and

cousins. That first year they'd spent the autumn in the ship, every free moment they had, sailing the sands of the island, re-christening her the *Arkhangelsk*. Birdie was captain. They had voted, as free sailors did, and she had been elected. As Lulu was always careful to point out the captain only had authority during pursuit and battle, the rest of the time the whole crew was in charge. Birdie did not argue. She had only been voted out of her captain position once, when Lulu called a new vote after Birdie had ordered all the boys over the side to raid an enemy ship for the hundredth time, holding Lulu back. But Lulu's term as captain had lasted only a few days before Henry called a vote that put Birdie back in charge, and set the boys, along with Lulu, over the side to attack the forts and towns of the coasts they sailed.

Birdie was trying to decide what they should do today. A new pot called for new adventures, but she wasn't quite sure what. Perhaps they should sail to the Spanish main and sack Campache. It had been a while since they'd done that. She was deep in contemplation of her battle plan when out of the corner of her eye she noticed a small sail rounding out of the northern river. The boat rode the middle of the current. This jarred her out of her reverie. Don't do that Francis. She tried to send this thought to him somehow, but before she could even begin to concentrate she watched as the boat slammed hard into the leeward shore of the bank, hurling two small figures through the air like dolls pitched from a catapult. She winced as they landed. She watched them get up. Down at the shoreline Henry and Māra were laughing as they folded up the net.

"My son sails like his father," said Auntie Māra as she walked by Birdie carrying the basket of fish on her hip, with the net slung over her shoulder.

Henry sat down beside Birdie. "Did you see them" Henry giggled. "They hit so hard."

"I've told him a dozen times, you have to stay south and use the wind to get out of the current."

"He knows," said Henry matter of factly. "He likes to crash so they go flying."

"What?"

"It's fun, I think?"

"They're going to break the mast one of these days. Or lose the sail. And then how will we fish?"

Henry shrugged, but didn't say anything.

Birdie stood up and started down the dune toward shore.

It took Francis the better part of an hour to get the boat down the beach to their camp. While she loved her cousins, they were not sailors. They did not come with Birdie and her family to summer camp in the north. They left the island, but only went as far as Charlestown where they lived on Sullivan's Island.

Birdie's Uncle Cole helped run a distillery, spending his days tending the vast vats of boiling sugar, turning it slowly to rum.

No one in Wanderer's crew drank rum. Her father didn't forbid it exactly, he simply did not associate with people who drank alcohol. "When you drink or eat something you do not just drink the liquid or eat the flesh of the thing, you consume its spirit as well," he told her one day when she asked why he never drank rum.

"Different things have different spirits Birdie." He dipped a ladle of water and drank it. "The spirit in the rum, it is not a good spirit. To me it seems like not a good spirit anyway. Many people, it takes them and makes them do as it wishes, sends them nowhere but in search of more of itself. Your uncle for instance, it drives him to work all summer making it. Other people it just visits and then leaves with no problems, it all depends." He shrugged and swatted at a mosquito on his shoulder. "Some days it visited me and left, but some days it visited me and wanted to stay even after I no longer wanted it, so I decided one day not to let it in me any more."

"It is not the way of our people I don't think. We did not have it back home. There was Vodka, but that was a drink of the lowlanders. We never drank it. Vodka has a strong spirit, but we did not need it. For us there is the sea, it has the strongest spirit, as far as I know. I would rather stand on its shore for one minute and taste its salt air than have a lifetime of rum or vodka. The sea is the spirit I want to spend my time with, the sea is who I serve."

Birdie had decided then and there not to waste her time with rum or vodka or anything with bad spirits. She too would serve the sea.

She watched as Francis tried to bring the little boat in through the waves. It was an offshore wind, which meant the sail luffed whenever he tried to head straight in through the waves, but to take them at an angle meant the little boat pitched and tumbled and threatened to roll with every wave. Francis might enjoy catapulting himself out of it when there was a nice soft sandbar to land on, but rolling in this surf would quickly be the end of the boat, and quite possibly Francis and Owen as well.

Birdie considered swimming out to help them, but beyond the break was where most of the sharks hung out. She did not mind the sharks too much, most of them were harmless enough, but there were a few that seemed to have bad tempers. It was always the larger ones with very sharply pointed fins. She avoided them unless there were dolphins around. She walked down to the shoreline just as Francis finally rode a wave through the break, somehow failing to capsize despite forgetting to lean back and counterbalance the roll of the boat.

Francis was smiling as the boat rode the last crumbling wave toward the shore. His dimples shadowed into his tanned cheeks and showed off his impossibly white two front teeth that Birdie was very jealous of. She unconsciously traced her tongue across her lone front tooth. She returned his smile, but tried to keep her

gap tooth hidden. Owen leaped out the boat and tossed the bowline to Birdie, who helped him drag it onto the beach.

“Did you see that?” Owen said breathlessly. “We flew Birdie, we flew.”

She dropped the bowline back in the boat. “I saw you nearly break the mast on the only fishing boat we have, if that’s what you mean.”

His face dropped. He mumbled something about finding Henry and walked off down the beach.

“Lighten up Birdie,” said Francis climbing out of the boat.

“Lighten up? What if you’d broken it?”

“Did I?”

She shook her head at him. He rolled his eyes at her and turned around. She wanted to say *I like you less when you act like your father* but she bit her lip and said nothing. She knew he didn’t mean any harm, he just didn’t think. But she knew Francis didn’t have what she had. She could feel him floundering sometimes, like he was lost in a way that she never would be and so she bit her lip and kept quiet.

He leaned against the gunwale of the boat. She came and stood next to him, thinking about what she should say, but she could come up with nothing.

“You always do the right thing Birdie,” he started, but she interrupted him by bursting out laughing.

“My father would disagree.”

Francis didn’t seem to think it was funny. He looked very serious for once. She was quiet again. “I didn’t mean. . . You did a good job getting her through the surf.”

“You think? I forgot to lean out when she pitched down the first time.”

Birdie shrugged, “I guess you didn’t need to. I mean, you didn’t capsize, you made it to the shore.” She saw him smile out of the corner of her eye.

“You want to go fish?”

“Yes. Henry did too.”

They both glanced down the beach in the direction Owen had gone, but there was no one. “Let’s just me and you go.”

Birdie bit her lip, Henry had wanted to go, but she’d spent all morning with him and going without him suddenly sounded good, though she knew she would feel guilty about it the whole time she was out. “Okay.”

He seemed to sense the hesitation in her voice and sighed. “Owen probably talked him into going turkey hunting.” Owen and Francis had somehow managed to kill a turkey with their homemade bow and arrows and Henry was obsessed

with doing the same. Francis was probably right she decided. Lulu had gone up the river with Tamba. There was no one else around except her father and Aunt Māra back in camp. She smiled. “Alright, you push us out.”

Francis went to the bow and pushed the boat while Birdie pulled on the stern. They dragged her into the water and spun her around. Birdie jumped in as Francis continued to push from the stern. Birdie grabbed the foresail line and sat down on the port gunwale. The little boat was a lateen rig, with a triangular sail held up on a single mast. A cleated line loosened and tightened the sail to catch the wind. Birdie unwrapped Francis’s poorly cleated line and let the boom to fill the sail with wind. Francis was up to his waist now in the water. Birdie leaned out to look past the sail and saw nothing but water. “Get in,” she shouted.

Francis heaved himself up over the side of the boat and rolled down into the bottom, Birdie drew the line in and turned the tiller to put them at an angle up the face of the first wave. Near the top a gust of wind finally hit the sail and the little boat leaped forward, sending them over the wave and rushing out, toward the next. Two more waves and they were beyond the break. Birdie watched the dark shape of a shark cruise slowly under the boat and then the bottom dropped away and there was nothing but dark, blue-green water. She pointed the boat as northerly as she could without luffing the sail. When she was happy she wrapped the line around the wooden cleat, looped it back under itself and sat back, letting her body relax for the first time since she’d hopped in.

She glanced at Francis, he was leaning over the side, dragging his hand in the water. Birdie pulled her handline out of her pocket and baited the hook, she dropped it gently into the water, letting the speed of the boat cutting through the waves carry it back away from her. She pointed the little boat toward the outer eastern edge of the bank. When they’d sailed by last month on their way in she’d noticed that there appeared to be an upwelling not too far out past the bank and it was near the updraft of cold water where she’d landed her two catches that day. She wanted to do it again, although she wasn’t sure she could. Her father had helped her reel it in on Wanderer. But Wanderer was a bigger boat and much of the trouble was getting the fish out of the water and up the side of the boat without it breaking the line or getting away. The skiff was only twenty feet long and worst case, she could always tie off the line and sail for shore to get it in. Although that would be very tempting to the sharks.

As they eased further away from the shore she saw Francis glance back at her more frequently. She could tell he didn’t like to go this far out. At least not in the smaller boat. It was a calm day though, the wind was light, it was the best sailing day she could remember since they’d arrived, especially for a vessel this size, light and springy as she was. Birdie could feel her dancing across the water, almost giddy to be moving it seemed to her. Boats have character. This one liked the zip and zig and zag, she like the lean too, which Birdie fought by leaning out over the water to counterbalance the wind. A flat boat is a fast boat her father always said. Tipping was more fun though. If you knew your boat

well enough to know where she like to be, what was too far, what was not far enough. You had to spend time with a boat to get a sense of her, and then you had to spend time on the water to get a sense of different conditions and how she would handle each of them. Birdie had been sailing the twenty foot sloop her father had built and named Delos for three seasons now, and in every weather short of a gale. While her father had given Delos to his wife's sister and her British husband, Uncle Cole, Birdie still thought of her as *her* boat. Only Birdie ever took her more than 100 meters offshore. Only Birdie pushed her, though Birdie did not think of it that way. She thought of it the way Lulu thought of horses. She just gave the boat its lead and let it go where it naturally wanted to go. A good boat you could trust like that and Delos was a good boat.

They crossed into a different channel of wind and suddenly the water around them went dark. They were still within sight of the shore, an easy swim to the bank even, but here was where the ocean began in Birdie's mind. That deep blue that speaks of depth, real depth. That was the open sea. That was the point at which land, even if you could see it, became irrelevant to your life. You were out here, in the deep blue beyond. Free.

Birdie closed her eyes and listened, taking in everything, the wind wisping strands of hair in her face, the surge and tilt of Delos as she rode gently up the now large swells, the churning froth of water foaming at her bow as she broke the crest and headed down toward the next trough. The mast creaked, the canvas seemed to gently sigh as the wind lulled slightly in the trough and the she felt Delos surge up again, catch that wind and fairly leap forward. . .

"Birdie!"

Her eyes popped open, startled. "What?"

"Bit far out don't you think?"

She looked around. Maybe? They were definitely too far from shore to have any hope of swimming in if something went wrong. They might make the bank. But what did it matter really? They could just keep sailing out here forever. . . she smiled at Francis. "Sorry, we'll jibe round."

She rarely got to jibe in the bigger boat since jibing with three sails was a rather violent maneuver. When Wanderer jibed two booms came swinging across the deck at high speeds, which put tremendous force on the rigging and the boom itself. Wanderer had broken her boom two years ago during an unintentional jibe that happened when her uncle fell asleep at the helm. This was why her cousins and their family no longer sailed north with Birdie's family. Birdie did not understand why her father, who was normally quick to forgive, even if his temper was sometimes easily ignited, refused to forgive this incident, but she did know it had made it so no one else was in a hurry to jibe on purpose either.

Since the wind never left the sails when jibing there was a lot of power in it, and with anything involving a lot of power, a lot care needed to be taken. The safer thing to do would have been to point the bow through the wind, which

let the sail luff and slowed the boat, making for a gentler turn. But Birdie did not want to slow in this swell. Delos handled it well when she was moving, but slowed down she would bob like a cork in these waves and that idea did not sound like fun to Birdie. So she brought her stern around through the wind and waited, feeling for that moment when the boom would swing over, it was like that moment when you swing on a vine high up in to the air and you can feel yourself slowing slowing slowing but never stopping, instead you're suddenly moving the other way. And with a sudden snap of the boom, which Birdie slowed by tightening the line that held it, Delos came around and started her broad reach back to the shoreline.

They'd come far enough out past the back end of the bank that Birdie was able to head right back to it and beach the ship on the small spit of sand that stood above the water.

It was somewhere between tides, which gave them about thirty square feet of soggy sand to stand on. Periodically a swell came through with a wave large enough to soak their feet, but it was protected enough that she and Francis could stand on the edge of the sand and untangle and prep the net.

If you had looked out from the shore you would have seen two children standing on the water, looking for all the world as if they were walking around, out for stroll on the water. Even though Birdie could not see herself that way, she had seen others do it, she knew how magical it looked. Everything felt magical to her out here.

It was warm, but not hot. The wind and water together kept them cool in spite of the afternoon sun and sweltering humidity. Birdie took off her skirt, then her shirt, and dove naked into the water, dragging the net behind her with her foot. She slipped under and tried to kick like a mermaid, legs locked together. She surfaced well beyond the bow of the boat, treading water. "Come on Francis! It's so lovely. Oh, it's perfect really." She dove under as he took off his shirt and dove in. Under water everything was silent save the occasional squeaks and pops of shrimp running in the sand somewhere below her. A school of dark, silver-sided fish she did not recognize through the blur of salt water was swimming just beyond where she could touch. She came up for air.

"I see a school out here. Quick, Francis, tie the net to the stern and we'll drag it out behind us, then circle back. She threw up the anchor and scrambled into the bow. Francis pushed them off the sand and they slipped silently, slowly through the water, Birdie could see the school better from above, she directed him to turn the boat to port, then starboard, and then, when she could tell the net was fully extended she grabbed the boom and pushed it back, against the wind to stop them dead in the water. They slowed, and then stopped. Francis pointed them into the wind and they both leaned over as watched and the net slowly sank down, startling the fish as it touched them, they darted and shimmered in confusion." "Bring it round." Francis laid the tiller over and Delos slowly turned, catching a breath, then another, and with a snap the sail filled and the boat

leapt forward, back toward the bank. Birdie scrambled to the stern and looked back to see nearly the whole school of fish caught in the net. She let out a whoop.

They landed and pulled the net in, there were easily hundreds of fish. They could not even haul it all the way up out of the water. They waded out to inspect it, Birdie knew there was no way they could get their entire catch to shore in Delos, she would have sunk under the weight. Birdie looked at the writhing mass of fish trying to decide how they could divide it up, let some go without losing them all. That was when she noticed a strange line sticking out of the water. It was a slight thing, thin and gray. She had never seen anything quite like it, which was why it took her so long to realize it was a dorsal fin and it was coming straight for Francis faster than Birdie had ever seen a fin move.

“Francis! Get out! Now!” Birdie dropped the net and ran for the bank. Francis was right behind her, but as Birdie scrambled up on the dry sand she noticed the fin was curved, not straight. She started to laugh. At first Francis thought she had played a trick on him, but then teeth closed around his leg and he screamed.

Fortunately for him, they were not shark teeth, but it took a moment of screaming and terror and panic before either Francis or Birdie fully understood this, because seeing a curved fin might have made Birdie feel better, but dolphins don’t bite. Except this one did. It bit and Francis fell to the sand and it began to drag him back into the water, Birdie grabbed his hands and pulled and Francis kicked until the dolphin gave up and darted off to deeper water.

They sat panting on the sand, watching the fin trace circles around the boat.

“Let me see your leg.” Birdie went to the boat and pulled on her skirt again, and pulled her knife from her belt. She cut back his pant leg and surveyed the wounds. There were five punctures, none more than a quarter inch across, and none very deep, but there was still plenty of blood and it looked like it would hurt. Francis groaned, “how bad it it?” Birdie felt a wave a fear come over her and she wanted to run away from the blood and the torn flesh and the pain it must have been causing, but she quickly set that aside and tried to answer him as calmly as she could. “It’s not too bad. We just need to stop the bleeding.”

“Okay. Am I going to lose my leg?”

She glanced at him. His face was pale and beaded with sweat. She could see the fear in his eyes. “I don’t think so. We need to wash it with salt water though, and it might sting.”

He nodded. She cut off his pant leg up to the knee, and then cut the fabric into strips. She helped him down the water’s edge—which was getting closer as the tide came up—and washed out the wounds with salt water. Then she wetted a few of the strips of torn pantleg and wrapped them gently around his leg. She tied two strips together and wrapped that one over the others, gently tying it to help hold everything in place.

“That’s the best I can do. When we get in Tamba will know something to put on it so it won’t get infected.” She glanced over that Delos. “Let’s get you in the boat.”

“No, let’s deal with the fish first.”

“I’ll open the net.”

“What? No. We’ve never had this much, we have to bring it in somehow.”

Birdie considered it. It was a lot of fish. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

“I’m fine, help me in the boat and I can help you from inside, that way I can sit down.” Francis stood and she helped him limp to the boat. Birdie stepped into the water, looking around for the dolphin, but she saw no sign of it. She waded out to her knees and started to pull the net full of fish over to the hull. That was when she noticed a lot of fish guts already in the water. Had the dolphin attacked because it was hungry? She turned the net, pulling up the bottom and heaving the top into the boat. Francis took it and began to pull it out of the water and into the boat. That was when Birdie noticed an eye in the net, not a fish eye, staring at her. “Stop!”

“What?”

“There’s a baby dolphin in the net”

“What?”

“There’s a baby dolphin in the net” In flash she understood why the dolphin had attacked. It hadn’t attacked, it had defended.

“What do we do?” Francis stared at her.

“I don’t know.” She thought for a minute. They could haul it all in, and risk crushing the dolphin. Or she could cut the net, let the dolphin out, but she’d lose possibly all the fish and she’d have a net to repair. She wondered what her father would do. She signed. She cut the net. She cut just in front of the baby dolphin, which had already eaten half of the fish in front of it, so there was no thrashing when her knife stabbed that fish. When she had a hole big enough for the dolphin to get out she worked the fish out first, and another came shooting out after it. Then the dolphin kicked once and shot free. It paused and seemed to eye her for a moment. I’m sorry Birdie said softly, staring at its big dark eye. It twitched and disappeared under the boat, out of sight.

Birdie tried as best she could to keep the net closed while Francis pulled it into the boat. It took them a good twenty minutes to get it into the boat, but in the end they saved well over half their catch. The ride back into shore was shared with dozens of flopping fish, and once, Birdie thought she saw a dolphin streak by.

After she had helped Francis limp back to their camp, and her father and Tamba had organized a trip upriver to see a medicine man who lived near the Waccamaw

trading post. Birdie came back out the beach to sail Delos back to her home at her cousin's camp around the north end of the island. She pushed off, but the wind was blowing off shore, forcing her farther out than she wanted. She ended up right back at the bank. She took it as a sign. There was only a small spit of sand still above water, wet sand, but she ran aground on it and climbed out. She looked around for a fin, but saw nothing. A turtle swam by in the shallow water. Birdie sat down on the sand and lay back in the sun, feeling its warmth against the cool of her skin. She felt the chill of the wind as it dried the salty drops of water running down her arm.

She closed her eyes. She began to feel something strange happening in her body, or to the world around her, she couldn't tell. At first she thought perhaps it was the lingering pitch and roll of the boat, which stayed with you even after you got out. But then the whole world seemed to undulate, like a ripple passing through it.

She felt as if she were floating in the water, but she was laying on solid sand. Then it came so suddenly it was terrifying. Something immense and unfathomable washed over her, a presence that stretched through her, encompassing her and everything she had ever known or done in an instant. She was afraid to open her eyes. A voice, no, that was the wrong word, something thought words for her, inside her. She could not understand them, a jumble of words falling in her mind so fast that she could not catch them, could not find the meaning of them, not even the order. She felt as if something massive and uncontrollably wild had seized her up in its arms and was taking her on some wild, frightening, but exhilarating dance. She became afraid again and forced herself to breath slowly in and then slowly out. As she did this it was like the thing gave up and set her down again. She felt it slipping away. She blurted out, "No! Wait!" She wanted it to stay, it was just too much, too sudden, she wanted to say, give me a minute, but it was already gone, slipping away, the world settled, she opened her eyes and there was the sea, looking as it always did.

She stared out the flat horizon where the sky bled into the blue of the sea. Come back. But nothing happened. She got up, she pushed off and climbed in Delos. She raised the sail and turned the boat toward the river.

Chapter 6: Fire

It was mid-afternoon by the time Papa rounded them up and set them about gathering grass and small sticks. He would light the kilns when the sun went down. There was a very precise mixture of grasses and wood required to get the temperature right. The mixture resided entirely in Papa's head, but Lulu and Birdie, and even Henry, had learned to know which thing they needed more of just by glancing at the piles, which they kept separate. Grass, then oak, then walnut. Papa claimed that to get the most tar out of the roots, you needed the right temperature kiln and to get that you need the right combination of each wood, plus there was always some trickery with wind and venting. The secret

was to get the wood hot, but control the flow of air so that it burned very slowly and under some pressure that caused it to give up the liquid sap that hid inside of it. This tar or pitch trickled out the base of the kiln into buckets which were then put in barrels and either used by ships that called on camp, or sold to the shipyards in Charlestown.

This year Papa had built three kilns. Each used the side of a dune as its primary structure, reinforced with a layer of split logs, and then packed earth and then packed clay. The other side was built up of logs and earth until a conical shape was formed and then the whole thing was filled with clay. For days Lulu, her father, and Kobayashi had hauled the rich red clay of the banks upriver down to the beach and packed it into the kilns until they were smooth as glass. Then they lit small, smoldering fires inside to dry the clay and bake it hard. This took several days, but when it was done the kiln was ready to make pitch.

Kobayashi and her father worked all the next day dragging last year's stumps to the kilns and took turns splitting them with the axe until all the roots had been neatly stacked. Tamba, her uncle, and Francis had gone inland to gather walnut logs in the wagon, while Lulu, Birdie and Henry gathered downed oak and stacked the grasses they had cut and dried several weeks before. Now they had everything neatly stacked and ready.

Lulu was chewing something Francis had brought back from his trip inland. A Muskoke woman they'd run into far up river had given him a strip of partly dried spruce gum. Francis did not like it. "It's like eating a tree," he said.

Lulu thought that made sense. "You are eating a tree."

He gave the rest to her. It *was* like eating a tree. And there was something wonderful about eating a tree. It gave her some of its huge spirit. Lulu could almost feel herself expand as she chewed, though she did wonder if the tree people minded her walking among them chewing up the flesh of one of their fellow trees. She asked an oak, but it just shrugged off a few leaves in the wind. Everyone gets eaten eventually.

Lulu wandered away from the piles of grass and twigs, deeper into the sandy hummock that separated their camp from the marsh adjacent the leeward side of the island. Edisto wasn't a very wide island. It was long and skinny. Edisto's marshy backside meandered for miles, as ribbons of the river traced their way through the flatlands.

The forest was a clutter of shadow and light. Lulu sat down on a log and watched the shimmering leaves dancing in the breeze high up in the tree tops. Everything was so different up there. She decided to climb up and have a closer look. She cast about for a suitable tree to climb. She was near the marsh, in a mostly oak and pine forest. She would liked to have climbed a pine, but there was nothing to hold onto, the trunks were bare well above her head.

She settled on a youngish oak that had a huge low limb she could get on, and then make her way up it to the trunk where another branch allowed her to pull

herself up. Above that was another branch, and another, and another. She kept at this for a while, ignoring the scrapes from rough bark, and trying not to pay attention to how high up she was. It took her a good ten minutes but she managed to get high enough up that she was afraid, and could no longer drive the fear from her mind and continue.

She made herself step up to the next branch, the last that seemed like it would support her. She sat down on it, and wrapped her other arm around the trunk and looked out over the forest canopy. She was higher than Wanderer's main mast. She knew because she'd been hoisted up it several times to fix things. The mast was 35 feet. She guessed she was 50 feet up. High enough to see out over the tops of the trees anyway. She watched two squirrels who'd scolded her the whole way up retreat through the thin branches to the next tree over where they took up their scolding again until Lulu threw a nearby acorn at them and they took off for good.

She watched an eagle circle the marsh, slowly, lazily, hardly ever beating its wings, just riding the air like a boat in the water. Lulu wished she could fly. That would be even better than sailing, to glide on the air, up and down with the thermals and drafts rather than be stuck on the ground, moving side to side across the water. Although that was fun too. She twisted her head to try to see if she could see the beach from up here, but there was another tree in the way. Just then the breeze kicked up again and Lulu felt the whole tree sway.

She wondered what it would be like to be up here in a storm, to ride the winds. She closed her eyes to enjoy the music of the leaves tinkling around her, mixing with the percussive clatter of palm fronds drifting up from somewhere below her. The tree smelled of a tonic of warm, wet wood, not unlike Wanderer after many days at sea, but here it mixed with traces of scents coming off the marsh, and farther off, from the sea. A briny mix of salt coming in undulating currents across the marsh to wave the leaves of her tree.

Birdie and her father loved the sea in a way that Lulu understood, but did not. She loved the wind. The wind is everything. The wind is everything it has ever touched. You could almost always smell the land from the sea. Whenever they were coming down the coast, any time the wind blew offshore Lulu could tell how far away land was by how strong the scent of flowers. She assumed the opposite was true as well, that if she ever went far enough away from the sea, she would know just how far she had gone by how faded its tangled smell of salt and seaweed and damp wood and rotting kelp had become. It suddenly occurred to Lulu that she had never been far enough from the sea not to smell it. She knew the smell of land more as a stranger scenting exotic perfumes on the wind and reading them than she did of walking on it and losing herself on it. She resolved to one day walk inland far enough that she no longer smelled the sea and smell perhaps what other tales the wind had to tell as it passed over all those mountains and valleys and forests and deserts that lay between here and the infinite Lulu would walk toward. She sat swaying in her tree, planning grand expeditions to chase the sun around the world. She would cross the deserts, she

would walk with lions, she would climb the mountains and stand on the peaks with her snowy leopard companion, and then she would say her goodbyes and journey deep into the jungle with her jaguar guide to see the lost cities of gold. Then she would say goodbye to her jaguar and walk again to the sea where she would build a boat and return home. This she would do.

The sun had already disappeared into the thickets of trees on the western horizon when Lulu noticed for the first time that it was growing cooler. There was some almost imperceptible drop in the humidity as the sun faded, and she knew, winter was nearly here. She shivered slightly at the thought and then made a mistake. She was thinking only of getting down, but to do so she had to look down and when she did, a hot flash of fear shot through her and she was unable to move.

She started to yell Papa, but then she realized she was alone in the forest, high in a tree, at least half a mile from camp. No one was coming to help her. They would come looking for her, and it was possible they might hear her if she yelled loud enough, but it would be after dark before they found her and that would be worse. I am alone, she thought. I have to do this myself.

She sat back down and gripped the trunk of the tree until she felt stable. She forced herself to breath deep and slow. She heard her father's voice in her head, count to four as you inhale, hold that breath while you count to four. Count to four as you exhale, count to four with your lungs empty. Slowly and steadily in and out. Lulu did this until she began to lose count and found that she was breathing normally. She opened her eyes and looked around. The last rays of the sun had poked their way through the forest thickets to fall here and there on Lulu's tree. It seemed to her as she looked below—she was careful not to look down, but at the trunk just below her feet—that the light was illuminating a kind of path down the tree. She could see the irregularity of bark in startling detail. She began to form a pattern of moves in her head, knobs seemed to jump out at her and she moved her foot down to the first one, easing her weight onto it as she gripped a branch above her with both hands. She shifted her weight onto that foot and gently moved forward, off the branch where she'd been sitting. She was up and moving. Now she looked down again and saw the perfect branch below her other foot. She stepped down. And down again, her arms finding the branches her feet had given up only moments before. She moved in a zig-zag pattern down the tree, using branches like a staircase, back and forth across the trunk, until she found herself back at the large branch she'd used to get up. She walked out on it, away from the trunk, balancing with her arms out, to where it very nearly touched the ground, and then she vaulted off to the ground.

She turned back and looked at the tree, up at where she'd been. The light was gone now, twilight spread evenly through the forest, turning everything a soft gray that made it hard to tell where tree ended and sky began. "Thank you," she said to the tree.

The smell of simmering boar reached her well before she got to camp. Her father

was busy getting ready for the kiln ceremony. If he'd noticed she was gone, he did not say anything. Her siblings too did not seem to have noticed her absence. They were sitting near the fire. Her Aunt Māra looked long and carefully at her as Lulu walked by her, but she did not say anything. She joined her siblings and cousins by the fire and sat down. They listened, bored, waiting for the stew, as the grown ups talked and seemed to do everything but get food. Lulu did not realize how hungry she was. Her hands shook slightly when she didn't keep them wrapped around her legs. It was dark in the east, stars were out on the horizon.

Finally her father stepped toward the fire and raised his hands. Everyone fell silent. "Friends," he began. "Thank you for being here with me." He paused. Lulu looked around the fire at all the faces flickering warm and orange in the firelight and she realized everyone she loved was here in one place, at one time. It did not happen all that often and it made it even better when it did. She felt a wave of warmth pass over her, noting in passing that it washed over her much like the fear had passed through her earlier in the tree. Emotions always move like waves, she thought. You can't change the wave, but maybe you can control how you ride it and where it takes you.

Her father turned toward the sea and with both his arms still raised over his head, "Hekas, hekas! Este bebeloi!" His voice vibrated as he spoke and Lulu felt the words move through her, vibrating her blood with a tingling sensation that faded slowly as the sounds of the night became louder.

He again vibrated the words and again let the sounds of the night once more return. He then spoke in a language neither Lulu nor her sister knew, but which somehow seemed ancient, as if it had been born millenia ago around fires like this. It was guttural and strange in way that was both thrilling and a little frightening. Lulu knew what it all meant because her father had finally told her last year, but she still could not match the sounds she heard to the meaning in English and trying to do so made her head swirl in a confusion of noise and sense and meaning until she could feel more than she could understand.

Tamba took a large stick out of the fire and went to each of the quarters in turn. First the East, then the South, then the West, then the North and then back to the East. At each stop he called on the archangel, the arkangelsk, of that station, offering a bowl of water to each. When he was finished he handed the stick, with its glowing red tip to her father.

Her father then nodded to Aunt Māra who went to the kettle of simmering stew. He handed her a bowl and she ladled some stew into it and gave it back to him. Lulu's father lifted the bowl in the air, the abalone shell glittered and sparkled in the moon light and not for the first time Lulu thought how lucky she was to be surrounded by such wealth, bowls that sparkled in the light. "Uriel, bless this earth, bless this bounty we give back to you that you might bless these fires. Thank you for your love." He carried the bowl over and set it down on the first kiln. He repeated this incantation twice more until all three kilns had bowls atop them. Then he laid the stick to the dry grasses that Lulu and her siblings had

gathered over the past week. Lulu watched as he lit each of the kilns in turn.

By tomorrow morning the first buckets of sap would be flowing, and then the fires would not stop until the stumps were burned up. This year Lulu was guessing it would take half a moon. Birdie thought longer, Henry was hoping it would only be a week, but she knew he was wrong.

Her father turned back to face the bonfire. He raised his arms again as his voice vibrated a final incantation and then a word Lulu recognized, “ahmen”. “Friends,” his face broke into a smile. “Let’s feast.”

Everyone cheered. Aunt Māra ladled out of the stewed meat into the abalone bowls. Lulu took hers and walked over to the kilns. She watched as the stew in those bowls slowly came to a boil while hers cooled. She whispered quietly, “thank you for helping us. Thank you for helping me.”

The next morning the smell of wood smoke and the faintly sweet scent of tar overwhelmed their camp. Lulu was watching the kilns while she ate, making sure the buckets below them were not too full so that they would be impossible to carry. She was not allowed to actually handle the hot tar. No one but her father and Tamba moved the buckets to the oak barrels, which, when full, were allowed to cool and then Lulu and her sister could hammer on the lids. No one had ever been burned too badly, though her father had once scalded his hand badly enough that the skin had come off. He made sure that the children did not handle the sap until it had cooled.

Lulu didn’t need to be told twice. The tar scared Lulu. It was a fiercely hot, red-brown liquid that boiled and bubbled and almost seemed to snarl in the buckets. It smelled of the forest somehow, like the distilled essence of a tree made so dense that all the complex smells of the forest, the light smell of living leaves, the floral scent of flowers, earthiness of bark, the soil, the dry leaves, the rotting wood, the mushrooms and lichens and fungus were all condensed down to a single point that was all of them and somehow none of them as well. It was a deep smell, plumbed out of the depths of the earth, too deep, too much all at once.

Lulu did not like the smell of it until the tar had been spread on the rigging or hull of a ship. Something about the way it mixed with the salt soaked wood and hemp lines of a ship took the edge off the smell of the tar and made it smell pleasant again, like the forest standing at the edge of the sea.

What she liked even less than the smell of the tar was the heat. Sweat dripped off the end of her nose as she ate. Working the kilns was a constant sweat bath. She sweated gathering wood in the stagnant air of the hummocks around the marsh, sweated while she fed more wood into the kilns, sweated as she sat in camp, doing nothing more than eating. Sweating was simply part of life while the kilns were burning. Even the ocean was no great relief. For the past two days a warm current had made the shallows nearly as warm as the air. It was

Lulu's least favorite part of the year, making tar, but she knew it was also the most important part of the year. She often thought the only thing that would make it worse would be having to tan hides while tending the kilns. She never complained about working the kilns or gathering wood though. She did however, complain plenty about tanning hides. Who didn't? It was a smelly boring business rubbing brains all over a hide and scrapping the fur off. This was how she made it through making tar, by telling herself over and over again, at least there were no hides to tan. It's the little things that get you through.

The sun was directly overhead when her father and Tamba returned from a barrel run. As soon as the previous day's tar was cool enough to move they secured it deeper into the marsh. It was unlikely there would be another storm this year, but her father was never a man to take chances on the weather.

He nodded at her as he entered camp. Papa was a quiet man, prone to grunts and nods in lieu of the sort of comforting, I heard you type of comments most people make. He was often absorbed in a task to the degree that he seemed utterly unaware of the world around him and yet sometimes Lulu would notice that he was also watching her, watching her sister and not in fact missing anything that was going on around him at all, that he was in fact more aware of what she was doing than she was. She would pause and think about this sometimes and try to focus herself more fully on what she was doing. If she could not take in the whole world around her like her father she reasoned, she could at least pay closer attention to what she was doing.

"Lu, you look pale." He said. "Here, drink some water." Her father passed her a gourd and she gulped down the cool water. She had not realized how thirsty she was until she started drinking and then she could not stop. She finished the gourd gasping for breath.

"You need to drink more when you're down here with the heat."

"Yes, Papa."

"You can go now. Tamba and I will take over here."

Lulu smiled and dashed off before he could change his mind. She knew Birdie and Henry were down at the ship. She found them playing with their cousins. Or rather Birdie and Francis were playing one game and Henry and Owen appeared to be playing another, which included harassing Birdie and Francis with toy arrows, a volley of which appeared as Lulu was climbing up into the ship. "Hey!" she shouted as one actually stuck into the wood deck near her foot. She grabbed it. The tip was a shell that had been broken to a point and sharpened. It could easily have split the skin if fired with sufficient force. The closer she looked at it the madder she got. "That could have hurt." She leaned over the railing looking for Owen. She knew Henry hadn't come up with this plan. He might be annoying some times, but he was never dangerous. There was no sign of either of them. She descended below decks to find Birdie and Francis.

Her eyes adjusted to the darkness and she could see a strange dark shape wiggling

up under a hole near the sand in the stern. Lulu could not tell who it was and started toward it. It was only then that she noticed Birdie in her peripheral vision, sitting on the ground, carving a stick with the knife her father had given her for Christ Mass last year. Lulu did not acknowledge her sister though, padding softly past toward the stern where the shape had clearly made its way into the boat now. Lulu stopped and slid against a bulkhead to wait. The figure dusted the sand off itself and began to creep forward. Lulu heard a whispered "Birdie?" just as Henry walked through the bulkhead, past her, without seeing her, and Lulu let out a wild howl and leaped on him, tackling him to the sand. He shrieked and covered his face and before Lulu could properly box his ears he was crying and she felt bad so she stopped. Sitting astride him, pinning his shoulders to the ground, she leaned close to his face. "That arrow could have hurt someone."

"I know," he started crying again. "That's why I snuck away."

Lulu rolled off him. "What game are you playing anyway?"

Birdie watched them but did not say anything.

"We were playing boys against girls."

"Three against one?"

Henry nodded. "I came to make sure Birdie was okay, and to help her."

Lulu glanced up and for the first time noticed that Birdie was carving a spear. Not the sort of toy spear they used for pretend fishing when the *Arkhangelsk* was sailing the sands, but a real spear, of the sort she used for real fishing when the surf was calm and the Snapper ran close in to shore.

"You going fishing?"

Birdie glanced up. "No."

"What's going on?" Lulu glanced at Henry. He shook his head. She looked over at Birdie, but she only shrugged.

"Papa get back?"

Lulu nodded in the darkness. "He told me I could go." She nodded at the spear, "I'll go fishing with you if you want. Wind is down, should be a good day for it."

"I was planning to throw this at Owen."

Lulu gulped. "Birdie, that..." Her voice trailed off.

"I suppose we could fish though. If we don't see him first."

Lulu and Henry looked at each other. "Okay," said Lulu nervously. "Well, why don't we leave through the stern, and we'll just... we'll just walk down to the water and if we see them, we'll say we aren't playing anymore. Whatever it is that you're playing."

“I’m not playing.”

“Okay, whatever. Let’s just go before you hurt someone.” Lulu loved her sister but Birdie was prone to blind rages that were best avoided. Sometimes Lulu could talk her out of them, but usually, she’d learned, the best course of action was to find something Birdie liked to do and try to get her to do it. She was single-minded and once her mind had latched onto something everything else was forgotten. Even the previous thing her mind had been latched onto, like murderous desire to throw spears at her cousin. Lulu had become quite good at managing these rages, unless they happened to be aimed at her, in which case there was little she could do but run. Or hope that Henry could calm her down, which he was getting better at doing. At least he no longer egged her on, or not very often anyway.

Lulu stood up. “Can I see it?”

Birdie handed her the spear, and Lulu knew she’d won. She was glad too because the point on the spear, combined with the way Birdie could throw it, would have gone right through Owen if he’d run afoul of it. It was then that Lulu noticed the dark spot on Birdie’s leg.

“They hit you with an arrow?”

Birdie nodded. All at once Lulu could see the streaks on her cheeks and she understood that Birdie wasn’t mad, she was sad. And hurt. “Sorry,” Lulu offered. “Does it hurt?”

“No. Not anymore.”

“I’m sure they didn’t mean to.”

“No, I don’t think so. Still did though.”

“You can’t call back an arrow.” This was something their father said, and until this moment Lulu had never really understood what he meant by it.

Birdie smiled. “No, you can never call back an arrow.”

Lulu sat down next to her sister. Henry slumped down into the sand and busied himself drawing with the stick. Often the girls assumed he was in his own world, ignoring them, but then weeks later he would make a comment referencing something they had said, and Lulu and Birdie would look at each other amazed that not only had heard them talking, but had remembered every detail of it.

This time, after they all fell silent, Henry looked up from a drawing he had made. “You can call back an arrow you know. You just have to tie a string around it before you shoot it.”

Chapter 7: Sarah

The kiln fires burned for nearly a full cycle of the moon. The children tended the fires, Tamba, Kobayashi, and Papa tended the tar. There was still time to

play, time to fish, time to climb trees, wade through the marsh in search of bird eggs, and time to sit around the fire at night listening to stories. Birdie and Lulu fished the bank whenever they could. There was a barrel half full of dried fish carefully stowed in Wanderer's hold to trade when they went to Charlestown.

Still, that month, the month the tribes around them called Last Moon of the Turtles, nearly everything revolved around the fires, around the kilns, around the tar. The fires never went out, the slow drip of sap never stopped trickling out the bottom of the kilns, filling the barrels even while they slept. They kept watch through the night, just like when they were at sea, but instead of trimming sails, they emptied buckets into barrels by torchlight at all hours of the night. Even when they were out on the bank fishing, there was a thin wisp of smoke drifting out of the trees at the southern end of the island to remind them what was waiting when they got home.

It was that smoke that drew the ship to them and forever changed the course of all their lives.

Birdie was the first to see it. She'd been on the north end of the island, helping Aunt Māra weave new reed baskets when she saw a patch of white on the horizon. She and her Aunt watched the ship work her way down the coast. Long before she'd come close enough to really study Birdie had decided her captain wasn't to be trusted. The sails were not trimmed like they should have been and her course wasn't nearly what it should have been. The closer she got the more Birdie began to wonder if maybe the captain wasn't bad so much as unwilling to get more than swimming distance offshore. She wasn't much of a ship. She wasn't far from joining the *Arkhangelsk*. Birdie could tell she'd once been a Bermuda sloop with a long bowsprit. Narrower than the *Arkhangelsk*, and smaller than Wanderer, she was missing her bowsprit entirely and her sails were torn. Her real trouble though looked to be that she'd been made of oak, rather than the Jamaican cedar used for Wanderer. Oak was a strong wood, but it did not last like cedar. It needed to be tarred more regularly to stop the worms from eating the wood. The worms, fortunately, were not as gross as they sounded. They were really more like snails, though they moved like worms. They ate every ship, but they really loved oak and this vessel showed it. She was riding low in the water and Birdie could tell she was probably taking on water faster than her crew was able to keep it out. That made her a good business proposition. Really, in the end the worms, Birdie thought, not for the first time, were what made tar necessary and therefore made her life possible. No worms, no tar. No tar, no reason to be on Edisto.

Birdie and Aunt Māra build up their fire and then Birdie cut green fronds of sago palm to put on the top, sending thick white smoke billowing in to the air.

At the same time Birdie ran to the other end of the island to fetch her father. By the time they returned the ship was nearly at the mouth of the river. Her father waded out on the point and waved his arms down the beach. Though they could not make out anyone on the deck, the little boat pointed off shore

and began to head out around the bank. Birdie and her father walked slowly down the beach, keeping pace with her as she made her way south to the safer anchorage of the southern river, just beyond where Birdie's camp lay, waiting with its fresh tar.

As they walked her father pointed out the ship's weaknesses and strengths. He agreed she was riding low, but he wasn't sure it was because she was leaking. "It's possible," he allowed, "but she could have a heavy cargo too."

Birdie studied her for the minute. "I don't think so. She's old, she's worm eaten, who would load her down?"

Her father smiled. "That's a good observation, but never underestimate a merchant's ability to let greed cloud their better judgment. She may be hardly seaworthy, but many a man would still load her full of gold if the gold needed moving."

"Why?"

Her father's smile faded. "I don't really understand it Birdie, tis the way the world is right now. It's been different before, it'll likely be different again one day, but for now, love of gold is a thing we must all account for."

A gust of wind blew his beard apart like the forked tail of a swallow and he gathered it back in his hands and stopped. "We don't though Birdie. We never do things for the love of gold. The love of people, the love of ships, the love of the sea. Always things that will return our love. Gold does not return love. There is nothing wrong with it, it is a fine metal, a grand reflection of the sun, but it is not a thing to work for, not a thing to worship. That is not the way of our people."

Birdie did not say anything, but she nodded to let her father know she'd heard him. She still didn't understand why people wanted gold so much. They wanted great piles of it, and for what? It wasn't comfortable to sit on, you could not eat it. You could buy food it with it. Flour was nice, Birdie liked flour for bread. She especially liked it when Kobayashi helped her fry little cakes in the pan. But it did not take much gold to buy flour. It seemed to her that you could get enough gold to buy a year's worth of flour in not much time at all. After that, why would you need it? You could make almost everything you could possibly need. Except maybe rope. Making rope was a pain. Birdie decided she would have to try getting some gold to see which was harder, getting gold or making rope. If getting gold was easier then perhaps she could understand why you'd go out and get some gold, so you didn't have to make cordage.

The little ship's captain was savvy enough at least to navigate the mouth of the inlet without too much trouble. He'd been lucky with timing, arriving with the rising tide and riding it up the river mouth without trouble. Until he'd promptly run aground on a sandbar. The ship came to a lurching halt just as Birdie and her father came over the dune. Tamba, who'd strapped on a sword, came up behind them and the three of them stood watching the ship. There was no one

on the deck, which was confusing because surely someone had been steering. And then they watched a man come up out of the hold with a dazed look on his face. He smiled and waved. Birdie and her father glanced at each other. Her father shrugged and waved back. Birdie did the same.

As they all stood smiling at each other there came a new sound from down in the hold, a light floating Irish lilt of a voice, a woman's voice, and it was singing a bawdy, rough sailor's song of full of cussing, drinking, and fighting. It worked its way merrily forward somewhere below the deck. And then a streak of gray came bounding out of the hold, landed softly on deck, and paused to survey the scene. Lulu came up the dune at the same time and bumped into Birdie. They watched as the woman's long red hair blew in the wind. Her large, wide-brimmed hat partly hid one of the more striking faces Lulu and Birdie would ever see. A fair and sharply defined jaw, with thin red lips curled ever so slightly into a smile, extended out of the shadow that held the rest of her face in darkness. The woman, for she was very obviously a woman, even though she wore sailor's britches, stiff and tarred, had on a long coat despite the heat. She wore it unbuttoned, but held close to her waist by a sash, much like the one Lulu was fond of wearing at sea, except that the woman had a hatchet and a pistol thrust into her sash.

She said something they couldn't hear to the man, and a third man came up out of the hold and waved. The woman pulled out a knife and deftly sliced a backstay rope. Birdie instinctively glanced at her father. He raised an eyebrow but otherwise seemed just as transfixed as she was. Before Birdie could fully put together what was happening the woman backed up took two quick steps forward, vaulted up off the gunwale and sailed out into the air, riding the arc of the rigging up and out until she was very nearly clear of the water at which point she let go, arched her back and landed, knees bent, crouched like a cat, hand on her hatchet.

Birdie saw out of the corner of her eye that Tamba and her father were both staring now, open mouthed. "Not the first time she's done that," her father muttered. Then he seemed to gather his wits again and slid down the dune they were standing on to greet the stranger.

Three men lowered a boat and came ashore in the usual manner to join the woman who was talking now with her father. Lulu and Birdie stood on top the dune, watching as their father and Tamba greeted the strangers. Birdie wasn't sure where Kobayashi was, but she suspected he was in a tree with a rifle somewhere. Her father might like to pretend he welcomed every ship, but he was careful too. He made sure someone had his back whenever a new ship showed up. It seemed to Birdie though that this was probably safe. There was a woman on this boat. Birdie had only twice before encountered women on boats and both times they were passing as men. At least they seemed to be. Birdie knew at once but no one else seemed to, or they pretended not to, it was hard to know.

This was the first time she'd seen a woman being a woman and being a sailor

and perhaps being a captain. She was pretty sure this woman was her hero. She watched in awe as she shook her father's hand like a man, smiled and laughed freely. She was, Birdie realized with a rush, just like Lulu and herself. Only bigger. Older. Was it possible to remain as she was now as she grew older? She had never really considered this until now. She had never really seen herself in any adult, even those she looked up to like her father and Tamba and Kobayashi, not even in Aunt Māra. She loved them all, but she was not like them, this she knew deep down in some place that she had not thought up or created through her experience. Some place that was just there, had always been there and would always be there she assumed. She was not like them. She was like this woman. This smiling, laughing, singing, swearing, hatchet-packing, trouser-wearing woman.

Lulu who stood silent beside seemed to feel the same way when she said suddenly, "Who is that woman?"

"I don't know." Was all Birdie could say.

"I want to know."

"Me too,"

Come on, let's go down there." Lulu started down the dune toward the adults. Birdie hesitated for an instant and then bounded after her.

They broke awkwardly into the semicircle of adults who were still laughing at some story. Her father glanced around and seeing Lulu and Birdie moved behind them and said, "these are my daughters, Lulu and Birdie."

The men tipped their hats, one of them said, nice to meet you ladies, but neither Lulu or Birdie looked anywhere but at the face of the woman. Birdie now saw she was not only a woman sailor, but beautiful as well, with striking green eyes that seems to sparkle and glitter as the evening light bounced off the river beside them.

"My goodness Nicholas, what beautiful children." She stepped forward with a kind pretend formality and offered her hand to Birdie. Birdie smiled shyly, but shook her hand. The woman did not return her shake, instead she gripped her hand firmly and turned her arm over gently back and forth. She murmured and nodded. "You're a sailor?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Oh, don't ma'am me my dear. My name is Sarah. Call me Sarah, please."

"Okay Sarah." She released Birdie's hand and turned to Lulu to repeat the handshaking. After which she turned away and nodded to her father. "Where is their mother?"

"She's dead." It was Birdie who said it. It just popped out of her mouth before she had formed the thought.

Her father nodded once. There was an uncomfortable silence.

“I am sorry.” Ann wrung her hands and seemed temporarily at loss for words.

“It was a long time ago now,” her father said at last.

Tamba, who had been staring at the sad little ship sitting on the sandbar, spoke up now. “We need to get your ship off that bar. I don’t think the tide is going to do it, we’ll need some long lines to pull her back when the ebb tide starts.” He glanced inland. “Which should be before the sun is behind those trees.”

The men climbed back in the boat to bring lines ashore to help pull the boat off the sandbar. Birdie and Lulu took Sarah to camp. There was an awkward silence when they arrived to find no one else there. Birdie had assumed Aunt Māra would be starting dinner, but she was nowhere to be found. Birdie stirred the ashes of the fire and laid in some grass and twigs, building up the fire. She turned around to get larger pieces of wood and found Sarah behind her, a bundle of wood under her arm. Birdie smiled. “Thank you.”

Birdie took the wood and laid it carefully into the fire, making sure not to choke the flames. Sarah sat down on a log. “How long have you been here?”

Birdie considered this for a moment. “Four moons I think.”

“Four moons?” Sarah chuckled. “I expect it’s been longer than that if you’re counting time in moons. Where did you grow up?”

Birdie glanced at Lulu. Lulu shrugged. “Here. The sea. Summer camp.”

“Summer camp? Where’s that?”

Lulu and Birdie glanced at each other. “Up north.” This was the answer her father always gave strangers. Birdie wasn’t entirely sure why he didn’t just say Block Island since that’s where they had stayed the last two years, but he didn’t, so she didn’t.

Sarah laughed again. “You two are suspicious of me aren’t you? Well, I suppose you ought to be. But I promise, I am not your enemy.”

“No ma’am.” Birdie looked down, ashamed at being called out for not trusting a stranger, but still not able to trust her. She busied herself with a kettle, boiling water to make a tea.

“Do you want to know where I am from?”

Birdie considered this, and realized that, although she was about to say yes because it was the polite thing to do, the truth was she did not care. She did not know where Tamba was from beyond the vague understanding that he came from Western Africa. Kobayashi came from Japan. She already knew Sarah probably came from Ireland since her voice reminded Birdie of Uncle Cole who was from Ireland. Beyond that it did not much matter out here. It mattered who you were, what you did every day that made up who you were, not who you used to be or where you came from. That was something the British cared so

much about and the people Birdie knew made it a point not to care about at all. Her father made it a point to tell them they were Alban, that they were different in some regards, that they were to hold themselves to a higher standard, this Birdie understood very clearly, but it was not because of where they came from, they did not come from anywhere, they were just out here, they had always been out here.

Still, Birdie nodded. But she'd been slow on the draw and Sarah picked up on that. Birdie smiled and looked away. When she looked back there was something different about Sarah's eyes, like she understood Birdie somehow. "You don't care at all do you?"

Birdie liked her more instantly. She smiled. "If you want to tell me about where you came from I would love to hear about it."

Sarah took off her hat and then her kerchief that held back her red-brown hair. She gathered up her hair and twisted it in her hands. "I'm from a couple islands up the way," was all she said.

"Where are you going?" This was all that mattered in Birdie's world.

"We're headed to New Providence Island."

Lulu and Birdie glanced at each other. A sailor's answer to the question where are you going is always, wherever the wind takes me.

Several ships that had careened at Lulu and Birdie's camp the previous year had called New Providence Island home. The men on those ships described it as a kind of chaotic paradise. Lulu and Birdie had found their stories hard to believe. Still, Birdie understood wanting to sail and the idea that Sarah really was a sailor made a kind of light buoyant feeling swelled in her and made her feel like she was larger and could do anything.

"You know how to sail then?"

"I'm learning." She laughed. "I could be better, that's why I want to join a crew. If they'll have me."

Birdie smiled. She knew many wouldn't though. Women were considered back luck on ships. Sailors were a superstitious bunch. Birdie had never wanted to be around them really. She'd never wanted to be part of a crew. She'd always wanted a ship. Her own ship. But then she didn't need to learn how to sail, she didn't need a crew. She had one.

Lulu spoke up for the first time, "You certainly know how to make an entrance. You were just like the stories the pirates tell."

Sarah raised her eyebrows and glanced back and forth between the girls. "You hear a lot of pirate stories do you?"

Birdie shrugged. Lulu went on. "Half the ships that careen here are pirate. Or are hoping to be."

“Hoping to be?”

“Well, there was one, they hadn’t actually captured a ship. But they had a Black Flag and they were looking for ships. When they weren’t bailing.”

Sarah smiled. “And that’s what you do? You help them careen and tar?”

The girls nodded.

Their father returned saying Tamba had taken the ship into the marsh, to help them anchor it just offshore from Wanderer. They were going to careen and tar them together beginning the next day. *Eliza May* turned out to have a crew of six, including Sarah. Her father sent Birdie down to the end of the island to fetch her Aunt and Uncle and cousins. Between the two camps, plus some salt pork from *Eliza May*, they were able to put together a stew that Birdie seasoned with wild onions she’d gathered the day before. She and Lulu had spent the morning hunting the marsh for eggs, which they boiled to go along with stew. Aunt Māra made bread the way the Waccamaw did, laying the dough right on on the coals and then breaking the hard crust into half moon shapes into which they poured the stew before setting the whole thing in their abalone bowls to cool. The result was a bready, gooey, stewy mess that was Birdie’s favorite meal, after turtle.

It was beginning to get cool in the evenings and her father had been lighting the big fire again some nights. Though it wasn’t cold enough to gather around it he lit it tonight and Uncle Cole brought out his fiddle and the men from *Eliza May* brought their instruments and there was playing and dancing well into the night. Birdie danced with her father, with Sarah, with Tamba, and finally was too tired to dance anymore and sat and watched the men from *Eliza May*, pass the rum between them. They offered it to her father, who glanced up at their commotion to see the jug being offered. Birdie watched as he stood. Her father looked at the men and smiled. “Normally I don’t drink. But I do appreciate the offer and I want you to feel welcome here, I have no complaint with any man that drinks, so long as he controls himself within the bounds of reason.” The other men listened, glanced among themselves and slowly nodded. “Sounds good,” said one.

But then her father did a thing Birdie did not expect. He took the jug and drank a bit gulp from it and handed it back to men, who smiled and cheered. Her father smiled and sat back down next to Sarah and resumed talking.

Birdie soon found herself jerking awake after having dosed off and so she went into the hut, gathered up her quilts and climbed the dune just beyond the fire. She laid down on the top to watch the sea as she fell asleep. She heard the sandy squeak of bare feet and her father sat down beside her, resting his arm on her back. “Good night Birdie.” he patted her back.

“Good night Papa.”

The sat in silence, staring out at the moonlight on the water.

“Papa?”

“Yes?”

“Why did you drink the rum?”

He leaned over and looked her in the eyes, his beard tickling her forehead. “Sometimes Birdie people are far enough from the path that they need know there is path, and more importantly, that they can get from where they are to the path. If I had just said no thank, I don’t drink, while that’s true, it would have set me far apart from them. For me to have a sip of rum to bring them closer is more important, more valuable for both of us.”

Birdie knew her father believed there was a path, a right and true path, for everyone. He believed that the first task of life was finding that path, but that no one walked the same path and there was no single way to find that path. That was life he said, finding that path and then sticking to it. Birdie had heard him say this thousands of times, but until now she’d never really understood that it wasn’t a path where you could see what was ahead of you, it was a path you were constantly making. There wasn’t a right answer in front of you, there wasn’t an answer at all. You were making the path every time you chose to do or not do something.

“So there is no path then?”

“What do you mean?”

She told him what she had thought. He smiled and rubbed her back. “Exactly,” he said. “Exactly.”

They sat in silence for a while until Lulu and Henry climbed sleepily up the dune and laid down beside her. Her father tucked each of them into their quilts and kissed their cheeks before returning to fire.

Chapter 8: The Syndicate

Lulu stood in the shade of the oaks, watching the thick hemp cords that held the *Eliza May* over on its side. Her job was to inspect the ropes and the tree that held them, looking for any signs of weakness or fraying or rubbing. If any of these ropes slipped or broke loose it would put more strain on the remaining ropes and if they went, the ship would roll back upright, crushing anyone who was working under it. It was pleasant work, watching things, though she couldn’t help but feel tense and nervous since it was more than likely her father working under the boat. He always took the most dangerous jobs himself. If anything slipped she would scream and run which would be signal for anyone in the way of the rolling ship to run for their lives. Lulu was well known for her ability to out shriek anyone, which was why her father had given her the job.

Lulu kept an eye, and an ear, on the ropes, but she also couldn’t help but keep an eye on Sarah. Sarah had donned sailor’s canvas pants and a cotton work

shirt just like the men. She used a bandana to hold her red hair back. She was helping Tamba tend the fire and stir the great iron kettle as they heated some of the tar. The tar did not have to be re-heated to apply, but it went on easier, and more importantly penetrated deeper into the wood when it was warm. So Sarah stood, looking like a man but for her hair, working the tar. Lulu had never seen a woman like her. A woman who was both beautiful when she wanted to be, but also, as Lulu had seen the previous night around the fire, able to turn into as much of a rough-tongued sailor as any who had ever graced their shore. She was two things it seemed to Lulu: a sailor and a woman. She and Birdie had discussed it quietly that morning, sitting on the dune eating dried fish as the sun rose. Sarah was exactly what Lulu wanted to be: a sailor and a woman.

She thought about what her father would have said if she'd told him this. He probably would have smiled and said, you can do whatever you want to do. But it was one thing to say that when you were Nicholas, it was another thing to actually do it when you were Lulu, who spent most of her time feeling small, curious, and unsure of the right thing to do. She knew everyone liked her stories. But she knew she invented elaborate stories primarily to keep anyone from thinking too much about her, to get them involved in some world she could control rather than looking to her, or at her, in this one, which she knew well enough she could not control at all.

Then there was Sarah. She seemed very much in control of this world right here, right now. Lulu watched as Sarah dipped a wooden bucket in the great kettle of tar, the muscles in her arms taut and ropy as knotted lines. Then she lugged it around the bow, out of view. Lulu desperately wanted to ask her if she really was in control, if she really did know what she was doing, and would she show Lulu how to do this, how to know where you belonged in the world. Instead she remained in the shadows, watching as Sarah worked alongside the men.

Lulu was relieved of rope watching duty after the hull was tarred and worked moved to the deck. The day was long, the tarring continued long after dark, everyone working by torches staked in the sand around the boat. They ate in shifts, dried fish, leftover pork. Lulu and Henry sat to the side, chewing strips of dried fish, watching the shadows of the men working streak across the sand. They looked a little like they were dancing as they moved back and forth among the torches, dragging the sopping rags of tar across the wood.

Finally they were too tired. The men in the crew of *Eliza May* sat down around the fire, passing a bottle of rum between them, telling quiet stories of peaceful shores they'd seen, other ships they'd careened. Lulu and Birdie sat down at the top of the dune, their backs to the fire, and watched their father walking down to the shore to swim. Sarah came up and sat down beside them. None of them spoke.

They sat in a line, watching the moonlight rippling on the quietly lapping waves. There was no swell, no wind, the sea was calm as a lake. Clouds near the horizon

caught the bluish glow of moonlight and scattered it among themselves until it faded into blackness and the bottom of the clouds merged with the darkness of the night sea.

Their father who had been standing at the shore, with his back to them, lifted his arms and pulled off his shirt. Then he dropped his pants and ran into the water.

“Oh goodness,” said Sarah watching momentarily, but then quickly turning away, toward Lulu. “Does he always swim naked?”

Lulu and Birdie exchanged a look. “How else would you swim?” Lulu asked, wondering, for the first time if maybe Sarah didn’t know everything. She looked at her in the moonlight and noticed her face was flushed. Lulu felt embarrassed for her and quickly looked away, back toward her father who was a tiny head bobbing among the crumbling white foam of the small waves. It was then that Lulu noticed the light swirling around her father as he swam back to shore. He wrapped himself in a quilt and came walking up the beach. “Great night for a swim girls, phosphorescence everywhere.” He nodded to Sarah, but she continue to look away.

Lulu jumped up and Birdie was right behind her. Sarah might dress like a man, and do a sailor’s job, but Lulu and Birdie knew some things too, and nightswimming was one of them. Night swimming is best on a quiet night, though the girls and their brother had been known to swim in wilder weather as well. Calm nights were best for phosphorescence though. Her father claimed the eerie blue light bubbling up around you like tiny glowing stars caught in the sea were actually tiny animals. He’d learned this sailing with a man from London the year before they’d come to the Carolinas, but Lulu wasn’t sure she believed it. Her father told just as many stories as she did.

When Lulu stopped at the shoreline she was surprised to find not just Birdie with her, but Sarah as well. Lulu smiled encouragingly at her as she began to pulled off her clothes, but she could sense that it would be best if she went ahead into the sea. She knew some adults didn’t like nakedness. This confused her, but she respected it, and, after leaving her pants and shirt on the sand out of the reach of the waves, she ran with Birdie into the water.

They stopped knee deep in the water and looked down to see the bubbles coming off their legs. Bubbles that glowed like tiny blue coals floating up to the surface of the water as she moved. She heard a gasp and looked behind her. Sarah stood naked in the water, her head bent down, transfixed by the blue glow. “I have never. . .” she did not finish the thought. Instead she began walking farther out. The girls could see a blue ripple of light following behind her like a wake as she moved through the water. She stopped when the water was up to her stomach and turned around toward them. “This is unbelievable,” she said, “what is it?”

Lulu shrugged. “It depends who you ask. Tambo and Papa say it’s tiny animals. They sailed with a naturalist who caught some and showed them under a glass.

Kobayashi says it's the spirits of the sea playing."

"What do you think it is?"

"It's really beautiful, that's what it is." Lulu smiled. She enjoyed knowing something Sarah did not, it made her like Sarah more. She felt equal, also in possession of mysteries. Different, but equal. "Watch this," she said, and dove into the water kicking her legs together like a mermaid's tail. It left a haunting wake of ghostly pale blue water behind her. She surfaced near Sarah.

The three of them took turns swirling around to stir up the bubbles of glowing phosphorescence. Birdie was the best swimmer, unafraid of the deeper water where Lulu well knew sharks also swam. She watched her sister streak round, swimming in circles like pods of dolphins did to herd fish, only Birdie stirred up a column of blue light that rose up to the surface where it spread out like spilled blue milk.

"Your sister is quite a swimmer," Sarah said as they watched her circle. Lulu was proud of Birdie, she was quite a swimmer. It wasn't that long ago that Lulu would have been jealous, but she knew she was a better tree climber so it didn't bother her any more. She liked that her sister was a good swimmer.

Lulu shivered and turned back toward shore. "I think I am going to go get warm by the fire."

"Oh stay a little longer, please?" Birdie floated, catching her breath. "Swim around, it'll warm you up."

"No, I want to dry off and be warm by the fire."

Birdie pouted but said nothing.

"I think it's time for me to go in too Birdie," said Sarah.

Birdie gave in and they all waded in together, swirling up the last lingering trails of blue light as they went. They dressed quickly, shivering more in the night air than they had in the water, and ran up the beach to the fire. Most of the men were passed out around the fire when they got back. Tamba and Kobayashi were nowhere to be seen. Only their father was still up, lying on his side by the fire, head propped up on his arm, quietly smoking his pipe, the sweet smell of tobacco and sweet gum bark drifting up from the bowl.

"How was it?" He asked.

"Beautiful," they all said together and then laughed.

Lulu flopped down on the sand close to the fire and leaned back against her father's outstretched legs. Birdie and Sarah sat down nearby.

"Your children won't tell me what makes that fantastic glow..."

"Oh no?" Her father glanced at them. Lulu shrugged. "Well, it depends who you ask I supposed. I sailed with a man from the Royal Society of London who

showed me tiny animals under the lens of a glass. He claimed they made the substance that glow. I have sailed with others, in the southern seas who called something similar Te Lapa, but this was deeper, not on the surface at all so I am not sure if the tiny animals can account for that." Her father smiled mischievous and said, "I also have the very old log book of a captain who calls it 'the essence of sea nymphs' "

Lulu noticed Sarah's cheeks flushed red. "And what do you think it is?"

Her father took a long drag on his pipe and exhaled slowly. "I think it's beautiful."

"That's what your daughter said."

Her father chuckled. "Well, Sarah, what do you think it is?"

Sarah thought for a moment and then smiled. "Well, it is beautiful. . ."

"That settles it then."

None of them spoke for some time, they listened to the soft crackle of the fire, the faint rumble of the sea, the rustling clatter of palm fronds.

Papa stood up, stretched extravagantly, and announced he was headed to bed. The three scooted closer together, but did not talk, they watched the fire burn down. Lulu spent some time screwing up her courage and then softly asked the question she'd been wondering, "Sarah, are you the captain of *Eliza May*?"

Sarah didn't stop staring in to the fire, but Lulu saw her smile. "We are a syndicate."

"What's that?" Birdie had sat up.

"It's a group of people with a common purpose, working toward that purpose so that we all make it where we're going."

"Did you sign articles?"

"Yes."

Birdie nodded as though she were satisfied. Lulu wasn't sure. "So if you signed articles, and you're sailing as Brethren, who is the captain?"

"There isn't one."

"Who makes decisions when a storm comes?"

Sarah stared into the fire. The hiss of burning wood filled the silence. "That hasn't happened," was all she said.

Lulu and Birdie exchanged a look. *It will* they were both thinking.

"I understand what you're asking me girls. You're asking who is in charge and the answer is no one." She sat back so she could see both of them, they instinctively scooted closer. "Why do you need a captain?"

Birdie did not hesitate. “So one person can make decisions when there is no time to make them by committee.”

“Well, we’re not planning to do anything other than sail to Nassau. So we’re probably not going to need to make many decisions in a hurry.”

Lulu realized suddenly that Sarah did not know everything. That she might wear sailors britches and a man’s shirt, but she had done very little sailing and when she talked she revealed how little she knew. Lulu was glad she wasn’t sailing with *Eliza May*. She knew eventually the sea would force decisions on them, it always did and they would not have anyone to make them, and they would argue and precious time would be wasted and people would be hurt. Or worse. But she said nothing.

Birdie was not so quiet. “You can’t run a ship through a storm by committee. Every sailor knows that.”

It was Sarah’s turn to be quiet. She turned her head toward Birdie and Lulu could only see her red hair, glowing even redder in the firelight. She understood in an instant why they had no captain. No one wanted to step up. No one wanted to be responsible. Why would anyone want to lead? It was much easier to sit back and let someone else make the decisions for you. The problem was that if everyone did that, then there was no one to make those decisions.

“I suppose we will need a captain at some point.”

“You will,” Birdie nodded. “And you need to pick one before you need one.”

And, thought Lulu, you need to pick one who knows where to go. It was something she and her father had talked about once. She asked why he sometimes was not the captain of *Wanderer*, why he let Tamba and Kobayashi lead. All he would say is that different times called for different people.

As she often did when her father wouldn’t tell her what she wanted to know, she’d asked Tamba. They’d been in *Wanderer*’s bow, using the reefed foresail as hammock, watching the sunset. At first Tamba said nothing, just kept staring out at the sea. Then, slowly he started to speak quietly. “You have to know where you are going Lulu, when you don’t, you may have to follow others for a time. Some of them may go where you’re going, and that may help. Some of them won’t, that’ll set you back. But in the end you have to find your own way. The secret is you can’t think your way out of it, you have to feel it, you have to know deep down. To listen to your heart Lu, to reason with your mind and to understand the world and its winds with your eyes, your ears, your nose, and the sense that tickles your spine when you know, this is the way, this is the wind, this is the line across the water, this is where I am supposed to go. And when you know that, when you feel that, open the canvas, catch every bit of that wind you can without any bit of fear in your heart and nothing can stop you.”

Sarah sat back and looked at them for moment, studying their faces. “How old are you girls again?”

“Nine,” they said together. They all laughed.

“Can I tell you something?”

They both nodded.

“You have to promise not to tell anyone, not even your father.”

Lulu and Birdie’s eye met for a flash, but neither of them said anything.

“My name is not Sarah. My name is Ann.”

Lulu considered this. It wasn’t much of a secret. She’d figured out years ago that hardly anyone who passed through their camp used the name their parents had given them. Even Lulu and Birdie didn’t use their real names. What Sarah, or Ann, was really revealing was how little time she’d spent at sea, and for this Lulu was grateful. This information was far more valuable than a name, and Lulu loved her for it far more than she did for the trust she was showing in telling them her name. On impulse, before she could stop herself, she threw her arms around Ann’s neck and hugged her.

Chapter 9: Trading Upriver

Two days later Birdie sat at the edge of the river, watching the *Eliza May* thread her way through the shallows, out to sea. Her father was on board to help. Delos was tied to a stern line so he could sail back once he’d guided them out of the river mouth and into the open ocean. Birdie could see her father, but she was watching Ann. Ann was lying down on the bowsprit with a lead line in the water, taking soundings. All Birdie could really see of her was her red hair near the tip in the bowsprit, but that was exactly how she wanted to remember her, clutching the bowsprit, leading the way out to sea.

Earlier that morning as they’d help load the last bunch of dried, salted fish the crew of the *Eliza May* had purchased from Birdie, Ann had pulled Lulu and Birdie aside and told them that she intended to make Nassau before the year was out and that she would be working hard to get a ship, and that if she did, they were to be part of her crew. Birdie liked this idea, though she knew there was next to no chance it would actually happen. Still, what stuck in her mind more than that was her offhand suggestion, “See if you can convince your father to go south this summer, not north.” Birdie had never thought of trying to influence their destination. It wasn’t that she couldn’t. They were after all a crew, destinations were agreed upon, not handed down. But Birdie had never had a reason to go any particular direction so she was happy to go wherever others wanted. Now though, maybe she did have a direction she wanted to go.

Birdie watched until she could no longer see any people, and noticed that Delos was being pulled in closer to the *Eliza May*. Soon her father would be back. Soon it would be back to work making tar. Birdie had an escape plan. She’d managed to unload one bundle of dried fish to the crew of the *Eliza May* in exchange for several copper kettles. Now she wanted to take those upriver and

see if she could trade some of the Waccamaw families for some kind of blue dye she could make into ink. She'd seen them with blue painted on their faces and knew they must have some, though whether or not she could trade for any of it she did not know. Still Tamba was an excellent trader and she was hoping she could convince him to go with her. They needed vegetables. They'd have to make a trip upriver soon anyway.

Few people lived as close to the sea as Birdie's family. There was too much salt in the river to drink, too much salt in the air to grow crops. People came out in the warmer months when Birdie's family went north, but when it cooled, and big schools of fish moved further offshore, most people headed back up the rivers, further from the sea, where the land was better for growing, the water better for drinking.

Birdie and her sister dug the marshes for sedge grass roots, and gathered a root the Waccamaw people called potato. The island also had plenty of Muscadines, blackberries, and raspberries, which they all gathered when they ripened. But they relied on trade with people upcountry to provide a variety of vegetables, corn and squash, tomatoes, okra, and rice. They brought dried fish, fishing line and French guns to trade. Most of the things Birdie's family had to trade upriver was traded from passing ships, which paid for tar in whatever was in their holds.

And everyone always traded news. The river carried stories from far up in the mountains down to the coast and the river boatmen carried stories from the coast back up into the mountains. Birdie had never been more than a few miles inland, but Tamba had once trekked far up into Iroquois territory with copper pots and French rifles to trade for seeds and high quality corn from the foothills, fatter and plumper than the red corn that grew in the coastal plain.

To her surprise, Tamba thought going upriver to trade was an excellent idea and agreed to take Lulu and Birdie as soon as their father returned with Delos.

Their father grumbled a bit about losing his best helpers, but then his eye fell on Henry who happened to walk through camp. "Come here my boy, I have a task for you. . ."

Lulu and Birdie leaped in the boat with Tamba and unfurled the sail and pushed off before their father changed his mind. There was a decent cross wind that had them tacking slightly up through the marsh, until the waterway narrowed down to something more like a river. There was a big island at the entrance this year, which Tamba called a good omen, when the river splits further inland it means the waters have been low, floods are unlikely.

The marsh was what separated Birdie's family from the world. It was the province of muskrats and minnows, snails climbing reeds with the tide, herons stalking fish. Humans rarely lingered. But as you worked your way up the rivers, the shores became more crowded. At first were the small huts of some of the few remaining natives who fished the rivers, hunted the bottoms and marshlands, and mostly kept to themselves. Or tried. Parties of slave traders

from Charlestown had begun raiding these small villages the previous year, capturing men to work the plantations further up the river. Usually the men came by sea, and Birdie's father had twice sailed upriver ahead of the slave traders, warning the villagers. Most of them had moved south by now, though between the British in Charlestown, the Iroquois inland to the west, the sea to the east, and the Spanish to the south, they were running out of places to hide. Birdie didn't understand why the people in Charlestown couldn't work their own farms. She'd asked her father but he'd only laughed and said the British believed work was something other people did for them.

She'd also asked him what would happen to the Waccamaw and the Winyah and Sewee and the others. He'd stopped smiling then and looked very tired, "they will be like us Birdie, they will run as long as they can, and then. . ." He gestured at the air, "who knows." Birdie remembered this exchange chiefly because it startled her. She had never thought of herself as running. So far as she could tell she had never run from anything, but it made her sad to think that other people had to run.

As Tamba tacked back across the river, the first cluster of now-abandoned huts came into a view. They were stout structures, made of pine logs and thatched with palmetto fronds, like her own home. But these were bigger homes, made of larger logs, and raised off the ground to keep them dry even when the river flooded. These homes were built to last, Birdie's was temporary.

There should have been cooking fires burning, the smell of drying fish, smoke, and hides, naked children playing in the river, swimming out to their boat, laughing and splashing. Now there was only a stillness and silence that left Birdie shivering even in the hot sun in the middle of the river. She glanced at Lulu, who was watching the shore, not saying anything. She wondered what Ann would say. She knew Ann was running. Who was Ann running from? Birdie hadn't asked, wouldn't have asked even now. When the British were around, everyone seemed to be running from someone.

The sail lufted and they all went back to paddling. Lulu continued staring back at the remains of the village even as it faded from view. "Do you think those families are working on the plantations?"

Birdie shrugged. "Maybe. Maybe they escaped."

"Papa told me they've been raiding again, they're shipping them off to the islands now."

Birdie nodded, she'd heard this story as well. Tamba seemed shaken by it. She knew it was the same thing they'd done to his people in Africa. Then to see it here too. Like they were following him. For the thousandth time she wondered why someone didn't stop the British. But no one ever did. Birdie had long ago decided she was going to stop them. She didn't know how, she didn't know if she could, but she was going to try. Someone had to, why not her?

The river narrowed and finally they saw signs of life, small farms of indentured

servants who'd paid off their debts, escaped slaves, a few former pirates who'd had the sense to take what they had and get out. Their farms were meager, but they usually had vegetables to trade for salted fish and other things Birdie and her family had easy access to that they did not.

Tamba hollered to an African man fishing from the bank. He pointed Delos over to him. The two exchanged words in a language Birdie did not recognize and Tamba did not translate. He merely nodded goodbye and pointed the bow back toward the middle of the river. The wind caught the sail and Birdie was able to stop paddling for long enough to ask Tamba what the man had said.

"He said the slavers from Charlestown came again. He hid in the swamp, but they took half the Sewee in the village up the south fork." Tamba glanced up the river.

Birdie's chest felt hot, like she couldn't breathe. She thought of the children she knew had been in that village, some her age. She'd traded dried salt for gum from a woman in that village. She tried to imagine her now, bent on some field, overseer's whip stinging her back. It made her chest burn with anger. She said as much to Tamba.

"There are always slaves, Birdie" Tamba said. "The people farther inland, they take slaves too sometimes. My people, before we were taken slaves, we took people as slaves. Your ancestors took slaves." He shifted his weight and the boat rocked. "The tragedy is not to be a slave, the tragedy is to be a slave to the British, a people without mercy or compassion. It is one thing to be taken by a people who see you as a defeated equal. It is another to end up with someone who sees you as a dog. The British. The French. The Spanish. The Dutch. These are the only people I have ever encountered who see anyone that way." He rummaged in his bag and pulled out a stick of dried fish. "Kobayashi says the Chinese are that way toward his people, but I cannot say."

They on sailed in silence.

Eventually they came to the Waccamaw village where Tamba was hoping to trade. Smoke rose from cooking fires just back from the river. A woman washing clothes in the river eyed them and seemed prepared to run, but she did not move. Tamba spoke to her in French and she nodded back at the village and said something in return. Birdie thought she heard the word British, she was sure she heard Charlestown. "They were here too? She asked.

Tamba nodded, but did not say anything. He ran the boat aground a few yards upriver from the woman. Birdie climbed out. Lulu held the boat while Tamba looped a line of the gnarled oak root protruding from the bank. He grabbed his gun out of the boat and they headed up into the village.

The village was nearly empty. A few fires burned, but there were no children playing, no one singing, no life.

"Half the people are still in the bush, hiding from the slavers."

“Are they still out here?” Birdie had not considered that the men from Charlestown might still be out looking for slaves. She felt a chill pass through her. What if they came for Tamba? For her? For Lulu? It might feel like it was a lifetime away, but Charlestown wasn’t that far. Once the marsh country was behind you the river actually became broader, there was less floodplain for it run out over so more of it stayed together and it became wider and deeper. People called it the Stono river and it cut a arcing path around St John’s island and eventually the narrow mouth of Wappoo Creek opened up, and took you through the last stretch of land, into the Ashley River right on the back porch of Charlestown. Paddling it would take at least three days, though with the sail on Delos her father had managed to do it in just over a day and half. With a boat full of oars the slavers could do it in a day easily.

Tamba shrugged. “You girls have your knives yes?”

Birdie nodded. She saw Lulu instinctively touch the knife at her waist. Tamba nodded. “And you know how to fire a gun. If you need to, take one off me and use it.” Without waiting for them to answer he turned around and walked toward the village.

It was not the happy place it had a been just a few weeks before. The people regarded them warily from the shadows of their huts. The head man came out and greeted Tamba, shaking his hand and clasping his back. He nodded to the girls and brought them all into the shade of an oak. A woman brought them tea. Tamba and the chief spoke half in French, half in Waccamaw, a kind if pidgin that Birdie could not follow, though she recognized the words for slaves and she thought the world for south. She thought perhaps the man was saying that the whole village was getting ready to move south. She knew others had done the same. The land south of Savannah was largely uninhabited until you came to the first Spanish settlements in Florida, but there were rumors the Spanish were pushing north, seeking to expand their territory. Still, rumors were less worrying than the actual attacks happening here.

They finished their tea. Two women came over to look at their dried fish and wares. They listened to Tamba explain Birdie’s desire for blue dye. One of the woman smiled at her, the other just stared at her for a long time, looking away whenever Birdie tried to meet her eyes. Eventually she nodded and walked off. She returned to their shaded spot under the tree with a small dried bladder, which she handed to Birdie, motioning with her hands that she should untie it. Birdie did, careful not to spill any, and looked inside. It was a dark inky color. She could not tell for sure if it was blue though. Lulu saved her by pulling a brush and piece of paper out of her bag.

Birdie carefully dipped the brush and dabbed it on the top the paper. The liquid hit the paper in the clear blue drop that held for just an instant before it broke and began to dissolve a deep rich blue that spread like a wave breaking over the beach. It left a slightly darker blue edge around it. It was the most beautiful blue Birdie had ever seen. She wanted to jump up and hug the woman, but she

did not. Instead she kept her face composed, she nodded to Tamba who smiled and said something in Waccamaw. The woman picked up one of the bundles of dried fish and left without another word. Tamba glanced at Birdie. "They took her husband in the raid yesterday."

Birdie watched her back as she walked into one of the huts. "Are they leaving?"

Tamba nodded, but did not say anything. He went back to bargaining with the other woman. The chief watched Lulu and Birdie and smiled. "We are leaving."

Birdie's eyes must of widened, because he laughed. "Do not be so surprised. Your tongue, it is not too hard. Not so hard as this one," he gestured to Tamba who ignored him. The chief looked at Birdie. "I am sorry your father did not come. I always looked forward to him. I will miss him." Then he broke into a laugh. "But I will not miss his loin cloth."

Birdie felt her face flush. She really wished her father had never done that. But she smiled at the chief's joke and promised she would tell her father as much.

Back on the river they sailed in silence. The wind rose and died with the turns of the river, but the current carried them enough that they did not have to paddle much. Birdie was lost in thought. Partly she was planning how to use her blue, but partly she was wondering what they would do with everyone leaving. Would they have to go to Charlestown to trade? Charlestown wasn't a good market for her dried fish. There were large fishing boats that supplied far more than she ever could. And she did not like it, it was full of loud shouting people who didn't seem to her to do anything but rush about and shout things. She much preferred drinking tea with the Waccamaw chief. She would miss the trips upriver. After that village there was nothing but scattered farms, or on the other fork, toward Charlestown, huge plantations full of slaves working the fields.

Tamba broke her train of thought with a simple question: "Do you feel that?"

He was standing up in the stern, scanning the eastern horizon. Birdie stop for a second and tried to see if anything felt out of place. Lulu beat her too it. "It just got a lot cooler."

Tamba nodded.

Lulu and Birdie looked at each other. Cooler air meant a relief from the heat of the fires. It meant an end to the fires was near too.

"It is too early." Tamba frowned. "Too early for this cool."

"What does that mean?" asked Birdie.

Tamba continued to stare off at the eastern horizon. "I do not know," he said finally.

The cool continued the next day. After dinner that night her father pulled out his guitar. Aside from his chronometer and sextant, the guitar was Papa's most

prize possession. He'd found the instrument in Wanderer's hold the day they'd found her drifting. He hadn't know what it was. The first time he tried playing it he'd used a bow. Then one evening in a coffee house in Boston he'd met an Italian man playing one in tk square. The man didn't speak much English and her father spoke almost no Italian, but the man had managed to show him a few things and her father just made up the rest. Usually he played lonesome songs, songs that made Birdie feel an ache in her chest though she could not really say why, but sometimes, when other instruments were around he did what he called, going a little crazy with it, and strummed and plucked the strings until lively, bouncing, rhythms you could dance to came out of it. Tonight Tamba joined in with some driftwood rasps he'd been working on. The guitar and percussion dueled and danced with each other in Birdie's head, first her father leading then Tamba stepping to the front, stomping with his foot to add bass to his scratch and clack percussion.

Auntie Māra danced with Uncle Cole, her braid twisting back and forth, her feet light on the sand. The music found a pattern and the dancers hooked arms like the instruments and began to turn each other. Henry came rushing in and they broke apart their dance and both reached down to each take one of Henry's arms and they began to turn in the circle, Henry pushing them ever faster. Papa picked up on it, bringing his playing in line with the increasing speed of the dance until all of them were frantically spinning and finally spun apart, spilling into the sand.

It was late by the time fire died down and Papa traded the guitar for his pipe. Henry was curled up against Lulu, already asleep. Birdie lay on the other side of Lulu, closest to the fire. She liked feeling the cool sand against her arm, the heat the fire on her back. She closed her eyes and began to drift toward sleep. In the background her father and aunt and uncle and Tamba continued to talk in lower tones. Birdie slept for a minute but woke up at some point to hear her uncle still talking.

She drifted in and out of sleep still until she heard her uncle say with conviction in his voice, "I want to come with you this year when you leave." She woke up completely. She could almost picture the surprised on Papa's face. It probably matched her own she thought.

"What about your wife and children?"

"I've built a boat."

Birdie's eyes sprung open, he has?

"I want to sail up to Charlestown, trade the furs I've been stockpiling and then use that money to get some supplies and take the boat north."

"That boat of yours won't make it. We'll have to tar her, re-mast her if we can.

"She's my boat, I'll see to it."

Birdie tried to think of what her father would say, but he said nothing. She could hear the soft sigh of his exhale as he puffed on his pipe in silence.

“You think it’s a bad idea.”

Her father just kept staring at the fire.

“You’re worse than my wife,” her uncle said.

Her father snorted. “You could learn something from your wife. . .”

She heard Uncle Cole stand up. “Maybe you could learn something from me. Maybe you could make some plans with someone else for once instead of keeping all your secrets to yourself.”

“Secrets?”

Birdie pretended to roll over in her sleep. Careful to neither open her eyes, nor squeeze them shut, she turned toward the fire so she could see them. Her uncle and her father had never been the best of friends, but now it sounded very much like they were about to come to some kind of a head and Birdie planned to stop them. She could feel their eyes on her. She tried to relax her body and keep her breathing slow and even.

Their voices got lower, her uncle seemed to hiss like a snake.

“I know you don’t want me to come north, I know you don’t want me to be part of your summer camp because that’s where you meet with all your pirate friends.”

Her father laughed now. “Is that what you think?”

“It’s what I know. Your children talk to mine.”

Her father said nothing.

“You don’t deny it?”

“No. I don’t deny that there are people I know on the cape who sail boats and don’t always do what the king wants. You have that much right.”

Birdie thought of summer camp. It was much like their winter camp, though there were hardly any trees near the coast. No pines anyway. She spent her time fishing. Her father often worked on ships and did other jobs around town. She loved summer camp, but there was no one to play with and the idea that Francis and Owen might come to it nearly made her jump up and cry out, yes, yes please come.

“I’m not even sure we’re going this year.”

“What? Why not?”

Her father shrugged, took another drag off his pipe. “Things are changing.”

“What things?”

“All things.”

Birdie risked a peek through the veil of eyelashes. She could see her father, he sat on his stump, leaning forward, elbows on his knees, staring into the fire.

“The British are coming.”

“You said they weren’t coming. Besides, the British are already here.”

“True. But I was wrong. More of them are coming. Many more. They’re headed for Nassau. They need to bring it in line or they’ll lose it forever.”

“How do you know?”

“The woman on *Eliza May*, Sarah, she told me.”

“Why should we believe her?”

“You don’t have to Cole, but I do. Her father is one of the people that convinced them to come.”

“I thought you said Nassau?”

“They will come first to provision in Charlestown. I want to be gone before that.”

“You’re just going to leave? You can’t just leave.”

“Sure I can.”

“But you have a life here, people need you here.”

For once Birdie agreed with her Uncle. But the thought of the British coming made her angry. She did not like the British. Their soldiers were always drunk, their sailors cruel. Unwashed, dirty men who brought nothing but pain and misery to anywhere they went, as far as she had ever seen anyway. Once in Charlestown she’d seen soldiers poking the slaves in the market with sticks.

“Let the British come,” Her uncle was drunk, slurring his words slightly. “Do you really thing they can control everything, be everywhere? Besides, they aren’t going to bother with us, we’re not big enough to interest them.”

“They’re not going to bother with us because they are not going to find us here. But do you really think they would ignore the people who make it possible for their worst enemies to continue to sail against them? Continue robbing their merchantmen? Stealing from the crown? Do you really think the British crown is going to ignore that?”

“You’re a coward.”

Birdie could hear the fire over the silence. She watched her father contemplate his response, she could see him straining to hold back whatever impulse his temper was sending him. He exhaled slowly. And then spoke slowly and clearly.

“You have never been to sea. Do not make the mistake of thinking that because you can walk proud on the land, that you have any idea what the sea is capable

of doing to you. Do not presume to understand courage when you have never been out of sight of land.”

Her father stood up and stretched causally. “And do not return to my fire for a while. I do not wish to see you. I will send one of the children for you when my anger has passed.”

Her father walked off toward the ocean. Birdie saw him in the moon light take off his deerskin shirt and run into the waves. Her father often swam at night. It was something he had done since he was a small boy. It helps me sleep he had said to her once. The cold helps you sleep.

Her uncle sat on the log. She could hear him muttering something to himself, but could not make out what it was. “Come on Māra, lets go.” Her aunt raised an eyebrow at him, but got up and gathered her things.

“Papa. What happened?” She asked when he returned.

“Birdie? You’re awake?” Her father came over and sat down beside her. He bent down and kissed her forehead, his beard tickled her cheek. “Nothing sweet girl, get some sleep.” Birdie let herself slip back into the sheets and quilts on the soft sand.

Birdie rolled over and stared up at the sky.

The British. Coming to Charlestown. She watched shooting stars and started to count them, but her eyes kept sliding shut. When she opened them again the sun was just cresting the sea.

Chapter 10: Storm

It was late in the afternoon when she felt it. Lulu sat straight up in the hull of the *Arkhangelsk* and hit her head on a cross spar. “Ow,” she exclaimed followed quickly by, “Birdie, do you smell that?”

“What?” Birdie paused and sniffed. “What?”

“The wind is different.”

Birdie sniffed again, she put her nose to a crack and sniffed deeply.

“What are you doing sister?” asked Henry.

“Lulu says the wind smells different.”

Henry too sniffed. He cocked his head to the side and studied Birdie for a minute, then turned and studied Lulu. He shrugged. “I think it smells like the sea.”

“Yes,” said Lulu, “but it smells like more like the sea.”

Henry stared at her like she had two heads. “What did you say?”

While her brother and sister did not notice it, at nearly the same moment that Lulu had hit her head, her father had also jerked upright out of a sound sleep in

a hammock slug between two oak trees. “Tamba!” He shout, leaping out of the hammock. “Storm.”

Tamba came slowly out of the hut, wiping fish guts off his hand with a rag. He looked up at the sky. He frowned.

Papa stopped to sniff again when Lulu came around the corner at full speed and skidded to a halt in front of him. “Papa! the air smells different, I think there’s a storm coming.”

He smiled at her and turned to Tamba. “See?”

Tamba grunted. “I see you have raised them like you. Like wolves.” He smiled and then it disappeared. “We need to stop Mr Cole, he was taking Delos to Charlestown today.

Her father glanced out at sea. “I’m sure he’ll stay.”

“You’re sure.”

Her father sighed. “Birdie, Lulu, run down to Aunt Māra’s camp and make sure they don’t do anything stupid like sail for Charlestown.”

Birdie glanced at Lulu and together they dashed out of camp.

“And hurry back. As soon as we load up, we’ll be moving Wanderer.” Her father’s voice trailed off as they left the dunes and ducked into the forest, following the well-worn footpath that led down the island to their cousin’s camp. That was how Lulu thought of it. Her father always called it Aunt Māra’s camp. No one called it Uncle Cole’s camp, though really he was the one who lorded over it. To tell the truth, thought Lulu, I would have much rather been helping to pack and secure our camp. She slowed a little as the oaks thickened and the ground became treacherously crowded with acorns that hurt even her calloused feet.

“Come on Lu, hurry up,” Birdie called. “I want to tell them so we can get back and help Papa pack everything up.”

“Let’s just go back, they won’t leave. The wind is coming up. They’re scared of the ocean anyway.”

“They won’t know, Lulu. They don’t know what we know. They can’t just sniff the wind. Even I can’t just sniff the wind apparently. We have to tell them.”

“Aunt Māra is mother’s sister, she’ll know.”

Birdie shrugged. “Maybe, but we still have to tell them, Papa told us to.”

Fine.” Lulu crossed her arms angrily. “Let’s run then.” And she took off down the trail, leaving Birdie behind. Their cousins’ camp, was in nearly the same spot on the north end of the island as Lulu and Birdie’s camp was on the south end. Nestled in the first row the dunes, out of the wind, and right by the river, that, while too brackish to drink, was good for fishing, washing, and cleaning. Lulu was panting hard as she rounded the bend and she could hear Birdie’s

feet pounding the sandy trail just behind her in what had become more a race between sisters than any message carrying errand. They both burst into camp, nearly knocking over Aunt Māra. Both doubled over sucking wind, unable to speak. It was Birdie who first looked up and saw to her horror that no one else was around. She put out her arm and caught her Aunt's dress. "Māra, where is everyone?"

"They've gone in the boat to Charlestown child, what is it?"

Birdie felt her heart sink. "How long ago?"

Māra glanced at the sky. "Left after lunch."

Lulu and Birdie shared a look. On a good day, with favorable wind and tide, in a good boat, you could make Charlestown in eight hours. Delos was a good boat, and the approaching storm would make the wind favorable. Until it made it more than favorable. Still, Lulu had a terrible feeling in the pit of her stomach. A helpless feeling, like the world was turning against her will. Like she was being pulled by lines she could feel all around her, but she could not make out which way they were pulling her. She watched Birdie start to cry. She could think of nothing to say. "Bee," she said finally, "Let's run up to the point and see if we can see the sail. Then we'll get back to help Papa."

Birdie nodded and they left their Aunt to grab her things and head for their camp where they promised to meet her later. The trail from camp to the seashore was hard going at this end of the island, loose sand you could not run in, sharp shells and sticker plants everywhere. It took them longer than either had planned to get to the mouth of the river where the sand bar at low tide was high enough that they could wade across to the next island and out on the point. Already the wind had begun to pick up. Lulu could feel the pressure dropping. Her ears popped. This was going to be big one. There was a small sail visible, not too far offshore, but too far to hail. Birdie jumped up and down and waved her arms. She started to cry again. Lulu considered lighting a fire, but she wasn't sure having them turn around was the best idea. They looked close the river mouth. If they made it up into the marsh they'd be better off than being caught out on the ocean, trying to come back. She said as much to Birdie. But Birdie kept jumping and waving until she was too tired to jump anymore. "Come on," said Lulu finally. "We have to get back."

By the time they got back Papa and Henry were on their second sled drag from camp to the boat. Papa pulled, Henry ran behind grabbing anything that fell off. Lulu dashed into the hut and grabbed her bag, which held her notebook, quills, and ink, the only things in the world she cared about. She slung her bag over her shoulder as she waited for Birdie to grab her paints and things. They set off after her father and Henry, who were already well down the trail. At the boat Tamba was already raising the sails while Aunt Māra hurried up and down out of the hold, hauling dried fish and water in small barrels.

They would sail Wanderer up river, threading the marshes as quickly as they

could, to the mouth of the river, there, on the far side of the first island, which divided the channel, they could careen her against a grove of swamp cypress. They would lash her to the trees as best they could and ride it out there. It was not a new plan. They had gone so far as to careen her once two years ago, but the storm had never materialized. Wherever it went, it had spared Edisto. Lulu could feel in her bones that this storm was not going away. It was coming here. Now. Tonight.

The tide was raising Wanderer, her father and Tamba used lines and a bent pine on the hammock next to it to winch it into deeper water. It took the better part of an hour, but she was soon floating. They used the Pirogue to load the last couple barrels of tar, which Kobayashi and her father were still maneuvering into the hold as Tamba raised the sail to get a enough speed to fight the river current.

High clouds had been blowing in all afternoon, but wasn't until the sun began to set that they could see the line of the storm off in the east. It was so dark it looked like night blowing across the sea. Her father climbed the mizzen mast with his spyglass and studied the horizon. When he came down Lulu noticed something she had never seen in his eyes before, fear. It chilled her. She shivered and put her arms around him. He knelt down beside her and wrapped his arms around her. "It's going to be okay Lu. I promise."

She nodded, but did not speak.

"It's going to be a long one, a fierce one, but we will all be alright."

She looked in his eyes. "How do you know?"

He blinked at her as if this were the silliest question he had ever heard. "Because I asked."

"Asked who?"

"The sea."

"How does the sea know? Isn't the storm the storm?"

"The sea knows everything. Nothing is older than the sea."

The darkness of the storm blotted out the remainder of the day. Lulu was wishing she could be wherever the sun was setting. Some place happy and bright. She heard Tamba yell from the bow and both she and Birdie rushed up to see what was the matter.

Threading it's way out of cluster of cypress trees was a small dugout with six people in it. At the stern was man, probably about her father's age Lulu guessed. In the bow was a woman, perhaps about the same age, his wife she assumed. Between them, in the line were two girls and a young boy about Henry's age. The older of the two girls held a baby in her arms. The man was calling out to

Tamba in a language Lulu did not know well, but recognized as Waccamaw. She had traded enough with the Waccamaw that Lulu had learned to recognize words that seemed like they meant please and thank you and hello. Lulu heard the man say the word she thought meant thank you. Tamba spoke fluent Waccamaw and spoke for some moments as the dugout moved alongside Wanderer.

He turned to Birdie. "Go tell your father that we're going to give this family a ride and they're going to show us another, better island. We can careen on the leeward side."

"What about the river mouth?"

"They say the water is already rising there."

Lulu watched as the man brought the canoe alongside.

"How come every one asks Birdie to do things and not me?"

"What are talking about?"

"You immediately turned to Birdie, you didn't even think of turning to me."

He studied her for a moment. "Lulu, go get a line and some rigging out of the hold that we can use to get this family on board."

She snapped to attention and smiled. "Yes sir!"

She took off for the hold. It was dark below, even the faint light of the evening was no help down here. She worked by feel to get several lines, but she could not find the rigging Tamba wanted. She ran back with the lines so Wanderer could at least tow the canoe along without the poor man having to paddle to keep up. Then she ran back into the hold and felt around where the rigging ought to have been but could not find it. She was about to give up and grab a couple of lines to tie a ladder when she tripped and fell and landed on the unmistakably painful lumps of tightly knotted hemp lines. The rigging. She dashed back up and with Tamba's help, secured the rigging to the gunwale and lowered the ladder-like rope over the side so the family could climb aboard.

It took several tries, but they eventually managed to get everyone on board. Tamba took the man to the cockpit to pilot the ship. Kobayashi came forward with a lantern they hung off the bowsprit to provide some modicum of light as the sun ceased to be of any help.

"Where were you when I was below?"

Kobayashi smiled at her, "I was lighting the lattern over by the stove, waiting for you to ask me for help."

"What? I never even saw you."

He shrugged. "You never looked."

A flash lit up the sky and the first rumble of thunder drifted toward them. Tamba came running foward and he and Kobayashi dropped sounding lines and yelled

out depths. The number came ever smaller, then sudden bigger as they entered the main channel of the river. Lulu helped her sister reef the sail and together with the current this slowed them considerably and they swung alongside a low flat island. Tamba jumped for shore and pulled them in and around the back. In the fading light Lulu could see it was only maybe ten feet above the river at it's tallest. A thick stand of oaks and pines stood in the middle of the island. It was there that she and her Aunt took two tarps and plenty of line to try to construct a shelter of some kind. Kobayashi and her father dragged the lifeboat off Wanderer, flipped it over, and propped it between two trees. Lulu and Aunt Māra draped a tarp over the upturned hull and began tying the tarp down to the base of the trees around them.

Her father shone the lattern on their work. "That should hold for a while anyway."

The Waccamaw man split a piece of young sapling wood from along the river and began to carve notches in it. He came over and fit the notches into the line and began to twist it, drawing the line tighter.

"Clever." Lulu said. Her father nodded as well, smiling at the man who smiled back. Lulu offered the children some strips of dried fish she'd retrieved from Wanderer. They took them shyly, nodding their thanks but returning to sit with their mother.

The storm came slow, it seems to pace back and forth somewhere just offshore. Lulu wondered what was happening at their camp. It seemed not so much angry, as... Lulu wasn't sure. She and Birdie were talking about it when Kobayashi interrupted them. "The sea is never angry. What we see as anger is just the sea god reshaping the shore. It takes tremendous force to reshape the shore. Think what effort it would take to move this island ten feet to the left yeah? Storms are the only tool the sea has to move entire islands. It reshapes things with wind. It blows hard because it has much work to do and wants to do it in little time. There are two faces to the world, one is so slow and patient, it's tough to see it work, you see?"

Lulu considered this, but before she could answer he went on.

"Trickle a stream down a bank of sand and it will slowly cut deeper and deeper as it comes to rejoin the sea. Deeper and deeper, until eventually there is a canyon where once there was just a trickle. Everyone thinks that's the end of the story, when that water flows into the sea, but we know better yeah? There are rivers in the ocean, the animals ride them, sometimes we ride them. Water is always in motion, that is it's nature. It is never at rest."

Her father and brother joined them. Tamba and Aunt Māra were building a small fire they hoped would burn down to coals they could keep until morning. The boat was half careened on its side at the rear of the island, as ready as it could possibly be.

"We see the medium processes," continued Kobayashi. "The ones that move at

our speed. We see the tides change every day, we see the moon wax and wane. We see the season turn. We see the winds change. We see only what moves at our speed. If we want to see the other things we have slow ourselves down. Or speed ourselves up. Or sometimes, like now, we just hang on and try to survive the ride.”

They watched as the last of the light faded. Everyone shared a meal of dried fish and rice and watched as the lightning begin to flash across the sky. The line of rain was visible in the flashes, inching toward them, relentless, slow, and mighty.

The storm came on so strong it seemed to suck everything toward it. The wind blew out to sea for a while, then sudden it switched and began to come back, like the storm had inhaled what the land had to offer and was now ready to speak its own story into being. It spoke in rhythm and rhyme. Wind that once whistled in the long leaf pines and clattered through palm leaves now shrieked and growled, rising like music Lulu had heard once coming from a big house in London town. It rasped over the reeds with a blast that knocked them flat, pinning them down to a single note that was washed over and drown out by the oncoming waves. As it grew stronger it beat waves across the marsh and up the river in front of them, ripples and surges of water. Then came the rain. At first a pelting, like drums rolling through the night. Everyone retreated then to the shelter of the pines, under the boat and tarps.

And then it opened up like something terrible that Lulu had never dreamed was possible. She had never known that such forces existed in the world. Everything seems to screech and wail as the storm tore at the land, working hard to rearrange, reshape, renew. Lulu, Birdie and Henry huddled with the others under the shelter of the boat, but it rocked and began to move too. Her father ducked outside and added more lines. The Waccamaw man, who had been carving more of his tightening sticks, went with him and together they tightened and shored up the shelter as best they could.

“That’s the last time we walk out there without a line.” said her father when he ducked back under the shelter. He started readying a line should he have to go out again. The flashes of lightning came so fast and frequent that it felt like the sky was just light, with flashes of darkness. She saw Henry sitting in Birdie’s lap, both of them huddled next to Aunt Māra. Tamba and Kobayashi were playing some sort of game with sticks that Lulu could not follow. They gathering them up, threw them, and then stared at the resulting scatter of sticks and nodded and grunted thoughtfully before gathering them all up again and starting over. It seemed aver strange thing to do in the middle of a storm.

Lulu knew if she went outside the wind would blow her away. She knew it would actually move her across the ground with more power and she had to resist it. It would shape her, it would put her wherever it wanted, she knew it and yet a part of her still longed to duck out under the canvas and feel it, feel her own helplessness in the face of the storm, measure herself against this great rearranging force, to feel as physically insignificant as she sometimes felt in her

head. It was so big thing. She was so small a thing in the face of it. But she was sure she could outwit it somehow, could dodge it, could survive it using only what she had about her. It was a feeling at once of power and fear mingled together.

Then suddenly, when it seemed it could get no worse, it stopped. And eerie quiet calm descended upon them. The wind dropped to nothing more than a windy day at the beach. Her father, Tamba, and Kobayashi were out in an instant, the Waccamaw man said something to his family and went out with them. They secured the lines on the tarp, the lines on the boat. They moved branches and debris that was washing ashore of the little island. They stacked logs up against the hull of the lifeboat the hold it down, they retied the lines on Wanderer. They hunted for anything that the second round might be able to hurl at them, and they moved and cleared it all as best they could.

Lulu and Birdie crawled out from under the tarp and looked around. The wind was steady, a stiff onshore breeze, but with gusts that would rip through suddenly, ferociously, a little reminder from the storm that it was not done yet.

The men were joking and laughing as they came back from securing Wanderer. Tamba and the Waccamaw man were carrying a barrel of water. Everyone came out and drank in the darkness and calm. Lulu wasn't sure, but she thought it was probably past midnight by now.

"How much longer will it last Papa?" She could see the whites of his eyes gleam in a flash of lightning.

"I don't know my girl, maybe it'll be over by morning."

Tamba said something in Waccamaw, the man nodded. He knelt down by Lulu and looked at her face. It was so dark Lulu could feel his breath better than she could see him. He reached out in the darkness, she felt his rough hands on her shoulders. He began to sing in a soft voice. Lulu could not understand the words, but she understood the meaning. His own daughter came out and stood next to Lulu, holding her hand.

The wind began to rise again, it felt like the pulse of the storm was quickening, building back to roar once more. The man's song finished. He squeezed Lulu's shoulder and she saw him smiling in the darkness. She crawled back under the boat with Birdie and sat back down in the bow.

Despite the roar of the storm and the pounding of the rain Lulu felt her eyes beginning to droop. She leaned against her aunt and closed her eyes.

She wasn't sure how long she'd been asleep but all at once she was awake, the hair on the back of her neck stood up. She couldn't see, she couldn't hear anything other than the rain drumming on the canvas and wood, but she could feel danger. It wasn't until the next flash of lightening that she understood. She saw the teeth first, whatever part of her brain was in charge of keeping her alive zeroed in on the immediate threat of teeth. Teeth that were far too big and far

too close. Above them a single eye regarded her. Lulu felt the fear wash over her like a storm sopped wave and she realized that though she was shivering from the wind and water that soaked her the hot flash of fear made her sweat. She kicked at her father's leg, but could not find words. He leaned over and stroked her head and looked at her kindly, as if she were scared of the storm. Still she could not find the way to make her mouth form the words. Finally in a whisper she said, "alligator"

Her father had his pistol out and pointing in the darkness so fast everyone jumped. What is it Tamba screamed over the whining howl of the wind. Her father pointed the gun. The gator eased itself further in under the tarp and seemed to regard them.

Despite her fear Lulu could not help thinking that that the alligator looked every bit as scared as she was. Except it had giant teeth with which to protect itself from fear. Then again she thought, her father had a gun. A bunch of creatures thrown together, all afraid of each other. Maybe this was how the storm wanted to move her, maybe it did not want to blow her though the pines so much as put her under a boat with a scared alligator. But why? What was she supposed to do? It continued to stare at her. It seemed to stare only at her, though she thought maybe she was imagining that. She stared right back anyway. The fear faded some. One can only be truly terrified for so long. One adjusts. Terror becomes normal if you experience it long enough. And when it comes to terror you don't have to experience it long to reach long enough. It's how you survive battles, storms at sea, perhaps alligators.

Instead of terror she began to feel uncomfortable. Why was it staring at her? Was it staring at her?

She thought she might be losing her mind until she heard Tamba say, "It's watching her."

Her father answered just loud enough to be heard over the storm, "She's edible size."

Lulu cocked her head. Are you trying to decide if you should eat me? She glanced around. What's wrong with the rest of them she thought.

"Maybe" said Tamba. "Maybe it's just scared too and trying to decide if she's going to eat it."

"You're feeling charitable."

"You're the one who hasn't shot it."

"If I shoot it we'll all be deaf and burned. And I'm not sure it'll kill it."

Tamba nodded. "Maybe it will go away."

A particularly close flash of lightning made them all flinch and when they did the alligator flinched as well and it was then that Lulu noticed it was missing its other eye. Lulu cocked her head and stared at its one eye again, but this time

she saw it differently. Was that possible? You're bigger, she thought. So am I. A year is a long time. Do you recognize me? Is that why you're staring at me? Are you trying to tell me something?

The eye moved as she thought these questions. It focused back on her for a moment and then it lifted its body up. Lulu saw her father raise the gun. "Wait!" she yelled. The alligator turned its eye to her one last time and then it slipped out from under the tarp and disappeared into the night.

Lulu did not remember falling asleep, but she woke with a start again, stiff and slumped against her father, who was still asleep. She did not move, but lay slumped, listening. The wind still blew, but it was only a gale, strong, stiff, steady, bending the palms and pines, but not tearing at the earth, not seeking to rearrange the world in a night. She gently eased off her father and crawled out from under the small boat that had been their world for a long terrible night. She half expected to see the alligator somewhere just outside, waiting for her, like a patient dog. Instead she found her sister, sitting on a washed up piece of gnarled old oak, staring down the river, out toward the sea, crying.

Lulu came and sat beside her. Neither of them said anything. Lulu thought of Francis and hoped he was okay. Francis was kind and good, you could see it in his eyes. Her uncle had something of that in his eyes too, but he didn't listen to it. She put her arm around Birdie. "I'm sure they went ashore. I'm sure they're fine."

Birdie nodded. "Thanks Lu." She leaned her head on Lulu's shoulder. "They're not though."

Lulu pulled back from her. "What? Why not? How do you know? What happened?"

"Nothing happened. I just... I can't feel anything. It's like... there's just nothing when I think of them."

Lulu considered this, but didn't say anything. She tried to hold them in her mind and tried to feel them. She too felt nothing. But she wasn't sure she ever felt anything. She had never done this before anyway, how would she know? Then she wondered why she had never done this before. "I don't feel anything either, but I don't think I ever did."

"You don't think about people?"

"We'll of course I think about people."

"When you think about people, you don't feel them?"

Lulu was quiet.

"When I think about people I feel them, somehow, I don't... I just... I can't really explain it, I just... I feel them."

“I wish I could do that.”

Birdie smiled, but started to cry again. “But now I don’t know, I think about Francis and I can’t feel anything, and I am scared that that means something happened to them, that, that they’ve died.”

Lulu felt herself start to cry. She hugged her sister and began to cry on her shoulder, and she felt Birdie crying on hers and they cried together, until they had nothing left to cry.

Chapter 11: Sails

It was after breakfast, the first truly cold morning of the year. Her father had come in from his morning swim and for the first time sat by the fire, hands spread over the flames to warm himself. Birdie had been stirring leftover stew in the kettle, which she’d hung herself over the fire. She was the first up, after her father. She scooped out a bowl stew and sat down on a stump to eat. The more she ate the hungrier she felt and before long she went back for another bowl. “That’s my girl,” said her father, ladling another bowl for her.

Birdie tried to smile but she didn’t feel it. It had been a week since the storm and there had been no sign or word of her uncle or cousins. Twice her father and Kobayashi had sailed the river to Charlestown and back, trying the marshes and tributaries, looking for any sign of her cousins or the boat, but had found nothing. Her father still said that they had likely been driven into the marshes and probably had to walk out, but Birdie could tell he believed that story less every day.

Aunt Māra rarely came to their camp anymore. She wandered the north end of the island like a ghost, staring out over the marsh. She seemed in a daze. She did not talk to anyone and Birdie had not seen her eat for days. Every now and then her father would convince her to eat something, but it was never much and afterward she would wander back to her camp and sit on the top of the dune, waiting.

Birdie had taken to following her, making sure she was okay by watching from a distance. She wasn’t sure if Aunt Māra knew she was there or not and she didn’t really care. She knew that she could not bear the thought of anything happening to her too, and so she appointed herself to look after her. It helped to have something to do too. It took her mind off the ache that sat at the middle of her, a vast blackness of loss and sorrow she did not want to touch, but knew would not go away. She kept it at bay, and was able to avoid Aunt Māra’s state by focusing herself on caring for her Aunt. She brought her food, put her to bed at night the way she had once tucked Birdie in, walking back to her own camp along the shore in the dark, using the moonlight and the *Arkhangelsk*’s mast to navigate her way through the dunes. She came to love these moonlit walks and she thought perhaps she understood why her Aunt wandered and stared. It was not just the ache of loss, though there was that, but also the moon and the sea

seemed to smile. Things so vast, so incomprehensibly huge and unfathomable made everything else feel less real, less important, less like a weight pushing in on you.

Aunt Māra probably saw the sail before anyone else that morning, but she didn't tell them. In camp it was Birdie who saw it first. She and Lulu had walked together down to the shore to wash their bowls in the surf. Birdie stopped at the shore. Lulu knelt and let the rushing water of the wave fill her bowl and pull the bit of fish at the bottom back out the sea. Birdie watched but she made no move to wash her own bowl. She stared out at the sea where she thought she saw something white on the horizon, something that might be a topsail coming into view.

“Lu, what is that?”

Lulu stood up. “A sail?”

They looked at each other and smiled. Birdie quickly washed her bowl and they turned and ran back up to camp. Laughing and shouting “sail.” Her father turned and squinted out at the sea. He hummed and went inside the hut, returning with the spyglass. He trained it on the speck still wavering at the horizon.

“Topsail, moving north by northeast.” He handed Birdie the glass and she climbed up the nearest dune to get a better look. Northeast was no good, that meant it was headed away from them, but that made no sense, they should have spotted it earlier if it was coming out of Charlestown. They'd have seen sails well and clear when she rounded cape and turned to the north, headed for London or Northampton. The only boats that ever headed northeast without coming out of Charlestown were. . . she glanced over at her father. He was watching her, she could see him smile, she watched him watch her figure it out. It was a coasting ship that had drifted too close and, probably unbeknownst to its captain and crew, had been spotted. Word would spread north. Not from their camp, her father never passed on sea gossip as he called it, it was one of the reasons raiders came to their shore in peace, but this one obviously wasn't. She walked back over to her father and passed the glass to Lulu.

“Doesn't look like they're headed this way.”

Birdie nodded. She screwed up her courage inside and said quickly before she lost her nerve, “Papa, can Lulu and I play at the *Arkhangelsk* until you need us?”

Her father looked at her darkly, but then he smiled. “What gave you the idea that there was ever a time when I did not need you?” He rubbed his beard and continued. “I always need you Birdie, at my side, we are joined at the hip. He clasped a huge hand on her shoulder and pulled her tight against his leg and attempted to take a step forward, swinging her along with him. She laughed and tried to pull away, but his grip was strong, she remained pinned against his leg

and he took another, stiff-legged step, swinging her along again. He walked her like that, laughing as they went all the way over to where Lulu stood oblivious to the both of them, watching the sail through the glass."She's tacking toward us."

Her father stopped and took the glass from her.

"Hey."

He stared for a while. "Indeed she is." He put the glass down and frowned. "Lulu, Birdie, take the pirogue, fetch Tamba."

Lulu frowned, "where is he?"

Her father smiled, "He's upriver at the trading post."

"Why is he there?" Birdie wanted to know.

"Never mind that, just go get him." Her father ducked into their hut and Birdie heard him waking Kobayashi.

Lulu shrugged. "Let's go."

They ran through the woods to the edge of the marsh where they kept the pirogue. They took turns padding up the river. Normally Birdie liked going up river, whatever the reason. She liked going anywhere on water, but today, strangely when she stopped to think about it, she wanted to be on the beach. She wanted to find out which ship it was, whether it was anyone they knew.

Tamba was lying in the shady grass beside the river with a young Waccamaw woman that Birdie did not recognize. He watched them approach, but did not get up until Birdie said, "sail." Tamba nodded and threw a piece of grass he'd been picking apart into the river. Birdie watched it bob in the water as ripples from the pirogue pushed it out from the shore. She looked up to see Tamba kissing the woman. She looked away quickly again. Tamba turned around, put his tripoint hat on, gathered up his rifle and sword, glanced at the sky, and without a word stepped onto the boat. Lulu pushed them off. Tamba sat in the middle of the boat and let Birdie sail them down river. None of them spoke for a long time. It wasn't until they were almost back to camp that Tamba asked Lulu if she knew the name of the ship.

Kobayashi told them when they landed. He was unloading extra cooking pots from Wanderer.

"*Whydah*."

Tamba smiled. "Ah, Captain Sam. It is always good to see Sam."

Lulu and Birdie shared an excited look. Their favorite sailor often sailed with Captain Sam. Although they liked Captain Sam as well. But no one told stories like Jack. No one was as comical and somehow earnestly serious as Jack.

"Ko," said Birdie. "Does *Whydah* have the same quartermaster?"

Kobayashi smiled. "I believe she does."

Sam Bellamy was the nicest captain to ever call on their camp. He was tall, strong, and rode the launch in the next morning like a true captain, one foot on the gunwale, holding the bowline, in command. He was dressed in his trademark black pants, red sash and worn, but still very stylishly cut, black jacket. In the sash were four duelling pistols that never left his person. At his side hung a French style rapier that he was reportedly very deft at wielding. He leaped just as the launch hit the sand and cleared the last bit of surf and foam to land on the sand, crouched down like a cat. Captain Black Sam had arrived.

Lulu stood with her brother and sister and father watching the men run the launch boat up on shore and secure her anchor in the sand. Captain Sam left them to their business, marching up the shore without a backward glance. He stopped in front of them with a smile. And bowed to her father. "Captain Nicholas, we humbling ask that we might anchor here at your island." He straightened back up. Her father laughed and stepped forward, embracing Bellamy. "Good to see you Sam."

He crouched down in front of the kids and smiled. "Birdie, how you've grown my dear." He turned to her sister. "And Lulu, still climbing trees?"

"Oh yes sir." Lulu caught herself, and then managed to ask, "is Calico Jack with you?"

Bellamy knelt down and glanced out at his ship, the *Whydah*. "The quartermaster is indeed somewhere on the ship. He is attending to some needs of the crew, but I do believe he will be ashore later. We plan to careen." He straightened up and turned to her father. "That is, Captain, if you have any tar to spare us."

Her father smiled. "I do believe that's why were out here."

"Likewise."

There was much hugging and patting of backs and the crew shook hands with them, some they remembered from the previous summer, when Bellamy had come north to the cape. The crew rolled barrels down the beach, they were headed upriver with Kobayashi to fill up on fresh water.

Bellamy sat down with the children in the sand. He glanced up at the dunes. "I see the *Arkhangelsk* has survived two years worth a storms."

"She lost her mast last week." Birdie dropped her head. "And her mate."

Bellamy signed. "You were close?"

Birdie nodded. "My cousin sir."

"It's a tough thing to take as a captain, Birdie. You are still captain, yes?" Birdie nodded and fought to keep the tears out of her eyes.

“I lost a first mate to a storm. Whole ship full of men in fact, whom I’d been drinking with not three days before.” Bellamy stared down at the sand, seemed lost in thought for a moment. “I wish I could tell you something that would make it easier. But the truth is, it’s never gotten any easier for me.”

Birdie did not say anything, but she understood then that it would never get any easier. That people-size holes in your life never filled in. The passing of years would teach you how to step around them, but they would always be there, yawning abysses capable of swallowing everything that remained if you let them. The trick was to pick your way around them, to acknowledge them without falling into them.

Captain Sam put his hand on her shoulder. “I’m sorry Birdie.”

“Thank you sir,” was all she could manage.

Bellamy struggled to his feet and dusted off the sand. He clapped a hand on her father’s shoulder. “I know you don’t drink captain, but I may have to tonight. Now tell me about the storm. We saw it, but it went well north of us at the time.”

Her father nodded, and started to walk down the path toward the camp, Bellamy followed, leaving Birdie, Lulu, and Henry standing on the beach, staring at the *Arkhangelsk*.

“I wish it had been washed away.” Birdie said it before she’d really thought about it, but as the words settled in the air around her, she knew she meant it. It would never be the same. She would never be able to play on the ship without thinking of Francis. She didn’t want to play on it anymore. She wondered if she really wanted to play. She wanted to. . . she wanted something and she didn’t know what it was. She wanted Francis back. She wanted Owen back. She would even take her uncle Cole back. She wanted things to be how they had been. She wanted her aunt to be like she was, she wanted to play on the boat, she wanted. . . .

But as she stood there in silence, wanting, she knew it would never be. Nothing would ever be the same. A thing came, a storm happened. It reshaped the land. It reshaped her. It had made her into something else and nothing would ever be the same. Her father always told them, nothing remains the same, everything is always changing. He said it so often it was a kind of mantra they made fun of behind his back, not because they didn’t believe him, but because they didn’t realize, they didn’t know. It was one thing to hear and understand a thing. It was another to live it and now, only now, did Birdie understand what her father was saying. Only now did she have some inkling of what it must have felt like for him to lose her mother. For her mother she felt nothing. There was an absence, but it was not loss, she had never known her mother. She had never really lost her, her mother had just never been there. Only now did she understand what loss felt like. And she understood that she did not understand the loss her father must have felt when her mother died.

Birdie glanced up and saw a second boat coming in, slowly rowing in against the tide. A figure in a wide brimmed hat was standing up in the front, he also had one foot on the gunwale, holding the bowline as if were reins on an unseen porpoise. It was too far to make out the figure's face, but Birdie knew who it was by the way he stood. No one stood the way Calico Jack stood. He had a perfectly balanced poise that suggested no matter where you might put him, he would be utterly at ease and soon in charge.

Her father had come walking back down and stood beside Birdie now, watching the boat come in. He shook his head. "That man knows how to make an entrance. He'll be a hell of a captain one day."

Birdie didn't say anything, but she smiled thinking about it. Captain Jack. Jack was too silly to be captain. The boat caught a reasonably large wave and pitched forward, sliding down the face of it which then broke and soaked the men in the stern. Birdie could see him smiling now, scanning the beach. He walked straight toward Lulu and Birdie.

He knelt down before them, his ridiculously large tri-pointed hat with its single ostrich feather was all they could see. He lifted his head and looked at each of their faces. "Birdie, Lulu. Have you been taking good care of your father and your brother?"

Birdie nodded, but could not bring herself to speak. Jack spun his head around to Henry. "Is this true Henry?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Good." A wide smile came over Jack's face. He put her arms around Birdie and then Lulu, and then waved a hand to draw Henry in too. "Nicholas, you know I am here to steal your children."

Jack straighted up and adjusted his hat. "Actually, we need to careen. *Whydah* has worms, our canvas is frayed, and lines are shredded. She's a sad sight when you get out there."

Her father nodded. "We'll bring her in at high tide then. Send some of your men out hunting with Tamba, let's see if they can't get a couple boar, we'll cook them overnight, have a feast tomorrow."

"You know Nicholas that I and my crew will drink if we do that."

"Good for you John. I don't care if you drink all the rum on the island, so long as you're not aboard my ship."

"You still call that thing a ship do you?" Ratham smiled. Birdie saw her father's face flash red and then return to normal. It happened so fast she was sure Ratham had not even seen it.

"I call it home actually."

“Oh relax, Nicholas, I’m just playing. She’s a fine vessel. She’s got what, two guns is it? He slapped his hand on her father’s shoulder and stopped laughing quite suddenly.” Everyone knows you’re one of the finest captains in the East Indies and yet you have a this tiny boat, and you spend all your time on shore making tar. . . which, don’t get me wrong, you make the best tar. . . anywhere, but I don’t understand why, you could have a huge ship, a proper crew and I’d be willing to bet you could take a Galleon without hardly trying and retire in wealth and splendor. Do you like this jacket by the way, it’s new.” Ratham held out his arm and her father pinched the calico cloth between his fingers and rubbed it.

“I don’t know anything about clothes John, but it seems nice to me. As for the ship, I rather like the one I’ve got.” he paused and glanced at Birdie. “You see John, when you know you can have something whenever you want it, you don’t always feel the need to have it all the time.”

Ratham laughed. “Well there you go then. Good man.” He walked over to the first boat and began dividing its crew into hunting party and careening party.

Bellamy and her father did most of the work to get *Revenge* in and on her side. Jack made a chair out of some wood planks and a pile of sand and sat down, jug of rum at hand, watching the progress. It took the entire crew and half the trees they’d cut that summer to bring *Whydah* in and get her on her side, sufficiently out of the water to work on her hull. At Ratham’s insistence they started on the starboard side. “Always start on starboard,” he said. Nicholas had just shrugged and passed the word on to the men doing the work.

Lulu, Birdie and Henry sat on the bow of the *Arkhangelsk*, watching the men work on the hull of the *Whydah*. “She looks to be pretty badly worm eaten. Probably doesn’t have but a couple years left in her at most,” said Lulu.

Birdie swung her legs idly. She wished she could help, but her father wouldn’t let her even roll barrels of tar down the beach. Too dangerous he’d said. Birdie understood the danger of careening, but she failed to see what was dangerous about painting a hull with tar. “If a line gives way, if a timber rolls and that ship moves, it crushes anything in it’s path like a bug” her father said. “I’d just jump out of the way,” she said, but he’d only grunted and ignored her further pleading. And so she sat, watching from another ship.

Over Birdie’s shoulder, back toward camp she could see a plume of smoke rising up from the great pits where her father had buried two huge boar in last night. By evening they’d be ready to dig up, and it would be Birdie’s favorite meal, the delicious sweetness of the pork, with the special rice Kobayashi made to go with it, her mouth watered even now at the thought.

It wasn’t until she glanced out at the sea beyond *Whydah* that she realized she had not thought of Francis or Owen for several hours. Is this what happens she thought with a start. Is this how we move on? We slowly forget them? It

seemed somehow the most horrible thing she could have done and yet she didn't do it. It simply happened. At most she let it happen. Then she understand why Aunt Māra wore black and kept to herself. If you didn't make an effort to hold the dead in your mind you risked them slipping away from you.

She found herself wondering what Francis would have thought of Calico Jack, he was hard not to love. He was loud, often drunk, a bit of a fool, but completely lovable. Henry followed him around like he was the greatest thing on the island, which she knew irritated her father, though he never said anything or made any effort to stop him. Jack was harmlessly hilarious, though from stories the crew told he was fierce and quite capable when he needed to be. He was after all quartermaster of a ship of about sixty men who'd picked him to lead them.

More than the captain, the quartermaster ran a ship. The captain decided where to go, what course to set, but the quartermaster represented the men, and was first over the rail in a fight. They'd captured a Spanish Galleon the previous year off the coast of Port Royal Jamaica, which Birdie knew had taken skill, perhaps some luck, but skill and daring certainly. It was hard to imagine the man now sitting in the sand in his fancy coat, swigging rum from a jug and throwing shells as seagulls leading a ship full of men into battle with a ship twice, maybe three times the size of *Whydah*, with three decks of 24 pound canons sticking out the side of it. Birdie had never seen a galleon. None of them had, not even her father, though he'd at least seen the British equivalent. If the rumors were to be believed British warships would be here soon enough. Birdie shivered. She wondered what Ratham would do when the British came for him. Probably get drunk she decided.

"You know what would be fun?" Henry's voice broke the silence and interrupted Birdie's train of thought. "We should try to sneak up on Captain Jack and steal his rum."

Birdie smiled. "Okay," she said.

Birdie wanted to do the belly crawl, but Lulu argued that Henry should. He was after all smaller. And he had a natural sneakiness about him. He had a much better chance. In the end Birdie agreed. And so Henry was sent out, worming his way across the sand, taking cover behind clumps of grass, stands of sea oat, until he came to a piece of drift wood which he used to worm is way down to just about even with Captain Jack's log. There was only two knots of open sand left to cross. Henry piled sand on his back and in his hair for camouflage and then he went for it. Slowly, ever so slowly, he would move, and then stop and lie still. Birdie was impressed. She understood now why he had become such a good hunter in such a short time. He was patient. And he was good at reading his prey. In this case it helped that his prey was very near drunk, if not completely drunk. Henry would have pulled it off had it not been for Bellamy, who happened at that moment to turn and look in Ratham's direction and then bend over laughing. He was too far away to be understood, but Ratham saw Bellamy and other men looking in his direction and laughing which made him

glance behind him just as Henry laid his hands on the bottle of rum. Realizing the jig was up, Henry snatched the bottle and ran.

Ratham leaped to his feet and roared a half animal yell that made Birdie's hair stand on end. And then there was the sound that made everyone's blood run cold, the long ringing hiss of a sword coming out of its sheath. "Who dares steal my rum?" Thundered Ratham.

Henry instantly dropped the bottle in the sand and kept running full speed back to the Arkhangelsk where he skidded into the sand and tried to hide.

Ratham shrugged and walked toward the bottle, fitting his sword back into its sheath with considerably less drama and noise than he'd used pulling it out. He bent down in the sand, picked up the bottle and glanced over at the *Arkhangelsk*. He slowly sauntered over, taking a long pull of rum as he walked. He did not say anything when he got there, he just leaned against the hull below where the children sat on deck and said simple, "You see children. Let this be a lesson to you. If your person strikes sufficient fear into the heart of others, you don't actually have to hurt anybody. Just the threat of hurting them is plenty."

He turned and walked back toward the beach. "Take the man you call uncle teach, he's the most feared man in this part of the world and I don't think he's ever so much as messed up another man's hair."

"But," he spun around to face them with a menacing look on his face. "Never take another man's rum."

Chapter 12: The Tale Black Sam Told

Henry avoided Ratham for several days, heading off into the woods in search of boar, while Birdie helped clean up and organize their camp each morning. A full ship's company could make an impressive mess of their camp. Lulu helped out, but Birdie always went beyond cleaning into organizing, leaving Lulu to her own devices.

She headed out of camp, along the edge of the marsh, looking for nests she could raid. She hadn't gone far when she heard a hissing whisper, "sister." She looked around, but did not see Henry anywhere. "Sister!" This time it was louder, and she stared hard into the undergrowth until she noticed a pair of eyes staring at her out of the dark shadows and tangled branches. She walked toward him.

"What are you doing in there?"

"I am hunting. Or I was until you came along and scared everything away." He glared at her.

"How was I supposed to know?" She picked her way through the tangle of branches closer to where Henry sat on an old log. Eventually she made her way to him and sat down. She looked out, there was a clear line of fire to the game trail she'd been walking. It was a clever blind. She was impressed. She had

always assumed that Owen was the hunter, that Henry was just tagging along, but now she wondered. Maybe Henry was the one who could hunt. “Have you had luck here?”

Henry glanced at her. “No. Not yet. But I will. Boar use this trail to get from the wallow to the oak grove over there,” he gestured toward the trees Lulu had been headed for when he stopped her.

“You’re going to kill a boar with an arrow?”

“Sure. Why not?”

“Because you’re seven, you weigh what, 4 stone? A boar is what, 20 stone?”

Henry stared at her. “Why should I care how much a boar weighs? I will get Papa or Tamba to help me carry it.”

“Henry, what if you don’t kill it? What if there’s just a 20 stone boar with an arrow in it’s back charging you? It’ll kill you.”

“Oh, I see. That’s why I am back here. The undergrowth will protect me.”

Lulu looked more closely at the tangle of dry sticks. “I’m not sure about that.”

“Then I’ll climb a tree.”

“Good plan.” She chuckled at the thought of Henry treed by a boar, but she stopped when he hit her shoulder, “hey” she brought herself up short when she saw the boar. It was a huge male, followed by a female. They rooted along the edge of the trail, digging at something. She was transfixed. They were not more than 6 knots away. She wasn’t even thinking of Henry and his bow until the distinctive twang of the string snapped her back. The arrow hit it in the neck, there was a squeal and it charged into the undergrowth on the opposite side of the trail. Time seemed to slow down. Lulu’s heart was beating incredibly fast, but she felt like she was moving in water, her actions where slow and sloppy. Her body seemed to move without her telling it what to do. Before she knew what she’d done she and Henry were six feet up sitting on the low limb of an oak tree. The boar was nowhere to be seen.

“Did you see that? I hit it! I got it. Yes!”

Lulu threw her arms around him. “That was amazing.” They sat in the tree straining to see or hear something, but the woods around them were silent. Even the insects seemed to be waiting to see what happened to the boar. Would it come charging back? Was it angrily biding its time, waiting for them to come down so it could launch it’s counter attack?

“Where do you think it is?” Henry climbed up another branch and then came back down. “I can’t see in there. I think we should get down and look. I think I killed it.”

Lulu considered this and decided they should wait longer and listen. They sat in silence. After a few minutes a cricket struck up again. Then a cicada. Soon

the usual symphony of the forest was back, rasping and singing its way through the afternoon. A squirrel chattered at them from the next tree over and Lulu decided that Henry was right, the boar was either dead or gone, but either way, it was time to get down.

They climbed out on a limb away from the tangle of undergrowth that served as the blind and dropped down to the forest floor. They waited, crouched, ready to climb back up if need be. But there was nothing. They walked the trail to where the boar had been rooting. There was a bright red stain spread over the leaves. Henry started to follow the tracks. "Wait," she whispered, but he was already gone, following the blood stains through a tiny tunnel of undergrowth. Lulu had to crouch down and crawl in the thickets, pushing through blindly until she came out in a little clearing where Henry already stood, staring at the largest boar Lulu had ever seen. A single arrow stuck out of its neck. It was very dead.

It took three men and an impromptu travois to get the boar back to camp. Everyone clapped Henry on the back, several sailors even paraded him around on their shoulders, but Lulu noticed that Henry seemed strangely subdued.

The sailors piled wood high on the fire that night until the bed of coals was six inches deep. Then they dug a pit and poured the majority of the coals into the pit.

Lulu stood off to the side with Henry, watching as they laid the pig across the coals. The singed smell of burnt fur filled the air and everyone stepped away. One sailor stayed behind to bury the pig in sand.

Then they built the fire back up, and the fiddles came out. The firelight lit the circle of dunes a rich orange glow like a dying sun still trying to light a world. There was singing and dancing and drums that turned more and more to bawdy sea shanties, and half sung tales of balmy seas, fair winds, and prize ships filled with nothing but rum and pieces of eight. After they tired of dancing around the fire, the crew put away the fiddles and settled into storytelling. Lulu began to fall asleep until she heard someone whisper for Black Sam to tell the ghost ship story. Ghost ship? She was awake.

After some cajoling Bellamy stood up and straightened his hat, rested his hand on his sword theatrically and began.

"We'd been in the doldrums for days, maybe weeks, it was hard to know, one brutally hot day after another, no wind, no current, dead stillness. I remember Jack took off his jacket and tried flapping it up and down at the sail to create a bit of wind, but of course that didn't work. He just ended up tired." Sam smiled and the crew looked to Ratham who shrugged. "Worth a try."

"We were all hungry and thirsty all the time. Food was running low. We'd put a water ration in place the minute the wind died. Two dips a day. It was like sailing a merchant ship." There was a round of dark, knowing chuckles.

“We finally found enough of a current to pull us out and what do we see on the horizon but a sail. Luck is changing. It’s impossible to know how far ahead she is though, we might catch her in a matter of hours, it might be a week. There’s still no wind, we’re really just drifting, but with a bit of direction. Those sails though, they must be drifting too. *Whydah* doesn’t have a very tall mast so we often sight ships before they sight us.”

“One of her best points,” put in Jack.

“Yes it is,” Bellamy smiled. He was nothing if not proud of his ship.

“So we figure there’s not much to be done. Either we drift faster and catch it or it gets the wind ahead of us and disappears. I hate drifting. Every sailor hates drifting. We float along for days with those sails on the horizon, never can see the ship, just the sails, the white against a world of blue, forever out of reach.

“Finally after three days the sails disappear and we know. Wind. Life comes back to the crew, men get out of hammocks again. Everyone feels lighter, the water ration doesn’t even seem so bad anymore. Two hours later we heard that first snap, that delicious curling sound of canvas catching wind. And we move forward, we leap forward. It feels like *Whydah* has been shot out of a gun. We’re laughing and crying, everyone is hugging.”

The crew was smiling now at the memory.

“And then we see the sails again.”

Lulu noticed the smiles fade from the crew’s faces. One man crossed himself the way the Spanish do. Sam continued.

“This is our luck, we’re out of the doldrums and there’s a prize in front of us. It doesn’t get much better than that. We slowly run her down. She’s not well sailed. Jack takes a point of intercept that’s about half a day out. We figure we’ll have her before nightfall. Now of course we can see her. And it seems strange but there’s no one on the deck. We figure they seen our black and are hiding. Wouldn’t be the first time. Though usually there’s still someone at the helm. We can’t be sure, but Jack says come here Sam. So I go up to the poop where’s he’s got the glass and have a look. It’s a strange thing, the deck is well laden, there’s stuff lashed everywhere, she looks smartly rigged. She’s not very well trimmed for someone trying to outrun a pirate, but hey, not everyone can sail.”

There was laughter from the crew.

“Still, you ever get a feeling? A chill down your back? Like something just isn’t right and you don’t know what it is? I had that feeling. I took the glass and went up in the rigging of the main mast. We used to have a barrel up there, so I went and stood in it for a while studying the ship. I can’t put my finger on it but something is off. I told Jack when I came back down that I had a bad feeling.” He glanced at Jack. He was breaking bits of a twig and throwing them in the fire.

“I told him it didn’t feel right to me. He asked me if I wanted to fall off. But that would be crazy, a heavily laden ship you’re having no trouble overtaking? Who falls off that? I said no, take her. I put the men to the guns, just to be safe. It’s right before sundown when we finally get within shooting distance. Jack gets the horn and shouts out, tells them to turn into the wind, we’re going to board, all the usual stuff. No one answers. No one is on deck. We figure they’re terrified, hiding below deck. So we pull along side, grappling hooks go over, we turn her into the wind and board. The men are up the masts, lowering sails to slow us all down. Jack and I and Alex have a look around. There’s no one. It’s so quiet it’s unnerving. The crew is starting to feel it too.”

The men were nodding. One yelled out, “I felt it from the beginning, but hell, I was hopeful of rum somewhere on that cursed ship.”

Captain Bellamy smiled. “so we get to the main hatch and all kind of look at each other. Everyone’s least favorite moment of boarding, stepping down in to that darkness where you don’t know if it’s going to be swords or guns or nothing coming at you. Jack goes first, heel slides the ladder, sword in one hand pistol in the other. It was quite impressive. He smiled at Ratham, who tipped his tri-cornered hat to the crowd.

“Alex and me don’t hear a thing. I yell down, Jack, what’s going on. Nothing comes the answer. Alex and I go down, slow, guns drawn. There’s Jack wandering around in the darkness, poking around the crew’s hammocks. There’s no one. And still that strange silence. You know how the presence of people makes a noise, a very quiet, subtle noise you don’t really notice... until it’s gone? That noise was gone.”

“We struck a torch and searched the hold, There’s no one. What’s more there’s no sign of anyone that looks fresh. There’s no half eaten food. No mess dishes, nothing. It’s like there hasn’t been a person on that ship in weeks. I’m starting to get a little spooked. I looked over and Alexander’s white as a fog. He says he’s going to go up and check on the rigging.” Everyone laughed. Alexander shook his head sheepishly. “You know me, I never back down from a fight, but how do you fight a ghost?”

Bellamy nodded. “No criticism from me Alex. So Jack and I stand there for a bit in the darkness, looking at each other trying to figure out what’s going on. The firelight from the torch is making strange shadows on the hull. Jack just stares at me. Where is everyone Sam?”

“You don’t think they’d hide in the bilge do you? I asked him. Jack made that face our quartermaster makes when he doesn’t like your idea. Sam grinned. Jack waved his hand in mock theatrical bow.

“We hunted around, but there wasn’t much to hunt through. Some silk, mostly some barrels of alcohol. Not the kind you drink. A couple were empty. There was some salt pork that was still good. Jack found the bilge hatch and we open it and thrust the torch down in it, but there was nothing but stinky water. We

went back up topside. It was pretty obvious, there was no one on the ship. It was just sailing.”

“We sat down on the deck rails and talked it over.”

Jack threw the last of the stick in the fire. “I think they abandoned ship.”

Several of the crew grunted. “Who would abandon ship?” asked Bellamy.

“In a storm? It’s crossed my mind.” Jack laughed, but seemed serious as well, and very drunk. “I mean, you really want to abandon ship right, but you don’t of course because that would be stupid. Well suppose you gave into that impulse? Suppose you really did it? You got in the canoe and let the main ship go. . . .” His voice trailed off.

“There were seven hammocks in that hold, no way you’re convincing at least seven sailors to abandon ship. No way.” Lulu was nodding along with Captain Sam. She knew she would never do it. The ship wants to be upright her father always said, just keep steady at the helm and trust the ship.

“What were they carrying again?” Her father spoke up without looking at Captain Bellamy. He was staring into the darkness, lost in thought, the way he looked when he was a hundred leagues away in his mind.

“It was grain alcohol mostly. Couple of empty kegs. Don’t know how anyone drinks that stuff.”

“Hmm. Did you seize it?”

Bellamy looked down. Ratham fairly gasped. “No. We got out there quick as we could. I’m not taking a ghost prize.”

“You left a perfectly good ship sailing itself across the Atlantic?” Her father looked incredulous. He seemed uninterested in the spooky aspect of the story, which had already made Lulu wish her Aunt Māra were there so she could crawl in her lap.

Black Sam and Jack glanced at each other. Lulu saw the crew stare away. She noticed her father pick up on it too. He shrugged. “Shame,” said her father, “it’d help kill the snails in your hull.”

Another man told a story of running aground at the mouth of a crocodile infested river in Africa, but Lulu had already dozed off. Until she heard the same whisper she’d heard earlier in the forest. “Lulu.”

“Yes brother?”

“Do you think the other pig is sad?”

It took Lulu a moment to process which other pig he was referring to but then she remembered the second pig. It had been further into the bushes so she’d not paid it much attention, but she wondered if they were related. Or mates. “I don’t know brother.”

“I think it’s out there, missing the one I killed.”

Lulu rolled over and looked at Henry. Her back was to the fire, but he was sitting up enough that she could see his streaked cheeks in the firelight. She did not say anything, but she reached out and took his hand.

He continued to stare off into the fire as a tears ran down his face. Finally he spoke again, his voice choked. “I think Owen is out there somewhere, missing me.”

Lulu didn’t know what to say. She thought a thousand thoughts, but none of them could do anything to ease the pain of that image, of Owen and Francis and Uncle Cole, somewhere out there in the darkness, never able to find their way back, searching for their families, but never able to find them. She couldn’t think of anything to say, but when Henry finally laid his head down, she pulled him close and wrapped her arms around him and they fell asleep that way.

Chapter 13: Careen

Sam and Jack and the crew spent two weeks on the beach. The crew helped her father frame out a new Delos. It still needed a mast, but they’d floated it and rowed it up the river. It was a slightly modified design her father believed would sail faster. Jack stood on shore watching Sam and her father trying to surf it in from its maiden voyage. “You know Birdie, three years ago I started sailing in something not much bigger than that thing. I sailed into a Nassau two winters ago in a canoe. A canoe Birdie. It was a fine canoe. But look at that Birdie. He pointed down the beach at *Whydah*, which was nearly upright, waiting for the tide to lift her enough to slide back out into deeper water, her hull sealed, her rigging the next thing to be worked on.

“That my girl, is a warship. We captured that vessel without firing a single shot. We simply paddled up. There was no wind that day, so we were paddling our canoe. We rowed up and they were so afraid of us they gave up. I never thought I would see a day like this, when people like me, Sam, your father... when people like us would have our own ships.” He took a large swig of rum from the small barrel in the sand.

“Sure, I dreamed of things like that, and maybe I even secretly thought maybe... maybe one day the sea would grant us a real ship, maybe I did think that was possible.” He wiped his lips. “But good lord, look at that thing! It’s a warship. People like us rule the sea right now. We have warships. This was not supposed to happen Birdie.”

He stared out at the sea in silence for a moment. “Somewhere, someone is very, very unhappy right now.” He smiled. She smiled back at him. “Someone somewhere is plotting their revenge. And they will probably get it, but for now... for now the sea is ours Birdie.”

Birdie went with Tamba to work the rigging on *Whydah*. The ship was huge, so much larger than *Wanderer* as to make her home feel like a little toy. *Whydah* was a warship Ratham kept saying, and Birdie thought he was just bragging until she got out there next to it in the rowboat and saw what he meant. It was big, a truly massive, hulking, heavy-looking piece of wood and sail. It had a presence you could not ignore.

She climbed up the rigging with Tamba behind her. They got to work tarring the standing rigging, some of which the men were still retying and splicing. The smell of pine and tar and salt water mixed in the offshore breeze with its scent of salt marsh and river mouths and maybe, if she really focused, the hint of campfire smoke. But she didn't focus, she focused on holding onto the rigging because she was higher than she had ever been before and, unlike her sister, she did not much like heights. She kept one arm looped tightly around the hemp line as she painted the tar onto the row of line above it.

She was halfway down the mizzen mast rigging when she happened to stare out at sea at just the right moment so that she saw something white move. At first she thought it was a sea gull, or a skimmer dipping its beak down to snag some unseen fish. But it wasn't moving like a bird. It was a sail. Without really thinking about it, because it was what she always did when she spotted a sail, it was what any sailor would do if they saw a sail, she yelled "sail".

She felt every eye on the ship glance up at her, find her line of sight and follow it out to sea. Tamba was in the rigging across from her and he slowly turned around to look. She watched as it dipped below the horizon before he had turned. She gulped, what if no one believed her? She glanced down. Jack was standing below her, one leg on the rail, glass to his eye. She watched as he brought the glass down and glanced up at her, "Flag? Bearing?"

She shook her head. He nodded. He called out someone's name and handed them the glass. Birdie watched as the sailor climbed the main mast rigging up to the barrel and began scanning the horizon. He was at least 20 feet higher than her, surely he would see it. She watched as he silently shook his head to Jack. Tamba turned back around and looked at her. "You sure?" he asked quietly.

She nodded. "Very."

"We should hurry up then. Even if it doesn't show again, Captain Sam may want to chase it."

"What about the rigging?"

"We'll leave them the barrel of tar, they can finish it when they finish it."

Birdie felt her heart sink. She glanced around the ship, everyone who'd shared their fire for half a moon would soon be gone. Birdie began to wonder if maybe it hadn't been a bird. She and Tamba went back to their work. The men below went back to their tasks, but there was a tension, Birdie could feel it. She glanced back at Edisto. She wondered what her father would say. She decided

he would probably say nothing. This was always a good assumption when trying to decide what her father would say. But would he believe her? Of course he would. He always believed her.

“Sail!”

Birdie glanced up at Tamba. He nodded toward the deck and they both began descending, brushes in their mouths, the bitter taste of piney tar on their tongues. Captain Sam was racing up the main mast rigging and Birdie couldn't help wondering why he hadn't done that when *she* had yelled sail. Was it her? Or would he have ignore the first sighting no matter who had made it? Was the sailor in the barrel some eagle-eyed trusted salt? Was that why Sam seemed to believe him and not her? She had a dozen reason why he didn't act on her sighting by the time she reached the deck, but the truth was she was hurt. She didn't like it when people doubted her. Especially a whole ship full of people she liked and wanted to like her.

Jack came up from below deck carrying two hatchets. Two more were strapped to his waist. Birdie had never seen him dressed for battle. She was startled by how different he looked. His eyes seemed more alive, they had an intensity Birdie had never seen in them before. “Birdie,” he cried. “I want to bring you with us,” Birdie's heart skipped a beat, but before she could react Jack went on, “but your father would kill me.”

He turned to a sailor near the rail. “Make read their pirogue. Birdie, you help Tamba get the bung in that barrel and then get overboard to the boat, we're raising anchor.”

Bellamy might be the captain, but the ship came to life when the quartermaster came on deck. Men scurried up the rigging and began dropping the sails. Others were already winching the great wooden wheel that raised the anchor. Birdie had spent most of her life at sea, been on many a ready ship, but she had never seen a crew come together in the kind of concerted effort that the crew of *Whydah* displayed now. It was like an octopus waking up, first a few suckers twitched, then whole tentacles began to move, then suddenly it's off, gone in a flash.

She and Tamba hammered in the bung and fairly slid down the side of *Whydah* into the pirogue. Two sailors hoisted up the netting behind them and *Whydah* began to move away from them before they had even settled into their seats. The offshore wind sent her surging out to sea and she and Tamba watched her go as they set about raising their own sail and tacking back toward shore.

And just like that, *Whydah* was gone, back to what she did best, chasing sails over the horizon.

Chapter 14: *Whydah* Returns

It was a quarter turn of the moon before the *Whydah* returned, with the prize ship right behind her.

It was early morning, Lulu was still half asleep but a voice was yelling. "Someone bring me the glass." Lulu turned to find this voice. Her father was standing on top of the dune looking out at the sunrise, yelling down at her and Birdie still asleep by the fire.

Lulu jumped out of her covers and dashed into the hut to grab the glass out of her father's sea chest, which lay opposite the door. She turned around and almost barreled right through Kobayashi, who laughed. "What is this big panic?"

"Father wants the glass." She darted out the door with the glass clutched tight in her hand and loped up the dune to where her father, Birdie and Henry were now standing. They were all shielding their eyes, watching the thin line of horizon where two ships were sailing, nearly directly toward them. Her father held out his hand without ever looking down. Lulu handed him the glass.

"*Whydah*. And her prize I imagine." His voice trailed off to a whisper. "Why are they coming here?"

Lulu knew he was talking to himself, but she enjoyed answering his inner monologues when he spoke them out loud. Who talks aloud and doesn't expect others to answer? "Maybe her prize needs to careen. It's happened before." She glanced down the beach toward the *Arkhangelsk*.

Her father took the glass from his eye and stared down at her. He cocked his head to the side as if considering her, but she knew he was really considering some silent thought in his head. "That could be Lu. That could be."

He turned around and walked back toward camp. "We may need meat," he said to no one in particular. "I am going to sail the pirogue out to them and see what's afoot. I'll have them fire a cannon if they're coming ashore." Lulu watched from the dune as he headed down the trail toward the marsh to collect the pirogue. She considered running after him, but she knew what he'd say *it's too dangerous*. It was always too dangerous. She grumbled to herself as she walked back toward camp to see Tamba and Kobayashi packing their rifles. "You should take Henry." They glanced at her, then at each other. Tamba shrugged. Kobayashi looked at her, go get him.

Lulu bolted back up the dune. Henry was already on the far side, walking the shore with Birdie. She yelled. They turned. But she knew they could not hear her. She gestured for them to come, and then she began running toward them. They met in the middle and Lulu had to bend over, panting hard before she could get it out even in gasps. "Henry... hunt... Tamba... Kobayashi..." Birdie put it together before Henry, and shouted. "Tamba and Kobayashi said Henry can go hunting?"

Lulu nodded and sat down in the sand. Henry did not ask for details. He was off and running the minute Birdie had opened her mouth. The girls sat in the sand, catching their breath. Birdie stood up. "Look, Papa."

There was the pirogue, barreling out of the river mouth, sail smartly trimmed.

They could see their father's back as the boat rode the offshore breeze through the surf at the mouth of the river. He was sliding through the swirling mix of river and ocean currents, a spot Lulu hated sailing. The slippery and strange mix of waters moved the boat in unnatural ways. It was the only thing she hated about sailing, crossing the mouth of a good size river. Her father slid right through it without seeming to notice. Soon after he was forced to tack and the sail swung over, blocking him from view. She was sure he could see them on the shore still though. The pirogue was a sneaky little boat. Or at least Delos had been. She assumed the Delos II was as well, she had yet to be in it.

She felt a wave of panic pass through her chest at the thought of Delos. She and Birdie had not spoken of it since the days after the storm when they were still looking for it. She missed the boys. She missed Aunt Māra. Aunt Māra might still be on the island, but the part of her that Lulu loved to be around was gone. She was like a ghost wandering the island, never really there, never really anywhere.

They watched as the pirogue and the man of war closed the gap between them. The merchant hung back. If she was in need of tar, no one seemed in a hurry to bring her in. Lulu shivered in the wind. She and Birdie took turns throwing shells at a seagull feather sticking up in the sand, trying to see who could get the closest, but not hit it. Birdie was winning.

They lost interest in the game as the two boats drew together. "I wish we had a glass," said Birdie.

"I wish we were in the boat with Papa," said Lulu. Though she too wished they at least had a glass. Technically Tamba had a glass and he probably would have let them use it if they'd asked, but she had not thought of it. Her only thought had been to get Henry headed back to camp so he could go hunting. Without Owen around Henry had no one to hunt with. He'd had no one to share the glory of his boar with. While it was probably fun to be paraded around on sailors' shoulders, she knew the one he really wanted to know about it was Owen. He rarely spoke of Owen, or of hunting, but she knew he missed them both. She saw it in the way he sat quiet sometimes, staring at nothing. It was a little bit like what Aunt Māra did, but it didn't last as long. Still it lasted long enough that Lulu had noticed it, and as soon as she noticed it she'd made a point to look for ways she could help him. This was the first thing she'd been able to do. It made her feel good to think of him off hunting, though she did wish that she'd thought to ask Tamba for his glass because it was impossible to tell what was happening offshore.

Her father's boat was in irons, probably being towed by a line to *Whydah*, since she had not slacked sail, though she did appear to be coming about. The pirogue's sail flutter like a flag alongside.

And then they watched as the Pirogue heeled slightly, caught the wind and pulled away from *Whydah*. The big ship began to turn away, abreast the wind,

Lulu saw the anchor fall from the bow and guessed *Whydah* was going to spend the night just off the mouth of the river.

Her father came back up the river, the tide and wind in his favor such that he sailed all the way up into the marsh without even tacking. Lulu watched him from the dune, and once she realized he might be able to do it, she darted off through camp and down to the edge of the marsh to watch. She was standing out on the huge fallen oak that served at their dock when he glided up and tossed the stern line to her.

“You never tacked.”

He smiled. “I got lucky.”

“Birdie and I have been trying to do that for two years now.”

“I know kiddo. I almost tacked just so you could be the first ones to do it. But then,” he laughed, “then I couldn’t believe *I* might be able to do it, so I had to do it.” He looked down sheepishly.

“It’s okay Papa, I’m glad you did it.”

“Thanks Lu. I’m glad I have you to back me up, because if I were listening to me, I would not believe me. Sam and Jack sure aren’t going to believe me.”

“Are they coming?”

Her father frowned. “Yes, but only for the night. A party of hunters is going to try the south island for boar and deer. They’re provisioning to go North to Block Island. Although it sounds like Jack may be jumping ship.

“Is that the prize ship anchoring out there?”

Her father frowned again. “Yes. We’ll talk about that tonight. Where’s your brother.”

“Hunting with Tamba and Kobe.” Her father raised his eyebrows. “It was my idea,” said Lulu.

“That was kind of you Lulu. I should have taken him I suppose. I know he misses having Owen around.” Her father glanced inland.

“Do you think they’re dead Papa?”

Her father stopped coiling the line for a moment and looked at her, then looked away. He sighed. “I don’t know Lu. It’s possible. But I don’t know, it seems like something would have washed ashore... but I don’t know. Maybe they made it inland and something happened. I tell you what though, I don’t *feel* like they’re dead. But I’m not sure I was close enough to any of them to feel that, so I can’t be sure. I still look for them everywhere I go. We’ll find out more when we go to Charlestown.”

“We’re going to Charlestown?” Lulu nearly fell off the tree into the fluf mud she jumped up and down so much.

“We are. Time to provision.”

“Wait, are we leaving? But I thought we were staying through Solstice?”

“We may. But we need a few things either way. Might as well get them. Sam is paying us a share of this prize. Your sister sighted it, he believes she deserves it.”

“What? She gets a share? Like a real buccaneer?”

“She does if she wants. But she needs to understand everything that means before she takes her share.”

“What do you mean? What does it mean?”

“It means she’s a buccaneer, her name goes in the ship’s log. That means anyone who ever gets hold of that ship’s log knows she’s a buccaneer.”

“Is that bad?”

Her father sighed. “It really depends who gets hold of the ship’s log, but I think it’s not good either way, and I’d rather she did not do it.”

“Why?”

He sighed again and climbed out of the Pirogue onto the log next to her.

“It’s hard to say really. I don’t know what’s right Lulu. On one hand, there’s that man out there in that other ship, he’s losing everything on his ship. Captain Bellamy will take it, and the ship, and sell it for himself. That man gets nothing. Sam is stealing everything from him. That seems wrong. Yet. Most of the things Sam is stealing were made by slaves or stolen from the people who lived on this land before the British came. People I think of as Wandren, though they may speak a different language. So that man who just had everything stolen, stole everything he had in the first place. Is it okay to steal from the person who stole? Or is it just more stealing? I don’t know. I can argue it both ways and in the end I’d rather just sail and fish and hunt and not worry about anything else. But we need new sails, we need lines, we’ll need flour and salt pork and other things. We could make most of those things, but it would take us a long time, and apparently, there is a man coming who wants us off his island.”

“Wait, what? His island? How is this island his?”

“It was granted to him by the King of England.”

“How can the King of England give our island to someone?”

“Because the King of England has more soldiers with weapons than we do.”

It was somber around the fire that night. Only Jack ended up coming ashore. Captain Sam was accounting the captured cargo. The grownups spent much time smoking in silence. Thinking.

“This McPhall.” It was Tamba who broke the silence. “Does he plan to settle here? On the island I mean? Like those plantations down south of here on that gooseneck island in Georgia?”

“Oh, I doubt that.” Ratham chuckled. “The way that merchant captain described him he sounds more like the type to call Charlestown home. I imagine he’ll get himself a nice house in town and send a man out here every now and then to make sure ruffraff like us aren’t overrunning the place. No, I don’t think he’ll stay, but I think he’ll make sure you don’t either.” Ratham dragged on his pipe. “I hear Virginia is very nice these days. Certainly a good bit of water to disappear into. Excellent fishing. Could be just your kind of place to winter. Bit cold though I suppose.”

“Not enough jack pine, there’d be no point to wintering there, we couldn’t make tar. Same reason we sail right past Okracoke”

Silence returned. More smoking. Lulu was bored and starting to doze.

This time it Ratham who broke the silence. “You ever met that fellow, Dampier?”

“The one’s always writing?”

Ratham nodded and her father sighed. “Once, yes, in London.”

“You don’t sound impressed.”

Her father shrugged. “We had a pint in a tavern, I was headed out, he’d just come in.”

“I’d have thought you two’d have hit it off, scribblers the both of you,” Ratham smiled. “And he’s like you, not very interested in riches, just wants to explore, sail off into the sunset. If he ever manages to command a ship, you’ll never hear of him again.”

Her father snorted. “I don’t think anyone is going to give Dampier a ship and I doubt he’s got the resources to build one.”

“I wouldn’t be too sure about that.” Ratham said no more and the reflective silence once more fell over the small cluster around the fire.

“Why’d you bring up Dampier?”

“Hmm? Oh. I was thinking of a time he and I were crewed on a boat in Virginia. I helped him out with some troubles he was having.”

“That’s mighty kind of you Jack,” said Tamba with a chuckle.

Jack shrugged. “His higher bred morals were unable to deal with the reality he found himself in so I helped him in exchange for some silver he’d taken on ship in the south seas. Other side of the isthmus.”

“He sailed round the horn?”

“Oh, I don’t know about that. He might have, but at least once he walked it. Over the Darien gap. The Kuna, that’s the people that live down there, they hate the Spanish as much as anything so all you need to do is tell them you’re headed to attack the Spanish and they’ll up and join you, get you through the mountains, over the Pacific. That’s the way he told it anyway.” Jack paused and sat up to add another log the fire. A shower of sparks shot up in the dark. Lulu shivered.

“Anyway, one thing that doesn’t get to the South Seas much, apparently, at least as far as I can tell from the stories I’ve heard, is the British Navy. It’s all Spanish out there and they’re spread far too thin right now to be able to control it. I don’t know if the place has Jack Pine, but I do know, if I were looking to avoid the British, that’s where I’d head.”

Lulu glanced at her father, he was staring into the fire lost in thought. She wondered what the south seas were like. She’d heard stories, Kobayashi had sailed the far side of them from his home in Japan, down though endless chains of islands, all covered in coconuts and mangos and surrounded by treacherous coral reefs, to a town named Batavia, where he’d somehow met up with her father, though both were rather vague on the details.

“You want to sail *Whydah* around the south seas eh Jack?” Her father smiled. “I’d go with you in *Wanderer* if you did. That’d be a fine adventure. Wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

Ratham laughed. “No, I like my Nassau. I like my clothes and my wine and my food, my Spanish Galleons. I’m a simple man, Nicholas, I don’t want adventure, I want more rum”

“They have Galleons in the south seas you know. The fleet comes from the Philippines.”

“Oh I know, but the south seas go on forever. Thousands of leagues of ocean. Why try to locate a fleet in the midst of all that water, when you can just wait for them to sail through the straits of Florida and attack them there?”

“Where’s your sense of adventure Jack?”

“I told you. Rum. Besides, you don’t strike me as the type to pull up stakes just because because some lord from London comes along claiming you’re stealing his trees.”

Her father sighed. “In principle no. This island is a wonderful place to make camp for the winter, but there are dozen of places to do that within a day’s sail of here, and thousands more another day’s sail beyond that. You can call it running if you want to, but that’s not how I see it.” Her father propped himself up on one elbow. “My people come from the high country, we got there following the water, just looking for a place we could exist undisturbed. But we kept having to go higher. So some of us turned around and went the other way, followed the water back to its source. If we leave here it will just be more following the water,

flowing on. Water never stops Jack. That river over there,” her father gestured toward the Edisto river, “would you say it’s running away from something? Or is it running toward something? I say it’s doing neither. It is just doing the thing it was given to do, to journey through the world as best it can, follow its course out into the sea, and keep going on wherever the currents take it. The lowlanders, they think the rivers stop at the shore. You and I know that’s not true. That water never stops flowing, nothing on this earth ever stops moving. Why would I? It’s unnatural to stay in one place too long. Besides,” her father smiled a broad, bright smile of the sort Lulu rarely saw him smile, “where’s the adventure in sitting around some island all day?”

Jack nodded and pushed his hat back a little, smiling. “Well, when you put it like that...” He raised his mug to her father and then took a drink. “I have something for you then.” Jack stood up and pulled a piece of paper out of his jacket pocket and passed it to her father.

“What’s this?”

“Open it.”

Her father unfolded the paper and Lulu and Birdie both leaned over to see what it was: a map. It was a sketch of a coastline. Her father smiled, “is this your work Jack?”

Ratham nodded.

Her father studied it. “It’s very good.”

“How do you know? You haven’t sailed it yet.” Ratham smiled and took another swig of rum.

Her father laughed. “True, but it’s good enough that I know it’s Florida. And I have faith in you Jack.”

Jack said nothing, but raised his mug and drank again.

Chapter 15: Birdie Joins *Whydah*

Birdie lay awake late into the night, watching Orion’s belt move across the sky, wondering about the hunter. Did he like it up there? Was it small consolation? Did he miss hunting? Did that great son of Poseidon miss Artemis? Are you happy up there Birdie whispered to Orion. I think I should have liked to keep hunting if it were me she answered for him. Never trust a jealous god, not even Apollo.

None of the stories swirling in her head had an answer for her real question though. Should she claim her share of the *Whydah*’s prize? Ratham had offered two shares. One for sighting, and one for being part of the crew, even if it were only for that morning. Every member of the crew was entitled to a share. With her second, for sighting, she would get over 150 pieces of eight.

That was more money than Birdie had ever seen in her life. More than she had ever heard of anyone seeing or having. It was more than her father had. It was enough to outfit them for years to come. It was enough that they would not have to worry about money again for quite some time. At least that was what Ratham had told her. But she knew her father was against it. She knew he didn't want her name in the ship's log in case that log ever fell into British hands. If it did her name would be there, marking her a pirate, pure and simple. If captured she would be hung like any other pirate.

This was not a fate Birdie enjoyed thinking about. She had seen men hanging dead from the gallows in Charlestown, crows picking at their rotten flesh. She did not want to be up there on the gallows. But the idea that her family would be safer, could afford to find somewhere new to live, could maybe even find a home away from... the British. Hadn't her father said the British treated everyone badly? Did it matter then if she was official a pirate? Was being thrown in prison for living on someone else's island so much better than just being hung? Maybe Kobayashi was right, at least being hung it was all over quickly, there was no sitting around in prison. It was hard for Birdie to imagine a worse fate than being locked in a dark prison cell. Just thinking of it now made her wonder if she might not prefer the gallows, crows and all.

The fire was nothing but coals. No one had banked them. Birdie got up and used a small log to move the coals to the side of the fire, piling them against the rocks to protect them from the wind, where they would last through the night and help them get the fire going again in the morning. She sighed and sat down beside the warmth of the coals. She shivered. It was getting colder. It was getting to only time of year she did not like, real winter, the two moons where it was cold enough that she had to wear pants and a coat all the time. It was the time they made their last batches of tar and the heat of the kilns finally became welcome. She wondered though, with the *Whydah* having used half their tar if they would have to keep making it longer than last year. There wasn't much left if they were going to tar Wanderer too before they left for northern shores in March.

She could change all that if she claimed the prize. She could make it so they no longer had to make tar. *I like making tar* her father had said, but in her head Birdie had been thinking, then you can still make it, you just won't *have* to make it. She half wanted to take the money just to see if her father would really keep making tar or if that was just something he said so that she wouldn't feel obligated to put her name in the log for the sake of their family. But the truth was, she did feel obligated, and as soon as she understood that there was no doubt in her mind what she had to do. She fell asleep watching Orion run down toward the sea. You never stop hunting, you just move to new hunting grounds.

She woke up before dawn and went down to the shoreline to swim. She stripped off her clothes and steeled herself for a moment before running headlong into

the sea and diving under the first wave she could before she lost her nerve. The cold was a shock so sharp it felt like fire. Her skin tingled. She broke the surface and gasped involuntarily. She stood for a moment letting the shock wear off before she strode back in, gathered up her clothes and walked back to camp in the twilight. She was shaking all over by the time she got the fire going. It seemed ages before the warmth began to creep back into her. She was dressed again and feeling refreshed by the time Kobayashi came out to stir up the fire. He smiled and nodded at her. "Up early on your big day."

She nodded and took the pot of water he passed over and set it on the coals.

"So, are you going to claim your share then?"

"Yes I am."

A bright smile spread over Kobayashi's face. "Good for you," he said in a whisper. "I am glad for you then."

"Have you ever had a share?"

"Oh, yes. Many times. Not since we came to this land. But when we were in the south sea as you call it, especially before I sailed with your father, many times I crewed with ships that captured prizes and split them. It is the way of the sea."

"You don't think it's wrong to steal what other boats have?"

Kobayashi paused for a moment. His eyes held hers and then he looked away. "If you were dying, walking down the street dying of hunger, and you saw a loaf a bread in a window and you took it and you ate it and so you did not die, would that be wrong?"

Birdie considered this, but before she could answer Kobayashi went on. "Who decided that some people get to have all the things and other people can have none? Are these people wrong?" He coughed as a wisp of smoke blew in their faces. "There are many questions that are difficult to answer, I think that there is no way to answer them. My people have a word for this, actually we have several words, but I will teach you one, Karuma. Your people say Karma. Karuma is an account of the things you have done. We must all answer for our Karuma. But I do not think we will answer to anything that cares about what was on a ship or not on a ship. I think that we will answer for how we treated the people we met, the animals we encountered, the winds, and the seas. Are you mistreating the man who owned this boat you are dividing up? I ask myself this every time I join a crew in search of prizes and I have to answer yes. I am okay with this. I am willing to account for this action and take what may come." Kobayashi shrugged. "A man or woman must eat, I believe the laws of Karuma account for this."

He ladled boiling water out of the pot into his cup, watching the tea leaves swirl. "I believe also that Karuma knows what is in your heart. If you act with love, without greed, without hatred, without fear... if you act as you know you should, I believe Karuma accounts for this when it comes the bear upon you."

Birdie thought about what was in her heart, and again she knew that it was the right thing to do. She was not taking the money for greed, she was not taking the money because she hated the British merchant, she was not taking the money out of fear of the future. She was taking the money to ease the struggle of her family, of her tribe, her crew. She was responsible not just for her well being but for theirs as well.

When her father came back from his swim she told him. To her surprise he did not object. He simply nodded and went to tell Jack who was still sprawled in the dunes, fully clothed, asleep in the sun. Ratham was excited. He insisted that Birdie accompany him out to the *Whydah* and undergo the ceremony of induction for new crew, which consisted of taking the oaths and then feasting and drinking with the crew.

It was nearly lunch time when the men who'd spent the previous day and night hunting upriver came rowing back. Their launch with so full of boar and deer it roared dangerously low in the water. Ratham, undeterred, climbed in and the crew headed back the *Whydah* to prepare for Birdie's induction.

That evening, Birdie and the crew of *Wanderer* sailed Delos out to *Whydah* and climbed up the rigging to the deck. The crew of *Whydah*, including the cabin boy, who was not much older than Birdie, was waiting. They lined both side of the deck. In the middle of the ship, near the wheel, stood Ratham and Bellamy. Bellamy had the ship's log, where he'd recorded Birdie's name. She'd never seen her name before, but her father assured her it was correct. She put an X beside it and Bellamy blew on it to dry before ceremoniously slamming the book shut. "Welcome to the crew of *Whydah*!" he cried. A roar went up from the men around the ship and Bellamy bent down to speak softer in her ear. "However briefly you may serve with us Birdie, it is an honor to have you."

"Thank you sir," she whispered back in his ear. Jack blew in a conk shell and the low groaning sound silenced the crew. Jack stepped forward and spun around to make sure he had everyone's attention. "The oath here is simple. To be a member of this crew, and to therefore receive your share in spoils, you must agree to the articles of this ship." Ratham unrolled the paper Birdie had put an X on and showed it to the crew. He began to read the paper, which quickly delved into details of sailing *Whydah* which Birdie would never need to know, given that she was sailing with *Whydah* tonight only, something she would reflect on with some relief in the years to come.

Two things stuck with her though from Jack's reading, one was the promise not to draw blood, or "take away the life of any man given Quarter," and above all else, to remain loyal and "assist your brethren in danger, on pain of death."

In the end much food was eaten, much drink was drunk and a small sea chest with 140 pieces of eight in it was presented to Birdie, though carried by Tamba and her father since it proved very heavy indeed. She sat with in balanced on her knees as the very crowded Delos made for shore in the moonlight, the weight

of it was somehow reassuringly real, unlike the vague weight that lay on her mind. Whatever may come, she was a member of *Whydah's* crew now.

Chapter 16: The British

Two weeks later Lulu woke from a dream where she was gliding over the water, slow and smooth like a pelican, alone, her wing tips skimming the waves and watching the schools the fish dart from her shadow. And then she was in her usual body, lying on a calico quilt on the sand. She sat up and stretched and shook Birdie, who swatted at her. "Come on, Birdie, lets play what we were playing last night."

Birdie sat up groggy, rubbing her eyes gently as they had all learned to do in a world where you never knew when there might be a grain of sand on your hand. "What game again?"

"Remember?" Lulu held up the braided sweetgrass doll she'd slept with. Lulu like to curl in a ball under the blankets, no matter how hot it might be, and tuck her doll, no matter how scratchy or hard it might be, up against her chest. Her aunt said she was a born cuddler.

"Oh right," Birdie turned away and scanned the sand. Birdie had a habit of flinging her dolls away from her just before she fell asleep. She was not a doll cuddler like Lulu.

It was Lulu who saw the doll and scrambled out of bed to grab it for her sister. She looked up from the doll and saw a ship, not a ship far out at sea, but a ship at anchor, with a long boat rowing ashore. It was full of men in red coats.

She lowered herself slowly down, not wanting to be spotted. She scuttled over to Birdie. "There's a ship anchored out by the bar. There's a boat rowing in full of soldiers."

"What?" Birdie snapped awake. They gathered up their quilts and dolls and ran for camp. Their father was up, drinking some of the coffee Jack had given him. She wanted to scream, but she did not. She forced herself to speaking clearly and slowly. "There's a ship. Soldiers are rowing in." She watched her father's face. It flickered for just an instance, but otherwise he looked at her as if she had just told him about a shell she found on the beach. He took a sip of coffee. He swallowed.

"Well, I expect that'll be this McPhall character Jack spoke of. Hmm, a boat full of soldiers." Her father stared at the coffee as if it were tea leaves and might have some hint of the future, but there was nothing in it but murky blackness. "Lu, get Henry and go with Kobayashi and Tamba. Ready Wanderer to sail. Birdie, I want you to stay with me."

Lulu balked. She did not want her sister to stay. She started to protest. She glanced at Birdie and could tell she did not want to stay either. "Papa why? I want Birdie to come with us."

“Lulu,” he hissed, “do as I say, and go.”

She ducked into the tent. Tamba and Kobayashi had a sail cloth bag into which they were shoving their guns and swords. Maybe she had yelled a little thought Lulu. She helped them gather all the shot and powder in the hut. Lulu picked up the coppers and the iron skillet her father loved. Henry helped with a bag of shot. The four of them headed down the trail to the marsh, Lulu tried to think where the tide was. She thought about the boat coming in, she tried to see it in her memory, where was the surf line. she thought it was high, that would mean there would be enough water to easily float Wanderer.

They stored the goods they could carry on the ship. Lulu set about readying her to sail, while Tamba and Kobayashi made a second trip to secure more of their belongings, dragging a sled full of blankets, skins and furs, the cooking tripod, and her father’s precious water pot for making tea. They used tackle to hoist the entire sled on board. Lulu scurried around stowing things she could, securing with lines the things she could find no place for, while Tamba and Kobayashi winched Wanderer down the pine logs on which she rested, deeper into the water.

Lulu’s heart was racing. She kept glancing back over at the darkness of the forest, half expecting to see the flash of redcoats and bayonet knives, but it was silent and dark. Whatever was happening back at camp, the soldiers did not seem to know about Wanderer. Lulu’s heart pinched and her throat went dry when she thought too long about her sister and her father, surely by now prisoners of the soldiers, of McPhall. She tried to keep herself busy, but the truth was, once everything was stowed there was nothing for Henry and her to do.

There was a light splashing sound when Wanderer came off the logs and into the water. Kobayashi waded through the stinking mud and climbed up a rope ladder Lulu hung over the side for him. She helped him rinse his pants from a barrel of salt water that was always on deck. She had never seen Kobayashi anything other than cheerful, but for the first time he seemed very serious, almost somber. He did not smile at her at he usually did, he simply nodded and went aft to find Tamba.

Wanderer cleared the shadows of the oaks along the shore and the bright morning sun hit the deck. It had all the appearance of a beautiful day, though for the crew of Wanderer there was no time to appreciate it.

Chapter 17: Staying Behind

“Do you know why I kept you behind?” Her father sat still drinking coffee, but she saw him glance frequently at the dunes behind her.

Birdie shook her head. She felt like she was going to explode. She understood now what Jack had said once about battle. *Fear is different than being scared. Fear is feeling like you want to jump out of your skin and leave your body behind.*

Her father smiled. “I don’t know what this man McPhall is like, but it’s been my experience that most men are less likely to murder a man in front of his own children.”

Birdie felt herself floating up out of her body at these words. Her father was going to be murdered. He had gambled his life and hers on a silly idea he formed somewhere along the way and she was about to pay for it by watching him die.

A shadow drifted down the dune, extending past her. It had a stick poking out the side of it. She knew there was a man behind her with a sword. Or a gun, she could not tell as the shadow was mangled in a clump of grass growing next to her, but either way, this was it. Her head felt heavy, her mouth went dry and she thought she was going to fall over. She forced herself to blink, to steady herself. *The way to master fear, Jack had said, is not to ignore it, it’s to feel it, to acknowledge it, and then chose to focus on something else instead, focus on what you know you need to do at that moment, focus on something you have trained to do. Like fighting back.*

Birdie slid her hand to her waist and gripped the handle of her knife. Things were happening slowly. Her father was talking she realized, but she had not heard what he said. He took another sip of coffee, set down his cup and stood with his hands raised in the air. “I am unarmed,” he said. Slowly turning a circle so whomever was standing on the dune behind Birdie could see. I am not she thought. Was that part of her father’s plan? Suddenly she felt foot steps trudging down the sand behind her, black boots passed her by, another pair stopped behind her. “Get up young lady” a voice commanded.

She stood and looked behind her for the first time. The sun was low on the horizon, golden rays bouncing off the reflective calm of the morning sea. She could not see faces for the glare, but there were soldiers all around them. They wore white wigs, and three-pointed hats of the sort her father was always making fun of. They all carried guns, many of them wore swords as well. They wore heavy red wool coats. Birdie knew this was what English soldiers wore, she heard her father and Tamba and Kobayashi talk about redcoats before, but she’d never really understood what that meant until she saw them. They were made of wool and looked heavy, heavier than any clothing Birdie could ever remember wearing. For some reason she fixated on this detail. It was not part of her training, it was not fighting back, but somehow it made her come back around to herself. She stopped floating a few inches above her self. She settled back into her body and mind. They were ill-dressed. They had made a mistake in clothing. What other mistakes might they make? There was hope here. Nothing was over yet. No one was dead.

McPhall hadn’t even come ashore with the landing party. Captain Vickry, the man whose shadow had first come sliding down the dune behind her, had to send for McPhall. When he arrived he seemed not particularly interested in either her or her father. No one bothered to chain them, no one said they were

under arrest. No one did anything, though Birdie could feel, she knew, that they could not leave.

She spent most of the day trying to figure out what Lulu and the rest of her family were doing. She knew Wanderer was not in the marsh because the soldiers had gone down to the marsh to look around and come back and reported that there was nothing there. And yet it wasn't hard to tell that clearly it was not just her father and Aunt Māra, whom the soldiers rounded up from the other end of the island, and her living here. The three of them sat around the cold ashes of the fire, her father and Aunt Māra sometimes whispering back and forth. Their voices were too low for Birdie to hear, but she could tell that her Aunt was mad at her father about something. Possibly about everything.

For once Birdie was half glad that Francis was not here to see them. She felt helpless. She did not like this feeling. She didn't not want to admit she was helpless so she plotted ways she could escape. *Focus on something you have trained to do.* Birdie wished she had trained to do something. They didn't drill much when they were on shore. She knew everything to do on the ship, that would have been like breathing. They'd never had been caught in the first place, but even if they had, no one would take their ship, she felt quite sure of that.

But on land they never bothered to drill. They had two rendezvous points, depending on which way trouble came from. She assumed Wanderer and crew were at the river point, tied up in the clearing her father had made, up a channel in the cypress swamp. Not a perfect place to hide because there was no way to come bursting out of it, but a place very few people would ever think to look for a boat. It was a good place to lay low and wait for darkness. It was nearly a new moon, Wanderer would have a good dark night in which to come out of hiding and slip out into the ocean and go find help of some kind.

"Get up," said a soldier. Birdie did not look up at him, instead she studied his boots, trying to memorize them. I will know you by your boots. "Captain McPhall wants to see you." The soldier kick at her feet, startling her.

"Me?"

"Her?"

"All of you."

Her father stood up. "I will go, leave her out of this."

"All of you." He said, this time in a much more sinister voice that Birdie did not like.

She followed her father and aunt through the dunes and down the beach where McPhall, Birdie assumed it was McPhall, sat at small table reading through some papers. "Ah, the legendary captain of this pirate outfit."

Birdie glanced at her father. Legendary? How did anyone from England ever know who they were?

“I did not know we had met” said her father.

“We have not. I am James McPhall,” Captain McPhall extend his hand and her father shook it. “And you are on my island.”

“Your island?”

McPhall smiled. It was not an unpleasant smile. In fact Birdie did not think McPhall was a particularly unpleasant person. But that made her nervous because her father always said it was the nice snakes you had to watch out for. The coiled snake hissing and ready to strike is easy to dodge, the one that gets you is the one you never saw coming. Did she see McPhall coming? Did she need to? She could not decide.

“Yes, this piece of paper makes this land my island. If you look here,” McPhall held out the parchment to her father, “that is the king’s signature.”

Her father never even glanced at it. “I am not English, so whether that is your king’s signature or not,” he smiled in nearly exactly the way McPhall had, slightly unpleasantly, but with that unpleasantness under a thin veneer of pleasantry, “I could not say, but either way. . . It was not your island until you arrived and took it.”

McPhall glanced around, out at the ship anchored offshore. “Well, as long as you recognize that it is mine now we’re making progress. But I had rather hoped you were a reasonable man.”

Her father said nothing.

“Because this island was mine the moment the king put ink to parchment, which was two years ago. Which makes you. . . that makes you a criminal. You have stolen my trees, poached them like a common poacher. No different than the poachers taking my game in England. Do you know what happens to them?”

“I expect you feed them to the dogs.”

McPhall smiled again, this time genuinely, his whole face lit up, “why yes, that’s exactly what I do.”

For the first time McPhall glanced over at Birdie. She had drawn herself up to aunt’s side as her father and McPhall talked, putting her left arm and hip into Aunt Māra’s dress so that she could reach down and keep her hand on her knife. “this must be your wife and daughter.”

Her father nodded, which surprised Birdie since Aunt Māra wasn’t his wife.

“Well I rather hate to do this in front of your family, I had really hoped perhaps we could work something out, but I can tell that that will not be possible. Which means I have no choice but to arrested you.

Birdie’s heart leaped into her throat. Her father just shrugged. “Do what you need to.”

“Where will I find the rest of your, em, crew? Entourage?”

“You won’t.”

McPhall scowled. “You do think you’re very clever don’t you? I don’t think your crew are likely to get far with my warship sitting here do you?”

“Is that yours? A minute ago it was your majesty’s.”

This time McPhall smiled cruelly. “Do you see a king anywhere around us?”

“No I don’t”

“Well that’s because I am his majesty’s emissary. He did not deem it necessary to come all this way on this piddly little errand, he entrusted me to do it for him.”

“Did he? Well, let me ask you something Mr. McPhall, do you see a king around here?”

McPhall frowned. “I think we already established that. Have you been drinking?”

“Do you see an army around here?”

Birdie noticed McPhall almost imperceptibly flinch, “I do. I see an infantry company that’s about to take you to Charlestown to be tried for trespass on the King’s land.”

Her father ignored the last statement, but he glanced around looking at the soldiers. “I see an infantry company of 14 men, and one warship of 32 guns. And if I were you McPhall.” Her father paused and stared directly into McPhall’s eyes. “If I were you, that would make me very nervous.”

Her father turned and began to walk back toward camp. Birdie glanced briefly at McPhall whose mouth was gaping open and shut like a fish out of water, and then she darted off after her father, her aunt running right behind her. They caught up and the three of them walked together through the dunes.

“Birdie stays with me. Māra, the boat will try to get out tonight, I want you on it.”

“The soldiers will have us in irons after that performance.”

Her father smiled. “Me probably, not you. His ego won’t let him chain women in front of the crew. He’s the sort of man who will only do awful things when he thinks no one is looking.”

“You have much more confidence in your ability to read people than I do.”

Her father didn’t respond. They heard McPhall yell something. Birdie started to turn, but her father caught her arm. “Forward Birdie, no looking back. You don’t react. The minute you react they’re in charge. Always keep them reacting to you. Even when it seems crazy.” He smiled at her. The three of them stopped in the shelter of the dunes, out of sight of both the beach and the soldiers back

in camp. “It’s okay Birdie. We’re going to be fine. You and I are going to Charlestown. Most likely by wagon. We may be separated, but don’t worry, don’t react. Trust that I will come get you. No matter what happens, I will come for you.”

There was a hard lump in Birdie’s throat and she felt scared. Not fear, not the electric aliveness of fear, but scared. She nodded because she did not trust herself to speak without crying. She heard the clinking of metal, the sound of soldiers running.

“They’re going to chain me up Birdie. Remember. Everything is going to be okay. You have to believe that.”

A soldier crested the hill pointing a rifle at them. Her father raised his hands over his head and stepped away from Māra and Birdie. “Easy soldier, it’s me you want, don’t point that at them.”

The soldier swung the rifle clear of Birdie and Māra while keeping it trained on her father. Two more soldiers came over the dunes. One of them carried irons. They placed the manacles around her father’s wrists. They turned him around and pushed him forward, toward the camp. Birdie and Māra followed and the soldier with the gun brought up the rear.

The sound of iron clanging woke Birdie. Every time her father rolled over, the chains on his wrists clanged together with a terrible metallic sound. She stretched her back and reached her arm out for Māra and felt nothing. Her heart started, but she was careful not to react. She continued her stretch and rolled over again. How had aunt Māra slipped out so quietly that she had not heard her? Birdie tried to imagine her sliding out the back of the hut. Her father had made a trapdoor in the wall that allowed anyone sleeping against it to slip out very quietly. He and Tamba had taken turns practicing slipping out of it quietly, but so far as Birdie knew, Aunt Māra had never practiced. Apparently she did not need to Birdie thought. Once outside you rolled a short distance in the sand and there was a small shrub you could use for cover while you stood up and steeled yourself. Then it was just a matter of slipping quietly down the path and out of camp. Once Aunt Māra, or any of the rest of them, were in the woods the soldiers didn’t stand a chance. This was what her father had always told them anyway, get to the woods and move quietly. Most people cannot move as quietly as we can and so we can avoid them. The more Birdie thought about it the more she thought maybe they had drilled on shore. All those games she’d played with her brother and sister, trying to slip past Papa and Tamba while they hid behind trees. Practicing stalking game, moving quietly. All that was a kind of training maybe.

Birdie wasn’t sure what their plan was, she had not paid much attention to the half whispers and gestures that her Aunt and her father shared the afternoon after they put him in irons. She had been too struck by the fact that her Aunt

seemed once more her Aunt. She was not a wandering ghost pacing the island. She did not seem numb and unable to see you, she looked at you again, and while Birdie was still afraid, this was one good thing she had found in an afternoon that she had mainly spent trying to think of good things. Every time she looked over and saw the iron manacles on her father's arms she had trouble thinking of good things. The whole world seemed wrong. Her sister and brother and the rest of her family were hiding somewhere in a swamp, trapped up the river by a 32 gun British warship and her father was in chains and he had warned her that they would be separated and none of this made Birdie feel anything but bad and scared and afraid and she wished she had a mother to hug her and tell her everything was going to be alright even if it wasn't.

Even now somewhere out in that blackness her people were trying to slip out of that river mouth, past the warship and off to find help. At least she hoped that was the plan. All she'd really heard was what McPhall had said, that the ship would likely make a run for it tonight and to have to watch doubled. But Birdie knew that the mouth of the river to the south of Edisto was not the only way out of the marsh. So long as Wanderer could get downstream to the marsh undetected she could turn south, ride the high tide through the marsh to the south and come out much farther south, well out of cannon range. They would still see her though, there were no black sails on Wanderer, but her father had always said she was the fastest ship on the sea, so, as long as they could make it to the sea, Birdie was confident they would get away.

Aunt Māra getting away was the beginning of that plan and that had worked. So far so good. Birdie rolled over toward the wall of grass siding. She wished she could slip out the hidden door and disappear. But she could not leave her father.

Chapter 19: Escape Aboard *Wanderer*

It all happened so fast that Lulu never had a chance to feel anything. She and Henry were off down the trail headed for Wanderer before it really even hit her that Birdie was not with them. It wasn't until she was helping Kobayashi wash off the mud that it hit her, where was Birdie? It was like something in the center of her had switched off, a vast open space created where there had been none. She wasn't positive, but she was pretty sure she and Birdie had never been apart for more than a few hours. Even then, Birdie was out fishing, or Lulu was down the river at the traders, they were both here. And now they were not.

Lulu headed to the bow to watch for sand bars, submerged trees, anything that might snag them.

"Not this time Lulu," said Tamba from behind the wheel. "We need you at the helm. Henry," he turned to Henry who sat by the wheel, picking at a splinter. "We need you in the bow. You know the drill? Call out anything you see, even if you're not sure."

Henry nodded in excitement and darted up to the bow. Kobayashi and Tamba went below to row. Wanderer had room for four oars. Or four guns, Lulu reflected, which suddenly seemed like maybe they might have their uses. She wondered if her father was changing his mind about cannon on the ship. Probably not. Four guns wouldn't do much good against the ship-of-line sitting outside the river mouth, presumably waiting for them.

She brought Wanderer out into the wide channel of current. She felt the boat slip and shudder at the current of the river met the current of the incoming tide. She could feel the oars lifting her, driving her against the current. Still, they were slow. What would they have done if the tide wasn't in their favor? Could Tamba and Kobayashi really row Wanderer up stream? It felt like they were having trouble as it was. Lulu glanced at the sun and thought for the minute. The tide would shift soon, she guessed the crest would be another hour. Then it would run out and the marsh would be impassible for Wanderer for the better part of eight hours. They would trapped somewhere up river until well after nightfall and then they would have the ride the river into the oncoming tide and either row, or, if they got lucky perhaps an offshore breeze could push them through the southern marsh and out the Edisto river mouth to the sea. That way the warship would miss them. Once they were at sea, nothing could catch Wanderer. She knew that. Or at least she believed the adults who told her that. Kobayashi swore by it. Only an outrigger could catch this boat he'd told her once. She hadn't known what an outrigger was, but he'd explained how the doubled thin hulls paired with a sail and some of the best sailors in the world made the outrigger the fastest, and possibly the best, boat on the sea. Lulu desperately wanted to sail an outrigger.

"Hard port!"

"Coming port!" She spun the wheel and Wanderer swung to port. Lulu ran to the gunwale and watched as the limbs of a tree slipped by, like two bony fingers reaching out of the river, trying to catch them.

She turned Wanderer back into the middle of the river and squinted at the trees in the distance. They seemed so far away. Wanderer felt so exposed out here. She wanted to turn around and look, but she could not. Were there soldiers there on the shore watching them slide upriver? Had they captured her father and Birdie? She could not bring herself to turn around and look. It was better to wonder than to know that that had happened. There was nothing she could do anyway. She tried to force thoughts of her father and Birdie from her mind. Focus on what you have to do. Take note of what's going on, because bad things may happen, but you can't react to them now. Never react, always act. Her father's words in her head. She tried. But somehow Birdie kept creeping back into her mind and she felt afraid. She shivered and tried to focus on the river, on the wind, the current, Henry's voice, but he sat silent in the bow. She wondered if he felt the great emptiness inside her that she felt. Is it different when you're a twin she wondered, or did everyone feel this way?

Finally, after what seemed like hours, Wanderer drew near the trees that marked the inland border of the marsh. Then they slipped into the wider current of the river. Here the current was slower, the water deeper. Another hour brought them to the stand of flooded Cypress they'd prepared years ago in case they need to hide Wanderer. She brought the boat alongside the edge of the largest of the trees and Tamba and Kobayashi, exhausted from rowing, but running on that same adrenaline and fear that Lulu had used to pilot Wanderer, managed to secure Wanderer. They lowered the dingy over the side with a block and some tackle. Using a bow line, Tamba rowed the small boat further into the thicket of trees and then, wrapped the line around a large cypress, ran it back through the tackle, and slowly winched Wanderer into the tree grove. An hour later you could have been paddling up river within twenty yards of Wanderer and not seen her. Lulu knew this because she took the dingy and paddled twenty yards out to fish for dinner and she had trouble finding her way back to Wanderer with her three catfish.

Kobayashi cooked the catfish below deck, waiting until the sun had set and mist coming up off the river would mask any smoke that might drift up. They ate in silence, Tamba at the bow until Lulu had finished and she came up to relieve him. It was like standing watch, but not fun and exhilarating like that was. This was scary and nerve wracking and Lulu desperately wished she could close her eyes and everything would just go back to normal, that this was all a dream she could wake from, still on the beach between her sister and brother, no ship on the horizon. But it was out there, the ship that is, somewhere out there. The question they all wanted answered was whether or not it was out there looking for them.

They gave Lulu and Henry first watch. Tamba and Kobayashi hung their hammocks topside and slept, or tried, Lulu wasn't sure how anyone could possibly sleep right now. They rested anyway. She and Henry sat on the windlass, staring out at the darkness.

"Lu?"

"Yeah?"

"I wish Papa was here. I'm scared."

Lulu sighed. She was scared too. She wished Papa was there too. They were never apart and she did not like it. "Tamba says he'll get away as soon as he can. But he has to talk to the man, otherwise we might have to leave the island." She saw her brother's face squeeze up into a frown.

"But we are leaving the island. We already left the island. And tonight we're trying to get out to sea."

"To go get help."

"Why do we need help Lulu? We never need help, why do we need it now?"

This stopped Lulu mid thought. He was right. She had not even thought about it. She had accepted that they needed help. But why did they need help? And why were they hiding?

If all her father was doing was talking to a man about pine trees, why did he want the ship hidden? And why did the man bring soldiers? There must be more going on than Lulu had worked out. She'd been too busy and too caught up in her own fear and pain to think about the bigger picture. She'd failed what her Papa always said, detach, step back and take a look around. See the whole picture before you dive into your part in it.

She had not detached, instead she'd worried about the future. Use the present to create future, wasn't that what Tamba was always saying? Worse though, she realized, she'd failed to look at the bigger picture and failed to ask questions. . . of herself, of Tamba, of anyone. She had accepted it all as it was handed to her.

"I don't know why we need help," she said finally.

Henry scooted closer to her so their legs were touching. She could feel his fear. She put her arm around him and he laid his head against her arm. "What I do know, she said after a while," is that we're going to make it out of here tonight and we're going to get help. We're going to do what we're supposed to do."

"How do you know?"

She wasn't sure. She could just. . . feel it somehow. She could see it in a vague way, she could already see them at sea in the wind and sunlight. "I don't know how I know Henry, I just know that I know."

Henry did not say anything, he continued to lean against her.

Lulu watched the water in front of them shimmering black in the starlit night. Overhead the wispy cloud of stars her father called the great sail was glowing above them. Lulu felt herself relax. She felt the weight of her brother against her, warm and safe. She squeezed him tighter and said a prayer for them all.

The darkness felt like a black quilt wrapped around them, a cover beneath which they could disappear into safety. She still didn't know why they were running, but if that was what they were to do, then do it already, she thought. But she said nothing to Tamba and Kobayashi who had relieved her just as her eyelids were starting to droop.

Henry had long since fallen asleep with his head in her lap. Kobayashi carried him back to the stern and placed him in his hammock. Lulu wanted to stay up but her eyelids were so heavy it hurt to keep them up. She didn't remember giving in, but she jolted awake again when she felt Wanderer move. She tried to gauge how long she had been a sleep, but she couldn't see the moon for the trees and wasn't sure where it had been when she fell asleep anyway.

She rolled out of her hammock with a thud and saw Tamba was at the helm, Kobayashi in the bow, winching them forward with the lines, pulling Wanderer out of the trees. With a start she noticed a third figure on deck and ran over to her, “Aunt Māra, how did you get here?”

“I slipped out of camp after everyone was asleep. I brought the pirogue.”

“Did you use the back door?” Lulu had always wanted to slip out of their hut using that door, but her father would never let them play with it. Now she understood why.

Her aunt smiled, “I did. And you know what?” She knelt down by Lulu. “It was fun. It was scary, but it was fun too. I felt a like I was a little girl again.”

Lulu smiled. Somehow she could not picture her aunt as a little girl. It was impossible to see grown ups as anything other than, well, grown ups. “When did you get here?”

“Just a bit ago. Tamba and Kobayashi are pulling us out of the trees. You father wants us to cut south through the marsh, take the southern fork and head out sea, to Ocracoke.”

Lulu’s heart skipped a beat. Ocracoke. Her Uncle Edward. Not really an uncle, but that was what the children had always called him. He told good stories. And his eyes were kind, though she knew he could also be rather frightening. Or at least some people were frightened of him. Her father wasn’t. She wasn’t. No one in her family was. And that was all that really mattered she reasoned. If anyone could help her father, it was Edward. He always had a plan.

“How is Birdie?”

“She sends her love.” Aunt Māra smiled and smoothed a piece of hair out of Lulu’s face, tucking it behind her ear. “She is scared I think. I’m sure you are too. But I don’t think anything will happen to her or your father. So long as they are together the British won’t harm them.”

Lulu shivered. “I miss her.”

“I know you do.” She stood up again. “We’ll get them back. Don’t worry. You head up in the bow and help Kobayashi. It’s going to be hard going in this darkness, we need all the eyes we have up there on the water. I’ll go check on Henry.”

Lulu went up to the bow and helped Kobayashi pull in the last of the lines. Wanderer was free of the trees and began to drift into the current. She kept an eye out and Kobayashi went up to raise their main sheet. It would make them easier to see, but they wouldn’t get far without it. There wasn’t much wind, but between what wind there was and the current of the river and tide heading out, they should be able to make their way along the backside of Edisto island, into the southern fork of the Edisto, using its current to get themselves out to sea. If it didn’t work there were always the oars.

Henry woke up when they moved out of the river current and into the slower water of the marsh. It felt like Wanderer was running aground as she moved into the slow mushy waters. Henry came and sat beside her in the bow, staring into the black water, looking for anything that might cause problems, dead trees, reeds indicating shallow water. It was all but impossible to see though. They moved through without hitting anything by Tamba's skill as a pilot and the grace of the gods, who must have wanted them at sea, not stuck in a marsh reasoned Lulu.

When they hit the current of the river again on the far side of the marsh Wanderer's bow swung toward the sea like a horse when you drop the reins. The ship knew where she belonged, knew where she wanted to be. Tamba gave her her head and she took them rushing out the mouth of the river and into the sea.

Far to the north, somewhere up in the darkness of the shore, which didn't glitter and shimmer in the night like the sea did, was where her father and sister slept, prisoners. At least she hoped they slept. Birdie was probably asleep. Her father might be. Sometimes he would stay up for days, sailing them through a storm. Other times he would sleep soundly through a squall, seemingly without even being aware it had come and gone. He always seemed to know which times it was worth staying awake for and which times he could sleep though. Lulu wondered what sort of time this was.

Aunt Māra came up to the bow and stood beside Lulu. "How are you doing?"

"Fine." Lulu did not feel like talking. But then she had a thought, "was Papa asleep when you left?"

"Asleep? Hmm. You know. I think he may have been. Why do you ask?"

Lulu smiled. "No reason."

Chapter 20: The Road to Charlestown

Birdie woke up to the sound of men snoring. She lay in the dark trying to decide which one of them was her father when she heard a whisper in the darkness. "Birdie, are you awake yet?"

"Yes."

"Listen, things are going to happen rather fast I think, so I want you to know, there is a plan here, the less you know of it the better, but don't worry." Birdie heard the wood creak as he sat up and swung his feet to the floor. "Well, I know you're going to worry, but try not to let it eat at you too much." He came over and sat down beside her with his arm around her. She leaned against his side, still half asleep.

He grabbed her hand and spread it open in the darkness. "Take this." He put something soft in it, leather she guessed. He closed her hand over it. Use it to

tie your knife higher up on your leg, against your thigh. They won't look for it there."

"Okay." She shifted her body, pulled up her nightgown, and with her hands spread the leather across her leg. She threaded the leather strap through knife holster and tied it tight. Too tight. She undid the knot and tried again. She stood up to see if it held. It did. She sat back down beside her father. "Got it."

"I don't think you'll need it Birdie, but it's better have a knife and not need it..."

"...than to need a knife and not have it." She finished. "You always say that."

"Do I?"

"Well usually it's 'gun' not 'knife', but yes you do."

"Ah, well, you know it well at least."

"I do."

They sat in silence, listening to someone outside snoring.

"In a few minutes their lookouts will see her and they'll chase her."

"Who?"

"Wanderer."

"Wanderer? I thought..."

"We needed her hidden so she could slip out at night. If all went well, and I think it did, Tamba and Kobayashi slipped through the marsh and out the mouth of the Edisto in the dark. But there's little in the way of wind, she's likely not out of sight. If they didn't see her earlier, they will in a minute." He squeezed her tight again and then went back over to his bed and lay down. "It's going to be a long couple of days Birdie, best get some rest while you can."

Birdie lay back down in bed wondering what Lulu and Henry were doing on Wanderer. She tried to decide which was scarier, being here with all the soldiers or sailing without her Papa on board. She couldn't make up her mind, but she was glad she was the one staying behind.

She was just beginning to doze off again when a loud angry voice barked through the door. "Get out here."

She sat up. It was light outside now and she could see clearly in the hut. She was surprised to realize it was just her and her father. Whomever had been snoring had been doing it from further away than she thought. She hopped down and pulled on her sailcloth pants, spreading her dress down over them. Her father motioned her back to bed and he went outside.

"That your ship I presume?" The angry voice said.

"How could that be my ship if I'm sitting here and it's way out there?"

“You’re not nearly as clever as you think you know. My ship is pulling up anchor now, she’ll have your bark by midday. You lost your easy way to Charlestown though. You get to go by road now, with me.”

“Sounds like a find trip. Do you mind if I make some coffee before we go?”

McPhall grunted. “You have coffee? Make me some. All they have on that ship is tea, not even good tea. Dried moldy tea. Brew a pot of coffee, I miss coffee.”

“I traded a bag last year from a ship up on the cape. They’re crazy for it in Boston apparently. I had never had it. . .”

Birdie watched from the doorway as her father clattered the coppers and made a big show of getting water. If McPhall had been angry before, he didn’t seem it now. She came slowly out carrying the wooden coffee grinding box her father had also got in the trade. She sat down beside the fire and began to grind the beans. McPhall nodded to her.

When the box was full of grounds she gave it to her father and he dumped it in the pot and set it on the coals.

“What’s the road like?”

“Sorry?”

“The road to Charlestown, what’s it like from here?”

“Bit rough getting off the island, but once you’re clear of the marshes it’s not too bad. Two day trip. Barring anything unforeseen.”

“How often does something unforeseen happen?”

Her father smiled. “Every time I drive it something I wasn’t expecting happens. Last time a Carolina Panther tried to hitch a ride on one of our horses.” Papa glanced at Birdie. “I shot it before I realized what I was doing. That was a fun trip wasn’t it Birdie?”

Birdie nodded. The truth was she’d never heard that story. She’d only been to Charlestown by road once, two years ago, and she couldn’t remember anything about it, except that by the time she got there she felt like her bones had been rattled right out of her body and that she’d collapse as soon as she stood up again. She had spent most of their time in Charlestown dreading the return trip, but then her father had run into some sailors he knew in town and they brought them and all their goods back down to Edisto in a very clearly Spanish bark only a little bigger than Wanderer.

“Panther eh? Had not heard of those.” McPhall rubbed the stubble on his jaw. “There a lot of those?”

Her father glanced up from the fire where he was stirring the boiling coffee. “I’m not sure, I’ve never tried counting them. But I’ve seen a few. One is more than enough.”

Her father handed McPhall a cup of coffee and he sat down to sip it. "God that's good," he said. "I haven't had a decent cup of coffee since Temple Bar three months ago."

"I always preferred Turk's Head in the Palace Yard"

"Been to London have you?"

"For a spell."

"Like it?"

"Not at all."

"What?"

"I prefer. . ." His voice trailed off and he took a sip of coffee. "less people."

McPhall laughed. "You prefer somewhere you can take what you want without paying for it."

Her father smiled. "No. I just don't like cities."

"Well I do. Cities are civilization. Cities are the whole point of everything we do. You're out here poaching my trees, for what? For tar, to put on ships, that are bringing things to cities. No cities, no poached profits for you."

Her father grunted. "I'm not making tar for the money Mr McPhall."

"Then what are you making it for?"

"I make it for the ships."

"Do you?" McPhall glanced at Birdie, shaking his head. "Your father is a real piece of work young lady, did you know that? I make it for the ships." He stood and tossed the dregs of the coffee in the fire. "Do you make the coffee for the cup?"

Her father smiled at him. "No, I made the cup for the coffee."

McPhall climbed to the top of a dune. "Want to see your ship for the last time?" He called down.

Birdie glanced at her father, he winked at her. No was all he said.

"Well then, I'm going to find Captain Rogers and have him round up the men. Anyone around here have some horses we could purchase for the trip?"

"There's a farm just after you get off the island, they have horses anyway."

"Good. We'll be wanting half a dozen I imagine. Your daughter ride?"

"No, she's spent most of her life at sea."

"She'll ride in the wagon with me then."

Her father glanced at her and she nodded. She'd have rather been on a horse with Papa, but the wagon might be more comfortable for a two day trip. She'd really rather have walked. At least they got to walk off the island. She knew the entire area would be watching them leave. The forests would full of eyes. Word of the ship had no doubt spread inland. She wondered if they would see anyone. Most of the people in the low country relied on the money they earned smuggling goods for men like Sam Bellamy to buy the things the soil would not grant them. Without the commerce from the sea, many would starve and the presence of a British warship was a threat to that commerce. Or at least it seemed like it might be, the whole countryside, the whole of the low country basin was watching to see what happened to Birdie and her father.

Birdie, at that moment, could not have cared less what happened to the low country, she just wanted to run away from all of it. Instead she watched the way the oak leaves shimmered and danced in the wind and morning sunlight.

It was nearing midday by the time they made it to the farm. It was the biggest house between Edisto and Charlestown, and owned by a man who had little tolerance for the British or anyone else who wanted to tell him what to do. He made it plain that he did not want to give any horses to McPhall or the soldiers. But McPhall kept upping the price until finally the man could not refuse.

He gave them the worst of his herd and a sad little wagon that looked to Birdie like it would fall apart long before they reached Charlestown, but she climbed in the bed anyway, preferring it to sitting next to McPhall on the riding board. Anderson, who owned the farm, gave her father the best horse, which could plainly outrun the rest of them. McPhall didn't say anything, but Birdie could tell that he saw all these slights, and knew them for what they were. She felt bad for him for a minute, everyone was against him and what had he done to them? But then she reminded herself that he was arresting her father, and she decided however people treated him, that was a reflection of what he did in the world. You shall reap what you sow was what Aunt Māra always said, which sounded good if you believed you were a good person, but how did you know? Aunt Māra said "well, you see what you reap. Does the world treat you kindly?"

Birdie used two scraps of burlap sack left in the wagon to fashion a pillow and lay down on her back to stare up at the sky and think. There was nothing better for thinking than the limitless view of the blue sky. The wagon lurched and shuddered across some dried mud ruts and onto the road. Birdie sat up and held on to the side until they found a groove of the road. It would be soft until they got out of the marshlands, then the road would turn hardpack, horrible and jarring. Birdie lay back to enjoy the sky while she could.

Was it true what Aunt Māra said, you reap what you sow? It sounded nice and it seemed like something that might be true because it was so simple. Everyone knew if you put corn in the ground, corn came up. No one ever put corn in the ground and ended up with squash, or beans. But was life the same way? Birdie

was suspicious of things grownups said that were hard for her to test. How did anyone know that you reaped what you sowed? What did her father sow to reap being arrested?

He lived, she lived, on an island, and burned stumps to make tar for ships. They harmed no one. Or did they? She knew Sam and Jack and Uncle Edward robbed ships. She knew they captured the ships, took their cargo, and sold it for their own profit. And she knew Sam, Jack, Edward and others used that money to pay her family to careen their ships and for the barrels of tar they needed. Did that make what her father did wrong too? Was it too closely associated with that theft? What about the people in Charlestown who sold flour that ended up on the *Whydah*? Or salt pork? Or anything else? Were they too pirates in some way? Responsible for what anyone they sold their goods too did once they had their goods? Was what Sam and Jack did wrong anyway? Hadn't the Spanish Galleons stole the gold from the people that lived on the main? Did that make what Sam and Jack did okay? Or did it make them further guilty? More blood on the money as her father always said about Spanish gold and silver. He refused to touch it, called it cursed, and said it would ruin the men that took it and kept it for themselves. He said it would sit in their storehouses and rot them from the inside, eat away at the souls of those whose livelihoods were built on it, and all those who came after them. It would fester like a lesion on the soul of the nation until the nation collapsed and disappeared and the gold returned to the earth from which it came. But then her father was prone to saying things like that. Birdie wasn't so sure. It seemed to her that the merchants got rather rich and didn't seem to rotting much. She'd said this to him once and he'd said, "you're not thinking long enough Birdie."

For a long time she'd thought he meant she had not thought about it for long enough, but then one day when she'd mentioned it to Lulu and Henry, Henry, who had sat very quiet while she and Lulu talked about the morality of the pirates they were pretending to be, had said Birdie, he means you're not thinking long enough in time. She'd asked him what he meant and he just shrugged, "Papa always thinks about things way in the future. He wasn't saying they'll rot right now, he means the weight they have brought on themselves will be there forever. Or until the get rid of it."

"Do you think that's true?"

Henry cocked his head at her quizzically, "I just said it."

"No, I mean do you think it's true that the money is cursed and curse will affect everyone forever?"

"Papa says that."

"But what do you think?"

"I guess so? I know I don't want that gold."

"Then what's the point of being a pirate?"

Henry smiled. "Because it's fun."

"What sort of pirate gives away their loot?" Asked Lulu.

"We do," said Henry.

"We're not pirates Henry," said Birdie.

"No, I mean in the game."

They had gone on with the game but Birdie had lost some of her enthusiasm for playing pirates after talking with Henry. What was the point of being a pirate if all you were doing was bringing some vague future ruin on yourself and your family? Ann had seemed to want to do it just because it was fun. In fact almost none of the stories she'd ever heard sailors tell had much to do with gold. She had plenty of stories of attacking ships and even scary stories of boarding ships, but she had no stories about whatever was on those ships. Either they thought that was something Birdie wasn't interested in or they thought it was something Birdie shouldn't be interested in or they just didn't think about it. Was it wrong to robs someone if you just took what they had and gave it to someone else?

Birdie also wondered why grownups were so concerned with gold and silver and money in the first place. So far as she could tell all you really needed was a little land to have a place to camp, some place to hunt, someplace to cook. Why did you need more than food and place to sleep anyway? Well, some things were nice. Some thing you need. She needed her knife, and her fishing net. And the gun her father was always promising her, but never actually getting her. And her horsehair brush, she loved her horsehair brush. And her ragdoll Jane. And her notebook. But that was it. All that fit in her sea chest. There was no need for anything else.

Her reverie was interrupted when a dark cloud of pigeons filled the sky. The soldiers began shooting them down and tossing their bloody caresses in the wagon. "You know how to clean a pigeon young lady?" asked McPhall. Birdie shook her head. McPhall glanced at her father. "She can clean a hog if your men want to hunt something edible."

McPhall chuckled, but the British soldiers crowded around her father menacingly. "We'll burn the feathers off tonight then. I am anxious to sample the local options."

"I can see about getting a boar," her father offered.

McPhall waved his hand, "too much work. We'll eat the birds and tomorrow evening I will dine with the governor in Charlestown while you enjoy moldy bread in jail."

Her father leaned forward on the pommel of his saddle and looked at McPhall for a moment before he spoke. "You didn't stop in Charlestown before you came down here I presume."

"I did not. Why?"

“I don’t know that the governor of Charlestown is going to be so pleased to see you.”

“Why is that? He’s a good man by all accounts I have received.”

“Oh I don’t know much about him as man, he may be a good man, he may not, but a good number of the people he depends upon to keep his city functioning may not particularly enjoy having a British warship in their harbor. It can be bad for some businesses.”

“Are you implying that the city of Charlestown is some kind of den of pirates like Nassau?”

“No, not really, you might find a few more liberal privateers down at the harbor taverns, but whether or not the men are there, the ships come and go, the goods come and go. Or well, they do when there are not British warships in the harbor. And when the goods don’t come, they don’t go, and no one makes any money.”

“I was warned of this.”

“Of what?”

“That the character of people who’ve been in the colonies degrades to the point that all they care about is commerce.”

Her father laughed. “Oh, I don’t care about commerce at all. I like to sail, and fish, and hunt. In that order.”

Chapter 21: Canons at Sea

They were well out of the river mouth before the eastern sky even hinted at dawn, but there was little wind to speed them over the horizon. They road the current and hoped for more wind. The plan was to sail east, out of sight, and then cut north to Okracoke. The wind was not cooperating though. In a flat out race they could not beat the British warship. It was bigger and heavier, but it had more sails and could catch more wind. Tamba still believed they could out run it, but even he didn’t want to try right now. So they were going to do what the warship could not, sail close the wind, row if they must, and use the tides and shallows to their advantage. They could lose her in the tidal marshes of the shoreline, they just had to get north of her first. That was the first race, and they had one distinct advantage: surprise. The British warship’s crew had to raise anchor, set the sails, and get moving. The ship might know something was hidden up the river, but the British did not know that they would slip out under the cover of night. They had a head start, the question was, how much would that help?

Tamba pushed them nearly four miles out and then turned north. They had a northwest wind at their back, but as they moved closer back to shore it would fall off. While Edisto Island faced nearly due east, most the coast line above it faced south and the land to the south didn’t extend out as far, which meant

winds from the south were blocked by the land when you got close to the island. That meant that while Wanderer had 13 knots of wind, and was moving at over 6 knots, the British ship closer to shore would have trouble finding southerly wind at all. Wanderer would run into the same problem as she got closer to shore, but if all went well, they would already be far enough north of the other ship that it wouldn't ever get within cannon range.

The British ship had sails out. Lulu could see them through the glass. There was something strangely thrilling about this chase. She knew they might all die if that ship caught them, but somehow it seemed impossible that it should. That was the thrill of it, that distance between what it seemed like was going to happen and what was actually happening.

She turned the glass north toward the shoreline of St James island, the marsh country south of Charlestown. The pitch of Wanderer and the blurriness of her glass made it impossible to tell for sure if the trees were moving, but she didn't think they were. That was good for them. She scanned back to the warship and was startled to see how fast it had gotten underway. It seemed like it was halfway to them already. For the first time since they'd escape the marsh Lulu felt afraid. She put down her glass and glanced at Tamba who was staring through his own glass. She heard him mutter under his breath as he brought the glass down to his side. He saw that she was watching him and he smiled. "She's a fast one eh?"

Lulu nodded and gulped. If Tamba was afraid then maybe it wasn't impossible that it would catch them. "Is it going to catch us?"

Tamba frowned. "It's going to be close. She's made good ground with the offshore breeze, just like we did. Now she's going to turn north at a slightly sharper angle and try to overtake us before we make it back in the wind shadow."

"Will she catches us then?"

"Not if I can help it. Now you go forward and tell Kobayashi to come back here. I want you to stay by the main in case we need you there."

She knew he wanted to talk to Kobayashi without her listening. Birdie would have found some way to listen, she had some curious way of always finding a way to listen to what the grownup were saying. They called her nosey sometimes, Aunt Māra got mad at her when Birdie listened to her, but Lulu never bothered. Grownups didn't know what they were saying half the time anyway and other half the they said things they would never end up doing, so what was the point in knowing them?

She went forward and sent Kobayashi aft. She sat down with Henry to play cards. There was nothing they could do. It was all about the wind and skill of the captains in using it. She, along with every other sailor, was just along for the ride. The wind always decided who won and who lost.

By midday it was not looking good. The British ship was within hailing distance.

Thankfully she had no forward cannon or they would be in real trouble very soon. As it was they still had a chance, though even Tamba was sweating now. He and Kobayashi had used lines to pull the main boom in tighter, allowing them to turn sharper into the wind, which gave them a heading the British warship could not match. Unfortunately it was also pushing them further out to sea rather than closer into the coast where they wanted to be.

When the sundial her father had built just forward of the wheel read 3, Tamba gave up on the coast and pointed them as close to the wind as they could come, heading them nearly east, when they wanted to head west. He decided, and they all agreed, that it was better to run until dark and try to cut back inland in the night, then disappear into the marshes at first light. It was working. They had gained a little ground on the British ship, but the wind would begin to die down as evening wore and her much larger sails would soon have the advantage. She was already anticipating this, having broken off a direct chase in favor of setting herself up to tack back into the them as the wind died and Wanderer's speed fell off.

"Her captain knows how to sail anyway." Tamba muttered.

Lulu watched the British ship cross their stern wake as it headed further out, hoping to catch the onshore wind of the evening and come swooping down on them. "What if we break now and run for the marsh? Couldn't we get into shallower water?"

Kobayashi nodded. "We could, but we might be stuck there. The tides are tricky too, we need to time them right to make sure we can get in, lay low, and then get out again without being noticed."

Lulu nodded. "But don't we want to Okracoke?"

"Yes, but first we have to lose this ship. No one wants us showing up with a 32-gun frigate behind us. That's no good for anyone."

"Revenge could sink that thing couldn't it?"

"Probably, but it might be quite a battle. And Revenge and her crew might not be well disposed toward us when it was over."

Lulu considered this in silence. She was curious what Jack did in battle, but she knew that Jack mostly preferred to avoid pitched battles with warships. Edward was the only person she'd heard of who enjoyed that. Her father too perhaps. She had never seen him in battle.

Suddenly the British ship began to come about, moving toward a parallel course. "Tamba!" Lulu screamed as she watched tiny black dots come running out the length of the British ship. Cannons. All those black dots were cannons and they were all pointed at Wanderer. Pointed at her.

Tamba stood beside her with the glass. He didn't say anything but she noticed his hand was shaking slightly as he held the glass. She heard him exhale and

steady himself. “Are they going to fire at us?” Before she was finished speaking a screaming came across the sky, a shrieking whistling roar that stopped when something splashed into the sea about two hundred feet off their port side. Lulu screamed.

Tamba scooped her up in his arms and hugged her tight. “It is okay Lulu, they are not in range yet. They are just trying to scare us.”

“It’s working,” she said as she composed herself.

“No it’s not.”

“I thought it was scary.”

“Of course you did, you didn’t know what was happening. It’s easy to be scared when you don’t understand everything that’s going on.” He sat down on the deck beside her, cross legged. “But it won’t work because we’re not going to surrender without a fight.”

“Are we going to fight?”

They watched a tiny puff of smoke and then there was another roaring sound. The splash seemed closer. “We may Lulu. But I still think we can get away.” Tamba glanced up at the sun, slinking slowly down behind the islands to their west. “Once that sun is down, the advantage shifts to us, he doesn’t have a pilot, none of them know these waters. We will lose them in the shallows tonight, make our way to mouth of the Ashley river and run out it northeasterly like any other ship headed for England. Then we’re home free, use the current to head to Ocracoke. Should take two days. Another to provision and ready Revenge, and then we’ll come get your Papa while that frigate is out at sea chasing our ghost.”

“And if we don’t get away?”

Tamba shrugged. “We get put in jail with your father and have to come up with a new plan. If I know you father, he’s already working on that part.”

Chapter 22: More Canons

Her father was up before dawn. He nudged Birdie’s foot and moved around so their heads were together. “How’s my girl?”

Birdie nodded. “I’m fine. How are you?”

“I am fine. I wish I knew were Wanderer was and what luck she’s had, but I’ll just have to have faith in Tamba and Kobayashi.”

“And Lulu and Henry,” said Birdie.

“And Lulu and Henry,” agreed her father.

Tonight we’ll likely get to Charlestown, unless they decided to wait another night and show up early. Either way we’ll likely be separated. I will be thrown in the jail and you’ll probably be taken to someone’s house.”

This sent a chill down Birdie's back. "I don't want to leave you."

"I know, but I'd rather that than have you in jail with me. I can get myself out of jail, I don't know that I can get both of us out of jail."

"How are you going to get yourself out of jail?" The news the her father wasn't worried about jail startled her. How did one get out of jail?

"Oh, there are several ways to do that. Gold is the easiest, but I haven't got any so I will have to use wits. Or cannons. We'll see."

"Cannons. Where are you going to get cannons?"

"Revenge. Perhaps."

"Edward's coming?"

"If Wanderer can find him."

"I thought you and Edward didn't get along?"

"What made you think that?"

"You argue all the time whenever we're around him."

"Oh, well, we're just discussing things. Edward is very idealistic about what he's doing. I am not as much." She could see her father's teeth in the starlight as he smiled. "And we both like to hear ourselves talk so we have that in common."

"Papa?"

"Yes?"

"What are we going to do if no one comes?"

Her father was quiet for a moment. "That's the hardest part. The waiting. We will give them six days. If nothing has happened after six days then I will get out the hard way and come find you. Wherever you are be kind to the servants, befriend any of the slaves you're around, they can help you get messages to me. And I will send messages to you as best I can. But always keep your eyes and ears open. Wherever you end up they will be in touch with McPhall and know what's happening. Always be silent. Always listen. He leaned over and kissed her forehead." "I love you Birdie."

Chapter 23: Night Sails

The sun was already below the horizon when Lulu woke up. She and Henry had laid down in the hammocks to try to make up for the sleep they'd lost last night and the sleep they'd lose tonight. Lulu didn't think she could sleep with a warship periodically firing cannons at them, but she did. She remembered her father once saying, you'd be surprised what you can get used to, but she'd not really believed him until now. She lay there a moment in the hammock listening to the silence of the boat plunging through the sea, there was no other sound and

it was easy to believe she was alone in the world. That the whole world was just this boat and there was no British warship around, no England at all, just ocean and her ship sailing between worlds where no one owned the trees and everyone was nice. Then she got up and looked around. The British ship was no closer and in little while it would be dark.

She went below to get some food for her and Henry when he woke up. In the darkness she found Aunt Māra and Tamba sewing on a huge black piece of canvas.

She took a piece of dried fish from the rafter and a ball of rice from the stove and came over to where they were working. “What are you doing?”

“Rats got into the night sail.”

“The night sail?”

Tamba laughed. “That’s what your father calls it. It’s a black sail, hard to see at night. Once it’s truly dark, we’ll bring down the other sails and run this one on the main so we’re harder to see.”

“I didn’t know we had black sails.”

“We haven’t used them since you were born.”

“Did you use them before I was born?”

“Some.” Tamba bent his head to his work.

“Do you need help?”

“I need a break,” said Aunt Māra standing and stretching. “I’m due to relieve Kobayashi in a spell anyway. You take over for me.” She handed her needle to Lulu and bent down to show her where she had been sewing. Lulu could see the ragged holes where rats had chewed the canvas to make themselves a nest. She hated rats.

She and Tamba worked in silence. When her section was done she carefully put the needle away in the bag Aunt Māra had given her and hung it back up in its spot on the wall. She grabbed some more fish and rice for Henry and went back up topside. The air was cool now and the last hint of blue was fading from the western sky. It was Lulu’s favorite time to be at sea. Darkness was overwhelming, like a huge thing rising up to swallow you, but in the good way. It was so much space, so much room, it was as if you could see forever. On calm nights when they were anchored somewhere sheltered, the water turned glass and reflected the stars so well it was like floating among them, sailing on the great clouds in the sky. Which her father told her were clouds of stars, but she wasn’t sure if he had been pulling her leg or not.

Tonight it wasn’t that calm, but that was okay, somewhere out there in the darkness that ship was still coming for them. She squinted at the western horizon, but could not tell how far out they were. She came and stood by her Aunt who

was taking her turn at the helm. She sat down on the stool Tamba had anchored to the deck, Lulu climbed in her lap.

TODO

Aunt Māra would sail for four hours, then Tamba would relieve her and sail into the early morning, then Kobayashi would take over, then Aunt Māra again, and so it would go. As long as they were at sea, someone had to be on watch. If her father were here, and if they weren't being chased, Lulu would have a watch, usually in the day time, although once or twice her father had let her take the first night watch. Twilight was her favorite time to be at sea, there was something so peaceful about the way to sounds of the sea and light of the evening mingled together, mixing at the western horizon where the last yellow glow faded to blue and then black and then it was just the waves and the wind and stars, endless stars.

Lulu jerked awake. She was still curled in Aunt Māra's lap. She stood up, hugged her Aunt and went forward to find Henry. She picked him up and carried him to his hammock, gently laying him down. She went below and fetched a quilt for Henry and another for her. The night was already chilled and would be even colder come morning. Then she climbed in her own hammock and pulled the quilt over her head and fell asleep.

The sun was up when she woke with a start. It was cold, but the beginning of warmth was there in the light of the sun poking through the canvas of her hammock. It was damp. Everything was always damp at sea. Her father said sailors love the sun not because it means fair winds but because it means maybe, just maybe, for a few minutes the world won't be damp. This sun had it's work cut out for it. The inside of Lulu's canvas hammock was nearly dripping. She however was quite warm with a quilt under her and another over her. She was wondering how long she could stay in this nice warm cocoon when Henry's head poked into her hammock, appraised her open eyes and said rather matter of factly. "here's some fish, you should eat, we'll be anchoring soon."

Lulu sat up. "Anchoring? Where, why?"

"Good winds through the night, Tamba brought us straight up to Ocracoke. We're going to see Edward."

Lulu looked out at the Carolina coast, which was more barren here than down south. That meant they must have had excellent wind all night to have made it this far.

Ocracoke was a small barrier island off the coast of Carolina with several very protected anchorages. It was favorite of Thatch and Bellamy. It offered three things all sailors loved, protection from storms, fresh water, and game. It was also nearly impossible to sneak up on it. They watched Thatch's lookouts come toward them from the headland long before they rounded the bend and actually saw his ships. If they'd been flying colors they'd have no doubt been engaged, but they flew a solid blue flag with a small white trident in the upper left corner.

It was another of her father's symbols which he was vague about. "It's the color of the sea he'd said once, and that's our only master.

Tamba hailed the men in the long boat with the bullhorn, letting them know they sought Thatch. The men came alongside and tied off to Wanderer. They both clamored aboard and glanced around briefly before Tamba brought them to the wheel to pilot her in to the shallows where they could anchor.

They were both missing teeth and dirtier than Lulu had ever seen anyone be. Even the men of *Whydah*, while rough, were not as rough as these men. Lulu involuntarily shrunk from them. One of the men grinned at her. "Don't often see young ones on a ship out here, good for you girl. And don't worry, I won't bite."

Lulu was embarrassed that she'd tried to back away from them and nodded quickly and then busied herself with a line that needed coiling. She avoided them both the rest of the time they were on the ship, which wasn't long. There was one narrow passage between two shoals that Lulu felt sure they could have managed without a pilot, but then one probably didn't want to take any risks. It wouldn't do to run aground in front of Blackbeard and crew and then flounder ashore and ask them to help you. Certain people commanded a level of respect that meant you had to get things right the first time, even if that meant accepting a pilot to help you through the shallows. Sometimes, her father had said to her when they came to Ocracoke the first time, you have to know when the real strength is admitting what you can't do. This he said, was why Edward liked the place so much, not for the protection, but for the weeding, the cutting of the herd.

Lulu was pretty sure they *could* do it, but then that was the point right? Not admitting that they couldn't sail the shallows, but admitting that they could not get to Blackbeard without a pilot. No one could. That was *his* point.

They Anchored Wanderer close enough to Revenge that they could have had a conversation with Thatch from the deck, but he was ashore according to the men who piloted them in. They left quickly, heading back the headland where they apparently lived, and presumably, kept watch over the anchorage.

Tamba, Lulu, and Henry climbed down into Wanderer's longboat and Tamba rowed them ashore. A sizable portion of Revenge's crew leaned over the railings, watching them in silence as they paddled by.

Here there was no surf to negotiate. The protected lagoon allowed them to row straight in and beach the boat. As they pulled her up above the high tide mark, Lulu glanced up the beach and saw two men walking toward them. One was stocky man of medium build that Lulu did not recognize. The other was a tall man with a massive black beard that stretched half way to his waist. He had long curly hair and sparkling, wild eyes. He reminded her of her father.

"Tamba! I thought I recognized that flag." He embraced Tamba, they clapped each other on the back. "How are you? Still sailing with Nicholas I see. That's still Wanderer eh?"

“Edward.” Tamba inclined his head in way Lulu had never seen him do before, it was not quite a bow, but it was more than she’d ever seen him do for anyone else. “I am in fact still sailing with Nicholas and that is Wanderer, holding fast.”

Thatch nodded, stroking his beard. “Still making the tar then?”

Tamba nodded. “Careened *Whydah* not more than a fortnight ago. Revenge before that.”

Thatch grunted. “Which Revenge? I’ve got a Revenge. Hornigold has a Revenge down in Nassua. Hell, Vain probably does too by now.” He turned to the man next to him as if sharing an inside joke. “If he stops drinking long enough to sail that is.”

“There’s a lot of Revenues in these damn waters Mr Tamba. What is it with Revenge? Nicholas would say that’s our problem, too much revenge, not enough. . . something else.” Thatch chuckled. He waved his hand to the man standing next to him, you remember my quartermaster Mr Dobbs?”

Tamba nodded to Mr. Dobbs. Then Thatch turned to Lulu and knelt down. “You must be. . . Lulu?”

She nodded.

“And you must be Henry. Ready to be a cabin boy yet Henry? Mine has just left, I could use a new cabin boy.”

Henry glanced uncertainly at Lulu. She spoke up. “He already is sir, on Wanderer.”

“Ah, shame. Well,” Thatch stood up. “Come, let’s walk to my new home. I have property now. Here. I own it. Thatch laughed.” “So, what brings you to my island Tamba? Not that you aren’t welcome to visit, but Nicholas does not appear to be here, and only two of his children are, which suggests. . . mystery.” Thatch’s eyes sparkled in a way that made Lulu shiver slightly.

Tamba looked down at his feet. “Yes. You might want to hear this before we go to your property. A British ship has come to Charlestown. Well. First to Edisto, now, since we lost it in the night, I assume, Charlestown.”

Thatch glanced up. “A British ship? You mean a man of war? Do go on. . .”

“A 32-gun frigate.”

Thatch glanced at his quartermaster and raised his eyebrow. “That’s four more cannon than we’ve got. I like this story so far, go on.”

“They brought a British nobleman of some sort, claims he owns Edisto. He arrested Nicholas for cutting down his trees.”

Thatch burst out laughing. “He was arrested for cutting down trees? That is the most British thing I have ever heard.” He glanced at Lulu, “I am sorry to hear about your father, but a British warship arrives on the most pirate infested

coast in the entire Americas and arrests a man for cutting down trees.” He shook his head smiling. “Some times I almost like the British.”

When Thatch had composed himself he straightened his jacket and smoothed out his beard. “I have learned something from my new neighbors Tamba. Not the British ones, the ones the British have almost wiped out. I have learned from them that one should spend more time thinking. Do you know what they do when visitors arrive? When I myself arrive? Provided it’s not urgent, they invite me in and we all sit down and we smoke tabacco, have a bite to eat, I sometimes convince them to try tea.” Edward smiled. “You know what it is Tamba? It’s civilized. Thinking, it’s the cornerstone of civilization.”

“My people do something similar.” Tamba smiled. “And we do something similar on Edisto.”

“Yes, I know. I have experienced that as well. But this time we will not have to put up with Nicholas’s contrarian streak.” Tamba and Thatch both laughed. “Come, join me in some tea and bit of tobacco, and we will talk about this British warship and what we should do about it. Bring the children, we have peppermint sticks.”

Lulu and Henry’s eyes widened. Edward really was the best pirate ever. Who else would keep peppermint sticks?

He shrugged when Tamba raised an eyebrow. “I like them. Dobbs likes them. What? Don’t you like them Tamba?”

Tamba frowned. “Too sweet.”

“Yes rather, that’s the point I think.” He turned to the children, “well you may have one if you like.”

Lulu and Henry both nodded.

The small party walked back down the beach to the tiny cluster of trees where a number of tents, ringed by cannon, were pitched in the shade. The wind blew harder here and the sound of canvas snapping in the wind added a rhythmic percussion that mixed with the distant thud of waves breaking somewhere on the other side of the dunes. Edward led them into a small tent where he and Dobbs set about making tea and gave Lulu and Henry three sticks of peppermint, one for each of them and an extra to take to Birdie. Lulu carefully wrapped Birdie’s in a scrap of sailcloth that Dobbs gave her.

Tamba and Thatch smoked. Lulu and Henry sucked at the peppermint sticks. An easy silence settled in and no one spoke for a long time. Finally Thatch said, “Well then, how soon to you think this warship will come looking for us?”

“Well,” Tamba glanced at Lulu. “I could not say.”

“Hmm, well, what could you say Mr Tamba?”

“I could say,” said Tamba, “that word is you are looking for a new flagship.”

“I see. That could be.”

“And Nicolas does not like his new residence in Charlestown’s jail.”

Thatch grunted. “I imagine not.” He blew out a long exhale of smoke. “So we sail into Charlestown, blockade the harbor, demand the release of,” he glanced down at Lulu and Henry, “your father, capture this British warship and sail out of the harbor, is that about it?”

“Exactly that sir,” said Lulu before she could catch herself.

“You do realize that would make me the most notorious and hunted pirate in the Americas?”

Tamba smiled. “Probably.”

“Sounds like a fantastic plan.” Thatch rubbed his hands together. “We’ve been itching for a prize around here. It turns out the men are less impressed with my property than they are with more, well, tangible goods. We’ve a bit of work to do as well of course, but when is that ever done? A ship is nothing but work. Nothing but work. Sometimes you just have to say enough. Trim the sails and find the following wind.” He patted Henry’s head. “Mr Dobbs, call the men, let’s put it to a vote and go get ourselves another ship. Maybe we can even,” he glanced mischievously at Lulu and Henry, “recruit some new crew members.”

Chapter 24: Why Is It Wrong?

The road into Charlestown became too rough to lie down in the back of the wagon. Birdie braced herself against the side, her legs stretched across the width and bed and pressed firmly against the other side to keep her from sliding around as the wagon lurched and shuddered over the deep, dry ruts of the road.

She tried to ignore McPhall, but he kept asking her questions and she knew it was impolite to not answer them, and she wanted him to like her since her fate, and her father’s fate, was at least partly in his hands. Until Revenge showed up anyway. Please hurry Lulu, she sent the thought out into the universe in hopes that her sister or her brother would hear her, please hurry.

Then McPhall’s voice brought her back to the world of the wagon and road.

“Don’t know that I’ll be doing this much” she heard McPhall mutter as they maneuvered through a particularly jarring set of ruts.

“If you don’t like the road, and aren’t going to come to the island, why do we have to leave?”

“Who said you had to leave?”

“You did.” Birdie looked away and rolled her eyes to herself. She found this habit of grownups playing innocent tiring. What did he take her for?

“No, I never said you had to leave the island, I said you’ve been stealing my trees and need to pay for them.”

This was news to Birdie, but she did not let McPhall know it. Perhaps this was why her father didn’t seem overly concerned. If all they were going to do was throw him in jail until he could pay these debts then that wasn’t quite so worrying. Edward could certainly buy her father out if all else failed.

“But we haven’t been stealing your trees. We didn’t know they were your trees.” She frowned. “I don’t even know that they were your trees when we cut them, if we did cut them.” She was quite proud of herself for adding the last bit, never admit to anything her father always told her.

“I’ve owned them for longer than you’ve been alive my dear,” said McPhall.

“How come you own them?”

“I own them because I have a piece of paper that says I own them. The king gave them to me.”

She thought this over for a minute. “But how did the king come to own them?”

“My dear girl, he claimed them of course.”

“The king has been here?”

“No dear, not personally, but people he sent claimed this land for him.”

“But to do that they had to force out the Edisto. And the Waccamaw. And the Sewee. You overwhelmed them with force and marched them out.”

“I did not.”

“British soldiers and settlers did.”

“Yes. . . Yes, I suppose that’s quite right, we did.” He smiled quizzically at her.

“That’s wrong. Every bit as wrong as what you say Papa did.”

“No my child, it’s not.”

This was what she’d been waiting for him to say. “If that’s not wrong then why is wrong when someone overwhelms one of your ships and takes it from you?”

“Woah!” He jerked the reins tight, and the horses nearly reared as the wagon came lurching to a stop. He said nothing, but turned and stared at her for a long time. She felt his eyes memorizing her features the way she had studied the pictures in her book. Then he turned around again, shook the reins, and resumed their journey. McPhall stared off into space and ignored her the remainder of the way into Charlestown. This was what some grownups did when they lost an argument, they pretended as if the whole thing had never happened.

The landscape changed as they neared Charlestown, swampy forest gave way to large rice fields and sugar plantations.

Charlestown sat on a peninsula at the confluence of two rivers, nearly five miles upriver from the sea. The first river you came upon from the southern road that Birdie's wagon was slowly lumbering up, met the Ashley river and followed it to the ferry at the edge of town. The road was better here, Birdie was able to sit up without bracing herself against the sides. It wound through great sugar plantations where her uncle and cousins worked in the summer. Birdie felt a now familiar lump in her throat at the thought of them. She squinted in the sun and watched as armies of slaves worked the fields. Men with guns sat idly in the shade of oak trees. They waved to the party of soldiers and wagon as it lumbered past. Birdie just stared back. The slaves in the field looked up and just as quickly looked down again, lest the men in the shade notice them.

Charlestown proper was a small walled city with some 3,000 residents. Most recent arrivals came up from the sugar plantation islands of the British Indies. Charlestown was, she'd heard Jack Ratham say, Barbados with none of the fun. Birdie had never been to Barbados, but she did agree Charlestown wasn't much fun. It was a swampy lowlying piece of land chiefly appealing because it was well situated for loading cargo onto ships, which was the main occupation of nearly everyone living in the city. The shoreline was muddy estuary, against which were stacked houses unlike any other Birdie had ever seen. They were high ceiled constructions with large windows and expansive balconies on the second story. They were plastered sided and capped with orange, tiled roofs.

Aside from the road Birdie was on, which led out to Edisto, Charlestown was entirely isolated, a city stranded on a narrow spit of muddy sand in the middle of a marsh. The only communication it had with the rest of the world was through the sea. To the north was North Carolina, largely in control of Blackbeard, Sam Bellamy, and various other pirate bands. To the south was hostile Spanish Florida. Charlestown had no one to turn to in the event of attack, it was essentially a West Indian slave island stranded on the coast of English America.

Worse for Charlestown, the entrance from the sea was blocked by a long sandbar that necessitated a pilot and was rather simple to attack. All you really had to do was sail up and point your cannon at the narrow channel, everything in the harbor was trapped. Birdie climbed down from the wagon and stretched her legs as the ferry brought them across the river into the city proper. She scanned the marsh for sails. There was one headed out to sea, but there was no sign of a blockade. As they rattled down the dusty streets toward the jailhouse though she saw the HMS Victory. If it was sitting here in the harbor, odds were it had never caught Wanderer. That meant her father's plan was unfolding as it should and everything was going to be okay. She glanced over at her father, he was watching her, he knew that she had noticed. The corner of his mouth smiled ever so slightly and he nodded to her before turning back to watch the street in front of him.

The entire town turned out to watch the soldiers ride in, and especially to see who was riding in the middle of them, clearly a prisoner. Charlestown was a divided city. The majority of its residents were African slaves. After that the small percentage of business men fell into two groups, those that made their money off the backs of the slaves, and those that made their money off the people who stole the first group's cargo. There were in essence, those who would benefit from the presence of the British, and those who would not. The one you had to watch out for her father had told her, were the men who made money both ways. They were the dangerous ones not to be trusted.

Bridie watched the faces watching her from doorways. She saw a mixture of expressions. Some clearly uneasy at the sight of the soldiers, uneasy at the sight of her father in chains. Others seemed pleased to see both. And every now and then she noticed men whose expressions were inscrutable. Men and women who seemed neither uneasy, nor pleased. Men and women who were trying to sense which way the wind was blowing. Men and women who could only sail where the wind blew them. Men and women who were dangerous, to themselves, to the world around them.

Chapter 25: *Revenge*

Thatch's crew convened that evening. There was a bonfire on the beach and some nearby farmer brought over corn and a two deer they had hunted. Lulu's mouth watered as the meat cooked. She and the rest of Wanderer crew had lived on nothing but dried fish for days. Not that they hadn't lived on worse at times in the past, but it was enough to have Lulu and Henry drooling as they stared intently at the meat slowly cooking over the coals.

"Good Lord Tamba, what do you feed these children?" Edward smiled as he sat down next to them. "But that does look good doesn't it?"

Lulu nodded.

Edward glanced up at the circle of men sitting under the trees in the shadows of the evening sun.

"Don't you get to vote?"

"Aye, I do. But I let them talk it over without me hovering over them." He smiled. "I am only a captain in battle and weather, but I still seem to impose some weight upon their discussions that they prefer me not to impose." He shrugged, as if to say, I don't understand it, but Lulu, who was staring at his dark face, black beard, and strange glinting eyes, understood it perfectly. And she understood that he did too. Some people move through the world and world takes notice her father said. They are rare people, but they are out there. Edward, thought Lulu, was one of them.

Edward stood up, drew a large knife Lulu had not even noticed in this belt, and carved off a bit of meat and fat hanging off the bottom of the rib. He did the

same to another rib and then stabbed them both with a stick and handed one stick to Lulu. "This is the best meat, and it'll cook faster this way."

Lulu stood up and moved closer to the fire, holding the stick over the coals, trying to keep it close, but not burn it. "Here, here," Edward gestured to Henry, "come hold this one and Tamba and I will get some rocks so we can wedge them in place. Henry stood next to Lulu, holding the stick over the coals." Edward has a lot of knives," he said quietly.

Lulu nodded. "He does."

Edward, Tamba, and Aunt Māra returned each carrying a piece of driftwood which Edward proceeded to stack and arrange in such a way that the sticks were in the perfect position over the coals. Every few minutes he'd rotate the sticks and inspect the meat, smelling it, and grunting to himself. "No children going hungry on my watch," he kept saying.

He gave the first piece to Lulu and Henry, handing them the meat, roasting stick still in it, on a piece of bark. It was the best meat either of them had ever tasted. Soon they were all silently eating.

The meat had just about disappeared. Lulu, who loved fatty bits, was still gnawing though some "flap" as she called it, when Mr. Dobbs came over to the fire to fetch Edward. "The men are ready to vote."

Edward put down his bark plate and heaved himself up. Every time he stood Lulu was struck again by how fantastically tall he was. "Alright then, let's hear it."

After they'd walked out of earshot Lulu turned to Tamba. "Do you think they will help us?"

Tamba chewed for a minute, looking over at the crew. Finally he said, "I think this is mostly a formality. I don't think any crew anywhere on this coast would pass up a chance to do what we're asking them to do. Some might not bother to get your father out, but Edward will."

Edward was smiling when he walked back, most of the crew followed. "Let's go get us a new flagship," he yelled raising his mug. The men cheered and cask of rum was opened. Much to Lulu and Henry's disappointment, Tamba and Aunt Māra dragged them away from the festivities quite early. They returned to Wanderer to ready her for the journey south the next morning. Wanderer would lead, Revenge and her two consorts would follow.

The next day Wanderer sailed out of the cove at Ocracoke, followed closely by Revenge, and the sloops Adventure and Rosa, the latter two being prize ships that Thatch and crew had decided to keep for the time being, since a show of force, rather than speed was called for on this occasion. The winds and current were against them coming out to the east of the island, but as they rounded the

point and moved into the ocean, the wind blew west southwest and Wanderer could bear almost directly for Charlestown. Revenge and the other ships, being square rigged, could not sail quite a close to the wind, and had to tack. After consulting with Thatch, Tamba agreed that Wanderer would sail to the mouth of the river and wait, staying out of sight as much as possible, posing as a fishing vessel should they be spotted. Tamba believed they would make Charlestown before the sun set, but it would likely be a long night of sailing either way since they'd probably have to tack back and forth all night. Unless they got their early enough to find a place they could set an anchor before the light disappeared. Tamba and Kobayashi set the sails and gave Lulu a heading before they went below to get some rest, leaving Lulu on watch. She knew that Aunt Māra was to keep an eye on her, but she also knew Aunt Māra was no sailor and that Tamba was trusting her to keep the ship on course and the sails smartly trimmed.

Henry sat on the deck beside her playing with two corn husk dolls who alternated between brutal close quarters sword fighting, and scampering runs around and between his legs and body. Sitting on the deck, below the reach of most of the wind it was warm in the sunshine. Lulu could almost pretend it was spring and they were headed north to fish, to spend the summers on the warm beaches of Rhode Island. But whenever she stood up to check her heading against the landmarks on the coast, or compare the maze of inlets, creeks, and estuaries on the map to the seemingly unbroken coastline in front of her, a cold blast of Atlantic winter wind reminded her it wasn't spring, and she wasn't sailing for fun.

The wind held throughout the morning, Lulu only had to go aloft once and adjust the sails. She'd let Henry take helm while she climbed up the mast. Surprisingly, he hadn't done anything to her or played at it. He simply stood holding the wheel, too small to really navigate, but perfectly capable of making sure the wheel didn't turn as the waves rolled past them. The seas were picking up as the day went on. If they timed the tides wrong they were going to have a rough time heading up river and getting in the inlet. Navigating narrow, shallow channels when the ocean waves were meeting the river current and ebbing tide was never fun, but on these shores she knew it had been the ruin of many a ship. Hardly anyone went to St. Augustine, the only other town on this stretch of coast, because the inlet there was so treacherous. Ships had been known to wait weeks for favorable winds and currents to allow them entrance to the river. "And after all that you get there and it's a bunch of Spanish hovels and miserable people," her father quipped.

Charlestown was not nearly so bad, as a town or a inlet, though it could get rough from time to time and today was shaping up to be one of those times. The wind that had brought them south at over six knots all morning had kicked up a considerable southerly swell that was now moving fast enough that it rolled Wanderer as it moved by. They were running almost directly down wind now. Wanderer rose up as the waves moved beneath her and then she slid and wobbled slightly side to side, like a squiggling piece of soap sliding across the top of the

ocean.

The good part was that the rough seas meant that, more than likely, the pilot boats and crews out on the island near the inlet would be laid up indoors, and unlikely to head into town to alert HMS Victory to their presence. The plan was for Wanderer to anchor near those pilot boats tonight if possible and stop them from going anywhere tomorrow when Revenge and the other ships showed up.

Tamba took over the helm when the sun reached it's high point for the day. Which wasn't very high. Lulu wasn't exactly sure what day it was, but she knew the Solstice was close. She wondered if they'd be able to celebrate this year with their bonfire pig roast. It had been that very fire two years ago that had first brought Captain Thatch to their shores. He'd been headed for Nassau when he'd spied a huge fire on Edisto and decided to investigate.

Lulu thought about that night as she helped Kobayashi gather up dried fish and two day old rice for a snack. She braced herself against the timber next to the cold stove and used the motion of the ship to guide her knife up and down through the tough strips of fish.

They made the inlet well before dark, but the channel was too rough to approach. They tacked out to sea, let the wind fall off into the evening and then made their way through the inlet in the twilight. They found an anchorage by the light of a quarter moon and Lulu fell asleep dreaming of storming the city of Charlestown demanding the governor release her father and sister.

It was still dark when she woke. Aunt Māra shook her awake so she could help Kobayashi and Tamba into Wanderer's long boat. They both had swords strapped to their waists, pistols on straps across their chest, and rifles in their hands. Kobayashi had darkened his face with charcoal and both were wearing black. They looked frightening. Lulu was glad she wasn't waking up to men like this bursting into her house.

She watched them row off into the darkness and then she went below to start the stove and make some warm breakfast. She struck a match and lit a bit of paraffin, which she pushed in the small door of the stove. She began to feed tiny splinters, and curled wood shaving into the flame, letting the fire build slowly until coals began to form. Once she had enough heat she put in larger twigs until she had a good fire going. Enough of a fire to heat water for porridge. She put a copper on the stove and filled it with water from the fresh water barrels. Then she measured out several handfuls of oats and put the sheet of tin that served as the lid over the pot.

She sat down on the stool Kobayashi kept by the stove and opened the door to the fire chamber to warm her hands. She fed in a few more sticks and waited for the water to boil. She watched the orange glow within the stove and wondered what Birdie was doing at the moment. Probably sleeping. If she was lucky. What was her father doing? Probably also sleeping. She glanced aft to where

Wanderer's guns would be if she had any guns. There was a faint glow around the hatch door which meant the sun was rising. That meant her father probably wasn't sleeping. Neither was Birdie. It also meant Tamba and Kobayashi should have captured the pilot boats by now. Soon the dreaded pirate Blackbeard's flagship would appear on Charlestown's eastern horizon and with any luck that would strike enough fear in the hearts of its citizens that they would release her father and sister, and then... and then what? For the first time it hit Lulu that they would not be going back to Edisto. That, even assuming everything in the next few hours went according to plan and they made their escape, nothing would ever be the same again. They might escape his clutches, but McPhall still owned the island. Still claimed the trees. Still had the soldiers to drive them right off it again. Wherever they went after this, for the first time Lulu began to understand, nothing would be the same,

Chapter 26: Jail

The wagon stopped in front of the jailhouse. It was tiny and a little bit forlorn. It seemed better suited to some higher duty, like a storehouse, or perhaps a shop. Birdie almost felt sorry for it. McPhall climbed down from the wagon and went inside without so much as a glance at Birdie. Her father sidestepped his horse closer to the wagon.

"What did you say to him?"

Birdie cocked her head. "What do you mean?"

"I saw you two talking, and then I noticed that you stopped. I assumed it was something you said."

Birdie smiled. She told her father about the conversation with McPhall. He chuckled. "Watch yourself Birdie. Don't make enemies you if you don't have to."

She looked down. She'd felt good about her verbal attack until her father said that. He would have said the same she was quite sure.

"How was the ride? You sore?"

Birdie rubbed her back. "A little."

"When you get wherever you're going, do a bit stretching, that way you won't wake up stiff."

She nodded. "Where am I going?"

"That remains to be seen."

"I want to stay with you."

Her father was about to say something when the door to the jailhouse swung open and McPhall stepped out. He closed the door and stepped back into the street to confer for a moment with the captain of the soldiers. Then he walked

back over the wagon. "Mr Nicholas. You may step down and go inside of your own accord. Or my men can help you."

"What is the charge?"

"Theft of property. Your trial will begin on Monday."

"Monday?" Her father let out a low whistle. "You don't waste any time do you Mr McPhall?" Her father shook his head and muttered something to himself as he climbed down from the horse. He came around in front of it and whispered something in its ear. The horse bent down and her father scratched between its ears. "Where are you taking my daughter?" He asked.

"Nowhere. She'll be in there with you."

Her father didn't bother to hide his surprise. "On what charge?"

"Aiding and abetting in the theft of property."

"You're serious?"

"Quite."

Her father glanced down. "Well then," he said.

She climbed down out of the wagon and ran to her father's side and hugged him. They stepped up onto the porch and Birdie turned around. The harbor stretched out before them in all its muddy, marshy glory. Out near the point, between the trees of the islands she saw a top mast, still too far to see the ship, but it was a big one. Behind it there was another. She glanced at her father. He shook his head ever so slightly. She looked down and followed him in the door.

When her eyes adjusted to the darkness Birdie saw a man standing beside a desk. He seemed ill at ease and was fidgeting with a piece of paper. "Well then," he began and then stopped and rattled the paper. "You'll follow me."

Her father grabbed Birdie by the shoulders and turned her to follow the man. They waited as he unlocked a heavy wooden door and then led them into what Birdie assumed was the jail. There were rooms on each side, all of them small with a single barred window high up on the wall. The man unlocked a door and stood aside. Her father had to duck to enter the room. Birdie heard the door close behind them. Her father came over to the door and spoke to the man outside. "The large ship in the harbor, what is she?"

"HMS Victory."

"No, the merchant."

"The Mary, slaver, out of Lisbon."

Her father turned away and walked over to the window to look out. There was no furniture in the room. The floor was hard packed mud with a bit of straw. Birdie sat down and leaned against the wall. Her father glanced down at her. "Sorry Birdie, I did not see this coming. Never meant for you to see the inside of

a jail.” He glanced out the window again. We’re facing away from the harbor. He sat down beside her and spoke very quietly. “I’m sure you noticed the topmast of what I assume is Revenge. Someone is here and I think things will begin to happen, if not tonight, then early tomorrow.”

“What’s going to happen Papa?”

He sighed. “I don’t know. But I hope it involves us being turned loose and being able to get back to Wanderer.”

“Then what? Can we go back to Edisto?”

He put his arm around her and pulled her into his lap. “No, I don’t think we can do that. Depending on how it goes perhaps we can stop by there and gather up our things, say goodbye, but I don’t believe we’ll be going back.”

“But it’s not fair. How can someone else just wave some piece of a paper and take away our home?”

He picked up a piece of straw and twirled it between his thumb and forefinger. “It’s not the piece of a paper Birdie, it’s the men with guns. Paper means nothing. Kings and Queen’s mean nothing. It’s whether or not you have the force of will to bend the world the way you want it to bend. McPhall has that will and he brought with him the force to see it through. We could fight, we might even win. In fact I know we would win, we’re about to take away his force, probably, their ship at least, but do you want to fight for that island? Or would we be happier finding a new island that no one wants?”

“What do we do when someone comes claiming that island?”

“We find another.”

“What do we do when all the islands are claimed and there is nowhere left to go?”

“It’s not about a place Birdie, it’s about the ability to go. Once you lose the ability to go, everything is lost with it. What makes our people different is that we bring with us a way of life, a responsibility to the world, a way of living that works anywhere and everywhere. It isn’t about where we are or even when we are, it’s that we are.”

Birdie nodded. She’d heard him say similar things before, but she liked Edisto, She like the cape. She didn’t want to go and she failed to see how her people, however tightly they might hold their free way of living, would survive if there was nowhere left to go. If being truly free truly depended on having somewhere to go then what would they do when there was nowhere left. She said as much.

Her father didn’t say anything. The silence stretched out. Finally he said very quietly, “then there will be no more free men left and it won’t matter anyway. But that won’t happen in our lifetimes.”

“What about my children’s lifetime?”

“No, not theirs either I should think.

“What about their great grandchildren? Shouldn’t we fight for something now so that we can hold it for when my grandchildren’s grandchildren’s grandchildren need it?”

Her father said nothing, but he flicked away the straw. “Perhaps, but we aren’t going to.”

It was Birdie’s turn to be quiet. That wasn’t the answer she’d expected.

“They will just keep coming Birdie. If not McPhall then McPhall Jr., McPhall III. They will never stop coming. Not for centuries, not until the wave of them breaks over this entire continent and beyond. That’s why we aren’t going to fight. Can you fight the tide?”

“No.”

“No. You use the tide to help you get where you want to go.”

“Where do we want to go?”

Her father smiled at her. “I don’t know, where do you want to go?”

“I want to go back to how things were, I want to go back to island before the storm, before the ships, before everything changed.”

“Ah, to go back before the tide. That would be a neat trick, but we can’t do that. The tide is here, it has risen us up and now it’s our turn to decide, do we just drift and spin and let it pull us as it will, or do we raise the sails, catch the wind, and go where we please?”

“Where we please I guess. If we get out of here.”

“Don’t worry, we’ll get out of here.” Her father stood up and went to the window. Why don’t you get some sleep, I’ll keep the rats off you and then we can switch.”

“Wait, there’s rats?”

Chapter 27: Blockade

The sun was just past its peak when Revenge appeared on the horizon. Tamba and Kobayashi had come back hours before with one of the pilot boats and six men under guard. They were below decks now, tied up. Lulu had given them fish and water. They were sullen and did not eat. She had felt sorry for them when she went below to get them water as Kobayashi had asked her, but by the time she came back up on deck she decided they were a rude lot and she didn’t really care what became of them. It was strange how you could swing from sympathy to antipathy just by looking deeply in someone’s eyes.

Revenge anchored a short distance back from Wanderer and launched two long boats that came over to Wanderer. Edward and his men came aboard and grilled the pilots about the best way into the harbor. In the end one of the boats took

four of the men back to Revenge, while Edward forced the other two into the second boat with him. As the sun set the crew began to row upriver toward HMS Victory which, according to the pilots, had a small watch. Tamba went with them. Kobayashi remained on Wanderer to bring her into the Harbor once the long boats returned.

Edward sat on the deck brading punks into his beard and tying more to strands of his long hair. He caught Lulu watching him from where she sat, perched on the rail. “Makes me look scarier.”

“You already look pretty scary Edward.”

He made a hurt face. “You mean I look scary all the time?”

“A little.” She giggled. Then she felt a little bad about laughing. “Maybe if you cut your hair? It’s a little wild. Or trimmed your beard?”

“Never.” He smiled. “Wild and scary aren’t bad things in my line of work.”

“That’s what Papa says. He says you look the part better than anyone he’s ever met.”

“He said that did he?” Thatch seemed pleased.

Lulu nodded.

Later Thatch was the first one in the long boat. He stood in the bow, one foot on the gunwale, adjusting his hat. He looked up at Lulu and tipped it to her. Tamba was the last man over. He shook Lulu and Henry’s hand before he went over. “If this goes wrong, take the ship, go to Nassau with your Aunt.” And then he began climbing down the netting into the long boat. Lulu and Henry glanced at each other. Lulu tried to smile, but this backup plan, it was not a thing that would make anyone smile. She filed it away under things not to worry about right now.

The sun was already setting as the long boat headed up the river toward Charlestown. By the time they were out of sight the darkness of night had fallen and the only thing left to do was wait.

Lulu paced the aft deck. Henry fell asleep in Aunt Māra’s lap. Kobayashi sat on the bowsprit with the glass and periodically scanned the horizon. Eventually Lulu too grew tired and laid down on the deck, wrapping a quilt around her. She was just dozing, slipping between darkness and dream when the distant sound of a canon jolted her upright. A moment later Revenge fired a single answer. Then the other two ships. Kobayashi had the anchor free before Lulu could get the sails up. Wanderer slowly followed Revenge between the sandbars. The three ships rode the tide and a light wind through the narrows and up the river into Charlestown harbor, one sloop stayed behind to make sure reinforcements didn’t arrive by sea.

When the people of Charlestown awoke the next morning, they found themselves effectively prisoners of a terrifying man who moved in a cloud of smoke and now commanded the very warship that had been sent to protect them from people like him. It was not a good day to be in Charlestown, no matter who you were. The problem with men like Thatch, what really scared people was not threat or even the loss of whatever he might steal. What terrified the world was that they never knew what he might do. Thatch played this to the hilt. No one sailing the Atlantic before or since would be as good at it as he was.

At first light, in the silence of the morning, a shrieking whistle came screaming through the pink dawn and exploded in the courtyard of the residence of the mayor of Charlestown, blowing out windows and sending shrapnel searing through plaster walls. The kitchen was destroyed, a pig torn in the half by a chunk of cannon ball. No more cannon fired. No more cannon need fire. The people of Charlestown understood what the first one said. It said very clearly, the king is not here. We are here.

Chapter 28: Escape

Birdie jolted awake just like Lulu did, but for her the whistling sound came before the sound of the firing, which was only a split second ahead of the explosion as the cannon ball found the governor's mansion and the poor, unsuspecting pig, which Birdie did not know about. She was about to jump up when she felt her father's hand on her arm, holding her down. "Patience."

"What was that?"

Her father yawned. "It certainly sounded like something Edward would do. No reason to fire a blank when you can lob an actual cannonball into town."

"Where do you think it hit?"

"Edward hates two things. People from Boston, and governors. I imagine this one went somewhere it might find a governor." her father sighed and rubbed the sleep from his eyes. "How was your first night in jail Birdie?" He smiled at her.

She stretched her legs which were stiff from sleeping on the hard ground. "Not that bad actually. I didn't feel any rats?"

"I didn't either," said her father. "And I didn't sleep much." He stood up and stretched. He walked over the windows and looked outside. "Fair winds, onshore. And I see Wanderer in the harbor."

Birdie leaped up and rushed to the window. Her father lifted her up so she could see. There was Wanderer, at anchor a stone's throw from HMS Victory, which she saw was flying the same black flag that flapped from Revenge and a sloop. Wanderer was the only ship in the cluster anchored near the harbor entrance that wasn't flying the black. She squinted and tried to see if Lulu and Henry were on the deck of Wanderer, but she could not see that far. "What do we do now?"

“The same thing we’ve been doing. We wait. It’s like sailing Birdie, lots of waiting broken up by the occasional moments of sheer terror.” He set her back down on the ground.

“I don’t recall any moments of terror sailing.”

Her father chuckled. “You’re young Birdie.”

She didn’t like this answer. She didn’t *want* moments of terror while sailing. She tried to imagine the scariest thing she could, but a storm was all she could come up with, and that didn’t seem so bad. Storms on land were bad too, no one complained about those. In the worst case at sea you drowned. Every sailor drowns eventually, no need to fear that. Birdie wasn’t in a hurry to drown, but she wasn’t afraid of drowning, or the sea, or a storm. And she didn’t think that was going to change even when she was her father’s age. She wasn’t sure what a battle at sea would be like, but she knew those were relatively easy to avoid. Just have the fastest boat on the sea and you should be fine.

The sound of hooves pounding along the dry streets broke her thoughts and reminded her that she was in jail still. Her father craned his neck out the window. “Looks like something has people galloping.” He chuckled. “I wonder what Edward will ask for besides us.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean he has control of this city right now. He could fire twenty-cannon broadsides into this city all morning until it was nothing but ruins. And every smart person in this city understands that and most of them will give him damn near anything he wants to get him to not do that. I am curious what it is that he’ll ask for, assuming he does ask for more than us.”

Birdie considered this. What would she ask for in Charlestown? Some paper and ink would be nice. A new doll for Lulu and her. Maybe some sail cloth for Wanderer. Peppermint sticks for every child. “What would you ask for Papa?”

Her father laughed. “I wouldn’t ask for anything, I’d just leave.” He looked outside again. “What would you ask for Birdie?”

“I’d ask for new sails for Wanderer. And peppermint sticks for every child.”

“Every child? That’s kind of you Birdie.”

Her father stepped back from the windows and quickly sat down beside her. “Lay in my lap. It looks like Edward asked for us at least.”

There was a rattling of keys and the heavy oak door they had walked through less than twenty-four hours earlier swung open and two men entered. One was the sheriff, the other was McPhall.

“Well, Mr Nicholas, it seems you have some friends who have come for you. Pirate friends.”

“I don’t know what you mean?”

McPhall snorted. "Don't worry, you'll walk out of here today, but this is no longer about fine money. You're a pirate now. You'll hang like one some day."

"Is there some charge to filed here? Am I accused of piracy?"

Her father looked to the Sheriff who shook his head. "No sir. You are being released."

"Well then," Her father helped her up, then stood and brushed off his pants. "Let's go."

The sun was well up in the sky when they stepped out onto the street. A wagon was waiting. In the back of it was a chest and very frightened looking man sitting on top of it." Her father glanced at the sheriff. "What's this?"

"Something else your friends asked for," answered McPhall.

Her father looked again at the man in the wagon, who seemed to shrink back as everyone stared at him. Her father shrugged and lifted Birdie into the wagon. He sat on the rear and driver shook the reins and they lurched off down the street toward the wharf.

The road lead through the main square where Birdie saw a yellow wall in ruins and behind it the shattered courtyard and collapsed inner wall of a house. Wisps of smoke still trailed up. Two men were heaving stones and trying to clean up the mess, but their movements seemed ineffectual and tiny next to the casual violence of the wreckage around them. Birdie watched the man sitting on the chest in the wagon practically start shaking at the site of the cannon damage. Her father had turned around to look at her and noticed the man's expression.

"Who are you friend?"

"James Seward." stammered the man.

"What do you do Mr. Seward?"

"I'm a doctor."

"Ah," her father sighed. Her turned to her. "Well, now we know what Edward asked for in addition to us."

Birdie glanced at Mr. Seward. It made sense. More sense than peppermint sticks for every child anyway. She wished she had thought of that. Of course they would need a doctor. After gold, doctors were the most sought after thing on the sea. Sometimes before gold. After all you couldn't find gold if half your ship was sick. She'd heard Bellamy tell stories of captured doctors who'd eventually joined their crews, not so much because they wanted to be pirates, but because they were no longer able to convince anyone they weren't already pirates.

The wagon turned up Meeting Street, headed for the shoreline. Near the end the road became too muddy for the wagon and Birdie and her father climbed down and helped Mr Seward with his chest, which was full of medicine Edward had asked for. Her father and Mr. Seward struggled through the mud to a long

boat where Birdie saw Tamba standing among a number of other sailors, all holding guns, all with swords at their waists. She wanted to rush into his arms, but she did not. She waited while the chest was loaded in and then Mr Seward climbed in. Her father lifted Birdie over the gunwale and sat her next to Tamba and then she threw her arms around him, and he threw his arms around her. Her father pushed them out, mucking his was through the sucking marsh mud until he was up to his chest in the water and then he heaved himself up and into the boat in a wet, muddy, stinking heap.

“Way to make an entrance” muttered one of the sailors who was rowing them back toward Revenge.

The long boat hadn't even touched Wanderer when Birdie leaped off and onto the hanging webbing. She felt her father and Tamba climbing up behind her, but she raced on up and over the gunwale in such a hurry she spilled over the top right into Lulu and Henry and all three of them sprawled in a heap on the deck. Birdie quickly gathered them up and they all squeezed each other until they could not breath and burst out laughing and rolled apart.

Birdie rolled over and kissed the smooth oak boards of Wanderer' deck. “Thank gods.” She looked at Lulu and Henry and it felt a little like someone was punching her in the gut, an unaccountable welling started in her gut, moved up her chest and began to slowly leak out her eyes in silent tears. Lulu rolled over toward her and they lay side by side, hands squeezed together, tears rolling down their cheeks as they stared up at the mast and the sun beyond it.

And then the sun disappeared and Lulu and Henry were yanked away from her as her father caught them both up in his arms. Birdie wiped her eyes and stood up. The first thing she noticed was how ruined the deck looked. Wanderer was in rough shape. No one had scrubbed her since they slipped off in the night.

She glanced at her father. She was surprised to see the streak of tears down his cheeks, disappearing into his beard. It was only then she understood that just because he acted like everything was going to be fine, didn't mean the world was going to do as he wanted. To act was one thing, to bring the act to the end you wanted was quite another. But here they were, now it was time to go. “Let's raise anchor,” she said.

Tamba chuckled. “Good to have you back Birdie.”

Kobayashi came up from below and scooped her up for a hug. “My dried fish thief is back at last.”

Over Kobayashi's shoulder Birdie saw Aunt Māra standing to the side, tears streaming down her face. Birdie slid out of Kobayashi's arms. Aunt Māra was wiping the tears from her face. She held out her arms to Birdie and Birdie ran over to her and buried her face in the softness of her dress. “My sweet girl,” she said stroking Birdie's hair.

“I missed you.”

“I missed you too.”

Birdie stayed with her arms tight around her aunt for a long time. She didn't know why, but she couldn't seem to let go. Eventually Lulu pulled her away to show her the night sails they had used, which were in the process of being folded to store away again.

She was in the bow with Lulu and Henry, telling them all about the wagon ride and the jail and what the cannon ball had done to governor's house when they saw a long boat approaching. Two men from Revenge pulled alongside.

“Captain!” The man in the bow called.

Birdie saw her father lean over the gunwale.

“Captain Thatch would like to see you.”

“Would he? Well then.” Her father glanced up at Birdie. “Birdie, come on, let's go thank Edward for his help.”

Birdie glanced at Lulu. “I'll be back.” Lulu nodded.

The long boat did not take them to Revenge. It took them to the HMS Victory, which had already been painted over. Two sailors sat on a plank that had been lowered over the stern. They were carefully painting some new lettering that spelled Queen Anne's Revenge. Her father laughed when he read it.

“What is it?”

“More revenge. Always revenge.”

They were brought on board and led to the aft stateroom, which Thatch had decided would be the captain's chart and plotting room. It was a large room, twenty feet square with a row of glass windows along the back that looked out at the sea, though currently the view was marred by the feet of the two sailors at work outside. In the middle of the room was a huge table and across it were spread charts and maps and a scattering of papers as Thatch and his quartermaster Dobbs sorted through what they'd captured.

“Nicolas! Looking not too bad for a night in jail. How is the Charlestown jail? I haven't been yet.”

Her father shrugged and smiled. He and Edward hugged briefly before Edward stooped down to Birdie. Even crouched he was taller than her. “Birdie. You have had quite a time from what I hear. Capturing ships, taking prize money, winding up in jail. Why, you'd fit right in with this crew. If you ever want to sail with us.” Thatch glanced over at Dobbs. “Mr Dobbs do we have any place on the crew for Birdie.”

“Aye, we always have a place for the brave and strong.”

Birdie smiled and nodded to Mr Dobbs. "Thank you sirs, but I am already part of a crew."

Edward made a pouting face. "Well, if you ever change your mind..." He stood up and gestured at two heavy wooden chairs. Birdie and her father sat down. Edward had to duck under the chandelier as he came around the table. "I thank you for pointing me to this ship, she's a fine prize and I've been wanting a bigger ship. Forty guns gives me the largest vessel I'm aware of sailing the black at the moment."

Birdie glanced at her father, but he only smiled and waited for Edward to continue.

"And of course I'm always happy to help when friends are in trouble."

Her father glanced at her this time. "We appreciate the help captain."

"I was hoping, in return, I might be able to get you to help me."

Her father didn't miss a beat. "What do you need?"

"I need to careen and tar. Revenge and Queen Anne's Renvent. Plus the larger of the two sloops you see to our east."

"It'd be too dangerous to do that Edisto now."

"Yes, quite. I was thinking perhaps we could relieve you of your tar and take it back to Ocracoke."

"Edward." Her father smiled. "Did you really bring me all the way to your fancy new ship, in this stateroom where high admiralty has probably dined, to ask me if you could have my tar? You could have just yelled across the harbor and I'd have said yes. It's no good to us, we can't take it, but there's nothing I'd like more than to see it keep some ships afloat."

Thatch seems relieved. "Well good then. And of course I brought you here, I wanted to see what it felt like. I wanted to summon someone and have them come. We don't get to do that much, men like you and I."

Her father chuckled. "True. And how was it?"

Thatch smiled. "It's not bad actually. I can see how the British get addicted to it. This notion that you can command the world to do what you want. But that's why I'm here, to keep them from getting too literal about that."

Her father glanced around the room, an ornate set of bookcases lined the port wall. He stood up and walked over to them, turning his head the read the spines.

"You make take some if you like."

"Really?"

Thatch waved his hand. Her father pulled down a book and kept reading the spines. He pulled another. On the second shelf he pulled a third. He clamped them under his arm.

“What did you get?” asked Thatch.

“Dampier, something from Pepys, and the minutes of the Royal Society, 1704.”

“Ah Dampier. Makes me want to sail the south seas.”

“He does make it sound appealing.”

“Not for you though? Not for me anyway.”

Her father shrugged.

“I almost forgot, I have something for you Birdie. Well, it was something your sister requested of Charlestown, but I believe some of it is for you.” He walked over to large chest that had accompanied them to the ship and opened it. Inside were bottles of medicine and bandages and other medical supplies. Edward lifted out a board, careful not to spill the bottles resting on it. Birdie leaned over to see into the chest and noticed a thick stack of paper. Edward drew it out. “As requested, paper.”

Birdie smiled. “Thank you sir.”

Her father looked at Edward. “Lulu asked for that?”

“Indeed I asked your whole crew if there was anything you needed from the city and Lulu was only one who answered me.”

Birdie saw her father’s face darken.

Edward shrugged. “You’d have told her not too I supposed.” He sneered slightly. “Stealing?”

Her father did not answer.

“It’s no different than showing up to steal land with with a piece of paper.”

Her father very quietly and slowly said, “that’s true Edward, but I would like to conduct myself and my family better than them, not as they do.”

Edward shrugged. “Suit yourself. But the kid wanted paper so I put it on the list. Don’t be too hard on her.” He winked at Birdie.

“I am sorry Edward, that wasn’t very grateful of me. I do thank you for looking after my children while I was. . .”

“While you were in jail?”

“Yes, while I was in jail.”

There was an awkward silence. Birdie looked over at the books again waiting for one of the men to say something. It was her father who finally spoke. “So what’s the plan? When do we get out of here?”

“I have to send the doctor back tonight. The crew doesn’t like him. Then we sail tomorrow. No sense sitting here like ducks.”

“Indeed. And that’s what you get for trying to press a man.”

Thatch’s face darkened. “Some take more convincing than others.”

“Watch yourself Edward.” Her father gestured around the room. “Are you so far from being one of them?”

Thatch said nothing, but Birdie saw his eyes flash in anger. He exhaled slowly, not unlike her father when he was mad she thought.

“We’ll meet you at Edisto in two days.”

Her father smiled. “We’ll hunt up some pigs for you. And then we’ll burn the place down. You’ll love it.”

It was after dark by the time they made it back to Wanderer. Lulu and Henry fell asleep in their hammocks but Bridie couldn’t sleep. She sat on the gunwale, dangling her legs over the side of the ship the way her father told her never to do, but she didn’t care, they were at anchor. She watched as Charlestown slowly lit up, its lanterns flickering to life as someone went around lighting them. She thought of earlier when Aunt Māra had stood to the side crying. She wanted to say something to her, to make her feel better, but she knew there was nothing to be said. Her family would never come climbing back up over the gunwale. There were no reunions in her future, just eternal reminders of what had been and would never be. Birdie nearly jumped out of her skin when Aunt Māra appeared at the rail beside her. Neither of them said anything, but she took Birdie’s hand and held it as they watched the lights being lit. Birdie squeezed her hand.

After a while she turned toward Birdie. “I will miss you Birdie.”

Birdie did not say anything, but she understood at once. Aunt Māra was never going to be at home with them. She could not. They would always be a reminder of what she had lost. She needed to go away. Birdie understood. Whatever lay down her path, it was not Wanderer, not her family, not the sea.

The color had faded out of the night. She heard the oars of a long boat dipping quietly in the water as it made its way toward Wanderer.

“Does my father know?”

Māra nodded. Birdie could see she was biting her lip. She slipped her hand out of Birdie’s and went over to the hammocks where Lulu and Henry had already fallen asleep. She bent to kiss each of them, and then lifted some canvas that had been piled against the mizzen mast and pulled out a small trunk that contained what things she’d had on Wanderer.

Birdie lowered the webbing and two men climbed up it and aboard Wanderer. They gathered up the trunk, tied a line to it and gently lowered it down into

the long boat. Aunt Māra caught her up in her arms and squeezed her tight. “Forgive me Birdie, but I just. . .” She never finished. She set Birdie down and quickly climbed down into the boat. The two men went down after her and boat pushed off, headed for shore. Birdie raised the webbing back up and stashed it in its place against the gunwale.

She watch the boat disappear into the night.

“She’s gone then?” Her father’s voice startled her, she had not heard him come up beside her.

“You scared me.”

“Sorry.”

“Yes, she left.”

“Are you okay?”

Birdie nodded. “Papa, where are we going to go?”

Her father put his arm around her. “My plan is to go back down to Edisto and gather all our things before we head out. I told Edward he could have all our remaining tar, so Revenge will be following up down to Edisto. Then. . .” Her father’s voice trailed off. “Well then we’ll have to convene the crew won’t we?” He smiled at her.

“I want to go to Nassau.” Birdie said this so quickly it startled her. Did she want to go Nassau? Apparently she did.

“Nassau?” Her father frowned. “I’m not sure Nassau is a good place for us. We’re not pirates Birdie.”

“McPhall thinks we are.”

Her father grunted and rubbed his beard thoughtfully. “That’s true, but McPhall isn’t the British Empire. We’re Alban, we’re sea people, not pirates.”

“Maybe it’s time the Alban brought some order to Nassau then.”

Her father narrowed his eyes at her. Then he smiled. “Now you’re talking.”

Chapter

Camp looked just as they had left it. Birdie ran ahead of her father and Edward’s men who’d come for the tar. As she crested the dunes and looked down she half expected it to all be gone, but it was all there, the hut, the fire, the kettles beside it. Everything just as she had left it that afternoon, just a few days ago she realized with a start. A few days and the whole world had turned upside down.

Now it was time to turn their camp upside down. While Tamba and Henry, along with two of the better hunters among Queen Anne’s crew headed off to

the interior of the island in search of boar and deer, Kobayashi and her father fashioned sleds from spars they yanked out of the roof of the hut. Birdie and Lulu gathered up their belonging and piled them next to the sleds. There wasn't much to gather, it took longer to build the sleds than it did to make the piles next to them.

It made Birdie a little sad to see the hut begin to sag where her father removed poles for the sled. They'd never taken it down before. It always needed work when they returned, and new thatching, but they had never destroyed it before. It was always there. Now her father planned to burn it. "Let McPhall build his own damn huts," he'd muttered.

Edward laughed. "That'll show him Nicholas"

Her father looked up and then laughed. "Well, it'll give us plenty of dried wood for a bonfire tonight."

Edward smiled. "That I can get behind, Nicholas."

Birdie didn't really want to burn what the hut. It wasn't home, but she liked it. More importantly, she liked knowing it was out there, waiting for her to return. Of all the places they made camp, Edisto Island was her favorite. She was having a hard time letting go of it. She sat on top a dune while her father and Kobayashi dragged the family's belonging on the sleds, through the dunes and down the beach to where Wanderer's long boat waited.

She thought of Aunt Māra. She thought of Francis and Owen. She thought of the hut behind her, destined to go up in flames. Everything ends. Everything that ever begins has to end. The only question is always, how long will it last? Edisto lasted three years. The longest anything in her life had lasted until now. She wasn't there always, but it was always there. And now it wouldn't be. It made her chest feel tight.

Lulu was scampering about the dunes, pretending to be a lynx stalking her father and Kobayashi as they hauled the second and final load down to the boat. Birdie marveled at her sister, that she did not seem bothered to be leaving. She wished it didn't bother her. She wished she could pretend to be a lynx and stalk them through the drifts of snow, but she did not feel like it, something pinned her to her seat, something stopped her from turning the sand dunes to snow drifts in her mind.

She watched as her father and Kobayashi escaped the stalking lynx, unaware of the danger they'd been in. Lulu came back over and sat down beside her. "I'll miss it here," she said.

Birdie glanced at her surprised. "Me too."

"This was a good place to come. I hope we find something like it again."

Birdie realized it wasn't that Lulu didn't care, it was that she was able to matter of factly accepting what the world gave her. If she had to leave, fine, let's head

to someplace where we can find something else that's similar, something else great.

"Me too," she hesitated. "Though, maybe some place with some more kids."

Lulu nodded. "Yeah, it could be nice to be in a town for a while. Do you think there are a lot of kids in Nassau?"

"Papa says no."

"I know, but how does he know? It's not like he's ever been."

"True, but somehow I doubt kids our age hang around pirates."

"We do."

"True."

Chapter 29: Following Winds

Lulu stood on a sand dune, watching men from Revenge and Queen Anne's Revenge drag the remains of their hut, along with a few more logs for good measure, down to the beach. Lulu followed the last of them down to the beach where kerosene soaked rags were already being lit. The fire would have been too hot in the sheltered area of the dunes, but on the beach it was perfect. Next to the bonfire they built a smaller cooking fire, which, when it had burned down to coals, was laid with an entire boar and a deer, spoils of the hunting party that had spent the morning scouring the north end of the island. Tamba had killed a boar as well, which he was busy butchering. Tomorrow at sea they would dry it on racks. It would give them a nice break from fish on their long sail to . . . Lulu wasn't sure where. They had voted earlier and unanimously decided to head . . . south.

Beyond that, they did not know. *Exploring we will go, exploring we will go*, her father had been walking around singing this song he had made up all evening. He always got strangely whimsical and light when they were setting out for somewhere. He'd been that way ever since he'd finished loading Wanderer and anchored her just inside the Revenges. Delos was on the beach, just above the high tide line. They were leaving. That much was indisputable. Where they would go, and how Lulu felt about it all remains more mysterious to her.

Lulu, Birdie, and Henry watched as the flames devoured their former home. The crew of the Revenges sang shanties, and fiddlers played while everyone else ate and drank. But for Lulu, and she sensed for Birdie and Henry as well, the celebration felt strange. She was glad her father and Birdie were safe, she was glad they had escaped from the British, but she wasn't all that glad to be leaving the island. She did not feel the lightness her father did. Or, she did, but she felt other things too. Deeper things that she could not place, could not see the full shape of, just dim outlines, like shadows dancing in her mind, black weights clouding her lightness of being.

As the night darkened she found herself alone, sitting with her back to the fire, watching the sea. The waves kept coming. Big, small, in between. It didn't matter. They never stopped. Did they get tired? Did they want to stop? Were they relieved to make it to shore? Disappointed to be at their journey's end? What was it like to be a wave? Was it so different than to be a human? We're all echos of something she decided.

Lulu wrapped her arms around her legs and glanced down the beach. Bodies littered the sand, most sailors content to sleep where they fell down. She'd never seen so much drinking. She finally understood why her father avoided rum. It certainly did not seem to make adults smarter.

Most of the next day was spent loading the ships. Her father and Tamba helped the crews take the tar on board, while Kobayashi and the children readied Wanderer to sail. None of them got underway until the sun the was nearly gone behind the great oaks of Edisto.

Lulu leaned against the gunwale watching Queen Anne's Revenge slowly sailing into the darkening eastern sky. The ship looked black, even the sails. A booming came across the water, one then another, the usual salute. Edward's crew had decided to head north in search of shipping traffic bound out of Virginia, the Chesapeake Bay, Boston. Lulu knew how Edward hated Boston ships. Soon everyone else would know too. Lulu watched the ships disappear into the darkness of night and water as Wanderer moved south.

Her father sat at the helm, head bent over a lantern, studying the map Jack had given then so many nights ago. How many nights ago? Lulu wasn't sure, but it felt like a lifetime. So much water under the keel has her father would say. So much good water still out there to pass under the keel.

Tonight there were favorable winds, and a following swell. It was shaping up to be a nice night. Lulu still couldn't convince her father to let her take a night watch, but he hadn't told her to go to bed either. She got the paper Edward had stolen her, and went below. She lit a candle and went to the back of the hold, and opened the rear canon hatch. She looked down at Wanderer's wake as it cut through the sea. There was no phosphorescence, but the moonlight made the wake of bubbles that they left behind glow like a pathway through the night.

She turned back to paper and slowly, carefully began to write. *The scent of the world crept into her hammock...* Lulu began to write faster as she went on, the words seem to tumble out of her and until she found herself telling a story to herself, about herself, but somehow also not herself. A record of the kind she would like to read. She wrote until her hand began to hurt, stopping only to glance out the hatch and study the path of where she'd been. When she couldn't write anymore she gathered up the sheets of paper and tucked them carefully, along with the quill and bottle of ink, into her sea chest and latched it tightly. She blew out the candle and when topside.

The moon overwhelmed the milky way, but she could still see Polaris and the great hunter Orion. Her brother and sister were already asleep. Lulu climbed into her hammock and stared up at stars for a moment. Then she pulled the hammock closed above her, shutting out the brightness of the moon, and drifted off to sleep, feeling herself again at home.

Glossary

Bow: The front of a boat **Stern:** The back of a boat **Port:** The left side of a boat **Starboard:** The right side of a boat **Taffrail:** Rail round the stern of a ship **Northerly swell:** a swell moving from north to south **Southerly swell:** a swell moving from south to north **Southerly wind:** a wind blowing from the south to the north **Northerly wind:** a wind blowing from the north to the south. **Lateen rigged:** One of the earliest triangular sail designs, this rig allows Wanderer to sail much closer to the wind (35 degrees to the wind with a skilled captain) than a square rigged ship of the line, which could only manage something like 50. **Caravel:** The ship that, for better or worse, brought Europe to the rest of the world. The Portuguese developed the Caravel off a fishing boat design in roughly 1451. It proved so successful that it dominated the spice trade for nearly 100 years, though it had a good bit of competition from the Carrack, which was square rigged in the fore and main, but still Lateen rigged on the Mizzen. The Carrack was somewhat stabler in heavy seas and could carry larger loads. **Hekas, hekas! Este bebeloi!:** The exorcism that opened the Eleusinian Mysteries, this phrase drives away anything not spiritual. It is said to mean “far, far be removed the profane.” # Acknowledgements

Michael Twitty whose book *The Cooking Gene* deeply influenced and informed all things food in this book. Townsends YouTube Channel *The Journal of Nicholas Cresswell*, while taking place several decades after this story was nevertheless helpful in getting a sense of how travelers were supplying themselves in the 18th century. Willam Bartram William Dampier