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BOOKS EVOLVED



DANIEL A. RABUZZI

THE CHOIR BOATS

Volume One of Longing For Yount



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Volume One of Longing For Yount



ChiZine Publications

FIRST EDITION

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A Grove extends, in tangled mazes wrought,
And fill'd with strange enchantment:—dubious shapes
Flit thro' dim glades. . . .
Dreams hang on every leaf, unearthly forms
Glide thro' the gloom, and mystic visions swim
Before the cheated sense. Athwart the mists,
Far into vacant space, huge shadows stretch
And seem realities; while things of life,
Obvious to sight and touch, all glowing round
Fade to the hue of shadows.

—**Anna Lætitia Barbauld,**

“To Mr. C—ge” [i.e., Samuel Taylor Coleridge] (1799),
lines 3–5, 7–13.

. . . a fracture in the vapour,
A deep and gloomy breathing-place, through which
Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams
Innumerable, roaring with one voice . . . in that breach
Through which the homeless voice of waters rose,
That dark deep thoroughfare had Nature lodged
The Soul, the Imagination of the whole.

—**William Wordsworth,**

The Prelude,
Book XIII (1805),
lines 110–113, 116–119.

For notes to the text, and other background information on the McDoons and Yount, see: www.danielarabuzzi.com

Dedicated to my two brothers, Matt and Doug, and my five nephews, Nick, Patrick, Than, Terence, and James.

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Prologue: Two Streets in London

The young woman counted—“*Otu, abua, ato, ano, ise, isii, asaa*”—using what remained to her of the secret language her mother had learned from *her* father, the language they had used in the place across the ocean when they did not want the white men with whips to understand. “One, two, three, four, five, six, seven . . . we need seven to succeed, seven to open the way. *Chi di*, there is still daylight left, still time, but not much.”

She stood near dusk in a blind alley in Whitechapel on the verge of the City of London. Distant notes drifted down from the sliver of sky far above, bells tolling the Feast of the Epiphany on the first Sunday in 1812. The young woman (little more than a girl, perhaps sixteen years of age) pulled her worn-out sailor’s coat around her and knotted her red kerchief against the cold. She scratched numbers on the brick wall in front of her, deepening the grooves made hundreds of times before. Staring at the numbers until the bricks faded, until she could see deep into herself and beyond, the girl hummed.

Rooks flew over rooftops but she did not heed their calls. She was

on the marches of *alammuo*, the realm of the spirits. There she met the ancestors, the *ndichie*, who spoke of pride burnished under the sun, the heart of courageous healing, the brown eye of wisdom. Today she went farther than she ever had before, led on by the humming of a thousand bees at a thousand bee-ships, until she neared the border to another land. The moon in that place illuminated a row of pillars on a ridge in the distance, pillars topped with watching creatures. One shape lifted itself off a pillar, a white owl as large as a house, an owl with a swallow's tail streaming behind it as it flew towards her. The young woman fled the owl's reshing beak, escaped from the borderland, turned back to see the owl circling at an invisible threshold. Its cry pierced the humming, followed her as she tumbled away.

Falling, she caught a glimpse of a young white woman reading by candlelight in an attic. A golden cat sat in the white woman's lap. The walls of the attic leaned inward, the roof sagging like a thumb seeking an insect to squash. The white woman thrust the book up against the room's slow throttle; the cat arched its back and spat. The candle flame shrank. The white woman threw back her head and opened her mouth, trying to sing but only gasping. The candle went out.

The woman in the alley ceased humming, fell back into herself. Before she awoke fully to her body, she heard the beating of a great drum and the booming of a great bell—a drum with eyes and a bell rimmed by living fire, out of which came a voice soothing and powerful, neither male nor female yet both at the same time.

“*Uche chukwu ga-eme*, God's will shall be done,” intoned the voice in the secret language and in English. “Seven singers for turning to the people a pure language. ‘But who shall lead them? From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia and Cush, the daughter of the dispersed . . .’”

A figure emerged in the mist on Mincing Lane. He wore a coat from the previous century, a reddish coat that seemed to shift with the vagaries of the fog. Porters, carriage-men and servants passed him by but would be hard-pressed to describe him in that instant and had forgotten him

entirely by the time they reached their destinations. Only the rooks wheeling overhead in the late-afternoon sky might have known what the man was, but no one understands their calls. Unheeded, the rooks returned to their towers as the church bells ceased tolling for the Feast of the Epiphany on the first Sunday of 1812.

The man in the crimson coat scanned Mincing Lane, a thoroughfare between Fenchurch Street and Great Tower Street not far from the Thames in the City of London. He found the three-story counting house of a merchant, unremarkable except for its dolphin-shaped door knocker and pale blue window trim. Without removing his gaze from the house, he took from one pocket a shrivelled apple. Fastidiously, he ate. His eyes took in the house, knowing as they already did every angle and every surface. Keeping pace with his eyes, his tongue and teeth delicately destroyed the fruit.

He was down to the core when the first light came on in the house. One window glowed in the mist, flickered as someone inside crossed the candle. He stopped eating, apple core held like a half-moon twixt finger and thumb. A candle was lighted in an attic room, illuminating a golden cat sitting on the window sill. The man's coat undulated, restless and ruddy. Night came. The cold increased but the coat-man disregarded it; he had been much colder before.

Very faint, the man heard a hum in the back of his mind. Eyes still on the house, he sought inward and outward and round-ward, chasing the source of the sound. No good. The ghost whisper of a hum faded, eluding him as it had for a long age of this earth. Somewhere above the fog the moon rose. The house—moored and complacent—was unaware of him, or aware only as a sleeper is, in some deep recess of thought beyond waking.

The man in the coat swallowed the core in one bite. "Soon," he said to the house. The next moment, he was gone.



Chapter 1: Drunk with Secret Joy

London merchant Barnabas Eusebius Playdermon McDoon received a box at his Mincing Lane house on the first Monday of 1812. Sanford, the firm's other partner, a man of few hairs and fewer words, said the box had come in the morning post but no one knew its origin. Barnabas pushed aside the letter he had been writing to their Bombay factor about the Hamburg and Copenhagen markets for smilax root, pepper and mastic gum. The interruption pleased Barnabas: he had fretted all morning, his irritation mounting as he wrote about stratagems and manoeuvres in the North Sea that he would not be able to execute in person. He was tired of waging tabletop battles between his inkpot and his snuffbox. He longed for the cardamom whispers he thought he heard just around the corner of deserted streets, the minarets and elephants he thought he saw reflected in shop windows. He desired to exorcise the ghost of guilt and the memory of actions undone, a love abandoned.

“Well, beans and bacon, let's have a look,” said Barnabas, who retained a Scottish accent even after years in London. He cut away

the wrapper, revealing a wooden box. At that moment Barnabas and Sanford heard, or thought they heard, a low, distant hum, like a hundred bees moving together over a far-away meadow. They heard the ticking of the clock on the mantle, the voice of their apprentice (Barnabas's nephew Tom) in the main office, the cry of rooks circling the rooftops, the clatter of horses and wagons on Mincing Lane, all the hubbub of London life. But under that was a humming. Barnabas opened the box. The humming, still unacknowledged by either man, grew louder in their ears, though it remained low and distant, as if the bees had only gotten larger, not closer.

The box held a key, a book, and a letter. Seeing three new mysteries in place of one, Barnabas nearly left his seat with excitement. Sanford's face became three times as dour as before. Barnabas placed the three new things on the desk, thrusting aside his inkbottle, quill, blotting paper, quizzing glass, and now-forgotten letter to the Bombay factor. Gripping his vest with one hand, Barnabas held up the key and commented on its ordinary appearance. Sanford nodded but disagreed inwardly: keys need locks, and McDoon & Associates knew of no lock for this key, which was disorder of the worst kind.

Clutching at his vest so a button nearly came loose, Barnabas turned his attention to the book. On its age-mottled cover stood in abraded gold print: *Journies and Travells to Yount and the Realms Within, Being Divers Recollections of Those Who Wished Themselves to Go*. The book listed no author. The two partners considered the book. They knew every land, city, and fiefdom on all the trade routes, and had shipped out to India when employed by Barnabas's uncle. They corresponded with merchants, bankers, naval agents, and consuls around the world. Their library held maps, portolans, atlases, travel accounts, histories, and descriptions of the known parts of the globe. Yet they had never heard of any place called Yount. Sanford's face was beside itself with premonitions. A key out of place was a travesty, but a country out of place was beyond reckoning, a non-thing, a disorder, a debit without a credit.

Divining Sanford's feelings, Barnabas grinned and held out the book. Sanford declined. Barnabas pressed the book forward. Sanford, with a mulish quiver, refused again to take it.

Barnabas put the book aside, took up his quizzing glass, opened the letter, and began to read. As he read, the humming grew louder—not closer but as if more and larger bees joined the first battalion. He breathed in time to the humming. Sanford's face resembled a winnowing blade: first a misplaced key, then a no-placed land, now Barnabas about to go missing. "Not good at all," Sanford thought. "Bears close minding, someone to put the accounts back to rights."

Barnabas handed the letter and the quizzing glass to Sanford. As Sanford read the letter, Barnabas hummed and stroked his vest, unaware that he did either thing. Despite himself, Sanford too hummed. A thousand thoughts raced through Barnabas's head, spinning and whirling as they did when he was striking deals on the exchange, only a hundred times more powerful. A thousand thoughts marched through Sanford's head, wheeling and stamping as they did when he was closing the account books, only a hundred times more powerful. Humming in unison now, the two men looked at the letter and then at one another. They dimly heard the hurly-burly of Mincing Lane and apprentice Tom teasing his sister Sally as she returned from lessons. The humming overlaid all else in their minds. Barnabas hummed bees that coursed in mighty zigzags and raced in golden loops. Sanford hummed bees that serried together in purposed patterns.

"Yes," they said together, "we will."

The humming crescendoed and ceased. The ticking of the clock was the loudest thing in the room again. The two men leaned back, blinking. Barnabas continued to stroke his vest, fingers tracing the pattern out of India, with its curling red tendrils and little blue flowers on a cream background. His breathing slowed. Sanford handed back the quizzing glass. Barnabas reread the letter, aloud this time:

DANIEL A. RABUZZI

*On the Day of Three Kings,
To Mister McDoon,
Merchant of Mincing Lane,
by Dunster's Court*

Dear Sir,

You seek something new, a way to your future by reclaiming your past. We can show that to you, if you take the chance. Enclosed are a key and a book. The book explains itself; others have gone before you, and have left instructions for those who would follow. The key is another matter. We cannot tell you all you need to know about the key, only that you must learn about its peculiar abilities yourself. This is not a game. If you seize the chance, you will be engaged in a great mission upon which the fates of many depend. More we cannot reveal until your heart speaks for you and you pass certain tests.

Go Tuesday week to the Piebald Swan, in Finch-House Mews hard by the London Dock. Two o'clock. Ask for the Purser. He will explain what needs explaining in the first instance. Take a trusted companion, one who would share hazards with you on a long journey if you were to undertake such.

Tell no one of your plans. Others seek the key. Their intentions are not good. Above all, avoid the agents of N.C. Strix Tender Wurm.

This offer will not be repeated. If you do not meet the Purser on Tuesday (being January 14th), you will never be given this opportunity again. Will you take it?

Postscript: We cannot promise heart's desire. But we know what you seek and can help you regain what you have lost. Will you take the chance?

Barnabas rubbed his eyes. Sanford shook his head. Each man

wondered if the ink might suddenly fade or the letter evaporate, so strange and unexpected was its message. Barnabas and Sanford thought of another letter, almost a quarter-century old, locked in a trunk, never revealed and never spoken of. The contents of *that* letter were stroked upon their hearts, Barnabas the recipient, Sanford the confidante.

Barnabas leaped back in memory to a place smelling of coriander, mangoes and sandalwood. Her voice was in his ear, the touch of her arms around his neck. He saw her singing in a garden. Kneading his vest, Barnabas stared at a print on the wall (one of his favourites, depicting Acteon and Diana) but he did not see it. Sanford remembered that place too, where the sun was as huge and red as a pomegranate. He recalled the aftermath: the letter hidden in the trunk, the arguments with Barnabas's uncle (*the* McDoon in those days), threats of dismissal from the firm and of disinheritance. Barnabas had not had the strength to resist his uncle, and had stayed in the firm and kept his inheritance, paying a heavy price to do so.

Barnabas gazed at his calicosh vest. Without raising his face, Barnabas said, "We should go, old friend." Sanford waited. "We must go, to discover whether the letter's claims are true."

Sanford said, "Heart's desire. A most private affair, Barnabas. How could strangers know?"

"Precisely," said Barnabas. "How could they?"

"Speculation," said Sanford, "or just business. Everyone knows, for example, that McDoon & Associates lost on our ventures in clove and nutmeg last year."

"In which case, we should meet the letter writers if only to recoup that loss," said Barnabas, "But, nay, spices as heart's desire? Surely you, of all people, would argue that poetics ought best be left out of the counting house."

"The loss you would have the letter refer to cannot be recovered," said Sanford. His voice now bore traces of his Norfolk upbringing

(Sanford had come to London years ago from Norwich).

“No,” Barnabas said, gripping his vest. “But, oh Sanford, who can say? I should have . . . What if she . . . ? Not one day in all these years . . .” Barnabas sighed, then realized that Sanford alluded to more than Barnabas’s own loss. Suddenly he saw in memory his uncle, slamming a door, upsetting a shelf of ledger books. Old McDoon had exiled Sanford when Sanford defended Barnabas, ended Sanford’s employment. Damned as he was, Sanford could only find employment as a wharfinger’s “boy,” a mercantile odd-jobs man making barely enough to stay alive. Mrs. Sanford did not survive the blow—she died of pleurisy that winter, a death Sanford laid at the feet of the Old McDoon. Barnabas supported Sanford as best he could in secret, and had been the only mourner at Mrs. Sanford’s funeral besides Sanford and the McDoon’s cook.

In the end, thought Barnabas, looking at his stockings, which were quince-coloured because it was Monday, *what did he gain from it, my implacable uncle? He died not long after he denied me my desire and ruined Sanford. All his talk of our Edinburgh upbringing and our reputation in London, our standing: those things did not warm him in his waning hours. He was as good as his word, though, no matter how hard that word was. He did not disinherit me.* The first thing Barnabas had done as the proprietor of McDoon & Associates was to install Sanford as his partner in the firm.

The ticking clock brought Barnabas back to the present. He said, “You are right, dear Sanford, some things cannot be gotten again.”

“But some things might be,” said Sanford, the Norfolk thick in his voice, holding his fist in the palm of his other hand. “One loss shall not compound another.” He leaned across the desk, prodded the letter. “If even one loss could be mended, then we would be nearly as good as restored.”

For a second Barnabas and Sanford shared a montage of memories: a chaffinch on the churchyard gate, a minaret against a great red sun, the roar of surf under a ship the size of a castle. And

crabbed handwriting on a letter locked in a trunk upstairs. Barnabas pushed his chair back, and strode forward to clasp his partner's hand. "Thank you," he said, in a voice low and taut. "We shall double this cape together, old friend. Together."

The partners turned to practical matters, neither of them having heard of the Piebald Swan. Sanford said, "Finch-House Mews is above Hermitage Stairs near Brown's Key and the Oil Wharf. George & Sons, the chandlers, have their office at Finch-House Longstreet and the New Deanery. You'll recall they owe us for jute-sacking from the *Gazelle's* last voyage."

"Well, buttons and beeswax," said Barnabas, "We should ask 'em, the Georges, about this Piebald Swan."

Sanford shook his head. "The letter is clear about not telling anyone."

Barnabas would not be swayed. "Not to tell anyone of our *plans*," he pointed to the letter, adopting the tone he used with East India Company officials and their lawyers when interpreting a clause in a contract. The lips on Sanford's face stretched briefly upward, the nearest thing to a smile he afforded himself or others. Barnabas was, he knew, "clarifying," as Barnabas called it. He'd seen Barnabas "clarify" contractual points to a profitable nicety many times before. Sanford was an able practitioner of "clarification" himself.

"In formal terms, yes," said Sanford. "But think what might occur should we noise about our enquiries for an inn or coffeehouse named the Piebald Swan. Quick ears will pick up our tale, pass our scent for money in all the rookeries and dens from Cripplegate to Whitechapel."

"Fairly spoken," said Barnabas. "Point to you, round still undecided." Sanford bowed his head. "No good to have every rascal, wretch, and cutpurse from here to Limehouse swarmin' 'round us. Not that we couldn't handle 'em, of course, just that the letter states it pretty plain . . ." Barnabas lost his sentence as he thrust out his arm, waving the quizzing glass in lieu of a cutlass to "handle 'em."

Sanford ducked the sweep of the quizzing glass. "Quite," he said. "And

then there's the N.C. Strix Tender Wurm the letter warns us against."

Barnabas paused in mid-stroke, looking like Playdermon, the hero of the hills whose exploits were put on stage by Buskirk in the year Barnabas was born. "Ah," he exclaimed. "Surely a monstrous brute, this Wurm fellow, a great villain . . . but we . . . aren't . . . scared . . . of . . . him!" Between each word, Barnabas took huge swipes with his phantom blade, ending with an explosive chop to a globe that he deemed suitable as a substitute for the Wurm's head.

Once again, the merest rictus crossed Sanford's face, the grimace that was his mule's smile. *Not scared, no*, he thought. *But best be wary, all the same.*

Satisfied that he had dispatched the Wurm, Barnabas thumbed through the book from the box. As Sanford's eyes narrowed, Barnabas read aloud from a page at random: "On March 10, 1788 the two ships in the French naval expedition led by de la Perouse left Port Jackson in Australia, witnessed by the British onshore, and vanished. France has been searching ever since for the lost expedition.' Well, there's some proof for you! Everyone has heard about the lost Perouse expedition. There was even that play about it, here in London. Not that I care for the French, mind you, but all the same, poor devils. . . . Ah listen, here's more: 'Some believe that the Perouse ships have wandered off our world onto the mist-wracked roads that lead to Yount . . .'"

Words like "mist-wracked" nearly caused the tendrils on Barnabas's vest to uncurl with delight. Eyes shining, Barnabas was about to steer the McDoon's Mincing Lane counting house onto the salt-roads in search of the Perouse expedition and Yount itself, when Sanford pointed to the clock and reminded Barnabas that they were due at the Exchange right after lunch. The India tendrils strained, and the counting house bucked to leave the quay, but Barnabas with a great sigh warped himself back to the clock and its demands. Barnabas sighed, "Yes, yes, right you are, *tempus fugit*, as the old Tully would put it. But tonight then, we can read the book this evening."

"No," said Sanford. "Tonight we meet at the Jerusalem coffee-

house to discuss the business in camphor wood with Matchett & Frew and their syndicate. Remember?"

Barnabas sighed again and searched the key for clues about its provenance. Finding none, he put the key in a vest-pocket. He took it out, checked the key again, returned it to his pocket. One hand soon found itself stroking the vest-pocket, sometimes fondling the key within. He locked the letter in the lockbox.

"We need to keep the book about so that we can read it, clear up this mystery," said Barnabas. "I know. We'll hide it in plain sight . . . in the library."

Neat and orderly, thought Sanford, who followed Barnabas out of the inner office, up the back stairs, and into the library on the second floor. Barnabas slipped *Journies and Travells to Yount and the Realms Within* onto a lower shelf between *The Life and Adventures of Joe Thompson* and *The Female Quixote*. Waving a hand above his head, Barnabas declared that no one would ever think to find the strange book there. But he was wrong.

Tom could not believe his luck. For an hour, his masters had been in the partners' office, leaving him unsupervised in the clerk's room. Perched high on a stool at his scrivener's desk, surrounded by ledgers and inventory books, he at first diligently reconciled the accounts for the *Gazelle's* latest voyage. Gradually, however, as the partners' office door remained shut, Tom dwelled instead on the escapades of various friends. His pen moved with languor as he thought of the theatres in Drury Lane, Covent Garden and Vauxhall. The door to the street opened, startling him into activity, but it was only his sister Sally, back from her morning lessons.

Tom was grateful for his situation but he longed for life beyond the ledger books, especially at a time when England was fighting for its life against the tyrant Bonaparte. The house of McDoon dealt in goods from India and China, selling mostly to merchants in Hamburg and Copenhagen and other ports in the North of Europe, with an occasional foray into cochineal or campeche wood

from the southern Americas or figs from Turkey. While the trade sounded exciting, Tom never ventured farther than the Thameside quays and spent most of his days at his davenporty-desk within the four walls of the house on Mincing House Lane. Tom had never even been back to Edinburgh, let alone seen Bombay or Madras: *Bit unfair*, Tom thought, his pen blotting. *Uncle Barnabas was sent out to Bombay by his uncle when he was my age!*

Thomas Tobias MacLeish and Sarah Margaret MacLeish had come to their uncle as children. Their mother was sister to Barnabas, a younger sister whose naval husband had died at the Battle of Camperdown in 1797. Having nowhere to turn as a pregnant widow, with a son aged six and a daughter aged three, she had left Edinburgh to plead for haven with Barnabas. Haven he had gladly given her, his only surviving sibling, but she died just months later delivering a stillborn son. In the fifteen years since their mother's death, Tom and Sally had become as son and daughter to Barnabas and he was both father and mother to them, with Sanford as much a parent to them as Barnabas.

Sally loved Tom with the comprehensive fierceness of an orphan. Sally resembled Tom in more than just looks (both had dark unruly hair, darting hazel eyes over high cheekbones, and chins a trifle too small for their faces): she too longed to find a dazzling field upon which to meet the cavalry charge of fate. More, she yearned for high houses of thought that girls were not allowed to enter and she dreamed of hills that could not be found on any map in the City of London.

The interlude ended as Tom knew it must, with Barnabas and Sanford returning to the outer office. (Sanford's full name was Nehemiah Severin Sanford, but he never answered to anything other than his last name, finding it uneconomical to use three words when one would suffice.) Tom picked up his pen, sighed, did sums in the margins of wastepaper fetched out of the cartonier. Sally had already gone upstairs. Magpies cried above the gables, horses whinnied outside, an oyster-man hawked his wares in the street.

The clock seemed to tick even more slowly than usual.

On her way to her room, Sally made a detour. She heard footsteps on the back stairs, which was odd because she heard the maid—for whose use the back stairs were primarily intended—gossiping in the kitchen (“mardling,” the maid called it) with her aunt, the cook. The footsteps must, therefore, belong to Barnabas and Sanford, which was doubly odd because neither man regularly left the ground floor during business hours. Sally dashed across the landing before the two merchants reached the second floor from the opposite direction. She dove into the library, and then scrambled under the writing desk in the far corner. Sanford and her uncle walked into the library. Hardly daring to breathe, Sally knelt under the desk and listened (dismissing thoughts that it was not very ladylike to hide under desks and eavesdrop).

When the men were gone, she came out from under the desk and searched the shelves for whatever book her uncle had deemed so important or dangerous that he had hidden it. Sally knew the library better than anyone else. For Barnabas and Sanford the library was a tool of the trade, for Tom a duty, but for Sally it was a field of pleasure, a storehouse, the contents of which she purloined on nocturnal raids. Her schoolmates, the daughters of other men of good standing, fancied romances and tales of gothic horror, but Sally hungered for knowledge about political economy, history, natural philosophy, just about any topic that a man (but, alas, not a woman) might debate in Parliament or in the coffeehouses. Her uncle worried about how she was to marry, since few men were interested in an educated woman, but he indulged her. Sally located the book in five minutes.

Her room was a cubby right under the eaves, smelling of tea and pepper because the rest of the attic was used to store trade goods. By the gable-window, alone with her cat Isaak, Sally began to read *Journies and Travells to Yount and the Realms Within*. The yearning in her heart responded, quickened as she turned the pages, began to take shape and name. The book’s anonymous author, or authors,

seemed to be present, whispering in her ear. She missed lunch, then almost missed dinner and barely ate when she did come to the table. The cook was not the only one to notice Sally's agitation. "Roasted rabbit, Miss Sally," urged the cook. "With mustard gravy just the way you like it." But Sally paid little heed to either coney or mustard.

"Something is afoot in this house," said the cook to her niece, the maid. "Or I am a stag-turkey." The cook and the maid were in the kitchen as noon neared. They had just heard Sally enter the library, followed closely by Barnabas and Sanford.

The cook picked up her flaring knife in one hand and the rabbit to be skinned in the other. Her words followed the rhythm of her knife.

"I have been in this house a long time," the cook said. "And I feel something's come unstilted." She *had* been a long time at McDoon & Associates. Originally from a village by the Norfolk Broads, near the fishing port of Great Yarmouth, she had been called to London by Sanford many years ago. Her mother had been a maid to Sanford's family in Norwich, and now the cook had called her niece from the same village. Unlike Sanford, the cook's Norfolk accent was plain to hear at all times. She ran the kitchen the way Sanford ran the office: no pan was ever misplaced, no tureen lacked its top.

Her niece, the maid, nodded. The cook put down the flaring knife, wiped her hands, picked up the leaching knife to slice the skinned coney.

"Yestereve," the cook said, leaching the meat. "I felt uneasy. Mark my words, niece, this home is being watched . . . spied on like."

"Aunt," said the maid. "As I lighted the candles yesterday, I had a sort of quaver, like Old Shuck had walked on my shadow. There was something outside in the dark. I thought maybe I saw a man near Dunster Court."

Both women crossed themselves.

"Mister McDoon and Mister Sanford, now, they are up to something, those two; they'll keep this home safe, so don't you worry about no boggarts in the alley," said the cook. "But could be

there's our Miss Sally to worry about, regardless."

The cook put the coney in the roasting-pan, and said, "Miss Sally is a funny little smee."

Aunt and niece thought of ducks trapped by nets in the Norfolk Broads, how the "smees" struggled in the brashy reeds until exhaustion and the hunter's hand overcame them. The cook wiped her hands again, touched the medallion of St. Morgaine (the baker-abbess of Chiswick-near-Shea, the matron saint of cooks) around her neck, returned to grinding the mustard seeds for the dinner's sauce.

"I think she sees things you and I don't, niece, nor other folks neither, though what things I don't rightly know," said the cook, shaking her head. "Always up in her room with her books."

The cook finished grinding the mustard seeds.

"Which ain't normal itself, her all alone up in the attic, in the *maid's* room, mind you," said the cook.

"Grateful I am for that, aunt," said her niece. "Especially as means sharing a room instead with you in the back-house, with its lovely big fireplace."

"Make yourself useful then," said the aunt. "Fetch out the china with the pheasant on it, the blue pheasant, that's the one, it's Sally's favourite, we'll serve on it today. So long as Sally eats proper, won't matter so much what she sees . . . funny little smee."

Sally disappointed the cook that afternoon, hardly touching the coney in mustard gravy. She did not voice her excitement but Tom sensed something, just as he sensed an electric air about Sanford and Uncle Barnabas. Tom sensed equally that Covent Garden might be less exciting than whatever agitated the other three. Rather than visit the theatre after dinner, Tom intercepted Sally as she hurried upstairs.

"You are quiet today, sister," said Tom. He did not need to say more. Sally beckoned him into the partners' room, empty since Barnabas and Sanford were at a coffeehouse. The coals in the fireplace and a lone candle on the table created shadows on the walls. Sally told Tom what she had read.

“A book about a lost continent in the southern seas?” Tom laughed. “Well, I’ll sooner believe that the giants will walk off the Guildhall clock! It’s an old and discredited story, dear sister! Cook and Bougainville have been there, to the far South Seas, you know that. They charted Australia, New Zealand and Van Diemen’s Land. But that’s all, there’s nothing more to be discovered except perhaps some tiny islands not worth the mention. At most, we’d find some strange animals, with luck some gold or cotton or other useful stuffs worth trading, and a king we’d either have to conquer or make a treaty with.”

He stopped when he saw the anger on Sally’s face.

“The book,” she said, “The book . . . it’s real, what it says, I can tell. You must believe me. Let me show you.” Something in her voice made him follow her to the library. Lighting one candle and shutting the door, in case Barnabas and Sanford returned early from the coffeehouse, Sally produced the book for Tom. Seeing the dog-eared, weathered tome, the apprentice became a little less jocular. The mere sight of it made Sally’s claims more plausible.

Sally read, “Ptolemy and Pomponius Mela assumed the existence of a great southern continent, necessary to balance the boreal continents, for how otherwise would the Earth remain equilibrated and avoid wandering lost in the void?”

She paused. The lacquered globe in the room caught the candlelight.

“Plato wrote of the fall of Atlantis, a mangled legend in his time but one preserving a measure of truth. A cataclysm in ancient times wrenched the continents and sent the ocean out of its bed. Does not the Bible itself tell us of the great Flood?”

Sally paused again. She and Tom thought about forty days and forty nights of rain. The dancing shadows from the candle seemed to rise up and overwhelm the ship’s model on the top shelf.

She read out another passage: “Far south of India and Sumatra lies land, exceeding difficult to reach, of no fixed latitude, fenced by perils. Some say this is the land of Prester John, in the wilderness of

sunrise seas beyond Araby. Others say it is a floating island, peopled with the races described by Herodotus. The Chinese admiral Cheng Ho, on his expeditions through the Indian Ocean to eastern Africa, is said to have lost ships on a coast that no one has since seen. Dutch whalers speak of mountains on the anti-septentrional horizon and say that boats seeking those mountains never return, only that sometimes one hears voices over the near-frozen waters of the deepest south.”

Tom stirred. “That sounds like what the survivors claimed happened to the boats of the *Glen Carrig*.”

Sally and Tom thought about the story published by the survivors of that ill-fated ship. The *Glen Carrig* had wrecked in 1757 in the southern ocean, blown far off the shipping lanes. The ship’s boats had landed on vast mud-flats where they were attacked by creatures unknown to natural philosophers. Plangent cries had filled the air, and other ships, empty, were stranded in the estuaries of that land. The authors swore that their adventures were true, but they were derided or pitied as madmen whose thirst and hunger as they drifted on the open sea had forced nightmares into their minds.

The candle burned low. Sally thumbed ahead to a page very near the end of the book. Her voice lowered as she read again: “We live in the Age of Reason. We employ the tools of enquiry that Locke and Leibniz, Hume and Condorcet have uncovered so that we may correct the omission of Yount from mankind’s histories and systems of thought. Yount is a third hemisphere, a *terra abscondita*, a hidden world within a lost sea, or *mare perditum*.”

Tom shrugged and said, “All those claims hardly make it as correct as Cocker.”

Sally implored, “Damn it, brother: *sapere aude*.”

Tom looked shocked at the first expression and then blank at the second. Sally translated: “‘Dare to know.’ It’s Latin, the rallying cry of our modern age, the motto of Kant.”

Tom laughed. “I yield, sister. You are harder than Coade-stone.” He and Sally had been schooled in German, Tom because he needed

it for McDoon & Associates' business in Germany and Scandinavia, Sally because her uncle had indulged her desire to learn as much as (no, more than) Tom. One of McDoon's corresponding merchants, the Landemanns of Hamburg, had recommended a German governess, Fraulein Reimer, a member of the German expatriate community around Wellclose Square. Fraulein Reimer had become part of the family over the years and now lived in a small apartment in the back-house behind the main house. She had not, however, had uniform success with each of her charges. Tom had a lazy facility with German but annoyed Fraulein Reimer with his indifference to the dative and genitive cases. Sally was Fraulein Reimer's star pupil, speaking with the precision of a Heidelberg professor. Unfortunately, Sally acted like a Heidelberg professor in other ways too. "*Quatsch*," was all Tom could muster in reply, the German word for "nonsense," which he heard all too often from Fraulein Reimer.

Sally was about to continue her lecture when they heard the clackering of the brass dolphin on the door as Barnabas and Sanford returned from the coffeehouse. By the time Barnabas and Sanford had reached the top of the front stairs, Tom was in his bedroom, and Sally was tiptoeing into her room in the attic. Tom would not admit it to Sally, but he thought about Yount late into the night. Sally was beyond debate. She wished herself to go. Somewhere far off there was a humming, threaded now with an intermittent, thin wailing, an eerie contrapunto that made Sally cry out in her sleep.



Chapter 2: A Visit to the Piebald Swan

For the next week Barnabas thought about little else except the meeting with the Purser, whoever he might be. Bursting with gambits, queries, and recipes for swift success, but not able to tell Tom or Sally about them, Barnabas shared his thoughts instead with Yikes, the ancient border collie curled at his feet by the fire, and Chock, the parrot given as a gift by an East Indian connection.

“What’s lost will be recovered, well, what do you think of that?”

Yikes—whom no one had ever heard bark or ever seen move more than three feet at any speed resembling haste—regarded Barnabas with equanimity and snuggled closer to the hearth. Uncharitable souls noted that Yikes, whom Barnabas characterized as a “Scotsman in London, just like me,” was no more a border collie than King George III was sane; in truth, Yikes had come into the world behind a knacker’s yard near Bishopsgate, so the only border known to him was that between the City and Spitalfields, and the only sheep Yikes was likely ever to herd were those in his sleep. Chock made the sound for which he was named, and shifted from

one foot to another on his perch. Pleased with these responses, Barnabas forged ahead with his drawing-room plans.

Sanford was another matter. Learning about Yount was important, and seeking to restore a past that Barnabas had thrown away most important of all, but McDoon & Associates had to be in order before they embarked on a new venture. One locked one's door and arranged for alternative postal delivery before a journey.

"Beans and bacon," Barnabas muttered when Sanford urged their attention to the disposition of the northern trades.

"Barnabas, be reasonable," said Sanford. "Our regular trade is blocked but the Landemanns in Hamburg and the Buddenbrooks in Luebeck write of loopholes in the French embargo. Helgoland in the North Sea, Toenning on Jutland: the Royal Navy protects merchants at those places."

Barnabas, with a "*Quatsch*," consented to be led through the opportunities to break the French blockade. Would Tuesday the 14th never come?

Tuesday came, January 14th, the feast day of St. Fiona, so all the shops had a dried nettle hung above the door in memory of her martyrdom. Barnabas and Sanford stepped out into a raw, sunless day. Barnabas admired the dolphin door knocker as he closed the door behind him, and wondered if the pale blue window trim wouldn't want refreshing come spring. From the McDoon comptoir in Mincing Lane, they walked towards the Piebald Swan in Wapping. All the life of the City of London thronged about them, a raucous river of buying and selling in the world's greatest port. Their house was nestled in the heart of the City, surrounded by the counting houses of friends and rivals such as Chicksey, Veneering & Stobbles just round the corner, Matchett & Frew in Crosby Square and others in Austin Friars and Pope's Head Alley. The pales of their immediate world were the Bank of England and Royal Exchange on Threadneedle Street, the East India House on Leadenhall Street, the Baltic Coffeehouse near St. Mary-Axe, the Victualling Office on

Tower Hill. On a stroll, Barnabas was apt to swell with pride at these edifices to trade, and expatiate on Great Britain's *imperia pelagi*, its oceanic empire, but the intensity of today's mission left him no time for such amplitude. The Purser awaited, and Yount beyond him. The key in his vest-pocket bounced with every stride.

Farther east they headed, near the Danish Church and Wellclose Square, where many of their captains lived, in a neighbourhood known for German merchants and sugar refiners. Skirting the London Dock, they entered a run of streets in the district of Wapping. Past a great brewery, near an even larger staveyard, they found the New Deanery, which intersected Finch-House Longstreet where George & Sons, Ship Chandlers, had their place of business. But Barnabas and Sanford did not halt at George & Sons (*payment owed us*, thought Sanford), hunting instead for the Finch-House Mews that must be nearby. The houses on Finch-House Longstreet were narrow and nondescript, built a century earlier in the plain fashion favoured after the Great Fire of 1666. Few people were about: a butcher's apprentice in an apron hurrying westwards to the Smithfield market, a woman with a load of old clothes for sale on her back, a peddler going house to house selling candle stubs and used suet, one or two men idling at a corner who might be sailors on shore leave. Barnabas paid little heed, but Sanford did not like the looks of the idlers. Wapping was no place for the fainthearted.

As Finch-House Longstreet turned towards the Thames, inns and taverns catering to a seafaring clientele appeared. Sanford made a slight show of thrusting his walking stick forward with every other step, a parsimonious yet eloquent gesture not lost on several men slouched in front of an alehouse. Interspersed with the taverns were a few coffeehouses, more refined establishments, though hardly as exalted as coffeehouses in the City. Shopkeepers, broker's clerks, coopers, chandlers, minor excise officials, shipwrights, and owners of ropewalks and tar-sheds frequented the Wapping coffeehouses, not great merchants such as Barnabas and Sanford. The proximity of the docks made sailor's tales and other fables as much the subject of

conversation as ship arrival and departure dates, the price of corn or alum, and the state of the war against the tyrant Napoleon. Barnabas slowed as he passed an inn called The White Hart—notorious for the imaginative mendacity of its drinkers—and stopped. A narrow alleyway led off Finch-House Longstreet. Stepping over dung, Barnabas and Sanford walked down a slight incline into the mews. The mews were empty, but at one end was a little sign painted with the likeness of a piebald swan. Barnabas fingered the key in his pocket and walked up the steps of the coffeehouse. Sanford, with a glance over his shoulder, followed.

The Piebald Swan was tiny and seemed to have survived the Great Fire, with its exposed roof beams and crooked stairs. A coffee urn sat on a counter at one end, tended by a man in a skull-cap. He had a short black beard, dark eyes and coppery skin. The man said nothing but looked intently at his only visitors. On a credenza next to the urn was a coffee-service in gold-rimmed white porcelain with harbour scenes painted expertly on each cup. The walls were bare except for an engraving of a man swimming with a dolphin, and a painting of a schooner taking wind into its sails under moonlight.

“I received a letter. I have come to see the Purser,” said Barnabas, warming to the puzzle as he did when entering a business negotiation. He felt the key in his pocket. He thought he might have heard a humming as he touched it.

The man in the skullcap pointed to Barnabas’s pocket. In an accent that neither Barnabas nor Sanford could place, he asked, “What do you have in your pocket?”

At the very edge of memory, Barnabas vaguely recalled that question coming into an old story of another riddling contest. But didn’t the question in that story have to do with a ring?

“A key,” said Barnabas.

“To what?”

“I do not know. That’s why I seek the Purser.”

“Who is your companion?”

“He is . . .” Barnabas checked himself again. “He is the companion

I was directed to bring with me. We are partners.”

The man in the skullcap looked from Barnabas to Sanford and back again. Sanford was impressed with how much their host said without speaking. The man in the skullcap pointed upstairs, and stepped aside with his finger still outstretched. Under the proprietor’s gaze, Barnabas and Sanford mounted the stairs.

The second floor was all one room, with gable windows letting in wan light from the mews, and a table at one end. At the table sat another man in a skullcap. He might have been a twin to the proprietor except that he was a little taller and had a larger nose. Like his compatriot, he dressed in a way that drew no attention to himself but was, upon close inspection, a model of simple elegance. His skullcap was black, with magenta embroidery.

Barnabas said, “Your cap, sir, I have never seen such a colour.”

The man at the desk said, “My people have recently devised the art of extracting dyes from coal-tar. This colour is one we have discovered using the new process.”

Self-professed abolitionists, Barnabas and Sanford were ashamed at themselves for wondering that such a dark-skinned people could possess a technology superior to that of any true-born Englishman (or any other European, for that matter): dye from coal-tar was a thing unknown. The merchants were willing to quash their prejudice in pursuit of profit, however, and wondered if the gentleman might consider a joint venture with McDoon & Associates to introduce the new dye process to Great Britain. Let Napoleon try to stop that!

The man at the desk offered compliments on Barnabas’s vest. Barnabas beamed: he was wearing his best today, a sherbasse silk with cerulean twiggery and scarlet buds traced on an ivory background. The man in the magenta-limned skullcap said, “I am the Purser. We have much to discuss and very little time to do so. We have summoned you because we need you. More than that I cannot say. The Learned Doctors in Yount will answer your questions. Assuming, of course, that you want to go.”

Barnabas tugged at his vest and clenched the key in his pocket.

Bees coursed in his mind through the scent of cardamom under a ripe red sun as he said, "One moment, hold on, figs and feathers . . . of course I do, want to go that is, but this whole thing is like a pig in a poke, you know."

The Purser frowned. "Pig in a poke? I do not know this expression." His accent, like the proprietor's, was hard to describe, soft and yet direct, with rolled Rs and muted vowels.

Barnabas explained. "Ah," said the Purser. "I see. You want to know more before you commit. Wise practice, in trade and in . . . ventures such as these. There is no time to tell you everything, even if I could. Like you, I am a man of business, responsible for logistics not policy. The Learned Doctors can answer the deep questions but you must win through to Yount to speak with them."

Sanford looked through the nearest window over a tiled roof across the mews, above which he could make out the tops of masts in the distance. A rook's shadow glided across the roof.

The Purser continued. "Long ago there was a great change in our worlds. We do not fully understand it but in strange ways your world and ours became linked. We call it the Great Confluxion. It is not natural, has potentially disastrous consequences for both our worlds."

Barnabas and Sanford listened closely. After years of negotiating business deals, however, they knew better than to swallow whatever they were told without chewing more than once. Sanford remained suspicious that the book, the key, and this visit might be a swindle. Both men were poised to "clarify," as if they were assessing the quality of tea auctioned at the East India Company House in Leadenhall Street or were querying the Khodja merchants in Bombay about the quality of pepper and cassia-bark for sale. Yet something had overcome their usual scepticism the morning the box arrived, and something had propelled them to the coffeehouse. They had read throughout the week from the book secreted in the McDoon library, belief alternating with disbelief. The book contained references to the "Great Confluxion," but neither man could make sense of it.

Barnabas wondered if it had something to do with Freemasonry or with stories he had heard in the Orient about multi-armed goddesses and dragons with beards. Sanford thought perhaps it had to do with the lost tribes of Israel or with the ships of Tarshish mentioned by Isaiah and other prophets: “Cross over to your own land, O Ships of Tarshish, this is a harbour no more. He has stretched out his hand over the sea, he has shaken the kingdoms . . .”

The Purser said, “All our science has not availed to separate our worlds. There is something deeper at work than science, something you and I might call ‘magic,’ a primitive term but all we have. We have discovered that someone from your world must help us. I do not know how, except that the key is involved. The history of the key is too long to recount now. Have you heard of Tlon, Uqbar, and Tertius Orbis? Of Xiccarph? Of Carcosa and Hastur? No? Well, if you make it through to Yount, you will learn more, you will understand what the key can do if used by the proper hand.”

A shadow slid across the rooftop again, catching Sanford’s eye. The Purser leaned even closer, lowered his voice. “The key can do other things if it is used by . . . other hands. It has great power.”

Sanford looked out the window again, thinking he heard a sound from the mews below. Barnabas stroked his vest and said, “The Wurm fellow the letter spoke of!”

“Yes,” said the Purser. “‘The Wurm fellow,’ as you call him, is—how shall I say?—more than dangerous. He is . . . He wants power. More power than your Napoleon—yes, imagine that!—and he will never stop hunting for the key. Strix Tender Wurm changes guise, so it is hard to say who and where he is. We’ve heard him called The Yellow King, the one who wears the Pallid Mask. He may be the one called Professor Moriarty—have you heard that name?—rumoured to head London’s network of thieves and villains. Others say he is Doctor Silvano, the art connoisseur, who you may remember tried to poison the Duke of Umbershire and then disappeared. That is how Wurm is here in your world. He is even worse in ours. He is in our oldest legends, an owl larger than a man, with eyes of fire and

a beak like a sabre. He haunts our earliest memories after the Great Confluxion.”

The merchants of McDoon & Associates were most struck by the Purser’s matter-of-fact delivery of this information. Sanford contemplated the possibility of a man, if man it was, alive since the Flood. He reached in his mind for Michael’s sword and Gabriel’s trumpet. Barnabas was torn. All thoughts of pepper, smilax root and mastic gum had swirled out of his head. Yount was in trouble. He did not know why, but the key had come to him, so he must help Yount. More: he sought the love he had surrendered. The letter said someone in Yount might be able to help him. So, he wished himself to go. But the story the Purser told was preposterous.

Barnabas said, “Sir, what proof have you of what you say? Why, who are you anyway? You have our names, but we do not have yours. For all we know, you might be a scheming Turk or Parthian!”

The Purser did not look affronted. “I am Salmius Nalmius Nax. Purser First Class, Commissionary for the Royal Fleet of Yount Major, and Deputy Attendant for the Fencibles Squadron.” He pronounced his name “Salms Nalms” but wrote it, Barnabas and Sanford were to learn later, “Salmius Nalmius.” Something, he told them when they first saw it written, to do with old family custom and Yountish protocol. *Like the “k” in “knife,”* thought Barnabas and left it at that. Salmius Nalmius Nax continued. “I know my story is strange to you, and you have every right to doubt me. Indeed, you would not have been called if you did not doubt. I can only assure you that what I say is true.”

“Beans and bacon!” said Barnabas. “We are no pouts fresh taken from the nest! Come, you offer no proof, only pure assertion.”

Salmius Nalmius Nax remained impassive, except for a flicker right around his eyes. “I think,” he said, “it must be—how do you put it?—that the proof of the pudding must be in the eating.”

“Which means no proof at all right now!” said Barnabas. “With pardon, sir, but you seem no more trustworthy than a bishop in Barchester. What *exactly* do you propose?”

Sanford nodded in support but had half an eye on the window. He felt something was in the mews. He did not like the shadows that wove across the rooftops, even knowing that they belonged to rooks.

Salmius Nalmius Nax adjusted his skullcap before responding. "You must voyage to Yount. Soon, weather to permit. With Mr. Sanford here, if that is your wish and his. There will be . . . challenges along the way and then again when you arrive. That is all I can say."

Barnabas and Sanford stood still. They wanted to do this business but these were not standard terms and conditions. Barnabas asked, "You are devilish hard to discuss business with, Mr. Nax, sir! The giants on the Guildhall clock are more reasonable! Were we inclined to go on this journey, what assurances could you give us of our return? And how should we conduct the business of McDoon & Associates in the meantime?"

"No assurances whatsoever, Mr. Sanford," said Salmius Nalmius Nax. "None can be forthcoming, this is not risk such as you might have underwritten at Lloyd's. As for your firm's business, we would run it on your behalf."

"Ridiculous!" said Sanford.

"Nonsense!" said Barnabas. The idea that a total stranger would run McDoon & Associates was so infuriating that Barnabas, for once, was at a loss for words. The merchants of McDoon & Associates left the Piebald Swan.

The proprietor and the Purser watched Barnabas and Sanford stalk away. The skullcap slumped on Salmius Nalmius Nax's head as he whispered something in another language to his companion. Both men looked pained. "We expected this," Salmius Nalmius Nax said. "But it is hard all the same."

Barnabas spat out, "Buttons and beeswax!" over and over again as he and Sanford stormed off. He so deeply believed in Yount that his anger was all the keener for the Purser's laconic half-statements and ludicrous proposition. Sanford was even angrier about the possible truth of the Purser's assertions about Wurm ("For their

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worm shall not die," he quoted to himself. "Their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh"). So upset were the merchants of McDoon & Associates that they failed to notice two things. The first was that, as they moved down the mews towards the alley leading to Finch-House Longstreet, the Piebald Swan seemed to shift or elongate slightly, like fruit seen through a cut-glass bowl as one walks around it. The second was that, as they made their way down the Longstreet back to the City and their home on Mincing Lane, a figure detached itself from a doorway and followed them.



Chapter 3: Eyes in the Dark

Sally's dreams were vertiginous and filled with a crying in the air. She read feverishly from the book, sharing what she could with Tom. She missed many meals (to the cook's distress but no one else's) and even missed her lessons once, which normally would have elicited comment, but neither her uncle nor Sanford noticed. She wondered if they had read the book too, and how it was that they had gotten the book in the first place. She tried to dismiss her fears but recalled similar dreams from childhood. Once, when she was twelve, Uncle Barnabas had called for the doctor. The doctor had patted her hand and said to her uncle, "A mild form of oneiric hysteria, related to an eidetic imagination—a common affliction of the gentle sex, particularly when they read and engage in other activities unsuited to their temperament." But the nightmares had continued and now they were back.

She did not confide in Fraulein Reimer or in the cook, not wanting to cause them concern. Her only comforts were Isaak her cat, her commonplace book, and her visits to the partners' office

when no one was there. She had rescued Isaak from a group of boys on the street, who had bound the kitten and were about to smash it with stones. She'd given it the German version of "Isaac" because she felt there weren't enough uses for the letter "k" in English. Then it turned out that Isaak wasn't a boy-kitten after all but the name had already taken. As a sacrifice saved, Isaak loved Sally utterly. She had long golden fur, with a tail that stood up like a plume when she galloped, and pantaloons that flounced as she bounded onto Sally's lap. She—Isaak, that is—stood guard at the top of the attic stairs, hissing and spitting at all comers. Everyone else in the house was terrified of Isaak, except Yikes, who ignored her, and the cook, who gave her the run of the kitchen and fed her milk from a chipped saucer. Isaak curled in Sally's lap as she—Sally, that is—copied extracts into her commonplace book: snippets from Cowper, Gibbon and Pope, passages from Shakespeare, Thomson and Mrs. Barbauld, her own translations of Novalis and Tieck, and much else besides.

For as long as she could remember, Sally had visited the partners' office once or twice a week, usually in the evening, whenever all the male members of McDoon & Associates were out. The mahogany furniture gleamed because, except on the warmest days of summer, a fire was always kept there. The clock ticked. Yikes slept by the fire, Chock sat in his cage, Isaak eyed them with contempt and stalked shadows.

On the walls were pictures she lived in. She imagined herself among the tiny figures in the paintings of the East India Company's fort at Madras and the European and American trading factories at Canton. She could name each kind of ship in the mezzotint prints: charks and galliots beating up the Trave at Luebeck, cats and pinks in the Danish Sound, schooners coasting off Dantzig. On the main table sat a bone-china punchbowl with a picture of the East Indiaman *The Lady Burgess* captioned "Launched September 1808 for the Honourable East India Company, God Speed and All Success!" Sanford had insisted that all visitors be reminded how necessary such wishes were: he had hung pictures of the shipwrecked

East Indiamen *Grosvenor* and *The Earl of Abergavenny*, though Barnabas had re-hung them so that the opened door obscured them (“Damned unpleasant having to talk business with those poor souls staring at you.”) Sally had studied every feature of the distressed crew members, memorized the details of spars and half-submerged rigging.

The print next to the shipwrecks drew Sally even more: a white boy stunned in the water, attacked by a grey shark with jaws agape, his shipmates desperately trying to haul him in, a black sailor overseeing the rescue from the boat. She often lost herself in the trinity of white boy, grey shark and black man.

Even more than the pictures, Sally knew the smell of that room, could summon it at will, a deep aroma of pipe smoke, coal ash, leather and ink, shot through with the scent of sandalwood from a carved box that Barnabas had treasured home from Bombay. All the way home, thought Sally. Home.

Isaak, commonplace jottings, and the redolence of that room were some defence against her fears, but soon were tested. Her uncle and Mr. Sanford had been exceptionally distracted at breakfast on St. Fiona’s day, and then had gone out on some business errand. When they returned, both men were in foul humour, which added to Sally’s anxiety. The following days were ugly at McDoon & Associates. Barnabas and Sanford were curt with everyone, especially Tom, whose work the rest of that week never seemed to please the partners. An error in a remittance from a ship chandler in Wapping caused a huge row. A letter from the Landemanns in Hamburg was full of more bad news (salt shipments were being held up by the French army blockades). The cook even burned the kippers at breakfast one morning, adding to the general malaise.

“Burned the kippers,” muttered the cook, scraping the remnants into the sink. “Well, I never in all my time!”

“Scorched ’em quite wholly,” observed her niece.

“You’ll mind your mouth or you’ll be cleaning this pan yourself,”

replied the cook. Her niece dared a smile, and moved up to lend a hand with the drying. Aunt and niece worked side by side in silence.

When the cleaning up was done, the cook leaned against the sink and sighed. She pointed to a potato-mallet hanging above a chopping block. "I'm like that old beetle," she said, meaning the mallet. "Beetle-headed anyhow. Piece of wood through and through. I ought to have seen this coming."

"What coming, aunt?" asked her niece.

"Whatever's coming, niece," said the cook, dusting off a soup tureen from the blue pheasant service, though the tureen already sparkled. "I can feel something, like chickens in the coop when there's a stoat slinking about outside. You see, you needs to get to know the ways of a house, know 'em right proper. Take Mr. McDoon, for instance, he is very particular about how his vests are pressed and laid out."

The maid nodded. She had only recently come to the house on Mincing Lane.

"And Miss Sally," said the cook, moving from the tureen to the mustard pot. "Upstairs in her room, dreaming and daffling and reading in all them books. She is looking for something, only she doesn't know what."

The cook's cloth found invisible dust on the toast forks and rinding knives as she continued her tutorial, "Our Mr. Sanford now, Norfolk bred just like we are, he has his little ways too. Likes goat's meat. How he loves goat's meat. Ever since he and Mr. McDoon came back from their great trip to India, which was the cause of all the trouble with the Old McDoon. I will gladly fix it for him English-ways, but no, he must have it with pepper and spices from India, or it isn't good enough for him! I have tried my best but, to speak wholly true, I just don't hold with that foreign way of dealing with an honest meat."

The cook looked up from her dusting, and said, "So my point, and maybe I got a smittick off the point, but now I will come back to it. The point, my niece, is that a house has its ways and, if you

listen and watch, you can see when those ways have been disturbed, sometimes even before others know it themselves. So, something is a-coming, I says.”

The maid thought again of strangers in Dunster Court. The cook wagged a great runcled finger, and then shooed the maid away from the kitchen, saying, “Be watchful, my niece!”

Sally kept to herself, but no one except Fraulein Reimer and the cook sought her out anyway. All the men were exercised with their work and had no time. Her classmates seemed even more frivolous than usual. At every opportunity, she spirited the book to her room for reading by candlelight, poring over it as closely as the Sibyl of Cumae studied scrolls in the print above the chiffonier downstairs. *Journies and Travells to Yount and the Realms Within* was a compendium of disjointed details from many sources. Some passages were translations, such as those “from the records in Persian held by the customs-house at Bandar Abbas on the Straits of Hormuz” or those “being originally in Arabic from the port city of Muscat.” Memoires archived at St. John’s, the Jesuit college in Goa, were referenced, likewise manuscripts at the University of Leiden and at the presidency offices in Madras, surveys commissioned by the Royal Observatory at Greenwich and by the *Casa de Contracion*, the trade college in Seville, and so on. Sally knew something of Alexander Dalrymple’s hypotheses on the existence of a great southern continent, which helped drive Cook on his famous voyages, and of Lord Macartney’s embassy to China in 1792. But she had not heard about Matthew Flinders’s voyage from New South Wales to Capetown in 1797, or the exploits of Jabez Haverstraw, a sailor shipwrecked south of the Nicobar Islands. Sally read about whales run ashore in Mozambique and albatrosses tangled in the rigging of Dutch East Indiamen, about “the Great Confluxion,” eddies in the cosmic ocean, the haunted roads leading to Yount.

Throughout the book ran notes of warning: references to mysterious forces, a grasping hand, suffering voices on the wind . . .

Sally almost felt she understood the threat, but not quite. The name “Strix Tender Wurm” snaked its way through the text. Sally struggled to make sense of the hints and allusions, but the book itself seemed to thwart her. Although she refused to believe it, Sally felt that the text shifted from one reading to the next: sometimes a section she had read the day before seemed to have disappeared, no matter how carefully she looked for it, sometimes the entries seemed to change order or the wording to elide subtly.

Sally, when not engrossed in the book, gazed out her attic window. So she had always done, trying to know the world beyond the house but not able or allowed to join it. She cradled Isaak for hours, looking down to the street, observing the sarabande of traffic, tracing patterns of pedestrians in cat’s fur. She wondered what passersby were thinking, where they were going. Yet the greatest fascination of all was above the rooftops. Sally looked to the sky, especially at night, seeking the moon above London’s fume. Tom not infrequently asked Sally what phase the moon was in rather than look it up in the almanac. She was always right, no matter how much fog and smoke hid the moon. “Our own lunatic! Our captains could tell the tide by Sally,” said Tom.

She began to notice an odd man and an even odder bird in the street. Mincing Lane was heavily trafficked, so she could not be sure, but at dawn there seemed to be a man loitering near the corner of Dunster Court. Not loitering exactly, but busy in an aimless sort of way, she thought, someone affecting one task while actually on another errand altogether. She became aware of him on Thursday, January 16th, the feast day for St. Nigel-le-Blayne, which is how she remembered, because the church bells were muted on that day in honour of the saint’s deafness. Friday he was there, also Saturday . . . at least it seemed to be the same man, though the distance from her window down to the street, and the constant stir of the crowd, made it hard for her to be sure. She noticed him primarily because of his old-fashioned overcoat, like something from the engravings of a time before King George III. To match a coat that out of style,

he really might have worn a bag-wig. The coat was remarkable not just for its cut and length. It was made of a reddish material that glistened as the man moved about the street. The coat almost seemed to writhe. Sally pulled back when she thought that, rubbed her eyes, and felt queasy. When she looked out again, the man and the coat were gone. She thought about telling Fraulein Reimer, but decided even Fraulein Reimer would find Sally's suspicions absurd. In any case, the man in the coat was absent on Sunday and on Monday. "Silly," she murmured to Isaak, who pressed up against her. "It's just a man on his way to his employment. Must pass this way every day, only I have not noticed before."

The bird she saw a day or two after she first saw the tall man. Sally observed many details from her bower: dray horses lumbering up to merchant warehouses, gentlemen in their cups late of an evening, the knife-grinder making his rounds, the baked potato vendor with his brazier, rooks disturbed from their perches by chimney-sweeps. Nothing escaped her gaze, certainly not the wren flitting from window to window across the street. A wren in the country is too common for mention, but a wren in the city is—as Mr. Sanford would put it—a thing out of its place. The wren seemed to be flying systematically from one house to the next, perching in crannies and cornices, almost as if it was searching for something. Sally laughed off the thought but there was the wren now positioned opposite the McDoon comptoir, its head rotating in a most un-wrenlike fashion.

She laughed again at her fears, looked out, the wren was gone. No, the wren was fluttering at *her* window. Sally started back. She caught its tiny eyes, black and dull as currants. Isaak leaped at the window, teeth bared and claws extended. The wren flew off, but for several days Sally saw it sitting on the eaves across the street. Isaak patrolled the attic window, growling at the wren. Convinced that the wren was spying on her, but too ashamed to admit such fears to anyone, Sally withdrew almost entirely to her room. Still no one paid much heed, so absorbed were the other members of the McDoon household in their own concerns.

Concerns drove every one but Sally out of the house Tuesday evening, January 21st. Tom went to Drury Lane. Barnabas and Sanford, seeking to slough off the oppression they still felt from their meeting at the Piebald Swan one week earlier, were at a coffeehouse off Cornhill. Fraulein Reimer was visiting a friend at Wellclose Square. The cook and the maid had their fortnightly evening two streets over with fellow Norfolk expatriates, the “bishy barnybees” as the women called themselves.

Sally normally enjoyed an evening on her own but tonight she wanted company. She sat for a while in the partners’ office, but the smell of sandalwood in an empty room only intensified her melancholy so she retreated to her garret. The evening was still and very cold, the atmosphere heavy with river mists. Shadows thickened, her fears grew, and her shame of the fear mounted along with the fear itself.

As an antidote, she tried reading something by fussy, finger-wagging Hannah More (mostly to please Sanford, who extolled More’s virtues) but, wait, was that a creaking on the stair? Sally bent all her will to the book. A muffled voice in the hallway? Sally shut the book, closed her eyes, murmured, “Sankt Jakobi, Sankt Nikolai, Sankt Michaelis, Sankt Katharinen.” Since childhood, Sally had chanted the names of Hamburg’s churches as a charm against fear, picturing as she did Fraulein Reimer standing next to her, pointing at each church in the print of the Hamburg cityscape on the wall outside the library. “See the tall spire of the Michal?” Fraulein Reimer would say. “And Sankt Jakobi with the *wunderschoen* organ that Johann Sebastian Bach played?”

For a minute, Sally heard the Bach melody that Fraulein Reimer hummed, smelled the good mustiness of her black dress, and Sally felt the fear recede. But only briefly: wasn’t that a creaking near the door? It couldn’t be Yikes: that dog never left the hearthside. “Sankt Jakobi, Sankt Nikolai . . .” She could stand it no longer. Fear circled her. “Sankt Michaelis.” Sally got out of bed. “Sankt Katharinen.” She heard the clock strike eleven. Sally went to her door, summoned the kestrel within, and yanked the door open.

She saw nothing and laughed with relief. Then she did hear something: not a creak, but a rustling, like someone shuffling through papers. A rustling of paper in a counting house is too common for mention . . . except as midnight nears and one is alone in the house. Could Tom be back? No, she thought, especially if he stopped for claret or port on the way. Besides, Tom was noisy and, more to the point, would avoid the outer office whenever possible. She suppressed a giggle thinking of Tom working at his ledger books at midnight. Once more, the rustling came from below. Fear closed round again. She clutched the well of her throat but crept downstairs, Isaak padding beside her with tail flared. Sally passed the print of Hamburg on the wall outside the library, used the spires of the churches to anchor her resolve. The rustling was heard more clearly now, and also the treading of feet. "Chock," sounded the parrot . . . and someone *hissed* in reply. She went down the back stairs. *Oh*, she thought, *why doesn't Yikes bark or attack?* But she knew better than that: Yikes would sleep through the match between Gog and Magog. She meant to slip out through the kitchen and she should have done so, but something stopped her. Her fear choked her but she felt anger as well.

Before she knew what she was doing, Sally was at the door to the outer office. The door opened, arresting her advance. Isaak howled. Two men stepped forth. Vicious eyes. A yell, another (Sally's or theirs? She was not sure). Running. She grabbed a toby-jug from the hallway stand, the jug commemorating Trafalgar, and swung it with wild strength. The first man crashed to the floor, cursing and clutching his nose. *Another victory for Nelson*, she thought. A short-lived victory as the second man caught her just before the door to the yard behind the house. He hit her hard. Sally was more shocked than hurt. The first man came up. "Here's one from me," he growled, using his free hand. Sally almost fainted from the pain this time. "Let's go," she heard, as they trampled over her and through the door. Her head smashed onto the floor.

"Halt!" said a voice. In the yard, just beyond the door, was a short,

stout figure, hard to make out in the closing darkness. Easily seen, however, was the pistol in its hand, held steady and chest-high, the barrel glinting with light from the snowy half-moon. Sally passed out.

The clock in the coffeehouse tolled eleven. Discussion ebbed as clients began to leave. Barnabas and Sanford had revived their spirits, even if the news was depressing, about the ever-increasing price of corn, Luddite riots in Lancashire, and the unsolved mass murders the month before in Ratcliffe Highway (one of those murdered had served on an East Indiaman whose captain was well known to Barnabas and Sanford, so small the world could be, even in the great metropolis). Above all, the talk was about the war with Napoleon's France: the victory last fall in Batavia, Wellington's opportunities in Spain, parliamentary debates over the Orders in Council, rumours of Russian anger about the Continental System. The French, Napoleon, well, at least they were real, not phantoms. An honest Briton could do something about them. Barnabas and Sanford had nearly put "that Yount business" out of their minds as they put on their hats and left.

Few folk were on the streets. Drizzle mixed with snow covered the cobblestones. About three streets from home, they crossed one of the crooked alleys so typical of the City. A single streetlamp sent out a weak light, the oil wick sputtering. Before they realized what was happening, somebody ran up from behind and pushed them. The merchants of McDoon & Associates staggered forward. A second man slammed them into a wall of the alley. But Barnabas and Sanford spun round together with backs to the wall, as they had done together more than once in Bombay when Sanford was supercargo for Barnabas's uncle and Barnabas shipped out with him. Both wielded heavy walking sticks.

"Come on, villains!" yelled Barnabas.

A bass growling stopped all four men in a weird tableau: Barnabas and Sanford prepared to strike, their assailants nonplussed at the failure of the attack, fists and canes raised in mid-air. The growling

echoed off the bricks. From around the corner of the alley it came. And was followed by two red eyes in the dark. A dog's head the size of a wolf's came into view around the corner, dusky red, with huge teeth. All four men flinched. Into the weak, guttering light, hard to see in the mist and shadow, stepped a man holding a leash to the dog. His eyes glinted reddish, but probably that was a reflection from the dog. Or from his long coat, a raddled confection from a bygone era (even in this situation, Barnabas noticed that). He had a peaked hat. His teeth shone white.

The first of the two attackers cursed and bolted, then the other. Barnabas and Sanford were prepared to accept the newcomer as their rescuer . . . until they saw the dog and realized why the two footpads had fled. As the man in the glistening coat moved around the corner, so did the dog on the leash. Rather, the dog flowed around the corner, an impossibly long body that bent and formed itself around the corner as if hinged. Its forelegs were at a right angle now to its back legs and still it oozed around the corner. The growl intensified. The man in the antique coat was about to slip the leash. Sanford saw that the dog had ape-like hands.

Sanford gripped his cane for a blow before going down. Shouts erupted from the other end of the alley. Two figures raced by Barnabas and Sanford, shouting in a foreign language, and brandishing very large pistols. The dog, or whatever it was, barked loudly once—a hoarse, wet sound as if its tongue was too large for its mouth. Darkness swallowed man and dog. A few seconds later, the two newest newcomers returned out of the darkness. In the gloom, Barnabas could just make out a magenta flash on each of their skullcaps.

“Salmius Nalmius Nax!” he shouted.

“At your service.”

Half an hour later, seven people crowded into the partners' office at the McDoon comptoir: Fraulein Reimer, Sally, Barnabas, Sanford, the Purser, the proprietor of the Piebald Swan, and Tom. The cook

and the maid had returned just before Barnabas and Sanford and, after determining that Sally was well enough to talk, and that the kitchen was un-invaded, they made for their room in the back-house. “Poor brave little smee,” said the cook. “The German miss with a pistol! Housebreakers! Niece, you bar that window!”

While the cook and niece barred the windows of their room, the seven in the partners’ office were in an uproar. Only Yikes seemed unflapped, looking on from his position by the fire. Sally lay on a chair, Isaak licking her face. Sally was bruised and her right arm in a sling, but she smiled grimly at her brother. “. . . and then,” she continued, “right outside our back door, up pops Fraulein Reimer.”

“Fraulein Reimer!?” exclaimed Tom.

“Yes,” said Sally. “Cool as can be, with this huge great pistol, yelling ‘*Halten Sie jetzt!*’ or ‘halt now,’ I don’t know exactly because I was in shock on the ground.” Everyone looked at Fraulein Reimer, a plump woman whose hands now held needlepoint, and who steadfastly refused to look at the others, though she was blushing. Shaking his head, Barnabas asked the fraulein what had happened.

The fraulein stopped working the needlepoint, looked up shyly, and said, “Those, those . . . *boese Leute* . . . bad men, they stopped only for an *Augenblick*, a moment, and then they ran around me, jumped over the wall, were gone.” She paused, looked down again at her needlework. “It is the most shockingest thing, the most shockingest thing.” Her undertone suggested, however, that she would have shot the burglars if necessary.

Barnabas and Sanford added this news to the evening’s growing list of wonders. Fraulein Reimer chasing off burglars was as remarkable as their rescue by the Purser and the proprietor of the Piebald Swan. “Oh,” grinned Barnabas. “Isaak tried to bite one of the attackers, isn’t that right, Fraulein?” The fraulein said “Ah, *ja, stimmt*,” and all members of McDoon & Associates. agreed that Isaak probably would have slashed the man to death had she only been a little bigger or the man a little smaller. Barnabas turned to Salmius Nalmius Nax and asked once again for an explanation of the evening’s events.

Salmius Nalmius Nax cleared his throat. "It has to do with Yount, and with the key, and the danger that surrounds the key." Though her head and arm throbbed, Sally strained to hear every word. Tom hardly breathed. "We have watched McDoon & Associates for a long time. I have been in London since just before your sister died, Barnabas." (Salmius Nalmius made a gesture with his left hand that the McDoon household understood to be a sign of respect and mourning.) "I am also known here by another name, as the merchant Oliveire de Sousa, a trader who left Amsterdam during the revolution in 1795, a trader with connections from Smyrna to Lisbon, from Antwerp to . . . Hamburg. I have not been alone. This is my brother, not merely the proprietor of a coffeehouse but one of Yount's greatest military leaders, Captain of the Fencibles: Nexius Dexius Nax." He pronounced it "Nex Dex Nax." He spoke of the Piebald Swan as their hidden base of operations, a haven from those who wished them harm. He said that those same foes had taken an interest in the McDoons, which is why the Naxes had sent for the McDoons earlier than expected.

"It's Fraulein Reimer!" Sally blurted out, looking away from the drowning men in the prints of the foundering East Indiamen. "Fraulein Reimer has been our guardian all this time . . . isn't that right?" The others turned towards her. Fraulein Reimer blushed and quickened the pace of her needlepoint.

"Yes," said Salmius Nalmius. "The fraulein is a long-time ally of ours. She has a more varied experience than you can guess. She has been our chief source of news about you, and your chief guardian all these years. You recall who recommended her to you at the start of her employ?"

"Why, the Landemanns," said Barnabas. "Of Hamburg."

"Yes," said Salmius Nalmius. "The Landemanns. We have worked with them for two generations now, father and son. Both on the matter of Yount, and incidentally on purely mercantile matters. Oliveire de Sousa has done some profitable business with the firm of Landemanns, if I may say so, especially in the matter of salt from Cagliari and Setubal."

“We know something of that business, sir, indeed we do,” said Barnabas. “So you were the mysterious investor, the undisclosed capital, that Lindemanns spoke of. Don’t I feel a capital chub-gudgeon for not knowing anything about any of this! Buttons and beeswax!”

Sanford felt order returning, patterns reasserting themselves. Sally, from another point of departure, felt the same. She stared at the white boy threatened by the grey shark in the mezzotint, while she said: “So what were they looking for here tonight?”

Salmius Nalmius spread his hands, his skullcap bobbed, its magenta embroidery catching the candlelight. “The key,” he said. The room fell silent, except for the “chock, chock” of the parrot. Sally and Tom looked at Barnabas and Sanford. Barnabas quickly told them about the entire package, was surprised (but not much) to hear that the book was known to them.

Sanford stirred. “The dog, the man?” he asked.

Salmius Nalmius moved to reply but his brother the soldier put a hand on his arm. Speaking in a low voice, Nexius Dexius said, “We call him the Cretched Man, on account of the coat he wears.”

Barnabas interrupted, “The Wurm fellow? Is that him?”

“No,” said Nexius Dexius. “But the Wurm’s chief lieutenant. Very dangerous. The thugs he used tonight, both here and in the street, were just common London criminals. We were lucky.”

“I saw him!” Sally cried, relieved that her “eidetic imagination” had not been so fanciful after all. “In Mincing Lane last week. Ugh, his coat seemed to move on him, gleamed almost.” The Nax brothers nodded. The tall man’s rusty virgated coat was his trademark. The fraulein said something that sounded like a prayer, of which Sally caught in German the words “a cloth of wonder with strange figures in-woven.”

Nexius Dexius went on: “Very dangerous, the Cretched Man. Also, his creature . . . very dangerous. Almost never brought here, to your world. The Wurm’s need is great. We call the beast ‘shaharsh-harsh.’ In your language, that is ‘knuckle-dog.’ Scholars say they are

the Hounds of Tindalos. As may be . . . knuckle-dogs.”

Barnabas and Sanford thought of the wolf-thing sliding bonelessly around the corner, gripping the paving stones with simian hands.

“Outside are the dogs and sorcerers . . . and murderers and idolaters,” recited Sanford under his breath.

“A bird,” Sally yawned and winced but wanted one more question answered before sleep took them all. “I saw a wren last week keeping watch on us.”

Salmius Nalmius replied, “Ah, a wick-wren, a hyter-spirit. Another one of *their* creatures. Not really a bird. A phantom made flesh. A spy.”

As if she understood, Isaak arched her back at the description of the wick-wren. Salmius Nalmius nodded in her direction: in Yount, cats were given special honour. Turning back to McDoon & Associates, he said: “It is late. My brother and I withdraw for the night. But please, let us talk again tomorrow.” Barnabas and Sanford agreed, convinced now of a threat but still uncertain of its origin, and how best to meet it.

At the door, Salmius Nalmius said, “They will try again, and soon. Please, I beg you: the key must leave London. The key must go to Yount.”

“Chock,” said the parrot, and then the house fell silent.



Chapter 4: Hearth and Home

No one slept well that night except for Yikes. The cook and the maid had the first word of the day, to one another as they lit the fires.

“Beetle-headed I said I was, and so I am!” said the cook. “We never should have gone last night to the bishy-barnybees. ’Stead of mardling there, we should have been here fighting off those reasty devils.”

The maid looked none too certain of that, but the cook pulled out her sharpest hulking knife and declared, “I would have gutted any man as came into this kitchen, same’s I hulk a chicken.”

The maid admired her aunt, and had no doubt of the cook’s abilities with any kitchen utensil, but thought she’d rather have Fraulein Reimer’s pistol to hand. She was on good terms with the fraulein, even though they did not always understand one another’s accents. She wondered if all German women were as brave. Altogether it had been an unnerving evening, what with the talk among the Norfolk women about the dreadful Ratcliffe Highway murders in December (someone knew a man who knew a brother of

one of those murdered, so small the world could be!), and now this.

The cook bent over to give Isaak some milk. “Well,” she said. “From what I hear, you did *your* best, didn’t you, little lion?”

Straightening up, she said, “Now, my dear, there’ll be no falling apart here, then. Pass me the eggs, let’s make the best duff-pudding we can.”

Bolstered by pudding (the cook insisted everyone have seconds, and she gave Isaak another saucer of milk), McDoon & Associates spent the day in caucus. Correspondence was suspended, a first in the history of the firm. Three times someone used the dolphin door knocker to announce themselves, and each time Sanford asked the visitor to come again the next day.

Barnabas was for counter-attacking immediately. “Like Lord Rodney against the French!” he said, waving in the direction of the picture in the hallway of Rodney in the *Formidable* leading the British fleet through the French line off the Dominican coast.

Sanford liked the precision with which the engraving was subtitled (“at fourteen minutes past nine A.M., April 12, 1782”), but nevertheless shook his head.

“Why not, old friend?” asked Barnabas, mentally arranging cannons on the foredeck.

“For three reasons, my dear Barnabas,” said Sanford. “First, Lord Rodney knew his enemy, and we do not.”

Barnabas considered the point, as he beat his gun-crews to quarters. He thought he looked rather fine in his tall admiral’s hat, and that his vest went well with the scarlet coat. But Sanford was right. *Quatsch*. Coat, hat, and cannons faded. For now.

“Second, we cannot be sure what game the Nax brothers might be playing at,” Sanford continued. “Are they truly our friends?”

“A fair pigeon, that one,” said Barnabas, looking at the print of Diana and Acteon, and then at the sandalwood box.

“Due diligence,” Sanford said. “We need to learn more about the Naxes before we act. Just possibly last night’s events were arranged by the Naxes.”

“To what end?”

“A scheme to defraud the firm perhaps, or simply a hoax, a monstrous great prank, who knows?”

“Aye, reason is all on your side, Sanford,” said Barnabas. “And we all know it, but still . . .”

“No,” said Sally. Like a burst of wind that topples a tree, her word overwhelmed the edifice of Sanford’s logic, to the relief of all.

“No,” agreed Sanford. “No indeed, Miss Sally. Something ill is at work here, but the Naxes are not working it. I cannot say how I know that, but I do.”

Barnabas said, “Because your heart tells you. So does mine. All of us.”

“The fraulein,” said Tom. “She is with the Naxes, and we know her. She is part of this house.”

“Settled then,” said Sanford. “The Naxes are not enemies, though what sort of friends they might be is yet to be determined.”

The fourth visitor of the day used the dolphin knocker. At the door was a tall man with big brown boots like farmers wear, pressing to his head a floppy hat against the wind and the increasing snow.

“Today we admit no visitors,” said Sanford.

“No visit, sir,” said the man, with a noticeable Devonshire accent (his “sir” sounded like “zahr”). “Message only. From Mr. de Sousa, sir, by special delivery, as I am his confidential clerk.”

Sanford thought he had never seen a man less likely to be a City merchant’s confidential clerk. He looked at the messenger’s huge hands, thick and red like collops of meat, and could not imagine those hands holding a pen. Though, he thought, they would be well-suited to other purposes. The man in the country boots handed Sanford a letter.

“What’s your name?” asked Sanford.

“Harris, sir,” said the man, smiling easily so that his side-whiskers rippled. “Good day to you, sir.” Harris’s brown boots ploughed through the muck on the cobblestones, and disappeared past Dunster Court.

Sanford read the letter aloud:

January 22, 1812

Dear Mr. McDoon, with greetings to McDoon & Associates,

Last night's unfortunate but inevitable events underscore the urgency of this business. Those who struck last night will strike again. We beg you, in all sincerity, to consider again what we discussed last week. Will you come tomorrow at noon to the Piebald Swan? Do not come on foot. Go to the hackney coach stand at the Minories near Tower Hill. Seek there Mr. Harris, who delivered this letter. He will escort you in a hackney coach that we have arranged for you. We will await you as before.

*Your humble servant,
Oliveira de Sousa*

P.S.: Be sure it is really Mr. Harris. You can best know him by his Devonshire accent and his country boots.

Tom broke in before Barnabas could speak. "Oh, may I go too?"

Sanford and Barnabas were swift and united in their "no."

"Think on it, Tom," said Barnabas. "There's a home here that'll need defendin' while we're away."

Church bells tolled the hour across the City, hard to hear above the increasing storm. By some trick of the wind, the bells of St. Margaret Pattens were heard over all the others. Barnabas sang to himself the old rhyme:

"Bull's eyes and targets, Say the bells of Saint Mar'grets."

By the time the bells had spoken of bull's eyes and targets three times, he was back commanding a ship of the line, ordering grapeshot

loaded into the cannons. Then the bells stopped, and nothing but the wind was heard, shaking the panes and going “flonk, flonk, flonk” across the chimney-top.

Holding Isaak in her lap, Sally spoke into the sound of the wind. “You gave Uncle Barnabas three reasons, Mr. Sanford, but you have only told us two.”

Sanford smiled, an alarming sight. “Ah, Miss Sally, ever attentive, as some apprentices I know might be more often. Third reason: Yount itself. Ridiculous concept. Unproven, probably unprovable, attack or no attack.”

“Yet there it is,” said Barnabas. “We all long to go . . . to a place we’ve never heard of, let alone seen!”

“Except it feels as if we *have* been there,” said Sally, her eyes focussed beyond the wind outside, her voice getting softer yet more determined. “A place we knew before we had words, someplace we have lost and must get back to. The corner of a garden, with a little fountain spilling its water and leaves falling from trees overhanging the wall . . .”

Everyone pondered Sally’s words.

“Bittersweet,” thought Sanford. “Imperfect memory.”

“A garden, Sally?” said Barnabas. “I like that. Oh, very much I do. How I feel every spring when we first turn the earth out back. Or rather more how I feel now, in winter, as I imagine what is to come. Say, maybe we should try planting smilax this year, what?” Barnabas thought also of a garden long ago in Bombay, but did not speak of it now.

“Makes me feel sad and joyful all at once somehow,” said Tom. “How is that possible?”

“*Sehnsucht*,” said Sally. “*Sehnsucht*, German for this longing after a place we aren’t even sure exists. Cannot be translated into English, not fully anyway. Fraulein Reimer uses it. When we talk about Hamburg.”

“Ah, smilax in a garden,” said Barnabas. “Ah, well . . . I suppose . . . Sanford, we’ll go tomorrow to the Naxes, but just to hear them out . . .”

no commitments. We cannot abandon everything, the business, the house, our home, to travel to a place no one has ever heard of, not without a great deal more explanation.”

“Uncle,” said Sally. “You know you wish to go. We all do. Even you, Mr. Sanford.”

Barnabas gripped the key in his pocket. “I know, my dear Sally, but nothing is that simple. None of this is according to Cocker! What becomes of McDoon & Associates if we leave?”

“The Naxes will have a plan for that, surely.”

“Yes, perhaps, but their first plan, well, less said about that, the better. Besides, the danger is here, Sally, against this house, our house. Why fly headlong into danger when it has found us right here? The brutes, hurting you like that, why, to think of it makes me . . . makes me . . .”

Sally squeezed his hand. No Sankt Jakobi when Uncle Barnabas was here getting ready to “handle ’em.”

Barnabas smiled at his niece. He thought of the one thing he and Sanford had not talked about with Tom and Sally: the claim the Naxes made that going to Yount would yield Barnabas’s heart’s desire. The thought that they might be able to bring her back to him . . . no, it simply could not be possible and, even if it were, surely there would be a price to pay, some favour or service or even money. No, it did not bear thinking about.

“Deadly cold this morning, sirs,” said Harris, the tall Devonshire man, when Barnabas and Sanford appeared the next morning at the hackney coach stand. “Beggars found frozen in Islington doorways, crows burrowing into dungheaps to stay warm, a bitter night but we hopes a warmer day, right, sirs?”

“You are . . . ?” said Barnabas.

“Harris, sir,” said the tall man.

“Not your real name, I’ll be bound,” said Barnabas.

“No, sir, now that you ask, not rightly,” said the man in the big brown boots. “But I come by it honest, as it was my mother’s name

before she married my father.”

“It will answer then,” said Barnabas. “You *are* from Devonshire, or else you are a damned fine play-actor.”

“Oh, yes, indeed,” said Harris. “True Devonshire, through and through.”

Sanford asked, “Who is the coachman?”

Harris stepped to the front of the coach, rapped on the coachman’s boot.

A small man in a great cape leaned down, touched his hat, and said, “Morning, my gentlemen. I rejoice in the name of Fletcher.” The accent was all London East End.

Barnabas put two hands on the ferrule of his walking stick, planted firmly in front of him, and put the clarifying tone in his voice.

“Fletcher, is it?”

“Well, chip chap chunter, I’m no arrowsmith if that is what you are driving at, sir,” replied the coachman before Barnabas had finished his question. “But where’s the fun, much less the profit, in using the name that’s scribbled in the parish book on the date when this body was baptized?”

Under his hat, Fletcher winked. Barnabas and Sanford could not decide whether to be amused or affronted. Fletcher caught their look, and grew serious in an instant.

“Solemn like,” he said, pulling back his cape to reveal two pistols and a knife strapped to his body. “Fletcher is as comfortable a cloak as this here one I am wearing, and just as serviceable against windy fingers and sniffing dogs. I am here to protect the quality against footpads, chowers, varlets, and squoriers. Why, if Dick Turpin himself rode up against us, he’d not ride off again.”

“God’s truth,” agreed Harris.

“Well met then,” said Barnabas, and they set off in the coach for the Piebald Swan.

“Welcome,” said Salmius Nalmius. “Today is no day for a visit but there you are, cannot be helped!”

Nexius Dexius appeared with a pot of hot chocolate, saying, “I

meet you in a minute upstairs. First, chocolate to Mr. Fletcher and Mr. Harris, who will wait outside in the mews.”

Upstairs, Barnabas admired the prints on the wall. “Beans and bacon,” he said. “This is a fine one. But what is the tale here?”

Salmius Nalmius said, “Ah, a favourite, a story from your world . . . do you not know it? The man riding the dolphin is Arion, a musician threatened by pirates. They were going to kill him, so he jumped overboard. The dolphin saved him, carried him to land, where later Arion got justice from the pirates. A good story.”

“What about these?” asked Barnabas, pointing to a row of old-fashioned prints depicting beached whales.

“Old Dutch pictures,” said Salmius Nalmius. “With meaning for us from Yount. Whales and dolphins are special friends of ours. You will learn this when you come. To see them run ashore like this is a terrible thing, a tragedy. We honour them.”

Barnabas looked at the great creatures on the shore, flukes in the air, mighty mouths agape, with people swarming about. In one picture a man stood on the head of the whale. In another, a small dog played with its owners by the side of the dying sea-mammoth. The engraver had done a particularly good job on one picture: the eye of the whale seemed to plead with the viewer for time, love, and caution.

Sanford had been looking out the window while the connoisseurs admired the prints. He watched Nexius Dexius talking with Harris and Fletcher. He looked at the sky. Not even a rook was up, with the wind starting again. Yet Sanford thought he saw shadows sliding over the roofs, angle around chimney-pots and corbels. He turned back to the room as Nexius Dexius came up the stairs.

The captain from Yount carried a rifle of strange design, which he placed by the door. “I will . . .” said Nexius Dexius. “I shall have . . .” Stumbling over the conditional, he looked at his brother.

“Would have?” said Salmius Nalmius.

“Would have asked Mr. Harris and Mr. Fletcher to come inside,” said Nexius Dexius. “It is hard cold outside. But our men must guard

out there. You were followed part way.”

“What do they know of Yount?” asked Barnabas.

“Enough to know how important their services are,” said Salmius Nalmius. “Harris and Fletcher are estimable men. They work for more than their pay. They have each their own reasons for joining our fight. Trust them.”

The word “trust” hung in the air. Each man sipped at his chocolate, indulged in the warmth of the fire for a moment. Barnabas stroked his vest (a pale yellow nankeen), cleared his throat.

“Buttons and beeswax,” he said. “First, Mr. Sanford and I owe you an apology, if we offended on our last visit. Events and your rhetoric moved in unlikely avenues, caught us off balance. Second, we also owe you our gratitude for your appearance in the alley the night before last. A tight spot that was, not clear how we might have fared without your help. Thank you.”

The Naxes inclined their heads, touched their caps.

“So now, here we are,” finished Barnabas.

The fire crackled. Outside the wind murmured.

“You still have questions,” said Salmius Nalmius.

“Yes,” said Barnabas. “There’s a Cretched Man and a Wurm who want the key in my pocket. There’s a place called Yount and you’re from there. Sanford and I are ready to concede all that, even though saying so much in public would have us locked up in Bedlam.”

He paused.

“Beans and . . .” he began. “We wish to go, make no mistake. It’s just that this is our home, don’t you see? McDoon & Associates, Mincing Lane, the City . . . we cannot just leave our home. Especially with it being attacked. Running off seems like running away. No. We won’t let them drive us away.”

Another pause.

“Besides,” said Barnabas. “Why can’t we send the key with you to Yount? It’s the key they want, right?”

Salmius Nalmius shook his head. “No, it is not just the key they need. Or that we need. It’s the holder of the key as well. The key

and the holder, together. One without the other is useless. The lock won't open without both. My dear Barnabas, you must come to Yount or all our hopes are naught."

"Look," said Sanford, his Norfolk accent more pronounced than usual. "I'm just an old moke from Mousehold Heath, but there is more here than you reveal."

Salmius Nalmius sighed. "Yes, but what we hold back is for your own good. And in truth there is much that neither I nor my brother understand of these events. We are, like you, just small threads in the grand weaving."

Nexius Dexius poured more chocolate, then paced to the window. He stood there for some time.

Barnabas spoke again. "The letter spoke of my heart's desire. What about that? How could you even know . . . ?"

The merchant from Yount held out his palms, touched his thumbs to the forefingers then the little fingers. His dark eyes were bright in the firelight. "This is beyond me too," he said. "But I know it to be true. The Learned Doctors in Yount understand. They will make it happen. All I know, all I have been told, is that you once long ago had . . . a liaison . . . a connection with a merchant's daughter in India, a connection that was severed before it properly had a chance to grow. Am I not right?"

Barnabas nodded. Sanford, the "old moke," stared straight at Salmius Nalmius.

"How your love—may I use that word?—for this woman is involved in our business, that I do not know," said Salmius Nalmius. "Nor do I know how you are to be reunited with her. All I know is that this is what is supposed to occur, all linked to the key and your carriage of it to Yount."

"Sir," said Sanford, with a ferrous tone. "If you jest or make false promise or in any fashion play with us . . ."

Again, Salmius Nalmius sat forward, palms outstretched, fingers touching. He shook his head, restraint in his voice. "No," he said. "My world depends on what I say to you. I do not jest or speak idly."

Nexius Dexius paced back from the window. "Not much time today," he said. "They are coming soon."

Sanford turned slowly from Salmius Nalmius to Nexius Dexius. He thought he sensed the sound of far-off footsteps on a hollow staircase. Outside he heard the coach horse stamp its feet, and a brisk word from Mr. Fletcher.

Barnabas spoke: "Here it is then: we cannot depart, not yet at any rate, much as we recognize the need. We must defend our home. Your proposal to take over McDoon & Associates is no more credible today than it was on first utterance. Not so much for our sake but for that of the market. Who would believe such a change? No, it would not answer. McDoon & Associates would be reduced, ruined."

The Naxes began to protest but Barnabas continued with a wave of his arm. "I am sorry, but that is how it must be. For now. Let us part today as friends and continue the conversation as wit and weather permit."

Nexius Dexius scowled, but Salmius Nalmius said, "So be it. As friends."

A knock sounded on the outer door, and then Harris drawled up the stairs, "Time to be afoot, gentlemen."

Nexius Dexius went down the stairs, taking the strange rifle with him. Salmius Nalmius reached out to Sanford and Barnabas. "Stay but one second longer," he said. "I understand your choice, though I regret it. No one knows about home more than I do, or Nexius Dexius. Defending one's home. Yes, we know about that. So let us continue to help you, if we may. Take Harris and Fletcher, let them live with you as guardians."

They moved down the stairs. "The Cretched Man will never desist," said Nexius Dexius. "You know that, don't you?"

At the door, Barnabas and Sanford halted. "Thank you," said Barnabas. "We accept your aid. Think us not ingrates. We may yet go to Yount. Our reluctance is not because we don't want to help you, but because we must look first to ourselves. Send us Harris and Fletcher, and we shall beat the Wurm on our own ground."

Nexius Dexius called from the mews. Sanford felt the hollow footfalls quickening in his mind.

“Thank you,” said Salmius Nalmius. “For this much, I thank you. We shall speak again soon. Now, make haste, and Godspeed.”

A minute later, the coach rattled out of the mews. A bolt of midnight-blue seemed to course after it, but flickered and was gone.

The Naxes shut the door against the cold. “Another step has been taken,” said Salmius Nalmius in his own language.

“The wolf takes six steps while the beaver gnaws the wood,” replied his brother.

“This beaver has sharp teeth, you shall see, brother.”

“Let us hope so. We will need every tooth in our heads, and all the claws on our feet.”

So Fletcher and Harris came to live in the house on Mincing Lane, with its dolphin door knocker and its blue-trimmed windows. Almost overnight the two men became part of McDoon & Associates, strange as that seemed to Sally. Strange but welcome, she thought, as she sat in the kitchen one evening a month later. Candlemas had passed, and the feast of St. Polycarp, and the feast of St. Eudelme with its procession of beribboned goats through the City. The most terrible cold had passed, but still it was good to gather around the kitchen stove for warmth and company. Mr. Fletcher was holding forth.

“They found a bag of bones in the foundation stones of a building what was took down in Lambeth to make way for the new bridge to be built over to Westminster,” he said, pausing for effect. “Small bones, like maybe a baby’s.”

“Come now, Mr. Fletcher, if you please,” said the cook. “There’s trouble enough without you going on about . . . baby’s bones.” She imitated Mr. Fletcher’s London accent as near as her Norfolk village tongue could manage. Her niece the maid smiled, her eyes round and bright.

“No, missus, I know it to be true,” said Fletcher, with his hand

moving to his heart. "Because I have it on good account from my cousin, who knows a man who works on the site."

"Hmmpf," said the cook. "I'm wondering if your cousin would know a hink from a twibill, that's all, coming with stories about baby bones in the groundstone."

The reference to hinks and twibills swept right over Mr. Fletcher, who would have ignored it anyway. But Mr. Harris approved.

"That's a good one, missus," said the man from Devonshire. The cook stopped scrubbing a pot for a moment to acknowledge the compliment.

Her niece used the moment to venture a query. "What else might your cousin have to say, Mr. Fletcher?" The cook banged the pot more than she needed to, but did not interrupt.

"Well," said Mr. Fletcher, his face red in the glow of the stove fire, "There's talk of a sighting in the Garlickhythe of a ghostly old nun walking back and forth wringing her hands." He walked the length of the kitchen and back, wringing his hands as he did so.

"Fallabarty and fol-dee-rol," said the cook, but she was not the least bit convincing. She had stopped scrubbing the pot, and was hanging on Mr. Fletcher's words.

Sally laughed good-naturedly. "Mr. Fletcher, really, that's such an old story, like the one about the haunting of Velvet Lane. Surely you don't believe—"

Mr. Fletcher cut her off, while bowing to her at the same time. "Oh, yes, Miss Sally, by Wee Willie Hawken, I do, as I have it well affirmed, from another cousin, this one on my mother's side, who knows a woman who is married to the deacon in the church there. Was him that saw the ghostly nun." An artist wanting an image of sincerity could not have found a better model than Mr. Fletcher at that instant.

Mr. Harris laughed again, his big brown boots crossed in front of him as he leaned back in his chair. "Hmmm, Mr. Fletcher, how many cousins do you have?"

"No small number, Mr. Harris, a veritable tribe of us, all true

cock's eggs, born within the sound of Bow bells."

"Hah! Soused gournards then!" said the cook. "That proves we ought all to stop our ears then whenever 'your cousin' holds forth."

More laughter all around. Fraulein Reimer, who understood the gist even when she missed some of the details in a language not her own, put down her needlepoint. "Perhaps we shall sing together now a song, yes?" she said. "I do not like this talk of ghosts and bones."

So the company sang "The Merry Christ Church Bells," the cook beating time on the pot and Mr. Harris stamping his boots. Sally, holding Isaak in her lap, joined the refrain:

Let none despise the merry, merry wives
Of famous London town.

Upstairs in the library Sanford put down a book to listen. Barnabas was tapping time, and murmuring the refrain. Sanford did not entirely approve of chat and singing in the kitchen, but allowed that Mr. Fletcher and Mr. Harris had accommodated themselves well to the household. Everyone's morale was improved since their arrival. Most of all, there had been no further attacks. No one had seen any evidence of the Cretched Man or any other minatory being. Sally said that her dreams were quiet. Sanford did not imagine the enemy had retreated far but for now all seemed well.



Interlude: Frozen Algebra on Fire

Maggie thought her mother might die from the cold. The winter had been the coldest anyone could remember and this night—January 22, 1812—was the coldest yet. Maggie was wearing all the clothes she owned, swaddled within the worn-out sailor’s jacket that reached to her knees, and still she shivered. Her ears were cold under her red kerchief: she wished she had kept the crownless hat she had found two weeks ago instead of selling it to the rag-and-bone man. She lay on the pallet on the floor, holding her coughing mother.

They lived in a cellar, like thousands of others throughout London. Actually, they shared a cellar, with an Irish family, separated by a thin, hastily erected wall. (The man who collected the weekly rent smirked every time he came, calling the basement flats his “salt-and-pepper cellar.”) Maggie heard muffled crying through the wall, the ache of one of the little Irish children overcome by cold and hunger. Sometimes on a Sunday in the summer, Maggie would join in their games in the alley: hopscotch, unkitty-dunkitty-donkey, tumble-sticks. They seemed to view her as a good luck charm, a

strange “blue” older sister. They never disturbed her when she carved numbers on the walls of the alley with an old nail or drew circles and lines with a pencil stub she’d found in the street. The children’s mother seemed a bit scared of Maggie but since the Irish woman did not speak much English, she limited her exchanges with Maggie to “good morning” and “good night.” As the little girl cried, Maggie felt sorry for her Irish neighbours, as sorry as she felt for herself and her mother. And she was angry that you could not warm two blocks of ice by rubbing them together.

The cold had stunned the wall-lice and bedbugs into temporary submission, but the rat which lived behind the far wall was active. He was drawn to the meagre heat of the fire Maggie kept alive in the fireplace. As long as the rat stayed hidden, Maggie kept it out of mind. Feeding the fire might bring the rat out, but Maggie had no choice. She put another slip of scavenged newspaper on the fire, revelled in the small gust of heat, held her mother close. They had spent their last shillings on coal two days ago. Maggie calculated that the pile of scrap paper, dried horse dung, and wood slivers would not last the night. At least she’d have the pleasure of knowing the rat would freeze as well once the remaining fuel was exhausted. What really pained Maggie, besides knowing that the cold was eating her mother’s lungs, was that every scrap of newspaper burned was a story she could no longer read. She made sure to read every fragment before consigning it to the flames, reading them out loud to entertain her mother.

“For young Gentlewomen,” Maggie read. “Lessons given in waxwork, filigree, japanning, quill-work, painting upon glass, embroidery with gold and silver threads, and other diversions not here enumerated. Enquire at Mrs. Neeseden’s in Derby Close by St. Blandina Priory.” Maggie and her mother had never heard of Derby Close or St. Blandina Priory: wherever these places were, they weren’t anywhere near by. The advertisement might just as easily have referred to a location on the moon.

The fire dwindled again.

“Reward offered by the Constabulary,” she read. “For any knowl-

edge leading to the capture of the person or persons responsible for the murders December last in Ratcliffe Highway.” Maggie and her mother shuddered even as they shivered. Everyone knew about the murders in the Ratcliffe Highway, everyone had a theory about their cause, and everyone claimed to know someone who knew or was related to one of the victims.

The flames died down. Viscous smoke hung in the air.

“For sale,” she read. “At Mr. Brewster’s shop in Carnaby Street, fine laced whisky-yellow gloves, white bird’s eye bone lace, gimp lace, and other fine possaments for Ladies of refined taste.” Maggie and her mother sighed, picturing these glories. They’d seen once or twice from afar the Ladies for whom such articles were made.

The fire smoked and sputtered.

“Newly arrived on the *Gazelle*,” Maggie read. “Best Chinese smilax root, also mastic gum, Gujaratee sandalwood, tragacanth, mace from Amboina, pepper from Ternate, divers other spices and apothecary wares.” Besides the pepper, Maggie had no idea what these things were or what their use might be, but her mind soared in the imagining.

In between readings from the doomed shreds of newspaper, Maggie told her mother stories to keep the cold at bay. The stories were the ones that her mother had told her over and over as a child, stories from far away, some of them stories from places where everyone looked like Maggie and her mother. “Well,” the story always started, “once upon a time in the summer time, turtle chew tobacco and spit white lime,” and then Maggie would tell how Woodpecker got the red patch on his head from pecking on the hull of the Ark, and how greedy Tortoise got his patchwork shell.

Her mother shut her eyes and sighed, her breath wisping from her mouth. She coughed, overrode her daughter’s request that she not overexert herself and said, “Maggie, *agamega*, leopard-woman, I tell you now about *Ala* the Mother and *Ezebelamiri*, the Queen who lives in the Water, and *Ikoru* the Drum-Spirit. Listen.” Maggie knew the stories by heart but listened intently, blocking from her

mind the wind and snow outside and the cold inside. Her mother told stories that had been passed down in secrecy about Tacky's Rebellion in Jamaica and Kongo-Jemmy's Revolt in Carolina, about the King of the Eboes flying across the ocean with an army to free his people. Her mother barely had strength to speak but insisted on continuing.

"Maggie, baby eagle, *nwugo*," she whispered. "Remember your story. You were born to me in a place called Maryland, near the Choptank River, on the Baird plantation. . . ."

"I know, Mama," said Maggie, smiling. "I know. My father was as strong and handsome as Quaco Sam. . . ."

"Yes, yes, *nwugo*," said her mother, smiling back. "Oh yes, and as smart as John who beat the Devil at the crossroads."

"What happened to my father, Mama?" Always the question, down through the years, always the same answer.

"He was from Africa, he had been a prince there, and he was smarter than the *buckra*," said her mother, smile fading. "When first quail calls, he took you and me, and we slipped away, following the drinking gourd in the sky. Oh, the *buckra* masters, they set dogs after us and men with guns on horses, but your father was too smart and we got away clean. From Bee-luther-hatchee we got."

"But not to Ginny-gal, Mama? Not like we hoped?"

"No, we came to New York, a big city like London. You were so small, so small, you could only walk a few steps, you were so young. But New York is not safe either. The Baird masters have spies in New York, *obala obala*, blood of blood, wicked men."

Maggie's mother stopped there. The wind howled. The Irish children moaned in their half-sleep on the other side of the wall. Maggie saw sweat on her mother's brow.

"Mama, no more now."

"No, we go on, *ndem mbu enyi*, women are as strong as elephants," said Maggie's mother. She coughed for almost a minute after that but continued. "After some by and by, we lived with another family of colour, only they were always free. The Weatherbys took us in,

like Abraham and Sarah they took us in as strangers. Remember that, Maggie, like Abraham and Sarah.”

Maggie held her mother tight, the old sailor’s jacket scrunched up between them.

“One night some *buckra* beat on the Weatherby door,” whispered Maggie’s mother. “‘Who there?’ says Mr. Weatherby. ‘Got a law paper says we can take the Baird family. Are they there?’ comes back a voice on the other side of the door. We changed our name when we came to New York, but still they find us! He was easy to find, I guess, your father, ’cause of his country marks. On his face. I told you he was a prince in Africa. So the takers are at the Weatherby door. ‘Quick,’ says your father. ‘Hide in the attic.’ You and me, little eagle, we run upstairs and hide in the attic. ‘You too,’ I say, but your father shakes his head. He going to deal with this so they cannot take his family. Last time I see your father, he is looking up at me from the foot of the stairs. ‘Hide,’ he says. So we do. I tell you not to make a sound or the *buckra* will take us. You are so scared you bite your hand until you bleed.”

Maggie looks at the scar between thumb and forefinger on her left hand.

“Mr. Weatherby tried to keep those men out, but they smashed a window. They came in. From the attic I heard fighting and yelling. Almost I ran back down.”

The cold is so intense in the cellar that even the rat in the far wall is quiet.

“Well, you know what happens. They took your father. He kept you and me safe. But he never came back from Maryland; now he’s in Bee-luther-hatchee.”

Maggie rocked her mother in her arms, hummed an old song about Elisha feeding the Shunammite widow and bringing back the dead. Maggie knew the rest of the story: how Maggie’s mother had determined to leave the United States of America altogether, how the Weatherbys and others in the free black community had collected funds for Maggie and her mother to sail to London, where

Maggie's mother had found work as a seamstress making simple waistcoats and ticken breeches. When they'd registered at the local parish in Wapping, they'd called themselves Collins, the name of the captain of the ship that had landed them in London. For a while they more than made ends meet. Maggie was able to attend the parish charity school, where she learned to read and do her first sums. People talked about that, a poor black girl who could read and add, but Maggie did not care, though she learned to play dumb when she needed to (which was often). For a year or two they lived above ground and shared a real bed, not just a pallet on the floor, and had meat three times a week. One Easter, Maggie's mother had bought them both bonnets and they had walked all the way to St. Pammachius Underhill for the noon service, and had tea after at a public garden. But then the war with Napoleon and the French got worse, and harsh winters followed poor harvests, so working folks got squeezed between unemployment and high prices. Maggie had joined her mother at the seamstress's establishment but still they found themselves back in the cellar without enough money for a full week's coal.

Maggie's mother was slipping into fever. "Ol' Heeg from under cottonwood roots is snatchin' my breath," she wheezed. "Ol' Heeg the witch-owl has a-got hold of my breath, Maggie." Maggie thought of the owl atop the pillar on the border of the spirit-land, the owl that was looking for her.

"Hush, Mama, no owl has you."

"Squinch owl, white as *buckra* men," husked her mother. "No Ginny-gal for us, just a dry-bone valley. But the King will fly back. Take force by force, he sings, with his fiery army. *Uche chukwu ga-eme*, God's will be done."

Maggie nodded. The fire had almost gone out. The pile of newspaper scraps and other rubbish was gone. Morning was still far off. The wind roared as loudly as ever. Maggie looked at her delirious mother, and knew what she had to do. Easing her mother full-length onto the pallet, Maggie went to the wall nearest the bed (and farthest

from the rat-infested wall). She pried away several bricks and felt for her most precious treasures: three books purchased for pennies from the peddlers who went street to street, in the years when she and her mother could afford bonnets at Easter. The books were old, ragged, missing pages; they were the sort sold by the pound at estate auctions, books that often ended up as filler for walls in the terrace houses being built in London's growing suburbs. To Maggie they were more valuable than diamonds.

Even in the dark she knew each book by its shape and state of disrepair. She had memorized each one. The first one she retrieved was *The Elements of Algebra* by Nathaniel Hammond. "In a New and Easy Method," Maggie chanted to herself. "With their Use and Application, in the Solution of a great Variety of Arithmetical and Geometrical Questions, by General and Universal Rules. Published in 1752." Page by page she fed the book into the fire, which blazed for a while, reflected in her mother's half-shut eyes. When the fire had died down, and her mother began coughing again, Maggie took out the second book: *The Compleat Compting-house* by John Vernon, published in 1719. Slowly she stripped out the pages, crumpling them before placing them carefully onto the embers. She watched as the flames jumped up to devour "the young Lad's first Understanding of plain Arithmetick" and "Tables for Calculation of Interest."

Her mother would need medicine, though Maggie had no idea how they would afford that. She would ask for extra piecework to take home, and perhaps the parish would provide some relief. Until the fever broke, Maggie would have to tend to her mother. She prayed for the cold to diminish. She saw two eyes flash in the far corner, a naked tail whisk into the shadows cast by the fire. The heat had also revived the bedbugs, several of which crawled over the blankets covering Maggie's mother.

"Women are as strong as elephants," said Maggie into the dawning light. The wind was dying down a little but so was the fire. Her mother coughed up thin greenish spittle, which Maggie wiped off with a bit of rag from the pallet. Summoning her strength,

Maggie pulled out the third book. She could just read it in the half-darkness, but she did not need to, knowing it by heart.

“*Cocker’s Arithmetick*,” she breathed as an incantation. “Being a plain and familiar Method for the full Understanding of that incomparable Art. Being the fifty-first edition, printed in 1745 by R. Ware, at the Bible and Sun, Amen Corner.”

Rip, rip, went the pages. Maggie half-sang Cocker’s preface: “. . . by studiously conferring with the Notes, Names, Orders, Progress, Species, Properties, Proportions, Powers, Affections, and Applications of Numbers delivered herein, become such Artists indeed . . .”

Maggie kept the fire going until mid-morning when the cold weakened its grip, and her mother’s fever abated slightly. The rat retreated into his wall. Just before she collapsed into sleep next to her mother, Maggie looked at the ashes of her books and cried. She had their knowledge in her head but they had been her only real friends, and now they were gone. Just before she fell asleep, Maggie thought of the white woman, the one about her own age with the nice clothes in the big house, whom she had seen in her far-dreaming.

“That fancy white girl, whoever she is,” thought Maggie. “*She* did not have to burn books this night just to stay warm.”



Chapter 5: Theft from the Garden

The McDoon household resumed its usual rhythm as the winter of 1812 ebbed. Mr. Fletcher and Mr. Harris became fixtures at the house on Mincing Lane. Lady Day and then Easter week came in late March, followed by the feast of St. Alphege in April, and of course May Day. The events of the winter seemed a dream, or a vision seen through grimed, frosty windows. Absolutely nothing out of the ordinary had happened since the night of the break-in. Sanford brought this up to Barnabas one day in early May as they prepared to go to the coffeehouse.

“That man in the coat and his dog,” said Sanford. “They’ve only gone into hiding, lurking concealed while we lower our guard.”

Barnabas whirled about. “Lower our guard?! Not on your life!” He brought his walking stick up in a posture of attack, catching the edge of the Rodney picture and almost knocking it from the wall.

“Nevertheless,” said Sanford, righting the picture so Rodney could beat the French on the level, “that’s what our enemy hopes for.

To lull us while they lie close and wait to strike like a viper.”

They discussed their defences on the way, with Harris strolling a few feet behind them as if he had nothing whatsoever to do with them. Still, other matters pressed in on them again, matters of business and politics that swirled through the coffeehouse. Barnabas and Sanford felt the urgency of Yount slipping from their minds.

Sally too struggled to keep Yount in her mind. She read and reread passages from *Journies and Travells to Yount and the Realms Within*, cross-examined her dreams for signs and symptoms of Yount. Yet there seemed to be a narcotic force at work in her mind, smothering the urgency, stilling her wish to go. She often found herself in the partners’ office, gazing listlessly at the sandalwood box, the book of Yount open but unread on her lap. From Mincing Lane came the cries of London:

“Buy my brooms!”

“Holloway Cheese Cakes!”

“Coal man, coal man here!”

“Ripe sparagas!”

“Pens and ink, who will buy my pens?”

With these cries as a lullaby, Sally would nod off, Yount a muddle in her mind.

Until one afternoon in early May, when Sally dreamed of—or was visited by, she could not tell which—the Cretched Man while she dozed in the partners’ office. She awoke suddenly, but may have dreamed she was waking. Either way, she turned around in her chair, like a recalcitrant cork being pulled from a bottle.

He stood there in his raddled coat and outdated hat, not four paces away. So close. She saw every detail of that coat, all its patterns and striations. She sensed a message in the patterns, began to discern a calligraphy in the threads. The longer she looked, the more she thought she understood the message, considered it a beacon luring the unwary to a deadly shore. The buttons of that coat were silver, embossed with a half moon. His hands were pale, finely groomed, with fingernails cut to match the buttons. Against her will, Sally’s gaze moved up to the Cretched Man’s face. She gasped.

He was beautiful. His eyes were a galvanic blue that shifted to green. Nose, cheeks, lips, chin, forehead, all were perfectly proportioned, like the statue of an ancient Roman. She hated herself for thinking so, but, dear Lord, he was beautiful. He held out his hands to her. They held gifts, two books. His expression was that of one long-pained, one who seeks to spare another the grief he himself has suffered. Involuntarily, she reached out to take the books. The distance between them closed. Two paces away. She smelled almonds. His eyes were enormous, trapping her. He beckoned with the books. Sally took a halting step forward, towards an infinite library behind The Cretched Man, miles of shelved books reaching to the heavens. From the celestial archive came the whispers of a thousand scholars, welcoming her if she just accepted The Cretched Man's gifts.

Sally wrenched her gaze away. The Cretched Man shook his head, smiled. She detected a hundred emotions in that smile. His face was too white. His teeth were too white. The smell of almonds overwhelmed her. Her eyes teared. When her vision cleared, The Cretched Man was gone. Or she woke up. Or both.

The Cretched Man struck the next day, Monday the 11th of May.

Barnabas, Sanford and Fletcher went to the Piebald Swan. Tom wanted to be part of the discussions at the mysterious Yountish inn, having read too many histories of Nelson and Rodney, and heard too many stories of Hornblower and of Lucky Jack Aubrey. Tom slipped out of the house on Mincing Lane to follow his uncle, but had not counted on two things: that those he followed would take a hackney coach, and that he would get lost.

The coach was soon away from Tom. If he ran, he might keep it in sight, but then he might also be noticed by the lynx-eyed Fletcher. He tried to estimate where they were heading, but knew only that their general destination was Wapping, and was soon lost in a maze of lanes and alleys near the river.

That's three men behind me, sauntering with purpose, I'd call it,

Tom thought. *Those two in the conduit, they're all together, that's five following me.*

Tom trotted.

I think this must be Blanchflower Street, not far from George & Son. If I can just make it to George & Son, I'll be quit of these rascals.

No one was about except the five men tracking him. Tom ducked into an alley.

Smallbone's Cutting, I think this is, Should leave me on Finch-House Longstreet.

But he was mistaken. The cutting ended in a small yard with no other entrance.

Tom turned to face his pursuers.

"What do you want?" he yelled at the five.

"You," said the leader of the band, with a sad, knowing look in his eye.

"Come on then, you chowers!" said Tom.

The fight did not last long: five on one were impossible odds, though Tom put up a game struggle.

Just before they bound his arms and put a sack over his head, Tom thought, *Quatsch! I wish I had one of the fraulein's pistols. Uncle Barnabas, come quick!*

"Where's Tom?" asked Barnabas when he, Sanford, and Fletcher had returned from their meeting. Everyone at Mincing Lane thought Tom was with another member of the household. They turned the house out looking for him, and then scoured the nearby streets. They called on neighbours. No one had any word of Tom, nor would they since Tom by then was a captive in a warehouse down the river in Shadwell.

Late that evening, someone thumped on the door with the dolphin knocker. Barnabas almost yanked the door off its hinges, but no one was there. A letter sat on the doorstep. No one could have delivered the letter and then disappeared so quickly. The hairs on Barnabas's neck went up.

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With trembling hands, Barnabas opened the letter. On cream-coloured stationery, and in a fine hand, it read:

Dear Mr. McDoon,

We are pleased to inform you that we have found the lost member of your household and are caring for him in preparation for returning him to you. We look sincerely forward to relieving ourselves of his care, in return for which we only (and humbly) ask for your cooperation in joining us on a certain journey, a journey you will undertake together with a certain article, viz. a key, that you possess.

To effect the transaction, we ask (amicably) that you meet us Tuesday, May 12 at Saint Clare Minoreesses without Aldgate at nine o'clock in the evening. Come alone. Your failure to heed this latter request will be taken as a grave trespass on our hospitality and good will, which might in turn have other consequences.

In anticipation of a satisfactory resolution to the immediate concern, and to furthering our heretofore only slight acquaintance, I am your most obedient servant,

Pausanias

Barnabas said, "So our enemy has a name after all. Is he Greek?"

Sally said, "He . . . he taunts us, Uncle. Pausanias was one of the ancients—a traveller and teller of tales." She turned away in tears. What good was all her learning if she could not save Tom?

Barnabas hugged Sally. What good were all his wealth and all his connections, if he could not save Tom?

Sanford felt pain in his deepest being: a part of the very household had been taken, creating not just disorder but an assault on order itself. What good were discipline and detail if he could not save Tom?

“Send word tonight to the Piebald Swan,” said Barnabas. “We make plans for our counterstroke. But above all we must get Tom back unhurt. Nothing else matters.”

In the kitchen, the cook held her niece. “There, there,” the cook said. “Don’t you worry. The house is roused, at last! You’ll see. And your Fletcher will come through unharmed. I’ll wager that.”

The cook looked about her, counted her knives. “Come on, lively now, girl,” she said. “We may have to defend ourselves, against this eel-rawney and his dis-holy brood.”

As she collected the knives, she chanted:

Willows walk and elders bleed,
Witches take what witches need.

“Witches got Master Tom,” she said. “Witches got Master Tom.” She touched her St. Morgaine medal, then sharpened the blades.

In the attic, Sally cried with her arms around Isaak. “On our mother’s grave,” she said. “That’s what Tom always swears by. Oh, Tom.” She took out the locket from around her neck, opened it to display the only picture anyone had of her mother.

In the back-house Fraulein Reimer sat alone with her needlework, remembering how she used to tell Tom and Sally the story of the wren and the bear.

“How is it called in English? *Zaunkoenig*?” she would ask.

“Wren,” Sally would reply.

“*Ja*, the wren. The wren was the king of all birds, but one day the bear insulted him, so there was a war between the small creatures that fly and all the animals. The animals were confident they would win because they were so much bigger and stronger. But the wren was too *scharfsinnig*, smart, for them. He sent hornets and wasps to sting them and birds to peck out their eyes. In the end, the animals gave up, and the birds and insects won.”

The fraulein put down her needlepoint, picked up the pistol beside her, and polished and checked its workings.

Barnabas checked his pocket-watch again. Ten minutes to nine in the evening. The night would be dark, only two days past the total lack of the moon. He stood alone just outside St. Clare Minoreesses without Aldgate, staring into the gloom. The church was a ruin, burned in a fire fifteen years earlier, roofless, with empty windows. Vines and creepers suckered to the walls, and a small elm tree had taken root in the vestry. Rooks and crows were the only visible guardians of the place. Barnabas would have laughed if he could: this was a scene out of a romance. He half expected a mad monk to shamble out of the ruins, seeking to carry him into the catacombs.

“Only this ain’t a novel,” he said.

Five minutes to nine, darker, darker. Barnabas strode over rubble and trash through the doorway. A paving stone was tipped up to his left, leaning against a charred buttress. To his right, beyond the young elm, was a pool of water and more heaps of broken stone.

Nine o’clock by the church bells from the City and Whitechapel.

“Well, come on then,” Barnabas shouted into the darkness. “I’m here.”

Barnabas thought he saw something move at what would be the far end of the nave.

“You’re good at hiding, and spying, and now kidnapping,” he said. “What I want to know is, are you good at keeping your word?”

Out of the darkness in front of him came a voice sinuous and clear: “A word is a breath of air, a rush of wind over the tongue and between the teeth, leaping to be free, rejecting restraints, slipping strictures and straits. My dear sir, you cannot *keep* a word, unless it is unspoken, in which case it is unborn and not yet a word at all.”

Barnabas saw a figure in a dull red coat, flickering like embers.

“Where’s my nephew?” said Barnabas.

“My guest,” replied the voice. “Is right here.”

The dark did not lessen so much as Barnabas could suddenly see in the dark. Or so it seemed. The man in the coat stood on a mound

of debris, with Tom beside him.

“Tom!” yelled Barnabas, lunging forward.

“Terms, Mr. McDoon, terms,” said the smouldering man. “I offer to return your lost one, but first you must agree to my terms. You know what they are.”

Barnabas pulled up short, breathing hard. The pistol under his coat banged against his ribs.

“I will come with you to Yount,” he said.

“The key?” said the Cretched Man with the slightest sub-slide of yearning.

“Here it is,” said Barnabas, pulling it from his pocket.

“You and the key together must come to Yount.”

“Yes,” said Barnabas. “First you release Tom, and guarantee his safe passage from this place.”

“Of course. Walk forward. We will complete the exchange . . . together . . . now.”

Barnabas shifted his gaze to the Cretched Man, saw his face for the first time. (*Marvellous*, thought Barnabas. *Like alabaster, like a living . . .*) All three were within six paces, five paces, four paces. For an instant Barnabas looked into blue eyes that shimmered green in the grisaille wash of witch-vision.

What happened next no one could ever reconstruct. Shots were fired. Someone shouted to Barnabas’s left, someone else to his right. More shots. A chorus of yells. Barnabas leaped forward, forgetting his pistol. His only goal was to free Tom. But Tom was gone, all was dark. Barnabas slipped, fell heavily to one knee. Something whizzed by his ear. He pulled out his pistol.

“Barnabas?” Sanford was nearby. The two merchants made their way to the far end of the ruins. After the shots and the cries, St. Clare Minoresses was quiet.

“Mr. Harris?” said Sanford, holding his pistol before him.

“The same, sir,” came the reply. Others had gathered to Mr. Harris. Even in the dark, Barnabas caught a glimpse of magenta on a skullcap.

“Salmius Nalmius,” said Barnabas. “Did we bag ‘em?”

“No.”

“Come, sir,” said Harris. “It’s no good here. Best we return home before the watch arrives.”

Back at Mincing Lane, Barnabas sat staring into the small fire in the partners’ office, a hand on Yikes. With his other hand he held the key in his pocket.

“The Cretched Man had at least five men with him,” said Harris. “We had more. How did his men get away? We had them surrounded, men posted in Goodman’s Fields and Heydon Square, as far up as the Whitechapel High Street. No one passed.”

“The Cretched Man can find doorways that others overlook,” said Salmius Nalmius.

Sanford thought of weapons against those who walked through oblique doorways. Jawbone of an ass? Jericho trumpets?

“No one hurt?” said Nexius Dexius.

“No,” said Harris. “Except Mr. Fletcher, who has a big gash across his forehead. Nothing serious. He is being tended to in the kitchen as we speak.”

Barnabas spoke, still staring at the small coals. “We failed. I failed. They’ve taken Tom.”

Sanford put a hand on his shoulder. “We’ll find him,” he said. But, in truth, no one could think of how. The next step, if there was one, would come from the Cretched Man, or it would not come at all. Barnabas stared into the flames as the others departed.

In the kitchen, the maid and the cook finished winding Fletcher’s forehead with an old piece of linen. The maid had nearly fainted when he came in, his face covered in blood.

“How did I get this?” said Fletcher. “Well, I’d like to say I duelled that scarlet devil myself to win this . . . but, to speak less dramatically, that is, fully accurately in all respects, well, I tripped and fell on a stone.”

The cook smiled in relief. Mr. Fletcher, she thought, is just fine—

no one hurt bad would ever talk like he did now. The maid, shaken by all the blood, was not so sure. Roaming the streets after dark in pursuit of kidnappers could be left to others, it seemed to her, now that Mr. Fletcher had been injured in the cause.

Harris walked in as Fletcher was finishing. “Humbleness,” he said, “is a great virtue but it can be overdone. Our Mr. Fletcher led the charge against the enemy, braving the bullets. The ground was rough uneven: falling over a rock was all too likely.”

The maid looked with redoubled admiration at Fletcher, who shot Harris a look of gratitude. The cook shooed everyone out of the kitchen. As she banked the fire, she murmured a prayer to St. Pancras, since his feast-day was just ending. “We’re in trouble, that no one can deny,” she said. “Sweet saint, whose feast was ruined by that eel-rawney, that witch-man, please help us save Master Tom. And help preserve that Mister Fletcher from harm, for my niece’s sake.”

In her room, Sally held a mirror to her face with one hand, and covered the bottom half of her face with the other hand. She nearly saw Tom: the flashing hazel eyes, the high cheekbones, the dark hair that never sat where it was supposed to. She began to cry. “Tom’s taken. We cannot get him back in London. What will we do?”

Isaak licked her face, jumped down to lunge at a dust mote. Watching Isaak attack invisible foes, Sally laughed in her tears. “We’ll go to Yount,” she said out loud, hugging herself. Isaak paused, stretched a golden leg, then returned to the fray.

No word came of Tom’s whereabouts the following day. Salmius Nalmius returned to Mincing Lane, Harris and Fletcher came and went on unspecified errands. Strange men used the dolphin knocker, entered with messages. Sanford was furious, on Peniel wrestling with a spirit as Jacob did.

Barnabas barely spoke except to say to Sally. “I swore to my sister long ago to protect you and Tom.”

Sally said, “It’s not your fault, Uncle.” She took out her locket,

handed it to her uncle, who opened it. He looked down at his sister's picture, head bowed like the pelican who would pierce its own heart to guard its young.

"She loved you then, she loves you now," said Sally. "And so do I."

Barnabas, vest ruffled, one stocking nearly to his ankle, hung his head. "I hate that . . . man," the merchant said with such a savage expression that his niece stepped back. "This is . . . I hate his wicked vermissage . . . is that a word?"

"I don't think so, Uncle, but we all know what you mean."

Barnabas snapped the locket shut, handed it back to Sally, and said, "We'll go to the ends of the earth if need be, beans and bacon, we will."

"Yes, Uncle, we will."

"Chock," said the parrot.

A knock followed on the door, so loudly that Sally jumped. Sanford threw the door open, to find . . . no one—only a box on the doorstep. Sanford rushed out the door, looking up and down Mincing Lane. All manner of traffic passed, but nothing out of the ordinary. He walked back, picked up the box. He turned around and scanned the street one more time. There! High up on the house across the way was a small bird-shape, like a wren only not so, with a dull blank face. It disappeared behind a chimney. Sanford spat and went into the McDoon house.

Barnabas looked at the box on the table. "Our troubles began with a mysterious box . . ." he said, casting a glance at Salmius Nalmius. This box held a letter and a glass pendant on a fine chain. The pendant was claret red. Barnabas read the letter, nodded grimly, handed it to Sanford, who read it aloud.

Dear Mr. McDoon,

You disappoint us. You violated the terms of our exchange. Therefore, and alas, we are obligated to begin the journey without you. We will, of course,

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take our quest with us, for his safekeeping. You know where we shall journey. Our offer still stands, on the same terms, to be consummated at our journey's destination. Come as expeditiously as you can. Meet us at the Sign of the Ear as soon as you are able. (Your new friends can tell you where that is.) We will await you, though our patience is not unlimited. More there is not to say. By the time you receive this, we will have departed. Make haste!

With regrets, but with hope for a successful resolution,

I remain yours, sir,

Phlegyas

Postscript: As an affidavit of our good faith, enclosed is a token that will assure you of our quest's continued well-being. Carry it with you if you desire to know how he fares. Your new friends can enlighten you further.

"Now he's 'Phlegyas,'" said Barnabas. "More mockery, I guess. What does he mean—do you recognize it, Sally?"

"I don't know—Virgil, maybe . . . oh, what does it matter?" said Sally.

"Where's the Sign of the Ear?" asked Sanford.

"In Yount," said the Purser. "I can show you the way."

"What's this for?" asked Barnabas, holding up the pendant.

"It is connected to Tom," said Salmius Nalmius. "It is a kind of ansible, a device for communicating across long, strange distances."

Barnabas jumped out of his chair. "We can talk to Tom with this?"

Salmius Nalmius shook his head. "No, I am afraid not. It only communicates . . . it lets you know that he is still alive. As long as it holds its colour—see how red it is?—you know that Tom is alive. If it goes dark . . ."

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Everyone stared at the pendant. The red was rich, deep. Sally saw colour swirl in the depths of the glass. A heart, Tom's heart, on a string.

Barnabas cleared his throat, did a defiant arabesque. "Well, beans and bacon," he said. "Let's go to Yount."



Chapter 6: Surprises Onboard

“What are we to do with her?” Barnabas said to Sanford. “Trip to Yount is much too dangerous for a girl. But she won’t have it, insists she *must* go. About as tractable as the Hellespont was to the King of the Persians. Never stops quoting that infernal Wollstonecraft woman! Can’t see that I am only trying to protect her, do what’s best. Sanford, old friend, I am at my wit’s end, I tell you.”

To Barnabas’s amazement, Sanford said, “Let her come with us. She may have foresight that you and I lack. As one uncle said to his niece long ago, ‘Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?’”

“Remind me,” said Barnabas.

“Mordecai. Esther. She saved her people.”

“That seems a grand burden,” said Barnabas. “Prideful to boot.”

“No grander than the one you have shouldered yourself, the burden we have all taken up now. Besides, it will be hard enough to explain to our commercial friends our sudden removal without leaving a key member of McDoon & Associates behind.”

Sally found another ally in Fraulein Reimer. One evening in the common room, the fraulein looked up from her needlework and said: "*Es war einmal ein altes Schloss mitten in einem grossen dicken Wald.*"

Sally nodded. "Once upon a time, there was an old castle in the middle of a deep dark forest . . . yes, that's how the story usually begins, doesn't it? And now we're in the story ourselves, and need to have all our wits about us, like the Cinder-Girl and the Brave Tailor and the Wren who was King of the Birds. Or else the witch in the castle will win."

"Figs and feathers, fairy tales have no part in the modern world—" Barnabas began, then stopped, thinking of Tom held prisoner in a castle, and of Tom's heart held by a cord.

"*Not bricht Eisen,*" Fraulein Reimer said. "Need breaks iron. Sally must be with you. I will travel with you also. I have the journey made several times, the first when I was only as old as Sally."

Barnabas looked at Sanford, who only grinned the barest of grins, threw up his hands and said, "Enough then, I yield, I yield. Sally, you shall come with us—though I will never forgive myself if anything should . . ."

That settled, Barnabas and Sanford concocted a cover story. They let it be known that they were sending Tom to one of their correspondents in Stockholm, while the rest of the firm was moving to Cape Town, the better to serve its far eastern trading needs, since the South African way station on the East Indies route had recently been taken by Great Britain from the Dutch. The first leg of the journey to Yount would, in fact, be to Cape Town. McDoon & Associates' London operations would be continued by the Landemanns of Hamburg and Salmius Nalmius in his guise as Oliveire de Sousa. A Landemann nephew who represented that firm in London, Johann Joachim Brandt, always a welcome guest at Mincing Lane, spent days in meetings with Barnabas, Sanford, and Salmius Nalmius.

"Wheat and whiskey," said Barnabas for the tenth time one morning. "So the Landemanns—Old Johann and Friedrich

Christian—and the Brandts too, have known about Yount all this time!”

Barnabas and Sanford did not mention Yount in the many meetings they had in the offices of the McDoon lawyers, Sedgewick & Marchmain near Austin Friars. Barnabas had never seen Marchmain, believed to be one of many lawyers involved in a famous Chancery case about the Jarndyce inheritance. Sedgewick, on the other hand, he knew intimately.

“Ah, Barnabas and my dear Sanford,” said Sedgewick. “How sad to hear of your imminent departure. Off like Jason and the Argonauts, hmmm? Seeking your Golden Fleece, how bold! Well, *audentes fortuna juvat*. I flatter myself that you will continue to call upon Sedgewick & Marchmain to provide you with legal services, given our history of navigating you safely through the reefs and shoals of the law, and insofar as we are entrusted with the legal wheel of your commercial vessel, Sedgewick & Marchmain will, *exceptis excipiendis* and, of course, *mutatis mutandis*, advocate for your interests while those interests and your corporeal selves are separated. Come, sirs, the porches of my ears await your news.”

Sedgewick, a short man with an oriel for a stomach, always talked like that, matching his rhetorical somersaults with flourishes of his pen. Sanford wondered if the lawyer breathed through his ears.

“Well, where to begin?” Sedgewick poured forward. “We shall need to find *mollia tempora fandi* to assuage any concerns the Rogers’ Bank and Praed’s Bank might have about their client decamping so unexpectedly. We’ll need to draw up and notarize spoke of powers of procuration for de Sousa and Landemann to handle the chirographic items. And then there is your collateral in . . .”

The lawyer’s wife asked to see Sally, so one afternoon Sally found herself sitting in the Sedgewick drawing-room with Mrs. Sedgewick, *the* Shawdelia Sedgewick. Sally had met Mrs. Sedgewick at McDoon Christmas parties, where she felt the lawyer’s wife was sizing her up for some task. Sally would have dismissed this regard in any other

woman as relating merely to Sally's matrimonial prospects (or lack thereof), but Sally sensed some other element, something unrelated to marriage, in Mrs. Sedgewick's evaluating glances.

"Men are splendid creatures," said Mrs. Sedgewick, using her spoon to indicate the doors of the inner office where her husband, Sanford, and Barnabas were meeting. "But then so are pismires, snails, and limpets. The secret, the trick, my dear, is to make sure they feel themselves the grandest of their sort: the Proud Pismire, the Superb Snail."

Mrs. Sedgewick poured more tea for Sally, then continued: "*Those three* are fine men, I concede. I am fond of Mr. Sedgewick, a clever soul, rumbustious. But, Sally dear, *they* find it hard, harder than Gibraltar, to admit *our* intelligence. Intelligence in a woman they view as 'proud defiance smothering all her softer charms.'"

Mrs. Sedgewick snorted, banged her spoon against her teacup.

"I'm told that you are quite the little philosopher, a young Montague or Carter. No one to talk to about their ideas, I know, I know, but you and I will talk someday soon, I hope, young Sally. Hume, Smith, Voltaire, Mrs. Barbauld's poems . . . so much we might talk about."

She feels much older than she looks, thought Sally. *The sending of an entombed spirit is what she is, a sphinx pacing in a narrow corridor with doors locked at either end.*

"To the point," said Mrs. Sedgewick. "I don't know what sort of adventure McDoon & Associates is embarking on, but going to open a branch at the Cape is, at best, only part of the story. There's much more to this than your uncle is letting on. I imagine my husband knows that but he is paid not to ask such questions. I am bound by no such protocol."

Sally's eyes narrowed.

Mrs. Sedgewick laughed thinly. "No cause for alarm. I can control myself that far. I won't ask your uncle or Mr. Sanford what's what. But your reaction confirms my suspicions. You are in on this, whatever 'this' may be. Business is but a part, maybe no part at all, or I am a turtle in a tree."

Sally opened her mouth but Mrs. Sedgewick marched right over the unspoken reply: "Sally, young friend, you can always call on me, no questions asked, I promise, though I hope you'll find me ally enough to include me in your confidences. I can help you if help you need. My husband does considerable business with the Admiralty, as did my father in his time, and there's my sister, Arabella, the pretty one, who married particularly well, into the Tarleton family, with their sons scattered throughout the Admiralty and the Colonial Office."

The door to the inner office opened. Mrs. Sedgewick looked hard at Sally, lowered her voice, spoke very quickly: "I had a dream, Sally, like the passage in *Job*, in which all the morning stars sang together and the sons of God shouted for joy. They sang about a girl who would travel far, far away. You, Sally, you are that girl, I am certain of it. They told me to help this girl."

Mr. Sedgewick stepped up just behind his wife. "Well," he said. "Here is a cozy conclave! What are you two plotting? Revolution over the tea-kettle, a campaign for clavichords and carnations? Oh *diem praeclarum*, my doves, poppy-seed cakes, my favourite . . ."

Saint Botolph's feast came and went, Midsummer's Day passed. Young Brandt came to live in the Mincing Lane house, combining McDoon and Landemann operations in London under one roof. Yikes took this news by rolling over in front of the grate and falling back asleep. Chock preened, watching the German newcomer with a beady eye.

"A nice gentleman," said the cook to her niece. "Though a skinny rotchet, needs good English cooking."

"And maybe he will invite Mr. Harris and, um, Mr. Fletcher to dine with him sometimes," said the niece, without looking at her aunt. "Seeing as how they have returned to their original employer."

"By Mother Bryce, he might do just that," said the cook, chuckling. "But in the meantime, the house is in a perfect scumble-scramble. We've much work to do, what with crates and boxes being stored but

others being readied for the journey. Here now, that trunk holds all the new vests Mr. Barnabas had special made from Fezziwig's, and this trunk—mind the curtains!—is for his medicines. 'I don't care what they say, I must have with me my Bateman's Pectoral Drops and my Turlington's Balsam of Life'—that's what Mr. Barnabas said, and so he shall have them!"

All that remained were goodbyes. The firm of McDoon & Associates being so widely known and well reputed, Barnabas and Sanford had many calls to make before the voyage. The news of McDoon's removal was overwhelmed that June of 1812 by other events, reports of which washed over the City's coffeehouses: Napoleon had invaded Russia, and hostilities had begun between Great Britain and the United States of America. Still, the departure of one of London's most respected merchants did not go unnoticed. Had the McDoons but known it, the "transfer of McDoon & Associates' headquarters to Capetown" occasioned a file of its own at the Admiralty, assigned to a young clerk named Tarleton. Other, less official, ears pricked and tongues wagged in backrooms, cross-quarters, and shy-offices across the City about the departure of the McDoons.

Not oblivious to the rumours their actions created, but in haste now to pursue Tom's tormentors, Barnabas and Sanford visited their closest connections to fortify their story. They squared accounts with the chandlers George & Son of Finch-House Longstreet, settled with Mr. Leobald Grammer (the London factor for the Luebeck firm of Buddenbrooks) and with the Caxeira and de Menzeu families in Bevis Marks, spoke of "hypothecation" and "sub-rogation" with Mr. Edward Gardner, the merchant in Gracechurch Street (whose niece, Elizabeth Bennet, when visiting from Longbourn in Hertfordshire, had become fast friends with Sally).

Barnabas and Sanford saved their final visit for Messrs. William Mercius Matchett and Robert Eustace Frew in Crosby Square near Bishopsgate, with whom they had done much profitable business.

"Something exceeding fishy here," said Matchett to Frew, as they

watched Barnabas and Sanford disappear down the street after the visit. “Preposterous, really, to think we’d believe they’ve sent the firm’s heir, the young Tom, to Stockholm—in wartime, mind you!—while the rest of them head to the Cape.”

“Unceremoniously too,” said Frew. “Not so much as a farewell party at the Jerusalem. It doesn’t answer.”

“McDoon can tell us he is simply out to secure new sources for Chinese smilax, but he’s always been better at what he calls ‘clarifyin’ than at the fine art of camouflage. I think we shall have to send out some enquiries of our own. Who is this Brandt fellow anyway?”

“More than that: we’ve heard rumours outside the sunlit channels, haven’t we, about a certain someone seeking something from the McDoons.”

“Curious, it is. We’ve done some work for Admiralty in our time, oh yes, there’s a whiff of their special branch in all this. I have a mind to call on young Tarleton, what say?”

“Yes. Tomorrow and oh so discreetly. We’ll investigate . . . as friends.”

The McDoons departed on St. Modwenna’s feast day in early July of 1812. Sally lingered in the kitchen as long as she could. “Goodbye, dear cook,” she said.

“But we needn’t weep so,” said the cook. “You will be back home again soon, won’t you?”

Isaak rubbed against her ankles.

Sally looked at the floor.

“Ah, our little smee,” said the cook. “I figured as much. Not so soon after all, is it then?”

Sally kept looking at the floor.

“Flying farther, are we?” said the cook in the tone she reserved for her own musings, when she had only her own reflection in a copper pot to talk to.

Still Sally said nothing, but looked up to meet the cook’s eye.

“Sometimes,” said the cook, “men haven’t a hen’s noseful of sense. They ought to see better, and sometimes they do, but mostly they don’t. That’s the way of it.”

The cook unbuttoned the top two buttons of her capacious blouse, reached in, and pulled the medallion from around her neck. It swung between her and Sally. “Here, our smee, take it,” said the cook. “My Saint Morgaine. When your fears come at you like a husk of hares and a dray of squirrels, hold tight to Saint Morgaine.”

Sally took the medallion.

“I don’t know all that is happening,” said the cook. “But I know that whatever it is, it is big, and that you will be needed. There’s that eel-rawney, the galder-fenny who has got Tom, for one. And more besides, only I don’t know what it is.”

Sally held the cook tight. Sally scooped up Isaak, clutching the Saint Morgaine in one hand. The cook held Sally’s shoulders, looked Sally up and down and said, “When you have gone and done whatever it is you must do—saved Tom, maybe saved Mr. McDoon—then come home.”

The oven fire hissed. Sally saw in the open cupboard the blue pheasant china, gleaming. Through the kitchen window, she saw part of the garden, where a row of early peas flowered white beside yellow campion and blue bixwort. Then her sight blurred.

“Thank you,” she gasped, hugged the cook one last time. She half-stumbled from the kitchen.

The carriage awaited. Mr. Fletcher held the reins with one hand, doffed his hat with the other. Mr. Harris stood on the footman’s step. Barnabas, Sanford, and Fraulein Reimer were already inside. Sally lifted a basket containing Isaak and climbed in.

“Tom?” said Barnabas. Sally brought out the pendant. It glowed red.

The last thing they saw as the carriage rolled down Mincing Lane was the cook and the maid waving in front of the blue-trimmed windows and the dolphin door knocker.

The Nax brothers awaited them at the East India Docks. The

Yount-bound party said goodbye to those who would remain. Barnabas asked Mr. Harris and Mr. Fletcher to watch over the house on Mincing Lane and take care of the cook and the maid.

"With our lives, sir," Mr. Fletcher replied, flourishing his hat. "Upstripe and downstripe, sir, upon my word, sir."

"As he says, Mr. McDoon," Mr. Harris said, shifting in his big brown boots. "If the smilax fails to take in the garden, sir, I trust you will not fault us."

"Goodbye, but not forever," said Salmius Nalmius. "I stay here as the merchant de Sousa, while my brother travels with you." He turned to his brother. Grasping one another's shoulders, looking straight into each other's eyes, they whispered something that sounded like "*Nahosh ulli posto*" several times. Then they touched foreheads lightly, and drew apart.

The *Essex*, an East Indiaman of twelve hundred tonnes, got underway. As it left the dock, church bells rang the hour. Barnabas murmured the old rhyme he had taught Tom: "Bell horses, bell horses, what time of day? One o'clock, two o'clock, time to away." The *Essex* worked its way down the Thames, and gathered with other vessels on the Downs, to be convoyed through the Channel. Gulls appeared, raising McDoon spirits a little. Barnabas and Sanford busied themselves with other merchants and officers onboard, leaving Sally with the fraulein. Sally tried sketching the ships, not because she was very good at drawing, but because Tom drew well, so drawing reminded her of him.

As she leaned against the railing, sketching a brigantine, someone behind her said, "That's a nimble likeness, if I may say so."

Sally looked around to see a stocky young man, perhaps five years older, dressed well but not ostentatiously.

"Thank you," said Sally. "But you flatter me with too much praise."

"James Kidlington," said the stranger, extending his hand. "Medical student, going out to join my brother as a doctor's assistant in Bombay."

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“Sarah McLeish, of McDoon & Associates, merchant bankers of London,” said Sally. “But you may call me Sally. And this is my governess Miss Reimer, a German.”

“Sally it shall be, as you insist,” said the medical student, laughing. “My compliments to you, and to your companion.”

At noon that day the convoy moved down the Channel protected by two frigates against privateers from Calais and Dunkirk. Barnabas and Sanford felt a familiar thrill as the sails billowed. Sanford even capered a little, like a dobbin dancing. Barnabas remembered that Sanford had galumphed the same sort of jig the first time they had crossed the equator together. The only thing missing was Tom. Barnabas looked at the sails, waved the wind on with his hands: *Haste, haste, haste*, he thought. *We’ll catch you this time, you crimson devil. We’re coming.*

Shipboard life settled into a routine. The only thing unusual about the voyage was that the *Essex* was leaving so late in the season: East Indiamen typically departed England by late spring. The unseasonal departure was due to the *Essex* transporting part of a regiment to reinforce the Cape Town garrison. The *Essex* would overwinter at the Cape before proceeding to China in the spring or, more accurately, it would pass the southern hemispheric summer at the Cape and sail on when the monsoons allowed in the fall.

The addition on the *Essex* of the soldiers—many of them with wives, some with children—made for a lively ship’s company. Children played unkitty-dunkitty-donkey and blind man’s buff on the foredeck and re-enacted the defeat of Tipu Sultan amidst sailors reefing and hauling. The McDoons enjoyed the tales told by the soldiers and by the ship’s crew: accounts of Canton and Macao, of berthing at Whampoa Reach and Boca Tigris, of coasting off the Hooghly, and reports of British naval victories and prize-taking by Nelson, Hoste, Pellew, and Lucky Jack Aubrey. Other stories were stranger, of odd occurrences at Innessmouth on the coast of Massachusetts, of the merrow-folk holding drowned souls in lobster pots, of wyverns sporting on night horizons and lamia luring sailors

to their doom on deserted isles.

One evening, in a swaying circle of lamplight, they heard the tale of Sam and Fred who took a magic ring into a bleak, murderous country far to the east and cast it there into a mountain of fire and thus destroyed a wicked sorcerer. Some claimed that “Sam and Fred” were Yorkshiremen, others that they were from Oxfordshire. A fight nearly broke out when a fellow from Cork swore they were Irish, since only the Irish were that brave.

James Kidlington outdid all other storytellers, at least in Sally’s estimation. She spent more and more time with him, listening to the stories of his medical studies in London, which ranged from the humorous (cures for flatulence) to the bizarre (the woman in Ludgate who reportedly gave birth to rabbits) and the ghoulish (anatomy lessons on corpses procured from who-knew-where). Kidlington had an anecdote for every occasion.

The fraulein, Nexius, and Sanford raised an alarm about the budding infatuation. “What do we know about this young man, his station and situation?” asked Sanford. “He might be a spy sent by Wurm or the Cretched Man.”

“Beans and bacon,” said Barnabas, alarmed now himself.

“He is a medical man,” Sally said, knowing that her uncle had great respect for the medical world. “Training at Guy’s Hospital in London, very knowledgeable. Going out to work in Bombay, seems to know some of our connections there. Wonderful discussions we’ve had, about the latest experiments, Erasmus Darwin’s work, Hunter’s theories on the *materia vitae*.”

Barnabas was satisfied, but Fraulein Reimer, Nexius, and Sanford exchanged a look that said, *We shall watch all the same*.

The voyage to the Cape was a long one. The *Essex* stopped at Funchal in the Madeira Islands to take on fresh food and water, and to swap mailbags. (Sally had already written several letters to the cook, as well as one to Mrs. Sedgewick and one to Mr. Gardner’s niece, Miss Bennet of Hertfordshire.) Watching Funchal dwindle astern as the *Essex* sailed on, Barnabas and Sanford asked Dexius

again about the roads to Yount.

“The main road to Yount is in the southern seas of this world,” said Dexius. “For a long time this was the only road we knew. It is the safest, though no way to Yount is safe. That is why we sail with this East India ship to the Cape. From there we will take . . . another ship, one of ours. But we also found another way, about one hundred years ago. In the middle of the Atlantic, between Africa and the Caribbean, south of Bermuda. It can be much faster but many times it does not work at all. Worse for us, we think Wurm’s folk have found other ways, ways we do not know. I guess that is how they will take Tom.”

Barnabas and Sanford scanned the ocean, looking in all directions, wondering where Tom might be, or if he were still in their world at all.

Tom looked out the window at an endless expanse of brown seaweed. The view was the same as it had been yesterday, and for windless days before that. The ship’s bell sounded the start of the second dog watch, so Tom knew he would soon be summoned to supper. He was accustomed to the dinners now, even (he admitted angrily) looked forward to them. He recalled the first one, on the third day under sail, almost two months ago. Still seasick, he had lurched to the captain’s cabin, clutching at his escort whenever a wave had caused the ship to heave more than usual.

“Ah,” the Cretched Man said, as Tom was brought in. “Welcome, young Thomas.” The man in the strange coat waved the escort away. Tom almost threw up at the sight of the food.

“Here,” the Cretched Man said. “The first time at sea is always difficult. The sea may have birthed us all but, alas, it does not admit us back without first exacting a penalty. Here, dear boy, drink this. It will palliate and stimulate. Drink.”

Tom balked at the outstretched glass and the coated man laughed. “Thomas, this is no fairy feast. One sip will not damn you. To the contrary, I assure you. Please drink!”

Tom sniffed the liquid, drank it, and felt better almost at once. The speed of the potion made him even more suspicious.

"Thomas," the Cretched Man said. "You doubt me still."

Tom found his voice. "Why not? You've waylaid me, kidnapped me. Your men broke into our house. Shall I go on?"

The Cretched Man replied, "Nay, that will suffice. I know you feel this . . . unpleasant for you. But, if you will allow me, I can show you that much of what you believe to be true about your situation and that of your uncle and your house is, in fact, misguided, incomplete, under . . . under-nourished. That's what it is, young man, under-nourished. Which reminds me of dinner, doesn't it you?"

The pale man continued as they ate: "You are my guest, Thomas, my guest, do you understand?"

"Guests come of their own choosing and can leave at any time."

"Sophistry, Thomas. Guests rarely come of their own accord but are compelled by greed, envy, lust, all of the base emotions, when they are not directed outright by those who ostensibly 'invite' them. As for leaving, why, you are as free as any of us to leave at anytime."

Tom opened his mouth to answer, then shook his head in disgust.

"Let us be friends, Thomas. Truly I mean you no harm."

"Release me then."

"Your release is entirely in the hands of your uncle, you know that. I would gladly have released you in London."

"Friends have names for each other," Tom said.

The Cretched Man smiled, like a bust from Pompeii come to life. "Very true, Thomas, very, very true. What name shall I use with you? I have so many."

For the first time, Tom felt the Cretched Man was thinking through something he had not prepared in advance. After a pause, the Cretched Man said, "Call me by my true name, which is Jambres. I have not been called that in a long time."

"Jambres?" said Tom. "I know that name but cannot place it."

"Indeed you do," said the Cretched Man, his lips like bowstrings.

“Think of Moses, think of the trial of the rods in the court of the Pharaoh.”

Tom’s eyes widened as he said, “Jambres was the Pharaoh’s sorcerer. He challenged Moses . . .”

“And lost,” said Jambres. “And was punished for it.”

“No,” said Tom, half-rising. “I do not believe you. You *cannot* be that person!”

“I wish what you say were true, young Thomas,” said the Cretched Man.

“Do not take me for a fool,” said Tom. “None of what you say is according to Cocker! I am a modern person, with modern understanding, like Sir Newton and Pitt and, well, all the thinkers Sally knows so well!”

“As may be, but there is much more to the world than you seem to think, young sir. History for one. Living repercussions for another. Besides, Sir Isaac suspected my existence, and the mathematics of Mr. Cocker confirm me.”

“*Quatsch!*”

“As for your sister, she already knows the truth of me, though she fears that knowledge at present.”

Tom was silent for a minute, shaking his head.

“What about Strix Tender Wurm?” he said. “Is that his real name?”

For the first time, Tom thought the Cretched Man felt something he had not expected to feel, something he wanted to keep hidden. The blue eyes glinted, the beautiful mouth tautened the least of fractions.

“His real name? Even I do not know that, Thomas, though I have sought long to know it. The creature called Wurm has existed since the beginning, or nearly so, if you can believe that. Everything you do and could have done, everything you think and should have thought, everything you feel and would have felt, all go into your true name. In the end, and often long before that, you will have to do penance for your name.”

Tom still did not understand what Jambres, the Cretched Man, had meant, but on that first evening dining together he had caught a note in Jambres's voice, as a finger sliding over the most minute hairline crack in a glass catches the imperfection. He had not been able to tell what the note was but he knew it was there, buried, tiny but real.

Jambres had continued: "Wurm' rings well enough for this world. It has a certain simplicity and directness about it, dispatches with the flamboyant, the orotund, the irrelevant. If you prefer something more historical, you might also call him Pechael or Sesuzmeniel."

The ringing of the second dog-watch tailed out in the stillness surrounding the ship, bringing Tom out of his memory of that first dinner nearly two months ago.

Someone knocked on the door. Tom put down his book (Buskirk's play "Hero of the Hills"); his cabin held a small but well-appointed library. Someone put a key in the lock, opened the door. Billy Sea-Hen stood there.

"Time, sir," said Billy, who was one of the group that had seized Tom in the Wapping alley, a group Tom had come to call his Five Minders. Tom was certain he had seen Billy Sea-Hen before, but could not say where. Besides Billy Sea-Hen, there was Brasser, Old Lobster-hide, Pinch, and Tatterhead, usually called Tat'head for short. Lean but thick-armed, with ears seemingly cocked for a call yet to come, all but Billy were from Lancashire or Yorkshire originally, driven to London by hunger and the want of work. Billy was London-born, as he put it: "Twenty-four years ago, born to me mum in the blissful bosom of Wapping."

"No movement today," said Tom as they walked from Tom's fore compartment to the captain's cabin.

"No," said Billy. "But we'll move soon."

Tom wondered at Billy's certainty. The sails hung limp. Hanging down from the topmast was the ship's long pennant, a white banner with a red orb trailing streaks and smears of red. Some held that it was a red-rimmed moon dripping blood, others an eye streaming

fire and sparks. As they passed the cabhouse, they heard a muffled bumping sound below deck, a noise that would have gone unremarked when sailing but which could not be ignored in the quiet.

“His pet,” said Billy. “Restless today.” Tom looked at the deck, ears straining to hear the sound of a great head rearing up beneath his feet, the head falling back again as he passed. Billy left Tom at the door to the Cretched Man’s cabin.

“English justice?” said Jambres, as the white, white man opened the door.

Every evening they picked up their debate from the evening before. Tom was ready. “Yes. English justice and fair play. That’s why we have the Empire, why we will beat Napoleon.”

“Justice?” said the Cretched Man as they sat down at table. He smoothed back a cuff. Tom had never seen him without his coat on. No matter how hot it became—and it was terribly hot as they languished in the tropics—Jambres always wore his coat.

“Yes,” said Tom, helping himself to pudding. “We are bringing law and justice to the world, to those unfortunates trapped by tyranny and choked by the chains of unequal custom.” He had practised that sentence all day. He thought it sounded pretty much like Hume, or maybe Burke, impressive in either case.

The Cretched Man smiled, while finely dissecting a cutlet, and asked, “Was it justice when the English fleet bombarded Copenhagen?”

“It was . . .” Tom hesitated. “Necessary. A necessary expedient in the war on Napoleon. It could not be helped.” McDoon & Associates had many connections in Copenhagen. Tom recalled the letters they had received describing the three days of fire and devastation. He was angry at the Cretched Man in his bloody coat for reminding him of this.

“Ah,” said Jambres. “Expediency. No different then, I assume you will concede, than your being temporarily detained to further another just cause? I and my confederates mean the McDoons no more harm than the English meant the Danes—our actions are

merely, as were the English fleet's, a matter of expediency."

Tom dug at a lump of pudding but said nothing.

"Do not be angry," said the Cretched Man, smearing lemon-and-raisin jelly on a bit of pork. "The English are probably no worse than others who have enjoyed your degree of power, nor even more hypocritical. Arguments of expediency in times of war have a long pedigree. Why, you've read your Thucydides, every English schoolboy has. Think what the Athenians demanded of the Melians!"

Tom said nothing. He wished Sally were here.

"You think me your enemy still?" said Jambres. The Cretched Man's face seemed even whiter that evening. "Am I more a shriek than the Duke of Marlborough or Wellesley, more than Rodney or Nelson? I hardly think I have as much blood on my conscience as they do."

Tom pushed his plate aside. "They fought *for* justice, to defeat infamy and to bring civilization to those who—"

"Wellesley hunting down Tipu Sultan in Mysore . . . justice?"

"Necessary in time of war. Tipu Sultan was allied with the French."

"Just but not cruel, was it?"

"No, not cruel! The French with their guillotines are cruel. And the Muslims, well, they're—"

"The English, not cruel? I wonder. Are the English a kind race then? Do you know what takes place in your sugar colonies, your Jamaica? There's blood in every cup of tea you drink. Under the minuets played at great English country-houses, your Mansfield Parks, there is the sound of sobbing from the cane fields. Oh yes, kind all right—as kind as Gorgon's milk."

Tom pushed back from the table, stood. "I won't have it," he said. "I won't stand for this from . . . from you . . . you bastard!" Tom strode from the cabin, grabbing his hat on the way out. The Cretched Man did not pursue him, but sat wrapped in his rudling coat, with his long white fingers pressed together in front of his face.

Outside, Tom felt better. Billy Sea-Hen stood at the railing. Night

had come, with a sky full of stars and a bright moon such as no Londoner ever had seen.

“Evenin’, sir,” said Billy Sea-Hen. Billy was talkative, more so than the other Minders. As for the rest of the crew, the proper sailors, they never spoke at all, at least not to Tom. Tom called them The Others. There was something strange about them, the way they moved so swiftly and silently. They appeared to be Lascars or Africans for the most part, dark-skinned, with black hair and odd head-gear.

“It’s a sight to be sure, isn’t it?” said Billy. The moon was nearly full. Flying fish skipped out of the sea of kelp, silvery streaks like harpoons from mermen under the surface. “The great Sargasso Sea. And up above us all, them stars.” Tom looked up. The starfields were a revelation to him. He dawdled every night after dinner to see them. He wished Sally could see them too; she would see more in an hour here than in a month of “lunaticking” at home.

“No wind, still no wind,” Tom said. The ship’s pennant hung, the red moon or eye with its streaks and curls of red downcast.

“True enough,” said Billy. “But it’s not wind we are waitin’ on now. We’re needing the winter stars to steer by. See, up there now are summer stars: the Bear-Watcher and the two Bears, with the Pole Star and the Ploughs in ’em, and the Triangle with Jubal’s Star, The Grail Star, and Zephiel’s Star. All very fine stars, naught can be said against them, but we need others.”

“How long must we wait? Winter, you say?”

“Yes, sir. Early December will answer. Then we’ll have the Eye of the Bull lined up with Ermandel’s Toe, and both lined up with the Dog Star. That’s on the one side. On the other side, we’ll have the Mouth of the Fish lined up with the Crossing Star at the end of Judgement’s River, and with the Ark Star. That’s six stars, counting Ermandel’s Toe as one, so we will miss only the seventh to make our voyage. And there she’ll be, our seventh, the May Star. She sits among the Sisters, on the Bull’s cheek. It’s her sweet influence we must bind. Being careful, of course, not to call the other sisters, the Weepers, as they seat the King in Yellow, him with the silky hands.”

Little of this made sense to Tom, who said only, "Where are we going again, Billy?"

"You know, sir—to Yount."

Tom, certain he had seen Billy's face before their meeting in the Wapping alley (there was something about the sharp nose, the cut of the eyes), said, "Tell me again how it is that you know of Yount? You, a Londoner like myself."

"Well, sir, it's like this: we are all following his Grace," Billy twisted his wrist, extending his thumb in the direction of the captain's cabin.

"But why, Billy, why?"

"For salvation."

This was as far as they ever got. Tom could not grasp what Billy said. Tonight he pushed further.

"Salvation? Billy, that man, the Cretched Man . . ." Tom lowered his voice in the immensity of silence around them. ". . . that man in there is . . . the Devil."

Billy raised one eyebrow and said, "No, that is just precisely what he is not, begging your pardon. You've gotten the wrong impression, is all. We're on the road to Yount, which is the road to salvation."

Tom turned full towards Billy, who stood as easily as ever. "That can't be," said Tom. "Who goes to salvation locked in a ship's cabin?"

"I'll allow as that is a mite strange," Billy said. "But then perhaps, and meaning no offense, there's them as need to be brought to the truth a little against their struggling. If you know what I mean."

Tom thought about this. Out on the flat sea, a flying fish splatted back into the weeds.

"Look," said Billy. "I won't deny that you've gotten some rough handling and that's to be sorry for. But it is a needed thing. To be as bold as a fox in a kennel, sir, we are poor and not used to the ways of rich folks like you. So sometimes we may seem, well, wrong, when we only mean what's right."

Tom kept silent.

“Back in London,” continued Billy, “we was all sinners but we didn’t want to be—only need drove us to the sins we did. I am ashamed of what I done but I am not at the same time because all I done was because I am poor and others is rich, and which is the greater sin? My mother was a hempen widow, my father hanged when I was a boy, and for naught more than culching meat from the butcher to feed his family. Nay, those what have lived in shoes like mine have not seen the Great forced to sing small.”

Tom began to say something, but Billy gave him no entry.

“All the same,” said Billy in a far-away voice, “we listened hard to the preachers, mind you, be they Muggletonians or Wesleyans or the con-geration of the prophet Southcott. But nothing really took with us until we heard his Grace, the Cretched Man, talk of this road, what we call Thieves’ Redemption. Now we are set right, and know that in this war, we are on the just side.”

Billy’s face had not changed expression, but his arms were down at his sides with his hands in fists. Tom turned and spoke nearly in a whisper, “What war is that, Billy? I don’t think there are any Frenchmen in Yount.”

“Not that war I am speaking about,” said Billy, but he said no more.

Back in his cabin, Tom read by the light of the moon. He put aside Buskirk’s play and picked up a history of Wellesley’s campaigns in India. “How the Maratha prince Jaswant Rao Holkar of Indore did perfidiously and without just cause make war on his neighbours and did defy the law that the Honourable East India Company was sworn to uphold,” he read.

Tom put the history down. He looked up to the sky, thought he found the star Billy had called the Grail Star, and wondered.

While Tom, Billy, and Jambres awaited the winter stars, the rest of the McDoons sailed into summer, having crossed the equator. Over two thousand nautical miles to the south and east of the Cretched Man’s weed-encircled vessel, the *Essex* sailed on.

In the few moments when Sally did not think of Tom, she felt like Mrs. Thrale on the Grand Tour in Italy. *Sapere aude*, indeed! When her anxiety about Tom threatened to overwhelm her, Kidlington cheered her up. He seemed to have special words just for her. Searching her vocabulary, Sally called his verbal freshets a “gasconade,” though that might not have been exactly right, since Kidlington was not boastful or conceited, so much as colourful and self-assured. Or perhaps it was that he seemed to boast only to encourage the listener to challenge and deflate his claim. Gentle self-mockery laced his bravado.

One afternoon, under the fraulein’s keen eye, Kidlington said, “Sally, that is a most lovely locket around your neck. May I be so forthright as to ask what it contains?”

She opened the locket and showed it to Kidlington. “It holds a picture of me on one side, my mother on another. Uncle Barnabas had it made for me on my sixteenth birthday, using the sole portrait of my mother, this cameo. I prize it above even my books.”

Kidlington remarked on the similarity between the two faces—Sally did look much like her mother. “But,” he added, “I should think the locket is at risk here, openly displayed onboard. Some thief or besonian might rob you.”

Sally agreed. “That’s why I rarely go with it in public like this. Otherwise, I keep it safe in my room, where I can look at it without fear of loss.”

“A sensible course,” said Kidlington and changed the subject.

The *Essex* swung out almost to Brazil to avoid the doldrums off West Africa before angling back on the trade winds towards the Cape. They were fortunate with the wind but typhus spread among the regimentals, killing five in a fortnight. Nexius and the McDoons kept to their cabins for fear of contagion. Chamber pots went uncollected, lice got into everyone’s garments, the women suffered particularly from the lack of hygiene, and Barnabas lost his quizzing glass on a trip to “the necessary.” In short, everyone was miserable.

Kidlington was their only inspiration. On they sailed, a little

sodality at sea, guided now by Kidlington the gascon. Like his hero, Erasmus Darwin, Kidlington talked medicine and literature, he talked flora and fauna, he knew the Bible as well as he knew the broadsheets. “Hydrates of cubebene,” he’d say. “That’s the thing for gout.” Or “Oil of cassia for the dropsy, unless it’s a gravid woman who is the patient.” (Barnabas was relieved to hear that Bateman’s Pectoral Drops and his other favourite cures were held in high regard by Kidlington.) Kidlington would enthrall them with visions of future technologies, about steam-propelled chariots flying on “wide-waving wings” through “the field of air” and ships that would sail under water. Over endless rounds of piquet and ombre, they would debate everything from the Union with Ireland to the state of King George III’s health.

Perhaps two weeks out from the Cape, Sally insisted on a walk around the ship.

“I cannot stand being shut up in this horrid cabin any longer,” she cried, overcoming her uncle’s protestations. “James will come with me. I don’t fear disease with a medical student by my side.” Isaak trotted after her, happy to expand her hunting territory.

Few people were about except for the crew. After a promenade on deck, Sally and Kidlington—and the ever-present fraulein—went below decks again to fetch fresh water from the aft stores. As they filled several jugs with water, they heard voices close behind them. Having become accustomed to close quarters, they thought nothing of it until they turned to go and found their way blocked by two men in canvas pants, one with a leather apron, both with short-brimmed hats.

“Have we met?” asked Kidlington.

“No,” said the man in the apron. “And we won’t make your acquaintance now.”

“What do you want then?” said Kidlington.

“You gournard,” said the apron-man. “It’s not you I’m a-speaking to. My message is for the females here. You just keep out of what is none of your concern.”

Kidlington started forward, but Sally grabbed his shoulder.

"She has more sense than you do, you lubbernowl," said the intruders' spokesman. He turned to Sally and the fraulein. "Listen, 'cause I won't say this but one time. I am instructed to tell you that our business together is well looked after but that time is pressing on. His Grace urges you not to tarry on your road. The exchange must be completed."

Kidlington looked at Sally. "What is he talking about? Who is this man? How *dare* he threaten you!" Sally was about to reply, when Kidlington wheeled from her and Fraulein Reimer, and, without another sound, launched himself at the man in the apron. The two went down together. The next seconds were a blur. A knife flashed, and Kidlington lay on the floor. The man in the apron hauled himself to his feet, bleeding from his lip.

"Fool," he growled. "Thick gounard! Look what you did make me do! I said this was no quarrel of your'n."

The other man yelled, "Who's the fool? Boss said no harmin' 'em, now look what you've . . ."

The assailants scrambled down the corridor out of sight.

Kidlington was the talk of the ship. His arm had only been pricked and he recovered quickly. The soldiers' wives cooed over him, the sailors applauded. Kidlington, in a position to boast, did not. Sally attended to Kidlington hourly. The fraulein praised him. Nexius and Sanford reversed their earlier doubts about the medical student. Barnabas was perplexed as well as angry, saying, "Poor Mr. Kidlington, attacked by sailmakers from the sound of it, stabbed with a sailmaker's knife. Odd way to come at a man. Not dignified. Oh, I wish we had been there. We would have handled those—what did Sally say they called Mr. Kidlington?—those lubbernowls!"

The perpetrators could not be found. No one fitting the description was known at all, giving rise to stories of ghosts or demons stalking the ship. Kidlington's stock rose still further. Kidlington was the most curious of all about the nature of the attackers. Sally resisted the temptation to bring Kidlington into her confidence. He asked

repeatedly what the men had meant, only to have Sally deflect his queries. “I don’t know, James, really I don’t,” she would say. “It all happened so fast. As you said yourself, it might be unsafe to walk onboard—how I wish I had listened. Perhaps they saw my locket and wanted to rob me, after all.”

Kidlington would look sceptical. “But they talked of delivering a message.”

“Really, that can’t have been—how on earth could we ever have known such people? What sort of business would McDoon & Associates have with that sort? They must have thought the fraulein and I were someone else. Or perhaps your wound has caused a fever that has blurred your memory.”



Interlude: Starved Mercies

Maggie's mother survived the winter cull in Wapping but only just. One of the Irish children was not so fortunate: Maggie watched as they took away her little coffin to the Latin rite chapel near Oil Wharf (the professional pallbearers complained because only two were needed, but, on the other hand, they had more opportunities for employment with the children). Others died in stranger ways: the Prime Minister was stabbed to death in the House of Commons, a woman in Limehouse was crushed by a falling wall, a man was gored when he fell into the bull-baiting ring behind The Hope and Anchor on Cinnamon Street (some said that the mastiffs gnawed off half his legs before the body could be retrieved). Maggie heard these and many other stories, prayed to keep her mother out of the stories and safely alive.

Maggie's mother was sick again in June. She coughed ceaselessly, and suffered what she called "the mullygrews," aches and fevers so severe she could not get out of bed to go to work some days. Maggie stayed home two days to care for her mother. They both got sacked by

the seamstress, who said that she had no need for lazy blackbirds when there were so many bodies who wanted the work. Maggie pleaded for piecework but the seamstress shut the door in Maggie's face.

"Women are as strong as elephants," murmured her mother that night.

"Yes, Mama," said Maggie. She poured weak tea, made from "smouch," which was what everyone in Wapping called used tealeaves. Maggie bartered short bits of thread (the tail-ends she had clipped with her teeth at work) for smouch with a maid servant at a nearby inn, The White Hart. Maggie had met the servant at a sermon preached in a field just outside London and occasionally the two had gone together to the Wednesday tabernacles in Great Eastcheap and in Moorfields. Best of all, the smouch came wrapped in old newspaper, so Maggie had something to read to her mother. "Mr. Joseph William Turner gives notice of his first lectures to the Public, to be given at Somerset House," Maggie read. "The thirty-eight-gun frigate, *HMS Pomone*, was lost by The Needles off the Isle of Wight, but all crew rescued and the Shah of Persia's gift of horses to his Royal Majesty King George III saved." "A report from our correspondent in Whydah of the latest advances by the Sokoto Caliph Usman dan Fodio in Hausaland." "The Maratha prince Jaswant Rao Holkar of Indore, who led the great uprising against the Honourable East India Company in the last decade, has died." Even last year's news helped keep hunger at bay, at least for a little while. But it did not stop Maggie's mother from coughing.

Maggie went the next morning—the feast day of St. Modwenna in early July—round the back of The White Hart and spoke with the maid servant there. Looking over her shoulder, the servant gave Maggie a half-eaten kidney pie.

"But this is all I can do, see?" said the servant. "I can't lose my situation, you understand, right? I wish I could help more but . . . Look here, I'll ask around for you at Whitefield's tabernacle, and I has a cousin who visits the congregation at Glover's Hall in the Barbican. Maybe she can put out the word. I'll scrape up whatever

other acquaintances I has, and see if they knows of any work.”

Maggie nodded her thanks.

“But it’s hard right now, calamitous hard,” said the servant. “My mam back home in Lincolnshire, she says the men have no work, so they’re burnin’ hayricks and breakin’ the landlord’s machines.”

From inside the tavern, someone called for the serving girl.

“I must go!” said the servant, reaching out to take Maggie’s shoulder for one moment but hesitating to embrace her. “Be brave like Esther! May the Lord protect you!”

Maggie went to every seamstress, mantua-maker and dressmaker between Holborn and Stepney. She got some piecework but nothing steady. She bought dubious concoctions from druggists who she was sure overcharged her. She sought help from cunning women who sprinkled rosewater on hymnal sheets and then told her to burn the sheets under her mother’s nose. She prayed every day, asked for special blessings at the revivals by the brick-kilns in Bethnal Green and near the bleacher’s fields of Mile End. She walked through the quadratic equations she’d incised in the alley wall and asked the *ndichie* for help. Nothing worked; her mother got worse. Some nights they shared a single boiled potato, counting themselves lucky if they had bacon drippings to go with it. They fell behind in rent. The rent-collector said he would give them one week before he evicted them. “Would be today,” he said. “But as I am a Christian man, and as your mum is sick, I will give you the additional time. But one week only, do you hear?”

On the first day of August in 1812, the feast day of the rising against harmation, Maggie went for aid at the local parish: St. Macrina the Younger, known to all as “the Baby Macaroni.” She sat in an airless room just off the vestry and looked at the gravy stains on the overseer’s collar.

“Let me see,” said the overseer, licking the fingers of his free hand, and waving a derelict pen in the other. “Maggie Collins. Collins, Collins. Do you have proof of your settlement here? We cannot have you unless you are chargeable to this parish.”

Maggie handed the overseer a piece of paper that indicated her

seven years at St. Macrina the Younger's Female Charity School. The overseer looked at it with distaste.

"Were they right then, I wonder, to let you in?" said the overseer, more to himself than to Maggie. "Your kind are mostly over at St. George-in-the East. St. George-in-the-East?! St. George-in-Africa is more like it."

He tossed the paper on the table in front of Maggie, who folded it carefully and put it in her pocket. The overseer thumbed through a large book, then looked up with a smile.

"We can offer sixpence for your mother's medicines and a shilling to help with rent," he said. "Unless you and your mother wish to enter the workhouse, of course."

Maggie sat up so straight that the chair creaked. "We would rather die than go into the lump," she said.

"As you please," shrugged the overseer. He opened a drawer and took out several copper coins. He wrote something in the book.

"Make your mark here." He indicated a place in the book.

Maggie signed her name. The overseer looked at her signature—the *fact* of her signature—and had a minor epiphany.

"Of course, of course," he licked his fingers again. "You are a former student at our Female Charity School. Appears they actually taught you something. Can you write beyond your signature, girl? Oh yes, I think you can, I see it in your eyes. Now, why didn't I think of that before? Here, just you wait one moment."

He opened the drawer again, fetched out a blank piece of paper and scribbled a name and address on it.

"It's your lucky hour, girl! Just yesterday one of the patronesses of the Female Charity School adverted for a charwoman, someone of good character and virtue, and the usual, with preference to go to an old girl of the school who might have fallen on hard times." The overseer paused, smiled. "Well, by Mother Bryce, if that doesn't describe you to an exactitude!"

Maggie clutched the seat of the chair, thought of her Mama, said nothing.

“Offers a bob a day, which you collect here,” said the overseer, a trifle too hastily, so that Maggie knew the overseer was skimming. (The wage was actually one shilling sixpence daily but the overseer found that an outrageously high sum for a charwoman, a charitable whim of a soft-minded patroness; he felt sixpence was a fair charge for his time arranging the job and disbursing the wage.) Maggie nodded her head.

“Look here, coffee-girl,” said the overseer. “You are lucky to be in this parish, where we take care of those in need. I am not entirely convinced of your settlement here, regardless of your history at the Female Charity School. You take my meaning?”

Maggie nodded.

“Fine,” purred the overseer. “Mind you work hard for your new mistress. She is important to us here. She is on the Board of Patronesses—do you understand?—the Board for the Female School. You can start with her tomorrow.”

He slid the paper over to Maggie. Maggie read what he had scrawled there: “Mrs. Shawdelia Sedgewick, at corner Archer Street and Pineapple Court, by Austin Friars.”



Chapter 7: The Moon Waits on the May-Star

The *Essex* arrived at Table Bay, the roads for Cape Town, on Martinmas eve in November, just over four months out from London. The northwest gales that had propelled them so quickly had abated, as winter turned to spring in the southern hemisphere. Soon the prevailing wind would be out of the southeast, and in the Indian Ocean the monsoon winds were shifting sea-wise from India, meaning that sailing from the Cape to Bombay or Madras would be nearly impossible until late March or early April. Kidlington would therefore be staying the southern summer in Cape Town, a prospect that heartened the McDoons.

McDoon & Associates “established their new headquarters” with gusto. Barnabas and Sanford were happy to get back to “clarification” as a way to contain their fears about Tom and their general desire to come to Yount. They had letters of credit drawn on the Rogers’ Bank and Praed’s Bank, and their connections were very good in that part of the world, Cape Town being the entrepôt for the maritime trade between India and the Far East and Europe. Sally had Kidlington

for long conversations about everything under the sun. Only Nexius was as guarded as before, insisting that they were lucky onboard and that their enemies had more means here, so close to the roads to Yount.

“The gateway to Yount is near, but hard to measure,” said Nexius. “Distances are different in your world than on the road to Yount. Soon we leave your world, what we call in our language ‘Karket-soom,’ which means ‘Big Land.’ We call all of you ‘Karket-soomi,’ ‘Big Landers.’ Yount is ‘Sabo-soom,’ that is ‘Small Land.’ We await the ship that will carry us there, the *Gallinule*, translated into English.”

“Funny name for a ship,” said Barnabas. “When will it arrive? We really need to push on. *Tempus fugit*, if you know what I mean.”

Nexius did not know the phrase but he understood its import. “Very hard to say. We will leave as soon as we can, but time for leaving is not possible to know. An East India ship can take three months or maybe seven months to go from London to Cape Town, all depending on wind and water, yes? It is the same for our next ship, only more so.”

“I see,” said Barnabas, who did not. “How is that?”

“I lack the words,” said Nexius, with a gesture of frustration. “Not just wind and water our next ship must face. Other things. You will see. Be patient.”

“So we might be here for . . . some time then, is that right?” asked Sanford.

“Yes,” said Nexius, who looked again at Barnabas. “Key still with you always, yes?”

“Of course,” said Barnabas, checking beneath his vest (a silver foulard).

“And Tom is healthy?” Nexius asked, turning to Sally.

“Yes, at least he was a few minutes ago when last I checked the pendant,” said Sally. She dreaded yet cherished the pendant, hating to look but driven to do so almost hourly.

“Good. You will be protected here as you were in London. Our friends have arranged with the British Army and the East India

Company to put soldiers on guard for you. Tomorrow I introduce you to these friends, good friends of Yount who know about your mission.”

The next day Nexius brought them to the house of Cornelius Pieterszoon Termuyden and his wife the *Mejuffrouw* Agnetha Termuyden, wholesale merchants. And what a house it was. Large, with a sprawling garden, it sat on the first slope leading to Table Mountain, just off the Herrengracht, above the castle-fort and the Dutch East India House, overlooking the bay. The McDoons fell in love with that house and its owners almost at once.

“The house we call the *Gezelligheid*,” said Cornelius Termuyden in beautifully accented English that made one want to sit up straight. He pointed to a well-made sign above the main door. Two mermen astride rearing hippocampuses, bearing tridents and blowing on conch shells, bracketed the word “*Gezelligheid*,” while dolphins swam below the letters.

“Which means ‘companionship,’” said the *Mejuffrouw*. She had masses of white hair done up in a complicated style, and her eyes were as grey as sea-waves.

“And ‘cosiness,’ like with good friends,” said Cornelius, whose trim grey hair was framed by a dapper black hat. He and his wife had pale skin turned rosy red from years in the Cape sun, and fine wrinkles at the corners of their eyes.

“It’s the Last Cosy House East of the Sun and West of the Moon,” declared the *Mejuffrouw*.

“Or the First,” said her husband, “depending on which way you are going!”

Everyone smiled. The Last Cosy House . . . it put them in mind of old legends.

“Do please come in,” said the Termuydens together.

There was something for everyone in that house. The library overflowed with books in a dozen languages, smelling of cracked leather bindings and slowly browning pages. There were rooms for dining (they even had a set of the indigo pheasant china that Sally

adored) and rooms for talking, including a large drawing-chamber called "The New Eglantine," all equipped with mahogany furniture and families of porcelain figurines on every shelf and mantelpiece, and clocks short and tall striking in unison throughout, and prints on every wall. Half a dozen guest rooms were occupied by banian-merchants from the Bengal and spice-doctors from Batavia, a ship's surgeon or Swedish apothecarist here, a London factor or a supercargo from Dublin there . . . and not infrequently visitors from Yount travelling under other guises. One room was for music, a little old-fashioned without a pianoforte but with a large harpsichord ("A real Blanchet," said Cornelius) in one corner. Another room, encased by windows looking up to Table Mountain and across to Signal Hill, was an aviary with cages full of yellow and green lorikeets and large *papegai* with rosy beaks from the East Indies, and canary-finches that hopped from one bar to another whenever anyone entered.

Outside in the large garden were other birds, equally mysterious to the McDoons: sugar-birds with long tails, rock-thrushes, the *bokmakierie* with its yellow throat and black mask, sun-birds, the robin-chats that the Termuydens called "Jan Fredriks." Best of all, by the little stream running down from the mountain: kingfishers with a versicolour breast! How they laughed when Sally said, "Look, look, the kingfisher wears a vest just like Uncle Barnabas!" Thereafter, they were "Uncle Barnabas-birds," even to the Termuydens.

Other creatures inhabited the garden, first and foremost, the Termuyden's dog Jantje. "Johnny," explained the Mejuffrouw. "Like your jolly Jack-tar, our name for our sailors." At first, Jantje took offense at Isaak, who immediately sought to oust the canine pretender. When a young baboon wandered down from the mountain, however, cat and dog made common cause in defence of the garden and were good friends thereafter. Isaak would spend many contented days hunting the strange rodents and insects of the place.

Barnabas also spent many days in the garden. "Beans and bacon," he'd say to Sanford. "See what they can grow here. This might be the first garden, the one in the Book, so much grows here."

As summer advanced with unbroken sun day after day, the garden and all of Cape Town blossomed in such profusion that the McDoons nearly wept to see it. Barnabas's horticultural joy was complete when he found a smilax in one corner of the Termuyden garden. "Sanford, what a beauty it is! A smilax, a real Chinese smilax! To think it might be growing as we speak, back home in Mincing Lane. Oh, what's their word? Gezelligheid, it is, to be sure!"

Gezelligheid. The evenings especially were full of good cheer. Some nights the English visitors would teach the Dutch (and Germans and Swedes and so on, whoever might be in attendance) the rules of whist, learning the rules to *Poch* and *Rapuse* in return. Other nights were sing-songs. Kidlington, so frequent a guest that the Termuydens considered him part of the McDoons, had a rich singing voice. He was equally good on old English ballads like "Sweet William's Ghost" and "Barbara Allen" and on the newer London tunes like "The Devil and the Hackney Coachman" and "Merry Miss Mary of Mayfair." Everyone laughed to hear the English stumble through the words of Dutch songs, the lyrics for which the Mejuffrouw provided.

The longer they stayed, the more the McDoons felt at home, embraced by the oddness of the house itself. The oddness, Sally decided, was paradoxically a familiar oddness, like a dream one forgets in the morning but remembers in the afternoon. "Or like the glimpse of a bumblebee in the flowers," she thought as she watched Isaak stalk something in the garden. "Only the bumblebee is violet or purple. Familiar but not."

The garden contained more secrets than the smilax. Its upper reaches, as it extended into the foothills of Table Mountain, were given over to massive hedges that created a maze. "We call it a *doolhoff* in Dutch," said the Mejuffrouw. "'Confusion garden,' you could say in English."

"The hedges are very old," said her husband. "They were here before we arrived."

"Oh, long, long before we arrived," said the Mejuffrouw.

“Indeed,” agreed Cornelius. “Legend has it that these hedges have roots that go down for miles.”

“Well,” said the Mejuffrouw. “As for that, it seems that the hedges have no roots at all, since I would swear—yes, swear—that the paths in the maze change from season to season.”

“The Mejuffrouw is right,” agreed her husband. “And sometimes the hedges rustle as if with wind when all else is still in the garden.”

“I am not so sure of *that*,” said the Mejuffrouw, her sea-grey eyes twinkling. “But I do know that the birds won’t nest in the *doolhoff*.”

The house held secrets as well. At the far end of the library, behind a lacquered Chinese screen, was an alcove full of curios and souvenirs left over the years by appreciative guests. The alcove was a jumble, what the cook would have called “a right hember-dember auction.” Stuffed animals (including a baboon that Isaak liked to challenge) competed for table space with rock specimens, antelope horns, seashells, ivory figures, porcelain, and carvings from the East Indies. Nearly every inch of wall space right to the ceiling and almost down to the floor was covered with paintings, prints, silhouette drawings, medallions, fine textiles, ladies’ fans, and more.

“Figs and fiddles,” Barnabas said to the Mejuffrouw one day, as he bent over to examine a silhouette drawing. “Is this really Sir Barrow?”

“*Bien sur*,” said the Mejuffrouw. “I remember him well: tall and thin, with deep eyes. You cannot see his eyes in the silhouette, of course, but you would always remember them if you had seen them. He stayed with us for a long time back in, let’s see, it must have been ’01. This was his base when he wrote his book about the Cape. We have a copy here, inscribed by him.”

“Figs and fiddles,” said Barnabas again, whistling. “The Second Secretary of the Admiralty, Sir John Barrow himself, only I guess he wasn’t yet the Second Secretary then, but no matter! Wonderful! I shall have to tell Sanford.” Barnabas grimaced, wishing he could tell Tom too and remembering how much Tom loved the Navy.

His gaze landed on a small, carved box. With a start, Barnabas reached down. "Sandalwood," he said. "Lovely, lovely example this is of Indian art. Do you know where it comes from?"

"Bombay," said the Mejuffrouw, looking intently at Barnabas.

"I thought as much!" said Barnabas. He turned the box over and over, opened its lid, admired the fine joinry, surreptitiously inhaled as much of the sandalwood smell as he could. He felt the pressure of the Mejuffrouw's deep grey gaze. "Do you remember who gave this to you?"

"*Bien sur*, I remember the givers of all these gifts," said the Mejuffrouw. "An Indian merchant, his wife, and their niece stopped here from Oman. They were taking the girl for special schooling."

"Ah," said Barnabas. He ran his hand over the lid of the box. "Just reminded me, this box did, of something . . . someone."

The Mejuffrouw said nothing but Barnabas was acutely aware of her scanning his face. "I have a box like this at home, you see," Barnabas said, looking at the box and not at the Mejuffrouw. "Back at Mincing Lane. Gave me a turn, that's all, to see a similar one here."

The Mejuffrouw nodded, as if she had heard the answer to a question she had long asked herself. "Come," she said. "Perhaps that is enough for today. You look sad now, and that is not what we want you to be in the Last Cosy House. Come out to the veranda where the birds are. Sally is there, you can tell *her* about Sir John Barrow."

Sally pretended great interest in her uncle's description of Sir John Barrow, but she was far away in troubled thoughts. The night before she had dreamed a vision that not even the cosy magic of the *Gezelligheid* could keep away.

Like the pelicans on the beach here, she thought. I am flying, gliding like a pelican above a bay, as far above the water as the spire-top of St. Jakobi's in Hamburg, or maybe even St. Paul's dome in London. Why I am not frightened, I do not know! But then I am frightened because there is no moon in the sky. No moon!

She knew with the certainty dreams give that the moon was

not simply full-waned or in eclipse. The moon, in this sky, was not. Ahead she saw a promontory plunging into the bay, with waves rolling around its base. She floated just over the promontory. The outthrust land was smooth towards the sea but its interior was ridged and wrinkled. The landmass behind it was heavily wooded, but the small cape itself was grass- or moss-covered except for five massive, wind-twisted trees, four in a square and one at the entrance to a structure in the middle of the square.

A building with a fissured roof and pillars dislodged, made of white stone, marble maybe, recalled Sally. A temple, a place for offerings and thanksgiving and grief. No one there, not on land or at sea, not in the forest, not on the lawn, not in the temple, but then I heard voices, hundreds of voices.

Sally was certain they sang in a language not English but that their words were being translated in the dream for her benefit.

A kiss for the wind in the moonlight,
A thief made bold, in the unbright.
Ride away, run away, run away, hide.

Then she woke up. She wondered at the words and the voices that spoke them. The accent was, she remarked this particularly, a deep Northern one, so that “unbright” came out as “oon-bright,” and so rhymed with “moonlight.” She thought it funny how spellings didn’t always answer to the sounds of words, as when the Purser spelled his name “Salmius Nalmius” but pronounced it “Salms Nalms.”

When she had the same dream three nights in a row, Sally decided she had to tell the others. The captain emeritus from Yount was, for the first time since any of them had met him, nonplussed. He looked at Sally with something bordering on awe, and—Sally thought—a streak of fear deep in his eyes.

“How you could see this, or be shown this I do not know,” said Nexius Dexius. “You saw the most holy place in all Yount: the Sign of the Ear.”

“The Ear!” Barnabas said. “That is the place where I am to be exchanged for Tom! Where the Cretched Man will meet us, that devil.”

Sally said, “The promontory *was* like a giant wrinkled ear protruding from the mainland.”

“Yes,” said the man from Yount. “But it is hard to see that except from a high place.”

“I saw a row of hills on the mainland, like a necklace around a fat throat,” said Sally. “Only ears don’t have throats.”

“Yes,” said Nexius. “Those hills are the *Mavkuzem monhudde*.” He paused, looked to the Termuydens.

“Hills of the Temple,” said the Mejuffrouw.

“We have many stories about the Sign of the Ear,” Nexius said. “Some believe that it is the ear of the god who brought us to Yount. Only her ear remains above the ground, the rest of her under the earth, sleeping but always listening to the *sasa serxim*, prayers, of her people above the earth.”

Sally leaned forward. “That’s why the temple is there—to bring the prayers directly into the ear of God.”

“Yes,” said Nexius. “That is the reason. We must pray to her because only she can take us away again, make Yount free, bring us to the place we are supposed to be.”

“But then why was the temple deserted, ruined?” said Sally. “If you need to pray to God directly for . . . ?”

Nexius put his hands on his collarbones and bowed his head, looking pained as he said, “We do not all agree in Yount, any more than you do here in Karket-soom. We’ve had terrible wars. You can hear all about these from the Learned Doctors if we reach Yount. For now, it is enough to know that the temple has been broken.”

Sanford thought, “*God created man in his own image . . . male and female created he them.*” He shook his head and asked, “You say ‘she’ and ‘her.’ How can that be?”

Nexius shrugged and said, “The god we pray to in Yount is a Mother, not a Father. I cannot explain better than that.”

Before Sanford could query him again, Nexius turned to Sally and asked, "You saw the five trees?"

"Yes," she said. "A quincunx with one tree and the temple in the middle."

"And the trees had their leaves?" asked Nexius.

"Yes."

"There is our hope," he said. "As long as the trees are alive, we believe that the temple can be rebuilt. The trees must live, and the moon must return. The key is to help bring us back the moon."

A shiver passed through Sally. No moon! There was no moon in Yount!

That evening, as he prepared for sleep, Barnabas looked hard at the key, turning it over and over in his palm. "Buttons and beeswax," he said, and gave a low whistle. "A key to bring back the moon. No wonder the Cretched fellow and the Wurm-brute want it. Strange though, it hardly looks like it would open the door to the attic in Mincing Lane, let alone draw down the moon. . . . Ah, the Man in the Moon came down too soon . . ." And then, grasping the key, he fell asleep.

Sally's dream, especially when it returned to her twice more, broke the spell of calm cast by the *Gezelligheid*. Sally tried to delay the onset of sleep by spending hours gazing at the stars and the moon, "lunaticking" as Tom had called it in London to tease her. The *Gezelligheid* had a star-walk around the cupola at the peak of its roof. Sally lost herself for hours in the heavens, the clarity and immensity of which were unlike anything she could see in London. James Kidlington joined her once or twice, but the *Mejuffrouw* was Sally's steady companion as the moon waxed and waned and the stars wheeled. Looking north, Sally and the *Mejuffrouw* on December nights saw the Milky Way running in a great arc from the northwest to the southeast. The Pleiades and Aldebaran in Taurus shone brightly in the middle sky, pointing to Orion's Belt and, brightest of all, Sirius overhead. Turning around, they could see Fomalhaut, Achernar, and Canopus—the Three Torches—aligned just above

the rim of Table Mountain. Something tugged at Sally's mind as she looked at these stars. She traced the lines of the stars, and kept coming back to Adhara, the Virginal Star, outshone in Canis Major by Sirius: Adhara was a seventh star, sitting at the intersection of the lines formed by Aldebaran-Orion's Belt-Sirius and the Three Torches. Adhara the Maiden also looked at the Mother, Maia in the Pleiades, just to the northwest of Aldebaran. Melody and meaning hid in the pattern: "*This picture, this gathering of the stars,*" Sally murmured. "But why, and for what?"

The moon rose, fuller and fuller, an old friend to ease Sally's fears of dreaming and her frustration with the patterns in the stars. The moon illuminated the garden maze, the Doolhoff, behind the Gezelligheid. Sally thought for a moment that the pattern of the maze matched that of the stars centred on Adhara overhead, but then the pattern disappeared or the hedges moved or the moon shadows shifted, Sally was not sure.

"You Moon," she said, quoting the great German poet. "Your mild eye gazes over my fate, as I wander between joy and pain in loneliness; what I know not wanders in the night through the labyrinth of the heart." The Mejuffrouw, remembering her own youth, put her hand on Sally's shoulder and led the young McDoon back inside.

The McDoons and Nexius grew ever more anxious to voyage on to Yount.

"Still no word from the *Gallinule,*" Nexius announced glumly each day.

"Wheat and whiskey!" said Barnabas. "And worse!"

Sally was the only one whose sense of urgency was blunted. She spent most of her time with Kidlington, usually under the discreetly watching eyes of the British regimental soldiers standing guard around the Gezelligheid. Sally and Kidlington talked of everything. Sometimes the topics were intellectual: medicine, politics, the works of Erasmus Darwin or the postulates of Malthus.

"I am not at fault, Tom," she whispered to herself. "I do not tarry.

The ship has not come.”

One Thursday, Sally and Kidlington were in the Gezelligheid garden, in the swings attached to a yellowwood the Termuydens called “L’Escarpolette.” The sun washed the yellowwood and the jacaranda trees, and made Isaak glow as she pounced across the grass. Through a screen of flowering bushes could be seen one of the regimental guards.

Kidlington sighed. “I am content, Mamsell McLeish. Here with you and in this place, I am held in a nutshell yet feel myself king of the universe.”

“Hold, Mr. Kidlington,” said Sally, laughing. “You run too fast!”

“No, I speak truly,” protested Kidlington. “Your presence is the cure for the canker of my discontent. I envy you McDoons, and would like nothing more than to be the most humble planet in your family’s solar system, the merest Uranus, a late-comer and outrider yet still held by your attraction.”

“Really, James,” said Sally. “You are as florid as your Mr. Darwin’s *Botanical Garden* . . . or as this garden.”

“Ah, Sally,” said James. “But it is you who blushes to match this flower.”

They bantered along in this vein for a while, until Kidlington grew quiet. He tossed twigs for Isaak and Jantje to attack.

“James,” said Sally on her swing under the yellowwood tree. “Where is your unbounded stock of wit and imagination?”

“Sally,” he said in the most serious voice she had heard him use yet. “You have wrought me up to a significant matter. May I confide in you?”

Sally stopped her swinging, and said yes.

“I was only half in jest a while ago, when I said I envied you McDoons and wished to be your satellite,” said Kidlington. “You see, I too am an orphan. My father hanged himself for gambling debts, and my sweet mother died thereafter of grief. My brother and I were taken in by older cousins, where we got bed and board but little else. We each won scholarships, and came like a pair of Dick

Whittingtons to London to pursue the medical profession. While we have prospered, 'tis true, or at least see the imminent possibility of advancement, we have had little—no, very little—of the conviviality and fellow feeling that so characterizes the McDoons. Oh, Sally, you must know that these past months with you have been the happiest of my life!”

“James,” Sally said at last. “Why did you not share this with me before? I would understand. Planet? You have been our sun, shining forth upon us.”

For once, her ready store of quotes and commonplaces failed her but her heart wrote him a sonnet. She held out her locket, which she kept in her lockbox since the attack onboard (having come to half-believe her own explanations to James) but which today adorned her neck for no reason other than because the sun was shining so. Kidlington unclasped the locket, and the two of them gazed at the images of Sally and Sally’s mother. Sally would have given Kidlington the locket, if he had asked. Kidlington did not. He reclasped the locket and handed it back to Sally. Their hands touched. The rest of the afternoon was spent on trivial talk, but all that time and every day that followed, Sally dwelt in Kidlington’s words of planets, loss, and finding.

The “new” Kidlington, the one who spoke in serious tones about weighty subjects, was in evidence two weeks later at the Termuydens’ dinner table. Talk had turned to the condition of Cape Town society, and specifically to the fact of slavery. The Cape was full of slaves, based on skin colour, a situation that appalled the McDoons and Kidlington.

“Thank goodness for Wilberforce,” said Kidlington.

“True words,” said Sanford, pleased to find himself agreeing with the young man.

“Quite right,” said Barnabas. “You Termuydens seem to be just about the only household who does not use slaves, but keep servants as a civilized person should do.”

The Mejuffrouw said, “Thank you. We are considered . . .”

“. . . *eigenaardig en eigengerechtig*,” said her husband. “‘Peculiar and self-righteous.’ Sounds better in Dutch.”

“In either language, we are,” said the Mejuffrouw, laughing. Then she stopped laughing, narrowed her pelagic eyes. “The *Gezelligheid* can never use slaves. How could it?”

Sally noticed that Nexius Dexius, who said little at the dinner table, had followed the discussion with deep interest. At one point he looked set to interject but satisfied himself instead by slicing his meat with restrained savagery. Nexius, an old warrior ever on alert, noticed Sally’s expression, and gave her the ursine equivalent of a wink before returning to the carnage on his plate. Mystified by this confidence, Sally meant to ask Nexius about it but forgot to do so because of what came next.

As sweet-cakes and port were passed around the table, talk turned to Kidlington’s opportunities in Bombay. Even Sanford became animated as he and Barnabas gave the medical student advice and reminisced about their voyage to Bombay for McDoon’s uncle. “The Bengal, or even the Coromandel Coast, now, that is where the real fortunes are to be made,” said Barnabas. “But old McDoon had it in mind to assemble some cargoes in Bombay, and he had his best contacts with a fine agency house there.”

“Finlay, Graham & Muir,” said Sanford.

“Scots like he was . . . like me,” said Barnabas.

“We sailed out in April of 1792, and were in Bombay a full year,” said Sanford. He looked across the table at Barnabas and said, with slightly more Norfolk in his accent than usual, “How young we were!”

“Beans and bacon,” said Barnabas. “Young isn’t half the story! Peas newly popped from the pod is more like it!”

“A full year in Bombay, sir,” said Kidlington. “Where did you stay?”

“In lodgings not half so nice as these,” said Barnabas, raising his glass to the Mejuffrouw and Cornelius.

“Really, you mustn’t,” said the Mejuffrouw, pleased despite her

efforts to wave away the praise.

The others raised their glasses.

“Health and long life to our hosts,” said Barnabas, thumping the table with his free hand. “And three cheers for the *Gezelligheid!*”

When the huzzahs had died down—and the port had been passed around again—Barnabas continued.

“Finlay, Graham & Muir had a small set of rooms for us to let, which they had found through their friend, the Parsee merchant Sitterjee . . . that’s what you need to do, Mr. Kidlington, be sure to make the acquaintance of one of the leading Parsee houses. They speak superb English, know our ways better than anyone in India, and are trusted by all the other natives—Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, makes no mind. A good man like our friend Sitterjee will take care of redeeming your *hundi*, that’s what they call bills of exchange there. Anyway, to return to your question, Mr. Kidlington, about lodgings. Sanford and I were in the eastern part of the Old City, just above the English Fort, could just peek out to see Butcher’s Island and Elephanta Island in the bay. Near Market and Dongri, fine old part of the city, where most of the Muslim merchants live.”

Kidlington nodded again, especially as conversation turned to the cost of lodging and food. Sanford spoke to these topics as Barnabas drank his port and stroked his vest, a design with roundels and palmettes marred slightly by a gravy stain from the evening meal. As Sanford described how close the English Fort was to the address of Kidlington’s main contacts, Barnabas suddenly thumped the table again.

“Sanford,” he said. “Do you remember the dinners we used to have at Adnan’s?”

Startled by the interruption, everyone stared at Barnabas. Sally thought Sanford shot Barnabas a warning look. Barnabas plunged ahead. “Our closest native contacts, outside of good old Sitterjee the Parsee,” he said to the entire company by way of explanation. “Adnan, and his brother Mohsin were estimable merchants and *sahukars*, Muslims of the Khodja following.”

A strange note entered Barnabas's voice as he said, "These Khodjas lived, in fact, just across the alley from the house where our lodgings were. So we spent much time with Adnan and Mohsin. Business, yes, much business. Made us all richer than we had been, when we got the cargo home to London. But good company too. Do you remember, Sanford?"

"Yes, Barnabas," said Sanford, clearing his throat. "I do."

"Why," said Barnabas, "remember the dinner parties? Almost as fine as the ones here at the *Gezelligheid*."

Sanford seemed pleased when Barnabas proposed another toast to the *Termuydens*. Once again the port went round as the cheers subsided.

Undeterred, however, Barnabas returned to his story about the Khodja merchants.

"*Hara masala*," he said. "That's what they called it, their special food. I am, of course, all for good plain English cooking, best in the world—begging your pardons, but I put it even above the Dutch—but my carriage towards food was altered, I must confess, when I tasted the *hara masala*."

Sanford sighed as well at the thought of Khodja cuisine.

Reaching for the port again, Barnabas mused. "Remarkable stuff altogether, garlic, ginger-root—Sally, you would have liked that—and coriander seed, with those peppers . . . coconut all grated, and almonds . . ."

"Goat's meat," said Sanford, despite himself.

"Well," chuckled the *Mejuffrouw*. "We shall have to serve goat at tomorrow's dinner!"

"What wine goes with goat, I wonder," said her husband.

"Such funny stories we use to tell and hear around the table at Adnan and Mohsin's," Barnabas ploughed ahead. "Sometimes Muir would join us. Remember Sanford, how Muir—he's dead now, God rest his soul—would always talk about 'casting bread upon the waters'? Only his brogue was so thick that Adnan and Mohsin thought he said 'casting bird upon the waters,' and imagined Muir

was rattling on about duck hunting!”

At this, Barnabas began to laugh, giggle almost. Sanford reached across the table to Barnabas. “Steady on, old friend.”

“I am sorry,” said Barnabas, stroking his vest and peering down into his port. “I . . . well . . .” He looked with imploring eyes at Sanford.

“Perhaps,” said Sanford, “we should conclude with the port for the evening.”

“*Quatsch*,” said Barnabas, but he did not reach for the bottle.

The small-cakes were gone, the candles burning low. The Mejuffrouw started to rise, when Barnabas said:

“I almost took a wife once.”

Everyone remained seated. The Mejuffrouw leaned forward with such alacrity that she almost knocked over the port bottle. Sanford shook his head slightly but, at the same time, clasped his partner’s forearm across the table. Sally held her breath. For Sally (and for Tom, had he been there), Barnabas’s celibacy was as natural a state as the tides of the Thames or Sanford’s precision with accounts.

“Oh yes,” said Barnabas, looking into a candle, slowly stroking his vest. “Adnan had a daughter, you see.”

Sanford started to say something, thought better of it. He continued to hold Barnabas’s arm.

“Her name was Rehana,” said Barnabas. “She is the only woman I have ever loved. In a wifely way, I mean. Only she was not to be my wife.”

The Mejuffrouw pulled in every word.

Kidlington looked at Sally before he asked the question they all wanted to ask. “Sir, what happened? If I may enquire?”

Barnabas looked away and did not seem able to speak. Sanford released Barnabas’s arm, sat up, and told the story.

Adnan had been delighted with Barnabas and fascinated by British ways. He had even allowed his wife, Yasmin, to join the dinners from time to time. His brother Mohsin was of like mind (his wife was named Bilkees). Great friendship developed between

the Khodja merchants and the men of McDoon.

“Great friendship,” said Barnabas. “Damon and Pythias. Except that I was no . . .”

“Do not admonish yourself, old friend,” Sanford said, then returned to the story. “We’d heard rumour, after several months of frequent visitation in Adnan’s house, of a daughter, but we had never seen her. Nor were we likely to—it is not their custom to bring forth their daughters to strangers, and we honoured that by not even asking after her presence.”

“But,” said Barnabas, staring again into the candle, “her presence became known to me nonetheless.”

“How, uncle, how?” Sally cried. She was aware of Kidlington’s eyes on her, and of the Mejuffrouw’s eyes on Barnabas.

“I heard the most beautiful singing,” said Barnabas. “One evening, as we returned across the alley to our lodgings, a gorgeous melody sung by a woman came over the wall surrounding Adnan’s house. I could not resist my desire to see the singer. Sanford tried to stop me—good friend, my dear Sanford—but I found handholds up the wall, rested on a ledge, and peered over the top, down into a garden. And there she was. And there forever, from that moment, has my heart remained.”

Barnabas paused again, gazing out over Sally’s head. Under the table, Kidlington touched Sally’s hand for a long moment.

“She looked up and saw me there,” said Barnabas. “She told me once that she thought that first night she had conjured me forth with her singing! She sang and danced in the garden, around the fountain in the middle like . . . like an elfin queen in the moonlight, with her black tresses swinging behind her, and her arms outstretched before her. She was Sacontala, and I was the king who saw her in the forest, who fell in love and then . . .”

Even the candles seemed to hold their breath waiting for whatever Barnabas would say next.

“So began our courtship,” he said, with one tear coursing down his cheek. “Every night thereafter I would hear her singing, and I

would come across the alley to the top of the wall. She would stand below me, half-hidden in the dark, and we would talk in whispers. She had some English, and I had some Gujarati and a little Hindi, so we communicated in our own private language. She longed to know who I was, what life was like outside her house, outside Bombay, and I longed to know who she was, what life was like inside her house.”

The Mejuffrouw nudged her husband, who reached into his pocket and offered a handkerchief to Barnabas.

“Thank you,” said Barnabas. “Finally I dared to come down into the garden. We trembled every second for fear of discovery, but we trembled more to be together.”

As he daubed his eyes, Barnabas said, “I loved her. Rehana loved me.”

Barnabas paused. Sanford said, “Our Khodja hosts did find out. Difficulty ensued. Adnan and Mohsin felt terribly betrayed, as if Barnabas had been a thief. At first they wanted to sever all connections. Sitterjee and the firm of Finlay, Graham & Muir intervened on our behalf. In the end, our business was allowed to proceed. Our cargo was assembled and we made ready to leave.”

“Adnan and Mohsin had come back to their senses,” said Barnabas. “Three days before we sailed, I asked Adnan for his daughter’s hand in marriage, having no real hope that he would accept my proposal. I do not know how it happened, but I guess that his wife Yasmin played some role in his decision, because he said I might marry Rehana, if I proved myself worthy.”

The Mejuffrouw put her hands in front of her, resting on the table, fingertip to fingertip, and cocked her head forward, making her coiffure look like the prow of a ship bearing down on Barnabas. “Worthy in what way?” she asked.

Barnabas laughed. “Adnan said I had already proven myself an able negotiator since I had managed to win both his wife’s heart and his daughter’s so that he, Adnan, felt compelled to accept me as a future son-in-law. Provided that I showed my true devotion and settled with Rehana in Bombay.”

Sally felt dizzy. There would have been no Mincing Lane for her and Tom!

“I would have had to become a Muslim,” Barnabas continued. “A condition of their faith, that’s as I understand it. Adnan could only allow the marriage if I agreed to become a Mohammedan.”

Strange emotion crossed Sanford’s face but he said nothing. Sally thought this story far odder than reams of legend about Yount.

“Would I have?” said Barnabas. “That’s your question, it must be. Well, yes, I would have, that’s how much I loved her. Wouldn’t have been the first Englishman to do so in India, not by a long straw. Think of all those John Company officials and generals who married Mughal princesses, why, half the nabobs had Indian wives, and they had to become Muslims to do so. A respectable practice, at least once upon a time, and in the eyes of . . . of those content in the knowledge of one God no matter how He might be worshipped.”

Barnabas cast a glance at Sanford as he said this, a look of gratitude perhaps, before continuing. “Sanford remembers. I said I was fully agreeable to settling in Bombay, that I only needed to return with our cargo to London, sell this at a profit, and then sail back with both intent and means to set myself up in Bombay. It seemed that Finlay, Graham & Muir would take me as a junior partner if our business did well.”

Sanford spoke. “I remember. By Saint Adelsina, I do. It was the only time I ever saw her, Barnabas’s Rehana. The night before we sailed, Adnan held a great feast to celebrate both the business and the betrothal. Rehana sat between her mother and her father, across the table from us, but I will never forget her dark eyes or her glossy black hair.”

Barnabas said to the Mejuffrouw, “That day in the curio room, the sandalwood box? That last night, at the feast before we sailed, Adnan gave me a box like that. ‘Into this box,’ Adnan said, ‘I put the memories and good wishes of my house, and a command that you return as soon as you can to rejoin the one you have already claimed. Remember always that you have taken Rehana’s heart with you: it is in this box.’”

Sally sat back. How many times had she sat in the partners’ office

at Mincing Lane and smelled sandalwood, toyed with the box? Like a memento from an aunt she never had.

“So we sailed for London,” said Barnabas. “Never has a heart been as full of joy and hope as mine. I counted the hours and wished for magical powers over the wind. All that remained was the blessing of my uncle. Upon our return, good Sanford here pleaded my case to old McDoon, and I pressed it too. Hard. But my uncle was harder in reply. He would have none of it. It would, he said, ruin our standing and reputation to marry an Indian, to become a Muslim. Beneath us, because of her nation, her religion, and the colour of her skin.”

Clutching his vest, Barnabas finished.

“My uncle forbid the union, and threatened to disown me if I pursued it. Banish me from McDoon & Associates. Disinherit me. I did not have the courage I ought to have had. I betrayed my Yarico, abandoned my Sacontala. I never returned to Bombay. I never saw her again.”

Sally contemplated the wickedness of some uncles and the goodness of hers. “Oh, Uncle,” said Sally, and stood up to hug him. As she did so, she noticed that the Mejuffrouw had shifted her gaze from Barnabas to her husband. Cornelius appeared to be on the verge of saying something, but the Mejuffrouw’s eyes enjoined him to silence.

The party broke up as the candles guttered. Barnabas was unsteady on his feet but insisted on making his own way to bed. Kidlington asked Sally to walk out with him to the gate.

“Remarkable story,” he said. “I take it you had no idea, none at all, about any of this?”

“None,” said Sally.

“Well,” said Kidlington. “I am truly sorry for him, poor man. A broken heart for all these years. It is a thing beyond reckoning. For my part, I hope I have the courage to be with the one I love, when the time comes.” Before she had time to react, Kidlington bent over and kissed Sally on the mouth, lightly and just for a second. With that, he turned, opened the gate, and disappeared into the night.

The effect of Uncle Barnabas's revelation, plus that of Kidlington's parting comment and kiss, sent Sally's heart in a dozen directions at once. She touched her lips. She put her arms around herself. She was not sure if she could breathe. Only later, much later that night, as she sought sleep in vain, did she recall the oddest thing of all about the evening. Nexius Dexius had not said a single word all night, but he had followed every remark the way a fencer follows the moves of his opponent. And he had kept constant watch on the Mejuffrouw, just as she had been absorbed in Barnabas's words. As she lay awake in the Gezelligheid towards dawn, Sally grew ever more convinced that Nexius was the only one—besides Sanford—who was not surprised by Barnabas's story.

"That old badger knew all about Uncle Barnabas and his Bombay love, Rehana with the dark eyes and glossy black hair," Sally whispered to Isaak. "I am sure of it. Another mystery to add to all the others we have collected since that mysterious box landed on our doorstep in Mincing Lane."

Sally had no chance to ask Nexius her questions. Either through contrivance or happenstance, the captain of Yount was rarely at the Gezelligheid in the next week. He was at the barracks, mostly and, presumably as a result of some conversations he had there, the number of regimental guards at the Gezelligheid increased. Nexius said he felt the presence of lurkers and wanted to bolster the McDoons' security, especially since the *Gallinule* had signalled its imminent arrival.

"We each have an ansible device," explained the Mejuffrouw, as she unlocked a room on the topmost floor. The room had just one small grated window, set high up, and was bare except for sea charts on the walls, and a table with four chairs. On the table was a mahogany box full of copper wires and cylinders, cut crystal shafts, and brass knobs.

"Can you talk to the ship?" asked Barnabas.

"No," said the Mejuffrouw. "They send a sort of noise, a blast through the ether that registers on our instrument here. Makes

it hum and gong when it gets close enough. We can send a similar report to them but no more.”

“How far away are they?”

“Very hard to say. They are not yet . . . in our world. Just close enough to send the first alert through on the ansible. It could be a week or a month before the *Gallinule* arrives.”

The McDoons prepared for the next leg of their journey, careful not to hint at anything to outsiders, especially Kidlington. Kidlington’s own ship to Bombay was also outfitting, so the long-dreaded parting would soon be upon them. As a result, Kidlington spent less time with the McDoons and the Termuydens, attending to necessary preparations himself. Or so he said, though Sally had other suspicions.

“He avoids my company,” she said to herself as she looked through a German herbal in the Gezelligheid library. “I do not know why. He has not spoken with me, not in private, since the night he kissed me. It is not his way to be so cack-handed so I must believe he *intends* to avoid me.”

She tried to read a page in the book, something about the uses of *Bichskraut*. *That’s German for bixwort*, she thought. *The little blue dye-flower we keep in the garden at Mincing Lane*. For a moment, she saw the house in London, heard the cook clattering in the kitchen. Her loss of Mincing Lane and her grief at leaving James collided. She ran her finger across a picture of Frau Luna, the Mistress Moon, surrounded by leaping dolphins, sagittaries, comets and stars, but did not see the image through her tears.

“He leaves soon and so do I, but not together,” she said. Isaak looked up at her, whiskers undulating. “Whatever shall I do? I long for Yount . . . and James cannot know, much less come.”

She pulled out the ansible pendant: it glowed red. “Tom, Tom. You would like James. He could be a brother to you.”

Sally’s room looked out over the Gezelligheid’s front garden (where two British soldiers stood at attention by the gate) and across the harbour. On clear days she could just see Robbens Island,

a smudge on the horizon seven miles from shore. A prison sat on Robbens Island. As Sally thought about Yount and Tom and James, and about Uncle Barnabas's astounding news, she imagined the prison squat and slit-windowed on the island. Even as she gazed at the dark spot on the horizon, she saw a sloop head across the harbour bound for Robbens Island. She could make out figures in shackles being shuffled across the deck. She shuddered, and turned away.

Sensing the pall, the Termuydens held a small supper party the next evening for the McDoons: the first of many farewells, as the Mejuffrouw put it. They served—on the indigo pheasant plates they knew Sally loved—goat stew spiced with cumin, nutmeg, and ginger, along with a red wine that Cornelius insisted was the perfect accompaniment. After several bottles, everyone at the table readily agreed. A perfect meal in every respect, except from Sally's perspective since, as so often recently, Kidlington was missing—dining with other medical students bound for Bombay.

"Pity," said Barnabas. "Because he has missed a very passable *hara masala*, for which we give thanks. Though I dare say he will be able to get the original article soon enough."

The others looked expectantly at Barnabas, but there was no repeat of the disclosures over the port-wine. Having erupted like a volcano that no one even knew existed, Barnabas had said no further word about Rehana or the Khodja merchants since that evening. Sanford was just as resolute in his silence, though that was less to be wondered at.

"A reading would be nice," said the Mejuffrouw, steering the conversation away from waters in which Barnabas clearly did not want to sail.

"Beans and bacon," said Barnabas, arrayed in a fine vest, periodically tapping the key in its pocket. "Fine idea. What shall it be?"

Sally said, "I know, something from *Roderick Random*, in honour of our adventures. I found a copy in the library here, and have been reading it in my room at night. Let me fetch it down."

Sally left the table and made her way up the great central staircase

to the second floor. It is a funny thing about a house that, when all the occupants are gathered in one room, the rest of the house begins to feel as deserted as if no one lives in it at all. As Sally ascended the stairs, candle in front of her, the shadows seemed very long, and the jovial sounds from the dining room made her feel more and more alone. At the top of the stairs, Sally hesitated. Without knowing why, she was disinclined to proceed down the long, dark corridor to her room at the front of the house. Surprisingly faint now came the sounds of conversation from the room below, too indistinct to make out individual words. The quiet outside the house seeped into the upstairs hallway.

In the quiet, Sally suddenly heard an unexpected noise: a rustle of papers. A rustle of papers in a merchant's house is nothing remarkable—unless it is late at night, and no one is supposed to be at home. Sally was instantly back at Mincing Lane. She stopped, thinking she should tiptoe back downstairs. *But it is probably nothing*, she thought. *A breeze, or my imagination. The others will just laugh at me.*

The rustling came again from the other side of her bedroom door. She froze. Who could be there? The Gezelligheid was guarded night and day; who had slipped through the pickets? Sally stopped breathing, padded towards her door. Without a doubt someone was within, very quietly searching for something. She stood at the door until she ran out of breath, then with a sudden shove, she launched herself into her room.

It was a moonless night. Sally could make out a figure by the side-window, holding her commonplace book in his hand. The window was open. In the light of her wavering candle, Sally saw other books (her letter copy-book!) by the lockbox on the table. The lockbox was open! She raised the candle. The figure, a man, stood calmly, almost as if he had been expecting Sally. He turned to face her with a smile, a sad smile she could just see in the dimness.

Seeing his face, Sally let out the shout that would change her life forever, and that of the man in front of her. One shout, one explosion of sound (how many times would she wish to recall that

cry, have it suppressed, obliterated?), and the world was changed. Sally's shout, almost a scream, was loud enough to find the ears of the two guards posted by the gate under her window. Her shout brought Uncle Barnabas and Sanford to their feet in the room below, and all the others. As the soldiers pounded on the front door and all was turmoil below, Sally looked in despair and wonder at the face in front of her. She had barely the strength to keep her candle aloft. She heard cries of "Sally, Sally" and the sound of many footfalls in the hallway. In the few seconds before the others burst into the room—the last few seconds she would have alone with the man in front of her—time stopped, Sally's eyes held his and his held hers. She exhaled four words:

"Oh, not you, James!"



Interlude: Entertaining Angels Unawares

Maggie scrubbed the fire-grate in the Sedgewicks' kitchen on her first morning of charring, while the pantry maid nattered on.

"The Sedgewicks are good to us, for the most part," said the maid. "Bit odd, the pair of 'em, if you ask me. He is a lawyer, a princum-prancum sort with his words that none of us can understand, but harmless, really. Enjoys his meat and drink, mind you, but otherwise hardly pays us much heed, which is better than my last employment, where the master was always pinchin' my bottom and tryin' to, well, you know . . ."

Maggie knew. Men always tried that. She was groped in the street almost daily. Most women were. Maggie wished she knew an equation or trigonometric expression for that.

"The mistress pays us mind," the maid went on. "But mostly in a friendly sort of way. Most of the time, she is nose-down in a book, not at all like the ladies in my other place or those I hear about from the other girls I know in service."

Maggie pricked her ears up.

“Mrs. Sedgewick will be very interested to meet you, to be sure, you being, well, different. Not that I mind, of course. I know your colour don’t rub off, not like what my friend Nancy says about black people. I am more ed-u-cated than that!” The maid drew out the syllables of her last sentence.

“But I must tell you—Maggie, is it?—that I ain’t never seen such hair before, not back in Shropshire and not here in London neither,” continued the maid. She reached out and, before Maggie could protest, touched Maggie’s hair.

Mrs. Sedgewick summoned Maggie upstairs around lunchtime. Maggie stood stiffly at attention, wishing her clothes were less ragged.

“Well, well,” said Mrs. Sedgewick, surveying Maggie from head to toe. “You *are* a sight. From the charity school at St. Macrina’s, right? Good. I remember you—how could I not?—from the Holy Thursday processions.”

Maggie relaxed a little. She had always liked the Holy Thursday processions, the annual event where every charity school in London marched its students to a special service at St. Paul’s. Maggie remembered the beadle waving his white staff at the front of the St. Macrina students in their green uniforms. She remembered singing “Great God . . . ’Tis to thy sovereign grace I owe That I was born on Christian ground” as they trooped through the streets. She remembered singing a hymn she liked much better in the cathedral as the assembled boards of governors, trustees, and patronesses listened:

I will shew you what is strong.
The lion is strong . . . the wild beasts of the desert
Hide themselves, for he is very terrible.
The lion is strong, but he that made
The lion is stronger than he: his anger
Is terrible; he could make us die in
A moment, and no one could save us
Out of his hand.

Maggie found herself humming this hymn while she faced Mrs. Sedgewick. Her new mistress smiled.

“Ah, I like that one too,” said Mrs. Sedgewick, and sent Maggie back below stairs, but not before noticing that Maggie had looked with longing at the bookshelves lining the study.

Mr. Sedgewick caught a glimpse of Maggie when she left for the day. Over dinner he said to his wife, “Well, my dear, my euryalic dove, I noticed today that you have hired a daughter of Calabar.”

Mrs. Sedgewick looked at her husband with dangerous patience.

“Now, from the abundance of my heart, my mouth speaks,” said Mr. Sedgewick, rubbing the abundance of his stomach and reaching for a lamb-chop. “I wonder if you have not taken in this dusky child as something of a pet, a project to fulfill the maternal feelings unfortunately thwarted by your body’s resistance to conception.”

Mrs. Sedgewick put her fork down and took up a sharper weapon. “George Gervase Sedgewick, Locke was right to say that a learned man has no long way to seek for examples of his own ignorance.”

Pausing as he chewed, Mr. Sedgewick said, “Ah, my voracious pigeon, no mere lawyer may slip a word in with you before you refer to the Grammar of Palaemon and damn him for a fool. Yet your argument is incomplete, *cetera desunt*, the rest is missing. You must steeve your points in more tightly for the ballast of your argument to hold.”

Mrs. Sedgewick counted quietly to five before she said, “You mix lobster with canary, Mr. Sedgewick, and would I fear eat both if they were put before you. I took on this child, as you call her—and her name is Maggie Collins, by the by—because we need additional help in this household and because I felt a duty—not maternal in nature, by the by—towards the school of which I am a patroness.”

“Well, then, the defendant withdraws his plea of not guilty and confesses the indictment,” chuckled Mr. Sedgewick. “*Nolens volens*, and more unwilling than not, but there, ’tis done, and now would you kindly pass the potatoes, my love?”

Maggie dreamed that night of a hedgerow as tall as a cathedral

and as long as the Oxford Road. Scattered at its embrangled roots were the bones of small creatures, and some not so small. She heard faint triumphant singing: "Take force by force." Across the face of the moon flew the King of the Eboes, with an army of floating warriors, each wielding a fire-tipped spear. When she woke up she thought for one moment she was no longer in a cellar and that her Mama was no longer sick. The refrain ("Take force by force") hung doggedly in her mind.

She was only allowed upstairs at the Sedgewicks to clean out the fireplaces and remove the chamber pots and fetch down brass items for polishing in a vestibule off the kitchen. Mr. Sedgewick she saw seldom. He worked with clients in his ground-floor office, a room she was forbidden to enter (she had no idea how he had that room's fireplace cleaned). On the few occasions when she saw him, a brief encounter in the hall or on the stairs, he always smiled as if to a poodle. Mrs. Sedgewick seemed to avoid her, though Maggie was sure that Mrs. Sedgewick scrutinized her through half-open doors or from the corner of an eye when Maggie came in to empty out the coals.

Maggie made every excuse to visit Mrs. Sedgewick's study, and the larger library on the third floor. She had never seen so many books. Just smelling them intoxicated her. She memorized titles and made up their contents on her walks home. One day she recited twenty titles to herself over and over again as she hid on the way home from a mob of typesetter's apprentices; although they were rioting for higher pay and shorter hours, such disturbances easily got out of hand, something any woman knew and knew to avoid. Another time, forced to take a detour as the carcass of a whipped-dead horse was being hauled off her usual route (she noticed that someone had already sliced off its hooves, presumably for the glue factory), Maggie organized and reorganized the books she'd seen that day on a shelf she imagined in her cellar.

Maggie succumbed to temptation not long after. Mrs. Sedgewick was at tea with some other ladies. Maggie had emptied the old coals

from the study fireplace, and put in new coals for the evening fire. She had replaced all the candles, carefully putting the stubs in one place for counting by the head-maid. The late afternoon house at Archer Street by Pineapple Court was dozy. Maggie shut the study door almost all the way, leaving it just ajar enough to allay suspicion, and went to a bookcase. Hesitating only for a moment, she selected a book and sat in the big chair behind the escritoire to read it.

The study door opened some time later and Mrs. Sedgewick walked in. For a second she and Maggie stared at one another. Then Mrs. Sedgewick did something that Maggie would never forget: she laughed, stepped inside, and closed the door behind her.

“Well, well, well,” said Shawdelia Sedgewick. “So there are wind-wagons on the plains of Sericana, after all!”

Maggie looked to see if Mrs. Sedgewick had anything in her hand with which to hit Maggie. Not seeing anything, Maggie relaxed a little.

“Come, my dear,” said Mrs. Sedgewick. “I won’t bite you, though perhaps I ought to. What are you reading?”

Maggie’s hand did not tremble and she kept her chin jugged out as she held up the book.

“*Aeneral Equations of Motion in a Dynamical System,*” read Mrs. Sedgewick. “Remarkable! I understand almost nothing that stands in this book, and not for lack of trying, I can assure you. Do you comprehend it? Speak truthfully.”

Maggie had only read a little in the book. What she had read sent a shiver through her, excited her to draw notations in the air with her fingers. In the voice they had taught her at the charity school, she said, “Not all, ma’am, but enough to inspire further, um, reflection.”

Mrs. Sedgewick laughed again. “How well you speak, especially since you are . . . since, well . . . I believe you, though I suppose I ought to test you, but then again, I cannot because I don’t know enough to do so.”

She went to the bookcase and pulled down another book, saying,

“Here, have a look at this. *Isoperimetrical Problems and the Calculus of Variations* by Woodhouse. Even more impenetrable, I’m afraid, but perhaps not for you. Herschel and Somerville recommended it to me. Mr. Sedgewick knows nothing of my studies, would scorn them if he did. What do you say, girl?”

Maggie did not know what to say. She dropped her eyes, then stopped herself and brought them level again with Mrs. Sedgewick’s. The two women regarded one another for some time. Maggie relaxed a little more. At last, Mrs. Sedgewick smiled and said, “Well, there is a great deal more to you than anyone could ever suspect, isn’t there? Oh yes, a great deal more.”



Chapter 8: Pious Drops for the Closing Eye

James Kidlington looked at the judge, who was about to issue the sentence. The McDoon household sat in the front row. Sally could neither take her eyes off Kidlington nor stand to look at him.

Only two weeks had passed since Sally's discovery of Kidlington in her room. In an action unheard of in England, the judge had ordered a speedy trial. This was not to be like the cumbrous machinery of the law at home, where a case might take months or years to come to trial at the Old Bailey, where a suit such as that of Jarndyce versus Jarndyce could last indefinitely. No, here at the furthest rim of Great Britain's expanding empire, in a place where British rule had only just been secured, and where the military was the essential authority in a time of war, the case of James Kidlington would be adjudicated quickly. He was offered up, pulled in to be made an example of, to show the Cape that English law and justice were fair, swift, and awesome, altogether different from the lackadaisical application of Dutch law the Cape had known before.

Sally had not wanted this. Hardly able to think, she had held fast to the hope that this was all a grotesque misunderstanding or, failing that, nothing that should become a matter for the courts and, worse, public speculation. Kidlington might have wronged her, but surely the best court to set his punishment was the court of her own heart. She pleaded with Barnabas and Sanford to have the case dropped. Hurt and puzzled, Barnabas would possibly have done so, for her sake, but he had no control in the matter.

Sally kept returning to the events of that evening. *Why*, she thought, *did I insist on Roderick Random? More than that, why did I cry out so?* Over and over she opened the door, saw Kidlington in the candlelight, an enigmatic smile on his face. Time had frozen right then and there. Kidlington had not moved. She wanted him to, would have let him go if he had asked. But he did not. He had not moved even when the soldiers had grappled him.

“How’d this man get by us?” the corporal yelled.

“I don’t know, sir,” the other soldier said. “Looks like he slipped into the garden from some other angle, and then found a route up through the window there, sir.”

The soldiers searched Kidlington. He had a key to the lockbox. Held tightly in Kidlington’s right hand, the hand he used to turn the pages of the journal, was Sally’s locket. Calm until now, Kidlington refused to surrender the locket, looking at Sally with an expression she could not read. Kidlington had to be pinned against the wall, his hand pried open. The corporal took pains to open the locket. Sally saw her picture looking back at her in the lamplight. The corporal wore a nasty look of satisfaction. “There’s trespassing, and maybe unauthorized possession of a key to this lockbox—would that be right, Miss?—and now burglary, in the lady’s private room, no less. What else might you have been doing, you puttock?”

Kidlington, crying “Sally” in a hoarse voice, scuffled with the soldiers and was marched out. He locked his gaze on Sally’s face until he was shoved from the room. In the combination of lamplight and moonlight, Sally thought he looked like a fallen angel.

The McDoon's plans of departure were thrown into uncertainty. Nexius's anger grew, both at the breach of security and at the delay. He was angriest at himself for being duped by Kidlington. Barnabas and Sally were often together in the next few days, but neither knew what to say.

Sally had barely endured the trial. Kidlington's testimony confused and excited her even as it plunged her into despair. He had begged the court's forgiveness, acknowledging the wrongness of his actions but insisting that he had done what he had done not to harm Sally in any way but to gain a better understanding of her sentiments towards him.

Eyes fixed on the judge, Kidlington said, "Her anxiousness for my well-being heightened my resolve to gain her good feeling. I urge you, sir, and this entire court, to leave her utterly out of these proceedings. Her good name and character should not be embroiled in this catastrophe solely of my making. Her character far surpasses mine."

The judge snorted. "On that last remark, Mr. Kidlington, I think we shall all agree. Now then, the most serious charge against you is that of burglary. You opened the lockbox with a key that you apparently had purloined or copied. A precious article belonging to Miss McLeish, namely a locket containing pictures of her and her mother, were in your hand when you were apprehended. Do you have any explanation for this?"

"Yes, I held the locket in my hand. Indeed, I was examining it because its contents I value not in pecuniary terms, but in another way altogether. I had no intent to remove the locket. I intended to replace it, along with the journal, within the lockbox, and to leave the lockbox as I found it. I would have taken myself from the premises close to immediately, with nothing more than I had come with, except that I was unexpectedly discovered."

The first blow fell: the jury found Kidlington guilty on all counts. (The corporal felt sure he had a commendation coming, and the prosecutor swelled with pride about the efficacy of English

law.) The second blow fell: the judge sentenced Kidlington to seven years transportation to Australia. English law, the Law, had spoken. Kidlington was led back to jail to await the first Sydney-bound ship. Sally could not see—Barnabas had to help her find her footing on the way home.

The McDoons avoided everyone but the Termuydens and Nexius. Sally could neither eat nor sleep, even in the *Gezelligheid*.

“Sally,” Barnabas said. “Nothing to be done. Rum affair all way ’round. No way to handle ’em, I’m afraid. I’ve spoken with the Termuydens and with the judge and even that mastiff of a prosecutor.”

Sally looked up with wild hope.

“No, my dear,” said Barnabas. “Not to get anything changed. Can’t, you know, it’s the law. But to see if maybe you and I might speak with Mr. Kidlington . . . in jail before we set sail for Yount.”

So Barnabas and Sally visited Kidlington, being taken to Robbens Island on one of the sloops Sally had seen from her window. Kidlington sat quietly as they entered, his mouth drawn, looking nothing like the gascon he had been. Australia! The penal colony. Many never survived that, and very few ever came back. He trembled as he spoke. No one else was in the room; the jailer waited outside the door.

“I am sorry, so truly sorry,” he said. “Mr. McDoon, sir. Sally . . . Sally . . . I did not mean to hurt you, not by the end, not at all. What I said in court was the truth. But I have not been truthful at all times. I am most sorry about that.”

Sally reached out to take his hand, but stopped herself.

“My father did not hang himself,” said Kidlington. “He is a squire in Shropshire, very well-respected in that part of England. The gambling debts were mine, not his. Never gamble in Bath—they will strip you clean! He disowned me; my entire family cast me out. I have no brother in the medical profession, nor in Bombay ’tall. But I did come to London like Dick Whittington, and I am in the medical

way. That is, I received a small inheritance that my father could not hinder, and used it to study medicine, and I took employ as an apothecary's assistant."

Barnabas asked, "How did you happen to be on the *Essex* then, if you have no brother in Bombay?"

Kidlington started to answer several times, finally found the words. "I had heard that a certain McDoon family would be travelling aboard that ship, and that they carried with them items of interest to . . . certain people in London."

Barnabas and Sally were stupefied.

"There is more to my tale," he said, looking desperately at Sally. "My life is a fiction, a Shandy." His face was stricken. "Those to whom I owed money, my gambling debts from Bath, they found me out in London. They sold those debts to wormy bailiffs and dubious men of business. You may have heard of such men, though I know your trade never touches on their sort, Mr. McDoon. Ralph Nickleby of Golden Square, to name one, and Daniel Quilp of Tower Hill for another, he who holds an interest in the Old Curiosity Shop."

Barnabas nodded. He knew those names, and felt pity for the man in front of him.

"They in turn sold the debt to still others," Kidlington said. "Oh yes, there is a thriving market in gall and misery. At last I ended in the clutches of another sort of person altogether, individuals of ungentle mirth, whose means of collection lack all refinement. I had no hope of repaying my debts except to perform various tasks that my final debt-holders presented to me from time to time."

Sally tried to focus on James's words but could not. Why did I cry out? Why did the corporal have to be so officious? Why did the judge have to be rigid? I would have given the locket to James.

"My upbringing, my studies, my position at the apothecary, all these things my new associates found novel and useful. Step by step, I descended into a world unknown to you, a side of London that dwells and spins far below the world of your City counting houses and the sunlit terraces of Mayfair. Connected though, always

connected, and I was—I am—a very useful means of connection.”

Kidlington found it hard to go on. “This other world is a hard one, with no tolerance for error and no care for those who fail. A thousand sorts populate it: squoriers, night pryers, chowers, guest-takers, mudlarks, slick-slack men. There is an organization to it, very hard to pin down. The medal has its obverse: above is Whitehall and the Palace, below their counterparts. There is a villains’ parliament of sorts, and an uncrowned king of them all. No one knows who he is exactly. Some say he is a Professor Moriarty, others say a Dr. Silvanus. The stories get mixed up. But there is a band which controls much of what goes on in London’s underworld. Headed by ‘the Chief,’ a strange chap in an old-fashioned coat.”

Barnabas and Sally grabbed the table to steady themselves.

“Oh yes, we’ll come to that. In any case, this band ultimately controls my debts, you see. As a result, I am frequently required to assist in the, hmmm, mortuary trade, procuring bodies for anatomists and such. Not that I do the actual . . . procurement . . . but I deal with the resurrectionists, arrange for transport and disposition of the cadavers. I have all the right contacts in my line of work.”

Now the words poured out of Kidlington. “A few weeks before we met aboard the *Essex*, I overheard two of the ‘snatchers’ talking about another piece of work they had done for the Chief. Something about a break-in on Mincing Lane, and an article of great value, highly prized by the Chief, but that they had not found it. The Chief was very angry, and everyone was looking to get this thing. What it might be they did not seem to know exactly. Some kind of jewellery, they thought, though their instructions included reference to a key, which they figured was a ruse on the part of the Chief.”

Kidlington’s voice became a monotone. “I had been looking for such an opportunity, you see. To gain a bargaining lever, something to break their awful hold over me, something to repay my debts and secure my freedom. I quickly found out that ‘McDoon’ was on every varlet’s lips, found out about the *Essex*, and decided to work my dodge.”

He refocused on Sally and Barnabas. "I was not working for *them* when I booked my passage. I *hate* them. I wanted to ransom whatever the item of value was for my freedom. Yes, I intended to befriend you to rob you, I confess that. But I befriended you all too well."

All three wept now. What else was there to do?

"I know you must have difficulty deciphering truth from falsehood when you hear me," Kidlington nearly moaned. "That is far worse punishment than transportation to Australia. Please, please believe me when I say that I did not perjure myself but spoke the truth in court: I did not intend to steal the locket, except only to steal a glimpse of you, Sally. Sally?"

It was a long while before any of them could speak again. Kidlington regained enough composure to continue. "I will face any danger for you. When word of this trial gets out, and it will, the Chief and his men will want me dead. The penal colony is full of their people. I know what I face." He paused, perhaps just a little bit, even under these circumstances, for effect. "Especially since I have read bits of your journal, dear Sally. . . ."

Whose secrets were bigger? Sally said, "Don't speak of it . . . James." His name came out blurred.

"Sally, I must," said Kidlington, even the shade of bravado gone, wanting desperately to salvage what he could. "I know your Cretched Man. He's my enemy too. The Chief, oh damnation!" Kidlington slammed his fist on the table.

Trembling, Kidlington said, "I only read a little, Sally, and only from sweetest interest. I know how wrong that was, but I only read a bit, and I understood little of what you write about . . . a key, a book, a letter, a voyage to a place called Yount."

Hearing Kidlington say "Yount" was like a gale in their ears. He knew, he really knew! Sally had so longed for this moment, but not like this. She sobbed. The jailer stumped by again outside the door. He ignored the sobbing, which was a fixture of meetings in that room.

"Yount," said Kidlington. "A struggle against the Cretched Man.

I read that much. It has consumed me since I read it. I hear a sound, nay, a music in me. Yount. I want to go with you. I want to join you.” At last he broke down completely, could say no more. His ship was leaving the Cape soon, but it would not be going to Yount.

The jailer had enough of the muffled sobs, thinking it was about time these fancy people understood the nature of real justice and did not overstay their welcome. He rapped on the door to announce the end of Barnabas and Sally’s interview with James Kidlington. Sally and Barnabas rose slowly.

“Here, James!” cried Sally. She took out her locket and thrust it across the table at him. He put up his hands to refuse it, but she lunged forward until their faces were inches apart.

“Take it,” she said. “I would have given it to you a hundred times. I would give it to you a thousand times if that would free you!”

She turned and fled. Just beyond the doorway, she half-turned and saw James Kidlington at the table, mutely holding the locket. She paused for one footstep, capturing every feature of that face in her memory before the door was closed behind her.

The trial over, nothing could further delay the journey to Yount. McDoon & Associates, hardly able to slip off unnoticed after the publicity of the trial, made ready to leave. They spread the word that they were sailing up the African coast to the Persian Gulf, the better to acquaint themselves with trading opportunities at Zanzibar, Socotra, Aden, and Muscat. They would give power of attorney to the Termuydens to represent their business while they were gone.

“She has arrived,” said Cornelius. “The *Gallinule* is just outside Table Bay, anchored at fourteen fathoms over a mile to the southwest of Robbens Island. That way she avoids even the most inquisitive eyes. We are sending out supplies by boat to them: fresh water, food—salted goat’s meat especially for you, Mr. Sanford—medicines, the like. Even some cases of books—that is especially welcome, we are told. She will leave straightaway once you are onboard.”

Dinner at the Gezelligheid on the eve of their departure was a

subdued affair. After the meal, as everyone lit candles to retire to bed, the Mejuffrouw came to Sally and Barnabas. Even in the half-light, her eyes shone.

“We wish you Godspeed,” she said. “For each of you, your heart’s desire is bound up in this quest. I cannot see how this will end, for you or for us, but I sense a greatness in both of you, uncle and niece.”

Barnabas started to mutter “*Quatsch*” but stopped himself. He was going to miss the Mejuffrouw very much.

Sally took the Mejuffrouw’s hands. “Thank you and your husband for your hospitality,” Sally said. “If we can ever repay you, we shall.”

“Success in your venture will be repayment enough,” said the Mejuffrouw.

Barnabas said, “I fear, my dear lady, that we have nothing suitable to leave in the Gezelligheid’s curio room.”

The Mejuffrouw shook her head, her lacquered hair making impressive shadows. “There is no need,” she said. “Do so when you return; leave us a keepsake then!”

Barnabas took his leave. Sally pressed into the Mejuffrouw’s hands a packet of letters for the cook and Mrs. Sedgewick, asked her to have them sent on the next ship to London.

“Of course, dear girl,” said the Mejuffrouw. The Dutch woman reached out, cupped Sally’s chin, and looked long at Sally. “Strange paths lie before you, and much danger. Trust is your best weapon but, as you have already seen, trust is hard to win. A final word: I cannot foresee what will come but, Sally, I believe you will see your James again. *Dat haal je de koekoek*, as we say in Dutch, meaning ‘I truly believe that.’ He has fallen but is not lost.”

Sally’s heart raced. She hesitated, then embraced the Mejuffrouw. “Thank you,” Sally whispered. Then she turned and disappeared up the stairs.

The next morning, a grey day in May of 1813, with early winter winds whispering, McDoon & Associates departed. Their last glimpse of the Gezelligheid was of the Termuydens in the front

garden waving goodbye, Cornelius holding his black hat in the air and the Mejuffrouw's white hair piled high and swaying. Jantje, with his front paws on the gate, barked a farewell.

Sally stared into the water as the McDoons sailed in a small cutter out to the ship from Yount. Barnabas, Sanford, and Fraulein Reimer watched as the *Gallinule* slowly hove into view. Three-masted, shallow of draft, it was boxy and bluff-built.

Slow bacon, this one, thought Sanford. *We won't crack on in this tub*. But then he brightened when he recalled that Cook had sailed his epic voyages in a sturdy little Northumberland collier. Perhaps there was more to the *Gallinule* than met the eye. Sanford noticed the copper sheathing on the hull (standard in the British Navy since the 1780s, but unusual in the merchant fleet), the gun sockets along the deck-railings, and the gun-ports in the hull. He wondered at the two shed-like structures on the deck, one on each side between the first and second masts, and the smaller structure in the middle of the deck, like a pedestal or dais. Sanford assumed they were storage huts for provisions since ships typically took livestock on long trips. Or perhaps the *Gallinule* had been a whaler and the sheds had held the cauldrons used to boil the train-oil.

The *Gallinule* weighed anchor, caught the wind, and set a south/southeasterly course away from Cape Town. An English ship that had laid over in Rio de Janeiro from Christmas until Easter had brought them their last news of the outside world on the day of their departure. They learned that Lord Liverpool's government, having taken over from the assassinated Perceval, continued the debates about the East India Company's trade monopoly, that the Duke of Wellington had defeated the French at Salamanca and then occupied Madrid the previous summer, and that Napoleon had also suffered a reversal in Russia in the fall of 1812. They reflected on the oddity of news already months out of date and on the eeriness of knowing that it was their last news of home for a long time.



Chapter 9: Pilgrims' Progress

At dusk on the second day out from Cape Town, a ceremony was held on the *Gallinule*. The entire crew, over one hundred men, lined up in three companies. Facing the crew, next to the ship's captain stood Nexius, with McDoon & Associates at his side. The McDoons realized for the first time, seeing the entire ship's company so arrayed, that most of the Yountians were brown-skinned, darker by far than the Nax brothers. *Like being in India again*, thought Barnabas, which caused a sudden pang that should not have surprised him but did.

The ship's captain called out something in Yountish. Every crew member put on a dark blue, padded vest. One company had a scarlet collar on their vests, one a white collar, the third pale blue, in each case matching the band on their caps. A small silver brooch of a leaping dolphin gleamed from every breast. The ship's captain began a speech, during which he paused at intervals so that Nexius could translate into English. "We welcome you, Big Landers. We welcome you who have wished yourselves to go to Yount. We welcome you who bear and guard the key. The key returns to Yount. The key has

found its appointed ones. Show forth the key!”

All eyes watched as Barnabas held the key up. The entire crew made a motion with their right hands. The ship’s captain continued, “We are the crew of the *Gallinule*, being officers, sailors, and marines, that is, the Fencibles.” As he mentioned the three companies, the head of each bowed in turn. “We, the men of the *Gallinule* vow to protect and guide you, as you will protect and guide us, so we vow by the Nurturing Mother.”

Then he chanted, and each company followed, half-singing a prayer in a round:

Kaskas muri ankus’eem,
Kaskas selwish pishpaweem,
Kaskas puro post’i feshdadeem,
Kaskas muri ullo darpapeem,
Kaskas muri ankus’eem.

The McDoons stood transfixed. Barnabas felt a humming in his temples. Sally felt the verse that was in her. As they chanted, the *Gallinule*’s crew held out their right hands, making small circles in the air. They repeated the chant three times, the words cascading as each company took up and finished a line or two behind the others. Nexius turned to the McDoons, who felt they understood the chant without translation. “It is our Common Prayer,” he said. “We call it “The Plea””:

Dear Mother, end our loneliness,
Dear Mother, protect and guide us,
Dear Mother, remove the mists that blind,
Dear Mother, unloose the chains that bind,
Dear Mother, end our loneliness.

“Nexius, you told us before that Yountians pray to a Mother,” Sally said that evening at the captain’s table. “Can you tell us more with

your colleagues here?"

Nexius, with a shrug that indicated he was a warrior not a theologian, looked at the other Yountians around the table.

Shaking his head in disbelief, yet not so vigorously as to close off discussion, Sanford said, "Worshipping a female! I have puzzled over this since that day, Nexius, when you deciphered Sally's dream. I can only conclude that you are a strange breed of papists, elevating the Virgin over the Father. But that hardly makes sense to me. I confess I am at a loss."

"No," said a tall officer sitting next to the ship's captain, laughing a little. "Though we have Catholics in Yount. And Jews and Muslims too. You will see."

Sanford pondered these tidings. His years in India and China had forced him to wider thinking than his demeanour might sometimes suggest. He pressed his enquiry. "So you know the Bible in Yount?"

"We do, Mr. Sanford," replied the tall officer. "But from your world, from Big Land, not as a part of our own. We believe in the Nurturing Mother, who had two sons. Like you, we do not always agree among ourselves on matters of faith. Some believe both sons rebelled against their mother, but that one atoned while the other remains adamant in his rebellion. Others say only one son rebelled, he who still disobeys. All agree, however it started, that the two brothers are at war, and that the Mother weeps."

"Cain and Abel," said Sanford.

"Yes, perhaps like Cain and Abel," agreed the tall officer. "Also like in Big Land, blood has been spilled over these rival interpretations. The only certainty is that the Mother weeps."

The tall officer addressed his dining companions as a group. "But, come, surely these are matters better addressed if we make it through to Yount: you will have ample opportunity to speak with the Learned Doctors, with the Gremium for Guided Knowledge, with the Rabbi of Palombeay if you wish. The Rabbi would be a good source for your questions."

"How is that?" asked Sanford.

“I know little of him myself,” said the tall officer. “But I do know that the Rabbi serves as a spokesman for all the Karket-soomi religious communities that have washed up on our hidden shores.”

“A Jew?” Sanford said. “To represent Christians?”

“Yes,” said the Yountian. “Speaks for Muslims too, as I understand it, for Hindus and so on. Probably I, who knows so little of your faiths, should not say this, but perhaps the case is that, no matter how different your faiths seem to you in their native soil, they are less different in truth and principle when seen in a foreign place.”

“Buttons and beeswax,” Barnabas said. “Where is this Palombeay then? Far?”

The ship’s captain answered, “No farther than anywhere else on Yount, at least viewed from our current vantage point. Palombeay is a district in Yount Great-Port, what you could call The Foreigners’ Quarter. Most of the arrivals from Big Land live there, under Crown protection.”

“Palombeay’s nickname is ‘Sabi-na-karket-soom,’” said the tall Yountish officer. “Which means ‘Little Big Land,’ if you see the play on words.”

For the first time since leaving James Kidlington, Sally smiled. The smile faded quickly when she realized that such wordplay reminded her of James.

Barnabas noticed the smile, and sent a grateful look to the tall officer who had so graciously answered their questions. It struck Barnabas that the tall officer was handsome and young, with an assured manner.

Without being a coxcomb, thought Barnabas. Poor Sally grieves for her Mr. Kidlington, and I understand why, but she cannot grieve forever. Who knows how long we may have to reside in Yount?

The tall officer raised his glass to the McDoons. “Now I beg leave to turn the topic elsewhere. First, allow me to introduce myself: I am Reglum Bammary, head of the scientific team onboard. The *Gallinule* is what we call a ‘tough ship’ or ‘fierce frigate’ in translation from the Yountish, an explorer’s vessel fit for battle. Every tough

ship carries a scientific team, like Banks and Forster on Cook's voyages, or the apostles of Linneaus on Swedish East Indiamen. I am a lieutenant, serving in the Fencibles, of which Nexius Dexius is highest ranking onboard. The Fencibles have a special branch, which can be translated as the 'Analytical Bureau,' or 'A.B.' for short. We Anglophones joke that it is actually the 'Abbey.' The A.B.'s task is to assist the crew and the marines with our knowledge of zoology, botany, mathematics, whatever is required. More broadly, we gather data for analysis in Yount, in our search for answers to . . . our current circumstances—our dilemma.”

Barnabas thought, *Handsome, young, and a scholar it seems. I do hope Sally is able to see past her grief. If not now, perhaps in a while.* Out loud, he said, “Your English is exceptionally fine, Mr. Rammary, excuse me, Bammary. All of you officers speak lovely English but yours, sir, is a marvel. How did you come by it?”

Reglum nodded. “English is my native tongue. Actually, I am bilingual. My maternal grandfather was English, you see, Lieutenant Humphrey Hiller-Thorpe, who served with Commodore Anson and who, in your year 1742, fell overboard during action against the French off the Mascarene Islands. By great good fortune, though he did not think so at the time, the gateway to Yount was near, he fell through, and washed up in Small Land. He married a woman of Yount, who bore him three children, including my mother. We spoke English as a cradle-tongue. Also, I was sent back. I went up to Oxford, took my degree at Brasenose. Passed as the son of an Indian prince, don't you know? Even learned a spot of Hindi to pull it off, even though I was hardly pukka.”

Barnabas laughed. “Good one, that!”

“Ah,” sighed Reglum. “I miss those days. Above all, the access to knowledge from ancient to modern, and from all corners of the globe—*your* globe.”

Sally, dabbing her mouth with a napkin, said, “The Termuydens took care to send out several cases of books . . .”

“Oh yes,” said Reglum. “Means more than you might realize,

Miss McLeish. Of all the treasures we fetch back from Karket-soom, the books and journals are among the most precious. Right now, for instance, we must settle for copies of *The Quarterly Review* and *The Edinburgh Review* that are three years old!"

Barnabas said, "Sally could make you *au courant* before the bells stopped pealing on St. Adelsina's day, couldn't you, Sally?"

"No time for that this evening, I fear," said the captain. "We need our rest now, as we begin to test for the gateway on the morrow."

The next day, far away from shipping lanes in the southern reaches of the Indian Ocean, Sanford got the answer to his questions about the structures on deck. The crew gathered at the "sheds." They dismantled part of the sheds, revealing machinery within, and a great wheel in each. The wheel, like a mill-wheel, had shovels attached, and was itself attached to a great hinged, brass rod that disappeared below deck. The hinges were opened so that the mill-wheels hung suspended over the sides of the ship, half in the water. Other crewmembers removed the hatch-cover from the pedestal or dais mounted in the middle of the deck between the wheelhouses. Another team removed a tarp off a long object lashed on deck to the side. Sanford had assumed cannon might be under the tarp, but it was a long iron tube, nearly as tall as the main mast. The team carried the tube to the opening on deck, hoisted the tube up, and inserted it, securing it with great bolts and a flange. The captain led the McDoons below, to a room into which the tube descended. The captain unlocked the door, stepped back, and revealed . . .

"A steam engine!?" said Sanford. "Our engineers at home have tried for years to build one that will drive a ship, but without success. Some trifling efforts up in Scotland, and we hear reports that the Americans have made headway, but nothing that could move an ocean-going vessel."

"We Yountians only introduced engines ten years ago," said the captain. "The sails are not just for disguise, since the engines are still weak and unreliable."

The steam engine and paddle-wheels were not the only surprise on the *Gallinule*. The day after the steam engine was unpacked, the captain unlocked another foreroom. In the middle of the room was a cabinet reaching to the ceiling and about five feet long on each side, set within an armature and on gimbals so that the entire construct stayed level while the ship pitched and rolled. The cabinet was a complicated mass of brass rods, levers, and loops, polished teak slats and shelves that could be pulled out, that rotated and swivelled, with coloured bands and dots painted on in enamel and hundreds of numbers and geometrical figures engraved on faceted surfaces. Large books sat on tables flanking the cabinet. The walls of the room were covered floor to ceiling with charts and maps. The hair on the back of Barnabas's neck prickled: he knew every major and minor trade route in the known world, but those routes were not pictured here.

Reglum joined them, along with another man. The ship captain said, "Reglum will need to explain most of this because the concepts are difficult for me to tell you in English. And also Mr. Dorentius Bunce, whom I introduce to you now as our Chief Fulginator."

Dorentius Bunce bowed, a slight man whose cap sat crumpled atop his head. His English was as good as Reglum's, which seemed to peeve the latter. "Thank you, Captain," said Dorentius. "I suppose our guests will wonder first about my title, and then about the machine behind me. *Mirabile dictu*, the two matters are related, as I shall now explain."

Sally leaned forward to catch a better glimpse of the machine behind. Something about the geometrical figures resonated deep inside her; she thought she understood for a second the logic of the interlacing rods and levers.

"We sail soon off Big Land's maps," said Dorentius. "We seek the gateway and then we must navigate with great precision through the Interrugal Lands, the places in between, to arrive in Yount. The process we render as 'fulgination' in English. I am the one who directs and controls this operation. You are familiar with the

ansible? Right, well, this is the next development along the ansible trajectory—an ansible amplified and tuned beyond any ansible of the usual kind. The machine in this room is the apparatus necessary to detect the right roads, to calculate our position, to extrapolate the correct trajectory—”

Reglum Bammary interrupted. “The Great Confluxion conjoined our worlds, but not so literally as if the Liverpool docks were suddenly to appear in the London basin. The connection is more ethereal, a series of gates and strands that allow visitors to pass from one world to the other almost without seeming to. Fulgination is a metaphysical art, buttressed by mathematics, pneumatics, eudiometry, and hydrostatics.”

Dorentius reclaimed the explanation. “The mathematics is infinitely complex. Do you know Euler’s rendition of the calculus? Lagrange’s?”

“Rotational symmetry groups, bichromatic plane patterns,” broke in Reglum again.

“—conics and spirals, tangents and vortices—” redoubled Dorentius.

“Gentlemen, gentlemen,” laughed the ship’s captain. “You make our heads ache with your knowledge!” He turned to the McDoons and winked, “Mr. Bammary and Mr. Bunce are competitors, you see, since the one is an Oxford man and the other went to Cambridge.”

“Caius College,” said Dorentius, with a challenging glare at Reglum, who affected Oxonian disdain.

“Tell us rather about the Fulginator itself,” pled the ship’s captain, hastening to add, “You first, Dorentius, then you, Reglum.” He winked again.

“There is nothing like this in Big Land. The closest analogy might be to Pascal’s ‘sautoir,’ his calculating machine, but that never worked, and besides it was not intended for the same purpose. Though Pascal’s hexagram theorem resembles the alphanumerical 42.b on the inverse field of quadrant 17 on the Fulginator’s right octasphere . . .” Dorentius trailed off, lost in thought.

Reglum took his opening. “The coordinates derived through manipulation of the Fulginator’s calculating schemata correspond to the positions on the wall-charts. The relative positions of the stars are also part of the calculations, though of course the stars will not be, with some odd exceptions, the same en route or at our destination as they are in Big Land. The books you see are gazetteers and concordances. This is how we pick our way forward and back through the tangled mazes of the Interrugal Lands.”

Dorentius returned to the conversation. “In Big Land the approaches to Yount, the gateways, are—with one exception that we know of—always in the southern areas of the Indian Ocean. The Arab mariners knew something of them, not as gateways but as places where the sea was more than normally confused and dangerous, places that ate ships. The gateway moves greatly within that area, sometimes nearer to Africa, sometimes farther south towards the eternal ice, sometimes farther north towards India. The gate shifts because of winds in the ether, ruptures in the Interrugal Lands, xantrophicius forces in the voids surrounding our respective worlds, coroscular flows and concatenations of chulchoisical disturbances...” He began to mutter again.

Sally brought him back with a question: “The exception . . . ?”

“Ah, yes,” said Dorentius. “Gateways appear in one other area, a stretch of the mid-Atlantic between Bermuda and Florida. We only learned of this in recent times, when a shipload of Lutheran Pietists en route from Hamburg to Philadelphia came through to Yount. Just over a century ago. The Pietists seek connections to Big Land, are thus often volunteers for even the most hazardous duty when the Fencibles or the A.B. send people from Yount into your world.”

Nexius Dexius had joined the group. “Fraulein Reimer,” he said. “She is one of them, of that society.”

Scrutinizing the Fulginator, Sanford said, “Superb craftsmanship.”

“Absolutely first rate,” said Reglum. “It has to be because the need for precision is incredibly high. If a calculation is awry by just a thousandth of a percentage, the *Gallinule* might wander off into . . .

lost space, and worse. Notice the goodness of fit, the intricacy of the escapements and gears. This is the most advanced fulginator ever built.”

Dorentius rushed to add, “We owe something of the precision milling to English craft as well. We purchased—I believe you have met our Purser in London? Nexius’s brother?—a machine lathe from the firm of Henry Maudslay, shipped it to Yount. The best in Big Land. Technically against your anti-exportation laws but, I promise you, all in a good cause.”

Sanford pointed to another feature of the Fulginator.

“Well spotted,” said Reglum. “Fulgination is a mathematical art, manifested through variable vibrations, verging on music. What you see, those wires strung taut, the membranes and short tubes, the glass and crystal enclosures, all those are calculating mechanisms too, ones that capture the xantrophicius reverberations and the echoes of chulchoisical forces. The attached styli convert these movements into mathematical formulae and patterns, inscribing them onto the cylinders you see there.”

Barnabas and Sanford recalled a humming on the far edge of their minds. Sally remembered the keening sounds in her sleep on Mincing Lane.

“No one is allowed in here,” said Dorentius, “except the fulgination team and the A.B.s. The door is enjambed with brass, and all the mouldings are brass, to keep out rats and mice. Would be disastrous to have them gnawing and running in the Fulginator’s workings.”

Reglum smiled and looked at Sally. “We don’t allow cats in here either—it would not do to have the ship pitched into a blind maze because a cat sought a perch in the Fulginator! But we love cats, have a whole ship full of them, give them free range everywhere else. Do I understand, Miss Sally, that *you* have a cat with you?”

So Isaak joined in the plots, alliances, wars, and ambushes of the *Gallinule’s* feline tribes, quickly becoming the queen of one deck, and a scourge of all rodents within her domain. Crew members called Isaak the *tes muddry*, which Sally learned meant “golden claw.” Sally,

whose memories of her first trip to Yount would be bittersweet, was glad that Isaak was happy. If only the cook could see Isaak now!

At dinner that night Sally showed such interest in the Fulginator, and played Dorentius so skilfully off Reglum (and vice versa), that she was invited to observe the fulgination process.

“You can start by learning the charts,” said Dorentius.

“I will give you a dictionary, so you can translate from Yountish,” said Reglum.

“Those charts,” said Barnabas. “They’re like nothing I have ever seen. Yet I have it docketed in my mind that those charts don’t show Yount either. So what *does* Yount look like? In all this time, we have never seen a map of the place!”

Reglum nodded. “We have atlases here and will show you. In short, Yount is our name for three large islands—”

“—and many dozen small islands,” interrupted Dorentius.

“Yes, yes,” said Reglum. “The Liviates and the Northern Fief-Islands, but now we’ve gotten ahead of ourselves. The largest island is Yount Major, also known as Farther Yount, where Yount Great-Port is, and much else besides. Yount Minor lies to the west, and Nearer Yount to the east.”

“Of course,” interrupted Dorentius again. “We use here the English equivalents for their names, in the original Yountish Nearer Yount is called Orn . . .”

The other Yountish officers at the table stopped their own conversations to join in describing Yount to the McDoons. Nothing interests mariners far out to sea as much as describing their home, in increasing detail as the distance between ship and home grows wider. In short order, the McDoons were overwhelmed with facts and figures. Barnabas waved his hands in mock-distress.

“Beans and bacon,” he said. “Our heads swim with all this knowledge. Obviously Yount is bigger than we had imagined! You’ll have to grant us some time to encompass all that is new!”

“Yet not all is new either,” said Sally. “I mean, most things are: the steam engine and the Fulginator, and, oh, for instance, the

decorations you place all around your doors and windows—we've never seen anything like those. Still, there is much that is familiar to us. Look, here, the tea service we are using now, why, it is the same or else very like the china we use in Karket-soom, right down to the indigo pheasant motif."

Noting to himself Sally's use of the Yountish word, Reglum said, "This service is from Karket-soom. We are too few in Yount to sustain all forms of industry, so are forced to import many things such as porcelain."

"It is a lovely pattern," said an officer across the table from Sally and Reglum, a thick-set curly haired man with agile fingers constantly in motion as if he were playing an invisible flute. "Reglum's right, this does come from Karket-soom, from Dutch merchants, but it was made in China. I know because I am Noreous Minicate, Purser of the *Gallinule*, and so responsible for all such purchases onboard."

Noreous Minicate picked up the teapot and let the candlelight play off its glaze, saying, "You see that? True porcelain. We could not make this in Yount even if it were financially sound to do so. We simply cannot because we lack a key ingredient for the making of porcelain, an ingredient you call 'china clay.' Being Sabo-soom, the Small Land, we suffer such lacks in many areas of industry. We do not have an entire world with which to trade."

"Ah," sighed Dorentius. "What I would not give for porcelain fittings in the Fulginator. Much better conductivity, better resonance for the coroscular forces."

"Why not trade with us?" asked Sanford, who guessed the answer even as he spoke.

The Yountians shook their heads as one.

"Too dangerous," said the ship's captain. "Each crossing from Sabo-soom to Karket-soom is a great risk."

"The ships are too small," said Noreous.

"Practically no cargo space," added Reglum. "Guns and cannon take up a great part of a tough ship's capacity."

"Fulgination is an unpredictable art," said Dorentius, with pride

and sadness mixed. “Unacceptably erratic from a commercial point of view.”

Sanford adopted a mild version of his “qualifying” tone, saying, “Yet you seem to have commercial agents all over our world.”

“No, no,” said Noreous, his fingers making circles in the air to keep time with his phrases. “I mean, yes, we have a network of factors, like the Termuydens at the Cape and the Landemanns in Hamburg. Salmius Nalmius orchestrates it all from London. Only there aren’t so many as you make it out to be, not at all, perhaps twenty families in all, families we Small Landers have known and trusted for generations.”

Something gnawed at the back of Barnabas’s mind. “Have you a factor in India then, or perhaps more than one?” he asked.

The officers looked at each other, shifted in their chairs, sent side glances to Nexius. Nexius nodded almost imperceptibly to the purser.

Noreous said, “Yes. One in Calcutta, and one in Bombay.”

“In Bombay,” asked Barnabas. “It is not a Khodja merchant named—”

“No,” said Noreous, tapping his fingers quickly. “No, but I have read that you know our contact there all the same: a staunch friend of Yount named Sitterjee.”

“Sitterjee!” exclaimed Barnabas and Sanford together. “Our Parsee friend!”

“The same,” said Noreous.

Nexius rose to his feet and said, “You still have many questions, Barnabas. Here, we officers know only some of your story and how your story—*dassamirran*—connects with ours and with the key. Reglum, tell Barnabas what we know from our orders.”

Reglum said, “Truly, we on the *Gallinule* know only what we have seen in the dossier our commanders gave us. These are deep matters beyond the thinking of any one man . . . or woman. The Learned Doctors took an interest in you, Barnabas, long, long ago. Before you were even born, in fact. It was your mother who first came to their attention.”

Barnabas opened his mouth, but no “beans and bacon” emanated. At last he said, “My *mother*? I barely knew her. Your grandmother, Sally. I’ve told you. She died when I was but a boy, eight years old. Sally, *your* mother, my sister, never really knew our mother at all. When she died—your grandmother—your mother and I were sent to be bred up by my uncle, the Old McDoon.”

Reglum coughed lightly. “I apologize for this. It is intrusive, I know, but we feel it best you know what we know. The better to help you when you arrive with the key.”

Absentmindedly, Barnabas fished for the key in his pocket. “No, it is acceptable,” said the London merchant. “I asked to know this. But what a marvel to discover that strangers not even of this world, my world, have known of me since my birth . . . knew my mother.”

“Your mother, sir,” said Reglum. “Born Belladonna Brownlee in Edinburgh in the middle of the last century. The Brownlees were less wealthy than the McDoons but a solid respectable family all the same. The Brownlees had been trading with the Continent, mostly through Amsterdam and Hamburg. Their main correspondents were, well, you can guess, members of the Termuyden and Landemann families. Pure happenstance, a coincidence or a gesture from God, interpret it however you wish. Your mother, Belladonna, had an unusual reputation already by the end of her childhood. According to the reports we have, she cut a strange swath in Edinburgh society. Many people thought she was a witch. I am sorry to put it in such crude terms.”

Sanford looked sharply at the Yountians and said, “Do not toy with us, gentlemen! We have come too far for cruel tricks. And think of what his niece must endure!”

Nexius stood up again. He bowed low, almost to the table, looking like a bear trying ballet. “*Kumsi majirra asal*,” he said. “We are pained to give pain, and we beg your forgiveness. We are your sworn friends. This we do for the key—and to get Tom back to you.”

Reglum continued, “Belladonna born Brownlee possessed a strong desire to come to a place she did not know, and an ability

—deemed witchly—to create visions of that place. A natural philosopher like myself, rejecting the concept of witchcraft, would say, Barnabas, that your mother had an innate ability to ‘feel far’ the way an ansible does. There’s not much more to tell. Your mother died a natural if premature death, a fever took her. The point is that her gift is exceedingly rare and it can be passed to offspring. The key can only be used by one with that gift, so reports from the Landemanns and Termuydens about your mother naturally aroused great interest among the Learned Doctors. I can only surmise that they see the potential in you for your mother’s ‘far-feeling,’ and so had the key sent to you.”

Getting to his feet, Barnabas said, “To speak here, with strangers, of things that I have never spoken of with anyone is a matter beyond my comprehension. My uncle would not speak to me of my mother, his sister-in-law. He quashed all my enquiries in that direction. Tonight you have told me far more than I have ever imagined. Pray allow me to retire now: I must ponder all that you have said.”

The ship’s captain said, “Please, let us all to bed soon. Tomorrow is our last day in Karket-soom—so Dorentius informs me. Let us prepare with rest that we may not enjoy again for months to come.”

In her cabin, Sally considered the evening’s discoveries. Isaak jumped up on the bed, walked around in a tightening circle and flumped down in the crook of Sally’s arm. Sally said to the cat, “Uncle Barnabas has more secrets than the crone who guards the Well at the Edge of the World. Secrets he himself knew nothing about . . . secret secrets. So, my grandmother was a far-dreamer. She had the longing for that which is foreign and strange, ‘*was fremd und seltsam ist*,’ as Fraulein Reimer says. Of course, the fraulein fits that description herself: a Pietist from Hamburg who fell through . . . a hole in the world. . . . Tom, where are you? What news I must share with you. Our grandmother, a witch. Uncle Barnabas was in love. *I’m in . . . love.*”

An image of Tom came into her mind: Tom as a boy hunched over

a ledger book writing with a pen almost as long as his arm. He looked up and smiled with her eyes and cheekbones. An image of Barnabas's Rehana came to her, but it looked like a female version of Reglum Bammary. *Deep dark eyes and glossy black hair*, Sally thought. A blurry image of another young woman, an African girl but in a city that looked like London, flitted across her mind; Sally had no idea who the young woman was. An image of James Kidlington sitting alone in a cell erased all else. Sally pushed that back, squeezing tears away from her eyes. "Sleep," she commanded herself against the pain. Sleep obliged. Sally woke up for one second more. "*Sehnsucht*," she said and then, thinking of Tom, she fell asleep without dreaming. It was the last dreamless night Sally would have until the *Gallinule* reached Yount.

Tom fended off a branch as the Cretched Man's ship sailed close in along a shore overhung with giant trees and choked with undergrowth. Billy Sea-Hen, Pinch, and Tat'head did the same, cursing as stinging insects flew at them from the greenery. The bosun called out yet another depth-reading, sailors with long poles pushed away roots and debris.

"Well, Tom," said Billy. "We knows we're not in London anymore, what with wasps the size of chickens flyin' at us . . ."

A large branch tangled itself in the rigging, forcing the ship almost onto the shore. Overhead the leaves rustled as if a large fish were swimming through the foliage. Something with webbed paws and too many eyes jumped from the tree onto the deck, long ears streaming behind it. It seized a sailor, tucked him under its arm like a loaf of bread, and bounded towards the railing.

"No!" yelled Tom and the Minders in unison. Tat'head dived on top of the snarling creature. The monster dropped the sailor, wrapped its talons around Tat'head's neck.

Tom grabbed the thing's donkey-ears, pulled back hard.

The thing howled, let loose of Tat'head, and grabbed Tom's hands.

Before Tom could respond, the leaper bit two of Tom's fingers off, sheared away from his right hand.

Tom screamed but grappled his enemy, hoisted it up, rammed its multi-eyed head against the mast over and over again until its neck snapped and its brains were smeared on the wood.

Tom looked dully at his bleeding hand, heard far away the shouts of Billy and Tat and Jambres. The last thing he saw before he collapsed was a finger in a puddle of blood on the deck.

For the next three days, fever smothered Tom. Blood kept seeping from the wound; something in the thing's saliva slowed coagulation. Jambres put forth a power to staunch the flow and quiet the fever. Everyone on ship prayed for Tom's recovery.

On the morning of the fourth day, the fever broke.

Billy Sea-Hen, sitting beside Tom, said, "By Wee Willie Hawken, you're back."

Jambres, sitting on the other side of the bed, smiled.

"Here he is just, Tom Two-Fingers," said Billy. "That's what we've taken to callin' you, lad. Two-Fingers!"

Billy reached down, brought up a jar sloshing with alcohol, which he presented to Tom.

"Here, we saved this for you," Billy said. "We could not find the other one. We think the monster swallowed it."

In the jar floated a finger.

"Oh, our second gift, young master," said Billy, bending down to collect a long, flat box. "You earned these, right enough—the sailor whose life you saved, and Tat, they thank you in particular."

Billy opened the box, which held two long fleshy ears, grey-yellow, still moist, pinned to the bottom like a butterfly.

"Should be the thing's teeth," Billy said, with a feral smile. "But we daren't touch its gob for fear of poison."

Tom tried to thank Billy but felt suddenly sick.

Jambres stroked Tom's brow, whispered, "Sleep, Thomas, sleep. Restore yourself. Soon we will sail into the place called Sanctuary."

Some time later, Tom looked out the window of a house by a beryline sea. Gulls with silver wings flew by. Sanderlings, the palest grey with twinkling black legs, ran to and fro, chasing the surf, and being chased by it up to the sea-kale and blite on the tideline. The door opened in the room behind him, and the Cretched Man said, "Good morning, Thomas."

Tom continued to gaze out the window. A gull plucked a crab from the water.

"Come, Thomas. You dally. Or do you ignore me of purpose?"

Tom stirred, turned halfway towards the Cretched Man, and said, "Forgive me, Jambres. I meant no reproach. It's just that, after all these weeks tracking through the void, my mind is oppressed."

The Cretched Man smiled in sad understanding as he said, "Oppression is the drainage of our punishment, the ichor squeezed slowly from our sin until we drown in it."

Tom looked back out the window. He saw someone farther down the beach gathering kelp, one of the Minders. The apprentice from Mincing Lane said, "To me, it feels more like a sort of animalcule chafing and gnawing at my mind."

"As you wish," said the Cretched Man with a terse laugh. "I deny no man his own image of despair. Extract or insect, however we see it, what you feel is the counterweight to longing."

Tom nodded slowly, then spoke. "What is this place? Is this Yount at last?"

"Nearly. We sit on Yount's borders, if we may speak in such terms in the interstitial realms. Though the echoes and wind-walls make talk of borders here illusory."

"How far then?" asked Tom.

"One day more, perhaps two by ship, with Ermandel's Toe and the Dog Star as our guides."

"Yet this place," Tom gestured around the room and out the window, "is a home of some kind to you, I take it."

The Cretched Man looked past Tom, out the window, to the wheeling gulls and the man piling kelp on a wheelbarrow down the

strand. "Nay," he said so softly Tom barely heard him. "A ciborium without the host, an empty chalice. Not home. But a haven for a while."

Tom heard again the note in Jambres's voice, like a fracture deep in an otherwise unflawed gem. Using the hand that now lacked two fingers, Tom pointed to the kelp-gathering figure on the beach. "Billy Sea-Hen and his lads call this place Sanctuary. They spoke to me of it before we arrived here yesterday."

The Cretched Man, whose carapace was maroon and subdued this morning, murmured as if Tom were not present, "Sanctuary, it is. It's just not home. No place to rest. 'Living in darkness, lacking all light, I sear myself away.'"

"What?" said Tom.

"Nothing," said the Cretched Man. His gaze returned to his surroundings, fell upon Tom's still-extended arm. "Let's have a look at your damaged hand, shall we?"

Tom offered his right hand, bandaged and missing the little and ring fingers.

"Hmmm," said the Cretched Man. "Improved, I am happy to see. But, alas, only to a point: there is no incarnative spell or medicine that will regenerate your lost digits."

Tom turned away and said nothing. Without the Cretched Man's ministrations in the aftermath of the attack, Tom might have died of blood loss or infection. Tom hesitated to place too great a faith in gratitude but could not help himself.

Outside the house, just above the high tide line, was a small yard of coarse beach-grass flanked by low dunes. A rough table and chairs made of pinewood sat in the yard. A teapot was on the table, along with biscuits, lard, and smoked fish. Gulls circled above the table but did not land.

"Quick," said the Cretched Man, pointing at the skreeking gulls. "Their reticence won't last."

As they ate, Tom looked at the ship anchored in the cove. "You know," he said. "I never thought to ask how she is named."

“Well,” said Jambres, swallowing a bit of smoked mackerel before replying. “It is my own private joke to name her the *Viaticum*, but the men call her the *Seek-by-Night*.”

“Where’s the flag?” Tom asked. The long pennant with the bloody orb was missing from the top mast.

“There,” said Jambres, pointing back to the house behind them. “We always take it down when we reach this place, and hoist it here.” The pennant streamed out from a flagpole on the roof.

“That’s writing!” Tom said. The curling streaks of red dripping from the eye or moon were words masterfully stitched, too small to be read as such at a distance. “*Facienti quod . . . Deus . . . gratiam*. I cannot make it all out. Latin, but what does it say?”

“*Facienti quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam*,” said the Cretched Man. “The motto for our modest ark.”

“God will . . . not . . .” Tom hesitated. “Making . . .”? No, my skill does not answer. I am not Sally with languages. What does it mean?”

“To the one who does what lies within him, God does not deny grace,” recited the Cretched Man. The banner snapped as the wind rose. The red-limned orb streamed over the house, with red words swirling in its wake.

Tom turned back to the ocean. Without looking at Jambres, he said, “What lies within you?”

The Cretched Man did not answer at once. He smiled with his pristine teeth as he smeared lard on a biscuit, and said, “What lies within any man? You, for example, or Billy, or your Uncle Barnabas?”

Tom turned to his breakfast companion and said, “You evade my question. I have earned an answer, a true one.” He waved his bandaged hand.

The Cretched Man smiled again as he spoke, “Elixate your pique, young Thomas, and think hard upon the enormity of what you ask. We could talk here on the beach for days and years, and still not begin to whelm the first rampart of your query.”

Tom would not be put off. "I want not the cyclopaedia, only a clear answer."

"I know not where to begin," the Cretched Man said, waving away a gull that hovered above the table. "My name and origin you know, though you continue to resist the truth of my tale. I am a man, like you, though my fate has been unlike that of other men's. I have the same soul and I suffer the same doubts and fears—more even because I have accrued more wisdom."

A line of cormorants flapped low and ragged just above the waves. Tom followed their progress while he listened to the Cretched Man.

"Like all children of Eve," said Jambres, "I have a set of tasks to perform. My duties were not always clear to me, but I have come to understand the order of things and my place in that order."

"What is that order?" asked Tom.

The Cretched Man stared a long time at the horizon, as if he might see Yount just beyond the edge of sight. At last he said, "A pattern, an imbrication of duties and deeds, of actions and reactions, of loves and hatreds, woven by all of us together, wittingly or no, on a loom designed by God. Regularity with uniqueness. Like the vests your uncle wears. I like his style, by the way; he has genuine taste. Have you not noticed the regularity of the patterns he affects, all his calicosh and allapeen and barragon designs? Yet no two sprays or roundels are ever precisely alike; each has its own individuality within the pattern."

Tom imagined Uncle Barnabas in the partners' room, wearing one of his favourite vests. Tom almost heard him say, "Figs and feathers!"

The Cretched Man looked for a second at his own coat. Tom followed his gaze. The Cretched Man's coat seemed to vary by day or even by the hour, sometimes being one shade of red, sometimes another, with striations and patterns that never seemed to be the same twice. Tom had grown used to the Cretched Man's coat, as he had grown used to so much else on the voyage, but paused now to consider the garment in light of the conversation.

"Do you know?" said Tom. "I have never seen you without your

coat on, no matter how warm the weather might be. That's a mighty deep-woven overcoat, and it is not particularly cold here. Why do you persist in wearing your coat then?"

The coat seemed to answer before Jambres did. It rippled, the pattern within this morning's maroon-red shifting subtly. Or so Tom thought—he could not focus on the coat for any length of time before his eyes grew weary. The Cretched Man said, "Persist? *Persist?* I have no choice in the matter. Look closely, Thomas, as closely as you can, as you have never looked before."

Tom, with sudden loathing, forced himself to look at the coat. He looked past the glamour that deflected his and everyone else's direct gaze, past the misty general impression of an old-fashioned overcoat to the hard specificity of this coat on this man. He looked at its pattern, a reticulated series that teased him with its mathematical meanings before dissolving into something else. He admired the cut of the cloth, the contoured tailoring, the seamless fit, without any gap between coat and—

"Skin!" Tom said in a loud whisper. He looked at the Cretched Man, whose expression was that of Prometheus on the rock.

"Skin," confirmed Jambres. "Yes, Thomas, my skin. I cannot take off my coat, this carmine integument, because it is part of me, laced onto me with a hundred veins and arteries."

Tom recoiled but not as far as he might have. He whispered, "But why?"

"Thomas, Thomas," said Jambres. "Unstop your mind at last, and understand the story I have told you."

Tom breathed out, "Punishment."

"Of course," said Jambres. "Part of my penance. 'I clothed thee also with brodered work . . . I girded thee about with fine linen . . . covered thee with silk.'"

Tom stared at the Cretched Man's face, wanting to look at the coat but fearing to do so.

"Actually," said Jambres with a wry note. "I *do* get to take my coat off. Or have it removed. Once every fifty years, which is why I

am out of fashion, dreadfully so, most of the time. I am . . . peeled. I moult, like a snake. I am born again, a little bit at a time over the centuries.”

“Does it . . . ?” asked Tom.

“Oh yes,” said Jambres. “Very much.”

Tom looked at his bandaged hand, moved it under the table.

“Reflect further upon my story,” said the Cretched Man. “A coat woven on a lattice of veins is the least of it. My entire body is not my own. Long ago, I looked unlike myself today. I was not white, the colour of shrouds and fungi and cataracts. I am told I am beautiful, but I think not. I was far more beautiful in my original state, because it was myself. I am told that one day, when I have redeemed and expiated myself, when all the flayings are done, the final circumcision performed, I will have been peeled back to my beautiful original shape and colour, the brown of my native Egypt before I challenged Moses in the court of the Pharaoh. Until then I will remain viduated, deprived, and bereaved.”

A gull landed on the far side of the table. Keeping its eye on Tom and especially on the Cretched Man, it lunged for a scrap of smoked mackerel. Jambres ignored it. Another gull joined the first. Tom got up from the table. Jambres continued to stare off into the sea. Tom walked away from the table, leaving the Cretched Man deep in thought with gulls wheeling just over his head and touching down on the table.



Chapter 10: A Song Out of Silence

Onboard the *Gallinule*, the Fencibles mounted small cannon, one- and two-pounders with flared muzzles like blunderbusses, on swivels set into the railings. At each station, they stored three other cannon of the same size, ready to replace the mounted cannons from their swivels in rapid succession. They wheeled large cannon up to the gun-ports below decks. Each man practised shooting his musket at targets dragged behind the ship.

“Look,” said Barnabas. “A dolphin!” A grey bottlenose had jumped over a target behind the ship. All the men of Yount watched the dolphin. Several made the sign they had all made when they chanted the Common Prayer. By the end of the day, three or more dolphins led the *Gallinule*, leaping and looking back at the crew members with their side-set eyes.

“They are the Mother’s,” said Nexius, touching the brooch they all wore. “They protect us and we protect them.”

That evening the ship’s captain gathered the crew again on deck. Reglum translated for the McDoons.

DANIEL A. RABUZZI

“Tonight we leave Karket-soom,” said the ship’s captain. “We begin our return to Sabo-soom. Mother protect us!”

The crew roared back, “Mother protect us!”

The captain pointed to the foremast and shouted, “Hoist the moon!”

Crew members hauled on a rope attached to a winch on the main spar, and brought up a large silver plate to the level of the spar. There the plate, six feet across or more, swayed in the wind.

Reglum said to the McDoons, “There is no moon either on the tangled roads or in Yount, so we bring our own moon with us.”

As one, the crew turned to look at the moon in the sky, a crescent moon just visible through the clouds.

“We seek your light,” the crew yelled. “Give us your light, oh Large Moon, send your light to the Small Moon on our ship.”

As one, the crew turned to face the silver plate swinging from the spar, and chanted:

The moon is eaten
But we need a lamp to light our way home.
Baffled boys
Cry in the dark
Lie down.
Down in the dark
Drown in the dark
Lie down.

At this, every man knelt down on one knee and bowed his head.

The moon is eaten
But we need a lamp to light our way home.
Unveiled boys
Fly from the dark
Stand up.
Up from the dark

Back from the dark.
Stand up.

At that, every man stood up.

“Our Moon will light our way home!” shouted the ship’s captain.
The crew shouted, “Home!” and dispersed.

“Come,” said the ship’s captain, turning to the McDoons. “There is one other ceremony to perform.”

Nexius, Reglum, and the ship’s captain sat with the McDoons in the captain’s quarters. On the table were three silver knives, each about four inches long, with a dolphin leaping over a moon incised in the centre of the blade. Reglum said, “These are *hatma* knives. Every member of the crew has one. We ask that you each take one and wear it in its sheath at all times as we cross the Interrugal Lands.”

As the McDoons reached for the knives, Reglum raised his hand and said, “There is more. Listen carefully, and please do not be offended or distraught. The *hatma* knife is only to be used when all other means have failed you, when your only remaining choice is to perform *hatmoi*.”

“And what,” said Sanford, putting the knife he had selected back on the table, “is that?”

“Suicide,” Reglum said gently. “Mutual suicide. Each of us has a *hatmoril*, a partner to whom we are pledged, one to the other, to help perform *hatmoi* should that be the only path left. So that no one is ever left to face something worse.”

“We are Christians,” Sanford said. “You ask us to do what we cannot and will not do. I *am* offended . . . and I fear for your souls.”

Reglum rounded the table and spoke again in a very gentle voice. “Mr. Sanford, please understand the spirit in which we request this—or offer this. Think us not heathens: the Nurturing Mother allows us such an outcome only in times of utterly final need. It is her act of mercy towards us, so she can gather us back to her bosom. If we are lost first, somewhere in the trackless wastes of the Interrugal Lands, she may not find us, and then we are truly

lost forever. Releasing our own life in those non-places is an act of our own will, the will She gave us, and so lights a little flame in the darkness, a flame which She can use to find us.”

Sanford shook his head. “I will fight to my end to save any one of you,” he said with a ferocity that sent shudders through Sally. “I fear neither the terror by night nor the arrow that flies in the day, neither the pestilence that walks in darkness nor destruction that walks at noon.’ *That* is our duty, not this . . . other thing.”

Reglum nodded and there were tears in his eyes as he said, “We speak of a terrible thing, it is true. We speak of this almost never, and never lightly. How to make you understand? When we come to Yount, I will take you to the Mariner’s House, in which is their Hall of Long Remembrance. In that Hall are engraved the names of all those who fared forth from Yount and never returned. Over the centuries that is many names—souls lost to the Nurturing Mother if they could not perform *hatmoi*.”

Sanford shook his head, mouthed the word “Father.” Reglum raised his palm and made the circling motion from the Plea.

“We cannot and would never force you to do what your conscience forbids,” Reglum said. “We beg you only, truly beg you, to take the knives as your final defence in case we are put to such trial.”

Sanford glared at Reglum, then looked at the other McDoons, and said in a voice of bronze, “We are bound to the same mission but not necessarily to the same fate. What you do is wrong, but I cannot change you. I take your knife as a token of your concern for me, but I will never use it for the purpose to which you entreat me. I will speak no more about this. Good evening.”

Barnabas picked up a knife and held it gingerly. “Nor will I,” he said. “But I understand that you mean to make us a great gift, the greatest perhaps that you can from your premise. I respect that. Good night.”

Sally picked up her knife and looked Reglum, Nexius, and the ship’s captain each in the eye before returning her gaze to Reglum. “I cannot imagine doing what you suggest,” she said. “But I can

imagine needing companionship as a bulwark to despair. I take the *hatma* as evidence of that companionship.”

The men of Yount looked at her gravely. Reglum said, “You know what happened to the boats of the *Glen Carrig*, to the survivors of the wreck of the *Alcimedon*. So many others lost to lands survivors called Doorpt Swangeanti and Severambes and Marbotikin Dulda, but which in reality have no names. So many others lost without any trace whatsoever. Most Robinson Crusoes are never found, Miss Sally.”

Sally sheathed the knife and wondered if James Kidlington would refuse to use a *hatma* where he was going, if he would be *allowed* to refuse, and for a second her sight grew dim. She grabbed the table.

“I am fit,” she said, as Reglum put his hand on her shoulder. “Thank you.” At the door, Sally stopped and asked Reglum, “Is it impolite to ask who your *hatmoril* is?”

“We make no secret of our pact-brother,” he said. “My *hatmoril* is Dorentius Bunce.”

Sally dropped her hand from the doorknob and was about to state her astonishment, when she thought better of doing so, and excused herself. She paused on deck to look one last time at the stars of her own world. In a line low off the southeastern horizon were the Three Torches: Fomalhaut, Archernar, and Canopus. But Taurus, Orion, and Canis Major were no longer to be seen. The Dog Star did not pour out his light, neither did the Maiden-Star look to the Mother-Star. Sally pulled her cloak around her against the cold and thought: *A song without harmony.*

That night, at about the time the *Gallinule* left Big Land, Sally had the first of the endless dreams she would have on the rest of the journey. She was on a long beach of black rocks, in the dark, with winds howling, and the waves crashing. Just beyond the breakers was a ship with tattered sails heaving to and fro. People on board cried for help, cries she heard above the roar of the wind. A black-green light illuminated the scene but there were no stars and no

moon. A voice came into her mind—Tom’s voice! Tom was singing:

The sickle-sinny drift of the ship in the tide
In the rip near the strand with the foam by its side.

She looked wildly about for Tom, but he was nowhere to be seen. Three times he sang the couplet and, at the final verse, the ship was thrust by a great wave onto the rocks and smashed. Sally screamed. She saw bodies flung and broken on the jagged shore. She clambered over wet rocks, over bits of mast and rigging, and splintered wood, and the first of the bodies. She looked for Tom, but could not find him. *There*, she thought, *there he is*: “Tom, Tom!” she cried, but the body just washed back and forth in the tidal pool, bumping its head against the boulder. Down she flung herself into the pool, slipping down the boulder, cutting her leg. She was on her knees, had her arms around the body, hauled it up and over: “Tom!” she shouted into the wind. Only the face was not Tom’s. It was the face of James Kidlington. Sally screamed again—

—and woke up. She had fallen out of the bed, and her leg hurt. Isaak was at the door, tail as big as a horse’s mane. The cold and the wind had increased. Beyond the wind and the “chuff-chuff-chuff” of the *Gallinule*’s engine, Sally heard—or felt—a change. She hobbled to the fulgination room.

“Dorentius,” she said. “It’s happening, isn’t it?”

Dorentius waved her into the room. As if summoned by the same call, Reglum came through the door just behind Sally. The three of them stood in front of the Fulginator. The chattering of the rods quickened for a heartbeat, the pace changed for the space of a breath. A keening note entered into the low quaver from the wires. Somewhere deep inside herself, Sally felt the same quickening, the same keening. Where capillaries and alveoli conjoin with the finest filaments of nerves, Sally felt a mathematical song of finding. For some time she stood thus, only slowly becoming aware that Reglum

was asking if she wanted to go on deck.

The ship's captain had joined the night watch. He raised his arm in greeting, plainly surprised to see Sally, but said nothing. No one spoke. The Small Moon clapped against the mast in the wind. Two dolphins leaped in front of the prow. Sally saw the waves stand still for the barest second, and the greyness of the mist palpitate. She looked up, searching for the moon in the sky. There was no moon, no matter how hard she scanned the heavens.

"Mr. Bammary," she said. "Please escort me back to my cabin. I am suddenly overcome—with weariness . . . and something else."

Reglum paused at her cabin door. "The crossing is always hard," he said. "I begin to suspect that for you it may be very difficult. You have troubling dreams written on your brow. You have a connection to the Fulginator that even Dorentius does not have."

Sally thought she might fall, but held herself erect: she was a McDoon, after all. She heard Isaak meowing from behind the cabin door.

"Beyond fulgination and dreams, I sense another grief as well," Reglum said. "I will never press you. But do not hesitate to seek me out if you need a sympathetic ear."

Sally blushed, though it might have been from the night's unexpected exertions. "Thank you," she said. "Mr. Bammary, you are a true gentleman. Brasenose College would be proud."

"I must remember to tell that to Mr. Bunce," said Reglum. "Now, I bid you good night. You will have to tell me in the morning how you managed to hurt your leg in the security of your own cabin. *Bon soir.*"

Sally had opened the cabin door and was reaching down for Isaak when she heard Reglum pause at the end of the corridor. "Sally," he said. "About your brother: everyone onboard is bound to help you find him. And now, I bid you truly a good night."

For the next week, wind and fog enveloped the *Gallinule*. Sounds

were heard above the ceaseless wind, growing louder as the days went by: croakings as of gargantuan mire-drums, howlings and snufflings less describable. Wheeling shadows, like huge lammergeiers, swooped at the vessel, serpentine darkness writhed in the walls of mist. Sally seldom came to the deck. She alternated between her cabin, where she wrote letters to Mrs. Sedgewick and the cook (letters that would never be posted), and the fulgination room. Sally took comfort being with Dorentius and his *equipe*, as he called it, of operators. Best of all was when Reglum and the other A.B.s also came to the fulgination room. Then Sally could forget the nightmares, and even set aside—if only for a while—her fears for Tom, and her anguish over James Kidlington. Inspired by their leaders, and further incited by the presence of a young lady in their midst, the fulginators and the A.B.s bickered over the most arcane points of scientific procedure.

Much of the time, however, Sally sat listening to the Fulginator. The hum and click of the Fulginator was her best protection against the nightmares and her deeper grief. She wove Sankt Jakobi and the other churches of Hamburg into the Fulginator's susurrations. She imagined the disks and cylinder-heads of the Fulginator as so many St. Morgaine medals.

"If I do not presume," Reglum said to Sally on one of her rare visits to the deck, "what are the nature of your dreams? I only ask because you are so obviously disturbed by them."

Sally, wrapped in a great cloak, held the railing of the ship. She looked into the fog. Nexius, Fraulein Reimer, and Sanford stood next to Reglum. Sally said: "I see often the Sign of the Ear. Always in the dark. I am no longer just floating above the peninsula. I am walking across the short grass towards the broken temple. There is a flower in the grass, a small blue flower; I do not know its name."

"*Sela-manri*," Reglum said. "The flower of repentance."

"Yes, it carpets the grass, especially as you get closer to the temple. Then I see the trees, the biggest trees I have ever seen. Oh,

Sanford, they are bigger than anything on Hampstead Heath or at Bexley. Enormous oaks, twisted, with lustrous, deep-green leaves. I hear the wind in the leaves, and the boom of the surf on the rocks below.”

Reglum and Nexius sighed, closed their eyes for a second.

“Something moves in the trees. At first I am scared, but then I am curious. There are monkeys in the oak trees! Small monkeys, reddish brown, coloured like a fox. They have long tails and swing about but, I can hardly believe it, they have the heads of roe-deer, with small horns. They are browsing on acorns.”

“The temple-apes,” Reglum said, eyes still closed.

“Then of a sudden the monkeys grow still. They cower in the trees. Above me I sense something. An owl, a huge owl, flies over my head, swooping low, nearly brushing the top of a tree. It is pure white with a tail like a swallow’s!”

Reglum and Nexius opened their eyes and stared at Sally as she continued. “The swallow-tailed owl hoots once—it sounds like a horn on the river in the fog. The owl lands on the lintel over the doorway to the temple. Its eyes are jet black, and its beak looks like a scimitar. It hoots again and looks right at me. The owl is trying to tell me something. I do not know what. It flies away as voices chant in a language I do not understand.”

“Yountish?” asked Reglum.

Sally, as if she had not considered this before, said, “I am not sure.”

Nexius grunted and said something in Yountish to Reglum, who answered in the same tongue and did not translate. At that moment a giant white bird flew out of the mist and over the ship. Sally cried out, thinking it was the owl from her dream. Reglum steadied her at the elbow. “No, Miss Sally, it’s not to worry,” he said. “An albatross!”

All hands stopped to watch the bird with a wingspan longer than a man circle the ship three times and then slip back into the mist.

Reglum explained, “The albatross can fulminate. They are sacred to us. Fulmars, petrels, albatrosses, all three sacred as well. Not gulls though, just the truly oceanic birds. Gulls are tied each to their own coast.”

He pointed to the dolphins pacing the ship. “Dolphins and albatrosses fulminate their own way through the interstitial lands. Presumably they have an organ in their brains to do so, but we do not know. They are sacred, so we cannot dissect them as we do other creatures. Dolphins will be with us all the way. We’ve never had a ship make it through without them. Their giant relations, the whales, they too can make the crossing—whales are the most sacred.”

The fog closed round again and the howling increased. Sally tried to stop her ears, but the howling was as much in her mind as something she heard. She cried, retreated to the fulmination room. When the sounds got really bad, she sat outside the engine room, concentrating on the steady “chuff-chuff-chuff” and the hey’ing and ho’ing of the crew members shovelling coal. The fog did not clear this time, but only thinned and receded a little. The sea they entered was quiet, windless, the sky a pale, sandy colour when they could spy it. Barnabas, watching the dolphins sport, was one of the first to spot an island slung low in the mist. As they came closer, Barnabas and others heard a scrunching sound under the chuffing of their engine, like forks and knives being dragged across rocks. The *Gallinule* ran as close to the shore as the captain dared, her shallow draft allowing her to get within one hundred yards.

Pacing on the shore were a half-dozen creatures, looking like outsized wolverines. Their claws flopped before them on a beach of crushed shale. Their eyes followed the *Gallinule* without blinking, never leaving the ship even when the creatures changed direction. Right up to the water’s edge they came. They made no other sound than what their clapper-claws made on the strand.

“This place and these monsters are new to us,” said Reglum, looking through a telescope. Fencibles with muskets crowded the

railing, watching the shapes patrolling the black beach. "I've asked to have the spot marked and added to the atlas, recorded in the log. We'll sketch the species for later investigation. Odd, isn't it, how they rushed to the shore, hoping that we'd wreck so they could fall upon us? Odd, I mean, because even without a soul, these creatures have hope."

As the *Gallinule* chugged along, the beasts kept pace. Reglum observed the clapper-claws through a telescope until their island dwindled in the mist. "Some kind of thassonid," he murmured to Sally, offering her the telescope. "Kin perhaps to the *shaharsh-harsh*, the knuckle-dog. Note the double set of canine teeth, nostrils on the top of the head, flocculent pelt, scapular muscles highly developed."

About the only uplifting diversions, besides the dolphins, were Isaak's prowess at rat-catching, and Sally's stabs at Yountish.

"*Na tisk*," she would stammer. "No, no, it must be '*Na trisk murrash em'na nahosh, saroo . . .*' Hold on, I've got it. '*. . . saroo ba ballibash'na dewawrinni*.'"

"I venture to say, Miss McLeish," Reglum would say. "That you are gifted with languages."

Sally curtsied.

"However," he would add, to general laughter. "You've just informed us that 'It rains on my house when the cheese is high in the sky.'"

Sally would laugh too, until she realized how much James Kidlington would have delighted in this sort of play.

"Chum-sist-chuss-pink-pink-pink," went the Fulginator hour by hour. "Weeeoow-zuss-pink-bedum-dum."

"The concentric lembus in quadrant 37.f shows positive apertures and the planar shift in quadrant 108.d is correlative," Dorentius would mutter.

Sally understood them both. What she did not understand were the place-names assigned to the coordinates in the charts.

“*Eswarroo Cha*,” she spelled out in the concordance. ‘A sea that, that does not flow, that does not move?’”

“In a manner of speaking,” said Dorentius. “We might call it the Gelid Sea. Like the doldrums in Big Land, only worse.”

“Worse how?”

“The sea in that place engulfs ships, drowns them with ooze.”

Seeing Sally’s look of horror, Dorentius said, “I do not intend to take us there! We are headed instead—if the Fulginator calculates the probabilities true—to a place that we could call the Opalucet Shoals in English.”

The Fulginator calculated correctly, and soon the *Gallinule* navigated a series of shoals, easy to mark from the milky colour that gave them their name. The fog and the voices in the mist were gone. The *Gallinule* steamed through placid water, with its Small Moon a source of comfort and the dolphins tirelessly leading the way.

The dolphins became agitated on the third day in the shoals. By the time Barnabas and Sanford came up on deck, the dolphins danced on tail-tip backwards, chittering to the *Gallinule*’s crew. All eyes and ears strained for the next hour as the dolphins noised their alarm without pause.

The sea changed abruptly. It boiled. All around the ship it boiled. Staring down dumbfounded, Barnabas could make out shapes in the water. All around him the crew was shouting in Yountish. Nexius took time only to yell at Barnabas and Sanford, “Carkodrillos!” Reglum, racing by, added, “Dart-fish!” Neither name enlightened the McDoons much, but they had no time to think, so it did not matter.

Hundreds of fish had erupted, thrashing and roiling the surface of the sea. Hard to see in the churning, they were as long as a man, some longer, entirely silver with large plate scales and obsidian eyes. Each had a long, needle nose and a mouth with many teeth. They swarmed the ship. Nexius gave orders. Fencible teams ran to the rail-mounted cannon, and tilted them so they faced nearly straight

down into the frothing mass below. Barnabas and Sanford did not need to know Yountish to know Nexius was calling out, "One, two, three . . . FIRE!" The fusillade of grapeshot hit the sea with a huge noise. Using mittens, the Fencibles lifted the expended cannon off, mounted the next cannon, and fired again. And again. And again, reloading as they went so they could keep up a nearly continuous fire. The sea was bloody and dozens of ripped fish bodies floated astern, but the attack continued. Over the din, Barnabas and Sanford heard a sound from the hull as if the *Gallinule* had hit rocks. Thud, thud, thud it came, an irregular pattern not at all like the constant chugging of the steam engine.

Thud . . . thud, thud.

Nexius and the ship's captain bellowed more orders. Some of the Fencibles and most of the sailors peeled away from the railing and flung themselves below. Barnabas and Sanford watched the remaining Fencibles reload, and decided they could be more use below decks.

Thud, thud . . . thud.

They jumped down the steps, and kept going to the bottom deck. Men (thud!) moved all (thud!) around (thud!) them in the dimness. Thud! Lanterns swung crazily, so it was hard to see. A knot of men wrestled something that protruded from the wall. A dart-fish had thrust right through, and was snapping and whipping its head around, seeking to enter entirely. Another one had pushed its way up through the floor. There were others. Shouts. Snapping. The silver scales and the eyes, wet, gleamed from the lantern light.

Barnabas saw Reglum's lead assistant, jaw clenched, wade into the fray wielding a marlinspike. One of the dart-fish leaped into the hold, followed by a gush of seawater. Its flanks were shredded from the copper sheathing it had pierced, but it had accomplished its task. Now another hole was opened, water pouring in at two places. The carpenters ran up, fighting the power of the water, holding prepared planks and oakum, trying to plug the holes.

Suddenly, right at Sanford's feet, a Fencible cried out and fell. A dart-fish, whipping its body around, had slashed his thigh. Blood spurted, and the carkodrillo wriggled frenetically to open the breach that its body blocked. Without thinking, Sanford scooped up the fallen man's cutlass and threw himself on the fish. The thing's head caught him sidewise in the hip but its mouth was nearly closed. Even so, Sanford felt his flesh sliced and knew without feeling it that blood was washing down his legs. Sanford hurled himself at the carkodrillo again. He almost severed its head with his cutlass. It died with one last bucking motion, effectively closing the hole it had opened. The thudding stopped.

The carpenters had covered the gaps, though both leaked heavily. Three dead dart-fish extended into the hold. The fallen Fencible received treatment. Sanford looked down at his bloody self and the bloody cutlass (a deeper red than his, but red all the same). Barnabas, who wielded a cutlass himself, was at his side.

"Sanford!" yelled Barnabas.

"I need to eat more goat-meat," said Sanford, clutching his leg and slumping against the wall. "Another layer of fat would have been useful."

"Come on," shouted Reglum. "Get these men to the sick-bay!"

A few anxious hours ensued, as the A.B.s (who were also the ship's physicians and surgeons) saw to the wounded.

"Glad tidings," said Reglum. "Mr. Sanford is made of very sturdy stuff. His gash is ugly but clean and not as deep as first feared. We have had him sewn up tight."

"Praise the Lord," said Barnabas, adding (because he felt it could not hurt under the circumstances), "And the Mother too. And, no, no, old friend, you cannot get up yet, not for a few days. In the meantime, we've arranged for an extra goat's-meat pie for you!"

"The cannon decimated them," said Reglum. "But they were routed by the dolphins. The dolphins slammed into the carkodrillos

from behind, battering them to death. Caught between the dolphins and the guns, and with the ship moving faster than they are accustomed to, the dart-fish withdrew.”

“Thank goodness for the copper sheathing on the ship’s bottom,” said Barnabas.

“Yes,” said Reglum. “Without it, the *Gallinule* would be on the bottom, and we’d all be a meal for the carkodrillos. But the captain says, copper or no, those *keemkulish* punched five holes in our hull, and we are taking on water. We need to put in to dry-dock or else we will not reach Yount. He has asked Mr. Bunce to plot us a course to Supply Island.”

The *Gallinule* reached Supply Island with several feet of water in the hold, despite pumping round the clock. Supply Island had a deep-water cove. At the head of the cove, ringed by hills, were several buildings, like barracks, and a dry-dock facility.

Soon the *Gallinule* was in the dry-dock, the holes in its hull being repaired. The ferocity of the carkodrillo attack was plain to see: besides the five punctures, the hull was scored and buckled in dozens of places. Sanford was not alone in once more thanking the Yountish Royal Marine for sheathing ships in copper. The captain and the sailors would be at least two days making the repairs and reprovisioning the ship. Dorentius and his *equipe* would be calibrating and triangulating all day too. Sally wanted to stay and help the fulginators but Barnabas would have none of it.

“Come on, Sally lass,” he said. “The fulginators can handle their own affairs for one afternoon without your help. See, Mr. Bammary has invited us on an excursion. Damn glad to get off this tub and stretch my legs.”

Reglum said to Sally, “Please do join us. This island has an interesting history. Oh, and bring your cat if you wish!”

The island was quiet, the sun was warm, the hills the colour of those above Funchal, Sally thought with a jolt, wishing again that James Kidlington could be with them, and hating him because he

could not be. That decided her: she needed to conquer her mood. After all, she was a McDoon of Mincing Lane. With a platoon of Fencibles, Reglum, Barnabas, and Sally walked up the hill away from the dry-dock. The air was very dry and warm. Even the Fencibles were breathing hard as they reached the top of the hill. Beyond were several downs, one after the other. They were forced to walk at a leisurely pace, being never able to draw a full breath.

“Mr. Bammary,” puffed Barnabas. “I wonder at this exertion. There seems to be insufficient air.”

“You are right about that,” Reglum puffed back. “One always feels light-headed here, and not in a pleasant fashion either.” The grass was like sisal and crackled under their feet. The wind rattled the seed pods of the few shrubs that could be seen. Their eyes stung, their ears popped as they plodded inland.

Barnabas said, “You mentioned this island had an interesting history. Seems rather barren to me. What has happened here to make it worth the knowing?”

Reglum called a halt, welcomed by all, to respond. “We discovered this place over sixteen hundred years ago, about the time in your world that Marcus Aurelius defended Rome against the Germans. Though, of course, at the time we discovered the island, we knew nothing of Marcus Aurelius or Rome at all for that matter. For sixteen hundred years, we have used this place as a supply dump and advance camp, stockpiling provisions. Not long ago we built the dry-dock we use today.”

Barnabas interrupted. “But you do not populate it?”

“No,” Reglum shook his head. “The island will always remain unpeopled. For one thing, as you have sensed, the air here is poor. People could not live here long before anaemia and lethargy overtook them. Even fire does not burn as it should here; it smoulders rather. But there is another reason. Come, I will show you.”

At the top of the farthest down, they looked at what Reglum had brought them to see. A town was stretched out below them in

a valley, large enough to house perhaps ten thousand souls. The streets were neatly laid out in rows, with squares and courts, here what looked like a cathedral, there what might be a guildhall. Sally felt her spirits rise at the sight of the creamy honey-coloured stone under the pale wide sky.

“But no,” she said to herself. “No sound, no movement, no smoke from chimneys . . .”

“It looked like this when we found it sixteen hundred years ago,” said Reglum. “We have charted and measured every building, every street. Sages have written volumes on individual buildings, arguing that this one contained communal baths or that this one was a market hall. Whatever force holds time at bay here is unknown to us. There is no decay in the stone, nothing crumbles. Three other towns are on the island, all as deserted as this one. Men and women lived here. We have found mosaics. They had dogs and cats for pets. They tilled the earth, enjoyed the grape, sailed in ships. All gone, without a trace, leaving their towns untouched behind.”

Sally looked at Isaak, carried in a basket, and thought: *The disappeared had cats for pets!*

Not knowing she did so, Sally drew a small square in the air with her index fingers, over and over again. The words of Ezekiel came into her mind: “*An end! An end has come upon the four corners of the land. Now the end is upon you, I will let loose the anger upon you . . . When I make you a city laid waste, like cities that are not inhabited . . .*”

“Gone, just vanished it seems,” Reglum gazed at the city, as if some clue to the mystery might be in plain sight but overlooked these past sixteen hundred years. “No physical calamity struck. This is not Pompeii as discovered in your world. Nor do we find any sign of strife or any disturbances of bones—in fact, we find no bones at all except in graveyards. Many believe that the inhabitants of these towns found their little island transported here by an event like the Great Confluxion, maybe by *the* Great Confluxion. So here they would have been, just this one small island encircled by howling

death, a few towns surrounded by the mists. It may be that the inhabitants came down to the beach one day and, holding hands, walked into the sea and drowned themselves.”

The Fencibles who understood English made the warding sign and whispered, “*Kaskas muri ankus’eem.*” Sally did the same. Reglum turned away but they heard him. “Only conjecture, of course. It’s why most of us call it Ghost Island instead of its official name.”

That evening they dined ashore. Sally asked, “This island is the first one we have encountered that holds even traces of human life. Have you met no others, besides those of us from Big Land?”

The Yountish officers put down their forks. For once, Reglum and Dorentius looked at one another to see who should go first. Reglum nodded to his Cantabrigian rival.

“No,” said Dorentius. “It’s why we call our contact with Big Land ‘the Blessed Encounter.’ Centuries and centuries, tens of centuries, passed after the Great Confluxion before we found you. We were alone. It’s why we have another name for Big Land: ‘Pash’ma-soom,’ which means ‘Human Land.’ We often shorten that, saying we are going to ‘Pash’ when we leave for a voyage to your world.”

“We’ve charted thousands of places since the Great Confluxion ripped us from wherever it is that we came from,” said Reglum. “We have classified and catalogued thousands upon thousands of species. But none are sapient so far as we can tell. Though there are possible exceptions.”

Barnabas said, “What about Strix Tender Wurm?”

Reglum said, “We don’t know what he is. Nor the Cretched Man. Some things are best considered as being categories unto themselves.”

No one spoke for a while, until Dorentius resumed. “We are not certain what places are indigenous to the Interrugal Lands—that is, permanently resident between the worlds, and what places have been dislocated and discharged here by violent coincidence. The

in-between lands are backwaters where flotsam and jetsam land. Imagine that you are tossed into a rushing river, battered by rocks and bars. You lose your hat, your shoes, maybe even your coat, which swirl in your wake. Yount is a hat or pair of gloves, a stray bit that has been stripped off in passage.”

“We have other evidence,” said Reglum. “Over the centuries, we’ve recovered three corpses from the seas that were neither from Yount nor Big Land. Humans to most appearances, but with certain . . . differences. Nictating membranes, extra digits, idiosyncratic organelles, that sort of thing. All described in our literature, and one preserved onboard in alcohol and today to be seen in the museum in Yount Great-Port. We call him simply ‘The Specimen.’”

Sally queried again, “But, until you found Big Land, no others like us?”

Reglum smiled, a bittersweet tone crept in. “No, no one like you. Or like us.”

Sally cried out, “But, Mr. Bammary, we *are* you, and you *are* us! Why, sir, I do not mean to state this so boldly, but no one else has commented on it, so I feel I must. We Big Landers and Small Landers, we can . . . have union . . . we can marry with success,” she ended in a rush.

Reglum smiled again, with no trace of bitterness this time, “Yes, there are some like me, with parents or grandparents from both worlds. We can mix, and not just like horses and donkeys, the offspring of which can bear no young themselves. We are, in terms your dear Linnaeus has set out, the same species. Strange as that may sound, and impossible as that might seem.”

Out of the darkness that had fallen on the island of ghosts, Reglum said, “Big Land and Small Land, our fates are entwined. Hence the key. Hence your voyage.”

Three days out from Supply Island the *Gallinule* stumbled. Sally felt it immediately. Deep within the clacking-clicking-chunking-ticking

of the Fulginator something went astray. An atomized current of energy or evanescent burst of sonic motion, whatever it was, it had impeded the process. The Fulginator's calculations were suddenly and completely amiss. Assured seeking became groping. Sally, knowing the Fulginator's cantata in her essence, cried aloud in her cabin and then stumbled half-blind to the fulgination room.

Dorentius had lost his cap and was running around the Fulginator. The rest of the *equipe* were yelling and consulting charts. Reglum and the ship's captain raced through the door. Outside mists arose. As if a giant in the sky waved a fan in front of the sun, shadows washed over the *Gallinule* followed by stabbing beams of light. Out of the mists poured ululating voices. In the fulgination room, Sally felt a chill, sat down, stood up, and then could not move at all. In her mind she saw a dolphin. She heard it speaking in the staccato tongue of dolphins, but she did not understand except that the dolphin was frantic. *Concentrate*, she thought, and focussed on the dolphin's eye, so bright and looking straight at her. Nearer and nearer and then . . . darkness. Nothing. Like a candle doused. She tried to find the dolphin in her mind but could not.

Sally staggered out of the fulgination room, followed closely by Reglum. On deck, they were buffeted by winds that had not been there minutes ago. They looked to the Small Moon, which clattered against the mast. Someone called from the bow that the dolphins were gone. Dreading what they would see, Sally and Reglum went to the bow, where the ship's captain joined them and the watch.

Everyone scanned the sea in front of them. Minutes went by. No one spoke. More minutes. No grey forms leaped in front of the ship, no sleek forms accompanied it.

Morning brought no relief. The ship's captain assembled everyone on deck. The *Gallinule* was lost. The Fulginator had failed. Dorentius and Reglum and every member of their teams were working around the clock to identify and repair the problem and, most important, to

find the ship's location so they could plot a route home. Until then, everyone without exception would be on short rations.

"At least the steam engine is performing well, thank the Mother," said Reglum. "And the ship's adequately provisioned."

"So far," muttered Nexius.

The voyagers had never seen such a sea. It was inky black, and gave off a sweet, resinous smell that soon became cloying. There was no wind, and only the barest wisps of cloud in a bright blue sky. The A.B.s tested the water with lines, buckets, and seines. The water contained no life: no fish, no turtles, no copepods, not a scrap of seaweed or algae, and most certainly no dolphins or whales. The *Gallinule* chugged on for two days.

"We cannot simply steam ahead in a completely empty sea," said the ship's captain. "Not knowing where we are going. We do not have enough coal."

"But we cannot stop and drift in open ocean," said Nexius. "There is no wind for sailing."

"Don't tell a mariner his business," said the ship's captain. "Though you are right, of course."

"We cannot understand what happened," said Dorentius, answering the captain's (and everyone else's) question for the tenth time. "Rebarbative flux, a purling of the xantrophicious ebblines, we do not know. We have come to a place utterly outside our charts. Not knowing our coordinates, we cannot calculate how to find the roads to Yount."

"That cannot answer, Mr. Bunce," said the ship's captain. "Surely there is a way to calculate our position."

"Difficult, but not impossible, sir," said Dorentius, looking anything but certain about that. "However, the mathematics are daunting, complex, and will take much time, even working at it night and day."

"How much time, Mr. Bunce?" asked the captain.

"It might be three or four months, sir," the fulginator said. "With luck."

"We have food enough for that plus the time it will take us to

regain the road to Yount,” the captain said. “But I worry about our supplies of fresh water. Well, Mr. Bunce, do what you can, and may the Mother speed your work.”

Sally worked with the fulginators and the A.B.s. Her math skills equalled theirs, despite her lack of formal training (Sally had taught herself math, the subject not being one taught to respectable merchants’ girls). She did not always follow the notation but she was quicker than almost anyone at finding the solution and she was peerless at deriving alternatives to the standard procedures of calculation. Reglum saw that Sally understood the principles better than he did; only Dorentius was better. They both instructed their men to follow her lead.

The *Gallinule* had been steaming in an empty ocean for three days, and the captain had decided to switch to sail on the morrow to conserve coal, when land was sighted.

The landmass was flat as far as the eye could see. As the ship got closer, Reglum saw a very pale green beach (*Sand made of smaragdite?* he thought. *Perhaps feldspar?*), with a uniform level of deep-green trees behind it. About five hundred yards from shore, pale-green mudbanks appeared. The captain feared running aground, so the *Gallinule* turned to port and steamed parallel to the shore. All day they worked their way up a coastline that never varied, always confronted by mudbanks at four to five hundred yards offshore. As they cruised by, they saw how queachy and jellified the mud was. Sally shuddered. This place looked too much like the Gelid Sea for comfort, only at least *that* place was on the map and so could be gotten away from. For eight days the *Gallinule* steamed along the coast, steadily turning and turning as the coast did. Until . . .

“It’s an island,” said the ship’s captain. “We have just returned to the very spot where we first arrived. There is the one inlet we’ve seen on this coast, we’ve come back to it. See, there it is! If, as I am guessing, we will have to prospect for fresh water on the island, then

this is the likeliest place to start.”

The captain cut the engines and anchored the *Gallinule* opposite the inlet, some five hundred yards out. Shipboard routine was the rock upon which each crew member set his stake. Sailors and Fencibles scrubbed the decks, repaired spars, spliced rope and rigging; they told each other stories, boxed, wrestled, and danced. Members of the Abbey, when they weren't with the fulginators, charted the night sky. Sanford, reasonably healed, walked around and around the deck, conversing with Barnabas. Everything was normal, except that they were lost outside the world.

With the engines off, the quiet of their surroundings dominated all else. The quiet sank into their pores, rose into their nostrils, infiltrated their minds until they rarely spoke above a whisper. There was no wind. The ink-black sea, devoid of life, was flat and unmoving, except in slow, sluggish currents, the origins of which were subject of much speculation by the A.B.s. Reglum scanned the coast but saw nothing except the thin strip of pale-green beach and an endless row of trees that looked vaguely like holly. Nothing stirred on the island: not a bird, not a beast, nothing at all. Everyone called the place “Oos,” which is “Silence” in Yountish.

Two months passed. Oos was an accursed word for them all. How they longed to shout and stamp their feet, to start a hare from the holly-like trees or put a gull to flight from the pale-green beach. How they longed to hear that the Fulginator was repaired, desired to know the coordinates for home.

Sally dreamed by day as well as by night now. Sometimes she saw the Sign of the Ear, with its swallow-tailed owl. Sometimes she caught a glimpse of a dolphin, but almost as soon as the dolphin appeared, it disappeared again. Other times she thought she heard Tom's voice. Once, she saw the African girl in an old coat staring at a brick wall marked with symbols Sally could not make out; the unknown girl, with black braids peeking out from under a headscarf, stared at the wall as if she was looking right through it. Sally thought

maybe the African girl was looking for the *Gallinule* but could not say why she thought that. And once, Sally saw James Kidlington in chains, gesturing as if to an interlocutor who was not there, and saying “Erasmus Darwin—you must read his latest work, it is simply extraordinary.”

Barnabas tried to cheer Sally, praising Isaak for the cat’s unflappable grace and prodigious hunting of the ship’s rodents. Sally smiled as best she could, for her uncle’s sake, and hugged Isaak, but mostly she dwelt in the mathematics of fulgination and dreamed down avenues flanked by Sankt Jakobi, Sankt Nikolai.

Barnabas fingered the key and marvelled at the discipline of the *Gallinule*’s crew. He hid his own anxiety with a torrent of good cheer and outpourings of concern for Sanford. Barnabas was convinced that Sanford would not heal fully without adequate provision of goat’s meat, and so wondered if a hunting party might soon be sent ashore since the ship had run out of it. A landing party was being assembled but the captain’s chief concern was water, not meat. Conferring with Nexius and Reglum, the captain called for four volunteers to seek fresh water on the island: two sailors, two marines, two pairs of *hatmoril*.

The following morning the entire crew gathered on deck. Four volunteers had come forward, and were lowered over the edge of the ship in a rowboat. The crew watched as the rowboat picked its way through the mudbanks to the beach at the mouth of the creek, the sound of the oars coming very loud across the silent waters. The officers watched through telescopes but even with the naked eye everyone saw the four figures, each in his dark-blue padded vest, turn to face the ship. All four waved. Silver glinted on their throats, the sun caught in their leaping dolphin brooches. The Small Moon flashed silver back to them—the last thing they would see of the *Gallinule* before they shouldered their muskets, picked up their pails, turned, and entered the forest of holly-like trees. Throughout not a word was spoken. Oos sat heavily both on the crew aboard the

ship and on the members of the water detail. They were due back by nightfall. Each man in the party had a watch and an ansible pendant matched to ones held by Reglum. The landing detail did not return by nightfall or the next day. Not a sound came from the island. The rowboat sat lodged on the beach, unmoving.

"The pendants are still glowing," said Reglum. "They live."

"Perhaps they are lost," said Nexius. "We will send up a rocket." The Fencibles sent up two rockets from the deck of the ship.

"They are what you call Congreve rockets," said Nexius to Barnabas, Sanford, and Ben. "What your fleet used to burn Copenhagen."

Barnabas felt remorse, even if it felt unpatriotic to do so, at the bombardment of Copenhagen, since McDoon & Associates had so many good friends in commerce at the Danish capital. He thought, "How very strange to think of it: Copenhagen. London, for that matter. Hard to know if such places really exist or if I've dreamed them until this very moment. But how silly of me, of course they do . . . exist, that is."

At two minutes past one o'clock in the afternoon of the third day, all four ansible pendants winked out. No sound could be heard. Oos was everywhere, a silence like clay-wrapped roots brooding deep in the earth, a silence like the floor of an ocean that has never seen sun, moon, or stars. The captain assembled the crew.

"Our four comrades are dead," the captain said, as he and the crew made the circling gesture. "Let us sing." The crew faced the island. As if to shatter Oos, the crew sang with strong, deep voices. Their song echoed off the beach and off the holly-like trees. Maybe it was the first such sound this world had ever heard. The song, as Reglum later explained to the McDoons, was called the "*Jassajoharrian*," which is the "Song of Homecoming and Humility."

This place I do not know
And yet I know the place.

DANIEL A. RABUZZI

The earth holds up a mighty yew
A mace to guard this place
This place I never knew.
Ivory roses screen my eyes
From a gated grove
Whose members, sleeping, will not rise.
Will not rise or gaze or stand
Within the slotted wall
Where counsels, doddered, run a-strand.
Where lichened keystone, bell, and arch
Within the rooted hall
Foretell a silent earthbound march.
The wind-sered roses rasp and rustle
Around that unknown place
Where clay is blood and stone is muscle.
The earth lets out a subtle sigh
A shade to mark the space
The place it knows for I.

When the last echoes of the *Jassajoharrian* had subsided, the ship's captain raised a fist to the island and yelled, "Our colleagues' names will be forever known on the walls of the Hall of Long Remembrance. Whatever you are, keep your silence, but not their names!"

That evening the captain called to meeting Nexius, Reglum, Dorentius, Barnabas, Sanford, and the young Purser with the flutist's fingers, Noreous. The captain said, "Gentlemen, we are not in a good way. Let us speak frankly. Noreous, how long will our stores hold out?"

Noreous twisted his fingers and said, "Four months at least, assuming half-rations. We are getting low on fruit and other anti-scorbutics, so I begin to fear scurvy. The lack of fish and game also

haunts us. But, of course, I speak only of food—we are running low already on fresh water, as you know. We have at best six weeks worth of water, not more.”

“Dorentius, that gives you no more than a week to complete your calculations and still give the *Gallinule* leeway to make our final run for home,” said the captain.

“A week is . . .” he started. “With the integers used by Gaspard Monge perhaps we might . . . or if we had more time for the differentials scaled by Laplace . . .”

“Mr. Bunce,” said the captain. “We don’t have time now to hear about Monge and Laplace.”

Reglum stepped in and said, “What Dorentius means—and he and his men have hardly slept since we arrived—is that we have the equivalent of latitude but cannot find the equivalent of longitude. As you know, we need both.”

Reglum added, “And it is at least eight axes we are working on, not just two. We have the proper coordinates for six of the eight plotted, but the interlacing of the final two has proven to be more problematic than expected.”

The captain nodded, turned to Nexius, and said, “How is the condition of the Fencibles?”

“Ready to fight,” said Nexius. “Will go ashore to find water until there are no more of us, if that is required.”

“Not yet,” said the ship’s captain. “We wait one more week for the Fulginator to show us the way home. If at that time we are still blind to our correct route, then we will *wiiswiis malan*.”

Reglum turned to Barnabas and Sanford, and said, “That means . . . it is very hard to translate . . . ‘to flee at random.’”

“‘To range without hope’ is another translation,” said Dorentius. “We can fulginate knowing some of the coordinates and hope that we, through blind chance, hit upon lands or roads known to us. Success is not likely but failure is assured if we sit here starving to death.”

Barnabas recalled one of his favourite prints on the wall of the partners' office at Mincing Lane: Acteon and Diana. He imagined the panicked Acteon fleeing as he turned into a stag, crashing blindly into trees, falling, eventually to be hunted down and eaten by his own hounds.

"You are part of this decision," the ship's captain said to Barnabas and Sanford. "Our mission is to protect and deliver you, so you can deliver us with the key. Is our plan acceptable?"

Barnabas looked at Sanford, who nodded his assent. He reached into his vest and pulled out the key. Holding it up for all to see, Barnabas said: "I will bring the key to Yount. I will get my boy back."

Like many plans, however, the one agreed to by the men in the captain's cabin lacked one essential contributor: Sally. Even as the men sat in conclave, Sally was drifting into another dream. On short rations she found that she sometimes could not tell her dreams from her waking sight. As the strange stars came out above Oos, and something lurked on the island, silence smothering everything, Sally dreamed a master-dream.

"We will die," she said to Reglum in her dream.

"Yes, it is possible," he said. "But that time has not yet come. Not yet."

He showed her a book. All the Yountians onboard had a copy of this book. He said, "Here is the *Som-manri*. Your copy. What you might call in English 'The Berosiana' or 'Book of Rue and Repentance.' We cannot die until we have written what we must write in the *Som-manri*, but your pages are still blank."

Sally looked at the book, and saw that Reglum spoke truly. Yet even as she looked, words appeared on the pages, in her handwriting. She peered at the pages but could not make out what the words were, except for names: "Fraulein Reimer" and "Shawdelia Sedgewick," and more names and more names, everyone she had ever known. "Uncle Barnabas." "Sanford." The writing became slower, more jagged, darker. "Tom." The script became fiery-black, as if written

with a sharpened coal. The writing stopped, and then suddenly began again. "James Kidlington." The ink burned, the book smoked. Sally dropped it and ran from Reglum, ran and ran until she found herself running on the green grass at the Sign of the Ear. Panting, gasping, she fell to her knees among the little blue flowers, the *sela-manri*, the flower of repentance.

"I repent," she said, heaving for breath. "I repent!" she shouted so that blood came up from her lungs, her throat, up to her lips. The wind roared its approbation. In rapid succession she saw faces of those on her pages in the Book of Rue and Repentance. The faces gathered, one by one:

Barnabas, Sanford, Tom.

The cook, her niece, the fraulein.

Mr. Fletcher and Mr. Harris.

Mr. Sedgewick and Mrs. Sedgewick.

Salmius, Nexius, Reglum, Dorentius, Noreous.

The Termuydens.

. . . James Kidlington.

Others, many others she did not know.

A white woman in a dress from the last century, with a face that looked like Sally's might in a few years time.

A dark-eyed young woman with silver threads woven into her glossy black hair and silver half-moons dangling from her ears.

The African woman in a hand-me-down sailor's jacket, wearing a red neckerchief, looking up from a brick courtyard.

More and more crowded together and chanted with one voice. The chanting grew and grew, and at last Sally knew what the chanting meant, and knew what she must do.

She awoke so quickly that Isaak had to jump off the bed. Grabbing Isaak, Sally ran past the fulgination room (Reglum looked up, marvelled at her speed, and followed) up to the deck and out to the bow. The sailors on duty greeted her, startled at her sudden appearance, but she did not hear them. She paused to catch her

breath, licked a drop of blood from her lips, stepped to the very front of the ship, and began to sing.

Low at first, then louder and louder, Sally sang. She sang in a language that was neither English nor Yountish, not German or Latin or any other tongue known to anyone onboard. She sang in the language that came before all these, and rests still at the heart of all words, all thought. She sang of longing and seeking and yearning and finding. She sang to defeat Oos, to banish the silence that kills, to find a way home for the *Gallinule*.

The sailors on watch stepped back. Reglum ran up and stopped too. In that ancient silence, Sally's voice went out like blazing arrows and radiant spears. It echoed off the Small Moon on the mast. It vibrated off the ansible pendant she wore around her neck, the thread that connected her to Tom. It rippled through the St. Morgaine and made the pages turn in the fraulein's house-book.

Barnabas and Sanford and Fraulein Reimer came on deck. Nexius, the ship's captain, Noreous—everybody came on deck except Dorentius, who stayed with the Fulginator down below because something was happening to the machine. As Sally sang longer and louder, the Fulginator responded. Sally trilled a note, so did the Fulginator. Sally's glissando became the Fulginator's. Dorentius shouted as the song pierced him. He scribbled madly, and scrawled equations.

"The third elliptic!" Dorentius yelled. "The tortile connection to the sixteenth element!"

No one onboard could say how long Sally sang or what the song sounded like. Or, rather, each man had a different impression of both time and song.

"Like a filigree of silver," said Nexius.

"Like sun reflected in the eye of a falcon," said Reglum.

"Like the sheen of watered silk," said Barnabas.

"Like the blue-whiteness of flame at its hottest," said Sanford.

Up and up the song crescendoed. Sally swayed at the bow of the

ship. Every person on the *Gallinule* hummed now, a deep brumming sound, in unison, to support Sally's song. Every person desired themselves home. Sally hit one brilliant high note, sending it soaring out into Oos. Every person on the ship hummed in perfect harmony, sending a wave of perfect yearning out into the void.

At that moment, Dorentius shrieked, pushed a lever affecting the 22.e sub-plate, and the Fulginator struck the same note as Sally's. A dolphin leaped out of the sky, chased by a beam of moonlight that reflected off the Small Moon, and tumbled into the ocean of Oos with a great splash.

For one second, the silence returned, old and malevolent, the emptiness between the beating of the heart, a clot of un-sound to break their music. Then the Fulginator went "chunk-check-tunk-seeoooo." And the dolphin tossed itself up from the water calling out in dolphin language. And one hundred voices on the *Gallinule* yelled, "Hurrah!"

Sally collapsed at the bow of the ship. Uncle Barnabas was there to catch her.



Interlude: Binomials, Quoth the Char-Girl

Maggie was halfway through Thomas Simpson's *Treatise of Fluxions* on a rainy Thursday, having borrowed it from Mrs. Sedgewick (as well as the additional luxury of a beeswax candle), when a bolt of silence entered her mind and smothered all thought. Maggie flung herself back against the cellar wall, trying to call out. Her mother, still sickly, cried out but Maggie could not hear her. A silence coursed through Maggie's arteries, seeking to strangle her heart. Maggie's fingers grasped the treatise on fluxions so hard that pages ripped.

With a soundless rush, Maggie was lifted over Bushnell's Rope-walk and the Green Stiles, above Cinnamon Street, and Wellclose Square, whirled back past Artichoke Lane, and slammed into the alley outside her cellar. While her body slumped in the cellar, she stood in the alley, mazed.

Think, think, think, Maggie yelled inside, trying to break the silence. *Sing, sing, SING!*

She stood defiantly and sang about cardinal numbers in the

continuum and congruent polyhedra and algebraic vortices. Gradually at first and then more quickly, the silence subsided. As it diminished, Maggie heard other voices—above all, a voice like hers. She saw the young white woman, the one she had seen before while far-walking. The white woman was singing from the prow of a ship, singing down the silence that gripped the ship and everyone on it. (*How odd*, Maggie thought, *to see just a few white faces in a crowd of dark ones.*) Maggie joined the choir, matching her notes to those of the woman on the ship. Their music exploded the silence, moonlight flashed everywhere (though the moon was gibbous that night over London), and a dolphin flew through the air. Maggie glimpsed crowds of singers on a beach, including a lean man hurrah'ing with a Wapping accent. The vision ended and Maggie sat up in the cellar, tears streaming down her cheeks. She hugged her mother, who said, "Little eagle, little eagle," over and over.

Something had changed with the merging of voices to defeat silence outside the world. For the first time, others—closer to Maggie, almost nearby—had heard her voice, and had lifted their heads like hounds scenting prey. Her song had gone forth like a flare in the night, leaving a lingering trace. And Maggie sensed their proximity. She felt vulnerable as she walked to and from the Sedgewicks. She wrapped her old sailor's jacket more tightly around her as a muffin man stared at her in the street. A group of boys playing marbles stopped as one when she passed them, vulpine faces tracking her movement, flickers of silent intelligence shared between them. Even the streets seemed to conspire against her, misplacing themselves, softening corners, running into courtyards that went nowhere.

"Why am I on Artichoke Lane?" thought Maggie. "I need to find Finch-House Longstreet. . . . Look up, look up, follow the rooks."

Mrs. Sedgewick detected something amiss with her protégé. Maggie was even more distant than usual, evasive when questioned, saying only that she needed more time with this book or that book,

please, ma'am. Mrs. Sedgewick's tutelage of Maggie was detected by the entire household; eventually, the head-maid told the footman, who told Mr. Sedgewick, who was otherwise oblivious, being so immersed in his work.

One morning, Mr. Sedgewick said over pilchards at breakfast, "Mrs. Sedgewick, dove of my heart, you have been found out: *cave ancillam*, beware what the maid said indeed!"

"Whatever do you mean, Mr. Sedgewick? And try to speak more plainly for once."

"Yes, yes, I shall do so, my veprecose swan," said Mr. Sedgewick. "I am always supportive of your follies and projects, *toties quoties*, but I am more than moderately curious as to what your expected outcome is this time. That is to say—am I being clear enough, my sweet?—what possible gain can be found in giving books on mathematics to a charity school girl, and one whose, shall we say, tincture is a bit on the darker side?"

Mrs. Sedgewick counted to seven before responding. "George Gervase Sedgewick, you must be born under the haunch of Saturn to utter such a thing. And to question my motives is . . . honestly, this is so beneath my dignity."

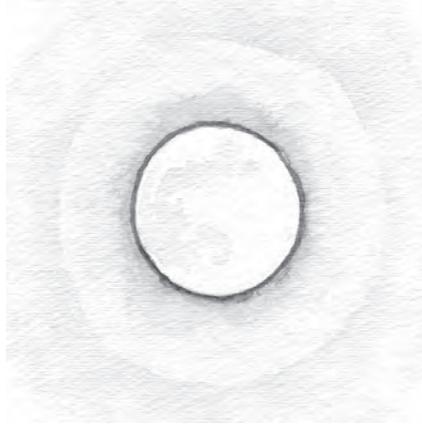
Mr. Sedgewick paused long enough to spear another pilchard onto a slice of bread, and said, "Yes, *infra dig* it may be, but what is your intent? To show off this prodigy at the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly or at the Bartholomew's Fair in Smithfield? 'Come see the Amazing Cushite Woman Who Does Sums!' She'd look good, wouldn't she, right alongside the 'Savage Prince of Patagonia' and 'Tom Thumb of Kent and his Bride'?"

Mrs. Sedgewick counted to nine, and then left the table. Her husband chuckled at the whims of women, and then returned to the ongoing mystery of the McDoon departure, wondering that he had never heard of the merchant de Sousa until Barnabas announced his removal to Cape Town. He had forgotten his breakfast conversation long before his wife had even begun to forgive him for it.

The feeling grew in Maggie that someone or something was searching for her in London. She heard rumours of men asking questions throughout the East End about women who sang.

“Maggie,” said the servant at The White Hart. “Uncanny, I calls it. Two men, not from around here to judge from their clothes and their voices, were asking last night about the strangest things: did we know any girls who sang, and what did they sing, and where might they be found? At first I thought they might be agents for Covent Garden or Vauxhall, as they’re always on the lookout for stage-girls, but then these mokes started mixing their talk with stories about the Singing Crucifix and the Talking Book, which I reckon are popish things, and other bits from the Bible, but not in a way that you hear it from the preachers, so I got scared somewhat and turned my ears away.”

Maggie mulled this on her way home, scanning the street for possible trouble. In the cellar by candlelight, she read another chapter in the treatise on fluxion and listened to her mother’s troubled breathing. She listened too for footsteps on the stairs. Squaring her shoulders, she thought, *Let them come. We’ve faced worse. We’ll fight force with force.*



Chapter 11: Dreams Are the Daughters of Earth

“Just wondering how you was getting on,” said Billy Sea-Hen to Tom late in the afternoon of their first full day in Sanctuary. “And whether you might care to join us for a spot of tea, what Tat’head and the other northerners like to call ‘baggins.’ So this would be ‘baggins on the beach,’ if you are partial.”

A cluster of cottages sat on a shingle jutting into the cove some ways down from the house with the flagpole. On the beach the four other Minders had made a fire from kelp, and were boiling tea and frying some rabbitty-looking creatures that one of them had caught in the heath behind the dunes. (“No game laws here! We can hunt as we wish and not be called poachers,” said the Minders.) Slivers of potato fried with the meat.

“Where are the sailors?” asked Tom.

“Oh,” said Tat’head. “They do not much like tea—not a Yountish taste, I reckon. Not that we haven’t invited them many a time.”

“They’re good blokes, though,” added Billy, to which the other

four nodded in agreement. “Strong and quiet, knows their jobs, sticks to it. No fuss, you can depend on it.”

“No whittie-whattie either,” said Tat’head. “‘Straight on,’ says their captain, and that’s that, straight on, it is.”

“So, the sailors are Yountish, are they?” said Tom. “I wondered, but never could get a word with any of them. I just assumed they were dashedly shy, that’s all. Do they stay on the ship then, when you come here?”

“No,” said Billy. “There, look, see a smittick farther down the beach? You can just see the tops of chimneys—those are their houses.”

“Some of ’em have wives there, most I do believe, and children too,” said Tat’head. “So they wanted a bit of space for their own.”

“And none of you has a wife?” asked Tom.

“No,” said Billy, as the other Minders looked into the fire. “Since we joined with Him and put our feet on the Road to Redemption, we have sworn ourselves to go without wives.”

“Our only wife shall be the imperishable Crown of Glory,” said Tat’head.

“The *immarcesible* Palm of Heaven,” said Billy self-consciously.

“By the sweet fancy Moses,” said Tat’head. “That’s a word for us all!”

“Immarcesible,” repeated Billy. “I learned that word off His Grace, the Cretched Man.” The others nodded.

Someone said, “Amen.”

Billy poured the tea. One of the Minders produced a tiny snuff box filled with sugar. He offered it first to Tom, who stirred a pinch into his tea, and then passed it to the others.

“Tis only smouch,” said Billy. “Old tealeaves used thrice over, with this wee snip of sugar, but it is as close to paradise as we are like to come within the next hour.”

“Too true,” said Tat’head. “And here is our rabbit, to make this real baggins.” As the afternoon shadows lengthened, and the surf

washed on the shore, and the wind rustled in dune and heath, Tom and the Minders had their baggins and felt—for a while—content. The fire was burning low and dusk upon them, when Tom turned the conversation to the Cretched Man.

“By Wee Willie Hawken,” said Billy Sea-Hen. “He is as different from us as chalk and cheese, there is no denying.”

“What do you reckon he is?” asked Tom.

“Hard to say, harder to know,” said Billy. “He is as He is.”

“Besides, it signifies little what we think,” said Tat’head.

“The point is, Master Tom,” said Billy, with the fire reflected in his eyes (Tom thought again that Billy looked like somebody Tom had known in London). “The point is that He is leading us on a righteous road. It’s like this, isn’t it, lads? Most folks is blind or greedy or both, and just take orders and follow leaders like tantony pigs. It’s not like that with the Cretched Man, is it, boys? He is seeking along with us, and He speaks with us before we commit to any kind of action, and He never asks us to do anything we don’t think ought to be done. It’s that simple. Sort of a House of Commons the way it ought to be.”

“Look,” said Tom. “I don’t mean to press you, and will respect your answer if you tell me I press too far, but I feel I must ask. How do you know he is what he says he is, or what you think he is? That he can offer redemption at the end of your road?”

The sun’s last rays shone off the waves as Billy answered: “As I said, on this road we walk not as blind men or greedy, but as ones what have thought things through, often in a very rough school.”

Tat’head said, “We know what the Book says about false apostles and how Satan can appear as the Angel of Light.”

“So we won’t be fooled,” said one of the other Minders from the other side of the dying fire. “We are forewarned.”

“The Book talks of healing as a powerful sign of righteousness. Just look how He cured you, made you as right as you could be after the monster bit your poor fingers off,” said another Minder.

“And don’t the Book talk of the releasing of those in bondage as

another sign of holiness?" said yet another Minder. "Why, that's what the Cretched Man has done—for us and, most of all, for the sailors who were all slaves once, slaves of the wicked Ornish in Yount, before they escaped to Sanctuary and got protected by His Grace. No longer slaves but brothers beloved, both in the flesh and in the Lord."

"You see," said Billy. "Please, Mister Thomas, do not think that red, raw hands and slow speech means ignorance and no book-learning. We can all of us read, and have all learned that one book, if nothing else."

"I see," said Tom. "And you know I meant no disrespect, asking only from concern and curiosity. You'll allow that my own manner of joining this company was, shall we say, a little less voluntary than your own?"

All the Minders nodded in assent.

"Still," said Billy. "We are right proud to count you as one of our own, if you wish, and maybe whether you wish it or not, Tommy Two-Fingers. Without you, Tat'head here might be dead, and maybe those two Yountish sailors, and maybe more of us. We know a test when we see one, and you, sir, met that fortune with the best of character."

The others murmured "huzzah" and "Amen." Tom waved his bandaged hand as if to say he'd sacrifice the fingers from his other hand to save any one of them a second time, and was surprised to realize that he would do just that, and that they would do the same for him. At that moment, a slender moon rose over the sea.

"Ah," said Billy. "The moon. Another reason why we call this place Sanctuary. First moon we have seen since we left our own world. Few places on the bent and mazy roads have a moon. Yount has no moon."

From the houses farther down the beach, where the Yountish sailors and their wives and children lived, came a burst of song. No one around the baggins fire needed to know Yountish to feel the joy

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expressed in that song. “They’re singing to the moon,” said Billy Sea-Hen. “Come on, lads, let’s sing out too!”

So they did, with Tom joining in. Out over the waves and into the silvery dark arced the song:

The Man in the Moon
Has carelessly strewn
The pack from his back.
Where can it be?
Oh, where can it be?
Like a fish or a dolphin it fell in the sea,
That’s where it be, oh
That’s where it be!
Like a fish or a dolphin it fell in the sea!
He’ll climb down now. . . .
Backwards and seawards and over his head
To fish for his pack and his lacy-full sheen
In the dark and the coldness of ocean and sea
The Man in the Moon used ankle and knee
To swim for his pack in the dark and the deepy and briny-full
sea.
Like a fish or a dolphin it fell in the sea,
That’s where it be, oh
That’s where it be!
Like a fish or a dolphin it fell in the sea!
He’ll swim through now. . . .
Backwards and sideways and under his tread
To fish for his pack and his glowing-full beam
In the dark and the coldness of ocean and sea
The Man in the Moon met cuttle and weed
To search for his pack, his unhoused pack,
In the dark and the vasty and briny-full sea.
Like a fish or a dolphin it fell in the sea,

THE CHOIR BOATS *Volume One of Longing For Yount*

That's where it be, oh
That's where it be!
Like a fish or a dolphin it fell in the sea!
He'll swim home now. . . .
Homewards but sadwards and slowing his tread
No luck for his pack and his shiniest beam
In the dark and the coldness of ocean and sea
The Man in the Moon met bad luck and worse
Deep down it sits now, his unfounded pack
In the dark and the vasty and briny-full sea.

Tom and the Minders sang this and other songs, which mingled with those of the Yountish sailors and their wives, echoing back down the strand to disturb the sleeping gulls. Jambres, the Cretched Man, sat alone in the house with the flagpole, deep in his thoughts. Once he looked up and out the window of the unlighted house, thinking he knew the words to one of the songs he heard in the distance, but then the song ended. He went back to his meditations, his coat wrapped close around him, pulsing in the dark.

Several weeks passed in Sanctuary. Every day in the late afternoon, the Minders had Tom to baggins. Sometimes a Yountish sailor or two would join as well, overcoming their uncertainty about tea. Their wives and children would accompany them from time to time, bringing home-made breads and stewed vegetables, products of the gardens they kept. Then Billy Sea-Hen and Tat'head and the other Minders were "on their best" as Billy put it, bringing chairs to the beach for the women, and offering solemn toasts to the Yountians. Invariably the meal ended with a song as the stars came out, a particularly rousing one if the moon rose early. Billy would chuckle and say to Tom, "We don't always know what we are saying to one another, us and the Yountish, but we always understand each other just the same."

Every morning Tom and Jambres shooed away the gulls and had breakfast together. Reaching for a fresh-caught sprat (the cove was rich with fish, and the sailors were very good fishermen while on shore), Tom said one day, "Billy and the other Minders believe in you. They think you'll lead them to salvation."

"And won't I?" said Jambres, arching one perfect eyebrow.

Tom said, "Your reputation with the Yountians in London hardly accords with the faith the Minders put in you. You cannot be surprised if I assemble some doubts. I harbour concerns for the men's well-being."

"Concerns for their well-being?" Jambres interrupted. "Well meant, I am sure, but what might you know of their well-being? You cannot claim to know their situation. I know something of their suffering."

"But salvation . . ." said Tom.

"Anything is better than their lot in England," the Cretched Man said. "Their children, those that live at all, have chalk-blue teeth and papery skin. I've seen children down on all fours in an alley, hungry enough to eat mouldy bread and spoiled potatoes. Women fight like rats for scraps cast off from rich men's tables, and are hanged for stealing a handkerchief worth one shilling. Or are transported to Australia, which might be worse."

"I cannot deny . . ." Tom started.

"But you must witness," said Jambres. "Your magistrates in England, your justices of the peace, nothing intenerates their hardened hearts to pity. Like alchemists trying to cerate base metals into gold, they use the prisons and the workhouses to mould and press the poor. In England, the poor such as Billy and his colleagues are worth less than the two sparrows sold for a farthing. They deserve much better."

Tom shook his head and said, "I do not dispute you. But Billy speaks of a war. In Yount."

"Salvation never comes without struggle," said the Cretched Man.

“In Yount are forces that must be overcome before the covenant of mercy can be fulfilled.”

“You speak again in riddles,” said Tom.

“Riddles, mysteries and, most of all, ironies,” said Jambres. “Listen to me, Thomas. Yount is no monolith. Far from it. Like the British and the French, the Yountians nourish enmities amongst themselves. The Yountians known to you, the residents of the Piebald Swan in London, represent the majority. But there is a minority that holds very different beliefs. The two sides clashed over a century ago in a great war. One side calls it the War of Affirmation and calls their enemies Rejectarians. Your Salmius Nalmius and Nexius Dexius—do not be surprised, of course, I know their names—are on the side of the Affirmation. The other side—from a place called Orn—calls it the War Against Errant Authority.”

“Who won the war?” asked Tom.

“Neither side,” said Jambres. “They exhausted themselves in strife. They ruined their temple, defiled the *omphalos*, the centre of their world.”

“What is that?”

“The place where we are to meet your uncle and get the key,” said Jambres. “At the Sign of the Ear.”

“You speak of ironies, but I do not grasp them,” Tom said.

“Because I have not made myself clear,” said Jambres. “I would lead my rogue’s crusade against Orn. The Ornish are slavers—they remain wedded to slavery. Those of Farther Yount, Yount Major, renounced slavery long ago: slavery and freedom were entwined in the Great War.”

“Still, I don’t see . . .” Tom turned his hands palm up in confusion.

“I would side with Yount Major,” said Jambres. “I am an ally of your Nexius Dexius and Salmius Nalmius, if only I could make them see that, make them accept me as one.”

“How could that be? You oppose them even as we speak . . . here I am!” Tom said.

The Cretched Man bowed his head for an instant. His coat shifted as he said, "You will find this hard to credit, Thomas, but I am not their enemy. So far from wishing them harm, I wish them an end to their punishment. How could I not? My release depends on theirs."

Tom said, "If you are not their enemy, but they see you as one, what does that make you?"

Jambres smiled bitterly, "Ah, the gall in my own potion! I was sent to Yount as part of my penance, to watch over the Yountians, to guide them. Instead I have become their jailer. And what prisoner does not despise his jailer?"

Tom nodded but less forcefully than he might have. He asked, "What could the Yountians have done to deserve such a punishment? Ripped from their home and condemned to exile?"

"Truly Thomas, I know not," said the Cretched Man. "That mystery is shielded from me, though I have tried to pierce its veils. It is sufficient to say that I was appointed to the role of gatekeeper and tutor. I have barely succeeded at the former task, and wholly failed at the latter."

Jambres fell silent. Moody wavelets rippled across his coat. The gulls, sensing their chance, crowded in. Tom stood up. He tried one final question: "What about Strix Tender Wurm?"

Jambres sat still as marble. His coat seemed to shrink upon him. Slowly the Cretched Man turned one cockatrice eye at Tom and said, "Of him, do not speak."

More weeks went by on Sanctuary. The Minders hunted and combed the beach, the sailors fished, the sailor's wives and children harvested beans, aubergines, and gourds from their gardens. Frost appeared on the heathlands, and sea-ducks came into the cove to escape the coming winter.

"Something has happened," the Cretched Man said one morning at breakfast. "Your Uncle Barnabas is delayed."

Tom put down his teacup, spilling a little, and said, "They would

never be late if they could help it!”

“You are right, Thomas,” said the Cretched Man. “Something untoward has occurred. I lost them some time ago. I have been searching but I cannot find them. Come, I will show you.” He led Tom into the house, up the stairs to a small locked room that was right under the flagpole on the roof. The room held bookshelves full of books, a table with many maps and, at the one window, a telescope.

“No ordinary telescope,” said Jambres. “An ansible-scope, if you will. Based on the same principles as the ansible but enabling far-sight. To do with sable-glass and refractored lenses and tuning for coroscular forces, if such interests you. With this I can, with practice, time, and discipline, scan the interstitial lands as well as peer back to Earth and onwards to Yount.”

Tom put his head to the eyepiece. At first all he saw was the *Seek-by-Night* at anchor in the cove, but swiftly the scene shifted. He looked at a deep-green valley with mist flowing along its ridges. Just as quickly the scene shifted again and the colours changed. In rapid succession he saw an eyrie filled with roseate eagles, then streaks of blues and yellows in a roiling sky, and then a bottle-green film descended over the view in the eyepiece. His eye hurt and he looked away.

The Cretched Man laughed. “It is no toy! An untrained eye will only get random images, spewed forth by the xantrophicious waves in the void.”

Tom was not easily deterred. He returned to the eyepiece. Images flickered across the screen once more. Tom could not identify any of them. He was about to give up when an image leaped into the frame and stayed there.

“A dolphin!” said Tom. Its eye was very bright and it was frantically waving its flippers.

“Not unusual,” said Jambres. “Dolphins are highly receptive to—”

“Sally!” yelled Tom. He gripped the ansible-scope so hard it shook. Sally had appeared, replacing the dolphin. Sally was asleep in

what looked like a ship's cabin. Tom thought he saw Isaak's golden fur when the image abruptly disappeared. Just before Tom looked up, he caught a blurred glimpse of a green lawn strewn with small blue flowers. The Cretched Man had grabbed for the scope and was looking through it. For five minutes or longer, he looked through the scope, saying nothing. Tom's head hurt badly, and he felt dizzy. He sat down and waited. Jambres said he could not see Sally, and asked Tom to describe what he had seen.

"Blue flowers in the grass?" said the Cretched Man. "Hmmm. You may have seen . . . well, never mind. Remarkable, remarkable, on at least two counts."

"Where is she?" said Tom.

"Impossible to know from such a short vision," said Jambres. "I checked the coordinates you were using as soon as I took the instrument over, but already they had been obscured. But the sighting is good fortune regardless."

"I thought you said it took years of training to use the telescope?"

"Indeed," said Jambres. "Altogether remarkable that you could find what I could not, even if you could not fix her location. And even more remarkable that you apparently entered into one of Sally's dreams, there at the end when you saw the flowers."

Tom snorted. "I don't believe in that sort of thing; that's the kind of nonsense Sally goes on about. . . ." He trailed off as he considered what he *had* just seen, and all the oddities he had experienced since leaving Mincing Lane.

"You are a remarkable family," Jambres said, half to himself. "I must credit the Learned Doctors with that much perspicacity: they chose you well."

"Chose?" said Tom.

"The operation with the key and selection of the Key-bearer and finding those who wish themselves to go," said the Cretched Man. "Very delicate, with many, many unforeseen consequences. The

Learned Doctors have made many attempts through the years, only two of which succeeded. This time—the third and final—they have, as you English say, ‘a sporting chance.’”

Tom was only half-listening. He was thinking of Sally and the rest of his family. He had taken to looking at himself in the mirror and masking his lower-face with his hands so as to see Sally. Now he had really seen her. He thought of her coming home from school and her lectures on points of Latin history and German grammar that only she cared about, and her missing meals so that the cook scolded her, and how she loved to sit in the partners’ room when she thought no one was looking. The Cretched Man’s next comment brought him back to the present.

“They’ve been thinking about your family for a long time, which means I have been too,” said Jambres. “Since your grandmother, Belladonna born Brownlee in Edinburgh.”

Tom felt a shiver and cried, “That’s unnatural! Why, I know next to nothing about my grandmother, so how could you . . . ?”

“Oh,” said Jambres. “Someone as sensitive to coroscular forces as your grandmother, someone with her ability to feel far—oh no, such people are exceedingly rare and hence awaken attention swiftly and far beyond the walls of the world. In Edinburgh they used to say that your grandmother had fairy blood in her and that she conversed with the Sidhe-folk, which, in its way, was not beside the truth. Alas for her, a Titania whose Oberon was too weak to defend her. Yet she lived long enough to pass her gifts on to her offspring.”

Tom was astounded. To sit in a room somewhere outside the world and hear from the lips of an eldritch stranger the story of one’s grandmother . . . “*Quatsch!*” was all Tom could muster.

The Cretched Man laughed, not unkindly. “The strangest thing is that the Learned Doctors . . . and I . . . may have missed the most gifted in favour of your uncle.”

The truth of the Cretched Man’s speculation came two days later. Tom and the Minders were having their late-afternoon baggins,

with more than the usual number of Yountians present. One of the sailors was twanging on a mouth-harp and another one was playing a fiddle as everyone clapped and stamped. The song was one the Yountians had been teaching Tom and the Minders, so everyone joined in on the chorus. "Mama-oyster says to baby-oyster to get out of bed before the wicked gull comes and tears you away," was the refrain, as near as Tom could translate it into English. Just as they came to the triple-clap that ended the refrain, they had an unexpected guest, and they all fell silent.

The Cretched Man ran towards them. No one had ever seen him run before. ("He always paces stately," Billy once said, "because he has what the French call 'sanfwa,'" which was more literally true than Billy realized.) As Jambres came to the fire, he bowed once to the group, and then called for Tom.

As Jambres called, Tom half-fell. Billy stepped up instantly and caught him. Tom sat on the beach, with Billy and the Cretched Man beside him, and all the others in a ring around him. Jambres called to Tom but Tom did not hear him. Tom began to hum, but it wasn't the Yountian song about oysters or the shanty about the Man in the Moon or any other song they had sung around the baggins-fire. He stopped for a second, as if listening for the theme, to insert himself in an invisible choir, then began singing. Jambres looked at Tom with wonder in his eyes. No one had ever seen such a look in his eyes before. ("Like he'd felt the rapture," was how Billy described it later. "And that's not just me gum-diddering.") Then an even more marvellous thing happened: Jambres began to sing as well, matching his voice to that of Tom's.

One by one everyone on the beach began to sing, a wordless harmony to a song that Tom shared with them. Later, no one remembered what the song sounded like or how long they sang, only that it was a delicious moment and all too brief. Tom cried out and fell back. The song ended on that note.

Blinking in the firelight, everyone looked around a bit shyly, as if

they had just been properly introduced for the first time. The sailor with the mouth-harp tried softly to recapture the song but could not. Tom sat up with tears on his face.

“Sally’s brought them back,” Tom said.

Jambres nodded. Billy helped Tom to his feet, and then he and Jambres walked Tom back to the house with the flagpole. Everyone else sat around the fire for a long time after that.

“Sally rescued them,” said the Cretched Man the next morning. “They should be in Yount soon.”

“I saw a strange ship and a strange machine and then a dolphin plummeted out of thin air,” said Tom. He yawned. He had slept a long time.

“Your sister is another Belladonna, and more,” said Jambres, offering Tom a biscuit. “I saw her on the ansible-scope suddenly, which is why I came to you. They were lost entirely in some ancient pocket of silence, a remainder from the *tohu-bohu* at the Beginning.”

“Nothing like this has ever happened to me before,” said Tom, taking the biscuit and heaping on the last of the marmalade from the ship’s stores.

“I doubt it will be the last time it happens to you.”

Tom shook his head, paused to devour the entire biscuit, and said, “You sang too.”

The Cretched Man wiped a bit of marmalade that had fallen on the table from Tom’s knife before saying, “I did. I wonder at that myself. Sally’s song was compelling.”

Tom put down his napkin, shoved aside his plate, and said, “You are playing a longer game than me, but you sang for Sally, for Uncle Barnabas, for all the Yountians on that ship.”

“I told you, Thomas, I am not your enemy, no matter how bizarre or ill-mannered my carriage towards you may sometimes seem,” said Jambres, holding the sleeve of his right arm as if the coat ached.

“Ill-mannered is an understatement,” said Tom, but he said it half

in jest. "How can you expect people to see you as an ally, let alone trust you as one, if you persist in sending knuckle-dogs and, what are they called, hyter-spirits after them?" He looked to the side of the house where a kennel sat in a small stockade. Only the knuckle-dog's tail could be seen hanging out of the kennel. Tom remembered the print of Diana and Acteon at home in the partners' room.

"I admit that the knuckle-dog has a rude appearance, that its fingered paw is an eerie extravagance, but it is hardly more savage than the wolfhound or mastiff kept by any squireen in the shires," said Jambres. "As for the hyter-spirits, they are scouts only, no more harmful than carrier pigeons. They have no appetites other than the ones I give them. I shape them from clay and breathe a pneuma into them. Jesus is said to have done the same and he is not castigated for it!"

Tom shook his head. "I have given up my defence of reason since coming on this quest," he said. "Too many occult matters have manifested themselves. But, for most people, talk of breathing life into clay is cause for fear."

Jambres sighed. "This is why my task is made so difficult. When I speak the truth I am the object of fear and enmity. When I speak other than the truth, I am rightly called out for a liar."

Tom could think of no reply.

Jambres continued. "The Yountians insist on the truth but then deny it when it is presented to them. Show them a truth and they seek a base motive or baleful desire behind it. Sometimes a beast is just a beast, not a monster moved by another's will, such as the Sow of Crommyon egged on by its witch owner."

"Or the giant's pet manticore that Gosse of Frinder slew!" said Tom.

"I don't know that one," said Jambres. "Rare and pleasing to discover a new story after all my years."

"An old Scots ballad that Uncle Barnabas sings on occasion," Tom shrugged.

“You *are* Belladonna’s grandson!” said Jambres.

They left the table, dispersed the gulls, walked down to the beach. The sanderlings had migrated, leaving only a pair of yellowshanks and a lone whimbrel searching for food on the tidal flats.

“What comes next will be difficult and may go awry, Thomas,” said Jambres. “The Yountians have schemed and plotted a long time to bring the key with the right Key-bearer to Yount. I set our meeting by design at the very place where the key must be used, at the Sign of the Ear. I too need to confirm the key’s authenticity and validate its Bearer. So far are our needs identical.”

“What will this key do?” asked Tom. “*Quatsch* to me, but I have never really followed this—just took what Sally and Uncle Barnabas said on faith. Sally’s hardly ever wrong about anything.”

“The key is exactly what it sounds like, Thomas,” said Jambres. “It will open the door to the Yountians’ prison, end their exile—and give them a bridge to Earth if they want to take it. Or elsewhere. I have given up, or nearly so, trying to tell them that the time for their release has not yet come. They have not met all the demands for their redemption. To go now, with conditions unmet, is premature at best. By the terms of my own assignment, I am barred from intervening too directly—they must be allowed the freedom to choose.”

The lone whimbrel pattered off in front of them, calling “peeyeeee-yeeee-yik” as it flew over the surf.

“If you cannot intervene, then how do you intend to lead Billy and the Minders, and whoever else, on a mission against those slavers?” said Tom.

The Cretched Man smiled one of his perfect smiles, highlighting the anguish beneath his brittle masterpiece of a face, and said, “One in my position learns to parse all terms and conditions to granular particularity. I am an accomplished jurist in the courts of heaven, having often pled my own case before judges of novembered diction and austere visage. In my carceral role, I have some latitude on how my talents may be used or withheld for the benefit of the immured.

My expedition against Orn, Nearer Yount, is a private project.”

“Unsanctioned, you mean,” said Tom.

“But justified in its purpose, a furthering of the levitical construct,” said Jambres, licking his lips as if something acrid were on his tongue. “So I would argue in the celestial house of forfeiture, should I be discovered.”

Tom looked at the Cretched Man’s coat and wondered how many more tailorings Jambres would have to undergo if he were discovered or if his interpretation of terms were overruled. Tom and the Cretched Man walked in silence for some time, their only companion the whimbrel that flew from spot to spot, always fifty yards or so in front of them. Its white and black wings flashed against the blue-green sea.

At last Tom said, “Another thing I do not understand is how the Yountians even came to have a key, and why, if you are their bailiff, you cannot simply change the lock.”

The Cretched Man said seriously, “This is not Newgate or the King’s Bench, where one simply bribes the warden for a day-leave!”

“Well, no, I hardly meant—” said Tom.

“As for their possession of the key, they stole it,” said Jambres. “From me.”

“But you are so . . .” Tom stopped in the sand and looked right at Jambres.

“Powerful? Yes but the Learned Doctors are not bookfull blockheads, no matter how doomed their actions might be. Desperation drives them to prideful feats. I understand their desperation—indeed, I share it. They have gathered a great armamentarium of hopeless wisdom—not enough to win them their freedom, but enough to give them a glimpse of unfenced sky and homeward highways. Enough for them to purloin a key from their jailer while he dreamed of his own long-awaited return.”

The Cretched Man licked his lips again, and said, “There are three locks. Such things always come in threes, except when they

come in sevens. The Learned Doctors have contrived to open two of the three with the key. Two others from our world who wished themselves to go have come over the last century. Now the Doctors invest all their power and knowledge in opening the third in the trinity.”

Tom thought of Uncle Barnabas, with his vests and funny little sayings and his habit of leaping out of chairs to handle and clarify what he could, as saviour of a world. Tom looked sideways at the man beside him, the pallid man in the red coat that he could not remove, as the gatekeeper who must refuse Uncle Barnabas and the Yountians.

“Yes, Thomas,” said the Cretched Man, as if he had read Tom’s mind. “I am constrained to retrieve the key. There is more. What Barnabas McDoon can unlock, he can also re-lock. I cannot do that myself, once the locks have been opened. He must re-lock the two locks that have already been opened.”

Tom remembered the botched exchange in London. This time there would be more men, more weapons.

“Yes,” said the Cretched Man, once again anticipating Tom’s thought. “We will be ambushed at the Sign of the Ear, beyond doubt or estimate. They will stop at nothing to ensure that the final lock is unlocked. I must not let that happen, for their sake and for mine.”

“But there’s Sally and the fraulein, Uncle Barnabas and Sanford on the other side,” exclaimed Tom, stopping again. Deep in his eyes, the Cretched Man registered an infinite sadness.

“Thomas,” said the Cretched Man with a tenderness that Tom did not want to hear. “We must make them understand that we are all on the same side, despite appearances. All of us are Proetids, wandering witless and mad for having insulted the divine, looking for our saviour.”

Tom waved his arms at the sea, putting the wimbrel to flight. He would have yelled but perhaps some of the Cretched Man’s sangfroid was becoming part of his own constitution. They said little as

they walked back to the house with its little yard in front and the kennel on the side. At the door, Jambres stopped. He winced, his perfect brow and his unmatched nose marred by an equally perfect, unmatched pain. Tom put his bandaged hand on the Cretched Man's shoulder to steady him. For the first time, he felt the blood coursing through Jambres, and below the blood, much deeper, the wells of anguish still to be emptied.

Jambres said, "The Yountians make their plight worse by attempted flight. We must make them see this. Their sentence cannot be completed until they fulfill all their obligations. Oh Thomas! If your namesake could convince King Hyndopheres of the passage to heaven, then so can we make the Yountians see!"

Tom left Jambres at the door and walked out on the heath, where he came upon Billy Sea-Hen an hour later. Billy had a rifle in his hand, and two of the rabbit-like creatures in his other hand.

"Afternoon, Tommy," said Billy, swinging his bag in a companionable way. "Shall miss the hunting when we leave, and our baggins on the beach."

"We'll be leaving soon," said Tom.

"Oh yes," said Billy. "We knows that. Getting our rifles ready for more than coney-hunting, if it comes to that."

"But they're my family on the other side," said Tom.

"That's a terrible fact, it is," agreed Billy. "Caught betwixt a bear and a lion, that is. But me and Tat'head have been thinking upon it, and hope we can help avoid trouble."

A late autumn wind soughed over the heather. A great bumblebee sat on a gorse-flower, slowly flexing its wings. It lumbered off to another flower and then flew away.

Billy followed its flight intently, and said, "The last dumbledore until next spring!"

"A good sign?" said Tom.

"Chip chap chunter, indeed so! He's a tough old bloke is the dumbledore. We're like him: rough and slow as it might seem, but

we'll be here next spring. You'll see."

As they walked back to the spit on which the Minders had their cottages, Tom pointed to the rifle and said, "Use it only when you truly must."

"Yet there may be true need, Tommy," said Billy. "We aren't heading to Cockaigne with marzipan mountains and trees spun of sugar. Could be some hard graft before we're done. Just so's you are ready like."

As the kelp-fire flared up on the shingle, Tom put his hand on Billy's shoulder so that they stopped just at the edge of the beach, where the heather ran out and the sea kale began.

Tom said, "I will be ready. Just keep our heads about us, that's all I ask."

"Depend upon it, Tommy Two-Fingers," said Billy, who turned and headed to the fire and the frying pan for the conies. Tom stayed a moment longer on the edge of the beach. He looked past the Minders as they prepared baggins. He looked past the *Seek-by-Night* as it bobbed at anchor. He looked far out to sea.

Well, Tom thought. If this doesn't top all: a kidnapper is a hero, and the prisoners must stay locked up for their own good, so Uncle Barnabas must be stopped. And Sally sings ships out of the dark.

The Minders were calling him to the fire for their last baggins on the beach before departing for Yount in the morning. Tom saluted the darkening horizon with his maimed hand and walked down to join the group. Picking up a mug of hot tea, Tom cast one more thought out over the waters: "Sally, sister dear, sing us a song . . . sing us all home."

Spent, Sally slept much of the three weeks the *Gallinule* took to sail from Oos to the Fences of Yount. She dreamed constantly, small dreams only, the kind with no great power beyond the personal. She thought of her dreams during the voyage out of voiceless entrapment as small incidental scenes behind the main subject of a portrait. She

saw Mrs. Sedgewick sitting by a fireplace, reading. She saw the cook and her niece in the kitchen at Mincing Lane, polishing the indigo pheasant plates. Twice she saw the African woman in the old sailor's coat and red neckerchief, standing alone in an alley yard surrounded by tall, drab buildings. Always she hoped for a glimpse of Tom or of James Kidlington, but they did not come to her.

Most frequently, she saw a woman her own age, in lambent silk, with half-moons dangling from her ears and silver threaded through her gleaming black tresses, walking in a garden.

Rehana? Sally thought. *But then I must be dreaming into the past. I don't know. Such dark eyes she has, whoever she is. I wish mine were so dark and fierce.*

Only once did she find herself at the Sign of the Ear. The temple-monkeys approached her swishing their prehensile tails, staying just beyond her reach, uttering low "chip chip" noises. She gazed at the little blue flowers, the *sela-manri*, flower of repentance. With a start just before she woke up, she realized what the flowers were: *Bixwort! Just like in the garden at home in Mincing Lane!*

As Sally drifted in and out of her dreams, crew members spoke of almost nothing other than her song.

"She is a *lail obos*, a Dolphin-singer," many said. "A *tassna innanosai*, a Moon-finder."

"We have not had either for a century, not since the reign of King Brusiminius," said one of the A.B.s to his colleagues, "The last was Matthias Laufer, who came as a child with the Hamburg Pietists."

"Before that, how many?" replied a colleague. "Sippia Sillitate, called the Sibyl of Qua, but she went mad. Deligence Nux, who disappeared in a thunderstorm one night, during the time of Queen Jillencia, which is nigh three hundred years ago."

Some murmured that Sally might even be the *sukenna-tareef*, the Saviour.

"Heresy!" exclaimed others. "No human can be the Saviour. Sally is *pash*, human like us. Only the Mother can save us and the Mother

needs first to be wakened at the Sign of the Ear! To say a *pash* could be the Saviour is the apostasy perpetrated by the enemies in Orn!”

Reglum spoke to the McDoons about Orn.

“The Coerceries of Orn occupy most of Nearer Yount, the island east of Yount Major,” he explained. “The four coerceries are each ruled by its own tyrannulet. The Ornish are Rejectarians, because they believe fulgination is a sin and that any attempt to go abroad from Yount is an act against the Mother. The Ornish enslave those who disagree.”

“Waking the Mother is but one of the necessities: the war between her two sons must also be ended!” the captain added. “And the key must be used to draw down the Moon, so the *fajet tindo*, the Serpent of Rebellious Despair, can be defeated.”

“Strix Tender Wurm?” said Sanford.

“The same,” said Reglum. “Or so we believe.”

Sanford nodded and murmured, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father has put in his own power.”

At the Fences of Yount, the mist rolled back and there before them was a great warship, as large as an East Indiaman, bristling with cannon. The dolphins accompanying the *Gallinule* raced ahead to frolic with the dolphins swimming round the warship. A whale flanked each side of the warship, which was called the *Saker*. One of the whales rolled over, revealing a massive fin. Its companion raised a great tail out of the water, let it fall back with a mighty slap that was more impressive than a cannon salute. There was much halloo’ing as the *Gallinule* pulled along side. Much-needed supplies of fresh food and water were rowed across to the *Gallinule*. The *Saker’s* captain came aboard for dinner, and his ship’s mailbags were given to the *Gallinule* for delivery. He looked with wonder at Barnabas and the rest of the McDoon party, partly because their pale skin was, well, so pale, but mostly because they bore the key.

The *Gallinule* had run out of coal and sailed now with wind only. The Fulginator was turned off, and the fulgination room locked

again. For the next ten days they sailed in the way ships do in Big Land, by compass and chronometer. They weathered a storm, harsh but natural. They sighted Yount Major on the second Prannish-day of Cole-month, in the year 351 since the Blessed Encounter, which is to say November 7, 1813 (“Martinmas, how strange to think it,” said Barnabas).

Everyone rushed to the bow. For the McDoons, it felt like coming home to a place they had never been. Far off in front of them was the tiniest top of what might be a very large mountain, separated by sea. Yet, for all their travails so far, each recognized that their adventures had only just begun, like Palmerin outwitting the crone at the Well at the Edge of the World, or Orlando taming the hippogriff.

Barnabas held the key, tugged at his vest, now barely recognizable as one of the finest ever made in London, and whispered, “Well, beans and bacon! We’re coming, Tom, my boy!”

Sanford found the words of the psalmist going through his head: “Some went down to the sea in ships. . . . Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out from their distress; he made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.”

I feel like Europa pulling her feet up as the bull stormed across the waters, thought Sally, hugging Isaak to her breast. No, that isn’t right: Europa went unwillingly, and I wished myself to go. More like Odysseus arriving at Ithaca. But no, that’s not quite right either since home is Mincing Lane—though arriving in Yount feels like homecoming too. Oh Tom!

The sun rose over Farther Yount. They would be there soon.



Chapter 12: At the Sign of the Ear

Sally held Isaak tight as the *Gallinule* sailed into Yount Great-Port. The return of a strong ship from a voyage to Big Land was always a scene of celebration because one out of every seven tough ships did not return, and those that did were scarred, their crews haunted. The crowd on the Naval Quay greeting the *Gallinule* was larger than usual because the city knew the ship had fared forth to bring back a Key-bearer. The crowds swelled as rumours flew that the *Gallinule's* crew spoke of another marvel onboard, a Dolphin-singer and Moon-finder. By the time the McDoons had wound their way past the Fort and walked across the University Pentangle, crossed the bridge over Dondil's Canal, and come to the Royal Palace, the streets were thronged. Yet the crowds were nearly silent, a sea of dark eyes watching the McDoons. A mother might shush a child or a man turn to a comrade with some whispered remark, but otherwise there was no more noise than that of a low wind among the masts of ships at anchor.

The McDoons barely had a chance to wash the salt from their faces before they were brought to the Queen.

“Do bring your cat,” said Reglum to Sally. “I meant what I said about cats having high honour in our country. A cat that has journeyed all the way from Karket-soom shall be presented to the Queen as well!”

Sally smiled, as she did rarely since the loss of James Kidlington. Barnabas noted to himself that those rare smiles came almost exclusively as a result of remarks made by Lieutenant Bammary.

They waited in the Queen’s anteroom. Sally looked out the one window, down the hill and over the harbour. Many ships moved in the harbour, surrounded by wherries and jolly-boats, lighters and barges. A great river emptied into the harbour, with quays and docks along its length. To a London merchant’s niece, the scene looked familiar, a great comfort after the strangeness of the Interrugal Lands.

“What’s that?” She pointed at something that one did not see along the Thames: poles as tall as ship’s masts scattered throughout the harbour in a design she could not determine, each with a ragged platform on top. “Do ships tie up to those? Are they mooring pales?”

“Yes, but they are more than that,” said Reglum. “Look!”

From one of the pole-top platforms a hawk launched itself and headed out to sea.

“Ospreys!” said Reglum. “We love them almost as much as we adore dolphins, though the fish-hawk cannot fulginate. They nest on top of the poles.”

Oh, to be an osprey! she thought, watching another one swoop in, a fish in its claws. *To lead a fierce and simple life, hunting, rearing young and then dying, but doing so without doubts or self-recrimination. Just being and doing.*

“Speaking of dolphins,” said Barnabas, pointing to one of the

many paintings and prints on the walls of the anteroom. “Look at this one, like the pictures at the Piebald Swan.”

Reglum said, “It depicts a story from Karket-soom, in honour of our voyages to your world: the story of Melicertes, whose mother threw him into the sea when they were pursued by his father, who was made mad by the gods. Little Melicertes—see, there he is—was saved by a dolphin, who carried him ashore.”

At that moment the double-doors opened, a bell rang, and two guards stepped into the waiting room. They said: “By the Trees and the Nurturing Mother, you are called to meet Her Highness the Queen.”

The Queen’s audience-room was small. The McDoons’ surprise at the modesty of the room was superseded by a much greater shock: the Queen was wearing trousers.

They had no time to register their shock, however, because it was followed by yet another: the Queen bowed to them. Six others were with her in the room. They each bowed. Reglum and Nexius each brought his fists together in front of himself and bowed. The McDoons did the same.

The Queen bid everyone sit at the oval table that was the sole piece of furniture in the room, except for some chairs along the walls. The two guards stepped outside and shut the door.

“Greetings,” she said in English. “I am Queen Zinnamoussea Hullitate of Yount Major, sixth in succession of the dynasty that led Yount Major to victory one hundred and twenty-five years ago in the War of Affirmation, the war that ended with the destruction of the Temple at the Sign of the Ear. We of Farther Yount, of Yount Major, affirmed our abolition of slavery. The Ornish did not. I bid you welcome with the greatest of respect and what I hope will become affection as our acquaintance grows and prospers.”

She paused and took a breath.

“So much of a speech I put in my head,” she said with a smile. “My English is good for listening, but I beg our pardon, not so good for

talking,” said the Queen. “I ask the Lord-Chancellor, whose English is goodest, to translate. I know too that the Marines have good English, from trips to Karket-soom.”

I wonder if Queen Elizabeth was like this! thought Sally. *Oh, if only Mrs. Sedgewick could be with me now.*

Trousers! thought Barnabas. *Beans and bacon! Trousers on a woman! On the other hand, they are very well-made trousers, I must say. I might enquire about that material—it must be coloured with more of those tar-based dyes Salmius told us about. Hmmm, I wonder if she notices my vest?*

The Lord-Chancellor introduced herself and then the other five in the room: the head of the Chamber of Optimates (“Roughly, the Speaker in Parliament,” whispered Reglum), the Arch-Bishop of the Sacerdotal Corps (“Makes him the Arch-Dean of the Learned Doctors,” said Reglum), the Major-Captain of the Marines & Army, the Chief Councillor & Protonotary of the Collegium for Agriculture, Husbandry, & Commerce and, lastly and off to one side, the representative for the resident Karket-soomi in Yount under Crown protection. This last person seemed to be there mostly on sufferance or as a direct request of the Queen that none of the others could talk her out of.

“That’s the Rabbi of Palombeay,” said Reglum to the McDoons, but he was interrupted before he had time to say more.

“One other introduction remains before we begin our serious discussion,” said the Lord-Chancellor. “We have heard about a cat that has travelled with you, one known as the *tes muddry*, the golden claw. We’ve not met a cat that came from Karket-soom. Would you bring her to us?”

Sally reached down and unclasped the wicker box at her feet. Out sprang Isaak in new-scrubbed golden glory, her plumed tail a banner waving in the air. Isaak jumped onto the table and investigated each person.

“Cats know no sovereign but themselves and thus make even

sovereigns think about their position,” said Dorentius Bunce, first in English and then in Yountish. “An old saying in Yount.”

The Queen laughed and said something in Yountish.

“All of us must be cats, acting with control and grace, otherwise we become mice who get eaten,” said Dorentius. “Another old saying here.”

When Isaak had curled up in Sally’s lap, the Queen signalled to the Lord-Chancellor, who said, “It is time. Show forth, please, the key.”

Barnabas, making a slight demonstration of reaching for the key so as to show off his vest, brought it out of his pocket.

The Lord-Chancellor said to the Arch-Bishop: “Is this the key in truth?”

The Arch-Bishop examined the key, and said, “Yes. This is the key.”

The Queen said in English, “To go to our temple at the place of the Ear and off-lock the door, with the key?”

“Yes,” said Barnabas without hesitation. “And to get my nephew back.”

The Queen nodded. She leaned forward and for a moment was just a person, a woman, not a ruler of millions with the fate of a world in her hands.

Looking right into Barnabas’s eyes and speaking again in English, she said, “Thank you. I know about your boy. I know about children who get took and lost. We will help you get him back to you.”

“Thank you,” said Barnabas.

The Lord-Chancellor brought her arms together so her palms met, and said, “We all thank you, we who represent the recognized bodies of Yount Major. We have heard you and we will help you, since doing so helps ourselves.”

“That’s that then,” said Barnabas, as the audience concluded. “Let’s get ready to handle ’em!”

“One more thing,” said Sanford. “And not wanting to appear too forward, but the letter—your first contact with us, Your Excellency—spoke too of help we might find here to recover

Barnabas's heart's desire. How might that be achieved?"

"We will help as we can," said the Lord-Chancellor (the Arch-Dean shifted in his seat). "Accept our word on that. Let us conclude first and quickly the opening of the Door and the return to you of your nephew. Then we will make good on our promise."

As they bowed their goodbyes and walked out of the audience room, Sally realized that the only person—besides Fraulein Reimer—who had said nothing was the Rabbi of Palombeay.

His eyes were keen enough, she thought. He followed everything, at least those bits in Yountish. I wonder what he is thinking.

Sanford thought, *Not at all what I would have expected in a Queen, but then again this isn't England. Very level-headed. I like her measure, even if she is wearing trousers. Still, their game and ours are not completely consonant—will bear watching, though I do trust Nexius and the others from the Gallinule, most especially young Bammary.*

Barnabas whistled and thought to himself, *So that's an audience with royalty. Seemed more like bartering on the Exchange. I don't much care for that Learned Doctor, brrrr, a chilly fish. Queen seems a lovely woman, and she cared about Tom, that's clear, though I cannot know why she would beyond politeness. She's a queen, after all, has millions of subjects to think about, and Tom's not even one of them.*

Back in their own quarters, the McDoons heaped questions on their shipmates.

"Trousers?" asked Barnabas.

Reglum smiled. "I should have thought to tell you, being one who knows English ways so well. Yes, trousers. Here in Yount, we think nothing of women in trousers. To speak plainly, your attitudes about dress never cease to astonish us. Here women go in trousers because women do whatever men do and more."

Sanford and Barnabas were in clarifying stances.

"How so, sir?" said Sanford.

"As I said, women do all the same work, hold the same situations, as men," said Reglum. "Our Lord-Chancellor is a woman—you'll

note that she too wore trousers.”

“Women as merchants, for instance?” said Barnabas.

“Of course,” said Noreous, amused.

“University professors?” said Barnabas, looking at Sally.

“Yes,” said Reglum, his smile widening. “Yes to any occupation you can think of.”

“Soldiers?” asked Sanford, with a confident look.

“Yes,” said Nexius. “We all fight here, as necessary. Like Sally’s cat.”

Even Sally was taken aback at that news. Women as soldiers! But then she looked at Fraulein Reimer and remembered the fraulein pointing a pistol at the ruffians on the night of the housebreaking.

“But,” she said. “There were no women on the *Gallinule*.”

Reglum’s smile faded.

“True,” he said. “But that is a recent event. The Queen decreed that no women were to go forth on the tough ships any longer, though they can still serve in the navy within Yount.”

“Why?”

“Because she lost her only daughter when one of our tough ships, the *Merganser*, went missing with the princess serving onboard.”

“Oh!”

“Yes, it is sad,” said Reglum. “The Princess Zessifa was much loved and would have made us a fine queen.”

“The *Merganser* disappeared near a place in the Between-Lands that we call Lizard-Home,” said Nexius. “We sent out three search ships but could not find our missing colleagues. Gone, off into the . . . well, now you know where they were lost.”

Nexius pointed to Reglum. “Lieutenant Bammary made his first trip on a tough ship as a member of one of the search parties. They only took volunteers.”

Reglum said, “Thank you, Captain.” Then to the others: “Nexius was my commanding officer on that ship.”

“The *Swift*,” said Nexius. “One of our last before we got the steam

engines. But, hunh, we were not ospreys to save a tern, as we say in Yount.”

Sally thought of something. “Does the Queen have any sons?”

“Ah, Miss Sally,” said Reglum. “No, she does not. One son she had who died of childhood pox, and then her daughter . . .”

“So Yount—at least Yount Major—has no heir,” said Sanford.

“Say rather the House of Hullitate has no heir,” said Reglum. “Yount Major has an heir, a prince from the Presumptive House among the Optimates, a family called Loositage.”

Nexius shifted, looked even more than usual like a badger with a briar in his paw, but he said nothing.

“Our rules of inheritance are complicated,” said Reglum, choosing his words carefully. “Just as yours are. Perhaps we should leave it at that, since this question is not imminent in the way our rendezvous at the Sign of the Ear is.”

But Nexius clearly wanted to continue the conversation just a little longer. The briar in his paw had grown to an entire bramble.

“Tell them more, Reglum,” he said in the tone of a captain to a lieutenant.

Reglum sighed and said, “The rules of inheritance are all nicely codified but there is also, outside the rules, a . . . sentiment, I suppose I could call it.”

“A prophecy from the Mother,” said Nexius.

“As some call it,” said Reglum with another one of the gestures that the McDoons did not understand. “Not a canonical text, not according to the Gremium for Guided Knowledge. The story was first circulated by the Sibyl of Qua, who attracted a large following. Then the story resurfaced independently, preached by the young Matthias Laufer, the passionate Pietist boy who came years later.”

“What does the prophecy say?”

“That Yount’s eleventh dynasty since our New Reckoning, which starts with the crowning of First-King Ussommeous Chabimate almost two thousand years ago, will be a dynasty begun by two

individuals from Karket-soom.”

“I guess that the House of Hullitate is the tenth dynasty,” said Sally.

“Precisely,” said Reglum. “The prophecy is one reason we put all Karket-soomi under Crown protection. Everyone welcomes Karket-soomi as proof that we are not alone, as evidence of our eventual freedom, but not everyone relishes the idea of Karket-soomi as rulers in Yount.”

“So,” Nexius said. “Two schools of mind. Those who would advertise our presence to Karket-soom, the better to advance the fulfillment of the prophecy, those are called Proclaimers. The others, who feel otherwise, we call Secretists.”

On the way back to their quarters, Barnabas said, “Buttons and beeswax, Yountish history is every bit as complicated as our own. Indeed, I think I might even prefer old what’s-his-name of Halicarnassus with his that battle and this battle until one’s eyes cross. Happy there is no examination on all this!”

“Even if there were, all that matters is Tom,” Sanford said.

Sally put up her hand before anyone else could speak. She took out the ansible pendant from around her neck and held it up for all to see. The pendant glowed a dull-red.

Sally felt her stomach tighten as they neared the Hills of the Temple, held Isaak even more tightly in her lap. She knew from her dreams that it was impossible to land a ship at the base of the promontory, that the only approach to the Temple was by land over the encircling hills. For two days they had travelled east and then southeast from Yount Great-Port, on a broad road hugging the coast. At dawn the second day, several companies of sharpshooters joined the members of the Queen’s Household Guard already escorting them. Sally looked out of the carriage window. All she saw jogging along on horses were swords and pistols, and, when she craned her neck to look upwards, the faces of soldiers. Several of these were women, just as Nexius had said.

First Tom, then we'll see about heart's desire, thought Barnabas, as the carriage bumped along. *How Rehana figures into this, I cannot reckon. Rehana . . .*

He thought of the Khodja garden in Bombay. The carriage jolted, tossed everyone nearly to the ceiling, and brought Barnabas back to the present.

“Hah! Time to get our revenge on the Cretched Man. Now we'll handle 'im, just like Lord Rodney against the French—straight at 'im, and no quarter!”

Must not let Barnabas do anything rash, thought Sanford, rearranging his hat. *Can't let him charge the line lacking his flints.*

Sanford looked to Sally. “I do not understand what has happened to her. I'd call it witchly. It is surely unnatural. But whatever it is, she is on the side of the righteous: she has cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light, as the Book talks about.”

Fraulein Reimer said nothing but did her needlework despite the jouncing of the carriage. She tried to hide the fact that the needle had jabbed her several times, but Sally saw drops of blood on the embroidery. *Like the Queen in the fairy tale,* Sally thought, *whose drops of blood on a handkerchief foretold the doom of a missing child.*

Rattling behind the McDoon's carriage were others, filled with Learned Doctors and members of the Gremium for Guided Knowledge, all wrapped in dark green overcoats. The Arch-Bishop—who was thus the Arch-Dean of the Learned Doctors—was among them. He seemed ill at ease around Sally, who returned the feeling. She noticed that none of the Marine officers spoke more than was necessary with the Arch-Dean or with any of the others in the other carriages. She also noticed that the carriages had their own escort, soldiers dressed not in the Marines' dark blue but in deep-green uniforms. Their brooches were silver with a green tree, not a leaping dolphin.

“Sacerdotal Guards,” growled Nexius when asked. “Only Optimates can join. Better equipped than we are.”

They stayed the second night in a small fort at a fork in the road.

“How far to the Temple now?”

“One more day. There to the southeast you see already the first Hills of the Temple.”

The next day was Sterrowday. With scores of soldiers riding along side, some in dark blue, some in deep green, they left the last of the farmed lands and rode into the hills. The sun was out but it was cold. A few birds piped from thickets at the base of the hills but otherwise they saw and heard nothing. The road, winding through the hills, became narrower and rougher, until it was just barely wider than the carriages.

“Interminable ride is breaking my back-parts,” Barnabas said. “But, from the egg to the apples, we’ll soon be done! I cannot imagine anyone, not even that wicked chap in the coat, standing up to the lot of us!”

Sanford pulled his chin in as he said, “Old friend, you are sometimes just a little bit too much like a sundial, seeing only the sunny hours.”

“Really . . .” said Barnabas, looking affronted and amused at the same time.

“Let us not count bearskins before the bear is shot,” said Sanford.

And skinned, added Sally to herself.

Late in the afternoon they passed out of the hills. Sally was glad the soldiers rode alongside again so she could not see. She feared the view though she could not say why. She heard the surf in the distance.

“Halt,” said Nexius. “We camp here tonight.”

Sally looked and beheld what she had seen so many times in her dreams. As the sun set, and dozens of campfires were kindled, Sally looked over a bare stretch towards a distant sea. At the edge of sight were five giant trees huddled around a white building. Sally

gasped: it is one thing to dream a thing, it is another to see it in the waking world, and then to wonder which came first, the dream or the waking experience. She seized her St. Morgaine medallion and clenched her jaw.

“Every Yountian knows of this place,” said Reglum in a low voice. “Only a few come here. Mostly just Sacerdotes, especially the Learned Doctors and the members of the Gremium, and even they do not come often or stay long. All the soldiers, men and women alike, are anxious and uneasy. ’Tis our most holy ground . . . holiness is hard to endure in such concentration.”

Sally did not answer but was glad for his company.

“Come back to the fire,” said Reglum. “It grows colder as we speak. The wind off the ocean is chilling.”

“No moon,” she said, and pulled her hood up over her head.

The next morning, Mickleday, came cold and clear. Over the sound of many hooves was the suffle of the wind, and over that, the boom of surf. The carriages slowed. Sally watched as the soldiers hived off to right and left, the green in one direction, the blue in the other. The carriages stopped.

Sally stepped into the scene she had dreamed so many times. For a second she stopped breathing. Here was the grassy lawn, with small blue flowers in it. There was frost on the lawn and on the flowers. She pointed at the flowers and mouthed, “Bixwort.” Fraulein Reimer nodded.

They passed under the five gargantuan trees, live oaks whose leaves did not fall. Acorns carpeted the ground all around the great, twisted, runcled trees. Now and then another acorn fell, bouncing a little before coming to rest. Sally looked up and, yes, caught glimpses of little fox-red monkeys with prehensile tails and antlered heads. “Chip, chip,” they mewed as the troops marched beneath the trees.

Sally walked more slowly. The Temple, which had seemed small in her dreams, loomed overhead. *As big as St. Paul’s, almost as tall as*

Sankt Jakobi, she thought. Its roof was cracked, its portico ruined, with bits of column and metope missing or lying in the grass. An enormous fissure ran up the façade.

“This is it,” Nexius said. “In we go with the Arch-Dean and his colleagues. With two dozen soldiers. The rest of the soldiers have surrounded the temple.”

Up the worn and crumbling steps they went and through one of the five doors into the five-sided temple. The temple seemed even larger inside than outside. Their steps echoed within it, and from outside came the sound of the wind and the throb of the waves smashing into the rocks of the promontory.

Light came from windows in the dome and from the clerestory, and especially from the rent in the roof. It fell on intarsia inlay that ran around the doorways, scrolling geometrical designs that Sally remembered from the *Gallinule*. A dado ran along the entire circuit of the wall, at a height of about five feet, with friezes of leaping dolphins, spouting whales and soaring albatrosses below it. The friezes were chipped and cracked: here a dolphin had no head, there an albatross lacked a wing. Rubble lay on the floor.

At each of the five angles, where the walls came together, was a mounting high in the wall holding a large clock. Each clock had a moon face, in a different phase of lunar progress, made of silver, white marble, and ebony. Every clock was stopped at a different time.

Bell horses, bell horses, what time of day? thought Barnabas.

In the middle of the temple were five pillars in a pentagram that soared to the plane from which the dome began. Each of the pillars was topped with the moon in one of its phases. Nexius, Reglum, and the McDoons passed through the pillars, followed by the Learned Doctors, and came to the centre of the temple. Here was a massive marble pedestal, ten feet tall at least, upon which was a single squat pillar, which held one huge round orb, a great white marble moon. Steps were cut into the pedestal and into the pillar leading to a small

platform attached to the moon. At that spot on the surface of the moon was a doorway, perhaps eight feet tall, with three locks and knobs in a triangle in its middle.

Nexius halted. Sally looked up, seeking a scissor-tailed shape that might swoop upon them. Sanford looked behind them, past the Learned Doctors, and saw the shadowy figures of Yountish soldiers beyond the pillars. Barnabas gripped the key in his pocket. It felt warm but he could not tell if this was only the heat from his sweaty hand or if it was heat that emanated from the key itself. All was silent except for the wind and the surf outside. The huge moon sat above them, as unmoved and unmoving as it had sat for centuries.

Barnabas stamped his foot and said, "*Quatsch.*"

His voice echoed. Nothing moved. Nothing could be seen.

Barnabas clapped his hands and yelled, "Cretched Man, Pausanias, or whatever you call yourself! Here we are again! We have chased across all time and space to collect Tom."

No one answered.

"Show yourself, Cretched Man!" shouted Barnabas. He held his pistol steady in his left hand. He wore his oldest hat and his oldest vest. He could not even say what colour his stockings were.

At that, figures suddenly appeared, walking from behind the moon on top of the pedestal. (When asked later, soldiers who had a view of that side of the moon said that they saw no persons there.) First in view was—

"Tom!" yelled the McDoons.

"Sally! Uncle Barnabas!" Tom called. "Oh, thank you, Sally! Dear Sally! Good old Sanford! Fraulein, it's really you!"

Behind him came the Cretched Man, his coat a ruddy streak against the dully gleaming white marble. Five men filed behind them, each carrying a rifle loosely at his side.

"We keep our tryst," said the Cretched Man.

"You are surrounded by soldiers, inside and out," said Nexius.

"Send down Tom and I will come up, but not before Tom is safe

below with us," said Barnabas.

To their surprise, it was not the Cretched Man but Tom who replied.

"No, Uncle, the Cretched Man is not what you think. Nexius, listen to me, this is a horrible confusion. You must not do what you ask Uncle Barnabas to do!"

Nexius had overcome thousands of odd and difficult moments but Tom's plea was outside his expectations and experience. He lowered his pistol, and just stared at the young man from Karket-soom as if he had gone mad.

Barnabas stamped his foot again. "*Quatsch*, boy! What is it you say?"

Sally watched her brother's face the way she dreamed: drinking in every detail and trying to make sense of it while she flew ahead of some awful pursuer. Tom looked just as intently at her.

Nexius found his voice at last, yelling, "Tom, come down!"

The Cretched Man shook his head, his coat shuddering.

"No, Nexius Dexius of the Fencibles," Jambres said. "For once, all of you, listen to the truth when you hear it. Listen to Thomas. Listen."

"Come down, Tom lad," said Barnabas.

Tom shook his head.

"Enough, by the Trees," said the Arch-Dean and Chief Sacerdote. "We understand. This Karket-soomi has lost his mind to the Evil One."

"No!" said Tom. "You must believe me. If Uncle Barnabas uses the key to open the final lock, something terrible will happen!"

Sanford half-raised his pistol at the Cretched Man.

On one side is the truth, on the other . . . another form of truth? he thought, while lowering his pistol. Or are both falsehoods? Does it matter what competing bands of heretics or pagans believe? "Keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called."

Fraulein Reimer had listened to hundreds of his fibs, tall tales and half-truths as he tried to evade his lessons or duck out to the theatre.

The truth often tastes bitter, she thought, lowering her pistol as well. *But a sweet lie is poisonous*. Dichtung oder Wahrheit? Nein, es gibt hier um Dichtung und Wahrheit.

Sally felt the truth in Tom's mind. She did not trust the Cretched Man, not even so much as to offer him the sympathy she suspected his plight deserved, if half her guesses about that were even half correct. But Tom was another matter.

Barnabas had come to the same conclusion: "Alright, my boy. We'll listen."

The Arch-Dean signalled to his colleagues. A woman with rusty highlights in her jet-black hair stood forth, brought an instrument from a satchel at her side. Sally looked at the instrument and divined its purpose without knowing how it worked in detail. Reglum and Nexius moved to intercept her. Too late. The woman with rusty-red highlights lifted the tube she held, while the Arch-Dean said something in Yountish.

The Cretched Man stepped in front of Tom and yelled, "No!"

Everyone froze: the McDoons below looking up in hope at Tom; the Learned Doctors preparing their device; Nexius and Reglum torn between their allegiance to the Learned Doctors and their desire to understand what Tom would tell them; most of all the Cretched Man with his arms outflung in front of Tom. Five rangy figures with rifles in their hands moved up to protect Tom and the Cretched Man.

The Arch-Dean held out one hand to still the colleague with the tube in her hands. "No, what?" the Learned Doctor said.

The Cretched Man, his coat pulsating, said, "No to your use of that weapon. I can withstand such a thing, but the others here with me could not, and I will not allow them to be harmed in that way. You claim to fight evil, though you do not give me a chance to explain

myself. How long have we danced this dance, for years uncounted through the ages of my perpassion? Far too long, let it end now!”

The Arch-Dean had a terrible smile on his face. “Far too long in truth. If you stand aside, we can end that forever. Let us take the Key-bearer to the door to perform his duty. Otherwise we use the weapon that the Mother put into our hands.”

Tom felt something shift deep in Jambres, a small eructation of grief and anger.

The Cretched Man seemed to shrink. “Come up,” Jambres said to Barnabas. “Thomas will go down.”

Tom turned to Jambres. “No,” he said. “I can’t. This isn’t right.”

“I have no choice,” said Jambres, his perfect face a mask. “I cannot put forth my strength without harming you and many others who should not be harmed. I have failed again. No, Thomas, you must go down. Go now. Let your uncle come up.”

Tom looked at Jambres and the Minders. He looked down to his family. He found Sally’s eyes . . . long she held his gaze. *Come down, brother*, she murmured in his mind. He had a swift image of the little blue flowers, the ones he knew were just outside. He longed to see them, to run across that lawn. *Sela-manri*. He heard her voice. *The little flower of repentance*. He walked down the stairs, which were blurred beneath his feet as tears poured out of his eyes. *Come down, brother*.

Halfway down the stairs, he turned and looked back. Jambres was looking at him with a look that spanned thousands of years. Tom thought Jambres said, “Little Jannes,” or maybe it was “Hyndopheres,” but he could not be sure.

Billy Sea-Hen nodded, and said in the most conversational manner, as if they were strolling on the heath together, “Goodbye but only for now, Tommy Two-Fingers. Don’t you worry, me and Tat’head and the others, we’re like that old dumbledore, you’ll see—we’ll be back again safe as houses.”

Tom raised his hand, the one with only three fingers, then turned

and stumbled down the rest of the stairs.

He hugged his uncle very hard, and then embraced his sister. The pendant around her neck glowed bright red.

“It is time,” intoned the Arch-Dean. He spoke in Yountish, too much and too fast for Sally to understand, especially with the echoes. The green-uniformed soldiers along the walls moved in towards the row of pillars. The Learned Doctors led by the Arch-Dean came to Barnabas, and then walked behind Barnabas as the merchant from Mincing Lane ascended the stairs.

At the top of the stairs, they confronted the Cretched Man and the Minders.

“I beg you one last time,” said the Cretched Man. “Do not do this thing. Use the key to close the two locks you have opened without permission, then return the key to me. I am the rightful possessor. Go no further with your desire to unlock the third lock. You will not succeed.”

The Arch-Dean laughed. “Your time is over. We have found a third and final Key-bearer. You yourself brought him to us. Think of that—such an irony has not been felt for ages.”

“I brought him to close the first two locks, not to open the third lock.”

“You claim to have the power to stop us, yet you hesitate.”

“You have grown wise in your captivity, but not so wise as to be blind in this final step,” answered the Cretched Man. “I can stop the Key-bearer from opening the final lock but only through persuasion, at which I have not succeeded. Stopping him by other means would break him.”

Barnabas stamped his foot, and said in his best clarifying tone, “*Quatsch!* Look here, the both of you. I don’t like being talked about while I am standing right in front of you, for one thing. For another, I hate being made to feel the ingot between the hammer and the anvil.”

The Cretched Man and the Arch-Dean both pulled up short. They

had, in fact, almost forgotten Barnabas and the key in their mutual enmity.

“See here,” Barnabas said. “I am a man of business, and reckoned a good one where I come from, and I don’t think that will be any different here. So, a deal’s a deal. *Pacta sunt servanda*, as the old Tully said someplace. I came to be exchanged for Tom, which this Cretched fellow has done fair and square. My transaction, I might add, was with him. I don’t recall any third parties to the contract, no Learned Doctor specifically affixed thereto in any event.”

The Arch-Dean looked nonplussed.

“So,” continued Barnabas. “Much as I dislike the Cretched Man, frankly I don’t much trust him, but, sir Bishop, I trust you even less. But in business you only got to do the deal—doesn’t much matter if you like the fellow or not. The only claim on me is by the man in the funny coat. I will do what he asks me, since he did what I asked of him.”

How like his nephew, thought Jambres. *Surely one day, I will be allowed to break bread with him.*

“This is not a piece of *business*,” the Arch-Dean spat out the word. “The fate of our world is in your hands, you fool. If you insist on using business terms, then consider your acceptance of our first letter and the key itself as a binding contract between us. And there we explicitly told you not to deal with the Wurm or any of his agents, of which the Cretched Man is one.”

Jambres reared his sculpted head at this last characterization but said nothing.

Figs and farthings, thought Barnabas. *Snakey bastard has a point. Damn it, how I wish Sedgewick were here to help us out. Friends aren’t acting so friendly, and foes might be friends, or at least not enemies.*

“By the Mother,” said the Arch-Dean. “Key-bearer, do your duty, perform under your contract, and open the third lock—there, on the door!”

Barnabas took out the key. All eyes were on it. He went to the

door. The Arch-Dean pointed to the top lock. Barnabas put the key in the lock.

“For the last time,” said the Cretched Man. “Do not turn the key. It is not the Nurturing Mother who will appear. She will slumber still. It is not time. The door must remain shut.”

Thought fragments raced through Barnabas’s mind: *Cretched fellow seems sincere . . . but what about that dog with human hands, hey? And kidnapping Tom? . . . Tom? He tells me to heed his kidnapper . . . Bedlam! . . . But Tom is only a lad, what can he know? . . . Of course, so was I when I went out to Bombay, and then I thought myself a man. . . .*

“Bah!” yelled the Arch-Dean. “Turn the key! Fulfill your contract!”

Contract, thought Barnabas. A sacred thing is a contract. Man’s word is his bond, and I gave mine, and I have never reneged before . . . no, once I did . . . and she must have cursed me forever for doing so, and I do not blame her . . . Oh Rehana, what I did was without excuse . . . I cannot fail again, with people who trust me as my Rehana did. . . .

Barnabas turned the key in the lock. “Click,” went the key, as if he were merely opening a drawer in the partners’ office.

“The doorknob,” said the Arch-Dean. A sigh, hoarse like winter wind and pointed like obsidian arrowheads, went up from all the Sacerdotes. Barnabas put his hand on the doorknob. It was very cold. He sensed a presence on the other side, something huge, ancient, and cruel, an immanity that had not been there until he turned the key. He took his hand off the knob.

“Don’t do it,” said the Cretched Man.

“The knob!” cried the Arch-Dean.

Barnabas saw a red sun and the lithe brown body of Rehana and smelled her rich, black hair—and he saw himself bowing down to his uncle’s threats.

He grasped the doorknob. The humming he’d heard when he took the key out of the box at Mincing Lane was in his head, but faintly. The notes were undermined and overwhelmed by a bass “whoooming”

sound that seeped through the door from whatever was on the other side. Barnabas fought the sound and turned the knob.

The Arch-Dean and several of his colleagues shouldered their way past Barnabas and the Cretched Man, and began pushing the door into the moon. The door opened one foot, two feet, three feet. With each foot, the deep thrumming from within the moon on the other side grew louder. A cold wind flowed from the doorway. It raced out into the temple, scurried through the debris on the floor, tossed soldiers' hats off, made the clocks chime for the first time in over a century. The Learned Doctors heaved on the door. It flew open. Wind roared out, knocking everyone but Jambres to their feet. The wind subsided but something else came out of the moon, a darkness that looked like Original Night. The doorway was entirely dark now, black with an absence of light. The wind died abruptly. The temple was silent except for the distant sound of wind and surf outside.

In the blackness that was the door in the temple-moon something moved, a dot of blazing white that sped towards the onlookers. As if coming from an immense distance yet covering that distance in seconds, the shape flew at the door, its whiteness shearing the darkness, not illuminating it. Out of the doorway flew a white owl with two streaming pendant-tails. Its eyes flamed yellow, with endlessly black pupils. Its beak was sharper than any sword ever forged in Damascus. The owl flew out of the doorway, growing larger once it crossed the threshold until it was ten feet tall. It circled the dome once and then hovered in the middle of the temple. Above its head was a bit of the darkness from beyond the door, a halo of Old Night.

“HOOOOOOOOOooooooo!!!!” it boomed, so that dust fell from the roof and the clock-chimes echoed. Everyone but Jambres and Sally shielded their eyes, cowered on the floor. Jambres's ventricular coat pulsed. His face was frozen. Sally struggled against her fear (“Sankt Jakobi, Sankt Nicolae . . .”) and forced herself to stand. *James did it for me on the Essex*, she thought. *I can do this for Tom.*

Without realizing it, she also had in mind Reglum throwing himself on the carkodrillos.

“NO!” screamed the owl, making itself heard in their native tongues in every head in the temple. The soldiers posted outside dropped their weapons and stood rooted to the ground, arms slack, with their minds filled by the image of themselves as small furry creatures hopelessly fleeing death from above.

“No,” said the owl, its vast wings effortlessly milling to and fro, wingtips sweeping the row of pillars around the moon on the pedestal. The wind had ceased to flow from the doorway but the wind created by the owl’s wings washed over them all. It smelled of offal.

The Arch-Dean raised his head to see the creature. “By . . . by the Mother,” he whispered.

“No,” said the owl. “She sleeps until her time of waking comes. That has not come because you have not completed your obligations. This you know yet you elected to pursue folly.”

The owl laughed, then boomed, “You try to break your yoke and tear off your bonds. You declare, ‘We will not serve!’”

Jambres stirred for the first time, and said in a low, controlled voice, “Someone else said that in another time and place.”

The owl, seeming to take notice of the Cretched Man for the first time, turned its sulfurous eyes on Jambres.

“YOOOOOOoooouuu!” it hooted.

It laughed again its laughter of scythes, and said, “Of all mortals, you should know better than to quote these words back to me, who was there to first hear them spoken.”

Jambres did not shrink but said, “Yet my observation holds.”

“BAAAAAAHHHH!” boomed the owl. “Do not bandy words with me, gatekeeper! Once more you have failed. You have neither educated these sinners to their penance nor kept them sequestered until they have grown enough to reach enlightenment. I fault them less than you, warden, since they only act within the ambit of their limitations, while you . . . you have had far longer to reach the

maturity of reflection necessary for your redemption.”

Jambres’s coat flared but he said naught.

“The *fajet-tindo*,” whispered the Arch-Dean, not sure if he meant the Cretched Man or the owl. “The Serpent of Rebellion.”

The owl swept the temple with his gaze.

“HEEEED me,” it said. “You have not fully repented. Your flowers are ungathered in the grass. Your books are not yet written in full. Do not attempt to open the door again.”

The owl flew backwards, like a bee leaving a flower, floating back to the doorway.

“You, warden,” the owl said to Jambres. “Come with me. You need another lesson in how to execute your duties.”

Tom looked up at those words, looked right at the Cretched Man. The Cretched Man’s coat rippled, as if being annealed. Rigidly beautiful, Jambres walked towards the door. Behind him Billy Sea-Hen and Tat’head and the other Minders stood up and walked in the same direction. Jambres stopped, turned and shook his head. Billy Sea-Hen just smiled (Tom saw that plainly), shrugged, and walked forward. When all five Minders had reached Jambres, the Cretched Man turned and together they strode beneath the owl’s whirring wings and one by one passed through the door.

“No!” shouted Tom, lurching to his feet, staggering to the base of the pedestal.

Billy was the last in the line. He turned at the sound of Tom’s voice, winked, tipped his hat and then was obliterated by the darkness. For one second, Tom thought he saw a small glowing coal out beyond the door, but then it too was extinguished by the dark.

Sally ran to Tom. Behind them, Barnabas hobbled to his feet. Below them, Sanford and Fraulein Reimer yelled. The owl looked down. Sally thought she saw surprise in its eyes but, she added to herself, *Who can tell with such beings?* Sally, Tom, and Barnabas held hands and stared at the owl above them, an owl that filled a temple, its banner-tails dancing on the floor, its wings like a hundred-gyre

of eagles. The owl stared back.

Sally heard the other voice first, caressing her heart. The voice was as deep as the deepest ocean, as old as the oldest rocks, yet as young as the newest chire of grass that springs up after the rain. It had no words of English, but the voice was vast, soothing, lush, each word like a garden blooming in an instant. An owl, even one as large as a ship, would be gently lost in that voice, would be just one small white speck in an endless green field.

“Not yet,” the voice said. “Wait. But soon, very soon. Make haste slowly.”

Sally understood. She knew who spoke to her. She knew that Tom and Uncle Barnabas heard the voice too. She knew that even though Tom and Barnabas heard the voice without understanding the words, it was enough.

The owl narrowed its eyes, like an eclipse of two suns. It too had heard. Sally wondered if it was surprised to hear that voice, or if it was surprised that Sally heard it too.

Sally said in a small but powerful voice that was heard throughout the Temple: “Go now, Owl, Serpent, Half-Fallen, Moon-Eater, Wurm. Close the door this one last time. But know that the next time the door opens, the door will remain open. And know that the time for the final opening comes soon. You know I speak the truth.”

The owl beat its wings. Frieze-work fell off the walls, the clocks rang crazily, an abattoir smell poured over everyone. It glared at Sally and snapped its beak, the sound of swords being whetted.

“DO NOT PRESUME!” it hooted so that all the men and women on the floor had to stop their ears, and those outside reeled backwards.

Sally, holding Tom’s injured hand on one side and holding Barnabas’s hand on the other, stared back. She smiled. The owl flapped its wings once, twice, taking itself to the top of the dome. Down it swooped, pounced on Sally, Tom, and Barnabas. Sally felt her uncle and her brother flinch but she would not let them go. *Hold*

fast! she shouted into their minds. The owl's talons came down upon them.

Sally opened her mouth and a note of pure music flew from it, a child of the wind that runs through the eternally green meadows at the beginning of our memories. One note the wind gave her, and the Mother laughed, and Sally laughed—and the owl's talons were stopped a foot from their faces, rebuffed. The owl swept its wings backwards, its eyes like comets under a dark halo. Its beak was opening and closing as it lurched back up towards the dome. One of its swallowtails slashed the air in front of Sally, feathers like silken razors. It hovered for a moment. Sally saw the doubt in its eyes, the anger . . . and the fear.

“YOOUUUUU!?!” the owl said. But its brazen tone was shivered into shards within the still-echoing note that Sally had sung. The owl circled the dome again, passed directly over Sally, hissing. It turned in mid-air, and shrunk until it was no larger than an owl that hunts in a deserted barn. It swooped to the door, pinnet-tail streaming and whistling. As it passed the threshold, the owl roared with the voice of a lion. It drew the darkness from the door mouth with it, back into the infinite space beyond. The door slammed shut.

Sally, Tom, and Barnabas stood hand in hand facing the doorway. They trembled but they laughed, looking at each other with eyes bright as stars.

“You handled 'im, Sally!” said Barnabas, shaking. Somewhere in the back of his mind, or at the roots of his heart, he felt his mother's touch. He had heard before the note Sally sang, known it as a zephyr in Edinburgh lullabies. “Figs and feathers, you handled 'im, girl!”

Tom fell to his knees. Sally knelt down and put her arms around him. “Do not cry, brother,” she said. “Today we were three and that was enough to withstand the Wurm. I think we are supposed to be five, and, when we are, we will be strong enough to defeat him.”

Nexius and Reglum were with them now, followed by Dorentius Bunce and Noreous Minicate. Looking over Reglum's shoulder, Sally

saw Sanford and Fraulein Reimer standing side by side, each pointing a pistol at the doorway. Sally heard yelling and running throughout the temple as the Learned Doctors and the soldiers recovered from the onslaught. Above the din was the voice of the Arch-Bishop, arguing with Nexius. Blue-clad Marines were running to support Nexius. From outside the temple came the sound of shots. Inside the Temple all went still for a second and then blue and green uniforms scrambled for positions among the pillars. One shot rang out, then another. Muzzle flashes were seen in the dimness. The McDoons stood rooted, unable to comprehend what was happening. Sally had no more notes to sing today, and felt naked against this unexpected threat. She saw a Marine spin and fall, and saw green soldiers lying motionless on the floor.

The Learned Doctor with the rusty streak in her hair ran towards them. She held the tube that caused the Cretched Man to yield. The tube glowed a faint purple at the end facing the McDoons. Sally could not move. She was vaguely aware of Tom and Barnabas at her side. Her mind was a blank, drained after the confrontation with Wurm. She scrabbled for her St. Morgaine but that was all she could manage. The Learned Doctor pointed the tube at Sally, raised her other hand to work a lever on top of the tube. Sally dove for the floor but it was too late. As she did so, two things happened: Reglum darted in front of her, sword drawn, yelling at the top of his lungs, desperately lunging at the woman with the tube; and there was a loud cracking sound behind Sally, followed by a hot searing sensation just over her head. As Sally hit the floor, she had a blurry image of Reglum smashing into the Learned Doctor, and the woman crumpling.

Sally looked up from the floor. Behind her stood Fraulein Reimer, holding a smoking pistol. She followed the probable trajectory of the fraulein's shot, and found herself looking at two bodies on the floor: Reglum and the woman with the tube. Neither moved. The tube lay a few feet from the woman's outstretched hand. Reglum's sword,

unbloodied, lay on the other side of their bodies.

“Reglum!” Sally yelled. “Reglum!”

Dorentius Bunce ran up, bounded over Sally, shouting. He slid on his knees to Reglum Bammary, his Oxonian rival, his *hatmoril*. Dorentius, a head shorter than the tall lieutenant, heaved Reglum off the woman. There was blood on Reglum’s shoulder.

“Oh *Kaskas!*” yelled Dorentius. “Oh Dear Mother!”

Sally, half-blind, ran to the pile of bodies. Reglum opened his eyes. He groaned and swore. Dorentius yelled for help. Reglum looked at Sally, tried to speak, locked her gaze on him. Nexius stood over them.

“Look,” Nexius said. “She’s dead. Shot dead.” He pointed to a gaping wound in her neck, and a spreading pool of blood on the floor. Nexius raised his head, pointed at Fraulein Reimer. “The Reimer hit her before she could fire.”

Reglum tried to sit up, fell back with a gasp. Blood ran from his shoulder. Nexius knelt down. “You’ve been hit, Lieutenant Bammary, clipped in the shoulder by the bullet that killed the Learned Doctor,” he said. “Broke the top of your shoulder blade, it looks like. Painful. Lie back. Here’s help.” He and Dorentius eased Reglum back, pressing the wound to stop the bleeding. Sally heard a crunching sound from Reglum’s torn shoulder.

Marines with a stretcher took Reglum outside. Dorentius went with him. Sally wanted to follow but Nexius, hands red with Reglum’s blood, waved her back. All around were Marines disarming Sacerdotal Guards and pointing weapons at the Learned Doctors. The Arch-Bishop walked up to Nexius.

“This is sacrilege,” said the Arch-Bishop, in a tone that would congeal fire. “You will be imprisoned for this, Captain, if not worse.”

Nexius said nothing but appraised the Learned Doctor and Chief Sacerdote with a calmly belligerent look.

“Oh,” Nexius said at last. “Sacrilege, yes. But not by me or mine.

You have much to answer for, using a weapon that is forbidden, and in the Temple of all places.”

“Don’t act the Dusiflux with me, Captain,” said the Arch-Bishop. “No righteous indignation about a weapon that your Marines covet for themselves.”

Nexius shook his head. “You truly misunderstand us, Arch-Bishop, for which I am sorry.” Nothing could have enraged the Arch-Bishop more, which was, of course, Nexius’s intent. Before the Arch-Bishop could retort, Nexius waved up his troops and ordered the Arch-Bishop and the other Learned Doctors taken to their carriages and kept under guard. When he was done, Nexius turned to the McDoons. His face was suddenly weary, his voice mournful.

“He is right about one thing,” Nexius said, shaking his head. “This is sacrilege. We have spilled blood, blood of our own people, in the Mother’s Temple.”

“What happened?” said Barnabas.

“It may take a while for us to know,” said Nexius. He walked over to the body of a Sacerdotal Guard, a young woman, arms splayed, her rifle still gripped in her hand. Two Marines bent down to pick her up.

“Gently,” Nexius said. “Honour her as a fallen comrade. This should not have happened.” As the Marines took her body away, Nexius lowered his voice and said, “They were better equipped, but the Marines were better trained.”

Nexius walked to Fraulein Reimer, who stood staring at the Learned Doctor wreathed in blood on the floor. Sanford had one arm around her. The other McDoons gathered round. Nexius took the pistol from the fraulein’s hand.

“A clean, honest shot, made in your own defence,” the Captain Emeritus said. “You saved Sally’s life, maybe the lives of us all. Hitting Lieutenant Bammary was an accident of war. He will understand.”

Fraulein Reimer looked up with tears in her eyes. She shook her head, mumbled something in German, crossed herself. Sally

and Tom embraced her, then led her outside. Nexius saluted the McDoons and moved away to complete the clean-up of the Temple. Noreous Minicate walked to the McDoons and said, "Come, let's go to the carriages for the journey home. We have had enough of legend-making for one day."

In the carriage, Sally opened the basket where Isaak had been kept while they were in the Temple. "*Tes muddy*," said Sally, and burst into tears.



Chapter 13: Breathing Honied Ashes

“Like the Ornish,” the Queen said in the way that only a sovereign can speak. “We have behaved like the Ornish, defiling the Mother’s Temple.”

The Arch-Bishop returned her look. He stood in the audience hall, not the small reception room where the McDoons had first met Her Majesty. Over one hundred people filled the room: the heads of the major Optimate houses, the deans of the Learned Doctors, the Tragiarchs of the Gremium for Guided Knowledge, senior officers from the Marine & Army, councillors from the Collegium. The Queen’s ministers sat behind her, with the chief justices of the Royal Courts flanking her. The Lord-Chancellor sat at her side. The McDoons sat at a table of their own. Outside the hall swarmed the writers of libelles and broadsheets, eager to interview the departing dignitaries and to be the first with the news for a public clamouring for information about the events at the Sign of the Ear. Also outside, and just as keen for news, were diplomats from the Free City of

Iquajorance, from The Land of the Painted Gate, and from the Ornish Coerceries.

“Surely Your Majesty recognizes the rationale for what the Learned Doctors did,” said the Arch-Bishop.

“If I did, Arch-Bishop, I would not have asked you here today to answer my questions,” replied the Queen.

So the exchange went for over an hour. Besides the Learned Doctor whom Fraulein Reimer had killed, six Sacerdotal Guards had died and three Marines, with Reglum Bammary and others wounded. Each side accused the other of firing first. The Wurm-Owl’s appearance and the disappointment of having the door closed were cited as explanatory factors: it was said the owl’s malevolence had gusted into the soldiers’ heads, deluding them, caused panic and misjudgement. (Left unspoken was the long-standing rivalry between the Marines and the Sacerdotal Guards, symptomatic of the deeper and even more tacit rivalry between the Chamber of Optimates and the Royal House.) Each side blamed the other for the failure to keep the door open.

“The Karket-soomi were bewitched by the Cretched Man,” cried the Arch-Bishop. “The boy, the Key-bearer’s nephew, spoke on the Cretched Man’s behalf!”

The crowd buzzed. All eyes moved from the Arch-Bishop to the McDoons and back again. Sensing his advantage, the Arch-Bishop turned to the assembly and raised his voice as if he were preaching a sermon, which, in effect, he was. He said: “The Cretched Man had poisoned the boy’s mind, turned him against us. We feared a dire alliance, were forced to use drastic means to remind the Key-bearer of his duty. The Marines clearly supported the boy and the Key-bearer in their willingness to abide by the Cretched Man. We acted to save our colleagues from dereliction of duty!”

Nexius was on his feet, along with a half-dozen other Marine officers. Sally would have laughed at the pugnacity of the short,

absented-minded Dorentius Bunce and the slender, nervous-fingered Noreous Minicate but for the cold fire in their eyes. (She knew how Reglum would react if he were here instead of recuperating in the lazarette; she had a sudden sharp memory of him leaping in front her, yelling madly and sweeping out his sword.) The hall erupted in shouts, the Lord-Chancellor called for order, and members of Her Majesty's Household Guard banged their rifle-butts on the floor to remind everyone where they were.

The Queen pondered the Arch-Bishop's allegations but focussed on the issue of the tube-weapon the Learned Doctors had wielded.

"The Verniculous Blast is forbidden," she said. "By our own law and by our treaty with the Coerceries of Orn. You defied the law."

"In the name of a higher necessity," said the Arch-Bishop. "Our law allows, even requires, such actions when undertaken for the greater and higher good."

So it went for many more hours. The judges thumbed through codices and pandects, the Optimates debated, the Major-Captain defended Nexius and the Marines. In the end, the enquiry was inconclusive as such proceedings often are: any higher truth that might have been abstracted from the strange events at the Temple was thoroughly enmeshed in human error. The Queen was advised that neither law nor politics would make it easy to ascertain culpability, and that more would probably be lost than gained in the attempt. Zinnamoussea had not been Queen for over two decades for naught, and she was a Hullitate to boot. She issued a ruling that avoided further crisis while putting the Learned Doctors on notice.

"No charges will be brought against either the Marines or the Sacerdotal Corps, provided each drops the complaints against the other," she said. "With one exception: the Learned Doctors shall be fined for possession of and attempted use of the Verniculous Blast, and must surrender that technology to the Crown immediately, while foreswearing future possession."

The Arch-Bishop glared at the Queen but held his tongue. Many

among the Optimates did the same thing.

“No charges will be brought against any soldier for discharging his or her weapon in the Temple or for the consequences thereof,” said the Lord-Chancellor. “The fallen will be given state funerals, and will be buried, not in the cemeteries of each corporation, but intermixed in a special section of the Royal Burying Grounds.” The Arch-Bishop and the Major-Captain shared a dislike for the last provision but admired begrudgingly the political finesse of the offering: the families of the fallen were being afforded the highest possible honour.

The Lord-Chancellor clapped her hands and said, “As her final ruling in this matter, the Queen requires the Sacerdotal Corps to hand over the key to the Royal House for safekeeping.” Before his arrest by Nexius in the Temple, the Arch-Bishop had been careful to extract the key from the keyhole. Nexius had been careful to notice the Arch-Bishop doing so.

The Sacerdotes and many of the Optimates roared their dismay but the military and the merchants and others of the Optimates roared louder their approval. The Queen turned to the McDoons and said, “Before we close this enquiry, and send our prayers of thanks to the fallen, and our pleas for forgiveness to the Mother, let us consider for a moment the remarkable bravery and astounding accomplishments of the Key-bearer and his companions from London in far-off Karket-soom.”

All heads strained to see Barnabas and the others. Nexius spoke in simple terms, a soldier’s description, of what had happened from the time the door opened to the time the Wurm-Owl flew back into the moon. The Arch-Bishop interjected with different interpretations, more florid and elaborate than Nexius’s account, but otherwise the audience hall was silent. Those waiting outside pressed their ears to the great doors.

The Queen stood up and made a great circle with her right hand, then bowed to the McDoons, and made a great circle with her left

hand and bowed again. "In the name of the Trees and the Great Mother," said the Queen, "we thank you for wishing yourselves to come to Yount, and we beg forgiveness for the pains and sorrow we have caused you." One by one, with greater or lesser enthusiasm, every person in the audience hall rose to bow to the McDoons. The McDoons looked around the room and were embarrassed and doubtful and a little bit angry all at once. Barnabas said, "*Quatsch*," and rose to make a speech, but Dorentius Bunce, who was translating for them, pulled him back down, saying, "Not necessary here, old chap; save your speech for private talk."

Barnabas had plenty to say in private: "What an earful that was, some of the best clarifyin' I have ever seen, or the worst, depending on your point of view. That rascally bishop and his crew pretty much had their way, especially seeing as how they started it all by bringing that what-did-you-call-it forbidden weapon! And then they complained about being dealt with unfairly! Hah, and what about us, then? Rushin' through unnatural wind and down strange roads to get here, to save them, and then the Learned Doctors try to kill us, not to mention we almost get eaten for their sake by an owl the size of an elephant. It's all topsy-turvy now, and I almost feel sorry for the Cretched Man, which makes no sense at all!"

The other McDoons nodded vehemently. Sanford asked, "What *was* the weapon the Doctors brought?"

Nexius said, "The Vernicolous Blast. So terrible that even we in the Marines dare not use it. It can barely be controlled, often destroying those who wield it as well as those it is aimed at."

Dorentius added, "Do you remember the Supply Island, where the air was weak and the buildings did not age? We have found other places in the Interrugal Lands where the laws of nature are not identical to those in our world and yours. On one of these we found a material in an ore that, when altered and arrayed, causes death. But not just death: a slow and horrible death, maiming and mutilating slowly over months before killing."

“A verniculous slow fire,” said Nexius.

“We in the Marines have long suspected the Doctors of keeping the technology in violation of the law,” said Dorentius. “That they would try to use it on you, whom we have called to help us, well, I cannot fathom it, no matter how desirous we all are to open the door. I am so sorry.”

Barnabas said, “We understand now that Yount is more complicated than perhaps we were led to believe, but I think we know who our friends are in this place. I guess the Queen had little choice—she seems to like us—but the Doctors did not get much of a punishment.”

Nexius said, “Perhaps you should know that the Arch-Bishop is also head of the House of Loositage.”

“The chief house in the Chamber of Optimates,” said Dorentius.

Sally made the connection. “The House Presumptive when the Hullitate line ends,” she said.

“Unless the prophecy comes to pass,” said Nexius. “That the eleventh dynasty in Yount shall be started by two from Karketsoom.”

“A prophecy the Arch-Bishop and all the Sacerdotes have declared heretical,” said Dorentius.

“They say there was little salt in the Arch-Bishop’s tears when he heard of Princess Zessifa’s disappearance,” noted Noreous.

“Oh, *Quatsch*,” said Barnabas. “We did not have to travel through thick and thin for such bother. We have enough disagreement about religion and politics back in England.”

Talk turned to the Cretched Man. Tom described again the conversations he had with Jambres and the Minders. The Yountians continued to be astonished: what Tom reported flew in the face of all their experience and understanding.

“Sometimes the clay is better stuff than the glaze,” observed Dorentius, sounding as if he needed to convince himself. “Perhaps the Cretched Man truly is trying to help us.”

Nexius snorted.

Noreous said, "It has happened before that a seeming enemy became an unexpected friend. Think about those Ornish who refused to reject and came to our side in the War of Affirmation."

Nexius said nothing but his doubt was plain to read.

Dorentius said, "Sometimes an osprey really can save a tern."

Nexius waved his arm and said, "Still a gatekeeper. That's what the Wurm called him. Even if the Cretched Man wants to help us, he cannot. He is under the power of Wurm."

Tom objected, stressing Jambres's desire to end Ornish slavery, and thereby speed Yount's release—and thus, presumably, his own. He and Nexius debated some more until Sally interrupted.

"We cannot sit like the mule between the haystacks who dies because he cannot decide which to eat first," she said. "I am inclined to think Tom is right about the Cretched Man's intentions, but likewise I believe Nexius is correct in saying the Cretched Man has limited power to aid us."

"So, what do we do now?" said Barnabas, ever more impressed with his niece. (*To think that I raised her!* he thought. *Well, beans and bacon, I must have had something to do with her upbringing, mustn't I have?*)

Sally said, "We make sure the fraulein recovers from . . . from her action." Fraulein Reimer had gone straight from the royal hearing to her room.

Sanford said, "Hear, hear." Everyone was silent for a few minutes. Then Sanford spoke again: "You must speak with the Queen, Barnabas, about your heart's desire. You fulfilled your end of the bargain."

Everyone looked at Nexius, who nodded. "I will take you tomorrow," he said.

Barnabas went to the Queen with Nexius and, at Barnabas's request, Sanford.

“Sanford was there at this desire’s beginning,” said Barnabas. “He needs to be here at its . . . ending, or whatever this will be.”

They met the Queen again in the small reception room. Only the Lord-Chancellor was with her. There were few formalities, beyond the Queen inquiring after Fraulein Reimer’s state.

“Let us start,” said the Lord-Chancellor. “Her Royal Majesty honours her obligations. We can bring you to someone who is close to your heart’s desire. More we cannot promise.”

“When?” breathed Barnabas, gripping his palempore vest so hard it almost ripped.

“This very afternoon, if you wish.”

“I wish, oh how I wish.”

The Queen sat forward and took Barnabas’s hands in hers. She said, “We ask pardon now if we have . . . meddled, is that your word? Visit first this person and ask us questions after.”

Several hours later, on a Runnow-day in the early winter, late in November by London standards, Barnabas stood before a door in a wing of the Royal Palace in Yount. The Lord-Chancellor had escorted him herself, with Nexius and Sanford. At the door, the Lord-Chancellor paused before opening the lock.

“Pass through, and earn what we owe you for your services,” she said, bowing. “But beware of unintended consequences. We have not the foresight of Nessi in this matter, though all that we have done has been done in good faith.”

Barnabas gripped Sanford’s shoulder for a moment, nodded to Nexius, and walked alone through the door into a garden like none he had ever seen. He was in a courtyard with arched walkways on all four sides and a carved fountain in the middle. Paths ran from each corner, to the fountain, with flowering bushes and beds of herbs in between the paths. Banks of blood-red carnations filled each of the four corners of the garden. Brightly coloured birds flew overhead, alighting on perches under the arcades. Where the paths began

stood trees with rich silver-green leaves, some bearing fruit like pomegrances, some like shaddocks, yellow and orange-red. A late-afternoon winter sun slanted down over the top of the courtyard but inside it was warm and scented and in bloom. Looking up in wonder Barnabas saw that small flakes of snow fell onto a roof of glass, stretched over a grid of thin iron beams.

He stood transfixed for many minutes in the marvellously large conservatory, breathing in the colours of summer while it snowed outside. An ornate thrush flew up from under a lilac bush, burst into song. A jet-black squirrel with an impossibly long fluffy tail stopped on a patch of lawn, ran up a fruit tree. A colibri, throat iridescent scarlet, hovered at a mass of tubular yellow flowers that ranged up a wall and wrapped themselves around a column of one of the walkways—the hummingbird went from bloom to bloom and then disappeared under the eaves. Everywhere he looked Barnabas saw colours that flamed all the more for the pale oblique rays of the November sun. Drawn by the sound of falling water, Barnabas looked at the fountain to which all paths led. Its base was of white marble. Lapis lazuli dolphins leaped in the branches of a spreading oak tree carved of jade or malachite. The dolphins spouted water that ran along the branches and dripped like gentle rain into the basin. The colibri flew down, perched on the rim of the basin, dipped its sickle-beak. Two buntings with black heads and blue wings did the same.

White marble benches ringed the fountain, with more red carnations planted beside them. Gradually Barnabas became aware of a figure sitting on a bench on the far side of the fountain, obscured by the falling water. No one else was in the garden. He walked towards the fountain, his legs shaking. He ran his right hand over his palempore vest, took off his hat (almost dropping it), smoothed his thinning hair with the other hand, looked down to be sure his stockings were not sagging. He rounded the fountain and saw a woman sitting on the bench, looking away from him. He cleared his throat, and felt as nervous as he had when he scaled the

wall to the garden in Bombay so many years ago. The woman on the bench raised her head with a start and turned to look at Barnabas, now fifteen feet away. They both gasped at the same time.

“Rehana!” whispered Barnabas, walking very slowly.

Under a blue silk headscarf showed glossy black hair in which silver threads were woven. Her eyes were black, her skin the most beautiful brown. From her ears hung silver half-moons, trembling. She clasped her hands in front of her, unclasped them, re-clasped them, but she returned his gaze. She said something in Yountish that Barnabas did not understand but took to be a greeting. He moved closer, his mind hurtling in doubt, hope, confusion. She held up her hand in a universal sign of halting, so he stopped just in front of her.

She stood up and he heard tiny bells tinkle at her wrists, saw the half-moons swing. Barnabas saw her lips tremble, her hands clasp and unclasp but he was the one who could not meet her steady gaze. Her dark eyes bore into his so that he almost quailed. He knew her but he did not know her. Rehana but not Rehana. His mind continued its frenzied racing, led by her eyes. Then she raised her right hand and pointed at him, her finger resting lightly but firmly on his vest just above his heart, and she said one word—as lightly but firmly as her finger pinioned him, and Barnabas almost broke at the knees. He held her gaze desperately as the one thing that could keep him standing. She kept her finger on his vest and repeated the word. Barnabas swayed backwards then, and sat down heavily on the bench next to hers.

“Father,” she said, in English, for a third time, and then sat down too.

Water fell from the dolphins. The hummingbird made its rounds of the yellow flowers. The black squirrel dashed across the lawn. For a long time, Barnabas and the woman on the bench beside him said nothing. She held him in her gaze though, so forcefully that he looked up and looked at her in earnest. He realized she could not be Rehana—she was the same age as Rehana had been when Barnabas

had jumped over the wall in Bombay, twenty years earlier. She was Sally's age. Sally's age, Barnabas thought, old enough to be my . . .

He shook his head. But he remembered. He remembered the evening of the betrothal feast in the house of Adnan, the night before he and Sanford were to sail back to London. He remembered the magnificent food and the music and Adnan's speech and his in return and Adnan's wife Yasmin steering everything from behind the scenes. There was a young Sanford trying not to appear gluttonous as he gorged on the goat's meat masala, the last he would get in its home country. There was Sitterjee, their Parsee friend, and old Muir, the resident Scots merchant whose brogue was so thick that few of the Indians understood him no matter how good their English was. He saw Rehana's uncle, Mohsin, and his wife, Bilkees, smiling as they passed platters of food. *Yes*, he said to himself now in the winter garden, *and after, what happened?* The grand feast had ended, all the guests had gone, and he and Sanford had said a long farewell to their hosts. How Rehana had wept, and her mother, and Adnan (who would never have admitted it later).

Had it not been for Sanford, Barnabas would barely have made it across the alley to their lodgings. But he slipped Sanford's eye later, and climbed back over the garden wall, where Rehana awaited him one last time. That night, faced with the ache of separation and emboldened by the promises made at the feast, they did what they had never done before and what young lovers do in the fit of passion in gardens under moonlight. Once only but it could have been enough—was enough if the young woman on the bench beside him spoke the truth.

The young woman picked up an object on the bench and handed it to Barnabas. As she did so, she said in lilting English, "My mother bid you take this and remember that you took her heart in a box just like this one."

Barnabas felt the world spin as she gave him a sandalwood box that was the twin of the one in the partners' office in Mincing

Lane. He no longer doubted in his mind what his heart had already acknowledged. He had a daughter, whose mother was Rehana, and that daughter was sitting beside him. The smell of sandalwood rose up and he began to cry silently.

The young woman watched as Barnabas cried. Tears ran down her face as well but she fought them, wanted to hold them back. She clasped her hands hard together, sat up straighter than a spear, pinned Barnabas with her eyes. Her voice shook only a little when she said, "My mother said you would act this way if ever we met."

Her tone cut threw his tears. Barnabas set the box aside, feeling a sudden chill. He pulled out a handkerchief, offered it to her. She shook her head, so the half-moons flew. He used it on his own face. His astonishment was giving way to a fear he could not name.

"Father," she said in an accusatory tone. "You have not asked me my name."

Barnabas came back to his senses. "I am sorry," he said. "It's just that you seem more prepared than I for our meeting." He realized how thin that sounded, and felt new shame added to his existing accrual of debt in that emotion.

With a small twist of her beautiful head, she said, "I am called Afsana."

"Afsana," murmured Barnabas. "Beautiful."

"My mother hoped you would like it, having to choose it on her own," replied Afsana. "But she did not hope for you to first hear it twenty years after my birth."

Barnabas bowed his head. To this, he had no answer. Ten thousand questions flooded his mind, and as many answers for questions he assumed she would have of him, but he dared not ask his questions under the fierceness of her gaze, and she asked him nothing. They sat in silence for some time, with the sandalwood box between them like a challenge or admonition. Finally he said, "Where is your mother?"

Afsana could not hold back her tears any longer. She struggled to

keep her body erect. Barnabas could not speak to comfort her. After a while, Afsana said, "My mother—Rehana—died five years ago, when I was fifteen years old. May Allah have mercy on her soul."

Barnabas clung to the bench, as the garden whirled around him. He tried to focus on the carnations beside the bench, looking for land in a storm, but they were hard to see in the darkness. He wanted to beg forgiveness but could not find words that might encompass his guilt, much less expiate it. All those years in the office on Mincing Lane he had imagined reconciling with Rehana, he duly apologetic, she forgiving him after understandable first words of anger. Now he understood how shallow those maunderings were. Rehana's anger, her rejection even, would have been preferable to the finality and lack of recourse now available. He felt the nullity of cowardice blossom within him. He tasted the thin, sour ullage of the betrayal he had committed.

Looking at his daughter, Barnabas realized that Afsana had imagined this scene for years and knew there would be little he could say to still an anger built throughout a lifetime. He looked down at the palempore vest, with its glorious tree of life design, which had seemed so appropriate an hour ago, and cursed himself.

Afsana stood up and said, "My mother loved you to the end. *She* forgave you." She said no more but looked at him with her dark eyes, and then turned and walked down the path leading to a door opposite the one through which Barnabas had entered.

Barnabas sat a long time on the bench with a ghost's forgiveness and his daughter's anger in his head. All he smelled, in the entire perfumed winter garden, was sandalwood. He did not leave until the sun had set completely.

Sally, Tom, and Fraulein Reimer had gone to visit Reglum in the military hospital while Barnabas had spoken with the Queen. The fraulein had insisted. In the hospital corridor, they met Dorentius Bunce, who had just been in to visit.

Dorentius smiled at them and said, “Reglum is well enough to challenge my citation of the paroemiographer Tassea Wamminax. He is wrong, of course, but then Oxonians so often are.”

Reglum smiled when Isaak came bounding into the room. “Our own *tes muddry*,” he said, wincing as he reached forward. “We could have used you against the Wurm!”

Sally cried out to see Reglum, both for joy at his lively demeanour and in pain at the sight of his bandages. “Oh Reglum,” she said but did not get much beyond that for a minute. She looked at his strong brown hand on the shining white linen, and at his fine nose, his hair (which she noticed had been combed very recently, as if Reglum had been expecting the visit), and she thought of the heroines in Fanny Burney’s novels, before she stopped herself by introducing Tom.

Reglum used his free hand to shake the hand Tom stretched out.

How alike, Reglum thought. *Same quick eye, same cheekbones.*

Dashing chap, Tom thought. *Would make a fine brother-in-law. But wait, there’s that other fellow, the one on the East Indiaman, what’s his name again? James Kidlington, I think. Hold on, Kidlington is a thief who has been transported to Australia, so maybe I am to have a Yountish brother-in-law after all!*

Fraulein Reimer stood silently until Reglum waved her forward. The fraulein said, “*Kumsa-majirra’a-sasal*. I am pained to give pain, and I beg your forgiveness.”

Reglum said in a grave voice, “Take comfort. My wound will heal but your sense of guilt will only fester if you do not remove it now. Please, do not feel guilt over your action, I beg you. Quite the contrary—you saved my life, and those of Sally and Tom, besides others.”

The fraulein bowed and said, “*Sehr danke, mein Herr.*”

“So, you see, I will be fine,” repeated Reglum. “Let us talk of other things, something happier. Theatre, for instance: I understand that you, Tom, are particularly fond of the stage. Thus, as soon as I am able, I propose that you, Sally, and I visit the Palliatum to see

something. They are always doing farces and burlesques: you will understand without grasping all the Yountish—and, by now, Sally can almost translate better than I can!”

So, while Fraulein Reimer sat in a corner doing needlepoint, the three young people discussed theatre: whether there was a Yountish equivalent to Missus Siddons, whether Sisso-e-Haied or Pedrench Lorimate matched Marlowe and Shakespeare. Reglum told Tom and Sally about the pageants held at the *kjorraw* ceremonies during the solstices. They agreed to translate and stage Buskirk’s “Hero of the Hills” for one of the dinner-entertainments held by the Marines in the spring. They agreed that Barnabas would make the best Playdermon, the protagonist of the piece.

Reglum grew serious. “The events at the Temple . . .”

Sally walked to him, and put her hand on his good shoulder for a moment, saying, “Later, another time. We must make plans, but they can wait until you are better, Lieutenant Bammery.”

“What better time to make plans than when I am bed-bound?” protested Reglum, but he laughed.

Sally said, “I brought you two bound volumes of the latest *Edinburgh Review*. When you have finished them both, we will come back to visit, but not before.”

“I can read with exceptional speed, especially when need drives me,” answered Reglum.

Sally blushed a little, collected Isaak, and said her goodbye.

Looking as far removed from Playdermon as possible, Barnabas that evening said to Tom and Sally, “You have a cousin. Her name is Afsana.”

Sally put her arms around her uncle’s neck, while her mind leaped. Sally turned to Nexius and would not be put off by his evasions. She used Yountish when he pretended his English was insufficient. The Captain Emeritus yielded the story step by step under Sally’s examination.

Rehana had been ashamed and terrified when she learned that she was with child. Nearly three months after Barnabas's departure, she revealed her plight to her parents. Her father, Adnan, had not said a word at first but went into the garden and had every tree and bush uprooted, every flowerbed ripped out. He threatened to cast her out but her mother, Yasmin, had prevailed upon him not to and, in the end, mother and father gathered Rehana to them. Still, such a violation would bring great shame on their house, most especially if Barnabas did not come back to Bombay. They could not now wait the eighteen months or more it would take for Barnabas to return to London, conclude his business there, and sail back to Bombay: the scandal would be upon them much sooner.

At that point, they turned to their mutual friend, Sitterjee the Parsee, for counsel. Sitterjee, the Yountish agent in Bombay, suggested they travel to Khodja relatives in Oman, away from prying eyes and wagging tongues in Bombay. The hope was to have the child there and reunite with Barnabas in Bombay, where the wedding would take place. A scandal it would be, regardless, having the child born before the wedding, but not the debacle that would ensue should Barnabas not return. Adnan and Yasmin seized on this as the only viable plan and sailed with Rehana to Oman, telling everyone that they were looking after their trading interests and would return in about one year. Rehana gave birth to Afsana in Oman, and awaited word that Barnabas was on his way back to Bombay.

Sally stopped Nexius at this point, and asked, "Why didn't Adnan and Yasmin send a message to Uncle Barnabas, inform him that he was . . . that he would soon have a child?"

Nexius shifted in his chair, and said, "By the Mother, they wanted to. In fact, they did send such a message, but it was never delivered."

Barnabas sat up with a strangled cry. Sanford put his arm around his partner's shoulder.

Nexius continued, "I am truly sorry to have to be the bearer of this news. Please know that I was not part of this. I am a soldier, not one of the politicians. It gives me pain to cause you pain."

Barnabas asked, "What happened?"

"The Learned Doctors ordered Sitterjee to intercept the message," said Nexius. "He would not do that, said that was going too far, but the Doctors insisted. I admired old Sitterjee, a man of honour. He still refused. So the Doctors sent one of their own to steal the letter and destroy it."

"Who? How?"

"A tough ship had arrived in Pash not long before your departure from Bombay back in 1793 by your calendar. The gateway was well north in the Indian Ocean in the 1790s, so the ship was not far from the Malabar Coast, within easy reach of Bombay. When he learned that Rehana bore your child, Sitterjee sent an alarm call on the ansible-box to alert the tough ship."

"Why?"

"All our agents in Pash knew that the Learned Doctors were interested in those families with the special talent for far-feeling and the longing for places unseen. They had tracked Belladonna Brownlee in Edinburgh, then you, Barnabas, first in London and then in Bombay. Standing instructions to let the Learned Doctors know when one of you has a child."

Sally raised an eyebrow, and said, "So why the alarm call?"

Nexius said, "Huhn. Sitterjee later said he should not have sent it as an alarm, but at the time he was worried that Adnan might banish his daughter or that Rehana in desperation might . . . might commit suicide. Not like *hatmoi*. Here in Yount or there in Pash, the Mother can find you. Or the Father, if you wish. But suicide, the loss of both mother and child, that thought frightened Sitterjee."

It was a while before Nexius resumed the story:

"Once the call went out to the tough ship, it could not be taken back, no matter how much Sitterjee might regret it."

Like my scream that night in Cape Town, thought Sally.

“The tough ship brought the Doctors, who overpowered Sitterjee and his second thoughts.”

Sally said, “That’s the how and the why, Nexius, but not the who.”

Nexius said, “You have met him. Orgunonno Loositage. Of course, he wasn’t Arch-Bishop back then.”

“Oh, horrible, horrible, horrible,” said Sally.

Nexius spread his scarred brown hands in front of him and said, “Rehana thought the message had been sent. All she received from London was a notice, sent by Barnabas’s uncle via the firm of Muir, Graham, & Finlay, that Barnabas would not be returning to Bombay.”

Rehana did nearly commit suicide upon that news but stayed her hand for the love of her beautiful daughter. Rehana raised Afsana in Oman; Adnan gave control of his Bombay business to his brother, Mohsin, and stayed with his daughter and granddaughter. Afsana, extraordinarily intelligent, was considered a seer by the time she was ten. By the time she was thirteen, the local religious figures saw her as a danger, possibly a djinn. Her grandparents and Rehana decided to return to Bombay, where religious attitudes were more flexible.

But Rehana and her parents only grew more concerned as Afsana began to have visions about more than local and private matters. Rumours grew in Bombay about a strange child living in Adnan’s house, and some called for her expulsion. Afsana began to long for Yount, though she did not know how to express her desire. Sitterjee and the Doctors were aware of this. Sitterjee, wanting to right an old wrong before he died, told Afsana about Yount, though he was very careful to omit certain details about his role in earlier events. One year after she had arrived in Bombay, Afsana received a box with a key. Partly enthralled by the key and partly fearing that Afsana was possessed by a devil, and concerned for her safety and theirs in the

face of growing animosity in the neighbourhood, Rehana and her parents acquiesced to Afsana's pleadings. Rehana bid her parents goodbye and, accompanied by Sitterjee, took Afsana to Cape Town and then on to Yount. The shock of the journey was too much for Rehana, who died shortly after arriving in Yount.

Nexius concluded the story: "Afsana opened the second lock, you see? But that was a double-edged sword for Loositage, since he thinks always about the prophecy—the prophecy he has declared heretical, of course!—relating to a dynasty founded by two Karket-soomi."

Barnabas pushed back from the table. "I longed to come to Yount and discover I am deceived!"

Nexius spread his hands wide and said, "Not so, I think, at least not in all ways. Here you are and here is Afsana, your daughter—that must be worth something!"

Barnabas, thinking of his daughter in the garden, turned away. Sanford, a protective heron, walked his old friend out of the room.

Sally said, "Nothing has been as we expected it since we arrived, Captain Nax. We trusted you."

Nexius sighed and nodded. "And still do I hope. Loositage and the Learned Doctors sometimes do things in ways that we Marines disagree with. But please remember that we never promised heart's desire, only help in regaining it. You came because you wished yourselves to come, and so did Afsana. I am just a soldier, Sally. You have powers that are needed here, not just for Yount but to help Karket-soom as well. Please, we need your help—we cannot find our way home without you."

Just before he exited, Nexius turned and spoke again: "Please, I will be with you through anything and everything. I am not proud of what happened in Bombay. I was only a young Marine onboard that ship and knew not what Loositage did until much later. Still, it troubles me. Sitterjee is not the only one in the story who seeks to put right an old wrong."

The next day, a Prannish-Day, Nexius was nowhere to be found. Barnabas would not come out of his room, and Sanford stayed with him. Sally went to the Lord-Chancellor, who agreed to arrange a meeting for Sally and Tom with Afsana, that very afternoon as Sally insisted. Tom and Sally entered the garden.

Oh my, orchids as gorgeous as in Merian's paintings, thought Sally. Red carnations, masses of carnations, a colibri like those in Catesby. Surely there is smilax here somewhere for Uncle Barnabas.

Isaak raced across a flowerbed in pursuit of the black squirrel with the lavish tail. The squirrel scrambled up a nutmeg tree, but Isaak made another discovery: someone sitting on the far side of the fountain. Watching Isaak stalk, Sally saw the figure as well and strode forward.

Sally and Afsana caught sight of one another at the same time, and both cried out. They had seen each other before—in Sally's dreams on the *Gallinule*. Sally and Afsana studied each other, as Isaak circled them both. Each saw a mirror of the other, a pale Afsana, a dark Sally, the same cheekbones, each with a chin just a little too small for their faces. Sally remembered the half-moon earrings and the silver threading in Afsana's hair.

"You called out to me," said Sally, without any introduction. "In my dream, the first time."

"In the dream, you startled me," answered Afsana. "I was dreaming too, and suddenly you appeared, very forcefully. I had a feeling of great danger. I called a warning to you: 'Beware.'"

Tom caught up with her. The apprentice from Mincing Lane took off his cap and looked nervous. Tom cleared his throat, hoped Sally would say something. When she did not, he bowed like one of the jointed wooden toys one could buy at the Christmas markets in London, and introduced himself. Afsana gestured to the benches and they all sat. Sally moved to speak but, before she could, Isaak leaped into Afsana's lap.

"Look at that!" said Tom. "Isaak *never* takes to strangers! She is

always grumpy, except with Sally and the cook.

Sally watched as Isaak turned once in Afsana's lap and curled up. Afsana tried to contain her astonishment, but Isaak conquered her discipline, and Afsana laughed.

One part of her wants the other part to stop laughing, thought Sally. And she does not wish us to see her inner struggle. Still, her laughter would not be out of place in Mincing Lane.

Afsana composed herself. Hesitantly she pet Isaak, who purred loudly enough for all to hear. Tom stared and shook his head, expecting Isaak to dig her claws into Afsana's blue silk dress and then pounce off after some distraction in the garden. But Isaak did not, only burrowed her head more fully into her tail.

"I have the advantage," said Afsana, "since I knew about you whereas you did not know about me. The Queen and the Learned Doctors told me I was to meet my father at last. About my father I have heard my entire life. I did not know I had English cousins until just recently, when the Learned Doctors said that my father had been accompanied here by his niece and nephew, and two other members of his household."

Not knowing what to say, Tom said, "Scottish, actually. We're Scots from Edinburgh, at least originally. Though we've lived most of our lives in London, so I guess—" Tom stopped and wished his sister would say something. Afsana stared right at Tom so that he felt compelled to say still more. "Anyway, your English is frightfully good. How did you come by it?"

Afsana, blinking once, said, "English is my birthright, just as it is yours. My grandfather spoke it fluently since he dealt with British—is that better?—merchants. My mother had some English. She insisted I learn it so I could speak with my father when he came back for me."

Tom interrupted her. "Uncle Barnabas is a good man."

Afsana reared her head and said something in a language Sally and Tom did not know, Hindi perhaps. Sally raised her hands,

hugged herself, to curb the anger she felt. What she wasn't certain of was whether the anger was at Afsana or at Uncle Barnabas. Probably both, she decided. Isaak looked up at Afsana's face, nestled back into her lap. Sally was determined to change the subject, as nearly impossible as that might be.

"They told us you have been here five years," Sally said. Afsana shrugged, letting the question of Barnabas's goodness rest. She told the McDoons about her life in Yount: that she lived in the Palace as a special ward of the Crown, that the Learned Doctors spoke with her frequently, that her only real confidante was the Rabbi of Palombeay, and that she had little to do since opening the second lock on the moon in the Temple.

"The Yountians hunger for our presence," Afsana said, touching one of her half-moon earrings. "They honour us Karket-soomi, need us for their escape from exile. Yet they are wary of us at the same time, and some, perhaps a growing number, are afraid of us. Though their fear is not so different from what I experienced in the Big World."

"In Edinburgh they feared our grandmother, said she was a witch," said Sally, nodding.

I wonder what people in London would say about me now, if they knew what I can do, she thought. Call me a dangerous lunatic, the way they've done with Joanna Southcott. Mrs. Sedgewick might understand. Not many others.

Tom said, "The Yountians *hate* the Cretched Man, but he is, well, their opponent only because he must be, and in Yount's best interest, even though they don't see it that way. Oh, *Quatsch*, the point is that people fear the unusual and don't always know who their real enemies are."

Afsana looked for the first time with interest at Tom. She asked Tom about the Cretched Man and, for a while, conversation centred on Jambres's role as gatekeeper, his subordination to Strix Tender Wurm, and the opening of the Door at the Sign of the Ear. Sally

spoke little, listening to the way in which Afsana posed questions. Light in the garden faded as the sun disappeared over the courtyard roof, the citrus fruits glowing yellow and the carnations glowing red in the dusk. Isaak twitched a paw as she dozed in Afsana's lap.

Afsana said, "I felt the Door opening and the emergence of the Owl-Wurm. I was very afraid."

"I felt you, but not in the Temple," said Sally. "You were in the chorus when we sang the ship, the *Gallinule*, out of Silence."

"Yes," said Afsana. "I did not know what was happening and had no idea who you were. I simply answered a call. I did not tell the Doctors, or even the Queen, about that."

The sun sank farther. Sally thought she saw in the shadowed bushes a pheasant, looking very much like the indigo bird on her favourite china. She rubbed her eyes. The hummingbird hovered for several seconds just above their heads, its gorget glowing in the dimness. They all stopped talking to watch the bird. Isaak woke up and watched too.

Afsana said with a sudden fierce urgency, "Do not tell anybody everything! Tell as little as you can. Guard your hopes, keep them small, or you will always be disappointed!"

Her emotion caused Isaak to jump off her lap. The cat sat at her feet for a moment, looking up, and then trotted to Sally. Tom and Sally each had a question but Afsana stood up like a fist being thrust into the heavens, cutting off further conversation.

Sally stood up and said, "I do not know that I agree but I believe I understand some of your reasons for saying what you do."

Afsana, perhaps because Isaak was gone, retreated into the icy reserve she had brought with her to the meeting. Sally saw Afsana peering at her with suspicion. The young woman from Oman turned and walked away. Sally walked after her, but Tom was even quicker. He caught Afsana gently by the elbow. Afsana pulled her elbow away so that her bracelet jingled but she stopped. She did not look at Tom, or at Sally as Sally joined them. The three cousins stood in a tableau

against the banks of carnations as the sun disappeared and the first stars appeared through the glass of the Winter Garden.

Tom spoke first: "Afsana, this makes little sense to us either—any of it. Not long ago I was an apprentice scratching all day in ledger books. My biggest worry was what play I might see that evening."

Afsana turned then, with narrowed eyes, and hissed, "Yes, exactly! *Your* biggest worry was a . . . a trivial thing! All *my* life I have lived waiting for a father who deserted my mother and who cared to know nothing of me. All my life, do you understand? A father who, it seems, cursed me doubly by giving me powers that cut me off from the few who *do* love me!"

Sally felt the falcon in her rise up, but Tom was steady. He said, "We are sorry for your suffering. Uncle Barnabas needs to speak with you about that. He will, I am sure of it, from his heart."

The granddaughter of Khodja merchants stood up so straight it seemed she might lift right off the ground, and said, "You might be confident but only because he has been to you the father that has not been to me."

Sally could not restrain herself longer, crying out, "But how could he be a father to you, when he did not know of you? Had he known . . ."

Afsana glared at Sally, her eyes flashing in the starlight, and yelled, "He *did* know! My mother sent him a message. He never answered! He did not wish to know me."

Quietly Tom said, "He did *not* know. The Learned Doctors destroyed the message. He never received it. Here's what Nexius told us yestereve."

Afsana displayed no emotion as she listened. When Tom finished, Afsana brushed by him and walked back to the benches. The garden was dark but slivers of starlight reflected off the water and the marble and the jade. Afsana sat a long time on the bench. Sally and Tom came back to her.

At last, Afsana said, "I surprise myself but I believe you. I want to hear this from my father as well."

“You will,” said Tom.

Afsana said, “My life has not been mine to control. I did not ask for this, any of this.”

“Neither did we,” said Tom.

Sally shook her head and said, “But we did wish ourselves to come, Tom . . . you and I. You as well, Afsana . . . cousin. We three were born with this longing. The question is, what shall we do with it?”

Together the cousins thought about Sally’s question while they contemplated the moonless sky. They sat listening to the water from the fountain. The sky above was fabulous with stars. Tom caught glints from Afsana’s earrings, saw the sheen of her glossy black hair. He heard her bracelet jingle as she moved her hand to stroke Isaak, who was weaving around her and Sally.

Afsana looked up to the stars and said, “No moon here, but elsewhere . . . We Muslims reckon time by the lunar calendar, so I know that tonight the moon should be nearly full.”

Cole-Month slipped into Grappling-Month, and headed towards the winter solstice. Barnabas met Afsana every day at noon in the Winter Garden. They talked for hours, sometimes until sunset. Sally let Barnabas bring Isaak (and Isaak would suffer Barnabas’s transport), to Afsana’s delight. On the days when Isaak curled up in Afsana’s lap, the conversations between father and daughter were much less fraught than when Isaak was absent.

“Buttons and beeswax,” said Barnabas to Sally after one of his visits to the garden. “Isaak shall dine on fresh fish every day forever, even if I must catch the fish myself!”

Sally and Tom would meet with Afsana in the garden for an hour or so before Barnabas appeared. The conversation was not always fruitful: sometimes Afsana fell into icy indifference and sometimes she raged at Barnabas and sniped at Tom and Sally for defending him. Sally lost her temper more than once, usually on days when she let Barnabas bring Isaak. Throughout, Tom stayed calm. He wanted

nothing more in the world than to be sure his sister and cousin were friends. On one particularly trying day, he laughed and said, “The Three Graces, we are assuredly not! The Three Blind Mice is more like it!” After explaining the references, Afsana smiled too, despite herself. So it went day after day as the McDoons struggled to find a place for an unexpected family member and Afsana struggled to decide whether she should find a place and, if so, on what terms.

In the afternoons, Sally visited Reglum Bammary, who was continuing his recuperation back on station at the Marines’ Analytical Bureau. The A.B., or Abbey as Reglum called it, was located in a modern building on Immer’s Canal, across the river from the Palace. Two days before the winter solstice and the *kjorraw* ceremony, after a vexing session with Afsana (who, if Sally were fair about it, had equal reason to be angry at Sally), Sally fled with relief to the A.B. and found Reglum free of bandages for the first time since the skirmish. They walked to the Department for Fulgination, to show off Reglum’s “new” shoulder to Dorentius Bunce. Sally loved Dorentius’s office, which contained piles of specially made graph paper filled with notations and symbols and a huge slateboard filled with more scribblings, besides all sorts of books, globes, and maps and several ansible-devices in various states of repair.

“Hello book-weevil,” said Reglum on this day, waving his arm ostentatiously in front of Dorentius’s face.

“Hello yourself, nib-whittler,” answered Dorentius, who, seeing Sally, said, “Or perhaps I should demonstrate that Cantabrigians are true gentlemen by congratulating you, sir, on being named the new editor of the catalogue.”

Sally said, “Well . . . ?”

“Youngest editor ever, in fact,” said Dorentius. “For the Phorcydiana, which is the Catalogue of Monsters and Goettical Creatures, one of the A.B.’s most important projects. After fulgination, of course, but otherwise quite worthy.”

Reglum said, with pride that belied his words, “Oh, *zattipatti*,

they probably just wanted to be nice to a chap who won't be much use with a sword for a while."

"So, Reglum, show Sally, take her up to your department," said Dorentius with an expectant look and a small flourish. "You won't find any monsters down here, no 'centaurs, gorgons or harpies, no, our work relates to mankind."

Neither Sally nor Reglum reacted to his last statement, causing Dorentius to sigh. "Oh, what's the use of learning dead languages from Karket-soom if not even you two get the reference?"

In his new office, Reglum said to Sally, "We Yountians started the Catalogue of Monsters & Goettical Creatures over seven hundred years ago. It's a running treatise of comparative anatomy and interpretative biology to match the descriptions reported by the two to four strong ships sent out each year. Never-ending work, more data pours in every year."

He showed Sally page proofs, plate after plate of exotic creatures with detailed descriptions.

"*Vizomri oon bjetti?*" she said. "What would you call these in English?"

Reglum frowned and said, "Little Goblin Butchers, something like that. See how they have a cleaver-like bone at the end of their arms, instead of hands or paws? Only three feet tall but very fast. Tentacles around the mouth to pull in what they chop off."

Sally turned to the next page. Reglum frowned again, saying, "The Pendryre-Bird, like a giant woodpecker. Feeds on brains."

Reglum cleared his throat and added, "These are proofs for a section about species that can fulminate. The little butchers infested several islands in the southern Liviates last century—took us two years to hunt them all down. There's a similar story for each creature described in this section, and it is not a short section."

Sally turned the page, found herself looking at a picture of a horghoid with its multiple mouths and six arms, pushed the pages

away and said, "Is it really nothing but monsters out there?"

Reglum scratched at his sore shoulder and looked out the window at the harbour before answering. "That's not really a question of biology, which I am qualified to answer, so much as a question of philosophy—or theology—or state policy, none of which I am qualified to address as such."

"Reglum," Sally said, moving closer. She could see each one of his eyelashes and the small hairs at his temples.

"I speak now as Reglum, not as a lieutenant in the Marines," he said. "Almost all of what we see, and everything we are trained to observe and depict, are monsters by any definition. They have no power of reason that we can discern, no conscience. They devour any flesh they can find. The brood of Phorcys, one and all."

He watched an osprey fly off its pole in the harbour, then continued, "Yet are these beasts doing anything worse than following the instincts they were born with, like a fish-hawk? Are they not part of the natural world too? Who made them, if not the Mother? God the Father as you style him in Karket-soom? Wurm? Some other angel or demon?"

Sally thought about the deep green voice in her head at the Sign of the Ear, and remembered the silence of Oos. She recalled the booming of the Wurm-Owl.

"I don't know," she said. "It seems God takes many forms: here, in Karket-soom, in the Interrugal Lands. But if God is everywhere, so too is the Wurm. Even if we free Yount, true escape may never be possible."

"Now you take us far beyond the simple truths of teratology," said Reglum. "As I have told you before, I don't pretend to understand a being such as the Wurm, though I admit to you alone that I have pondered his nature. At Oxford, I read Prinn's *De Vermis Mysteriis* and the fragments of the *Pnakotica* and the *Liber Ivonis* kept in the Bodleian, but to little avail. Is it not enough to know that he is our foe?"

“In his beginning, the Wurm was not as he is today,” said Sally. “I see that in his deepest eye, the lens that goes back to his birth. He and his fellows chose their path, Reglum, unlike the monsters in your catalogue. Which means they can choose again, if only their pride will let them. Which means *we* can choose again too.”

“Oh Sally, you veer into what the Sacerdotes call unorthodox philosophy when you make such claims. They will tell you to stay with description and classification, and to leave thoughts about first causes with the Learned Doctors.”

“As they tell us also in Karket-soom,” said Sally. “But I think they cannot hear the Mother—or are wilfully blocking their ears.”

“Ah, now we come to it,” said Reglum, grazing Sally’s arm as he spread his hands. “Here at the Abbey we have been thinking for over a century about what the Learned Doctors say. The ichthyologist Flureous Mur’a Hunce was most penetrating—you must read his work sometime—and Vallussea Dwendify, who studied beetles, she was also trenchant. We disagree with the Doctors on some matters that they insist are objective truths. We learn from Karket-soom in ways they do not. We read your Hunter and Blumenbach, Erasmus Darwin . . .”

Hearing those names, Sally’s heart skipped. Instead of Reglum’s voice, she heard James Kidlington’s. She saw James on the deck of the *Essex*, and on the swing at the Gezelligheid. She fought not to, but she saw James sitting at a table in prison on Robbens Island, holding her locket. With a small gasp, Sally backed away from Reglum, who looked up in alarm.

“Sally, what is it?” he said, “I am sorry. First monsters and then, worse, a lecture about them. Here, sit down.”

Sally shook her head. She willed James Kidlington out of her mind for now and looked anew at Reglum. Reglum gazed at her, while rubbing his shoulder. Sally walked over to the window and pretended to watch the ospreys for a while. She was very conscious of Reglum standing right behind her, was certain she felt his breath on her neck.

“Tell me more, Reglum. If the monsters are no worse than lions or tigers, then what about their normal prey? They must eat something when they cannot attack tough ships or invade Yount itself. Do you catalogue their prey?”

Reglum sighed, “Yes, but only as an afterthought. Once a new species is determined to be non-threatening, we lose almost all interest in it. We’re poor Linneans, I am afraid, in that regard. We record such species in a supplementary catalogue, the *Auctary of Innocuous Beings*. To be the sub-editor for the *Auctary*, that is a position with no future, let me tell you.”

An osprey lumbered back to its pole with a fish. Sally and Reglum watched the osprey rip into the belly of the fish.

Reglum said, “Some of the Innocuous Beings are strikingly beautiful. In one place are little flying rodents that we call *druddi*, which is maybe ‘applequits’ in English. Their wings are blue, their bodies banded in black and white. In another place is a sort of antelope we would call in English something like ‘Chiming Sebastians.’ As they skip along they utter ringing notes that sound like they are chiming out, ‘pass the mustard, pass the mustard.’ Imagine herds of them loping over the savannah, how the air shimmers with their music!”

Reglum raced ahead like the antelopes he described, saying, “Natural phenomena too are not always hideous in the Interrugal Lands. Once, while serving on the *Curlew*, I saw a rainbow created by starlight only, the oddest colours refracted over the sea. We do not yet fully understand the optics but no Marine who saw that sight shall ever forget its beauty. We have built a device to measure the starlight rainbow. We can differentiate its colours, even capture them on recording paper using silver nitrates and cyanotypic glues.”

Reglum no longer raced but soared, and Sally soared with him.

“Rainbows, Sally,” he exclaimed. “Like the one in Akenside, do you know it, in the ‘Pleasures of Imagination’? Here, here, I have it . . .”

Reglum strode to a bookshelf and pulled out a well-thumbed volume. “By my bedside at Brasenose College, and always close to hand

here. Ah, listen: 'The melting rainbow's vernal-tinctur'd hues . . .' Yes, yes, farther down . . . ah: 'through the brede of colours changing from the splendid rose to the pale violet's dejected hue.' Marvellous."

Seeing Reglum's face glow and listening to him recite English poetry outside the world in which England was, Sally thought, *Herds of ringing antelopes and starlight rainbows, I want to see these things. With Reglum, I would brave goblin butchers and carkodrillos and all other goettical creatures.*

Later, back in her own room, holding Isaak in her lap, Sally had another man's voice in her head again, and the memory of him holding her locket. Not for the last time, she wished the cook were here, and Mrs. Sedgewick.

I can sing a ship out of an ocean, and force an owl back into his cage, she thought. *But I cannot see my way clear on this other matter. And I do not have a Saint Morgaine for this affliction.*



Interlude: Regina Coeli

Maggie sat cross-legged in the alley, with a treatise of calculus in her lap. The Sunday sounds of a London late afternoon faded in her mind. The Irish children had watched her for a while but then drifted away. Maggie solved equations, placed the solutions in her mind, scratched arcs and tangents on the wall. Sitting cross-legged on the alley floor, she raised up her mind and put herself along the path of a tangent and walked, slowly at first but with increasing confidence. London faded away behind her.

Maggie walked a long time alone in darkness. Stars emerged overhead, one by one. When the moon rose, a lark landed on her shoulder, and sang softly in her ear. The lark guided her feet, while pouring forth polynomials, diophantine equations, notes on the topology of curves, proofs relating to the existence of monodromic groups. Maggie found the solutions to the lark's equations, posed problems of her own, which the lark solved and to which it then responded with another series of equations. Maggie solved and

sang in turn, and so they went, intertwining their music. Maggie walked through a landscape of rolling hills, long sweeping grasslands without a single tree. At the top of one incline, she saw on all horizons the first hint of dawn and dusk simultaneously. The lark soared trilling from her shoulder, higher, higher, higher until it was lost to sight. Spilling a torrent of song, the lark tumbled back to Maggie. On she walked, with the lark periodically leaping into the ever-dawning, ever-gloaming sky, singing.

She came to a wall at the top of a slope. Maggie heard the distant crash of waves on a shore and tasted salt on the breeze. The wall was made of red brick in one light, and grey brick seen in another, and all colours in all lights, but never white or black alone. The wall curved around into the rising and setting sun. Bell towers stood at regular intervals along the wall. The path ended at a gate in the wall, flanked by two griffins. Eyes rimmed the gate, fierce eyes, kind eyes, stern eyes, eyes lined with tears. Atop the gate was a mouth that spoke as Maggie approached. "Who/what/why do you seek?" it said in every language at the same time, a perfect harmony coalescing into the language that precedes all others. Maggie did not remember answering but she must have because the griffins bowed to her and the gate opened.

Inside was a garden, suffused in the never-ending dawn and endless dusk commingled. The sea-tang merged with a thousand fragrances, the bass of the surf supported the tenor of fountains. Espaliered roses climbed the walls, fruit trees stood in rows, flowering vines hung from arched trellises. Cats roamed terraces, chasing after butterflies as big as hats, and dogs frolicked on geometrical lawns. A bell tolled and then another and another. As they did, Maggie entered a plaza flanked by columned walkways, with an enormous fountain in the middle. At the top of the fountain was a statue of a pelican piercing its breast: water gushed from the wound, flowing down over rows of marble water-horses and sea-turtles. Dolphins swam in the fountain. Everything was tinged pink

and grey, peach, purple, and nutmeg from the perpetually rising and setting sun. The lark left Maggie's shoulder, alighted in a plum tree, and joined its voice to the dawn/dusk chorus—the *Mantiq al-Tayr*, the language of the birds.

Six African women and a woman from Asia Minor sat at tables in front of the fountain. They looked up and smiled as Maggie approached. One of them stood up and, bowing, said:

“Known now as Maggie Collins, be welcome.”

Maggie bowed and looked at the woman. She gasped:

“The Baby Macaroni!”

All seven women chuckled. The standing woman laughed most of all.

“Well, yes,” she said. “If you will. But I suppose Macrina the Younger has a slightly more dignified ring, don't you think? Of course, I forgive you (how could I not?), if you will forgive me.”

Bewildered, Maggie nodded.

“My love,” said St. Macrina the Younger. “Meet your sisters/daughters/mothers.”

Maggie looked at each of the others. Suddenly she knew them: Saint Crispina of Numidia with the shaved head of her martyrdom, tall and unyielding to her male interrogators; St. Monica of Hippo Regius near Carthage; the Saints Perpetua and Felicitas, also of Carthage; Ijeoma Chidera, weaving intricate geometrical designs for the honour of Aha Njoku, the Lady of the Yams; and Nne Adaobi, holding a spear inscribed to Oya, the goddess of wind, fire and lightning from across the river. Maggie knew them and they knew her in that instant, just as they had known each other forever. Maggie beheld her *ndichie*, and they embraced her.

“But why?” asked Maggie.

“Come,” said St. Macrina the Younger. She took Maggie by the hand. They walked in the sunrise/sunset to the nearest bell tower, ascended the winding staircase, and emerged in the carillon. They looked out and Maggie gasped, partly in surprise, partly in recognition.

“Behold the Garden,” said the saint. The wall was an enormous circle that was also a dozen other shapes, all perfect. Inside the wall was much larger than outside, an infinite regression, fractals of lawns and arbours and fountains. The air was so transparent Maggie discerned the follicles on the feathers of birds perched in trees across hundred-mile greenways. The air was so quick Maggie smelled the aroma of flowers a day’s walk away.

“*The Garden?*” she asked, knowing the answer now but wanting confirmation.

“No,” said the saint. “Not that one, but not so far away either.”

Maggie considered the flowers, which named themselves to her as she gazed. She had seen very few flowers since coming to New York City and then London. The last time she had seen and smelled such a profusion of flowers, she had been a very small girl, barely able to speak, in the place called Maryland. Her memories of that place were not good.

“Maryland,” she said.

The saint looked at her sadly, and said, “A different place but not so far away either. The mockery of its intended. Maryland is not Mary’s Land. And here we are, at the Garden of Patience, the Inns of Learning, where we sing the Quadrivium and the Trivium throughout the constant dawn and dusk, the forever-becoming, as we plan for some other end.”

“I don’t understand,” said Maggie, who was beginning to understand but only as a frog begins to appreciate far above it the rim of the well into which it has fallen.

“Look,” said the saint.

Maggie saw now thousands of others in the garden. A few she recognized: Saints Paula and Eustochium with their books and brooms, steely-eyed Saint Radegunde with her mason’s trowel, Saint Teresa writing and writing, Hypatia surrounded by a dozen pupils. The names of others formed in her mind as she beheld them: Rabia al Basri, with her broken jug, Meerabai singing *bhajan* prayers, Guan

Yin holding a willow branch, Dhashi Zhi at her feet, both listening to the music of the world, Machig Labdron, the Queen of Bliss, playing her drum and bell, Tse Che Nako the Thought Women, the Spider Woman, Estsanatlehi the Self-Renewing One, clan-mothers of the Haudenosee, women from every people, every country, every continent, from Africa, Europe, Persia, India, Siam, China, from Australia and Peru, from California and the polar North, from everywhere on Earth. Women sat in libraries, vast libraries opening onto the garden. Women sat at drafting tables, wove patterns into cloth, mixed chemicals in retorts, manipulated large engines of calculation and analyzed the results.

From the assembled minds arose a humming, a music that probed and retreated, advanced and circled back, concentric and tangential, always emerging and always receding at the same time. Like the perception of a lost time on the tip of one's tongue, thought Maggie, or the memory of an event that has not yet happened but certainly will. Maggie saw that men were also present, fewer of them, but working alongside the women, and likewise of every possible race and type. And then—Maggie had to rub her eyes to be sure—she perceived other beings, also working with the men and the women. Some were all covered in fur, some had feathers instead of hair, some were as tall and thin as storks with superbly long noses to match. Maggie saw across the pellucid air that their beak-noses had three nostrils.

“What am I to do?” said Maggie.

“This you know though you have forgotten,” said Saint Macrina the Younger.

Maggie considered this as sunrise and sunset coddled the air, lacing the sky with shades of tin, cream, and coral.

“I fear the Owl,” she said at last.

The saint said nothing while the world turned around and onto itself.

“Fear him but not forever,” she said at last. “And not into despair,

not into inaction. He and his kind are not the highest powers.”

The saint pointed down at the great fountain with the statue of the self-mutilating pelican, a thousand fountains replicated across the gardens below. The water gushing from the pelican’s wound turned to blood, a splashing river of blood out of which the dolphins leaped with cries of alarm. Rivers and rivers of blood, thousands and thousands of dolphins. As quickly as it began, the blood ended, replaced by water that turned mirror-silver. At first the thousand mirrors reflected up to Maggie and the saint the turquoise and lilac of the sunrise and sunset. Then the mirrored garden revealed a vision of ingenious power to Maggie, the creation of a key to open the mightiest gate ever made. All the music, all the equations, all the geometry of the universe would have to go into the engine depicted. And all the love, all the mercy, or else the device would fail.

“We need seven for this song of building,” whispered Maggie. Saint Macrina the Younger nodded, and all the saints did the same down below, every man and woman of every species in the garden nodded.

In the mirror were the images of six individuals. Maggie knew them. Most of all Maggie looked at the image of the young white woman, the one with the small-chinned, anxious face. The white woman was sailing beyond the edge of the world, desiring herself to go to a place where sad dreams come true. The young white woman looked out at Maggie and, for one instant, Maggie and the white woman hummed to one another, “I know you!”

The mirrors clouded over, the waters of the fountains swirled again. A long sigh broke from the massed scholars.

“The other six seek you, though they do not realize that yet, not fully,” said Saint Macrina the Younger. “They must find you and together you seven must sing the Song Eternal to awaken the Mother.”

Maggie said, “I know. But still I fear the Owl.”

“Look,” said the saint, pointing to a dark grey shape that soared

out of the thousand bell towers at the instant, a shape that swooped low over the fountains and gardens before flying over the heathlands and down beyond the wall.

“The owl of wisdom flies at dusk,” said the saint. The owls hovered and then circled towards the line of shore, hunting by the sea. “The Wurm-Owl is not this owl. The Wurm-Owl is a usurper, a bloated, leucristic mockery. Fear the Wurm-Owl but not unto death.”

From the far side of the sea, something stirred on its pillar of bone. Maggie shuddered and, despite herself, so did Saint Macrina the Younger.

“Come down now,” said the saint. “You must go.”

Maggie descended the staircase, and re-entered the garden. Larks, thrushes, and wrens greeted the dawn. She heard the bees flying from flower to flower, could see the hairs on their legs, full of pollen as they worked at a million pistils and stamens. She smelled sandalwood and acanthus, galbanum and sarara, the spices of every archipelago. The lawns were strewn with small blue flowers.

“Go forth now, find your six sisters and brothers,” said the saint, and all the saints of every nation.

“May I return?” asked Maggie.

“You need not ask,” said the scholars together in every language. “You are of this place and can never leave forever. In the end you must return, not having left, to complete with us the Great Psalter—which has already been written and sung—to solve the Great Equation—which was solved before Time began.”

A lark of many larks flew from a plum tree of many plum trees and alighted on Maggie’s shoulder, a little streaked golden fire on Maggie’s brown shoulder.

“Goodbye for now,” said all the scholars.

“Goodbye,” said Maggie.

She walked out the gate, patting the flanks of the bowing griffins as she passed. Down a long road over the swales she walked, with the lark for company. The darkness grew, the stars came out. On

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and on, colder and colder. The lark sang, "What is the square root of infinity?" and, before Maggie could answer, it flew back up the moon-lit road.

Maggie woke up in the alley, cross-legged with a book in her lap, almost unable to stand.



Chapter 14: Endued with Particles of Heavenly Fires

At the winter solstice, all of Yount celebrated *kjorraw*, the chant of solemn joy, the wistful search for memory, and the shield against loneliness. At dawn, every house, every ship, had a Small Moon hanging from roof or mast to reflect the sunrise. At dawn, the harp-boats and ship-violins rode in Yount Great-Port harbour, as they did everywhere in Yount, playing the symphony of longing and hope, fanned by the wind and poured out into the water through resonating strings hanging from the keels.

The dolphins sang back first, crowding around the breakwater and leaping high before all two hundred thousand residents of the city. Then the whales sang back, their great heads and fins surging in the waves just off the breakwater. The humans and the cetaceans sang to one another, whale-matins in exile, a shared melody to kindle light in the darkness.

The Mother's Song, thought Sally, watching the proceedings from

the royal barge. *I know this melody. I sang it to defy the Owl in the Temple.*

Sally moved to the bow and sang, waving her arms like the conductor of an orchestra. As she did so, the dolphins raced towards her, leaping and tumbling to match her gestures.

“A *lail-obos!*” cried people on the barge, and the word spread throughout the multitudes. “The Karket-soomi woman rules the dolphins!”

Afsana, Tom, and Barnabas joined Sally, held hands, and sang as well.

“*Kaskas*, look!” cried the people. “A whale enters the harbour! Not in living memory has one passed the breakwater. They’ve called the grandsire of whales, look how he lifts his head, his tail must be thrust into the harbour mud. His eye is enormous. See how he looks at the Karket-soomi singers. . . . Ah, now he sings with them. Oh, by the Nurturing Mother, such a singing!”

And all two hundred thousand sang together, and millions more did the same everywhere in Yount, led by four Big Landers and, above all, by two young women, cousins warily clasping hands in front of Neptune’s herald.

As the crowds dispersed to the rest of the *kjorraw* ceremonies, Sally thought, *So now we are four. Afsana is strong. We are too alike and not alike enough, but we need her strength, her anger. Who shall be our fifth?*

“Glorious, that’s what it was!” said Reglum. “A song for the ages! Now come, let us enjoy the rest of *kjorraw*. There are Dorentius and Noreous on the next ship—I hope they are not too envious of my good fortune in being onboard the royal barge—we can all go together to break our fast.”

Sally, aware of the spreading talk and what her performance would do to fuel it, was glad for diversion. As they were rowed back to shore, she said to Reglum, “I feel funny inside right now. Empty and full all at once. I cannot put it any other way.”

“You are a marvel,” said Reglum. “Truly, you begin to scare me a little too with what you can do. You scare others as well, you know. Some people think you might be the *sukenna-tareef*, the Saviour. Others say that is heresy. Some fear you are in league with the Cretched Man. And now Tom and Mr. McDoon, as well as Afsana! Old prophecies are on many minds now. Be watchful in the midst of our rare moment of joy!”

Sally looked back at the Arch-Bishop, who affected a look of bland hauteur.

“But forgive those who fear you. Our fear springs from our situation, alone here in the wilderness. We do not know our origins,” said Reglum. “We do not know where we came from or why we are here or where we are going. We lost our history when we arrived here and, at first, we had even forgotten the concept of what history is or what it means. The Great Confluxion was like an explosion from which the survivors awake with no memory. We are amnesiacs. Our only progress has been, over the past two thousand years, to become aware that we are amnesiacs.”

Sally remembered a man who had fallen off a roof on Dunster Court by Mincing Lane. He had survived but could not remember his name or where he lived.

Reglum brightened and said, “But enough of the mournful and solemn! Now we eat—I could eat an entire star-duck stuffed with pears!—and enjoy the pageant and pantomimes and all the other entertainments. See, Barnabas, *kjorraw* breakfast is like a gigantic *poisille*, not too sweet, not too bitter. Try the rice-and-thyme cakes dipped in honey, for example.”

The McDoons enjoyed the rest of the day’s festivities, but were aware that, everywhere they went, they were the centre of attention, however surreptitiously or politely people looked at them. They laughed at what they understood of the comic skits and staged fables: the story of the addled brill, a flatfish who fell in love with the reflection of the moon (“Which is why we speak of needing more

than one eye in matters of the heart,” said Dorentius, with a wink at Reglum), the tale of the dog who wanted to swim with the dolphins, and that of the human mother who raised two bear-cubs and how the bears thanked her.

They tried to follow the duels in which competitors traded traditional proverbs in search of the most ingenious and illuminating ripostes, and the riddling contests, and the competition to create epigrams extemporaneously. They listened to the Rescue Stories, told especially to the young, real examples of bravery and camaraderie in the Lands In-Between. They enjoyed the music, joining in where they could on “Far Benison, the Sainted Seas” and “The Sun We Hail with Song Profound.” In the evening they attended a performance of “The Carnation on the Mast,” a classic drama about the *Lanner*, a Yount Major frigate that sacrificed itself to save a city during the War of the Affirmation—“Remember the *Lanner*,” they roared with the rest of the audience at the curtain call.

Several days later the McDoons celebrated Christmas. Yount Great-Port had, besides two mosques and one synagogue, three churches: one Roman Catholic, one Lutheran (run by the Pietists), and one shared by several other Protestant denominations, all serving the small communities of Karket-soomi who had come to Yount one way or the other, plus a handful of converts from the Sabo-soomi. Sanford had misgivings but agreed that finding a service at all so far from home was commendable and that they could all be excused for liturgical inexactitudes under the circumstances. In fact, as Barnabas pointed out, the McDoons could feel doubly righteous since they attended not only the rather shambolic Anglican service but also the well-ordered Lutheran one, having been invited by Fraulein Reimer’s sister on behalf of the entire congregation.

“She sings beautifully, the little one there with the unkempt hair and the light in her eyes,” whispered Sally to the fraulein as they listened to the children’s choir perform J.S. Bach’s “*Ach wie Fluechtig*,

Ach wie Wichtig."

The fraulein smiled but said nothing.

Afterwards, the McDoons held a private Christmas dinner in their quarters. As far as any of them could remember, it was the first time they had gathered without at least one Yountian present since they had boarded the *Gallinule* in Cape Town, or maybe even since boarding the *Essex* almost eighteen months earlier. They realized that it would soon be the year 1814 back in England, that they often forgot which saint's day it might be, and that they missed Mincing Lane terribly, no matter how much they had longed to come to Yount.

"Figs and feathers," said Barnabas, wearing his now-stained buff-coloured nankeen vest and frayed quince-coloured stockings. "What I would not give for some of the cook's best for our Christmas feast!"

"Roast goose!" said Tom.

"At least Fraulein Reimer has been able to make us her traditional plum tart," said Sanford, bowing to the fraulein.

They spent the next minutes saying things like "Remember the time you . . . ?" and "I wonder if Yikes has moved from the hearthside?" and "Has Mr. Fletcher proposed to the cook's niece yet, do you think?" Each in his or her mind's eye saw the print of Lord Rodney attacking the French, the dolphin door-knocker and the blue trim around the windows, the bean-poles in the garden surrounded by blue bixwort. Each heard the call of rooks and the cries of the oysterman, the milk seller, and the broommaker in the streets.

Only one person at table was dry-eyed, the sixth, their only guest: Afsana. Sally caught the look of feigned indifference and real scorn in Afsana's eye, like the look of a beggar with her face pressed against the glass of an elegant tavern or food shop. Sally moved to curtail their crawl towards self-pity.

"Hear now," Sally said. "Let us toast this feast and our being together . . . and welcome our cousin."

“Hear, hear,” said Tom, more loudly than he needed to. Everyone raised their glasses. Barnabas, striving to please his daughter, had banned alcohol from the table. Although he thought nothing would be finer at the moment than a little toddy or punch, he hoisted his mulled pear juice and said “Hear, hear” even more loudly than Tom had.

“Thank you,” said Afsana. “Most certainly my first Christmas dinner. You do know that we honour Jesus in the Koran?”

Before Sanford could explore that topic, Sally said, “We need to talk about our plans. Thank . . . heavens we have our Tom back, but our task here is not fully done. Uncle Barnabas opened the Door but we could not keep it open. To do that, we must help in other ways.”

“How?” said Sanford.

Before Sally could reply, Afsana said, “War is coming with Orn. They have been talking about that since I arrived. I feel that we have a role to play in that conflict.”

“Is that our conflict or theirs?” said Sanford. “Besides, we are merchants, not warriors.”

“It is our conflict if it is part of liberating Yount, helping them find their way home,” said Afsana. Sally was not the only one who noticed that Afsana said “our.” No one spoke to Sanford’s second point, but the Londoners thought of Barnabas challenging the Cretched Man in the church ruins and Sanford himself attacking the carkodrillos and Tom losing two fingers against a leaping monster and . . . the fraulein standing with a smoking pistol over a woman bleeding to death.

The fraulein said, “I have feet in both worlds. I think Afsana is right.”

Sally leaned down to give Isaak a scrap of star-duck, and said, “I agree. A war with Orn, if war comes, is tied somehow to Yount’s ultimate freedom.”

Tom nodded. He saw Jambres on the *Seek-by-Night*, its blood-dappled moon flag fluttering, and he saw Billy Sea-Hen tipping his hat as he walked unbowed into darkness to confront a monstrous owl.

“Thomas,” Tom murmured with a slight Wapping accent. “Tommy Two-Fingers.”

Sally caught Tom’s emotion and pushed her point further, saying, “The Learned Doctors called us. The Arch-Bishop and others among them may regret that now, thinking they have unleashed more than they wished for—which may be right. But the main point is still unresolved: how to end Yount’s captivity.”

Sanford wiped his hands of duck grease with a thoroughness that suggested he was cleansing himself of something else, and said, “I wished myself to come but only to help Barnabas find his heart’s desire—and to rescue Tom-lad. Now that he is rescued and we are all well, I say that we should leave this place and its troubles to itself.”

Isaak moved stealthily beneath their feet, hunting scraps, wrestling with bones, but otherwise all was still.

Barnabas said at last, “*Quatsch*. Sanford has a point, you know. Sally . . . ?”

Sally sat long in thought before she answered. “Sanford . . . I love you as I love my uncle. Your counsel is always good, we have always listened, but think on it: if Tom wishes to remain, would you still wish to return home?”

Tom swallowed hard and said, “Sanford—second father—I cannot leave yet. We have a thing to do here that must be done. And I believe the Cretched Man will return to our aid . . . Yes, hear me out! . . . and when he does, with his soldiers, well, I need to be there.”

Sanford said no more, looking convinced of neither the one thing nor the other. Barnabas said little more but his eyes made it plain that, if Afsana remained in Yount, then so too would he for now.

“Let us agree on this much then,” said Sally. “We cannot leave in any event until the first tough ship sails in the spring. That is at least three, possibly four months, hence. Much can happen in that time.”

The McDoons, now including Afsana, all nodded. Isaak jumped from the floor into Sally’s lap, and put her head up over the table, scanning for scraps, sweeping everyone with her invincible and

haughty gaze, daring all comers with her outthrust chin. Everyone laughed.

“Besides,” said Tom, as they left the table. “We are going to stage Buskirk’s ‘Hero of the Hills’ at the Marine soiree in the spring. We cannot leave before we do that!”

Again everyone laughed, including Afsana, who had that morning accepted Tom’s invitation to perform opposite him in the play.

The McDoons would look back later at the next three months as being nearly idyllic, though they hardly thought so at the time.

Barnabas and Afsana continued their daily conversations in the Winter Garden. Afsana and Sally spoke frequently, and Tom found many excuses to join them or to make sure his daily routine included being where Afsana might be at a given moment. Not every meeting between Afsana and the other McDoons, especially Barnabas, was an unqualified success but, on the whole, the two sides continued to creep towards reconciliation. Watching Barnabas and Afsana gesticulating as they spoke to one another, Sally, at the other end of the garden, thought that Afsana “clarified” as well as any other McDoon.

“When the English were still using wood for coins and did not know how to count in a ledger book,” Sally heard Afsana lecturing in a tone that was not unfamiliar to those who had heard Sally’s lectures, “Ibn Hawqual and Al-Muqaddasi and Ibn-Majid were charting and sailing the trade routes from the Malabar Coast to Penang and from Socotra to the Bengal!” Watching her cousin handle Barnabas, Sally had no doubt that Afsana could sail with Lord Rodney, and had no doubt that Barnabas knew this too.

The winter was very cold, without much snow but racked by dry gales. Pack-ice crept into the northern waters, making navigation hazardous, so the departure of the first tough ship of the year, the *Pratincole*, was delayed until Plassy-Month (which is early April). The only advantage of the dry weather was the lack of cloud cover,

so that Sally was able to scan the heavens at night, “lunaticking” as Tom called it. As many evenings as she could, and for as long as she could withstand the cold, Sally—sometimes with Reglum, sometimes also with Afsana and Tom—would stand on the rooftop and search the sky. She marvelled at the strange constellations, which Reglum identified for her: The Oarsman, The Physer or Spouting Whale, The Dabchick, The Mother-Dragon, and dozens of others, an entire sky full.

“And there,” Reglum added one evening. “Two that mariners know from Karket-soom: what you call Sirius, the Dog Star (which we name The Wolf’s Eye, which is near enough), and Ermandel’s Toe (which we call simply The Thumb). No one can explain how these two stars appear in both Karket-soom and Sabo-soom—in fact, can be tracked through many of the places in the Interrugal Lands. Like the starlight rainbow . . . something inexplicable.”

The wind made Sally’s ears hurt as Ermandel’s Toe gleamed without flickering. “Of course,” said Reglum, laughing, “old Dorentius has a theory about it—but then he always does!”

Sally was intrigued by the concept of a starlight rainbow, wanting to know more about the device for measuring and capturing the stellar spectrum, how it worked, how it recreated the light on sensitive paper and so on. Reglum was happy to talk about what he saw as a clever toy without much application. Sally saw in her mind’s eye a mechanical finger for drawing star-colours on paper, an indexical to draft the stars into artistic service. She wondered if it could be used on moonlight as well.

Tonight a half-moon should have begun to rise when Reglum pointed out the Dog Star and Ermandel’s Toe. Sally stared at the spot where the moon ought to be but wasn’t, willing it to appear but to no avail.

“Like Rapunzel,” murmured Sally to herself. “Easing the tedium of captivity by pacing the rooftop, her hair reflecting the moonrise. Chanting to herself, ‘Stars up above and thorns down below, the

prince's arrival was cumbered and slow.”

“I'm sorry, did you say something?” said Reglum.

“Oh, nothing, Reglum,” said Sally, flushing as she thought of James Kidlington.

The weather was not the only reason they stayed the entire time in Yount Great-Port and limited themselves to a few places within the city: after the events at the Temple and the *kjorraw*, they were objects of continuous scrutiny whenever they went out in the streets. Most of the attention was welcoming but even that was overwhelming. A cobbler (a woman, Sally noted, still adjusting to the idea) would press a pair of boots on the McDoons, a baker a cake, parents would hoist children to see them, work would stop as people looked out of windows and doors, and all before the Karketsoomi had gone one hundred yards down any lane or street in the Great-Port. And some of the attention was less welcoming: a scowl, a hardened gaze, people furtively whispering to one another in the rows farthest from the McDoons; nothing overt but always the susurrus of suspicion ran with them. The McDoons soon kept to themselves, venturing out only with Marine escorts in carriages within what became a limited circuit of visits.

Foremost among the stops on the circuit was the Analytical Bureau. Best of all, at the A.B. they began rehearsals for Buskirk's “Hero of the Hills” to be staged at the Marine soiree in Plassy-Month. During rehearsals, everyone forgot the roaring winds outside and the threat of war with Orn and all the weird and dangerous adventures that had befallen them.

They cancelled rehearsal on one Dowse-day to visit the University, primarily to see “The Specimen,” the preserved body of a near-human that had washed ashore in Yount. Reglum and the other A.B.s felt the body should be housed at the Analytical Bureau, as part of the biology and anatomy holdings, but the Sacerdotes, who ran the University, saw the body as an exemplar of divine will and a matter for theological discussion.

After all that they had seen since leaving Mincing Lane, the sight of a human who was not quite human still came as a shock to the McDoons. Sanford, in particular, did not wish to stay long; he searched but could not find a verse to comfort or guide him. The naked body lay embalmed under glass on a plinth in the middle of an otherwise bare rotunda. He looked like a stork if a stork were anthropomorphized: eight feet tall, with long, gangly legs and arms, an elongated neck, a bony narrow chest, greyish skin with a sort of pinkish wattle around a nose twice as long as it ought to be (even considering the height of the man). The nose had three nostrils.

Sally stared a long time at the body before asking, "What colour were his eyes?" The eyes were shut.

A Learned Doctor answered, "We do not know. The sea had taken them before he reached us."

Sally turned away and asked no more. Nothing emanated from the body; it lay there mute, with nothing to tell the viewers beyond the raw fact of its existence.

Somewhere out there is, or was, a world where this—man's—kind lived and presumably loved, warred, thought, raised their children, Sally thought. I wonder if they dreamed and what they dreamed of. Did they worship a mother or a father, or both, or neither? Were they also trapped in a place they could not escape? If so, what had they done to merit their punishment, and what must they do to escape it? Along what tangled, folded route did this unfortunate travel to arrive dead on a beach in Yount? Was he sent here as a sign of providence or as a warning?

The Specimen offered no clues.

The McDoons' few other visits were more light-hearted. They visited Fraulein Reimer's sister several times, a cheerful woman named Frau Rehnstock, who had a large family she was eager to show off. Frau Rehnstock's granddaughter, Amalia Elisabeth, adored the great-aunt she had never seen and shyly nestled next to Sally: Amalia, called Malchen by all, was the girl with the teased hair whose eyes had shown as she sang so beautifully at the Lutheran

Christmas service. The fraulein and Sally read out loud to Malchen in antiquated German from crumbling books, the family's treasures from their sundered Hamburg.

"See Malchen," said Sally. "Salts of messium are best for curing horsebites, and here are ways to predict the rain."

"Who are these people?" cried Malchen, pointing to a plate on the next page.

"Rose-warriors," said Sally. "See, they have thorns for teeth. Here are their friends, the oaken-children. Together they battle the salamanders, see over there?"

"But who are the little men in this picture, the ones with beards, curled up inside duck's eggs?"

"Dwarflings," replied Sally. "Cousins to the mandrake root and the mare's nest."

Malchen lingered longest over the picture of Frau Luna, with the leaping dolphins and the moon, and traced the silvery crenellations in the picture of the enclosed garden.

Sally accompanied Afsana three times to meet with the Rabbi of Palombeay.

"You want to know how there came to be a rabbi in Yount?" he said, making tea for his guests. "The whole story would take up volumes but the short version is this: My father was a rabbi in Salonika, part of the Ottoman Empire (ah, I see you know that!), who, because of his great service to the Sultan, was asked to join an embassy to Persia, Herat, and Sind. They returned by sea, but the ship was blown far south by a storm and disappeared into—yes, you guessed it!—the gateway to the Interrugal Lands. My undaunted father washed up here, where—God having a great sense of humour!—he found eighty Jews (including his future wife, my blessed mother) looking for his brand of leadership. By dint of his intelligence and gentle but persuasive diplomatic talents, he became the Exilarch, the head of not only the Jews but the entire expatriate Karket-soomi community in Yount Great-Port. Less intelligent but

more fortunate than he, I inherited this position. So, here I am!"

He spoke with Afsana and Sally of the wisdom Jews, Christians, and Muslims held in trust for one another and the roots they cultivated together, all the more visible for being equally alien in Yount. Afsana and Sally listened as the Rabbi discussed the commentaries of Isaac Abravanel, the revelations of Yosef Karo, the encyclopaedism of Yalaqov ben Mahir Culi.

"What about the Mother they worship here?" asked Sally. Afsana nodded.

"Well," said the Rabbi, nibbling a honied breadstick. "Little enough of her stands in any of the Books we know from the Abrahamic faiths, *but* perhaps the covenant was written differently in different worlds. I do not know, but in my un-knowing I admit to greater wisdom. Or so I believe. Dates and cinnamon, young misses?"

Sanford diverted himself by visiting the commercial Collegium and befriending Noreous Minicate in the Central Commissary to learn what he could about Yountish merchant practices. Still, he fretted much about the business of McDoon.

"Barnabas, what if Brandt is beset with troubles? He is ever so young." Sanford said, worried.

"Well," said Barnabas. "There's Salmius, I mean de Souza, to help him, and Sedgewick, and Grammer on behalf of the Buddenbrooks. Never you fear! Matchett & Frew, for another, and Gardiner . . . we've many friends!"

Winter passed slowly. Sally dreamed only once. She saw the young African-looking woman, who had been in her dreams on the *Gallinule*, wearing the cast-off sailor's jacket with the worn red neckerchief. The young woman stood in a narrow, soot-grimed, red-brick courtyard under a foggy sky. At first Sally saw the woman in profile, her black hair tightly braided but, as if Sally had announced herself, the woman turned and looked straight at her. Sally felt the woman had been expecting her, waiting for an answer from Sally to a

question Sally did not know. The woman looked at her out of solemn, patient eyes, but her stance suggested a judgemental attitude, the patience of an interrogator. The two regarded each other, as wisps of fog crept into the courtyard and the meagre sunlight dwindled. Sally felt she should know something, a terribly urgent something, but what it might be, she did not know. The woman looked disappointed, in the way a mother might look when a child fails a simple test or neglects a basic duty. Sally tried to speak but could not. The woman, whom Sally saw was very cold in the mean, damp courtyard, made a tight circling motion with her left hand. Sally woke up.

She sought out Afsana straight away and found her teaching Tom how to play the Yountian equivalent of chess, a game called *glunipi*. Sally described the dream to Afsana and Tom, but Afsana had never seen such a young woman in her own dreams.

“You know,” said Tom, trying to be helpful since he did not dream the way his sister and cousin did, at least not that he remembered. “You describe what could be a courtyard almost anywhere in East London. Could be in Wapping, say, or around St. Giles, or St. George-in-the-East.”

Sally bit her lip and, in a tone that made Tom leave his questions about *glunipi*, said, “The girl—just before I woke up, so maybe I did not see it rightly—made the warding motion that the Yountians do, when they speak ‘The Plea’ to the Mother.”

But neither Afsana nor Tom had any more idea than Sally did about whether the young African woman might really have moved her hand that way and, if she had, what she might have meant by doing so. Sally walked away deep in thought, leaving Tom to lose yet again to Afsana at *glunipi*.

Sally wrote many letters to the cook, and the Mejuffrouw Termuyden and Mrs. Sedgewick, and one to Elizabeth Bennet of Longbourn in Hertfordshire, planning to post them on the next tough ship sailing for Pash in the event that the McDoons did not sail with that ship. Nexius stopped by one day to say that the ice was

breaking and that the *Pratincole* was due to sail in two weeks, which topic the McDoons studiously ignored at dinner for the next three nights.

Sally finally said, "We cannot keep padding around the porridge; we must take a bite at it before it gets cold!"

Tom said, "We can hardly leave with the debut performance of Buskirk's 'Hero of the Hills' due to take place the week *after* the tough ship is set to sail."

Barnabas said, "No one has asked us to leave, not even in a polite way that we might have missed. In fact, I think the Queen and the Lord-Chancellor and, beyond any doubt, the Marines expect us to stay at least through the summer."

When they could bear it no longer, Tom came right out and asked Sanford what Sanford wished to do.

"Well, dearest friends," said Sanford. "I miss our home on Mincing Lane, and our business in the port of London. I miss our garden, and I miss the chance for another *hara masala* dinner. But I think we are called to help the dry bones in this valley find their own way home. It seems we McDoons cannot go home until Yount does."

Everyone cheered. The McDoons would stay in Yount a while longer. To everyone's surprise, the next day Afsana made a meal to celebrate Sanford's decision: a *hara masala* with goat's meat. Unfortunately, newly slaughtered goat was hard to get at that time of year, especially with the war on, so Afsana was forced to use salted goat's meat that Noreous had found for her in the Central Commissary. Also, not all of the masala spices were available in Yount, so she had to substitute in some cases. Try as she might, the meal was not very tasty, but Barnabas was fulsome in his praise.

"Father," Afsana said (the word was still new to their ears). "My mother and grandparents always said that a family's love had to be rooted in hard truth or else the tree could not survive. So, tell me truthfully, does my meal really taste so good?"

Barnabas stroked his palempore vest that he had worn to honour

the masala. He reached in his pocket for the key, which, of course, he no longer had. He coughed twice and wished he had something more to drink than pear juice.

“Well, to speak plainly, which is always the best course to take,” he said. “No, my daughter, the dinner is not so fine as perhaps I have suggested. But my praise is aimed more at the intent than at the result.”

Afsana smiled in bittersweet triumph, and picked up her fork. Barnabas coughed again, looking for a moment as if he might pop with some great emotion that he struggled to contain.

“Afsana,” said Barnabas. “So long as you raise the subject of truth in families . . . well, I must say . . . that is . . . oh, *Quatsch*.”

Afsana gripped her fork.

She means to throw it at Uncle Barnabas, thought Tom. If she does, no doubt she'll plant it expertly in Uncle's sternum.

“Here it is,” said Barnabas, looking down at his vest and his hands. “You are right to be angry with me about how I treated Rehana. I told you what I did was low behaviour that does me no credit whatsoever . . . irreparable unless I can in some small way make it up by being a proper father for you. But, but, your saying to me that I played a role in your mother's death . . . well, I do not think you can lay that at my feet!”

Afsana trembled. Tom wanted to put his arms around her but did not. He worried about where her fork might end up. Afsana stood up, still holding the fork. She thrust it out like a rapier. Tom half-stood but Afsana waved him aside.

“She suffered a lifetime because of you,” said Afsana.

Barnabas stood up and said, “Yes, I know that. I can never forgive myself but I will try to make it up to you. But her death . . . ?”

Afsana stood with the fork held in front of her. She lowered the fork slowly. Her shoulders shook as she soundlessly began to cry. Tom stood and Afsana did not wave him away. He put one arm around her. She did not bow her head or put it on his shoulder, but

she allowed him to keep his arm around her.

Drawing in several large breaths, Afsana said: “No, I cannot lay her death at your feet. I wished myself to come to Yount. No matter what you had done or not done to her, I longed for Yount. By forcing her to come with me . . . I caused . . . she died . . .”

Sanford walked around the table to Afsana, gently took the fork out of her hand and stepped back. He stood there as he had in the churchyard on the day his wife was buried, the day only Barnabas and the cook were graveside with a grieving husband. All the credits in the world could not right that debit but Sanford could try to help balance someone else’s ledger.

His voice choked with his Norfolk accent, Sanford said to Afsana, “Grief is made out of love so grief never dies until you do. But love can make other things too, that last even longer. Join us and make more than grief from your love.”

Afsana looked in wonder at the austere man before her, a man whose spiky Christianity scared and angered her and whose laconic, meticulous ways baffled her. Suddenly she saw that her own wounds had caused her to overlook the pain of others. More than that, she had not understood that others in pain might share their wisdom, if only she asked for it.

Sanford said, with one of his frugal smiles, “Besides, it was not the best *hara masala* I ever et, but nor were it the worst.”

Sanford stepped aside as Barnabas approached.

Barnabas reached for his daughter’s hands and said, “I owe you an apology I shall make for the rest of my life. I wronged you before ever you were born. Please join this family so I can make amends. Please.”

Afsana took her father’s hands, with Tom still holding her. In her mind’s eye Sally saw two books, a pair of *som-manri*, one her uncle’s, one her cousin’s. She could not see what was written in the books of atonement but she saw that in each there suddenly appeared one blue flower, the *sela-manri*, the flower of repentance. The flowers

were pressed between two pages and the books were shut.

After that meal, the McDoons looked forward to an improvement in events, an upturn away from their maladventures and disappointments. But that is not what happened.

The Ambassador from Orn, no more than five feet tall, walked into the royal audience hall on the balls of her feet like the champion fencer she was. A scar ran from one cheek over the bridge of her nose to her other cheek, the mark in Orn of a leader of a noble war-clan. Her black uniform was bare except for one red stripe down each pant leg and one red stripe around each sleeve-cuff. A sword in an unadorned black scabbard swung from her hip. Behind her walked her delegation, five diplomats dressed in identical black uniforms (except that theirs lacked the cuff-stripe), each with a sword swinging to match hers. With lethal grace she advanced down the long carpet towards the dais which held the throne upon which Queen Zinnamoussea sat. The Lord-Chancellor, the Arch-Bishop, and the Queen's other chief counsellors sat behind her. The audience hall was filled to overflowing with people, more even than had jammed into it for the hearing after the events at the Sign of the Ear. The McDoons sat on one side, with Nexius, Reglum, Dorentius, and Noreous.

The Ornish delegation paced forward: the creaking of the leather scabbards was audible as they swung in unison. Ten paces from the foot of the dais, the Ambassador from Orn and her delegation stopped. As one they reached up and took off their hats, which to the London McDoons looked like the fore-and-aft hats of officers in the British Navy. As one the six Ornish placed the hats under their arms and stood at attention. Their hats seemed to have more life than their faces. So expressionless were the Ornish that—to Sally's eyes—they looked like cephalophores, the decapitated saints who were pictured in stained glass holding their heads tucked under their arms.

It was one week after the McDoons had decided to stay in Yount. The Ambassador from Orn had demanded an audience with the

Queen. No ambassador had demanded, as opposed to requested, an audience in almost a century, not since the Incident at the Island of Loism in the Liviates had almost caused the War of Affirmation to resume. Nor had the Ambassador from Yount Major to the Coerceries demanded an audience with the Tyrannulets in all that time. Yount Major and the Coerceries of Orn had skirmished, bickered, and sniped at each other for almost a century, sued each other over alleged or real breaches of the Treaty of Malipad-Em, but done so within what the two sides agreed were normal diplomatic channels. Demanding an audience broke the system and both sides knew it.

The Ambassador from Orn took two more steps forward, and said to the Queen: "In the name of the Mother and by the Five Trees, I represent the Four-Coerceries of Orn-Acting-in-Concert: Nash, Wheyse, Khoof, and Moozhe. I bear the greetings of the Four Tyrannulets, may their ferocity be commended, and of the Ornish College of Hierophants, may their wisdom be praised, and of the collected noble war-clans, may their loyalty be shown against all enemies."

Queen Zinnamoussea, with a look that said she was keen to skip the formalities, welcomed the Ambassador.

The Ambassador nodded and said, "Unfortunately, exalted Queen, as you no doubt have surmised, I am not come on a happy errand or to exchange pleasantries. Rather, I am instructed to deliver to and lodge with you and your government a formal complaint, and to issue a demand to you and your government stemming from that complaint."

Queen Zinnamoussea replied without emotion, "And what, Ambassador, are the specifics of the injuries and harms your government alleges under the Treaty of Malipad-Em, and what are the specifics of the demand?"

The Ambassador shifted her balance from one foot to another, as a fencer does, and said, "Our first complaint is that you and your government did, without informing us in advance, let alone seeking

our consent as the treaty constrains you to do, enter the holy Temple of the Mother at the Sign of the Ear, did employ several so-called Karket-soomi, strangers from outside Yount—procured through means and in a nature expressly forbidden by the Mother—did endeavour to open and did actually for some short time succeed in opening the Door in the Moon, but in so doing roused a demon against all of Yount and, in general, through your heedless and selfish actions did violate the wishes of the Great Mother and prolong the suffering of all Yountians in our place of exile.”

No one on the dais moved. The Ambassador might have been delivering her speech to a collection of statues.

“Our second complaint is more serious still. We understand that one in particular among the Karket-soomi you have called here and caused to be brought here has extraordinary powers, and that this person, a female, might be in truth the key to the salvation of Yount. In short, the Hierophants in Orn believe that this person might be the *sukenna-tareef*, the Saviour. If this is true, then Yount Major has no right to hold her for its own narrow, selfish, and misguided purposes, but must release her for the greater good of all Yount. If the female in question is, in fact, the Rescuer, then the time of Yount’s deliverance is at hand, and anyone denying, obstructing, deterring, or in any fashion standing in the way of that event must be considered anathema, enemies to be destroyed in the righteousness of the Mother’s merciful cauldrons.”

A ripple ran through the audience hall. The figures on the dais moved.

The Ambassador put up her hand and continued: “Allow me to finish, for I am almost done. Our demand is that this female, known in her native language as Sarah Margaret McLeish, be brought immediately by us to Orn to be examined by the Hierophants, so that they can determine if she is the *sukenna-tareef*.”

Queen Zinnamoussea remained seated but gripped the arms of her throne, leaned forward, and said in the coldest voice Sally

had ever heard, “Ambassador, by our count, the Coerceries of Orn have broken the treaty eighty-seven times since it was signed. Your complaints have no standing, rationale, or basis in principle that merit their discussion. We find them groundless, at best a willful misreading of facts ill understood. As for your demand, even if your complaints had merit—which, as I assert, they do not—it is so odious as to be beneath our dignity even to think about it. The one you demand is an honoured guest here. In short, we utterly reject your complaints and your demand.”

The Ambassador smiled at this, knowing she had come to the real point of her embassy. She stepped two steps back and said, “Suspecting that you might respond thusly, my government has instructed me to make the following declaration.”

She took her sword out of her scabbard and held it easily, as a fencer does, dangling at an angle in front of her with the point facing the floor. The Ambassador, with an ironic bow, knelt and placed the sword on the carpet leading to the dais, with its sword pointing directly at the Queen.

“My delegation and I will sail for Orn in forty-eight hours,” said the Ambassador. “We maintain our demand to take with us, for Yount’s sake, the female we have named. You have until then to re-evaluate your response. Your failure to re-evaluate will mean Yount Major wishes to flout the wishes of the Mother by denying Yount an opportunity to host, foster, and encourage properly the one who may be the *sukenna-tareef*. Your failure to change your decision will be tantamount to a declaration of war on the Coerceries of Orn and all other right-thinking Yountians. Much as we will regret having to do so, the Coerceries of Orn will respond in kind to your unjust and provocative action.”

The room was so silent when the Ambassador finished that Sally heard her heart racing, and thought she heard the hearts of everyone in the hall. She moved her hand to Reglum’s arm without knowing she did so.

The Queen stood up slowly, walked to the edge of the dais, and said, "I am Queen Zinnamoussea, sixth in direct line of the Hullitate dynasty, the House which emerged to rule Yount Major during the War of Affirmation. I have prepared my entire life, as my forebears did before me, for this moment. Orn will receive no different answer in forty-eight hours, or in forty-eight years, from the one I gave you, Ambassador, just now."

The Queen held out her right hand, without looking back. The Lord-Chancellor and the Arch-Bishop stood up, together picked up a scabbarded sword from behind the throne, and walked the sword to the Queen. Zinnamoussea took the sword and with a practiced motion swept the sword out of its scabbard. A throaty sigh went through the room. She held the sword in front of her the way a fencer does, perhaps not with quite the balance of the Ambassador but with easy resolve nonetheless. She walked down the five stairs of the dais, and paused on the carpet with her toes almost touching the point of the Ambassador's sword. She looked at the Ambassador but did not bow before kneeling down to place her sword at right angles to the Ornish sword.

The Queen stood up and said, "Ambassador, your embassy is at an end. By our laws and the treaty, you are granted safe passage from Yount Major back to Orn, provided you leave within forty-eight hours. From this moment, as a result of your egregious and wholly unfounded demand and subsequent hostile actions, Yount Major and the Coerceries of Orn are at war with one another. I bid you farewell."

Queen Zinnamoussea turned and walked up the stairs. She stood in front of her throne and signalled to the soldiers guarding the doorway, who opened the doors. Outside stood a company of drummers, headed by two soldiers bearing flags. The drummers, twenty in unison, began a tattoo the instant the doors opened. In they marched, with the dolphin, tree, and moon of Yount Major flying in front of them. The sound, coming after the close exchange before a near-silent audience and in an indoor space, was remarkably loud.

The drummers lined the carpet, ten to a side, beating the tattoo, with a flag-bearer at the head of each line. The Ambassador from Orn retrieved and sheathed her sword, paced through her cohort with the same grace as she showed when she entered. With the drums drowning out all else, the Ornish put their hats on as one and marched down the carpet, past the hundreds assembled, past the standard-bearers, past the twenty drummers and the guards and out of the hall. The drummers played on and on.

Within the hour the drum-ships beat in the harbour of Yount Great-Port, ketches holding enormous drums which were each beat by five drummers, the sound echoing off the windows of all the buildings, putting the gulls to flight, pulsing into the sea. All day and all that night the ship drums beat, like giants clapping over the entire city. The drumming was heard in the outlying precincts of the city, where drums were set up in the market-squares to pass the message to the industrial suburbs, where in turn drums beat, passing the message to innermost market towns and so on out to the villages and to every remote hamlet. The drumming spread from the Great-Port down the coastal roads, relayed to every city and every farmstead. By dawn the next day, all of Farther Yount knew the War of Affirmation had begun again, and drum-ships were on the way to the Margravate (Yount Major's march-land on the island of Orn itself), to the Northern Fief-lands and the Liviates, to confirm what alarm blasts by ansible had already transmitted.

That afternoon Queen Zinnamoussea went to the Winter Garden with her counsellors and had all the blood-red carnations harvested. She went herself to the royal flagship in the harbour and, to commemorate the sacrifice of the *Lanner* in the first war, she nailed a large bunch to the mast. She turned on the deck and raised her arms, and from the ship and from shore came a roaring call, "For the *Lanner*! Death to Orn!"

Sally and the other McDoons, watching from the Palace windows, felt both dread and a fierce will to action. Sally reached for her St.

Morgaine medallion, but she did not recite the Hamburg churches. Down below she saw blue-uniformed companies marching on the promenade to escort the Queen back to the Palace. Shouts and cries cracked off the cold building facades. The boom-boom of the drum-ships did not stop.

So, they think I might be their saviour, the sukenna-tareef, Sally thought, holding Isaak up to the window. If I am, I do not feel like it, no matter how far or deep I sing. If I am, then I do not think I want to be. Me, the saviour?! As the cook would say, "There's more boke than corn in that bushel." Well, whatever I am or whatever they think I am: one deep breath and forward we go!

Aloud she said, "Kaskas selwish pishpaweem, dear Mother protect us."

The debut staging of "Hero of the Hills" in Yountish had gone forward as planned, in fact had become a royal command performance. Given the declaration of war, Nexius, Reglum, and the other Fencibles had assumed that the production would be cancelled but, at the Lord-Chancellor's recommendation, the Queen had asked that it be staged as scheduled. She felt it would be good for morale, especially once she heard of the play's martial theme, and most especially because it was to be staged as part of the Marines' spring soiree.

The play was an enormous success. The Queen sat in the front row, feeding sausages to Isaak. Nexius received thunderous applause when he rambled on stage as the Old General, and the climactic battle scene had everyone on the edge of their seats. Barnabas's mangled Yountish caused great mirth; some of his deliveries were repeated for days in the mess-halls and muster-rooms. Above all, the audience was caught up in Playdermon's loss of his beloved Alexandra on the eve of battle, and her miraculous return after he wins the day. There was not a dry eye in the house when Playdermon and Alexandra are reunited on the crag above Killiecarnock, and many wondered if the script called for the passion that Tom and

Afsana showed in the roles.

Their good spirits were reduced a few days later when they received news of the war's first encounters. The Ornish invaded the Margravate on the Island of Orn, overrunning Yount Major's defences and besieging the Margravate's lone city, Arreniuble. An Ornish fleet was seen heading for the Northern Fief-Land. At least one Ornish contingent had landed in the Liviates. The mood in Yount Great-Port plunged when the first ship arrived from the Margravate, bearing wounded and ill news.

Crew from the march-land ship whispered of the Ornish war cries and the long lines of captives being led away in chains to work in the Ornish iron mines, saltworks, and collieries. The stories spread rapidly in a nervous city and by dawn the magnitude of Orn's victory had grown six-fold in the telling. In some corners talk was heard that the Ornish invasion was punishment for Yount Major inviting so many Karket-soomi and particularly for bringing in the Key-bearers and the Whale-singers, or maybe it was retribution for the failure to hold open the Door, or perhaps because some of the Karket-soomi were in league with the powers that guarded the Door, and so on. Some whispered that the Queen should have handed the *lail-obos* to the Ornish. After all, what business was it of Yount Major's what the Ornish believed or wanted, if it meant avoiding a war? Some wondered if the Hullitate dynasty, heirless, had run its course: having emerged in the first Great War, perhaps it was fate that the Hullitates would end in the second Great War, or the War of Continued Affirmation as it was being called.

Nexius, called to a meeting with the Queen by the Major-Captain, visited the McDoons. He was in a foul temper, both about the early outcome of the war, and about the rumours in the streets.

"People are frightened," he said. "Understandable. And understandable that frightened people will believe and say foolish things. But there is more to this talk than random fear. It is orchestrated, that's what I think. This is deliberate rumour-

mongering, stoking the fear that people feel.”

Sally said, “The Arch-Bishop?”

Nexius grunted. “Loositage, yes. That’s what I think. Oh, not he himself, of course. He is far too clever for that. But somewhere in the dark, his minions write his words on the backsides of apes, and send them scampering through the city to do their mischief.”

More ill news soon reached the city: one of the Liviate islands had been taken, and the entire Yount Major garrison destroyed, five hundred soldiers slain. The fear in Yount Great-Port rose and the mutterings about Karket-soomi grew louder. Talk of Big Lander conspiracies, of treason in high places, and the involvement of diabolical forces moved from back alleys and the kitchen hearth to impromptu gatherings at the well or at the market-stalls. Others held opposite views, that the Key-bearers and Whale-singers would soon lead Yount Major to victory, so arguments and fights broke out. People talked of a great Ornish fleet bearing down on Yount Great-Port, and Ornish soldiers armed with weapons against which there was no defence. The McDoons did not leave the Palace.

The Queen sent embassies to the Land of the Painted Gate and to the Free City of Ilquajorance, seeking allies or at least neutrality. The *Pratincole* was fitted out for a run to Karket-soom, to inform Yount Major’s network there of the war. The Arch-Bishop and his colleagues said little in these discussions but said much with their silence. The journalists would duly print the official demarche from the government in their newspapers, but they would also run up separate handbills and broadsheets with lurid banner-sentences and many exclamation points. Many of the more fantastical claims flouted the libel laws and would have been suppressed by the government censor but, since that function was controlled by the Sacerdotes, no actions were taken against even the most scurrilous speculations. The public, in any event, could not get enough of the broadsheets, which, as the Yountish expression has it, flew out of the print-houses and booksellers like star-ducks in mating season.

THE CHOIR BOATS *Volume One of Longing For Yount*

Nexius ripped up a particularly scabrous example in front of the McDoons, saying only, "If one baits a bear, one must reckon with the consequences."

Sally looked out the window at the crowds in the streets. To her they looked like fields of wheat swaying in the wind that leads a thunderstorm. She turned away from the window and sat the rest of the day with Isaak in her lap.



Chapter 15: No More Pint o' Salt

That evening, still in the chair with Isaak in her lap, Sally dreamed that she walked at night on a road winding between low, barren hills. An enormous moon dominated the sky. The stars were alien, unknown to Big Worlders and Small Worlders alike. Sally walked a long time on the silent road under moonlight, accompanied only by her long shadow leading the way. The moonlight should have been a pleasure except that she feared what lay at the end of the road. She walked up an incline until she reached the top, where the road fanned out in a dozen directions. The new roads sloped up another hill. At the point immediately beyond the fork in the road was a white pillar with thousands of names and dates inscribed on it, a cenotaph. On the top sat the Wurm-Owl, gleaming in the moonlight, whiter than the pillar. He did not move as Sally approached, except once to fluff his wings slightly and shift his scissor-tail that hung far down the cenotaph pillar.

Sally stopped in the middle of the fork in the road, directly in

front of the pillar, and looked straight up. She saw that the four-sided capital, the top of the pillar upon which the owl sat, had writing on it as well but the Owl's shadow obscured the words. The Owl looked down at her with his blazing yellow eyes. At length, Sally said, "Here is where you hide the moon then, Orb-Reaver!"

The Wurm-Owl snapped his beak at her but made no other reply. Sally saw now that the pillar was streaked with the Owl's excrement, fouling the names, that its base was littered with the regurgitated bones and hair of the Owl's prey, skulls of men and women among the detritus. The eye-sockets of the dead stared at her, sharply etched in the moonlight. A shinbone, shining and blank, stuck up from the mound, seeming to point like a signpost to one road in the fork.

Sally looked down that road, and then at each of the others. So many, how to choose? She decided one was as good as another and, with a glance at the Owl above her, set her foot on the road indicated by the shinbone (*I salute you, whoever you were*, she thought. *Rest in honour*). Before she had gone three steps, the Owl opened its wings with a rush and boomed, "Not here, not this time!"

Sally stepped back and tried another road, and a third, but each time the Wurm beat his wings and cried the same words. Try as she might, she could not pass down any of the roads, so strong was the Wurm's will. Instead, Sally floated upwards, past the outraged face of the owl. His power prevented her from moving forward but she was able to rise higher and higher until she hovered a hundred yards above the road. Once as a child she had looked through a kaleidoscope at the Covent Garden fair: it was like that now, as the horizons shifted, fell into place, and she saw a plateau laid out below her. From the Owl's pillar the roads wandered over the plateau, each of them in turn forking into more roads that disappeared into the distance. At each new fork was another cenotaph, upon which sat a great figure, not an owl but a different creature on every pillar: a hoopoe with glowing eyes, a jackass-eared toad, a boar, and many others. The plain was filled with grotesque stylites, all staring with

hostility at Sally, none moving except that once the toad's tongue shot out of his mouth and, like a squamous arm, groped down its pillar before sliding back. None spoke but in her mind she heard their words, *Not here, not this time!*

She floated for a long time, unable to go forward, tethered like a balloonist to one spot by the Wurm-Owl and rebuffed by the army of his kindred arrayed before her. All eyes were on her. The moonlight showed only the funereal plain and the snaking roads that dwindled into darkness, and the forest of pillars, with the shadows of bones everywhere, like ossuary-gardens at the foot of every column. She had learned nothing in this place, unless it was that she had no power here. Sally desperately wished for the dream to end, fearful now that some part of this dreamworld would attach itself to her, return with her. "Wake up," she called to herself, "Oh, wake up!"

From below came a dry, gurgling sound: the Wurm-Owl was laughing. Sally felt herself descending. She sought within herself for music, but held no music, not a simple arpeggio, not an ostinato, not one tiny note. Nothing. She descended and the Wurm's beak opened to receive her, while the Wurm gurgled and slobbered. Before she fell beneath the level of the plateau, far off she saw something moving on one of the roads, a small knot of men perhaps, led by one who glowed a dull red, the only colour in that entire landscape. Whoever they were, they were coming closer, approaching the rows of watchers from behind, moving steadily but slowly, or it might be that the distance was so great it only seemed that way. Sally had no hope of succour from them, with the Owl's beak only feet away.

"Wake up!" she screamed but still she descended, her legs circling as if she were treading water. She looked down, right into the shining empty pupils of the Owl, each pupil a tunnel into which she could fall and never stop falling. At that instant, strength flowed back into her. She stopped her descent, realizing that she had held the Wurm pinned to his pillar, that he could not pursue her even if she could not overcome him. Only ten feet above his slicing beak,

Sally floated and yelled, “No, not here, not this time!” With that she suddenly flew backwards. The Owl’s face dwindled and disappeared. Sally woke up.

She woke with her heart pounding. Isaak was walking all around her chair. Tom was pounding on her door, and yelling. Still fearful that a shadow from the Wurm’s world might have clung to her and entered Yount, Sally stumbled to the door. Was it really Tom, or was it something that only sounded like Tom? Isaak came to the door and looked up at Sally as if to say, “Why aren’t you opening the door to your brother?” Sally opened the door.

“Jambres!” yelled Tom. “He’s coming back, with Billy and Tat’head and the others! I dreamed him—sister, you know I don’t dream the way you do—but I dreamed. I saw them walking towards me on a moonlit road. Billy Sea-Hen tipped his hat and held up a hand in salute, curling two fingers into his palm. They’re coming! We must tell the Queen.”

The next morning, Tom, Afsana, and Sally took pains to tell the Queen without telling the Arch-Bishop or any Sacerdote. When they could not tell her the timing of the Cretched Man’s arrival or what he might do once he came, the Queen was in doubt but finally agreed to meet him, provided the McDoons were with her.

“I put my trust in you, who have given us so much,” said the Queen. “But I sense that you are yourselves not wholly convinced about the wisdom of seeking alliance with . . . with the Cretched Man. We shall meet with him, but no more can we promise now.”

The next week was grim. The Ornish siege of Arreniuble tightened. The Ornish continued their advances in the Northern Fief-Lands and in the Liviates. Casualties mounted. Against this backdrop, the only good news was that the watchers on Yount Major’s western coast reported that the embassy squadron was making good time and that no Ornish raiders were to be seen.

“Ornish raiders!” said Tom to Reglum, who had arrived with this latest piece of news.

“Unlikely though, they would have to cut right through our core defences, to make ’round all of Yount Major,” said Reglum. “Don’t you worry, the Ornish have stolen a march on us in the outlands, but we shall rally quick enough once this war gets going for real. Well, I must be off, even A.B.s with suspect shoulders have duty-watch in wartime. May I come ’round the same time tomorrow, Sally?”

As he walked upstairs for bed, Tom could not rid himself of the idea of raiders boarding the embassy frigate. Lost in this gloomy thought, he turned the key to his room, opened the door, and in the thin gaslight saw figures within. Gasping, he started to pull the door to, but several hands caught it and pulled the door inwards and Tom with it.

Loositage! Tom thought. *Sacerdotal Guards!*

He flung himself on the lead figure. He and the man fell to the floor grappling one another. Tom pinned the man down and was about to hit him with his good fist, when he realized these weren’t Sacerdotal Guards.

A familiar voice said, “Well now, Tommy Two-Fingers, my lad, this is not exactly the warm welcome we were expecting—or rather it is too warm, you might say!”

Tom gaped at Billy Sea-Hen on the floor beneath him. With one easy motion, Billy extricated himself from Tom’s grasp and stood up. Tat’head and the other Minders were all around him, laughing softly. In the corner sat Jambres.

“Like that old dumbledore, didn’t I say that?” said Billy, nudging Tom’s shoulder. Tom picked himself up off his knees, shaking his head. Tat’head made a soft buzzing sound.

Tom found his tongue at last. “But . . . how did you . . . ?”

Billy jerked his head in Jambres’s direction and said, “His Grace can find hidden paths, you know that. We walked a piece on one, and here we are.”

“But we cannot stay long,” said Jambres. “The Learned Doctors have ways to detect such comings and goings and will discover us

shortly. That would be infelicitous.”

Tom focussed on the Cretched Man. Even in the dim light something looked strange about him. With a lurch in his stomach, Tom knew what it was: Jambres had on new clothes. Instead of the great-coat from the advent of George III’s reign, Jambres had a cutaway frock-coat. His tricorne was gone in favour of a top hat, his breeches were replaced with trim trousers that strapped under each foot and tucked into his shoes. The materials and the cut were exquisite: Jambres would not have been out of place among the fashionable ton strolling in Mayfair or Belgravia in London. Except perhaps that his coat and pants were the colour of blood, and they rippled at the seams and stitching.

Before Jambres could speak, Billy said, “We were all to be fitted for new clothes, all of us, but His Grace would not allow it. He argued with the Tailors, made ’em keep their needles and scissors away from our flesh. Only there was a price he had to pay, something he had to barter to make full weight on the Tailors’ bill, and we don’t know how we can ever make it square with him for his paying it on our behalf.”

Jambres shook his head and said, “There is no need to speak of repayment, William.”

Billy looked grim. “Well, governor, someone’s got to pay, to make right your sacrifice, that’s all I got to say.”

Tom stared at Jambres and realized what price the Cretched Man had paid. Jambres was no longer just the man in the coat, but the man in the coat *and* trousers. Tom felt sick.

Jambres said, “William, all of you, ’tis I who should repay you. You came with me when you did not have to, and you too have incurred a cost in doing so.”

Tom looked carefully at the Minders’ clothes but confirmed that they were ordinary in every detail. He asked Billy what the Cretched Man meant.

Billy said, “You know how slaves get thumbs or noses cut off or

are hamstrung or gelded?"

"Oh no!" cried Tom.

"Rest easy," said Billy. "We all have the parts we were born with—everything, if you catch my drift. But they cut us all the same, just not so's you could see it, deep in our minds. With ghostly blades. Oh yes, they made a little cut but they couldn't reach the deepest places in our minds. We protected ourselves. They did not hurt us like they wanted to."

Billy fell silent. Tom thought again that Billy looked like somebody he had met in London, only now, if Tom ever met whoever it might be in London, Tom would think that person looked like Billy and not the other way around.

Tom gripped Billy's arm and said, "I would have gone with you, Billy, you know that. I wanted to go with you."

Billy smiled, they all did, and said, "Of course, Tommy boy. We knows that, no one more than me. But you weren't supposed to go, that wasn't the way of it. Your place was here, not there."

Tom released his grip and said, "Where *did* you go?"

No one spoke until at last Tat'head said, "His Grace knows for certain. All I can say is that we went very far, to a place you never want to come to Tommy, never."

Billy said, "The Owl took the Cretched Man in his beak and he took all five of us others by his claws. We dangled like throstle-birds on a wire, heads flopping, as the Owl flew away with us. We flew and flew into bitter cold night, with just the moon for company, only there wasn't much to see except a grey desert beneath us. The Owl flew a very long time."

Again everyone fell silent until Tat'head said, "Funny thing about the place, Tommy, is that time was all slant-wise and unstilted. We have talked amongst ourselves about it and can't agree how long we were gone, only that it was a long time, and for certain not the same as how the clock runs in England or in Yount."

Jambres stood up, joined the circle, and said, "As William says,

it is cold there, a lunar cold. High flew the Owl over the frozen grey wastes. Wastelands but there are roads there, oh yes, many roads lead to the place we were going—many, many roads so every soul can find a well-trodden path. We flew over the ranks of the Watchers, who guard the outermost perimeter, far beneath us, so far that they looked no larger than the heads of pins, though they are huge as they squat on their pillars in eternal vigilance. Finally we approached the first circle and began to descend. From our great height we just caught a glimpse of what lies beyond, as far from us as we had already travelled, but it was enough.”

The Minders stared at the wall, seeing again what Jambres described.

Tom said, “What did you see?”

Without moving, Jambres said, “What Uriel and Raphael showed Enoch. On the very edge of sight the teterrimous mountains, huge, made of brass, scaling the dark heavens, rimmed with blue flames. At their base, the lake of living ice in which the nine stars are chained for their sins. On the plain, the prisons for the angels who have fallen. In the mounting hills, etched by white fire unquenched, the hollows that will be the tribunals at the end of time.”

Tom wished he had not asked, but now it was too late.

Jambres continued. “Down we descended in the dark. The Owl left us at the ante-buildings and others came out to take us within. The ante-buildings are vast beyond your imagining, full of chambers and endless corridors and stairways that run very deep, yet they are only the least of all the edifices in that place. We passed through the House of Triangulation and the House of Truncation and the House of Transection, in all of which ageless practitioners have perfected their arts, where they will carefully work trenchant attitudes upon you. At last we were brought to the hall of the Tailors where I was fitted, sutured, and brailed, as you now see me.”

Tom wished to hear no more.

“There is little more to tell,” said Jambres, with a brittle laugh.

“I am to resume my duties as gatekeeper and warden to Yount. They sent me back in my newly bespoke suit. They made us walk the long road over the cold desert. That’s where you saw us in your dream, Thomas. And then slowly we made our way to Sanctuary, by roads that crossed out of the dark place, ones that only someone with my skills could find.”

Tom said, “Where is the *Seek-by-Night*?”

“Still in Sanctuary with her crew,” said Jambres. “We did not think it prudent to sail into Yount Great-Port, so we slipped in by a quieter door!”

For the next hour, they spoke of recent events in Yount and the reason for the Cretched Man’s return. Jambres said he needed to see the Queen as soon as possible. Tom said the Queen had already agreed. All that remained was to select a time for the meeting.

“This very day, if it can be arranged,” urged Jambres. “We can return here at immediate notice. Speak everything in your power, Thomas, to make this happen. Much depends on it!”

“How will I send word?” said Tom.

Jambres handed Tom a bronze token, the size of a fifty-pence coin, with a circle of sable glass inset in the middle, and said, “Focus on the glass lunette, think of me until you can see me in its smoky depths. Shout with your mind, as hard as you can, and I will hear you.”

As he said that, Jambres turned his head slightly as if he had caught a faint sound that was not there earlier. He held up one hand in his elegant coat. No one spoke.

“Hmmm,” he said. “We have been found out. Come, we must depart. There is yet a few minutes. The Doctors have clumsy equipment and will not be able to locate us with accuracy, but they know I am here.”

The Minders made ready to leave. Jambres bowed to Tom, turned, made a small motion and said something in a language unknown to Tom. The gaslight faded until only a small, ruddy glow remained at

the tip of the hissing nozzle. In the near-dark, Tom could not see clearly but it appeared that Jambres and the Minders walked into a corner of the room—and vanished. The last to leave was Billy, who nudged Tom in the shoulder on his way past.

“Good to see you, Tommy,” said Billy. “Time’s comin’ now for the fight.”

Tom saw a last rustle of movement in the corner, and out of the darkness he caught Billy’s rapidly fading voice saying, “A respiration of angels, Tommy, a glory of seraphim.”

The next morning Tom summoned Jambres to meet first with the other McDoons, and Jambres came. The McDoons gasped. Jambres sat in the chair in the corner at the far end of Tom’s room. He was white as ivory. His suit was immaculate. He wore no expression but he sat as if he were a violin string that had been tightened to the breaking point. Afsana said something in Hindi. Sally saw, for one second, the image of a shrike, its cold eye staring at her above a bill polished and cruelly curved. She had a cribbling sensation along her neck and shuddered down her spine. She regretted her decision to allow the Cretched Man here. Isaak hissed, her tail twice its normal size, her back a ridge of golden fur. At the sight of Isaak, the Cretched Man’s face betrayed emotion, a flicker of sadness, a shiver of desperation.

Jambres slowly reached his right hand out and said to Isaak, “Please, do not be frightened. Come to me, little Bast.”

Isaak stopped hissing but did not advance. Jambres said, “In my country of origin, back before Moses and Aaron, we held cats in the highest esteem. We built shrines to your kind, little one; we sent you to the Otherworld when you died. Come now, I will not harm you.”

Isaak paced forward, not quite stalking but placing each paw with enormous precision. She did not take her green eyes off the Cretched Man.

Jambres said, “Does the small lion have a name?”

Against her will, but knowing that Tom would say if she did not, Sally said, "Isaak."

Jambres smiled and said, "Isaac. Very good. Behold, here am I."

Isaak came to within six inches of the Cretched Man's outstretched fingers. Isaak stopped and sniffed. Slowly her tail resumed its normal size, the fur on her back lay down. Isaak walked with exaggerated deliberation along the perimeter in front of the Cretched Man. She did not come fully to him, but neither did she flee. Jambres put his hand palm up on his knee, letting his fingers hang limply over his kneecap, very white against the red trousers.

Looking up at the McDoons, the Cretched Man said, "I know what you see in me: 'dreams, magical terrors, lying signs, a witch, a night spectre, Thessalonian wonders.' Am I as you see me? I come to offer what aid I can. Thomas can vouch for me."

Barnabas thrust out his arm and said, "I do not know what to make of you; you play tricks on us. You kidnapped our Tom!"

Fraulein Reimer held Tom's arm, said something harsh in German, looked as if she might spit.

Afsana broke the silence. "Your very name is reviled in Yount. The only matter upon which the Ornish and those of Yount Major can agree is that you are the devil himself."

Before Jambres could answer, Tom said, "Unfair, cousin! Fraulein, I beg you! You leap to a conclusion before you have heard the facts! The Yountians know Jambres not, or not as he could be."

Sally looked at Jambres, but avoided the eyes that had almost snared her in her dream in the Mincing Lane partners' office.

She said, "You are here solely because Tom has spoken for you. I am still not inclined to put my trust in you."

Jambres bowed his head slightly and said, "To this I am accustomed. I come because I see a great danger threatening Yount Major, and because this war will decide the fate of all Yount for a long time to come."

Isaak came fractionally closer to the Cretched Man's extended

fingers. Jambres affected not to notice.

“The Ornish have prepared for many years, waiting for just such a pretext as Sarah and Afsana gave them,” he said. “Not wholly a pretext—they genuinely wonder if Sarah is the Saviour and fight in part to seize her. Regardless, they make war with a power and ferocity that Yount Major, for all its efforts, cannot meet.”

The McDoons digested this. The fraulein shook her head, said something about the King of Wrens. Tom said, “But what about the others? The Land of the Painted Gate and the Free City of Iquajorance?”

“Place little hope there,” said Jambres, as Isaak edged a little closer. “Murximrash-manwa, The Land of the Painted Gate, has little incentive to join with Yount Major this time, such are the blandishments made by the Ornish. And the Free City is a city of financiers, counting profit only, seeing profit whoever wins. It has been neutral in all disputes for centuries. Look not to it.”

Afsana put her hands on her hips, and said, “What do you propose then? You make it sound hopeless. We who have wished ourselves to come will not end as slaves in an Ornish iron mine or run away from Yount back to Palipash.” She lifted her head so the silver threads in her hair flashed and her earrings glistened. Tom would have followed her into Ornish rifle-fire at that moment. Even Sally was impressed.

Jambres said, “No, I do not propose either. I offer instead a plan to bring more Karket-soomi into this conflict, to wage a war against Orn, not because they are Ornish but because they refuse to relinquish slavery.”

Tom turned to the others. “See? This is what I told you about, the ‘Thieve’s Redemption’ that Billy and the other Minders speak of. A rogue’s crusade to—”

Afsana cut him off. “Crusade?! That is not a word I wish to hear. Nor would the Rabbi of Palombeay or many other Karket-soomi who dwell here. Nor, come to think of it, would the Yountians—they do

not worship your Christian Father!”

Tom stammered and blushed. “No, yes, I mean . . . of course, you are right, dear cousin . . . a poor choice of words. I did not mean it literally . . . figure of speech. . . .”

Sanford interrupted. “Tom has told us about the five with you from England. Brave as these may be, they are hardly enough to turn the tide of battle against Orn, no matter what we call the effort.”

Jambres said, “Quite so. I intend to recruit many more from the poor wards of London, from the docklands of Liverpool, the slums of Manchester and Glasgow. And beyond: there are many who would join us from Port-au-Prince to Pondicherry, from St. Petersburg to Cape Town.”

Afsana, with an angry glance at Tom, said, “But how can you do that? Yount has never advertised its existence to Karket-soom.”

“Very true,” said the Cretched Man, as Isaak swiped his fingers with one whisker. “That is why we must speak with the Queen. She is a Proclaimer at heart. She might be persuaded that the time has come for Yount to end its centuries of secretiveness. Though I realize doing so would weaken her vis-à-vis the Arch-Bishop and his faction.”

Isaak put her nose against the Cretched Man’s fingers for one moment, like the hummingbird in the Winter Garden touching a flower. Sally saw, deep in the Cretched Man’s eyes, far beyond stratagems for war and questions of policy, a rivulet of joy. She watched the tiny freshet as it coursed over alabaster dunes, banks so long dry that the shock was almost painful. Jambres shut his eyes.

“Jambres?” said Tom.

The Cretched Man opened his eyes and said, “Forgive me. I lost my part in the discussion, for a short instant.” He slowly flexed his fingers and looked at Isaak out of the corner of his eye. Isaak was sniffing at a red pant leg.

“Do you have time to gather the army you would send against the Ornish?” said Sally. “All the way to Karket-soom and back?”

“I do not know,” said Jambres. “But I will make time work for us, if I must. There are roads we might take. . . .”

Tom thought of what Tat’head said the night before and he blanched. *Not that way*, he whispered to himself, *not that way*.

“The war cannot be won by defending Yount Major,” said Afsana. “We must attack the Coerceries. That requires more ships. Where will you find ships and sailors for your fine army?”

“Ships we can build at Sanctuary, the place Thomas has been to. As for sailors, I already have some of the best in two worlds. I can get more all too easily, if I recruit instead of waiting for strays to find me. You see, the sailors are Yountians, all former enslaved who have run away or been rescued from Orn. The only destination beyond the reach of the Ornish is Sanctuary but most enslaved think it legendary, a whispered rumour late in the night, and the road thence is beset with incredible dangers. I will bring word to the enslaved and make a straight road for them to Sanctuary.”

Sally watched Isaak the entire time Jambres talked. Isaak sat at the Cretched Man’s feet, facing him without moving. As he spoke, Jambres steadily moved his right hand towards the top of Isaak’s head.

“Why do you offer this?” said Sanford. “As gatekeeper you are barred from interfering, are you not?”

Jambres said, “Yes but no. I am willing to intervene because slavery must be eradicated or else Yount will have no freedom. I have observed for centuries but can do so no longer. I will answer elsewhere if I overstep my authority.”

Sanford considered this, then said, “If you are to maintain at least the pretence of minding the gate to Yount, shouldn’t you possess the key? After all, it’s what brought us here in the first place.”

“Yes, if only—as you say—for the pretence. My time as gatekeeper is nearly at an end, no matter what happens. They sent me back for one final attempt, with certain . . . warnings . . . stitched into my new raiment. So, yes, I must ask the Queen for the key.”

The Cretched Man's hand touched the top of Isaak's head very lightly. She did not move away. His eyes glistened as he said, "I believe the war is a final test for Yount. Should slavery continue here, if only in Orn, Yount will not simply have its sentence prolonged. I fear a worse retribution. Do you remember the silent cities on Supply Island? 'How those cities sit now solitary that once brimmed with people!' You know those words. 'They are become widows that weep sorely in the night.' That is the fate I fear for Yount if Orn prevails."

Jambres stroked Isaak's head as he said this. Isaak stood more still than the statues of Bast in ancient Egypt. So they sat for a minute or two, each considering the others' words. All that broke the silence was a small sound of purring. Jambres's hand trembled as he pet Isaak.

Sally said, "Let us find the Queen."

The Queen met them in the small reception room, alone but for the Lord-Chancellor. The Cretched Man had walked through the Palace so that none except the McDoons could see him. The Queen and the Lord-Chancellor recoiled as he revealed himself to them: they were face to face with a nightmare.

"Your Highness Queen Zinnamoussea, respected Lord-Chancellor, I beg you hear me out," said Jambres. "I must be swift. The Learned Doctors suspect my presence here."

With shaking hand, the Queen bid the Cretched Man to sit. Sally brought Isaak out on the table. Isaak made her customary rounds, rubbing and sniffing at the Queen's hands and those of the Lord-Chancellor. The Queen did not hide her astonishment when Isaak proceeded to the Cretched Man and did the same.

"We live in a time of wonders and miracles," the Queen said. "Does the osprey really try to save the tern? Or am I deceived?"

Tom put his three-fingered hand on the table and said, "Your Highness, we who wished ourselves to come to Yount understand your amazement. We were equally amazed in our turn. But we

believe you should entertain the Cretched Man's idea."

Listening as ones caught in the webs of sorcery, the Queen and the Lord-Chancellor heard the Cretched Man's plan. The McDoons supplied additional details. The fraulein clutched her hands but said nothing. The Queen agreed only that Yount Major needed allies but did not see how an untrained army of Karket-soom's poor and dispossessed could be helpful.

"They will only get themselves killed in a world not their own," the Queen said.

The Lord-Chancellor said, "Besides, the Arch-Bishop will never tolerate any of this. We mean no disrespect but I do not think we can give you the key."

Jambres exclaimed, "Think upon my proposal. I have no more time today. The Sacerdotes are on their way . . . the Arch-Bishop himself! Thomas knows how to summon me. Now I must away."

Only Isaak and Tom seemed unfazed when Jambres walked through the closed door. A minute later a knock came on the same door. The Lord-Chancellor opened it to the Arch-Bishop. The conversation between them was very short and even less pleasant. He looked over her shoulder, registered the presence of the McDoons, smiled nastily, and departed. They knew they had only small time left.

Time got smaller on the morrow. A steam-driven frigate from Yount Major on patrol south of the Fief-Lands had seen a large Ornish fleet on the eastern horizon and made hard for Yount Great-Port with the news. The Ornish were heading for Yount Major itself. The main Yount Major battle fleet was in the waters between Yount Major and Orn, squarely in the path of the oncoming Ornish fleet. Yount Great-Port girded for battle.

The weather turned warm with winds out of the southeast. Everyone in Yount Great-Port, some two hundred thousand souls, strained their ears for any sound of battle brought by the winds.

Every rooftop had watchers looking to the east. From the Signal Tower the observers could just see through their spy-glasses the dark line of Yount Major's battle fleet strung out like a curtain of thorns on the horizon. Reckoning nothing of the coming conflict, the ospreys took off from their harbour poles and the cormorants sat drying their wings on the breakwater. But the dolphins understood that something was amiss; they chattered in agitation and leaped back and forth. No one sighted any whales. Companies of Marines were on every street, the harbour promenade had cannon placed every twenty paces, the batteries at Signal Tower and the Fort and the Customs House were all trained eastwards. The wind blew and blew. Every gust brought the Ornish invaders closer.

Under the looming threat, the Chamber of Optimates asked the Queen to appear before them. The Arch-Bishop let others question the Queen and her government, but few doubted the ultimate source of the questions. The tone was strained from the outset. Led by Optimates known for their friendship and sympathy with the House of Loositage, the enquiry into the state of war preparedness and the conduct of current operations pushed the Queen into a corner. One Optimate made a seemingly off-hand remark about the Queen attending a play after the war began. Insinuations were made about the botched attempt to open the Door at the Temple and about the government's close ties to the Karket-soomi. Thinly veiled allegations of sedition were dropped into questions.

During the debate, Sally sat in her room, not wanting to see the Arch-Bishop or think about the war. *Sehnsucht is a deceiver*, she said to herself. *The truest falsehood, honey that evaporates before you can free it from the comb. There-Away and Over-the-Hill become Here with all the grease and glaucoma, flatulence and ragged trousers of the place you left. Yount too has giants in the earth that once knew the world and spoke to its people but who have now fled or been submerged. Once upon a time music was the language everyone spoke here but they cut open the nightingale to discover how he sang.*

Isaak jumped up into her lap.

“Our *tes muddry*,” Sally said, rubbing Isaak’s head. “The Yountians yearn to be elsewhere just as I wished myself to come. Well, Isaak, they and we will just have to find our Hyperborea, together.”

Isaak curled up for a nap.

“Fraulein always cautioned me against the fate of the Pease-Princess or of the Ashen-Gretha’s sisters. Oh, I do wish I could speak to Mrs. Sedgewick and the Mejuffrouw. I would give anything to be in the kitchen at Mincing Lane, listening to the cook mardling with the maid. Or at the Last Cosy House, where nothing bad ever happened. Ah, no, bad things *did* happen, even there . . . oh, not you James Kidlington, not you.”

Sally stopped petting Isaak and reached to her neck for a locket that was no longer there. As she did every evening just before falling asleep, Sally “glassed off” the thought of James Kidlington, making him a memory she could see but not feel or touch.

Her gaze opened out, fell upon one of the dolphins leaping frantically in the harbour. Watching his powerful but erratic motions, Sally glimpsed again in her mind the outlines of a plan that had been growing over the past few weeks.

“Fulgination”, she murmured. “Fulgination is the . . . key. The key is a fulminating device!”

This insight made her sit straight up, disturbing Isaak.

Only we do not know how the key fulminates within the lock. No one even speaks in those terms. The dolphins and the albatrosses fulminate but we do not know how. The music from the Mother, the notes I sang to defeat the silence and to rebuff the Owl, they are akin to the melody—only no one calls it that—of the Fulginator. There is also a melody in the star-lines, the dance of the Three Torches with Sirius, Orion, and Aldebaran . . . and the Maiden-Star’s dialogue with the Mother-Star. I think perhaps Dorentius would understand.

She had another thought, one which repelled and fascinated her: *The Cretched Man fulminates too, or something very like it.*

Someone knocked on the door, making Sally jump. She went to the door and asked, “Tom? Reglum?”

“No, another,” replied a perfect voice. “Less welcome, I suppose, but I have urgent need to speak with you.”

Sally debated with herself, opened the door, and swiftly stood back. The Cretched Man walked in, shut the door, and took off his top hat.

“Sarah,” said the Cretched Man. “I know how little you trust me, and how much less you like being in my presence, but there is much we could do to help Yount, all Yount, if we worked together. Please, I have some time while the Arch-Bishop is preoccupied with questioning the Queen, but not so much time that we can waste it.”

Sally motioned him to a chair. She sat down at the other end of the room, and said, “I saw you and your men, far off across the cold wastelands heading towards the Wurm-Owl.”

“Yes, the Tyton Ophis, Pechael, sitting on a pillar at the head of the Watchers.”

“All the pillar-creatures were watching. Who are they?”

“The Half-Fallen, the Watchers, set to guard and punish. They have many names.”

“I could not see beyond the Watchers. What lies that way? What was your business there?”

The Cretched Man said after a pause, “I told your brother what is necessary to know. Sarah, you do not want to know more. It is a school with a taloned curriculum. The Prefects are stern. They are the Authades, the Phtheiros—they too have many names. Mastema is the Head-Master. The Tailors sew for us our gowns upon graduation, as part of our ongoing education, a constant reminder of the lessons imparted. You saw the names of the pupils inscribed on the pillars: Belikra the Samaritan, Ahab son of Kolaiah, Zedekiah, Shemaiah the Nehelmitite, Simon Magus, the sons of Joatham the priest, Philetus and Hymenaeus, so many others. I am an alumnus of the institution.”

“I saw bones at the foot of the pillars.”

“The remains of those who, in pride or folly, sought to evade or flee their prescribed instruction. Some even manage to elude the Watchers for a century or two, but that is nothing to those who pursue them. The Watchers pick their teeth with the ribs of those they catch, stamp the residue with their iron feet. In the end the devouring is slow, followed by . . . no, I will not say.”

Sally heard in her mind the wailing of the interstitial lands, forced herself to close off the memory. One more thing she had to know about the pillar upon which the Wurm-Owl sat: “Words were on the capital at the top of the pillar but they were in shadow.”

“‘Righteousness,’ ‘Judgement,’ ‘Forgiveness,’ and ‘Salvation,’” said the Cretched Man. “The same words stand over all the doorways in that place. Look closely at my coat and now my trousers too—the words are woven into the fabric. I tried to show this to you the day you dozed in dream in your uncle’s study, but you were too scared to see it.”

Sally looked at his coat. Slowly a pattern emerged in the seething of the materials and she could make out the words Jambres had used. The words moved from Hebrew (“tsedaqah,” “mishpat,” “selichot,” “yesha”) into Greek and then into Latin and into dozens of other tongues, but always she understood. With each beat of Jambres’s heart, the words flowed afresh. She turned away, trying to breathe. In the midst of her horror, Sally began to understand the Cretched Man. She reached for Isaak but Isaak was sitting next to Jambres, and looking back at Sally.

Jambres lowered his eyes and, having long since lost the ability to shed tears for himself, said, “‘My flesh is unsound, filled with loathsome disease. My bones have no rest. My heart groans in anguish.’ So was it written long ago, and so is it now with me.”

Sally understood more than she wanted to. She said, “Why have you come?”

“To seek your redoubled aid in convincing the Queen of my

proposal. She will not be persuaded by such as me, Sarah. She trusts you McDoons. She will listen to you. I need to send Billy Sea-Hen to preach the word in London but want the rest of my crew to stay here so they could fight and prove to the Queen their loyalty. If the *Seek-by-Night* stays, then Billy's only transportation will be on a tough ship. Sarah, you alone can convince the Queen to send another tough ship and allow Billy to be on it."

"I have it in mind already," she said, hesitantly for fear of divulging too much, "to ask the Queen to outfit one more tough ship. She will find it difficult to divert resources as the Ornish bear down upon us. Sending one unproven man to London on the *Cretched Man's* say so will not suffice as a reason. But she might be willing if we . . ."

Slowly, and saying only as much as she thought was needed, Sally spoke of her half-formed plan. The *Cretched Man* sat very still as he listened, except when he stroked Isaak.

When Sally finished, he said, "What you propose—and I sense that you hold much back from me—is either unrivalled lunacy or a degree above genius."

Isaak moved away from Jambres, hopped up on the windowsill.

Jambres said, "Even if what you suggest is possible, in the sense of technology and budget, you would stir the wrath of the Wurm and all his tribe. Would you dare that?"

Sally did not respond at once. Only the tramp of booted feet on the promenade below was heard, and the faint creaking of gun caissons.

At last she said, "Yes, I would. But not alone."

"Who would be with you?"

"We are four now," said Sally. "We need five, I think."

"Not five," said Jambres. "More."

"Five I thought, one for each of the Trees."

"Yes, but you know we are part of the Grand Story, where one always needs seven for the kind of enterprise you propose. Think, Sarah, the Lamb has seven horns and seven eyes, Wisdom has seven pillars. . . ."

Sally nodded slowly, saying, "Of course! Seven-league boots and the seven tasks of the woodcutter who lost his children. Palmerin had to answer the seven riddles posed by the crone at the well beyond the world. The seventh star has a story written in the night skies. The seven liberal arts and the seven mechanical arts. One then for the Moon, that would be six . . . and one for the Mother who sleeps, that would be seven—that's it, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Jambres. "So you lack three."

Sally said, "I am at a loss."

"I have searched for many years," said Jambres. "Sometimes I found three or four together, but never more. You McDoons are the last, best hope."

Sally said, "I have always wondered who opened the first lock in the Moon."

"Clever, Sarah, I knew you would ask eventually. The first Key-bearer who succeeded was Matthias Laufer, the young Pietist who came a century ago. He succeeded but died early as a result of his exertions."

Sally said, "Is there more to the story?"

"Of course, there is always more in adventures like this. You know his grand-niece."

Sally smiled, and said, "The fraulein is good with a proverb, and capable with a pistol as it turns out, but she is no singer. She is not one of the seven, much as I regret that."

"No," said Jambres. "But the fraulein is not his only grand-niece."

Sally thought about the fraulein's sister, Frau Rehnstock, and Frau Rehnstock's granddaughter, Amalia—"Malchen"—with her sweet singing voice, her bright eyes, and her curiosity about the pictures of Frau Luna and the enclosed garden.

"Little Malchen is the fifth then," said Sally. "Two more . . ."

Jambres splayed his fingers in front of his face, and said, "There is someone in London who may be the mightiest singer of all, stronger

even than you, Sarah.”

“How do you know?”

“I do not know for sure, and I do not know who she might be exactly, but for several years now I have felt her presence there. Yes, a female and young—at least in this turn of the wheel. She may be the *sukenna-tareef*, as they term it here.”

“You’ve known this for several years at least and have not acted upon it?”

“To act too openly would have drawn the attention of the Wurm. Besides, you credit me with more power than I possess. She is out there, a young woman in London’s warrens, showing extraordinary capacity, but her precise whereabouts either she shields from me or some other potency draws a veil. In any case I have not been able to locate her. My only comfort is that I think she is veiled also from the Wurm and his kin.”

“I have seen her!” said Sally. “A young African woman wearing the sailor’s coat and neckerchief, singing and waiting in a courtyard.”

“Your description intrigues. Seven singers for turning to the people a pure language. ‘But who shall lead them? From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia and Cush, the daughter of the dispersed . . .’”

Sally said, “If you are right about little Malchen, and if we can find the mysterious black woman in London, we would still be only six singers.”

“Perhaps the seventh will reveal himself or herself only once the others are marshalled,” said the Cretched Man.

From outside came the sound of crowds. The Chamber of Optimates had concluded their questioning of the Queen, and the first broadsheets of the event were being distributed and read.

“I must leave soon,” said Jambres.

“One last question for today,” said Sally, looking out the window at the crowds below. “Why does the Mother sleep? She has sung to me but I think that music was only echoes of melodies rising like bubbles from her dreams.”

“I do not know, Sarah. I try to reach the Mother, but she hears me not or hears and ignores. A greater mystery is here, one not taught in the fanes or ecclesiastical schools. Where is Sophia (that is Wisdom), where is Ennoia, where is the Shekhinah? Hidden, sleeping deep. I do not know how she shall be wakened unless perhaps the seven of you can do so.”

When Sally looked away from the window, Jambres was gone. Isaak sniffed and pawed in a corner. Sally walked to the corner, picked up Isaak and returned to the chair by the window.

Shutting the window against the voices below, Sally hugged Isaak, and said, “I am *not* the *sukenna-tareef*. I never wanted that. I do not fear the ending, but I do fear being unable to meet the task. Maybe the African girl is. But how will we find her?”

That night the sounds of battle far off came to Yount Great-Port on the southeasterly winds. The battle fleets had engaged. All night came the rumble of cannon over the waves. From the rooftops and the Signal Tower and the towers of the churches and the Fort, onlookers saw flashes on the horizon. Every soldier stood ready at his or her post throughout the city. Everyone wanted news and, unchecked by trustworthy facts, rumour rushed in to sate the need and breed a thousand fears. Reglum came to Sally, Tom, and Afsana, joined later by Noreous. They had no more news than anyone else but raised the spirits of the McDoons. When Nexius stopped by to join them for supper, he was pleased to find everyone in a determined mood.

“Good,” he said. “The children of horghoids are upon us. It will be white-of-the-eyes time soon.”

First light brought the first news, as well as the first smell of burning from across the water. The horizon was hidden by a great pall of smoke. The distant booms and thuds of cannon continued uninterrupted. One of the steam frigates came into the harbour, laden with wounded.

“The Ornish fleet is more numerous than we had known,” said

the frigate's captain. "All ships on both sides are engaged now. We withstand them well but their greater numbers may begin to tell. The *Courser* has been sunk, but we saved many. The *Matchless* likewise, though we saved fewer. More I cannot say."

Fresh sailors and Marines filed onboard the frigate, which also took on munitions. As the frigate pulled away from the quay, the crowd cheered, but their cheers were tinged with fear.

The morning passed slowly. Twice more a steam frigate shuttled to and from the harbour, offloading wounded, carrying out replacements. The line held, but the *Ornish* attacked without pause. In the streets few spoke except in low mutters. *Karket-soomi* stayed indoors if possible.

Dorentius came early in the day and spent several hours listening to an idea that Sally had, something that made him almost forget the battle. He hurried to the Analytical Bureau and returned with books, charts, and reams of notational paper. Dorentius and Sally spent the afternoon deriving, graphing, and calculating. Tom peered in, upon returning from the firing range, and said that he'd rather lose a hundred times at *glunipi* than do whatever it was they were doing. Afsana, overhearing this as she caught up to Tom, said that he already had lost a hundred times at *glunipi*. Everyone laughed but the laughter was stretched over anxiety, and was not repeated. Dorentius and Sally continued their work until well past midnight, ignoring the growing sounds of battle, their empty stomachs, and the dimness of the gaslights.

The Chamber of Optimates called the Queen and her government to another emergency session that afternoon. Nexius agreed to have the McDoons along, telling them to make themselves as inconspicuous as possible. Messengers and journalists ran in and out of the meeting with the latest news. Everyone kept an ear to the open windows and whatever tale the wind might yield. Queen Zinnamoussea found herself losing support in the Chamber. The Loositage faction saw its chance. Fear drove many of the lesser

houses. Though no one spoke openly of the inheritance rules, of the ending of the heirless Hullitate dynasty and the rise of the presumptive heir in the form of Loositage, the rules were as much a backdrop to discussion as the distant booming of cannon.

Nexius said to the McDoons, “Now we come to it at last: the Loositages will reveal themselves. By the twelving of the bell, hold your shot or fire the shell!”

Even as he spoke, a junior member of the Loositage clan rose to address the assembly. He called for a vote of no-confidence in the Queen’s conduct of the war, and he sought the comment of the Arch-Bishop. The assembly roared, some to acclaim, some to reject.

Slowly the Arch-Bishop, Ugunonno Loositage, rose, dressed in a dark green chasuble, holding a black staff. The hall went quiet. He spoke as one forced to speak by great need, as if reluctant to speak at all.

“Colleagues and fellow patriots, in the name of the Five Trees and the Mother, I accuse no one but merely pose questions,” he said. “Why does her Majesty dally so with the Karket-soomi? Is she perchance considering ending the secretist policy and bringing in Karket-soomi ‘aid’ that will turn Yount into a colony? Why the infatuation with Karket-soom anyway—after all, the Karket-soomi allow slavery in many guises in many places; even their leading nations embrace the horror.”

“Hear, hear!” “Huzzah” “Never reveal ourselves!” rippled around the room.

“Why does our Queen refuse us use of the Verniculous Blast, which the Learned Doctors are confident we can control? If not now, then when? This is Farther Yount’s time of extreme need.”

He put forth questions as innocuous, even abstract queries, as if he were lecturing new matriculants at the University. He asked one more question, in a casual way he had practised a thousand times alone in his chambers: “Are the rumours true, I wonder, that the Queen has been meeting with the Cretched Man?”

The hall erupted. The Arch-Bishop smiled blandly to the Queen and sat down.

The Queen said little in her own defence but focussed instead on the battle that raged just within earshot. She did not address the Arch-Bishop's concerns.

"I wonder in my turn," she said, "that we sit here debating, under the very mouths of the enemy's cannons. Talk without action only aids our foe. You can vote your lack of confidence if you wish—over your consciences I hold no sway—but I am going down to the harbour to speak with the soldiers as they leave, the wounded as they arrive, and the bereaved as they weep."

The hall erupted again. As the Queen departed, the vote was cast. By two votes, the Queen's faction defeated the motion.

As they slipped out into the early evening, Nexius said to the McDoons, "The Queen carries the floor for one more day. One more day only as it may turn out. Be wary, my friends. Sometimes the enemy at your door emboldens an enemy in your own dwelling"

The second night of the battle passed slowly. The smell of burning pervaded the city. The eastern sky lit up with constant flashes, nearer than they had been the night before. The rumble slowly became a roar. Steam frigates came constantly to the harbour.

"More shot, more shot, we run low!" they cried. "The *Saker* is burning, with great loss of life. Captain Bil-e-Maido on the *Accipiter* has been killed."

The crowds at the harbour took in the wounded, ferried supplies out to the ships; everyone worked together. The Queen and her ministers worked alongside raw recruits and aged grandmothers. Those who cried at the loss of a loved one or the sight of a gaping wound did so quietly. Tom and Afsana helped a company of Marines, working with Noreous and Reglum. Sanford and Barnabas worked with Nexius.

Dorentius remained with Sally; her room was now carpeted with

notational paper as they calculated the precession of Aldebaran in various skies and the azimuth of Adhara in others. As they worked, the sound of battle approaching gradually rose but they did not heed it. Isaak sat in the windowsill, listening to the hiss of the gaslights inside and the rumble of war outside.

The Ornish broke through the line at mid-morning the next day. The steam frigates were the first to return to the harbour.

“Calamity!” said their captains. “Their rate of fire outstrips ours, even if we are more accurate. They overcame our flanks. Captain Nerricessia on the flagship holds the centre but she is now encircled.”

By early afternoon the news was worse yet. The Ornish had destroyed the flagship and disabled many of Yount Major’s central squadron. The tattered wings of Yount Major’s fleet retreated to Yount Great-Port, with steam frigates screening the withdrawal. By evening the remains of the fleet were anchored just outside the breakwater, ranged now as the city’s first line of batteries. Only a dozen ships were still afloat, and many of those had been grievously hurt. The setting sun reflected off the many sails of the approaching Ornish warships, now visible to the naked eye. The first of their shots, the opening of the bombardment, crashed into Yount Great-Port shortly after nine o’clock, killing a six-year-old girl and her grandmother as they sat behind shuttered windows. By morning those two casualties were only the first of many. Fires broke out across the city.

By dawn the Ornish fleet was ranged in an arc at the mouth of the harbour, beyond the breakwater, not quite a mile from the city. Between Yount Major’s remaining ships and the Ornish fleet was a space of some four hundred yards, a track of open water between a shark and its prey. The Ornish ships, with broadside to the city, rode gently on the swell, their rows of cannon rising up and down to mesmerize their enemies, like a thousand eyes glaring at Yount

Great-Port's last line of defence. The winds continued to blow from the southeast, pushing the smoke of the city's fires back into the streets and squares, so that the harbour air was relatively clear, the Ornish ships easily seen even by those on shore. Ornish musketeers were in the rigging. Ornish cannoneers were seen on every deck.

"Why don't we fire back?" said Tom to Nexius, looking through a telescope as they stood with a Marine gun crew on the Palace roof.

"We will, lad, we will. They are just outside the range of accuracy of our shore guns, and we will not waste ordnance until we must. They can bombard us because they have no need of accuracy; anywhere they shoot is a target. And they no longer fear our shipboard guns."

From the Ornish ships came a sound. All the Ornish were shouting as one, over and over, the war cry the Ornish had shouted since the founding of the Coerceries: "Oooooom-ta-heee, oooooom-ta-heee, oooooom-ta-heeee!" The bellowing grew, carried by the wind, echoing off the city. Then on every ship they brought out the wreaths of carnations they had stripped from captured and disabled Yount Major vessels and they burned them so Yount Great-Port could see it. They cast the burning carnations on the water.

"For the *Lanner!*" jeered the Ornish.

Still the Yount Major guns held their fire, and then a remarkable thing happened. From the sea to the southwest, beyond both the city and the Ornish fleet, came a ship sailing at great speed. It rounded the hill upon which the Signal Tower stood and sped into the channel between the two fleets, the no-man's-land under the guns of all. The ship did not belong to either side and both sides looked on bewildered. Sharp built, cracking on almost as fast as if she were steam-driven, the ship darted like a dolphin down the deadly track. As it did so, a great pennant unfurled from the topmast: a white banner with a red-rimmed orb dripping blood.

Tom yelled, "*The Seek-by-Night!* Behold, the Cretched Man returns!" His words were passed from the Marine gun crew on the Palace roof to those below and within minutes they leaped through

the city as quickly as the *Seek-by-Night* sailed between Yount Great-Port and the Ornish fleet. Neither side fired. All were astonished and afraid.

Midway down the track, right in front of the Ornish flagship, the *Seek-by-Night* tacked hard, in a manoeuvre that would have capsized almost any other ship. Now the *Seek-by-Night* tacked into the wind, sailing at the Ornish flagship head-on. As it did so, a great wreath of blood-red carnations was hung on the stern so all those in Yount Great-Port could see and a second wreath was hung on the bowsprit, so the Ornish could see. From the *Seek-by-Night's* crew came a shout that sounded as large as that of the Ornish war cry, a shout they repeated and repeated as they charged the Ornish flagship, a shout that the wind carried to the crews of Yount Great-Port's ragged battleships: "For the *Lanner!* For the *Lanner!* For the *Lanner!*" The Yount Great-Port crews took up the chant. Quickly the chant spread to the soldiers at the shore batteries. The cry carried the *Seek-by-Night* into the Ornish line, straight at the flagship and its startled crew.

So the King of the Wrens attacked the bear. The *Seek-by-Night* carried eighteen cannon, four- and eight-pounders, on a single deck, with a crew of ninety-six. The Ornish flagship carried one hundred cannon, each a thirty-two pounder, on three decks, with a crew of nearly nine hundred. The shadow of the flagship engulfed the *Seek-by-Night* long before the little brig came close; the Ornish man-of-war towered far above the vessel from Sanctuary. Thousands of telescopes were trained on the narrowing strip of water between the two ships. From the Ornish flagship and its companions on each side came a smattering of rifle-fire but nothing else.

"The Ornish cannon are set steeply inclined to bombard the city," cried Tom. "They cannot fire at the *Seek-by-Night*. The Ornish are frantic now! Ha ha! Look, they are levering their cannon downwards, but no, too late!"

Timed to perfection, the *Seek-by-Night* flew under the flagship's

guns and, just before it would have crashed into the flagship's stern, the *Seek-by-Night* tacked again to run parallel. Ornish musketeers poured fire into the *Seek-by-Night* but still the ship with the bloody-moon pennant flew forward. The *Seek-by-Night's* cannon were tiny but very mobile in comparison to those on the flagship. The gunners from Sanctuary had pivoted all nine cannon on the side facing the flagship, so that they targeted the same spot. Crack! All nine fired as one, hitting the flagship at the waterline.

The *Seek-by-Night* sailed around the flagship's bow, between the flagship and the neighbouring Ornish warship, out beyond the Ornish line, and swiftly looped, running hard to slip back around the flagship's bow and make a second pass. The *Seek-by-Night* turned as tightly as any ship ever has, but even so its radius took it into the firing zone on the flagship's far side. Again the opponents raced: the flagship crews to manoeuvre their cannon into position and fire, the *Seek-by-Night's* crew to whisper under the cannon-wall one more time.

Too late! With a roar the first of the flagship's great cannon fired, then a second, a third, more. Cannonballs chopped and whistled, several smashing into the little ship from Sanctuary. The Cretched Man urged them on. Billy Sea-Hen stood just behind the bowsprit and calmly aimed, fired, and reloaded his rifle as if he were hunting conies on the heath in Sanctuary. Tat'head and the other Minders led cannon crews, preparing for the one chance they would have to fire. The *Seek-by-Night* passed into relative safety again. Cannonballs shrilled overhead. Musketballs whizzed and pinged all around them, hitting more than one member of the crew.

The *Seek-by-Night* whirled around the flagship's bow again, so close to the flagship and the next warship that the faces of the Ornish were seen in great detail. The *Seek-by-Night* began its second pass. There was the hole in the flagship, drinking in water with every dip of the tide.

"Steady on," yelled Tat'head, then "Fire!" Crack! All nine cannon

on the starboard side fired as one, and all hit the same mark, widening the hole at the flagship's waterline.

The Ornish flagship took on water, listed, but in doing so its cannons were lowered. To make the Yount Major line, the *Seek-by-Night* would pass through the full weight of the flagship's broadside. The *Seek-by-Night* swerved and started its run from the Ornish line of battle.

The Cretched Man's ship was perhaps one hundred and fifty yards beyond the line when the bear, stung, brought down his heavy paw at the retreating wren. The flagship and its nearest neighbours were lost in smoke as they thundered. The *Seek-by-Night* was lost in sheets of water. When Tom and others could see it again, the damage was immediately visible: the stern was gouged, presumably the rudder destroyed, the mizzen-mast gone, and most of the sails on the two remaining masts shredded. The *Seek-by-Night* continued to move forward but slowly and at an angle, doing little more than drift. For the gunners on the Ornish line the wing-clipped ship from Sanctuary was an easy target. Within one minute the Ornish would reload and fire again. The next broadside, some sixty-four hundred pounds of iron from four ships, might sink the *Seek-by-Night*.

"*Viaticum*, indeed," said Tom, remembering the Cretched Man's private name for the ship. "Oh horrible, such destruction on deck. Where's Billy?"

Billy was still at the stern, what remained of it, firing his rifle at the Ornish line.

At that instant, Yount Major's steam frigates darted from behind the remnants of the battle line in front of the breakwater and made for the Ornish. The steam frigates fired steadily, concentrating on the Ornish flagship. The frigates swarmed past the wounded *Seek-by-Night* and blazed away at the Ornish line. The Ornish answered but could not afford to aim solely at the Cretched Man's ship. The rest of the Yount Major fleet fired now as well, further engaging Ornish attention. A steam frigate cast ropes around the *Seek-by-Night's*

foremast and bowsprit and began to tug. Slowly, under the claws of the bear, the Cretched Man's ship was hauled into the harbour. Tom yelled as he saw the pennant through the smoke, the red-edged orb with its flaring streaks reading "*Faciendi quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam.*" He ran from the roof as fast as he could to greet the *Seek-by-Night* as it reached the quay. Nexius ran behind him.

Down the gangplank walked the Cretched Man. Beyond the breakwater the artillery exchange continued, and the occasional cannonball fell in the harbour or on the promenade. Few in the throng quayside heeded these dangers. All eyes were on the *Seek-by-Night* and its crew, and especially on the bleached man in the red clothes who was its captain.

No one spoke as Jambres reached the quay. Behind him from the smoking ship came Billy Sea-Hen and three of the four other Minders, each helping a wounded Yountian sailor. The growing crowd at the quay stared at the Cretched Man: the goblin of their most ancient dreams stood before them, having just performed a wonder on their behalf, so unpinning all that they thought they knew of him and his role in their imprisonment. Every species of dread, hope, disbelief, and astonishment was in the eyes of the crowd. Eager to see the Cretched Man, yet fearing to touch him, the crowd seethed backwards and forwards. Jambres stood like a peninsula in the midst of a querulous sea. He had streaks of smoke and grime on his perfect face and his hat was missing. He looked in vain for someone to greet him, to embrace his crew, to aid his wounded men and women.

In vain? No, not entirely, for Tom pushed his way through the crowd, yelling in English and broken Yountish. The crowd gasped as Tom ran to the Cretched Man and took his hand.

"Jambres," said Tom.

"Young Thomas," said Jambres, though it almost sounded as if he said "Jannes."

Over the Cretched Man's rusty shoulder, Tom caught sight of

Billy. He yelled, “Dumbledores don’t die!”

“Not this day, Tommy, not this day,” said Billy. “But there’s others will if they don’t get help and fast.”

Nexius appeared at Tom’s side. He looked the Cretched Man long in the eye, then turned to the crowd and shouted orders to the many Marines nearby. Marines took the wounded from Billy and the other Minders, and moved onto the *Seek-by-Night* to begin immediate aid and removal. The *Seek-by-Night*’s crew moved down the gangplank, Yountians all, some with the marks of Ornish enslavement on arms or legs made visible by torn clothing. The crowd on the quay was startled to see a Yountish crew. *Seek-by-Night* sailors spoke with the crowd, and word spread quickly of the existence of Sanctuary and the Cretched Man’s mission. Some in the crowd believed, others were still to be convinced.

A woman in the crowd screwed up her courage and shouted to the Cretched Man: “What is your ship called?” Nowhere on the *Seek-by-Night* was its name painted. The crowd hushed, waiting to hear the Cretched Man speak. He said its name to the woman. The name travelled quickly throughout the crowd.

The woman hesitated and then said, “Thank you. May the Mother bless the *Seek-by-Night*.” This too rippled through the crowd. Many nodded and cast blessings upon the ship. Jambres thanked the woman. Tom saw that Jambres’s hand trembled as he did so.

Jambres said to Tom and Nexius, “I have crossed a threshold now and can never go back. Take me to the Queen. But first, tell me, please, where my crew will be housed, and where our wounded will be repaired. And how we shall bury our dead. We lost twenty-two, and I fear several more shall succumb to their wounds.”

Nexius answered the Cretched Man’s questions as they walked to the Palace. Besides the Marines, a swelling crowd accompanied them.

Eyes red, Billy leaned to Tom and said, “We lost Pinch, taken by a musket ball square in his cheekbone.”

Tom bowed his head. Pinch had been the youngest of the Minders, from a Lancashire weaving village, quick to offer a song or a bit of tobacco (hence his name). He would be badly missed.

Rifle slung over his shoulder, Billy looked around at the crowds and said, "So, now the fight is on, like I said, Tommy boy. We can give 'em worse than we get, only we need more fighters."

Someone in the crowd came alongside Billy and Tom, gave them each a carnation. They put them on. Billy smiled and said, "This is like Vauxhall Gardens, ain't it just? Pinch would have liked this; he was partial to fairs and flowers. Here we are, on the other side of the bloody rainbow, and it's like Vauxhall!"

As they reached the gates of the palace, the woman who had asked the Cretched Man for the name of the *Seek-by-Night* reappeared at Jambres's side. She shyly held out a bunch of carnations. Jambres stopped and took them. Everyone watched as he did so. He held the flowers up in a salute to the crowd, which sighed in a peculiar half-cheer. But even a half-cheer jolted Jambres: his arm trembled and his voice shook as he thanked the woman again.

Taking his hat off and pointing to the carnations, Billy had the last word: "See, Tommy me boy? Our redemption begins. Twenty-two dead, including little Pinch. But see? The flowers, them's the *immарcesible* palms of glory. Yes, Tommy, trust my word on this, we'll reach the crown of heaven, one bleeding bloom at a time."



Chapter 16: Stone-Corbies on the Quay

“Figs and feathers,” said Barnabas to Sanford a week after Jambres, Billy, and the *Seek-by-Night* had sailed into Yount Great-Port. “These Ornish devils are worse than Turks or Saracens.”

Sanford raised an eyebrow.

“Well, I mean,” said Barnabas, suddenly remembering Afsana and her religion. “Confound it, then, man, I meant no disrespect, leastways not to her. Anyway, Afsana’s an Indian, not a bloody Levantine . . . oh, *Quatsch*.”

Sanford cut his remaining husk of bread in two, and offered half to Barnabas. Rations were short, and tempers shorter in the city under siege.

“Thanks, old friend,” said Barnabas. “Not much of a dinner for either of us, is it? Here, have a drink of my beer, make us quits.”

Sanford drank and said, “The Ornish *are* devils.”

Barnabas looked over the rooftop wall of the palace at the line of Ornish warships outside the breakwater. An osprey circled the

harbour, flew over the ships into the dusk.

“Though they’re no different from the planters in Jamaica or the Carolinas when it comes to it,” murmured Barnabas. “Funny to see that so clearly only when we are quite fully out of our own world.”

Sanford nodded.

Tom came up behind them, followed by Afsana. One was rarely seen without the other. Afsana said something softly in Hindi as the last light of day caught the silver threading in her hair.

“No change in their position, I see,” said Tom, pointing at the Ornish ships with his good hand.

“No,” said Sanford.

“Any word from Nexius?” asked Tom.

“No, nephew, nor from Dorentius or Reglum or Noreous. Seems they’re all off at various points in the line, little time for chat with foreign guests these days. Not as I blame them, of course; I would just like to hear a bit more about what is happening.”

Tom and Sanford smiled. Poor Barnabas! He so wanted to be part of “handlin” the Ornish, and was despondent that no one consulted him on strategy. Most days Barnabas was seen bustling through the palace halls, still cutting a figure even if his stockings were faded and his vest frayed, his hands full of maps, approaching anyone in uniform with his latest scheme for victory. The Queen listened to Barnabas one morning—“Most interested, she was too, indisputably liked my idea about hauling ten-pounders up onto the Commissary roof”—but had not yet put any of his plans into action.

“Where is Sally?” asked Afsana.

“With the fraulein,” said Barnabas, happy to speak with Afsana on a topic without sinkholes. “Visiting the fraulein’s little niece.”

“Malchen,” said Tom. “Amalia Elisabeth.”

“The very one,” said Barnabas. “The little songster.”

“I hope they are back soon then,” said Tom. “We Karket-soomi are not welcome everywhere in this city right now. There’s been trouble in the streets, stones thrown, beatings. Reglum should be with them.”

“He is,” said Sanford. “I made sure of that.”

Boom! A cannon on one of the Ornish ships fired, a red streak in the dark. Boom! Boom!

“Come,” said Barnabas. “The nightly bombardment begins, let’s get below.”

Sally and the fraulein heard the first cannon of the evening and knew it was time to leave the fraulein’s sister and niece.

“Oh please, Auntie, let us sing one more song,” said the little girl.

“*Ach, warum nicht?*” the fraulein said. “Why not? Something with oomph, ja? The sound of the Ornish cannons will be our—what is the word, Sally—powk-drums?”

“Kettle-drums,” said Sally. They might have been at Mincing Lane, gathered for a family evening. She looked at Reglum, drinking tea in a corner, and smiled.

So Amalia sang, accompanied by her mother on a spinet. Sally joined in as she began to understand the melody (from *Stabat Mater*), matching her voice to Amalia’s. For a few moments everyone forgot the siege.

An explosion nearby forced them to stop.

“Come, time to go,” said Reglum, boots creaking.

“Alas, you are right,” said Sally. “Malchen, my dear, you are almost a choir unto yourself.”

The girl’s eyes gleamed in the candlelight. Sally carried that image with her as she, the fraulein, and Reglum walked back to the palace.

“Here is Isaak, ready to pounce on Ornish raiders,” said Sally when she returned to her room. The cat leaped onto her shoulder.

“What news?” asked Tom.

“Very little. We get grim looks in the streets from some, and flowers given us by others. Disconcerting. Ornish cannonballs fall at random and people worry about food supplies. What news here today?”

“None, really,” said Afsana before Tom could reply. “Stalemate. The Ornish sit just beyond reach of our cannon. They have us half-encircled, so supplies can still get in overland to the city. Very odd, and not well thought out, if you ask me.”

“Indeed, something is amiss here,” said Tom. “The latest news is that the Ornish are negotiating with the Land of the Painted Gate to thwart Farther Yount’s embassy. But there is so much rumour. This morning I heard that Ornish troops were being ferried about in hot-air balloons, hundreds of ’em ready to descend on the city! That’s a good one. ‘Why not imagine the Ornish will sprout wings and fly themselves?’ I said.”

The truth was more prosaic. Four days after Sally sang with Amalia, Reglum interrupted the McDoons’ meagre breakfast.

“Disaster!” he said. “Oh damn it! We underestimated Ornish cunning: they landed troops far to the west, screened by their fleet so that we caught no news of them. Their soldiers marched through the Nale, the hills ramping the city, whose hikes and hews we thought to be impenetrable. This morning they overran our landward pickets—too few, for we never expected assault from that direction—and now we fight for life and liberty above the city. Come and see!”

The McDoons raced to the ramparts and looked behind the city, not out across the harbour. The wind was from the sea so they could not hear the sounds of war, but the smoke rising from the hills told them all they needed to know. Nexius stalked up as they stared landwards.

“The Ornish outwitted us,” he said, before he stormed off. “Shame on us. But we will make them pay. We will fight for every house and every street.”

The city was now surrounded and, with every hour, the Ornish tightened the vise. All day the McDoons heard tales of the dawn’s surprise attack, of Ornish legions crashing out of the woods, the

patrols of Farther Yount overwhelmed. Nexius and the other captains had stopped the onslaught in the city's outer precincts, but all day Ornish troops flowed down out of the Nale.

"The battle joins in earnest very soon," said Reglum. He looked at the McDoons with a peculiar glint in his eyes. "Well, now we have our chance for glory. Which will it be: the Teutoberg Forest or Alesia?"

"Are we the Romans or the barbarians?" asked Jambres, who had just walked up, along with Billy and the other Minders.

Reglum bowed his head.

"We aren't in a tutorial at Oxford—it was Oxford, wasn't it?" continued Jambres. In his red coat and pants, he looked ready for the parade ground, a hussar lost from heaven.

Reglum inclined his head again.

"Ho, Tommy Two-Fingers," said Billy Sea-Hen. "I don't know nothing about Toodleburgers or who is a Roman and who ain't. All's I know is true-born Englishmen must fight now. You coming with me? Will you help an old dumbledore one more time?"

Tom stepped forward. Afsana did too.

"He goes only if I am with him," she said. Isaak ran around her ankles.

Billy smiled and took off his hat.

Barnabas clutched at his vest and stepped to his nephew's side.

"No, uncle," Tom said, gently. "Stay here. We may need you, and Sanford, for the final defence. Seek the Queen. Help protect her if it comes to that. And protect Sally, above all."

Tom hugged his sister and moved off with Billy and the other Minders. Afsana took Sally's hands.

"We'll be back, I promise. But our duty here is less, I think, than the responsibility laid upon you," Afsana said.

Releasing Sally's hands, Afsana looked swiftly at Barnabas and Sanford before racing off to join Tom on the way to the front.

"Oh, figs and feathers! What a wretched mess!" said Barnabas.

He brushed past Jambres and stamped away.

The siege dragged on. Some outer neighbourhoods changed hands several times in the course of a single day. The dead and wounded filled the streets. Rumours leaped from mouth to mouth, stories of assassinated cattle, prisoners flung into wells, houses burned with the inhabitants inside. Some called for the Queen to surrender Sally to the Ornish, others marched to the palace swearing to die in Sally's defence.

Amid the fevered talk and garbled news, one story grew steadily in the weeks after the Ornish broke through the pickets on the Nale: a tale of a Karket-soomi pair, a young brown woman and a young white man, who fought side by side wherever the fighting was most desperate. Many recalled the forbidden prophecy, wondered if Tom and Afsana were the heirs to the Hullitate throne.

"Just like Palmerin and the Lady Fiona when they slew the Buccine Knight," said Barnabas to Sally. "Or Gosse of Frinder when he defeated the giant what-was-his-name, when the Daughter of the Moon helped him by firing silver arrows. What if Tom and Afsana *are* the next King and Queen of Farther Yount?"

Sally started to respond but Barnabas cut her off, saying, "Such a thing that would be! Hah! Think of their children. I would be a grandfather . . . and the children would be among the heirs of the McDoon fortune . . . oh yes, that would put paid to my uncle."

Sally stepped back, seeing the look in Barnabas's eyes. Outside was the low boom of cannons, but the heartbeats inside were louder.

"I venture to say that Tom is a better soldier than lover," said Sally. "I mean, he has not to my knowledge declared his love for Afsana. Silly, since it is plain for all to see. If I were Afsana, I would be pressing for a resolution."

Barnabas laughed, "I believe you are right. But don't be too harsh on your brother. He is like most men: bold in the fray but cack-

handed in love.”

“Why do you suppose that is?” said Sally, more to Isaak than to Barnabas.

“Courage comes in many forms,” said Barnabas, more to himself than to Sally.

“You are wiser than you pretend, Uncle,” said Sally. “Women are not always as courageous as you make out.”

Barnabas shuffled his feet, gripped his vest, and said, “I do not understand.”

“Imagine, dear uncle, that a woman loved two men at the same time.” Sally stopped. “No, no, this is impossible. I—”

“I cannot guide you here, though I wish I could,” said Barnabas. “I am a most unreliable mentor in such matters, as you know. But I might observe that one of the men of whom you speak is far away while the other is right here with you.”

Sally looked straight at the floor and said, “So true, so true. Yet the distant one has not left my thoughts in all this time. No more than Rehana left yours even after years had passed.”

Barnabas sighed. “Ah, I begin to understand. Sally, you will have little joy of ghosts and memories, please believe me. Better to trust in someone close at hand, someone who you can hold.”

“Enough of my trivial, selfish concerns!” cried Sally. “Let us talk rather of Tom and Afsana. Fraulein, what do you think of the stories we hear?”

The fraulein, who was doing needlework in a corner of Sally’s room, shook her head and said, “Is the most astoundingest thing, *ganz unglaublich*.”

Isaak tried to jump into the fraulein’s lap as she said this.

“Isaak, you know better!” said Sally, crossing the room to collect the cat. “Why, Fraulein Reimer, what a marvellous picture!”

The fraulein shook her head but displayed the oval needleworking: a picture of a house, with the words *Trost der Erloesung* stitched above, and *Not bricht Eisen* stitched below.

“‘The Solace of Salvation,’ and ‘Need Breaks Iron,’” read Sally. “Do come and see, Uncle Barnabas, it’s our very own home on Mincing Lane.”

Barnabas peered at the needlework and said, “So it is, right down to the blue trim on the windows! Capital job, Fraulein!”

“Look,” said Sally, holding Isaak in her arms. “There you are with Sanford in the partners’ room.”

“Ah hah!” said Barnabas. “And there’s Cook in the dining room, followed by her niece. What do you suppose she is serving?”

“Goat’s meat for Mr. Sanford,” said the fraulein.

“Well said,” laughed Barnabas. “Oh ho, do I spy our garden out back? Buttons and beeswax, I can just make out my smilax bushes.”

Sally, Barnabas, and Fraulein Reimer gazed at the picture for a minute before anyone spoke again.

“Uncle, we have little time left,” said Sally. “I have a plan to save Yount, but it will mean a voyage back to London.”

“We are besieged, Sally, how will you—?”

“With the Cretched Man’s help, strange as that sounds to me still.”

“What do you propose to do in London?”

Sally paused, shook her head, and laughed.

“I am going shopping, Uncle!”

Barnabas leaned forward, tugging on his vest, and said, “Sally, out with it!”

“I am going to build the largest Fulginator ever built—nay, larger than any ever imagined, a Fulginator large enough to move not just a ship but an entire world.”

“This world,” said Barnabas. “Yount. You aim to fulminate all of Yount.”

“Back to its original place, yes, Uncle, all the way home. Wherever that is.”

Barnabas clapped his hands and said, “Archimedes lever!”

“Yes, that’s right. So I need the finest tools, the finest materials

in two worlds, and the best minds in natural philosophy, in the nautical sciences, in metallurgy and engineering. Thus I am going to London. And I will need your help, and Sanford's."

"Of course, of course, my girl. Why, figs and feathers, you would have our help whether you wanted it or not!"

Barnabas paced up and down the room, one hand strangling his vest, the other punching the air as he spoke.

"Sedgewick, we must speak to Sedgewick immediately when we land," said Barnabas. "He has extensive dealings with the Admiralty, you know, and can help us gain audience there. Why, he might even get us to see Sir John Barrow himself! Also, he has friends and relations throughout the Treasury and the Office for War and the Colonies. Most useful, I'm sure. Then there's Matchett & Frew, rum fellows with even stranger connections—they will be most interested in our adventures, no doubt, no doubt. . . ."

Barnabas paused, suddenly doubtful, and said, "Sanford and I *are* meant to come with you, right? I mean—"

"Of course you are, silly man!"

Barnabas rose up on his toes and almost yelled, "Hurrah then for the McDoons! Oh, and, when we're home again, we shall have to make time for a trip to Fezziwig's; I am so dreadfully eager to order new vests and stockings. After all, one cannot save the world looking like a soused gournard! Oh, oh, and a trip to the apothecary would be lovely. I am all out of my Bateman's pectoral drops."

Sally hugged Barnabas.

"Oh, uncle, thank you. We'll charge at 'em like Rodney against the French, isn't that right?"

Barnabas stood at attention and then mimed the actions of an officer on the poop deck of a frigate. The fraulein joined in the laughter.

Barnabas grew thoughtful and said, "We cannot just wish ourselves back to London, Sally, we'll need—"

"We need to see the Queen straight away. She likes you

particularly, Uncle, so let's ask her to call a meeting for this evening. Just us McDoons, our closest friends and . . . the Cretched Man."

Sally opened the door. Isaak raced down the hall towards the Queen's chambers, with the McDoons on her heels.

That evening the Queen met with Sally, Barnabas, Sanford, and the fraulein. Standing around the table were Dorentius Bunce, Reglum Bammary, and Noreous Minicate. The Cretched Man sat half-shadowed in one corner and the four remaining Minders leaned against the wall next to him. The Yountians glanced at him out of the corner of their eyes.

"Where are Tom and Afsana?" asked Barnabas.

"Coming," said the Chamberlain. "They have become so well known we needed to cloak their movements, lest their arrival be marked. Captain Nexius is coming too, by a separate route."

Even as she spoke, the door opened and the three warriors entered the room.

"Your Majesty, bad news," said Nexius. "The Ornish have advanced as far into the city as Palombeay."

"Palombeay!" said the fraulein. "We must rescue the Karket-soomi!"

"Yes," said the Queen. "They are under my protection, and are now threatened from all sides in this war."

"One among them is especially important," said Sally. "A young girl, related to our fraulein, a girl who may be one of the seven singers who will—"

"Say no more; we will send Marines this very night. Lieutenant Bammary, see to that as soon as we finish this meeting."

"I will go too," said the fraulein. "To show you the way and reassure my sister and my niece."

"Very well, and now to the main business at hand," said the Queen. "Sally, I ask you to speak."

"Thank you, Your Majesty. To the point: I have a plan to save

Yount. For the plan to succeed, I must return to Palipash, to London in England. Without delay.”

“Sally, whatever do you mean?” said Tom. His eyes were rimmed with dirt and charcoal.

“Do not judge me mad, brother, until you have heard me out. My plan is to build a Fulginator large enough to move all of Yount back to its home.”

Sally repeated herself in Yountish. Everyone spoke at once as the implications sank in.

“Impossible!” said Noreous Minicate. “That would be an engine the size of . . . the size of . . . the palace!”

“My initial calculations show that a structure the size of a large ship could be built with enough power and precision to move this world,” said Sally first in English and then in Yountish.

“Even so—and I doubt that one the size of a ship would suffice—a Fulginator the size of a ship is, with respect, madness,” Noreous replied. “Dorentius, you are the expert here. What do you think?”

“Actually, dear friends,” said Dorentius, looking as happy as anyone had ever seen him. “Sally included me in some of the calculations she mentions, while swearing me to secrecy. I know it sounds mad, but I believe it might be done. It just might.”

Noreous was not so easily convinced. He pointed at the Cretched Man and said, “Is this some plot of *his*? A trap?”

Everyone turned towards Jambres, who stood up and said, “I understand your suspicion, but I had no part in this plan’s original devising, which was all of Sally’s doing. Rather, as she can attest, I first told her that such a plan’s audacity was matched by its lunacy.”

The group digested these words.

Nax said, “Will it work?”

“I do not know,” said Jambres. “Enormous uncertainties abound, obstacles and risks of every sort confront this undertaking. Possibly a Fulginator of this size, if it can even be built at all, will send Yount further into the void. I truly cannot say.”

The Queen shook her head, saying, "I fear to risk so much."

Reglum spoke. "Your Majesty, your fears are shared by us all. However, if I may, I believe the danger just outside our door compels us to take risks that no previous generation would have accepted."

The Chamberlain spoke. "Why go to Palipash? If we beat back the Ornish, could we not build such a device here with our own materials and technology? Why has no one thought of such things before?"

"Sound questions, your Honour," said Dorentius. "Members of the Analytical Bureau have over the centuries conjectured about such a Fulginator as Sally describes, but all have concluded we could not build it because we lack key materials. For example, without getting too detailed, there is a ceramic ingredient called 'china clay' in England that would be necessary for a Fulginator powerful enough to free us. We lack this substance altogether in Yount. Likewise, we do not have the skills of the Karket-soomi in certain technologies necessary for this project, certain forms of precision engineering such as the gearing seen in their timepieces."

The Queen, with a side glance at the Cretched Man, said, "We speak here as engineers and cameralists, but what about opposition from those who have pent us here? Will those powers not resist an effort by us to remove ourselves?"

Again all faces turned to Jambres. He looked around the room and adjusted his red, red coat before saying, "Oh yes, very much they will resist. The time is not yet come for the end of your sentence, make no mistake about that. But some sentences may be meted out unfairly or unclearly. Sometimes the prison door is left unlocked, leaving the prisoner to discover this fact and exploit it."

Everyone shifted uncomfortably.

Tom said, "Remember that Jambres has more to lose than any of you. He has cast his lot with us."

"Thank you, Thomas," said Jambres, his coat glistening in the lamplight. "Too well I know their mourning-markets, the ribbed closet in their winter-house. I will not lead you thither."

Isaak hopped off the table and walked to Jambres, her golden fur glowing against his red clothes. Jambres bent down and picked Isaak up. She nestled into the crook of his arm as he continued.

“The Mother stirs in her sleep, I feel it. She will help us if we can waken her. To waken her, and to power a Fulginator the size of a ship, we need to assemble a choir of singers the likes of which have never been heard in all the worlds before. We will call together seven singers who can sing the Mother from her slumbers, who can sing a wall too high for the Wurm-Owl to fly over, who can sing winds of knowing into the Fulginator.”

A whisper of music ran through every head in the room, shreds of the songs sung at *kjorraw*, of the evensong in churches and temples in two worlds.

Sally spoke. “Four of the seven are in this room, and a fifth is in the city. We think the sixth is in London, which is another reason why I need to return.”

Nexius growled, “I will support you in whatever venture you propose. You trusted us when we sent you the key, so shall we trust you.”

“Thank you, Captain,” said Sally.

“But practical matters concern me,” said Nexius. “How will you travel to London? Where will you build this Fulginator-ship of yours?”

“We will build the Fulginator in Sanctuary, the hidden place guarded by the Cretched . . . by Jambres,” said Sally.

“Will he also transport you to London then?” said Nexius.

“No, I cannot,” said Jambres. “A few individuals I could possibly take through but not an entire ship there and back—that is beyond my power. And a ship must go, to bring the necessary supplies back from London.”

Noreous said, “Which ship then? How will the ship break the blockade? We are at war!”

Dorentius replied, “We have one tough ship still relatively

unharméd: the *Gallinule*. We could leave in two days time. We will simply have to blast our way through the blockade and outrun the Ornish until we reach the gates to the Interstitial Lands.”

“We will divert the Ornish fleet with a general attack from the harbour,” said Nexius.

“I will cast a glamour on the *Gallinule*,” said Jambres. “Something to baffle the aim of the Ornish cannoneers.”

The Chamberlain said, “Even if the *Gallinule* wins through and returns to build this gargantuan Fulginator, Yount Great-Port will . . . I hesitate to say this, but we have no time for false courtesies—will have fallen. We are straitly besieged now. You speak of possible salvation to come in, what, a year, two years, maybe three? We who remain will be dead or worse by then.”

Afsana said, “We will never surrender!”

“No, but we may be overrun nevertheless,” said the Queen. “My duty is to think of even such terrible possibilities. What say you, Captain Nexius?”

Nexius clenched his fists and said, “You are both right: we will never surrender but we may be overrun. We cannot withstand the siege much longer. I have already been making plans for breaking the blockade and taking to the hills to continue resistance.”

The room was silent for a moment.

“That means death and enslavement for many,” said Afsana.

“Yes,” said Nexius. “But a chance to fight again for some. We have no choice.”

The room fell silent again.

Jambres broke the silence. “The Captain is right, I fear. But his point brings us back to Sally’s London voyage, which can also be a mission to seek aid from the British government . . . and from other sources.”

Everyone spoke at once.

“Buttons and beeswax!” said Barnabas. “Splendid idea!”

“You mean we should break our ancient policy, and announce

ourselves to Karket-soom?" said the Chamberlain. "You know that could lead to civil war within Farther Yount, ruining whatever chance Farther Yount has of defeating the Ornish."

"Nonetheless, this is the path I advocate," said Jambres. "British troops, British technology . . ."

Tom, Barnabas, and Sanford thumped the table in agreement.

"There's more," said Jambres. "I will send William and his companions back to their home-country with Sally, not only to protect her with their lives, but also to recruit an army for you. Yes, an army of the dispossessed, the poor and hungry, those searching for justice and freedom. Oh yes, William will return with a great army fit to battle the Ornish here—and those on Karket-soom who think like the Ornish. Sally's machine, the choir boat, the Fulginator the size of a ship, has been called other things: 'The breast-plate of judgement, the throne-chariot of God.' We shall build it in the workshop of desire, anneal it with our passion. What do you say to that, William?"

Billy Sea-Hen and the other Minders stepped forward as one, out of the shadows on the wall and into the light from the lamps above the table. Billy winked at Tom across the table.

"Judgement, your Grace, has a very fine ring to it," Billy said. "We'll rouse the Claverites, we will, and the preachers of the Deathless Sermon. We'll enlist the followers of John Jea and the congregations of the Potter. We'll arm the Grantlings in their tabernacles, the flocks of Lady Huntingdon's Connection, the ragged pastors of St. Adelsina, and the Matabrunians. Our officers we'll find at the Tailor's shop in Charing Cross Road, and among the disciples of Spence at the Pineapple and Mulberry Tree. Your Grace, Your Majesty, and gentlefolk, we will bring you an army of fiery love with iron in its soul."

Sally did her best to translate Billy's words, though she could not decipher many of the specifics. No one needed a translation, however, to understand Billy's meaning.

Jambres cocked his head and said, "I must leave now—the Learned Doctors know I am here; they will find us out. I will help you outfit the *Gallinule* and in whatever other ways you want. Send Sally back to London the day after tomorrow."

The Queen rose and said, "So be it! All old prescriptions have run dry; all our wisdom has been turned upside down. We send Sally and her company to Karket-soom on the *Gallinule*. Captain Nexius, please direct this to happen."

The meeting broke up. Jambres lingered long enough to hand Isaak back to Sally.

"Thank you," he said to Sally and to the Queen.

"No, thank you," said the Queen. "Truly, this is a world gone mad, and a fitting end to the Hullitate line, that I should be the first ruler of Farther Yount to ally herself with, of all people, the Cretched Man."

"Stranger things may yet happen, Your Majesty," said Jambres. He bowed, put his hat on his head, and walked out of the room through a dark corner, followed by Billy and the Minders.

The Ornish bombarded the city that night with great force. Fires burned unchecked, as water ran low. Smoke filled the streets. Just before dawn a Marine banged on Sally's door and escorted her to a guardhouse in one of the palace enclosures. Reglum met her there, with a bloody bandage on his face. Sally ran to him.

"Reglum, what is it? Dear Reglum!"

"Sally, oh Sally . . . I have . . . here, prepare yourself. . . ."

"Reglum . . . Reglum?"

Sally knew then, as grey light entered the square, as smoke seeped into her lungs, as Reglum turned away, at that moment Sally knew Fraulein Reimer was dead.

"Oh no," she said. "Oh no, no, no . . ."

"Sally, I am so sorry," said Reglum. "We . . . nothing we could do. We went to collect the Rehnstock girl, me and five Marines, and

your German governess.”

“Malchen? Is she . . . ?”

“I’m sorry,” said Reglum. “I cannot hear very well, you see, because of the explosion. Oh, the little girl . . . yes, she is alive, and so is her mother—they are both inside.”

Sally grabbed Reglum’s shoulder but refused to buckle further. She said, “What happened? Spare no details.”

“The bombardment grew worse on the way back. We heard a whistling near us several times, ducked for cover. The last time—right overhead—the explosion knocked us all down. The fraulein never got up.”

Sally walked into the guardhouse. Malchen and her mother sat on a bench, too shocked to cry. A Marine covered in blood lay on one table. He was missing a leg. Sally went first to the Marine.

“What was his name?” she said.

Reglum told her. She nodded and then slowly turned to the figure on the other table.

“Oh,” Sally said.

The fraulein’s right arm was ripped off ragged at the elbow. Her jaw was askew and her right eye was gone. Her black dress seeped blood. Sally did not cry until she saw that the fraulein’s shoes were missing from her otherwise unharmed feet. When Tom, Barnabas, and Sanford arrived, they found Sally bowed over the fraulein’s body, crying and reciting over and over again the names of the churches in Hamburg.

They had no choice but to bury the fraulein that morning. At the graveside (a hastily dug pit for a dozen other bodies, including that of the Marine who had died protecting the Rehnstocks), Malchen held her mother’s and Sally’s hands. Sally knelt before Malchen and said, “Take this as a memento, a little *Fussnickel*, and I will do the same.”

Sally handed Malchen a half-finished needlework picture, one of several Sally found under the fraulein’s bed. The picture was of a

ship sailing on a sea strewn with roses. Sally had never seen it before and realized the fraulein had contained mysteries that Sally would never be able to discover. For herself, Sally kept the picture of the house on Mincing Lane.

“Oh *Quatsch*,” said Barnabas as they left the funeral, and burst into tears.

That night the McDoons gathered at the quay on the canal where the *Gallinule* lay ready. On the landside of the quay, opposite the ship, was a building used for the fitting out of ships. On the ground floor a table had been set, amid crates, barrels, and pallets of supplies. The Queen and Chamberlain were there, with a dozen Marines.

“I come myself to mark this most desperate cast of the die,” said the Queen. “We can spare only thirty for the crew, and no Marines to guard you, but that may be a good thing since we can only supply the ship with enough rations for a reduced company.”

“War or no war, siege or no siege,” said the Chamberlain, “we will hold the sending-off supper as we always have, for all the centuries that we have sent tough ships on the voyage to Pash. Come and dine!”

Round the table the dishes were passed, from the Yountians to the McDoons to Jambres and the Minders. Dorentius explained the meaning of each dish, the order of its presentation, the prayer to be said each time. The Minders and the Marines ate with gusto but no one else had much appetite, least of all Sally.

From the hills came the constant mutter of gunfire. Periodically the volume grew. Each time it did, Nexius would smile, take out his watch (made in London, a gift from his brother), and say, “Right on time, that will be Srix and the Tenth Foot” or “Very good, we are holding the bridge in Duchmennaney.” Tom and Afsana would nod, sometimes adding comments.

“They would not recognize you in the coffeehouses back home, Tom,” said Barnabas. “I am so sorry not to have you with us on the voyage.”

“I am sorry too, Uncle. But I think my duty keeps me here this time.”

Afsana put down her fork and said, “Duty only?”

Tom opened his mouth but no words came out.

Barnabas did his best to rescue a floundering nephew, saying to Afsana, “I hear that you are like the Lady Fiona fighting with Palmerin. You know, against the wicked knight.”

“Actually, no, I do *not* know,” said Afsana. “I do not know that story since no one has bothered to tell it to me. Perhaps instead I should tell *you* about the archer Srikandi, who married the warrior-prince Arjuna in the stories my mother told me, that she heard from her Hindu nursemaid in India.”

Barnabas opened his mouth but no sound issued. Sanford rescued a flailing friend, saying to Afsana, “I have some recollection of that tale, from evenings in Bombay. I would like to hear it in full sometime from you, upon our return.”

Afsana smiled, “Then so you shall, over a *hara masala*—better made this next time, so I promise! Only now you are committed to returning, no matter how short the rations or how terrible the foes you face.”

Sanford smiled, that rarest of occurrences, “The thought of *hara masala* and the story of Srikandi and Arjuna will raise my spirits even as our rations run low.”

Even Sally smiled at this exchange.

Talk turned to the voyage itself. A Yountian unknown to the McDoons stood up and said, “Your Majesty, and all assembled guests, especially those from Palipash, allow me to introduce myself. I am the new captain of the *Gallinule*, and my name is Aynellian Limmilanax, formerly serving on the *Murrelet*. I am sad to say that I must replace the old captain, who was killed in the fleet-battle while serving on the *Pratincole*.”

Everyone raised a glass and toasted the dead captain.

“I can only promise you my utmost dedication and my unswerv-

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ing attention to the execution of the mission,” said Captain Aynellian.

The Yountians closed the dinner with the Song of Return, which Tom translated for the Minders, and which ends:

Witness the bonfires on shorelines,
Rime-stippled strandlines,
Glad flames on spithead, the finisterre
Awakens to ship’s wheeling turn.
In the ember-weeks and
Cricklewood gloaming,
Sun harvest home rowan, stripped birch and willow,
A magpie skates light, bright slate, white hillow.
Stone-corbies on quays shake frost from their feathers,
Cold-drakes in furrow slit eyes open and listen:
Rook the leaper
Salutes the ship’s
Return
Return
Return.

“By old Peg Tantrum, that had a ghostly feel,” said Billy. “Return, return, return’ . . . very solemn. Not that I don’t like it, but I wonder if we need to stir our blood somewhat. I think we might offer something a bit more lively for the company, with your lords’ permission.”

“Yes, but be swift,” said the Queen. “The ship must leave within the hour.”

“Oh, we will, ma’am, we will,” said Billy.

Tat’head said, “Fair gillicks and filthy straw, said the sherehog to the farmer, let’s get this over with! Where are we going, Billy?”

Billy chanted back:

We’re off to skin the devil, boys,

We're off to flay Old Nick.
We'll scorch him in a frying pan,
We'll beat him with a stick!
Booriley booriley booriley, boys,
Rooriley rooriley rah!

The Minders clapped and stamped their feet in time. Billy waved for Tom to join them, which he did.

"What shall we do with that little madge-owlet, Billy?" asked Tat'head.

"We'll spatch-cock that wicked bird," sang back Billy. "We'll cut him into collops."

"What else, Billy?" said Tat'head.

"His eyes we'll sweat like day-old cheese, them we'll crush like lusky peas. Come sing with me now: We're off to skin the devil, boys . . ."

By the end of the second refrain, all the Yountians had joined in, if only for the "rooriley rooriley rah!" which they roared at the tops of their lungs.

"Is there more, Billy?" shouted Tat'head.

"Yes! We'll pillow our heads with his liver at night, and his ears we'll fly as a flutt'ry kite. His nates we'll use to strike a light, his claws we'll use to rake our shite. Oh, come sing with me now: we're off to skin the devil, boys . . ."

"Oh Billy, what I would not give to have you with us fighting the Ornish," said Tom, as the song ended.

"Oh, that you shall, little Tommy, just wait a spell and we'll bring you back an army," Billy said, and then added, "I shall miss you, Tommy Two-Fingers, and your fightin' bride—now, now, don't deny it, she'll make you a handsome wife, a *spirited* one. Well, lad, we're off again into the great Midwhere."

Everyone made their goodbyes in the lamplight by the ship's gangplank.

"Take this letter to my brother in London," said Nexius to Reglum.

“Float light as an emperor’s wing and then shred your enemies into gubbings,” said Billy to Tom. “And never forget Pinch, who shan’t make the voyage home with us.”

“Find the door of hope,” said Jambres. “But beware the many angels trapped in the seams of purgatory. Now then, where is Isaak? I must wish her Godspeed in crucial grace.”

The gangplank was drawn, the hawsers thrown and the *Gallinule* warped away from the quay. Dawn was two hours off. Sally, Barnabas, and Sanford, together with Reglum, Dorentius, and Mineous and joined by the Minders, stood at the ship’s railing. Tom, Afsana, Nexius, and Jambres looked up at them from the quay, with the Queen and Chamberlain a few paces behind.

“Halt!”

A troop of Sacerdotal Guards ran out of the darkness and down the quay, just ahead of the Arch-Bishop and a clutch of Optimates and Learned Doctors.

“Halt!” shouted the Arch-Bishop. “Halt now!”

The *Gallinule* drew away from the quay, the steam engine beginning to chug.

Jambres turned, looked up at Sally, his red coat blazing in the lamplight, and yelled, “Go, don’t stop!”

In her mind, Sally also heard words that no one else heard, a plea from the Cretched Man: *Find her, find the master singer, the African girl!*

A second later the Cretched Man turned back towards the quay, took a step out of the light and was gone.

“Treason!” shouted the Arch-Bishop, waving a piece of paper. “The House of Optimates voted this evening to dissolve the present government. The House has authorized the Arch-Bishop to form a new government for conduct of the war.”

Nexius and the Marines took positions around the Queen and the Chamberlain. Tom and Afsana drew pistols and stood flanking Nexius.

“The Queen is the Queen,” said Nexius. “You cannot touch her.”

The Arch-Bishop shook his head, and said, “Captain Nexius, you are out of your reckoning. This entire operation is unauthorized. The Queen has no right to send out a tough ship with the House’s approval even in peacetime, but to do so in war, when we need every ship and every soldier . . . Far worse to do so under the guidance of him—the enemy of our people for time immemorial.”

The Arch-Bishop looked to the spot where Jambres had been but did not seem alarmed to find Jambres gone, smiling rather at the confirmation of his words.

“You see,” said the Arch-Bishop, pointing at the Queen. “She allies herself with a demon. She twists the loyalties of her soldiers, and consorts with Karket-soomi who have filled her mind with deceit. Thus the House has passed a vote of no confidence. You shall remain a queen, Your Majesty, but a queen without a government, a queen under the direct and firm protection of the House and of the Gremium.”

No one moved for a moment and then Afsana calmly stepped in front of Nexius, pointed her pistol at the Arch-Bishop, and said, “No.”

As the *Gallinule* moved down the canal towards the harbour, the last thing those onboard saw before they passed out of the lamplight was the eruption of gunfire and Afsana being shot down.

Afsana lay on the ground unmoving. Tom lunged forward, firing blindly. Marines and Guards battled hand to hand. The Arch-Bishop led Guards to the edge of the canal, where the Guards knelt and fired on the *Gallinule*.

Afsana lay unmoving—that sight was the last thing the McDoons saw as the *Gallinule* slid into darkness. Barnabas tried to leap overboard to swim back. Sanford, shouting “Afsana!”, restrained his old friend.

The ship reached the harbour. Nexius had arranged for the shore batteries to fire on the Ornish blockade as a diversion, but not all

the batteries fired and many fired only once, another sign that news of the Arch-Bishop's coup was spreading. The Ornish heard the *Gallinule's* engines during the pauses in the shore barrage. The *Gallinule* broke through the blockade but was hit many times. The crew stoked the engines to the highest level and the tough ship sprinted away from Yount Great-Port and from the Ornish. In the dark behind them, those onboard the *Gallinule* saw lines of fire ringing the city.

While the sun rose, the *Gallinule* faced nothing but empty ocean as it raced towards the gates of the Interstitial Lands. Sally sat in the bow, staring ahead, clutching her St. Morgaine's medal. She heard the voices in her head, whispering "In the sickle sinny drift," and she saw in her mind dozens of bodies floating in long, strangling strands of kelp. One of the bodies was that of the Specimen, or someone just like the elongated body preserved at the University, his stork-nose covered with barnacles and whelks.

Reglum came up behind her. Sally did not want to see him. She saw the bandage on his face covering the wound from the explosion that killed the fraulein, and she hated him for his bravery. She hated him for not saving Afsana. She hated him for not being James.

"Sally, I don't know what to say," said Reglum.

Sally suddenly realized that Reglum's hands were bloody and that he had blood smeared across his clothes.

"Reglum, are you hurt!?"

"No, no, it's Dorentius. He was hit by shrapnel. A cannonball smashed onto the deck, showering him with splinters. His leg must come off or else it will go gangrenous. He is feverish and in great pain."

"Oh no, not Dorentius! I cannot take more of this, no more!" cried Sally.

Reglum held her and said, "I know, dearest, I know."

The *Gallinule* surged ahead. As the dawn proceeded, the damage from running the blockade was more evident. Two bodies lay near

the forecastle.

“To think that I might lose my *hatmoril* right here in Yount, not out there in the Places-In-Between,” gasped Reglum. “I cannot bear to think of that. Do you know what I told him? I said that he could not die first because he is a Cambridge man, and Cambridge always comes second to Oxford!”

Sanford and Barnabas joined Sally and Reglum. The four stood close in the bow as the *Gallinule* raced for the Fences of Yount. Sally held tight with one hand to her Morgaine medal, and held Reglum’s hand with her other. Isaak, having already caught her first rat in the hold and offered her victim’s kidneys to Sally, groomed herself at Sally’s feet.

At last Sanford said, “If Dorentius cannot, who will fulminate for us?”

No one answered. The sun rose. As it did so, three dolphins burst from the ocean just in front of the *Gallinule*’s prow and began pacing the ship. In that instant, Sally saw a great brown eye peering at her through a wheel of gold, and heard in the pith of her bones a song that was the sine of love.

Sally said, “I will. I will fulminate for us if Dorentius is unable.”

She kept her eyes fixed on the three dolphins, glistening and black, as they leaped up and down, up and down, the arc of their bodies saying to her:

Return

Return

Return.



Coda: Introit for the Days of Lead

Maggie's mother was dying. Her breath shushed in and out, as she said, "*Chi di*, there is still time, but not much, little eagle."

"Mama," said Maggie.

"Listen," said her mother. "What's my name?"

"Persephone Collins," said Maggie.

"That's what they called me in the big house," said Maggie's mother. "But not what they called me out back. Among our folks I was 'Ada.' The old women out back would say, 'Little Ada, come here,' and 'You look like your father for sure, Ada-Eze.'"

Maggie had never heard this story.

"Sometimes," wheezed her mother. "Sometimes, they'd say, 'Ada, you're just like your father was, but you got your mama's eyes.'"

Maggie had never heard anything about her grandmother.

"So I would ask them, 'What you mean, I got my mama's eyes?' but then nobody would say much, just shoo me along or give me a corn-husk to make a doll with."

Maggie listened so hard her ears hurt.

“But by and by I found out what they meant, little bit there, little bit here, you know?” said Maggie’s mother. She paused. “My mama was a *white* woman!”

Maggie swallowed air.

“You heard me just right,” said her mother. “You’re grandmamma was *white*. Makes sense, if you think about it. Otherwise why are my eyes kind of green like?”

The air in the cellar was close. Maggie heard the Irish family moving about on the other side of the wall.

“Never, ever did find out *who* the white woman might be, the one who was my mama,” said Maggie’s mother. “Oh, I looked and looked at every white woman on the plantation, and at the landing. Thought for a while it might be the woman who ran the little store at the landing, but it wasn’t.”

“I don’t understand, Mama,” said Maggie. “What happened to your father?”

“You *know* I never met him, child,” said Maggie’s mother. “He was gone long before I was old enough to remember. I was brought up by all my aunts and grandmothers, only they weren’t really my aunts and grandmothers, just the best and most kindly women in the world who took care of a poor orphan in the shacks out back.”

Maggie nodded.

“I tell you now before it is too late,” said her mother. “What I learned was that my father was a slave like all of us, tall and handsome and a prince from Africa, just like *your* father was. And my mother was a young pretty white woman, not long in Maryland, come from over here someplace. Well, you know that a black slave and a white woman . . . worst of all, she was already some other man’s wife, a *buckra* with some money they said. That *buckra* man was so angry, why, he . . . he . . .”

Maggie wanted to stop her ears.

“Story was, he had my father cut like they do with . . . with bulls

and stallions . . . cut him bad, so he was no longer a man full and proper,” whispered Maggie’s mother. “And *then* that *buckra* had him hung up from a tree.”

After a while, Maggie said, “What happened to my grandmother?”

“No one rightly knows, child,” said Maggie’s mother. “The man, he wasn’t going to have such as me runnin’ around in his house, that was for sure! Couldn’t let me be seen anywhere, couldn’t let anyone back here know that his wife done got herself licked by the tar brush, now could he? Well, that ol’ plantation on the Choptank River was pretty far from anything, not even close to much else in Maryland, just lots of water and field after field of tobacco. So, he let my mama have her baby, only she had to give it over to the aunties in the shacks. And then he took my mama back to England. Neither came back again to Maryland, at least not so’s I knew of it. So, that’s how come I grew up an orphan girl, ’cept that I was happy with all my aunties and grandmothers. And then, by and by, your father came along and, well, you know the rest of the story, child.”

Maggie’s mother was crying. Maggie was too, and they held tight.

“You know, my daughter,” said Maggie’s mother. “One time I heard from the oldest of my aunties that it was a terrible scene the day they brought me back to the shacks. Oh, a terrible scene, with my mama wailin’ and all the aunties wailin’. I was only just been borned, wrapped in swaddlin’ clothes. My mama did not want to give me up, not at all. ‘Fit to break the heart of a stone,’ said that oldest auntie to me. ‘But only that the *buckra* man, he like to had no heart at all.’ So, I believe my mama *loved* me, and maybe she *loved* my daddy too, and I am sure she loves you, Maggie, wherever she is.”

Neither Maggie nor her mother could speak again for a long time. Finally, Maggie’s mother said, “Anyway, I am going to meet her real soon now, my mama. I hear the drum-spirit and all the *ndichie* telling me that, and the good Lord and all His other angels too. Soon I will meet my mama and know her again.”

Maggie's mother died two days later, at the end of June in 1814. No one paid any attention. The grand review in Hyde Park took place that week, celebrating the springtime abdication of Napoleon and his exile to Elba. The Union Jack and the Cross of St. George and all sorts of patriotic caricatures festooned lampposts across London. The quiet manner of her death further reinforced the anonymity of Maggie's mother's departure. How could she compete with the more extravagant forms of death meted out that week to the poor? Folks talked about the brewery in Soho that blew up, drowning three in a flood of porter, and of the two women in Shepherd's Ludlow who burned to death when a vat of turpentine caught on fire in a soap works. Of course, people speculated as to the culprit when a woman, who "rented out her forecourt" (as the saying had it), was found strangled in Shoreditch. But no one wondered about the passing of Maggie's mother, no more than they had wondered about her while she was alive.

"Oh Mama," cried Maggie when she found her mother that evening. "Women are as strong as elephants. . . ."

In the morning Maggie asked help from the Irish woman next door: she needed to have her mother's corpse guarded against thieves and, worse, body-snatchers, but she had to go to work. The Irish woman had to work herself, but posted her two nine-year-old sons, who did odd jobs already on the docks and were veterans of a hundred street battles. Maggie asked the head-maid for two days off, which scandalized the maid but, under the circumstances and remembering sermons from her minister, the maid asked permission from Mrs. Sedgewick, who granted the leave. The head-maid was scandalized even more when Mrs. Sedgewick appeared in the kitchen with a letter for Maggie.

"I am sorry for your loss," said Mrs. Sedgewick. "Take this as a token of my condolences."

The head-maid, the kitchen-maid, and the cook all looked hungrily at the letter, which bulged at one corner, suggesting a weight of coin

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inside. Maggie thanked Mrs. Sedgewick with an accent that hovered between upstairs and downstairs. She curtsied but not so low or so long as protocol required, then rushed from the kitchen to be with her mother in the cellar.

Dear Maggie,

Please take these coins as a small measure of help to ease you in your time of trouble. May the Lord take your mother to sit by His side forever. As the poet writes:

*Ah! sunflower, weary of time,
Who countest the steps of the sun,
Seeking after that sweet golden clime
Where the traveller's journey is done.*

With condolences,

Mrs. Sedgewick

What does she know of my mother? thought Maggie, pushing the coins around the table. *Or me? I am just a curiosity to her, the girl who does the calculus while cleaning out her chamber pots.*

“Who will clean out the chamber pots, or sift the ashes from the cinders?” said the head-maid. The kitchen-maid grumbled most of all, her Shropshire accent heavy, because she would have to do Maggie’s work. “And for no extra pay neither,” said the kitchen-maid. “I wish the mistress might give *me* sixpence in snacks but, I guess as I don’t do ’rithmetic instead of my chores, she won’t do that.”

Mr. Sedgewick chuckled when he heard this news from the footman. "Did she say that now? Not at all untypical! I only hope the staff is not too put out to muster a good supper for us," he said. He added privately, "What nonsense, my hudibrastic dove! I cannot see where your folly with this coromantee girl will ultimately debouche but, for now, since it seems harmless enough, I suppose I must permit it."

He gave the matter no further thought that day because two unusual visitors arrived shortly after Maggie left the house. The first came at noon, a young man in severe black dress, carrying a leather portfolio.

"From the Admiralty, you say?" asked Mr. Sedgewick.

"Not precisely, Mr. Sedgewick, sir, and not at liberty to say precisely," replied the young man. "I am from a very special branch of His Majesty's Government, working at present with both the Admiralty and the Office for War and the Colonies. Under-secretary Barrow asked for you himself."

"Ah, did he now?" said the lawyer.

"Yes, sir, he insisted on having you handle this, um, *delicate* situation, said you were just the man for speed, thoroughness and, above all, discretion."

Mr. Sedgewick took the portfolio.

"We have followed your good work for the Admiralty for some time, especially that concerning the Navy's dealing with the merchant marine and with City interests. Your commercial knowledge is something the Admiralty needs in particular."

The young man got up to leave, taking his nondescript hat with him. "Should you have questions, enquire after Mr. Tarleton at the Admiralty. He is, I believe, known to you, or at least to your wife. Good day, sir."

Feeling as if the wainscoting might sprout eyes and ears, Mr. Sedgewick opened the portfolio and read. "The Admiralty complains of a miscarriage of justice in Capetown," he murmured,

his finger coursing over the papers. "Seeks injunction . . . ah, seeks release of a prisoner . . . having been transported to Australia, said prisoner to be returned to London immediately . . . the court, upon consideration of new facts brought to light by the Admiralty and by the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies . . ."

Mr. Sedgewick's finger paused while he thought, *Ah*. The more serious he got, the more monosyllabic he became.

". . . hereby overrules and annuls the decision of the court in Capetown . . . prisoner to be released into the custody of the Navy, upon certain conditions enumerated herein . . . prisoner's debts in London are considerable . . . in return for the prisoner being released, the Admiralty requires prisoner's debts be conveyed to it, i.e., to have the current debt-holders paid and their claims assigned to the Crown—to be clear, the debts are *not* to be extinguished . . . conveyance must be done with the utmost of secrecy by a lawyer known and trusted by the Admiralty."

Mr. Sedgewick arched an eyebrow when he saw the list of the prisoner's creditors: some of the names were most unpleasant. Attached to the list were drafts on Praed's Bank, and a notice that the H.M.S. *Telchine* had sailed from Melbourne bound for London with the released prisoner onboard. The prisoner was named—

"James Kidlington," the lawyer read. "Well, Mr. Kidlington, I've never heard of you but you obviously know some very . . . odd individuals on the one hand, and have some very powerful friends—if that's what they are—on the other. I believe I shall enjoy making your acquaintance when your ship arrives this fall."

The second visitor to the lawyer's house in Archer Street by Pineapple Court was even stranger. He came in the late afternoon, dusty and dishevelled, and carrying a small trunk.

"Good day, sir," said the stranger, speaking in a Scottish way. "Pardon my appearance, but I came as instructed straight from the Edinburgh coach. Might I trouble you for something to drink?"

Finishing some punch, the Scotsman said, "Now sir, to come

to the point of my visit. First, you *are* the lawyer George Gervase Sedgewick?"

"I am."

"Capital! In that case, this trunk and its belongings are to be entrusted to you, by order of the court in Edinburgh."

"But what . . . ?" said Mr. Sedgewick.

"An old case, sir, a matter of a bequest long reviewed in probate, a dispute of some sort many years ago delayed it, and then, to speak frankly, it was near-forgotten for many more years, there not being any living descendant left in Scotland so far as the court could tell, and no one to pursue the case in person. Also, no money appears to have been involved, there not being any left in the estate, so that also made its resolution less pressing, in the eyes of the court. I am only a sergeant-at-arms, sir, an employee of the court, not a barrister, don't know all the facts of the matter, much less the law on it. All I know is that probate is now complete and that the contents of the trunk are for a Mr. Barnabas McDoon, merchant of London, and him having removed his place of business to the Cape of Africa, and you being his attorney, the court as required by law sent the bequest to you for its keeping in trust for the beneficiary."

Mr. Sedgewick said, "Ah."

"Took the court some time to track down Mr. McDoon and to locate you," said the court sergeant. "The court offers its apologies for not communicating earlier, which is to say, being silent all these years, and hopes Mr. McDoon will understand. Sending me direct and personal was their way of making amends. Now, my duty is discharged, here's the key to the trunk. If you'll just sign this receipt, please?"

After the Scotsman had gone, Mr. Sedgewick opened the trunk, which was packed with court documents, letters, and other papers. For the first time in the memory of the house, Mr. Sedgewick had to be called three times to supper and then he ate only a few morsels before returning to his office. He read late into the night and

continued the next day.

“By all the quirks and quilletts of the law, utterly remarkable,” he murmured. “The will and testament of Belladonna McDoon, born Brownlee . . . all letters and personal papers to be bequeathed to my son and daughter . . . including notes relating to certain visions and experiences I, Belladonna McDoon, have had, that some might deem lunatic but which assuredly are not . . . also, of greatest importance, depositions concerning the unfortunate events surrounding my dear sister’s brief sojourn in Maryland in the United States of America, as related to me by my sister herself before her death . . . my sister, Eusebianna McDoon, known to all who loved her as Sibby, married to my husband’s brother . . .”

Taking up his pen, Mr. Sedgewick wrote to Barnabas. He spent most of the day doing so.

Maggie spent the day burying her mother. With money they had always kept hidden from rent-collectors and every other creditor, Maggie paid the undertaker for the meanest of funerals—but a funeral nonetheless, not the shame of the potter’s field. She chafed at the lack of a white winding-sheet, and the fact that they started for the burial grounds at noon, which was unlucky. She knew her mother would have wanted beads or shells in the coffin, but the coffin was nailed shut before Maggie could place anything with her mother. Maggie walked alone behind the corpse-wagon, which rattled so that the coffin nearly slid off.

Mama, thought Maggie. No more peck o’ corn for you, no more pint o’ salt, and no more mistress’s call.

Pedestrians made way with ill grace. A dog gnawed a bone in the middle of the street and would not go until the undertaker shouted something at it from the head of the wagon.

Mama, no more Bee-luther-hatchee for you. You’re going home to Ginny-gall, where the drum-spirit and Ala the Mother will take you in. I have seen it, Mama, it’s a wonderful place.

THE CHOIR BOATS *Volume One of Longing For Yount*

As they passed The White Hart, the alehouse maid ran out, crying, "Maggie, I am so sorry for you! Your mother was a good woman, like Ruth in the eyes of the Lord. I cannot get free from work, and I don't have much to offer but here is a little red ribbon I got at the last fair."

Maggie, all alone behind the coffin-wagon, stopped and took the ribbon. For the first time that day, she cried. For the first time, the servant girl from The White Hart hugged Maggie.

Mama, Moses had a Cushite wife, so maybe there is hope, I just don't know. Maybe you'll find out the answers where you're going.

They passed butcher shops and fishmongers still decked out to celebrate Napoleon's defeat. Maggie saw a baked sheep's head with turnips and onions, a cock turkey wreathed with sausages, turbot baked in cream, scotched pike in jelly. She calculated that Mrs. Sedgewick's gift would just about cover a wake-meal. She would buy everything she saw and bring it home to share with the Irish family that evening.

Mama, ol' Heeg, the squinch-owl, he's come out from under the cottonwood roots. He is lookin' to catch me, put my soul in a bottle to hang from the tree. Can't let him do that, Mama.

Maggie walked alone behind the wagon as they passed lime pits, laystalls, and brickworks on the way to the New Burying Ground on the outskirts of the city.

Time to sing for real now, Mama. I have to find the other singers. Choir of us, Mama, and the first songs we've already sung.

The wagon entered the burying ground. Maggie followed. The sun shone and Maggie cried.

Goodbye, Mama. I love you.



About the Author

DANIEL A. RABUZZI

Daniel A. Rabuzzi studied folklore and mythology in college and graduate school, and keeps one foot firmly in the Other Realm. His fiction and poetry have appeared in *Sybil's Garage*, *Shimmer*, *ChiZine*, *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*, *Abyss & Apex*, *Goblin Fruit*, *Mannequin Envy* and *Scheherazade's Bequest*. He has also had twenty scholarly and professional articles published on subjects ranging from fairytale to finance. A former banker, Daniel earned his doctorate in 18th-century history, with a focus on issues of family, gender and commerce in northern Europe. He is now an executive at a global non-profit organization that provides educational materials to children from under-resourced and traditionally marginalized communities. Daniel lives in New York City with his wife and soul-mate, the artist Deborah A. Mills, along with the requisite two cats.

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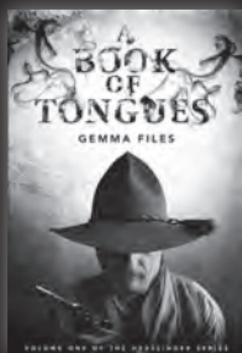


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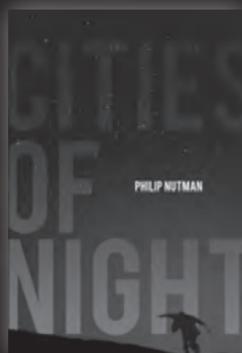
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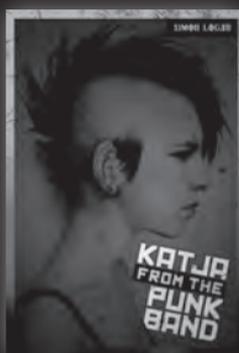
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