

TIMESCAPE



SOMEWHERE IN TIME  
LIES A TERRIBLE AND PERFECT TRUTH...

# AT THE EYE OF THE OCEAN

HILBERT SCHENCK







## *“What Is the Eye of the Ocean?”*

Directness seemed appropriate.

She cocked her head and I could see her eyes peeping out brighter and beadier than any bantam hen's. “A place of wisdom, Abel Roon. Where the ocean and man can speak . . . together.”

“And where is that place?” My voice was tight and quiet, and Hope put her hand over mine.

“In the other ocean,” said the old woman casually. “The whalemén have been there, but it means naught to them.”

I took out from under my arm the fine, thick atlas I had borrowed from Judge Folger's library and opened it to a general map of the Pacific Ocean. “Could you show me where on this map you think it is?”

Mother Feeney cackled at that. “You think it be just a place on a map, Abel Roon? You know better. It is in your own eye too, young master.”

“It is not a place, then?” I said in puzzlement.

“It is a place and not a place,” answered Mother Feeney at once.

**Books by Hilbert Schenck**

**Wave Rider**

**At the Eye of the Ocean**

**Published by TIMESCAPE/POCKET BOOKS**

# **AT THE EYE OF THE OCEAN**

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**HILBERT SCHENCK**

**A TIMESCAPE BOOK**

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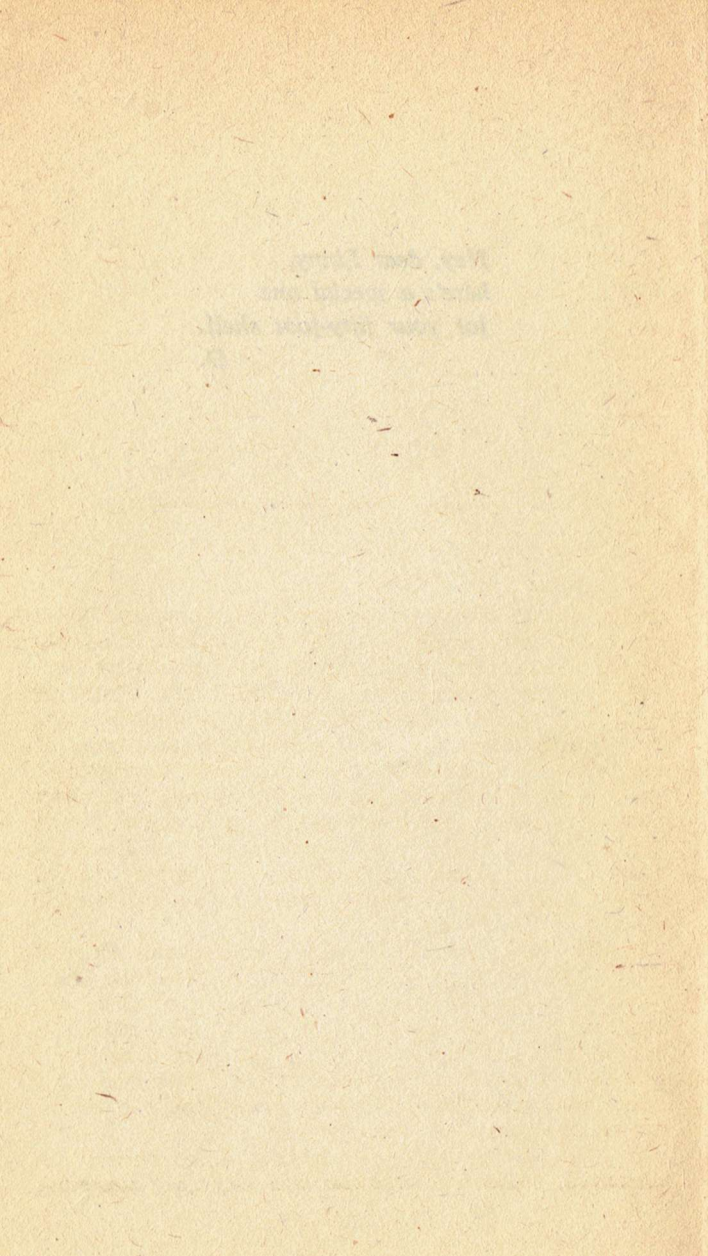
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*Hey, dear Linny,  
here's a special one  
for your fifty-foot shelf.*

*D.*





## Abel Roon

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The island of Nashawena, on which I was born and where I spent my first thirteen years, is one of a chain of islands, the Elizabeths, that stretch fifteen miles southwest from the turbulent passage of Woods Hole. The winter of 1828 was a harsh one on Cape Cod and my birth during a northeast storm a grim surprise and near-disaster to my parents, childless in seventeen years of marriage. Nashawena, then as now, is an island entirely given over to the raising of sheep, and during my boyhood over a thousand of these stupid beasts roamed its three-mile length and one-mile breadth, always seeking ways to fall from the cliffs, get caught in the east end bog, or freeze to death almost anywhere.

Fortunately for me, as I learned later, Sarah Allen of Cuttyhunk, the island west of us that completes the Elizabeth chain, arrived across the narrow gut of Canapitsit Channel in time to save both my mother and myself. This fine woman and excellent midwife had learned her trade in New Bedford before marrying Isaiah Allen, the pilot, and removing to Cuttyhunk, where a few houses clustered on the bare central hill of that small island.

My thin, grey mother, in her early forties when I was conceived, could not force me into the chill, blustering

Nashawena winter until Sarah Allen's skilled hands opened that short but deadly passage. But those screams and hurts I do not remember and, indeed, I think little enough of Nashawena now, even though it lies only a few miles to the south. Like other children of those islands I owe little to such treeless, barren places, burned in dry summers until we islanders would desperately seek fodder on the main at great cost for transportation, or blasted by January gales that bewildered and coerced the sheep to cluster in foolish places and die. When the Englishmen first came to these shores the islands were wooded and probably beautiful with their deer and wild birds, but the depredations of the sheep, with their hard, efficient teeth that crop closer than a skilled scythe, has stripped away all cover, leaving a rolling wind-blasted stubble.

We lived a mean and dull existence on such a place. The few months of summer were warm enough, but the sheep required shearing and washing, and our food gardens, cow, and sickly chickens needed constant attention. There were three families on the island in those years, but I was much younger than the other children and my only friends were the few my age on Cuttyhunk, where I seldom was able to go. The only actual money we obtained came from passing coasting vessels to whom we sold food-stuffs, wool items and whatever else could be exchanged for cash. Cash was needed to patronize the busy tavern at Tarpaulin Cove that lay five miles to our east on great Naushon Island, that largest of the Elizabeths that forms the eastward half of the Elizabeth chain. In fairness to my father, I suppose I should say that he always brought his rum, or some of it, back so that he and my mother could spend an evening of stupor and cheer huddled in front of the driftwood fire, simpering or dozing. Probably it was after an especially successful event of this sort that I was conceived, a child, not of love, but of a moment of prosperity and the distillers' chemistry of desire.

Yet, if they were not happy at these frequent bouts, they at least forgot for a few hours the thin and daunting life of our island, the scream of bitter wind under the door, the fine snow drifting, unmelted, into the corners of our meanly built and tiny house.

This life and this place were too grey and narrow to make us really hate one another. Such strong emotions seem more appropriate to the New Bedford main or Nantucket where one may win and lose and where matters of



property and reputation have meaning. Except for the rum, no windfall or happenstance could relieve the cold conditions of our place, the mindless, never-ending demands of the sheep.

Yet, not hating my father, I feared him greatly, for he was mad. I knew this, I suppose, from my earliest days. My father and I shared a strange vision and, just as I recognized it in him, he could sense it flickering around my life like fox fire in a schooner's rigging. And this knowledge added to my fear, for if my father had become demented by his own sensitivity, what possible reaction other than violence could he have for a son he saw deeply stricken as well?

Now I did not then, and do not now, regard myself as stricken. My father was raised in a fundamentalist religious family at Brewster on Cape Cod, and was unable to connect his vision, his gift if you like, to what he thought was true. He seemed to believe himself possessed by evil, by the antichrist. Perhaps I most regretted my disgust at father's drunken nights the first time I reached drunkenness myself and discovered that liquor dulls my gift, my sensitivity, very much. How my poor, driven father must have hated the two horns of his dilemma, to struggle endlessly with what he regarded as possession by pagan sin, or to gain relief using the demon of intoxication, itself a work of the devil in many minds. Mother, of course, never understood any of this, and to her, the rum must have seemed a gift indeed. It lit her pale cheeks and sparked her eyes, at least in the first hours, and must have offered visions inside her poor head that she could not possibly remember in the windy, grey mornings afterward.

What I would have become without the Orange Wreck, I do not know, but I was certainly wrong in saying that *no* windfall could *ever* change our pinched lives. When the *Estrella*, a Spanish bark, came ashore at Fox Point on the East End of Nashawena in a March southeasterly storm, our lives were surely turned to a path we could not possibly then imagine.

The Spaniard was an old vessel and she opened up rapidly in the hammer of the surf. Her crew had abandoned her earlier and, we learned later, fetched up on the Lobsterville shore of the Vineyard. But it was her cargo that was the real miracle, a hold full of oranges from Cádiz. That next morning, thousands of bright orange



spheres, rolling and bumping in the surge, covered Vineyard Sound with an extraordinary, moving, golden carpet.

But the local citizenry from Cuttyhunk, Nashawena and the other islands hardly noticed this magical change, for we were intently collecting the valuable cargo. The water was numbing, ice cold, yet we hardly noticed, dashing in with gunny sacks into which we stuffed the bright, hard fruit. My mother screamed with joy as each sack was dumped into our sheep-drawn cart. What nights of rum-delights she saw in that tumbling orange harvest! What dreams might flow from each happy rumble of oranges pouring into the growing pile! The old *Estrella*, her masts down in a tumble about her decks, her planks splayed out, lay in a halo of golden cargo. As the morning grew brighter, so did the crowd of salvagers grow larger, boats tacking offshore scooping with dip nets and row-boats paddling about in clumps of bright fruit.

Naturally, the price of oranges along the south shore of Cape Cod fell to almost nothing. We fed the spoiling ones to the sheep but managed to save enough in the icehouse to let the market recover, then peddled them from our small lugsail boat to the coasters. And with our sudden wealth, each in my family achieved something of his heart's desire. My father was able to turn his occasional drunken night to a more or less continual half-stupor. My mother could now spin her stiff wool while most of her mind flittered in a world of gentle winds and women in silks who stood outside tall, white homes.

In my case, I was able to go over to Cuttyhunk to school. For a few pennies a week, Mrs. Sarah Allen would teach any child at her house and, when I arrived that fall after the *Estrella's* fortunate stranding, there were four other scholars at various stages of scholarship, undergoing Sarah Allen's stern and excellent tutelage. This strong and good woman had learned a simple lesson; that reading and the comprehension of words is best taught by material that the pupil truly wants to read. Thus, those who became involved with the history of Israel hunched in a corner over the Old Testament while those readily inspired by moral instruction might work along through *Pilgrim's Progress* or possibly Milton's great poem of paradise and purgatory. If religious uplift failed, there were the bloodier plays of Shakespeare or perhaps the scouring of England by the Knights of the Round Table. In extreme cases, there were even magazines of recent is-

sue containing exciting, if perfectly worthless, stories of warfare in Spain and of great Gothic castles where young women faced supernatural adversaries.

Sarah Allen found my hatch cover to learning in the myths of Greece. I had learned the rudiments of reading with my mother from a McGuffey, but when Mrs. Allen tried me on a chapbook retelling of the myth of Troy I was immersed. All that fall, winter and spring, I rowed across the short channel to Cuttyhunk and walked the mile to the village. In Mrs. Allen's front room there were hinged desk tops that dropped down from the walls and chairs that lifted down from pegs. We read, aloud to Mrs. Allen or silently to ourselves, or else penned themes assigned by our teacher. These forced us to rapidly improve our penmanship, for remedial practice with the pen took time away from reading.

I devoured the stories of Greece and its gods. I was twelve years old, yet I immediately saw that at the core of all these ancient tales was a single fact; a person possessed, given a vision, holding a gift or power—in short, a person exactly like my father or myself. And it was not just at Troy or on the road to Corinth that such seizures might be expected but in Scottish castles and on Danish battlements too, for Shakespeare saw the same extraordinary truth; that special sight and special gifts lie at the core of life. And then the Bible . . . but why go on? Without its revelation, its miracle, its belief in extraordinary human power, the Bible is nothing. It is hard for me to describe the joy that seized me that long, cold winter on our barren island. Infrequently I had a wonderful dream in which I was able, by simply willing it, to float up off the ground, to become weightless, and then to move about, over older, treed, green Nashawena at my whim. But the most remarkable part of the dream was the warm, enfolding, confident sense of accomplishment at my beautiful trick. It was a joy of power and a joy of control over one's body and it led to the only bad part of the dream, that moment of black disappointment when I realized that the feeling had led me false and that I held no such power and never would. During that winter of reading at Mrs. Allen's school, I permanently gained something of that same elusive satisfaction as I realized that gifts and powers are not madness or ruinous destinies but mighty, dangerous tools.

So the next summer I finally spoke my thoughts to



Sarah Allen. And I asked her why, if all the great writings of the world, all its myths, spoke of the possessed, the gifted, the sighted, we never met such people and they did not seem to exist, as far as I was able to tell, at this age of the world.

This was surely a ridiculous presumption on my part; that in my mean and isolated life, I had seen enough and lived enough to conclude that wonder had died, that the rough and stupid men I met on the decks of the coasters were the only remaining lords of the earth.

Sarah Allen did not smile at my questions. Her strong, round face, framed by tight, white curls, had peered steadily at many odd and desperate moments. Whether gods spoke through men or men became gods she did not know and, if the truth were told, probably did not care. She only understood that there were persons alive who should be dead and persons gone whose only failing was a loss of will. Expecting nothing, Sarah Allen was not surprised at miracles. She worked at that triple point where birth, death, and pain coalesce and where special sights and powers are not exotic myths from a golden age of superstition but the simple currency of moment-to-moment survival.

"There are other matters in the stories, Abel, beside persons with sight," she said mildly. We stood, that June morning, looking eastward from her porch to brown and green Nashawena, itself deceptively benign in the gentle, southwest wind. The many wretched sheep grazing on the hills facing us seemed only tiny, grey puffs of smoke from this distance. This was the last day of school for that term, and I knew I would not be back in the fall. The orange money would be long spent by then.

Suddenly, in desperation, I said, "I have sight, Missus Allen." There was not another person in the world, least of all my father, to whom I could have said that. There were many persons then, as now, who hold such gifts demonic and dangerous.

Sarah Allen put her arm warmly around my head. "And what do you see, Abel?" she asked me.

"The ocean," I answered at once. And thinking how stupid that sounded, I rushed on, "I see its motion and how it meets the land. Sometimes, it . . . shines and I can see the waves inside it. And the fish are like . . . spots or flashes."

She looked down at me seriously. "Does the ocean . . . speak . . . Abel?"

"No . . . not with words . . . it connects all within itself." I floundered for words to express what can only be experienced.

"But it lives?"

I thought about that. It lived, all right, but not as we live. Then, would that . . . other . . . be life? "I don't know," I said, looking up at her strong, simple face. "It is . . . all of itself. It knows itself."

Mrs. Allen laughed and hugged my head again. She smelled of clean soap and dried summer flowers. "So Poseidon lives, Abel? The world is not as old and tired as we thought!"

I tried to consider Poseidon. The flow through Canapitsit Channel was northward and I saw it . . . spreading out into the open roadstead of Cuttyhunk Harbor, then into Buzzards Bay, all fifty miles of it no more than a great eddying wheel that revolved and turned other wheels within itself. The whole of the sounds separating the Vineyard and Nantucket from the main also turned, but they flowed as well. This great extent, joined to other greater volumes, was connected in a whole scale of motions and these meshed in the ever-greater movement of the deep, offshore waters. Within this whole darted and glowed the fish and other living things. They both responded to the motions and were independent of them, bright lines that strung the masses together . . . dark beads on gold wire . . . I didn't know how to answer her.

"The stories, the myths, don't really tell it," I tried to explain. "Sometimes, there's a kind of glory inside it. A glow of, well, rightness, of everything fitting together. But no person. No naked man with a fish spear."

"Is there fear, Abel?"

I knew the fear was what had driven my father from his senses. You have to understand the fear to control it. It is our special gift, that fear. You must put aside fairness and justice to meet that fear, and human pity and the triumph of courage, the mercy of God and the light of hope. The antichrist would sneer and denounce such things, but in the life of the ocean they do not relate. It is not failure of pity, or hatred of pity, but simply the non-existence of pity. That, and the great and complicated strength, both lead to fear. My father could not leave it, and he lived on bare, bitter Nashawena, and he feared it



and so he drunkenly minded sheep. At age thirteen, what was I to say to Sarah Allen?

"Fear of strangeness. Yes."

"The myths are what are called metaphors, Abel. Stories in which men and beasts represent other things. Fear can be controlled by writing it into stories."

I shook my head. The great whorls and masses of the waters around us interleafed and moved. From the corners of my eyes I could see the sparks of fish cutting through twinkling schools of bait. This was not our joy. Something larger . . . and harder.

"It is cold and beautiful," I said finally. "And there can be warmth too." How did I know that suddenly? Sarah Allen's strong, warm body against my side? Suddenly I desired warmth intensely.

"Abel. Do not speak of this to others," said Mrs. Allen softly. "I will see Judge Folger on Naushon this summer. He," and she smiled very kindly at me, "he has a certain sight too, Abel. And he is very old."

That single mention of Judge Folger set my life's course a fortnight thence. It was at the height of summer, when even Nashawena achieves a certain rolling softness, that my life there came to an end. I had watched with sick apprehension the steadily dwindling orange money and one hot July evening it, as represented by the last of the rum from the tavern on Naushon, was gone. My father's eyes were bloodshot as he stared at my mother and then at me. "You will earn the money to pay back for your schooling, Abel," he said harshly. "We should have quite a supply of dollars now but for Sarah Allen, who hardly needs such new money!"

Watching my chance I silently crept from the house and walked softly down toward the small harbor on the north side of the island. The moon was only the thinnest crescent but the stars hung brilliant over the entire dome of sky and the warm water splashed softly on the rocks. Large fish moved in the bay, fireflies of activity, while the small animals of the foam turned and rolled in a glow of life. And then I heard him behind me. He loomed dark against the stars and he carried a double barreled gun. He was a thin man, my father, gaunt and hollow, eaten by sheep and the rum. Now I could see his eyes burn hotly against the dim skylight. I stood against a rock at the edge of the water and he came toward me, staring at me.

"Abel. School is not for the likes of us, Abel. We must lie quiet, Abel."

I could not speak and knew I should not. He was only a few paces from me, raising the gun. "Thee and I, Abel, we are not clean, Abel. We. . . ."

The gun barrel came up and, flinching, I felt a sense of the water, its lapping and touching the shore, so many miles of it. Unimagined and unlooked-for, yet steadily, the light pulse . . . came! There was no sound to it, no sense of explosion or disruption. Only a pulse, like a great throb of blood, and the ocean, all around that island, in the harbor and as far as I could see, glowed. The light bloomed steadily and when it could grow no more it glowed brighter still! I looked at my father and his pinched face now seemed struck by the noon sun, white and flat, even brighter than that.

"No Abel, no. . . ." He dropped the gun muzzle and took a half step back. I could see every detail, the cocked flint on the right barrel, the dirty-grey homespun pants, the veins, red and broken on his nose. "No . . ." he said again.

At that moment, a scream came from my left. "You'd murder him, would you! You bloody-minded loon!" And my mother burst through the bushes beside him.

I turned and ran! Somehow in that terrible instant I did not know whom she was talking to. I ran to the landing and the rickety dock. I was untying our open boat with the lugsail when the first shot came far behind me.

When the second barrel went off, far back in the dark brush below our house, I vomited from the boat. My body knew perfectly well what those explosions meant, but I had not the courage to see it in my mind.

The southwest breeze took our leaky, ugly scow north from the harbor, then east along the shores of the Elizabeth chain. The water burned and sparked with life and creamed white and lively under the heavy forefoot of our awkward boat. It was a fair wind that night, light but steady. The low, dark mass of Pasque Island passed me to starboard, a smaller, barer and even more depleted island than Nashawena. Then I came to the west end of Naushon, and the trees and hills of that beautiful and fruitful island, uncorrupted by wandering sheep or the scrabbings of weak men. The wind held steady and I drove along Naushon's northern shores, smelling the wild honey-suckle and fruited trees, still not daring to think.



In those days, Hadleys Harbor, the perfectly protected, small-boat anchorage at the east end of Naushon, could be reached from the north through a small passage between Naushon and Uncatena, one of the lesser islands that forms the western side of Woods Hole. I turned in, ran past the close shores, my rig scuffing the tree branches, and entered Hadleys, a dark punchbowl of still water.

Naushon House stood dark and silent up the hill in the first predawn light, its many towers and porches a mazy wonder against the sky. I tied my sailboat to the large dock and ran up the huge lawn to that gigantic, silent house. Not thinking of anything, I had nothing to say when I came upon him, standing on the wide porch, the red tip of his cigar winking orange as he drew in the smoke. We faced each other there at the big, double front doors of Naushon House, and all I could do was repeat my name, Abel Roon, to him.

People then said many things about Judge Moses Folger. That he had been a drummer boy with Washington at Yorktown. That he had been at the bloody fight south of Nantucket between the American privateer *Prince de Neufchatel* and boats of the British frigate *Endymion* during the late maritime war. The Judge owned various properties; vessels, parts of railroads, banks in Boston and more. And as the lord of Naushon, he ran a tight, efficient ship. People whispered about smuggling and traffic in contraband. Judge Folger did not depend on the police of the main or the Vineyard but kept order in his domain with hard-faced men on horseback, a brace of dragoon repeating pistols across their saddle pommels. Judge Folger was a very private man at a time when such a stance was still possible.

He stood only a little taller than me, and I was then just slightly over five feet, but he was stocky. It was impossible to guess his age, for his round face was smooth and his eyes frighteningly alert, peering, almost colorless, always in motion. Now these eyes took me in, snapping up and down coldly as they did this. But his voice was friendly. "So, Abel Roon. Sarah Allen has told me of you. I welcome you, sir, even though you call upon me early."

Was he making fun of me? I had to say something to him. Finally I managed, "My father tried to kill me. With a gun. He . . . he fired it twice." I waited.

Judge Folger stared out at the expanse of lawn around his sprawling house. "Abel," he said finally, "if you and I

were to start preparing some eggs and bacon in the summer kitchen, Mrs. Robinson will soon hear us and save us from ruining good food. Come."

To one who has spent his life in a three-room shack into which cold light could penetrate through knot holes and past warped sills, Naushon House was simply awesome. The great central reception hall stretched back and back to a many-windowed room they called the solarium. Filled with flowers and flowering shrubs, it drenched the whole of the central part of the house with the piercing sweetness of honeysuckle, lilac, and flowering wisteria. To the left the house rambled away to kitchens and pantries, butteries and storage areas. Halls coursed through the house, up and down stair flights, running past bedrooms and porches. Parts of the house were only opened when social guests came, and other parts were never opened. The downstairs ceilings were high and the core of the house was filled with light, but turning a corner, one might come suddenly on a small, dark space eerily filled with furniture and boxes covered with cotton sheeting.

Mrs. Robinson, a tall, thin woman with a face as sharp as a knicked ax, was already up, and soon Judge Folger and I were busy with eggs fried in butter, crisp bacon, and hot biscuits with English marmalade. I had never eaten smoke-cured bacon before and found it delicious.

"I think Abel will have a bit more bacon, Amanda," said Judge Folger cheerfully, then excused himself and left. Somehow he had received a signal from outside the house, for as I ate my second helping of tasty bacon I saw him through a window talking earnestly on the lawn with his chief factotum of Naushon, Peleg Robinson. The bacon turned to dirt in my mouth. I knew I would soon have to face the truth of what I had left behind on Nashawena.

After breakfast Judge Folger and I walked back outside and he led me toward the middle of the great lawn, far from the house or other buildings. When he stopped and turned, his face was serious yet filled with a warm kindness. "Tell me just what happened last night, Abel," he said quietly.

So I did tell, about my schooling and the rum and my father's threat about the money. About the gun and, yes, about the pulse, the marvelous light inside the water. Then my mother's screams and the shots and my sick fear.

"Abel, I will not spare you on this. What is done is



done," he said. "Peleg Robinson has just talked with your neighbor, Zephania Fuller. Your father shot your mother and then killed himself with the other barrel. What you sensed, alas, was true."

So I finally took it completely in. Judge Folger put his arm around my shoulders and let me weep. If the truth of my inner heart could be prized out, I suppose I wept as much for my own uselessness as for the loss of my sad parents. In truth I wept for the smallness of our lives and the bitter sense of failure that must have seized my father in his last mad moment. How terrible it is to see yourself as nothing!

"Abel, I wish you to stay here with us, at Naushon House. I have sent Peleg to Nashawena to bring your belongings here and to arrange matters there with the neighbors. If you do not object, I think it best that we conduct the burials at once and as quietly as possible. Headstones would be inappropriate, I think. Since I am a coroner in Dukes County, there will be no problem with the death certificates."

Judge Folger spoke firmly as we walked back toward the house. "You, my boy, must continue to live south of Cape Cod, and such events as these tend to stick in some foolish persons' minds, especially if they are prolonged. As you will discover, the policies of Naushon House tend to favor the living. Now, Mrs. Robinson will show you your room and give you a tour of the house. There is much work to do here, Abel, but we will talk of that this afternoon."

I was never left alone that first day. Mrs. Robinson, her icy face at least attempting to register some warmth, led me everywhere and I followed more or less blindly, trying to keep track of the floors and hallways and turnings of Naushon House.

After a lunch for which I had little appetite, Judge Folger returned and led me back into the depths of the staff quarters at the north end of the house. We followed a winding, unfinished hallway that led downward, a few steps at a time, when the Judge suddenly stopped and looked at me. "When you told me of the pulse of light around Nashawena, Abel, you told me a secret that some might use to hurt you. Now I do the same. Here is our great secret which I entrust to you completely." And so saying, he carefully pulled what appeared to be three large nails partly out of a thick joist and swung open a

hidden door, so cleverly matched that the joints disappeared, when it was closed, behind other parts of the wall structure.

Behind this door lay a room; low, long and rambling, it seemed to follow the path of the hallway on the other side of the wall. One end was filled with mattresses and bedding, but at the other was a table and chairs, and the whole was lit by the brilliant, steady, white light of several spermaceti oil lamps. Three people sat at the table, staring up at us. They were Negro persons, a young man and woman and a little girl, perhaps eight, with her short hair done up in many calico bows.

"Come and meet our guests, Abel," said Judge Folger, pulling the door shut and setting the nails back into place from inside. "This is Luke, his wife Samantha, and their daughter, Rachel. May I introduce Abel, my friends, who will act as mate on your trip to the main tonight?"

Luke rose and held out his hand. "Thank you for helping us, Abel," he said in a soft, slurring speech.

As I dumbly took his warm, gentle hand in mine, Judge Folger stared at me. "Do you know who these people are, Abel?" he said, and his voice was now thin and hard.

I nodded stupidly. "They are black, African slaves," I answered softly.

Judge Folger shook his head bitterly. "Black and slaves, yes, but not African. They are Americans, born in Georgia, Abel. Tell Abel what you did there, Luke."

"Ah worked in the big house, suh. Ah drove and taught the young master's children to read."

"You see," said Judge Folger bitterly, "a school teacher, like Sarah Allen! And Samantha, a cook and housekeeper, like Peleg's good wife. And their daughter to be sold when she is twelve since there is not enough work to justify her food and value at that plantation." The Judge's voice went coldly on. "What do you think the value of you and your family might be at an Atlanta auction, Luke?"

"Ah should think about two thousand dollahs, suh."

I was astonished. That huge sum would buy a large fishing vessel, equip and man it, and make its captain completely independent. Why would anyone pay so much simply to have their children taught and their meals cooked?

Judge Folger nodded angrily. "These are valuable per-



sons, Abel. What they call in the South"—and his voice showed bitter disgust—"house darkies. You don't whip or starve them, any more than you'd harness a thoroughbred to a stone boat." He spoke grimly now. "There are men afloat and ashore right now at Tarpaulin who will slit throats for two hundred dollars, never mind the two thousand. So we have these rooms. We know each other only by first names. And there are other precautions, Abel, that you will learn about."

Mrs. Robinson soon appeared with an evening meal of spicy ham, cheese, Naushon apples and thick bread. Judge Folger, who had been sitting talking to Luke, rose and put his hand on the Negro's shoulder. "I think the wind is fair, Luke my friend, but if you or your good family are not ready sailors, you might wish to carry the food and eat at least some at the other end. Come, Abel."

The little girl, who had said nothing throughout our visit suddenly lifted her hand and moved her black fingers up and down the smallest amount at me. "Good-bye Abel," she said in a high, tiny voice.

I waved and smiled. "I will see you again, Rachel," I called.

The sun was lower when we walked back on the lawn of Naushon House. It was a quiet, golden day and the bay and sound were spotted with shipping, sails full but not pulling hard. Judge Folger looked at me without expression. "Abel, what I will say now, I will never say again, but I think it must be said. Especially considering what you will be doing here with us. Why did you run, last night, Abel? Your father had lowered the gun muzzle?"

I gave a sob. I tried to remember how it had been. Finally I said, "My mother . . . screamed . . . at us. I . . . couldn't face them both . . . together . . . I was frightened."

Judge Folger looked at me steadily. "The pulse of light. Did you . . . cause it, Abel?"

"I don't know . . . I must have."

"Yes, you must have. You had controlled, for a moment, some profound power. You knew that? And yet you ran?"

I could now only nod. How could I have stopped their deaths? Yet, was Judge Folger saying I should have tried?

"Abel, no man can blame you for running, and I do not blame you. I want you to see that there was another,

harder course, one that might have left them alive, one that also might have seen you shot. The way this applies to our tasks at Naushon House I will explain. You have met three of our guests and you will meet many more as they pass through our hands here. There is a simple rule about these guests that I have established, Abel. The Robinsons understand and agree to it, so do the others you will meet."

He paused and looked intently around his small but lovely empire. "The only considerations that will decide all your dealing with out guests is first, their freedom, and second, their safety. To insure these two essential things you will, if necessary, exchange your life, the lives of any of us, the safety and secrecy of Naushon House, or your own reputation. If the situation leaves no choice and you must kill a police officer or sheriff, revenue official or member of any state or United States force, then it is to be instantly done! You will perjure yourself and lie to all officials, sign false oaths or documents, and conceal from every person at every level any hint of our guests or their destinations."

Judge Folger gripped my arm. "You see, Abel, how readily a former judge of the Superior Court can change his stripes. We are all criminals here, not just violating federal law every busy day of the year, but performing a great and important political act." He grew excited. "These good folk in our secret room are blood running from a wound, Abel. That wound will open. The border states will drain them off in the West. We will force an end to abomination, Abel! With patience and firmness and nerve. And so, Abel, if your . . . gift . . . appears again at some tight, future corner, use it, seize it, whatever the consequences!" And his eyes flamed at me. "You are in luck, Abel Roon! Everything you do from now on will have large importance . . . because you will hold the freedom of innocent, honest men and women always in your hands. Sir, I ask you now frankly, will you join us in this?"

Join them? After all that had happened that confusing and terrible day I could only turn and desperately hug Judge Folger. "Make me as you are!" I said passionately in his ear, totally overwhelmed by love.

So began the first day of my service to Judge Folger. After supper I dozed on a couch outside the solarium until Peleg Robinson woke me in the late evening with a



brusque word. Silently we went to the hidden room and quickly helped Luke and his family pack their belongings.

Our destination that night was Hyannisport. Vessels moving toward Cape Cod from the South attempt to make landfall at Gay Head on the Vineyard or Cuttyhunk Light and then move up Vineyard Sound, through Nantucket Sound, finally returning to the open ocean and the deadly backside of the Cape at Monomoy. Most of these overloaded, unhandy vessels seek harbor where they can enter and anchor readily to wait out bad weather or wrong currents in the sounds. The best of these is Tarpaulin Cove on the south side of Naushon. Perfectly protected from northeast and providing a partial lee to southwest, Tarpaulin is a natural harbor of refuge in winter and summer. But Judge Folger would allow no transfer of guests there. For one thing, Tarpaulin at that time was enough of a town to have a customs agent, a federal snooper who, as Judge Folger explained to me, was required to report the interstate flight of slaves to Washington while he charged duty on importing the property. Also, residents of the other Elizabeth Islands—my father had been an example—tended to appear often at the tavern and would soon recognize any regular arrangements involving local people.

Hyannisport, about halfway along the south Cape, was ideally protected from northeast and therefore a winter haven. The government had attempted to protect the roadstead against the summer southwesterlies by a costly bit of offshore rock breakwater, but on stiff days the anchorage was lively.

South across Nantucket Sound at Holmes Hole on the Vineyard was another large anchorage, fine in the summer but a funnel with its open end pointing north.

Now I learned another of the secrets of Naushon House: the tunnel that led from one of the huge dirt cellars beneath the ground to emerge at a locked shed a few feet above the cut I had used to enter Hadleys. Shored and braced with driftwood and ship's timbers, the small passage forced us to move one behind the other, stooping and smelling the damp earth. A ladder led up to the trap inside the small tool shed, and after we had assembled there, Peleg Robinson opened the door and led us quickly on board *Hero*, a trim cutter moored at the bank, and an essential part of the Naushon naval forces.

*Hero* in time became my own command and there can

never be another boat like that one. She honored her builders, herself, and her captain, sweet-tempered and bold, steady as a rock at any point of the wind and forgiving as no other craft I ever saw to fools who waited too long to pull sail off her. She was about twenty-six feet along the hull, six tons burthen but with a large bowsprit, almost double-ended with a small counter. Inside she was filled with surprises. The decking beneath her cockpit could conceal a number of people lying flat, not comfortably, but in case of search. She had no keel, but a large iron centerboard that ran half the length of the hull and hung on a giant bolt set in solid oak forward. With this and a neat folding rudder, *Hero* could sail in less than two feet of water, although doing this reaching to windward had the breathless feeling of skating on the first ice of West End Pond. There were closed panels behind which cutlasses and firearms were hidden, and the mast was cleverly and not obviously stepped and hinged on deck so *Hero* could duck behind a low headland. In total, a smuggler's dream vessel.

Guests arrived at Naushon on north-moving cargo schooners. They might be taken off at Hyannisport or Holmes Hole, but sometimes the coaster might run up Buzzards Bay, then would lay in along the north shore of Naushon, masked from seaward by a line of rocky islands, the Weepeckets, and signal Naushon House in cipher, using a bull's-eye lantern. We then would run out in a shallop as the larger vessel lay with her sails backed, and take off the guests from under her counter, scooting them into the same entrance to Hadleys that I had used, then leading them underground to the house.

The ideal arrangement, of course, was passage direct from a Southern port to Canada, and those guests we would never see. Such direct runs were uncommon, and so Naushon House served to remove guests from vessels whose destination was New Bedford or Boston and put them aboard vessels, usually originating in New York, heading offshore to Halifax and other Canadian ports.

The run to Hyannisport that night was swift and easy, the south wind giving us a good, full reach at maximum speed. Peleg Robinson let me handle *Hero* most of the time and already I loved her completely.

At three in the morning we came like a ghost, the gaff peak dropped and all the jibs off her, under the high hill of Hyannisport while Peleg stood forward and answered a



blinking light shore. Back and forth went the signals and finally he turned and indicated that I should move in on the shore light. Hyannisport is bounded on the west by a great marsh that divides the heavily wooded Squaw Island from the main. We entered this wild place with our feet pulled fully up at an indent called Halls Creek, and a few yards in we softly grounded and several men appeared on the bank.

Peleg helped Luke and his family ashore, and they immediately disappeared into the high cattails with the strangers, one of whom stayed behind.

"This is Abel Roon, Alonzo," said Peleg Robinson to the huge man. Then, turning to me, "Alonzo Scudder, Abel, has a safe house here. If at any time I cannot be found in an emergency, you should come here and find Mr. Scudder."

The two men could not have been more different. True, they were the same height, but there all similarity vanished. Peleg Robinson was thin and wiry, strong as an ox and with huge hands. He was completely humorless, a fanatic, bold and hard. His face, like his wife's, was as firm and unchanging as an edged tool. Alonzo Scudder was all fat and fun, a big red face and a wide grin, white hair in all directions, and a roaring laugh like a bull. I would see Scudder often as a social guest at Naushon House parties for he was an important publican on the south Cape as well as a major supplier of food and gear to coastwise shipping.

He clapped me on the shoulder. "Abel Roon, delighted, sir! I think we need new blood in this business. But, Peleg, he is thin, sir. Your good wife will have to take that in hand. Ah, the biscuits with honey and of course, those pancakes. Abel, they will have you as big as me in no time."

"He can sail well enough," said Peleg Robinson in his expressionless way. "When he gets his feet, I think he and Billy can make this trip, at least if the weather is reasonable. I will teach him your ciphers and let him bring us in two more times."

Alonzo Scudder rubbed his several chins in doubt. "He is young to command Uncle Billy, Peleg."

Peleg shrugged. "Billy is less mad than we, Alonzo. He wears madness as a cloak."

Alonzo laughed but his face was serious in the thin light of the dark lantern. "Billy is a Folger, I am certain of it

Peleg. He is Shubael Folger, bos'n of the *de Neufchatel*. Moses and he were together that bloody night. Something happened to Billy, there or later."

Peleg made no expression or gesture. "That part of the past is of no interest to Moses Folger. If it is ever discussed when there are social guests at Naushon House, the Judge will never join such discussion."

"Indeed, Peleg, I know that as well as anyone," said Alonzo cheerfully. "Well, I think we may let Abel have a try with Uncle Billy. They do, after all, share a certain nearness to childhood, Abel on the one end and Billy on the other."

This arrangement settled, Peleg and I turned to board *Hero* when Alonzo spoke once more. "One more point, Peleg, and yes, Abel too. Without discussing how, I have learned of an estimate that through the several routes north, our friends with the cotton are losing two percent of their useful slave force every year. As this grows, I think we will see far more attention paid to the ways this departing capital finds its way north."

Peleg Robinson shrugged. "What is that, Alonzo? A modest tax on their assets, nothing more. The whalemén pay far more to the thieves in Washington for the privilege of landing their hard-won oil on this benighted coast."

"True and spoken like a bookkeeper, my friend. But consider," and Alonzo Scudder placed a huge pink finger on the tip of his large nose. "Suppose this, tax as you call it, should reach, say five percent per annum. Now, Peleg, this seems still modest enough, but consider, in twenty years the capital is exhausted: True, it reproduces itself, but in how short a time? You see, at some rate of tax, they will clearly find the entire system melting away. And what will they do then, eh, Peleg?"

"I suppose the rascals in Congress will vote the funds to send the Army here, butcher the young, and transport the rest of us south to the fields of the cotton lords," responded Peleg and meaning every word of it.

Alonzo roared and slapped me again on the shoulder. "Abel, the one thing you need never fear when you work with Peleg, or with old Billy either, I dare say, is being taken from behind. These are men who expect the worst!"

"Perhaps, my friend," said Peleg calmly. "But I am seldom surprised."

"Oh," shrugged Alonzo, winking at me, "surprises are not so terrible, if they don't happen too often. No, Peleg,



I think we shall see a real effort to break these routes and those who operate them. They will use the government when they can, but I think here, mainly private agents. The use of uniformed police in the hunting of slaves in New England at this time presents certain difficulties. Of course, if our efforts continue and grow, then they will have no further choice. Some day, they will have to close their borders."

"War!" said Peleg Robinson with as much relish as he ever showed in his speech.

"We are close to these Negro people, Peleg, but such a great blood-letting . . . ?" Alonzo Scudder's bushy eyebrows indicated his uncertainty.

Peleg shook his head. "This is a republic. It is done to them in my name. In all our names. You and I, Abel, a few others, can partly, and only partly, relieve this debt. Each day we work our little way to pay them back, but never fully. There is only one way that proper payment can be made, Alonzo. In our blood!"

"Well, well, Abel. You are surely thinking you have thrown in with a cutthroat crew," and Alonzo Scudder's open face was so filled with kindness and cheerful good humor that I could only smile at his words. "I only meant my warning to suggest we remain alert, not seize our cutlasses and invade the South. We will meet again, friend Abel, and pass more of this philosophical hot air to where it belongs, the south winds of summer."

It would be some years before I remembered this conversation again. Alonzo Scudder's percentages had to work their slow and twisting ways.

Such a complete transformation of my fortunes bewildered me for a time and I followed the life of Naushon House only half-believing in it, expecting at any moment to see it snatched away. Yet, we were always busy and there were many long days. In the sun we worked with the open world of commerce, goods, crops and livestock, for Naushon was famous along the coast for its turnips, its rich milk, and its noisy tavern. I gradually met the stock boys and farmers, the managers of the Tarpaulin tavern and hotel, the store owners, the hated revenue official, and the men who rode the byways of Naushon on tall horses, Folger's troopers they were called on the main, although their real general seemed to be Peleg Robinson.

At night there were the movements of the guests, sometimes to the Vineyard or Hyannisport, sometimes out on

Buzzards Bay after hours of waiting for signals. I learned the codes and ciphers and by the end of August, I was making the Hyannisport sail as captain of *Hero*, her large cabin filled with dark, quiet guests, Uncle Billy grinning and jabbering at all of us. Billy was certainly the strangest of the Naushon people. As short as I was, thin and bent, his round, wrinkled face was covered by bristly white and red whiskers. He almost always showed a wide, simple grin which parted on one or two crooked teeth.

Still, I agreed with Peleg that he was not crazy. Rather, in some ways, the exact opposite. It seemed to me he was always saying things so extreme and different that you instantly saw they were oddly true. Billy spent much of his spare time at the tavern, being offensive with the many sides of politics and religion, or the hypocrisy of gentle-folk, and sending the rougher drinkers into cheers and shouts of approval. Uncle Billy really defined the term "coarse."

Once he accused Judge Folger, who was telling us about a visit to the Lowell spinning mills, of looking for sexual partners. "Oh, Billy knows what the rich folks see in them mills!" And he made several gestures with his fingers that were both explicit and funny. "Fornication, that's what, Moses. Yessir! Them Lowells and the rest of you parade through them mills like lords and somebody sees this plump, sweet baggage and they point and say, 'I do really believe I would like that one,' and then. . . ." But Billy did not leave the rest to our imagination, using his fingers and other body gestures to explain the remainder of the transaction, wriggling and sniggering.

Judge Folger grinned even wider than Billy and then snorted and spat. "Uncle, any one of those young women would have you hiding in the outhouse for a week, throwing corncobs to keep her away from you. You'd better go see Ma Barnes in Falmouth."

At this mention of that middle-aged, but still highly regarded business woman, Billy, his sparse, reddish white hair standing stiffly, capered off shouting, "Billy don't pay for nothing! You just remember that!"

Judge Folger turned to me still smiling. "Imagine that little exchange, Abel, at the soirees of Beacon Hill or in the marts of commerce under the Sacred Cod. Yet, in a way, he is right. At least two of the women at those soirees, and handsome they are too, Abel, were spinners. It



is easy to be smug when one is rich." I could not see how smugness and Uncle Billy could ever exist together.

With fall our lives underwent many changes. Judge Folger, here much of the summer, was gone to his larger worlds of power. The social guests, who stayed awhile in the great front bedrooms of Naushon House and went boating in Hadleys and riding in buggies to picnics at the West End Pond, disappeared to their cities. The north wind now whipped the grey sounds and gusted thinly across the dark green lawn of Naushon House. Fewer guests arrived now. I never really learned why the winter brought them more slowly but supposed escape was easier when they were in the fields all day. *Hero's* stove often glowed redly and the trips down the sound were often harsh, windward slashes, fighting the river of current sweeping in from the Monomoy Channel. In December the weather turned fierce and the coasters clung to their anchors at Tarpaulin or Hyannisport, waiting for a turn. Our inventory of guests went as high as sixteen then, and other quiet back-rooms of Naushon House were pressed into use. Peleg's mounted men patrolled out in the blustery dark while inside we rushed plates of biscuits and cornbread, clams, oysters, lobster and plenty of milk and butter to several remote apartments. Uncle Billy filled this time with music from his harmonica and fun with his dramatic monologues, such as his imitation of a southern planter who drinks a quart of moonshine whiskey before discovering it is urine. Our guests found this simple entertainment irresistible, and Naushon House was filled with laughter and light and the smells of summer from the solarium, so that whole days passed me with no memory of Nashawena or my parents, now corrupting inside pine boxes in that rocky soil.

But then, in the middle of December, Judge Folger was suddenly back. Other social guests arrived with him, important men with Purdy, double cap-locks and gold-headed shooting sticks. The annual Naushon hunt took three days. Peleg and his men had identified the deer to be thinned out, sometimes a lord of stags who was injuring too many of the young males, but usually middle-sized animals who showed no particular promise as breeding stock.

This was all preparatory to the several great days of Christmas, one of the two times each year when Naushon House was really full. Thanksgiving has always been the

traditional Cape Cod holiday for most families here, with Christmas a poor second, but Judge Folger brought the big Christmas tradition from Boston, itself much influenced in those days by the styles of well-to-do London.

Relatives, friends, persons of every age, arrived at Woods Hole or New Bedford during the several days before the holiday, and we were busy transporting them across Buzzards Bay or the Hole, then getting them settled in the house.

A dozen girls and women, led by Amanda Robinson, worked long days in the kitchen preparing the feasts and treats. A dozen of us men and boys, led by Peleg, chopped the wood and filled the many fireplace boxes, cleaned, then stoked, the stoves throughout the house, and uncovered and moved beds and furniture, until suddenly the day was almost upon us. I was hastily set to work at the last minute to hang the streamers and decorations around the downstairs hall, solarium and other big common rooms. Outside the whetstone sang as Peleg sharpened his knives to butcher the hanging deer and the big Canadian honkers Judge Folger and his friends had brought down from his West End blinds.

All the leaves were put in the table of the big dining room and more tables put up in the solarium. There was no tree that first Christmas Eve I was there, for Judge Folger had not heard of that custom then, but there was hot ale and an orchestra from the main, two fiddles and an accordion plus Uncle Billy's harmonica and Mrs. Robinson at the cherry wood parlor organ with its two manuals. There was dancing, and toasting chestnuts in the crackling open fires that roared in the several great rooms, and some gentle firecrackers that popped marvelous red paper balls all over, carol singing, when the dancers could be made to stop by bribes of clam fritters in maple syrup, sugar cookies and cider and a reading by Judge Folger of the story in Luke.

Then on Christmas Day came the great feast with everyone seated in front of hot platters of venison and roast wild goose with chestnut and oyster stuffing, baked striped bass, with pork strips, and the beloved turnips cooked two or three different ways, and so much else that the dinner was really a museum of food through which we could wander that long and happy day. At the center of the main table and visible through wide double doors from the other rooms was Judge Folger, a focus of ac-



tivity and life. He was continuously proposing toasts or pointing out some special feature in one of Mrs. Robinson's dishes or commending a wine from the large cellar of Naushon House. He chivvied the young ships' officers about their ships and the young women about their ships' officers. He joked and guffawed with his old cronies, like Alonzo Scudder, and lectured us all on how too bad it was that we had missed the terrible Christmases along the islands during the 1812 War so that we could truly appreciate this one.

That Christmas was the first time I met Hope Mayhew. Judge Folger always seated the young people at their own tables and I found myself in a group of large and cheerful Scudder girls and boys, and across from Miss Hope Mayhew and two young officers, both at least eighteen years, who had returned that fall from long whaling voyages. Although Hope Mayhew was my age, she seemed then as unattainable as the moon. Slender and pretty in a long brown and white dress with lace sleeves, her hair was a black shine of beauty down her back, and her delicate nose was elevated at an angle that indicated understanding of her own effect. She was a granddaughter of Judge Folger through her mother, Martha. Her father was Silas Mayhew, the most successful and noted of the whaleship captains in the fleet financed by Judge Folger's banks.

I was intensely shy that first Christmas. I knew these rich people would have heard of my past and how I came to Naushon, so that I looked furtively in their eyes for that flicker of fear or suspicion that said, "Mad, he is mad, like his father." I was glad enough then to sit and eat silently and let the two hulking braggarts across from me fill the air with romance and danger, casual mentions of Patagonia or the Japan grounds, or, "the time we had two eighty-bar'l sparm on at once."

Hope Mayhew, her large blue eyes bright with interest and amusement, responded with such stupidities as "Oh, how exciting!" Or, "What an extraordinary story, Stephen," and I would almost wince as she put a hand on one or another arm to show her excitement and approval, a hand that I knew, as I knew nothing else, would be both soft and warm.

I did not touch that hand then, but I imagined touching it, and yes, the face and slim body too, during many a wet run in *Hero* that year and years after. And though the food and wine and wonderful desserts were delicious,

Hope Mayhew was more delicious still and I sat through Christmas in a trance of impossible love.

After the pies and puddings and coffee and brandy, I quietly excused myself, for there were six guests finishing their own Christmas dinners in the secret room who had to be taken to Hyannisport on Christmas night.

Judge Folger intercepted me in an upstairs hall and beckoned me into his small book-lined study that faced out on the lawn. "This present, Abel, I chose not to give you when the others received theirs for reasons that will be obvious to you," and he handed me a small rosewood box. On the top was a silver oval with my name engraved in running script. Inside, nestled in green baize spaces was a small Colts repeating revolver with all its fitments, an extra cylinder, mould, powder flask, wrenches and whatnot. Such a rich gift was simply beyond any expectation. "Thank you . . . oh, sir, thank you." I had no true way of showing my delight.

"Abel," said Judge Folger, one arm giving me a sudden hug, "I trusted Sarah Allen completely in this matter and you have more than repaid our trust. And for this I train you to kill and so betray your trust in us. Such are the imperfect times, Abel. Peleg will instruct you in the management of that weapon and, I pray, sir, it is never fired except at bull's-eyes."

After Christmas the days were cold and short, the trips on *Hero* often grim, and life at Naushon House ran at a slower pace. Peleg showed me how to load, aim and shoot my present and how to cast the balls from fishing-sinker lead. Uncle Billy and I, bundled in slickers and wool from the sheep Judge Folger kept in a penned area near the West End, made many a windward run to Hyannisport with our poor guests shivering at the cabin stove in the unfamiliar chill of our Cape Cod winter winds. The wind may blow for days at a time along these islands, and even at Naushon House the shriek down the chimney or past the sills becomes a part of life. But this was a good time too for there were days when I could sit, the gale at bay, in Judge Folger's firelit study and read whatever I pleased from his shelves of books or, if Peleg was also not busy, learn navigation and the keeping of accounts.

Now an odd thing that happened as I lived more and more fully in the routine of Naushon House was a reduction in those powers or sights which had seemed so acute when I had spoken of them to Sarah Allen less than a



year before. Sometimes I still saw the sparks and flashes from the very corners of my eyes, and even Peleg, himself a skilled south Cape pilot, admitted that my judgment on currents was without peer among the old-timers. Of course it should have been, for where they learned them, in the many combinations of winds and moon phases by hard experience, I saw them beneath *Hero's* keel and flooding or ebbing around me in the bay or sounds. Still, this was little more than a conjuring trick, as was my ability to put *Hero* over a school whenever Mrs. Robinson gave us an order for fish. That impressed Peleg less. Most of the fishermen from Holmes Hole could do as well, whether or not they saw, felt or imagined the schools. Uncle Billy stoutly maintained that a certain Captain Obediah Tilton of the Vineyard was able to find fish by tasting the water, but Peleg stonily assured me that what Tilton actually tasted was two or three pints of rum at which time, far from seeing fish, he saw teeth coming out of the planking of his cabin to chew him up.

I suppose it was the very intense need of the guests and what we did that diminished or maybe replaced my visions. I don't believe that anyone could have worked with the guests as I did without being changed. We were all changed at Naushon House, even the roughest of the troopers. Dealing with those gentle, black persons—their manner so soft and grateful, so different from the abrasive men at the Tarpaulin Tavern or other Cape Codders with their independent ways—I lived in a bath of gratitude and affection. Those soft words, "God Bless you, Cap'n," warmed even the worst of the winter journeys.

So in the late spring when I took *Hero* alone to New Bedford with a five dollar gold piece, a list of purchases, and my new account book and pencil, the fish and currents of Buzzards Bay occupied me hardly at all. But it was still a strange day, hot for the spring and thick with humid puffs or irregular wind. All ahead of me, along the main were towering thunderheads, moving little but giving a dull, distant rumble now and then. They would not cross the water, Uncle Billy said, until the tide turned, a truth that I could not confirm since I had at that time no special sense of the wind and cloud.

*Hero* made a slow trip in the fluky winds, but by noon I was past Palmer Island and running along the forest of masts that choked the waterfront, looking for a spot to tie. New Bedford was then at its peak of whaling activ-

ity. Dozens of ships lay one beside the other almost solidly blocking any approach to South Water or Front streets. Slipping past their sterns, I soon saw ahead a Folger whaleship, the *Four Brothers*, Captain Simon Gifford. I dropped the main in a rush and let *Hero* come to rest in the ebb abreast of her stern. The old man himself soon appeared at my halloo, smiling from his halo of chin whiskers, and cheerfully helped me tie *Hero* across her stern. *Four Brothers* was a big, bluff barkentine, with a one-hundred-and-ten foot walk along her deck until I could drop from her bowsprit onto the paving stones of Front Street.

It was even hotter ashore, humid and oppressive. The grumbling of the thunderheads was continuous and the light was fading, the city steaming and stinking in a dusky pallor.

I sweated freely moving from this store to that. Peleg needed hardware for two handsome rowing boats they were building in the Hadleys boat shed. Rowing had become a great summer pastime among the rich, and Judge Folger had obtained plans for a special, light, pulling and racing boat then popular around English university towns. Uncle Billy confided to me his lack of confidence in these designs. "Them fools will either have heart failure, Abel, or else tip one of them piss pots over and drown and I say good riddance." Uncle Billy's basic view of the rich was that the only acts that could arouse them from complete lethargy were fornication or cheating the poor.

The day, if possible, was even darker and hotter when I walked up the hill on William Street, past the pillars of the Merchants Bank, waiting for the first big drops to fall. Mrs. Robinson needed supplies of the rarer and odder spices that were not stocked at the Tarpaulin store, saffron, ginger root, curry, items sold at one of the many small, special stores that ranged along William Street in those days. I think the light had about reached its dimmest and the rumble of the thunder completely surrounded New Bedford as I hurried by a small curio store and happened to catch a glimpse of the great chart. It was one of those tiny stores that had sprouted with the New Bedford whaling industry, dealing in the oddities and scrimshaw brought back from the long voyages, selling to Bostonians and others who came in the steam cars to see the great whaling fleet at its docks, an enter-



prise of considerable interest to land-bound New Englanders at that time.

I suppose I had glanced in this store before, its dirty window a disorganized mass of dusty whale's teeth, carved bone implements, and wooden, primitive spears made, perhaps, by a Fiji warrior and perhaps by a whittling Yankee whaler who never went near the Fiji's. But this time, hung across the back of the entire window space was the string and fiber chart, intricate, colorful and beautiful.

I entered the store and stared at the old Jew sitting on a stool behind his showcase, his sagging face creased by sweat lines. "How much is it?" I asked him, pointing to the large chart.

He winked at me. "It is a rarity, young master. From the heathens of the lost Pacific islands. It is woven by virgins to cover a king's banquet table."

"No it's not!" I said bluntly. "It's a current chart for some great body of water."

He shrugged sullenly. "Perhaps. Who can say what the heathens do or believe? Whatever, it is much the largest and finest in the city."

I looked at him intently. "You have seen other such charts?" I asked him.

"One or two, perhaps. Much smaller and less fine."

I peered at his dark, heavy face in the dim store. "Where are they from? What island group? Where?"

He frowned at me. The oppressive heat and dim light made us both short and liverish. "I am not a museum curator, young master. Tablecloth or chart, the price is fifty cents!"

I had forty-two cents left and put forty down on the showcase top. The old Jew shrugged and took the money, unexpectedly smiling, even more unexpectedly saying, "All the races of man have their own secrets, young master."

I took the chart down from the nails on which it hung and discovered that, although the fiber pieces pointed in every direction, they were tied and pivoted within the string net so that they aligned when the thing was rolled up, an essential feature, of course, for storage in a long, narrow, outrigger canoe. I thought about what the old Jew had said. What secrets as wonderful as this did we white New Englanders possess? Uncle Billy would have a short and crude answer to that question, I had no doubt.

The rain still threatened as I hurried, in a river of sweat, back to the *Four Brothers* with my various pur-

chases hotly banging my legs. Captain Gifford urged me to wait out the storm with a glass of beer in his cabin. He told me, without much rancor, that the coopers of New Bedford were so busy that he had to wait his turn to buy barrels. So here he was feeding his crew three squares a day and, as he noted, "Even if a whale showed up in New Bedford Harbor, we dang well would have to get in line again to have a stab at him."

As soon as Captain Gifford had unloaded this sad story, I held up my purchase and asked him, intently in that hot, dark cabin, if he knew anything about it.

Captain Gifford was impressed. He peered through small, round spectacles. "Waal, Abel. It's one of them navigation charts that them aborigines make, but Gawd, that one is shore a beauty. Never saw one that size before. And it's got—what—some kind of wind flags, too, Abel?"

I nodded. "And moon phases too, I think, sir."

"Abel. I think my boatsteerer, Sam Phipps might have ideas on that piece. He's got a bit of Polynesian in him." The old man winked at me, his circular whiskers sticking out even further. "Probably cannibal too—and Lord knows what else!"

Phipps was a large, sweating brown man. He wore a leather sheath and hook on his left wrist stump, evidence of an arm that had got into the bight of a sounding whale's line. His round, smooth face showed even more interest in the chart than Captain Gifford's. "I never seen one that big. Never! That's surely the true Water Speech, Cap'n. Didn't know. . . ."

But that phrase, "Water Speech" caught me as no other two words ever had. "What is that?" I said tensely. "Water Speech?"

The brown man looked down at me from heavy lids, his smooth, fat face expressionless. "Oh, I don't know it so good. Never really met a real Speaker."

And then he made with his hand, hook, and arms an extraordinary series of sinuous movements that quite astonished me. He moved, for a moment, as the ocean moves and from directly over us at that instant came a tremendous blast of light and a clap of thunder and the rain drove down, drumming on the cabin roof.

Captain Gifford smiled admiringly and poured his boatsteerer a drink of rum. "Bless me, Sam, you bleedin' heathens shore have yore tricks! Water Speech, is it? Makes it rain does it, them motions?"



I knew that sudden blast of the storm was only coincidence. What Sam Phipps called the Water Speech was not a trick but a truth, and a way to truth. Those people who spoke thusly were clearly like me.

The roaring squall lasted an hour and in that time I questioned Sam Phipps closely about those people and their homeland, but all he knew was secondhand. The motions he had learned from a man who had once sailed with a Speaker. The location of their home islands was somewhere in the middle Pacific. They were regarded in their region as magicians and were hired to navigate long journeys or to instruct others to make such journeys. Most charts that came back as heathen souvenirs were small, made for other tribes to use, the Speakers not needing such items. My find he had no theory about. Perhaps an instruction device for their own people? Sam Phipps shrugged. Sextant and chronometer were better, and, anyway, who but an aborigine would spend thirty days to go a thousand miles in an open boat?

The weather was cooler after the storm and a brisk west wind had set in. *Hero*, sluiced down clean by the driving rain, heeled away from the *Four Brothers* and scooted down the harbor on a run.

And as she moved, driving steadily in the calm water, I practiced the Water Speech with my hands knowing full well how imperfectly Sam Phipps had done it, what with his lack of understanding and his hook. Below was the rolled-up chart, which I carried in *Hero* thereafter and showed to every Pacific whaler I met.

The other big party at Naushon House each year came on the Fourth of July. Long tables were set up across the wide lawn, and platters of lobster, bass, clams, oyster, corn and several large salmon, shipped in ice from Maine in a baggage car, covered their tops. There were lots of firecrackers, and horse races by some of the young men, and a quite cheerful march to the small cemetery to put flags and flowers on the graves of the old veterans, led by Uncle Billy playing "Yankee Doodle." Men and women in white dresses and summer suits walked about with parasols occupied by laughing conversations. Hope Mayhew was there and again I sat near her at dinner in a group of children and young folks. If anything, she was prettier than at Christmas, dressed in a white lace gown with short sleeves, her hair tied by a large silk bow and falling in a fan of black, warm beauty down her back.

Of course, the usual young officers and young solicitors were clustered around, with Hope effortlessly charming them all in her rather obvious way.

This holiday I managed to say a few things, but I was hardly in a position to talk intelligently on the present state of the Japan whale grounds or the latest scandals at the Boston State House. How I longed to tell them about our nighttime transfers of guests in a scream of wind, the tiny blink of a distant bull's-eye lantern while *Hero* shuddered and shook in a six-foot chop.

Once she did turn to me, smiling in her cool way. "Abel Roon. Grandfather says you sail *Hero* better than Peleg Robinson."

This generous and unlooked-for praise completely surprised me and I suddenly wondered if Hope Mayhew knew or suspected something of what we were doing at Naushon House.

"Peleg has taught me the most of it, Miss Mayhew," I said with appropriate humility, not quite able to stare into her round blue eyes.

She smiled so directly and warmly that I could hardly catch my breath, then looked around at the others at the table. "If Grandfather says you are better, then you are. And if you are better at something than Peleg Robinson, then you are very good."

No knight at Arthur's Court ever received a lady's boon with greater joy than I received that accolade. Now I *did* look in her eyes. "Some day, Miss Mayhew, you must come for a sail in *Hero*," I said in the most casual way possible. "She's the finest cutter her size on the south Cape." But though this was spoken outwardly in a most offhand manner, inside I could not actually believe that I had dared to say it.

Hope Mayhew inclined her head. "Oh, I would like that, Mr. Roon." Then, seeming to realize she had spent enough time with Grandfather's strange, little ward, turned warmly to the officer next to her and said in a gush, "Someday I want to go on *all* your ships," to which he of course immediately and forcefully agreed.

It was not much but it was more than the other time and I could easily visualize thereafter her smile when she had complimented me. The day ended with colored bombshells and bursting rockets with all faces turned upward. I only watched Hope Mayhew, her long, smooth throat and perfect lips fitfully illuminated in dim colors with each



flash-bang of an aerial burst, her white-gloved hands clapping excitedly with each explosion.

How often I looked forward to that second Christmas through a long, cold fall, but it turned out terribly in the end. My stupid behavior started, I suppose, on a breezy September night at the Tarpaulin Tavern. I had ridden west on Old Columbia, Judge Folger's gentle saddle mare, to pick up any cipher messages left with the proprietors and found the Tavern was bursting with boisterous cheer and a particular sense of fun and laughter. Uncle Billy, of course, was holding forth in the midst of this, acting as a foil for Captain Abner Hallet, a rough-faced bearded giant of a man, loud, and coarse in this setting, yet a man of two completely different sides.

"Abel, m'dear," shouted Billy as I walked into the large, low smoky room. "Just in time to hear Cap'n Hallet tell us about the whoremaster hypocrites of Nantucket. Start it again for Abel, Abner."

Captain Hallet took a long pull on a large mug of grog and wiped his sopping whiskers on a filthy shirt cuff. He gave me a big wink, for I knew the other Captain Hallet as well, a man who from the stern of his coaster, her sails backed and the guests scrambling down a ladder, gave me terse and complex messages from the South for Peleg or Judge Folger. Hallet's crude, drunken roughness probably served him well on the docks of Savannah or Charleston, for Peleg told me once, in a rare burst of confidence, that Hallet was the most important of the Folger captains, the man who had the surest contacts in the far South for removing and shifting escaped slaves.

"Waal, Abel," said Hallet, blinking bloodshot eyes as the room quieted, "it seems them good folk on Nantucket decided to have one of them antislavery meetings where they can sing hymns and say how awful the Southrons are and how fine we New England folk are compared to 'em."

Uncle Billy, his reddish white whiskers spiky, made a characteristic gesture at the audience and announced that the only reasons the Nantucket gentility didn't have slaves was that they were too cheap to pay their food and too stupid to tell them what to do.

Captain Hallet genially allowed the shouts and cheers of approval at this observation to die away and took another pull on his mug. "Waal," he said, grinning at them, "it seems the fust day of this here meeting they got this

here escaped slave, Frederick Douglass, to give a speech. Course he stands up there a-shakin' and telling them about being whipped and all that, until that Boston agitator, Garrison, starts shouting, 'Is this a man or chattel,' things like that, and everyone is standing up yelling, 'A man, a man!'"

"Hell, Abner!" said Uncle Billy, "they was just thinking what a fine manservant that Douglass would make driving them to church in a new buggy. Why should the Southrons have him for free when they'd give him two dollars a week and an afternoon off?"

"Likely, Billy," said Captain Hallet cheerily, giving me another big wink. I had heard about this meeting and realized that Hallet had been on Nantucket to attend it. Judge Folger instructed all of us to pay close attention to any public antislavery agitation. Such public acts often attracted slave hunters to an area.

"So after the fust day all them good folks are feeling mighty proud, what with them daring the law or somebody to come and get this Douglass and then bravely refusing to let him go. But next day it didn't go so awful good," and he motioned at the proprietor for another mug.

"Seems they found this abolitionist feller named Stephen H. Foster. He was a humdinger, that feller! Had this pamphlet he was selling around called," and Captain Hallet carefully pulled a small, dog-eared book from his slicker pocket and read from the cover, "'The Brotherhood of Thieves of a True Picture of the American Clergy.'"

Billy applauded that loudly and the rest of the audience seemed to agree that at long last someone had written a proper book.

"Waal," said Hallet beaming at all of us, "this Foster got up to speak, and he really did speak, too! He starts off"—and Hallet referred again to his book—"sayin' that the American church and clergy were . . . as a body, thieves, adulterers, man-stealers, pirates, and murderers. . . ."

Captain Hallet could not continue for some time after that, a round of comment and applause actually rattling the small tavern windows. Finally, he continued. "Course that got some of the audience mighty restless right then, there being quite some collection of reversed collars a'setting in the Nantucket Atheneum. But after some more



talk, this Foster gets going on the Methodists, saying that the Methodist Episcopal Church was more . . . corrupt and profligate than any house of ill fame in the city of New York." Another great cheer began to swell but Captain Hallet pressed loudly on: "that the Southern ministers of that body were desirous of perpetuating slavery for the purpose of supplying themselves with concubines from among its hapless victims." Only Hallet's huge voice could have carried the rest of the message over the madly cheering sailors: "and that they were guilty of enormities that would disgrace an Algerine pirate!" At which point the entire room broke into a pandemonium of cheers and laughter with Uncle Billy pounding the heavy table as hard as he could with both hands and crying out joyously, "Whoremasters! Whoremasters!" tears of delight flooding down his ancient, wrinkled face.

Captain Hallet, delighted by this warm reception, read us a few more of Foster's equally offensive passages to similar enthusiasms when Uncle Billy began to shout. "Waaaaaait, Abner! Tell 'em about what happened then!" This finally quieted the group and Hallet nodded, grinning.

"Waal, right then some of them folks is standing up yelling at him to shut up and others was throwing cushions and things. Some nice folks doing that—Starbucks, Macys, Coffins—but, you know it was funny . . . they was a big bunch of toughs outside the hall waiting with . . . well, old vegetables and eggs, things like that, and they just come in then and it was a big hullabalo in there, yessir!"

"Didn't like that stuff about the preachers being whoremasters, eh, Abner?" giggled Uncle Billy.

Captain Hallet pursed his heavy lips and sucked on his mug. "To tell the truth, Billy, I don't think them men that came in gave a damn one way or another. They didn't strike me as churchy folks, you know, Abel?" And now he was looking straight at me out of hooded, serious eyes.

We had always avoided Nantucket with guests as far as possible, since there were Southern business agents living on the island and considerable direct commerce between the island and Southern ports. Captain Hallet was telling me that now there was danger there and men who were willing to act publicly against abolition. And it suddenly seemed to me a bitter thing that the so-called nice

folks would join their enemies against a fool of an agitator who, like Uncle Billy, only told a wildly distorted, but grievous truth. I knew with certainty that there were white Methodist preachers in the South who forced Negro women. Peleg or Judge Folger, after talking with a guest, often wrote his or her story in a large, secret book. That story, and a hundred others equally terrible, were in that book.

An old, massively bewhiskered captain who had chuckled all through this performance finally puffed a smoke barrage on his huge calabash and then pointed the stem at Hallet. "Bill o'Rights don't mean much when you talk agin' the clergy, eh, Cap'n?"

"Appears not to," said Hallet mildly. "They finally got another meeting going in the old shop where they uster have them revival meetings, but by then nobody much would be caught dead with them abolitionists. Course them Methodist bosses ain't going to cut loose from them Southron churches and lose all that money, eh, Billy?"

Billy, perched on a table, nodded violently. "Whore-masters," he said cheerfully. "They all know them Negro women. . . ." But the rest of it, though greeted with much applause, did not further the argument, and the laughter and jollity only drove Billy to ever-greater excesses of gesture and statement.

Unfortunately for me, that rather one-sided retelling of the infamous Nantucket antislavery convention fit all too well with other events of the later fall. Coincidentally, we began to see some of the most terrible excesses of the slavery system. A young, crippled boy, whose leg was smashed by an overseer's stick and then never set, peered in silent awe at us one night as Peleg grimly measured him for a proper crutch. I had never heard Peleg's cold voice so frozen as when he spoke. "Who would treat a horse or ox like this, Abel? Moses Folger says it is all money, credit, value. But if that were true, Abel, they would not so casually destroy their own valuable property. No . . . money is the lesser part. It is the master-ship that can only be truly affirmed by complete cruelty, by the ability to give pain and destruction to another human in the blink of an eye!"

And it was odd, that night, for when I stepped out on the dark lawn of Naushon House, my body and neck still stiff with a formless, helpless rage, I saw the bay and sound again alight, flowing in marvelous connected



wheels, the bright fish everywhere in their cold, slashing joy. And that freezing hardness, that chill freedom of the ocean can wash over hot, impotent anger so that as I watched the strange connected life around me turn in itself with mighty strength, I began, right then, a wait for them, a wait that at its end would freeze even Peleg's heart.

Then, only two weeks before Christmas, we listened in the secret room to a young woman holding a pretty mulatto baby tell in a low, flat voice her own ghastly tale; how the gross, fat old man had not just forced her, but forced her in front of her brother, while an overseer restrained the man in bonds. The old planter could not accomplish the act without such a provocative setting, so the woman told us in a slow voice. And then the next day when her brother went in a blind rage for the old man, the foreman coolly cut him down with a machete. They had waited for him to attack. He had been a "bad nigger," a troublemaker and loud mouth.

For a moment I thought Peleg would seriously injure himself. As she finished this grotesque story in her simple, plain way, Peleg crammed his left fist into his mouth, the thick veins on his long neck standing like purple ropes. "Abomination!" he croaked around the bitten, bleeding fist. "God has left the world, Abell"

"Or was never here at all," I said in a dead voice, though my breath came in long gasps. I wanted to take some of Peleg's pain and anger. He had too much, yet I had no room for more.

The Negro mother took it effortlessly from us both. "Ah don't hate the baby," she said, quietly stroking the child's face. "He's all Ah got. All Ah'll prob'ly evah have."

So when that Christmas came, I was not really ready for the flood of rich, casual people talking so brightly of nothing important in unimportant ways. Still, the very intensity of the gaiety on Christmas Eve was irresistible. I spent a breathless, active hour with the less-fat Scudder girl in a square dance; this capable, if gigantic, young woman showing me that special dancing grace which only the fat possess. Then, and all else truly left my mind, a too-brief round dance with Miss Hope Mayhew, now taller, fuller, and blindingly beautiful, which soon ended as a tall, young Naval officer smoothly cut in, his gold uniform buttons sparkling.

Again, at Christmas Day meal, we younger folks sat in the solarium, the summer smell of flowers sweet and strange mixed with the dimly heard bluster of a snow storm. And, alas, Hope Mayhew at some point found it necessary to remark to a young, Nantucket whalingship officer across the table how ". . . terrible about that dreadful meeting, that man Foster . . . disgusting!"

The future Three-Thousand-Barrel Captain agreed unctuously and at once. "I don't understand why he was allowed to speak. And you know the Episcopal Bishop was in the audience."

If only I had not been there when those words were passed! But I was and, like Uncle Billy, I spoke right up. "What exactly was it that you objected to in Mr. Foster's speech?" I inquired in wide-eyed innocence.

The Fearless, Square-jawed, Nantucket Whaleman stared at me. "He said, among other things, that the Methodist clergy used Negro women as," he paused and looked tentatively at Hope Mayhew, but she nodded bravely at him to continue, "concubines."

The Scudder girls giggled immensely at this. I was sitting next to Hope Mayhew and I leaned forward so that I could see her face. I stared coldly at them both. "What he said is true. You're only quarreling with the relative numbers."

"Well . . ." said Hope Mayhew, startled.

"I don't think that's funny, my friend," said the Hero of the Offshore Grounds, frowning darkly. He was four or five years older, but I had grown immensely eating Mrs. Robinson's food and was almost his weight and taller besides.

"I say there are Southern pastors of all denominations who are pimps and whoremasters and who procure Negro women," I said evenly. "Judge Folger will confirm that, if he chooses. He has told me himself."

Hope Mayhew turned and stared hotly into my eyes. "Judge Folger would have the good manners not to discuss such matters in this company, Master Abel Roon!" Her slender hands were tensely clasped and her red, round lips were pressed tightly together.

"And," I continued heedlessly . . . stupidly . . . relentlessly, "the northern churches are too greedy and spineless to reject abominations and so, in every moral sense, are participating in them."

The Sperm Whale's Nemesis eyed me with a set jaw.



"Nobody here is against eventual, peaceful abolition, mister, but talk like that will only set it all back."

"Each day that passes, the Negroes are not free and their life passes," I said icily, now looking at a completely bewildered and suddenly very young Hope Mayhew. "When you live in a big white house on Water Street in Edgartown with horses and servants and parties and silk dresses it's a little hard to imagine the blacksnake whip—or the cat—or the broken fingers when you try to escape."

But Hope Mayhew had risen, looking now very pinched, and young, and very vulnerable too, and I wished like anything that I could stop with all that stuff on Christmas Day to this beautiful young woman but, mad and driven, I could not stop and, trembling, she nodded across the table and in a thin, small voice asked, "Please, dear Seth, I think I'd like a look at the storm, some fresh air. . . . Oh, thank you, dear," for the Scourge of the Pacific had instantly risen and was leading my beloved away saying in her ear—no slow poke he—

"In the lee of the house we can see the bay with the driving snow across it, a wild sight, Hope!"

So I spent the next six months composing in my head an apology to Hope Mayhew, or rather hundreds of apologies, but when the Fourth finally arrived she was not there and I went riding to the West End with a Scudder girl and emptily watched the fireworks pop a brief and empty beauty against an empty sky.

By the time my third Christmas arrived at Naushon House the thought of stepping up and formally apologizing seemed slightly odd and complicated but it didn't matter much since Hope Mayhew sat with her returned father, a twenty-five-hundred-barrel voyage under his belt, next to her mother and Judge Folger at the Christmas dinner and was never by herself that long day. And then I missed the next Fourth myself. We had a complicated and urgent transfer of guests at Block Island when a coaster stranded there and was too damaged to proceed.

But we were always busy and I had gradually managed to convince myself that Hope Mayhew had behaved as no more than a rich hypocrite in taking such offense and was probably, if you ever really got to know her, a shallow person.

By then I was tall, wiry and strong, confident in my seamanship and used to sudden problems in the choppy sounds. I thought I had seen and overcome all the emergencies, changes in weather, lost rudders, sick guests, meeting failures, but that next November I faced a different and frightening accident, unexpected and never imagined.

There were five guests in our hidden room that blowy November evening, four rough-dressed, male field hands and a large woman with a serene black ivory face. They were all sick from a rough, four-day passage around Hatteras right into Buzzards Bay, and they all were from the interior and had never been on a boat before. Still, a New Bedford to Halifax schooner had made West Chop just before dusk flying a signal indicating we must load that night in Holmes Hole. So I didn't think too much about the physical state of our passengers as we fled before a strong, steady, northwest wind across the usual slop of Nantucket Sound. But as we neared the West Chop lee, *Hero* still pounding heavily, Uncle Billy poked his short, bristling whiskers out of the cabin door and winked. "Gotta get Sarah Allen," he said brightly.

I didn't take it in at once. "Who . . . ?"

"Gonna have a pickaninny . . . mebbe two."

We finally drove behind the Vineyard lee and I handed the tiller over to Uncle Billy and ducked below. The woman lay on her back on one of the two bunks, silently watched by the four men. Her belly mounded hugely and she moaned.

"Husband . . . father?" I asked the men but they shook their heads. They none of them seemed to know each other.

I put my hand on her belly and waited for a pain. Before I came into that cabin I was a tough, hardened, fugitive runner who could spit farther than Peleg, but now I was a scared, sixteen-year-old fool with a real mother in real labor. I clearly remembered Judge Folger's instructions about the absolute necessity of the safety of our guests and suddenly I put my hands over my eyes. There was no way we could get to Sarah Allen! Cuttyhunk was four windward pounding hours away with the current set dead against us. We had no safe house or contact at Holmes Hole, and I had no idea if Alonzo Scudder could be signaled from seaward to meet us quickly at Squaw Island. Anyway, Hyannisport was two hours, even on a



run. We couldn't just put her on the coaster. That was out of the question. And, then, out of my panic, I had an idea . . . not just any idea but I guess, all things considered, my finest idea ever.

I darted back up on deck and seized the tiller from Billy. "Get the four men ready to climb off. Quick! I'll shoot her up under the schooner's counter and they can get off forward! Move, Billy!"

We swept into Holmes Hole on a smooth sea and I picked out the big, square-sterned coaster anchored well out from shore. We shot up to her stern, the sail rings and blocks banging sharply, and in moments our male guests had clambered off *Hero's* bowsprit up a rope ladder and over a thick rail. I waved quickly at the dark silhouette of her master and dropped *Hero* off on star-board tack, spinning her around so she weathered away from the coaster's stern with a slam-bang of gear and set off hard to windward on port haul. "Get below," I hissed at Billy. "Give her some liquor! Do something to slow up the pains! We're heading for Edgartown!"

We beat handily in the flat water to East Chop under a bright moon, faced a few tremendously steep seas, and then fell again into a lee and ran smoothly at good speed southeast to Edgartown.

*Hero* stormed in past the Harbor Light, a hiss of foam under her forefoot, the wind and tide both hard behind us, and glided smoothly alongside the town dock as her sails came down in a clatter. I tied her hurriedly, ducked my head in the cabin and told Billy to keep our guest quiet—having no real idea how he would do this—then set off on a hard run north up Water Street.

The Mayhew house, handsome with its fine double chimneys, roof peak walk, and fan window over the wide front door, had a suggestion of light behind the closed shutters. I banged the knocker rapidly, and listened tensely as a light footfall finally came from inside. It was Hope. She opened the door, a white, bright spermaceti candle in one hand, and stared out at me.

"Abel? . . . What?"

"Who else is here?" I asked quickly.

"Well . . . no one but old Joseph. Mother is out at Tisbury with Aunt Mabel. . . ."

She stood blocking the door, prettily dressed in a flower-decorated housecoat, her hair piled loose and

black on top of her head. "May I come in?" I said, trying to keep my eyes from devouring her lovely mouth.

She stepped back without a word and I darted past her. "I need a midwife! Urgently! Someone who is . . . trustworthy. There's a . . . passenger . . . on *Hero*, she's having a baby!"

Hope set the candle in a holder. "Wait here, Abel," she said, and dashed up the curving staircase. In a minute she was back, her hair inside a scarf, and she was now dressed trimly in riding clothes. "Where is *Hero* at, Abel? I've got to ride to get the midwife. She lives about a mile out of town."

"Town dock," I said, turning for the door, suddenly wondering what was happening on my beleaguered ship.

As I ran back down Water Street, I heard behind me a sudden, fierce tempest of hooves and, turning my head, saw Cannonball, Captain Mayhew's gigantic black stallion, come wheeling round the far side of the Mayhew house on the dead run, hammering at me like Jove himself, in thunder and earthquake. Hope Mayhew, tiny atop that huge animal, rode bareback, up high on his neck, knees sharply bent, speaking urgently in the flaring ears, and with her left arm stiff out behind she slashed the loose end of the reins left and right on his flanks as hard and fast as she could go. Cannonball, his nostrils larger than the mouth of a twenty-four pounder, his eyes vast rolling saucers wilder than any hawk's, came by like a whirlwind in a deafening drumroll of whipcrack hoofbeats. And if he was not actually breathing flame, there was certainly plenty of smoke. Cannonball laid a dust trail two stories high the entire length of Water Street, heading like God's judgment for Katama, and shutters banged open all along his route, but I doubt that anyone looked out in time to see him go by.

Back on *Hero* I found our guest actually giggling when I dropped down into the cabin. Heaven knows what Uncle Billy had been saying to her. But, very frequently in between giggles, there were low grunts and the suck of in-taken breath. Billy, who believed drinking alone the worst of sins, was now fairly drunk and, politely ignoring our guest's periodic inattention, was uncorking the rum ration again.

I put my head back above deck and, far to the south, I heard Cannonball coming back. By the time he got here, I thought, we would have half the Vineyard at his heels



to watch the cavalry troop exercising at midnight on the main street of Edgartown.

He tore around the boarding house at the foot of the wharf and came at us down the dock faster and louder than his namesake, suddenly rearing to a standstill with a screaming whinny that surely woke those few in town who were not already staring out of their windows.

Hope slid from Cannonball before I got up to the horse, and we both helped a thin, small, bent woman down off the broad back. She was a scrawny, tiny, ancient person dressed in a black homespun dress, her head in a stiff flaring bonnet. She looked at us out of tiny, bright, bird eyes, then turned and put her hand up to Cannonball's nose. I would not have dared do that. The horse was shaking its head, drawing his lips back and whinnying, wanting to run again, his many perfect teeth large and shiny. At her first touch he dropped the huge head and nuzzled her hand, gentle as a new lamb.

"Quick," I said. "We may have to get away from the dock if anyone comes up. Hope, thank you for doing this."

She looked at me evenly. "I'm coming to help, Abel. Cannonball will go home by himself and Joseph can put him in the stable." She patted the monster's neck, spoke a few soft words, and the giant turned and trotted off, a black thundercloud momentarily passive.

I would certainly not argue with her about that, whatever Peleg or the Judge might say later. The midwife disappeared with Hope below and Billy was immediately ejected. "How's she doing?" I asked him tensely.

Billy took a pull on the rum flask he had brought up and grinned. "Hard, Abel. But that witch'll get the pick-aninny out. Aye, that old woman'll do it, one way or 'tother."

I was only half listening. There were voices along Water Street. I could hear people at their front doors questioning one another. "Get the main up, Billy," I said softly. "Quick!" I cast us loose and *Hero* drifted out into the harbor. Hope's head peered up between the companionway doors. Her face was white and her lips set. "Abel, Mother Feeney says that it's going to be . . . hard and hurtful. Could we have some more rum and she says you should go where the . . . the woman can cry out. Mother Feeney says . . . crying always helps."

I snatched the rum from Billy and passed it to Hope.

Pushing the tiller to starboard, I let *Hero* fall off on port tack and fill her main. We left the harbor close hauled, but we weren't going far. Just north and east of the Edgartown Harbor entrance is a shallow, unmarked gut that leads to Cape Poge Pond, a wide body of protected water that forms part of the almost deserted island of Chappaquiddick. Nobody went in to those two or three foot depths except an occasional clam digger or scalloper and as we ran north up the gut, *Hero's* hoisted-board sometimes gently rubbed the soft bottom-sand. We anchored well up into Cape Poge Pond, nobody within a mile or more—and then we waited.

The screams and groans started about ten minutes after that and they went on a very long time, one after the other, until the tears were pouring down my face and even old Billy was having trouble grinning, though he had located some more rum in another of *Hero's* many hiding places.

The lapping circle of still water lay around us. The wind came brisk but steady across the Cape Poge headland carrying the dry grass smells left over from summer. The silver moon-lighted water and the silver flash of the sparking fish flowed all about us. The screaming finally began to fade and, acutely conscious, I looked down the small lighted space where the cabin door lay ajar and I saw framed the thin, pointed figure of the midwife, her small, old face sharp and bright, her head cocked, like a jay. And I could just see her hands as she leaned forward and these small hands were gracefully, sinuously making the Water Speech. I remembered that man is born in water. Sarah Allen had told me that years ago, and the Negro woman's cries finally ended to be replaced by a thinner, newer cry.

Uncle Billy slapped me on the back with a great laugh. "Another pickaninny, Abel. Just what we was all a'waiting for."

But I went forward and softly opened the doors and looked down on my beloved Hope, her wonderful mass of black hair now sweat-drenched and completely beautiful, holding in bare, white arms a new black baby, all but its face wrapped in a blanket.

"A girl, Abel," she said, her eyes level, looking into mine. "There was much blood, but Arabella is strong and needs food and rest."

My heart grew wider than *Hero* then and I could not



speaking. Hope, so strong and close in front of me. But even more, at that instant, the most of all; I had not betrayed Judge Folger's trust.

The moon had long since set and it was almost pitch black when we eased up to the Edgartown dock. I had decided—well, really Hope had decided, to let Mother Feeney find her own way home so we could set off immediately to carry our two guests back across the sound to the ministering hands at Naushon House. I debated how much to give Mother Feeney in an effort to buy her silence. We always had a hundred dollars in gold hidden aboard *Hero* for, Judge Folger cheerily told me, "Bribes, subornation, corruption of public officials, inducement to perjury, and any other similar, useful activity." I would have gladly given Mother Feeney the whole sum, but I knew Peleg would throw a fit about that. If that much gold suddenly appeared in sleepy Edgartown the morning after Cannonball's great effort, the local gossips would look hard for a connection and a conspiracy.

So I took a bright double eagle from the pouch, still too much by Peleg's cautious standards but little enough as far as I was concerned. I looked down at the small woman on the dock, her face a dark, hidden shadow in the stiff bonnet. "Mother . . . thank you. Please," I said as I handed her the gold piece, "do not talk about this with anyone."

Out of that shadowy bonnet came a strange, thin voice. "You be young, Abel Roon. I'll not give away thy secrets, boy."

I stared at her in the gloom, a small, angular figure, and, on impulse, made the Water Speech I had learned from Sam Phipps.

"Eh?" she cackled, then moved her own hands and arms in a marvelous, rapid, sweeping speech, much too fast for me to follow in the dark. She was speaking to me of the sound and the current motion.

"Abel, come!" It was Hope calling from *Hero*.

"Mother," I said softly, "I must go but I will come back. Thank you for this healthy, strong child," and I turned and ran back to *Hero*. The little woman stood a barely visible, dark figure on the dock watching us fall away flapping. She lifted a hand and I barely heard her odd, little voice, "Abel Roon. You should find the great eye. The Eye of the Ocean, Abel Roon."

But the sails stiffened with a clatter of blocks as we set off to windward. I could hear her no longer.

We beat heavily across the sound, avoiding the rips over Hedge Fence shoal, then tacked west along the shore, finally slipping into Hadleys as the first pink tint of dawn showed over the Cape. I decided we would come, this one time, like social guests into Naushon House. After tying *Hero*, we strode, three abreast, up the great lawn, to meet Peleg waiting on the porch, I carrying our new mother, Arabella, in my arms. Hope, her firm but dimpled chin high, striding like Diana in her boots and riding clothes, holding the sleeping babe. While Uncle Billy, his harmonica out, kept our marching pace with a bit of "British Grenadiers," altogether as fine a moment as Naushon House might ever expect to see.

Peleg looked at us levelly and took in the entire story without a word. He inclined his head to Hope. "Welcome to the other Naushon House, Miss Mayhew. May I thank you on behalf of Judge Folger for your help."

Hope Mayhew smiled and put her warm hand on Peleg's arm. "Oh, Peleg, I knew you were doing something like this. Mother knows too, I'm sure."

"We will put the guests in the single front bedroom," said Peleg to his wife, who had stepped out and was squinting in surprise at us. "Miss Mayhew can have an adjoining room."

I carried dozing Arabella, no lightweight actually, up the wide front stairs and laid her on a fine poster bed, then left the field to Hope, Mrs. Robinson and the other women who were now clucking and chattering and cooing like a pack of fool doves and chickens.

Peleg still stood on the porch, dawn now well-advanced. He really never smiled, but this time he came close. "An ingenious solution to a difficult problem, Abel," he said, his eyes peering from under heavy brows.

I stared right back at him. "The only solution, Peleg," I said evenly.

His eyebrows jumped up. "Perhaps, Abel. In any case, Judge Folger will be delighted by the resolution of the entire matter."

By the words, "entire matter," I realized Peleg meant exactly that, not *only* the Negro woman and her new baby. What that implied dazzled me with joy and I stood in the thin sun grinning tiredly at Peleg.

"Get sleep, Abel," said Peleg. "I will go in *Hero* for



Sarah Allen. Our guests will need attention for a few days."

Supper that evening was one of the gayest I can remember, Sarah Allen and dear Hope sat on either side of me at the kitchen trestle table and across was Peleg and Uncle Billy, with Mrs. Robinson sitting down after she served us. Hope and I told everyone the story of our long night, the ride for the midwife, the painful effort in Cape Poge Pond. Then Uncle Billy suggested a few of the stories he had whispered to Arabella to make her forget her pain and, of course, the women were scandalized. Except for Sarah Allen who put her strong hand across the table on Billy's sleeve and laughingly said, "Uncle Billy, you're really the only person I know who can put obscenity to Christian use."

But Mrs. Robinson sniffed icily at that and suggested if our guests were taking to Canada the idea that Cape Cod was inhabited by dirty old men in their second childhood then she would just as soon they went by an inland route.

Uncle Billy remarked with spirit that he guessed most people would rather deal with a person lucky enough to have two childhoods rather than someone who had never had one.

Before Mrs. Robinson could reply Sarah Allen reached her other hand across the table and laid it on Mrs. Robinson's arm. "My dears," she said, squeezing them both, "Judge Folger needs a court chamberlain, you dear Amanda, and his jester," and she squeezed Uncle Billy's arm. "No king was ever better served by either." Now Mrs. Robinson almost smiled, and Sarah Allen turned her head to me, her cheeks dimpled. "Dear Abel, you will be our Galahad," she said gaily.

I shook my head. "If Judge Folger is Arthur, then I will be Sir Bedivere."

But Peleg shook his head. "That is my place, Abel. When the sword must be given back, I will be beside him."

Hope impulsively put her hand on my arm, warm and firm, looking at us out of round, blue, perfect eyes. "Oh dear, then I'll have to be Elaine or Guinevere or somebody terrible like that!"

"No, no, Hope!" said Sarah Allen, jolly and laughing. "They never really lived, those grim old people. And you would never be anyone but Hope Mayhew, then or now!"

After supper, Sarah Allen back upstairs with the guests,

Hope and I walked out across the dark lawn in a cool breeze and finally sat down on a rude bench on the north edge facing the bay. I was too overflowing with love to say a word, content to sit next to her and try to catch the faint smell of her hair. But Hope was solemn and businesslike.

"I was very stupid two Christmases ago, Abel!" she said, looking at me. "I guess I just said what I thought people wanted to hear. You knew about Negro slavery and I knew nothing."

Hope was apologizing to me? After the way I had acted? Where now were all those speeches I had worked out on *Hero*, those serious but still light apologies? I couldn't remember a one. I looked at her in the thin moonlight. "I love you, Hope! Please let me love you. I'll never be like that with you again, my beloved Hope!" The words came marching out one after another.

Hope Mayhew took my hand warmly and firmly in hers and I was silenced. "You know, Abel, you really are just like Grandfather." She peered at me from a shadowed, serious face. "You just speak out and expect everybody to jump. And since my face showed pain she squeezed my hand and smiled. "Oh, Abel, be fair! Think about it now. The reason I was so hurt when you said all those things two years ago is that they were true. I *do* live in a rich house with servants. What right do I even have to an opinion about poor people or slaves? But you don't only . . . yell at people, Abel. Suddenly last night you just . . . well, appear, to show me about slavery and what you're doing. And of course as part of it, the tiniest part, you give me the only really important day in my whole life. That's the kind of thing Grandfather is always doing . . . terribly good but terribly . . . well, powerful. And on top of it all, now you say you love me."

She took her hand from mine, put both her arms around my neck and kissed me on the lips. I held her close, our lips hot together, and we both trembled. I had imagined it endlessly in *Hero*. Was this the same, better . . . ? I guess, in the end, unimaginably itself!

She pressed her cheek next to mine. Oh, warm! Warmer than the August sun. She whispered in my ear. "Abel, dear Abel. You don't know yourself! You think I could not give myself to you? Ohhh, how easy that would be! Don't you see that Peleg loves you as a son, the son he has always imagined? You think he would sacrifice you



for the safety of a guest, Abel? I pray he never has to make that choice! And Uncle Billy and Sarah Allen and the others . . . you *are* their Galahad, Abel, and mine too . . . oh yes, mine too . . . but . . . think what happened to *him*, Abel?"

I kissed her again, and then touched her face with my fingers, as I had dreamed a thousand times. "Let me come and visit you," I whispered, looking at her. Somehow, what she said had made me melancholy, but then remembering, I smiled. "You can teach me to ride Cannonball, but not that fast."

Hope Mayhew tilted her head back and sniffed. "I was just showing off, doing that. I knew well enough you wanted things quiet but I thought for once I would do something my way. But you may certainly call on me, Abel Roon."

I called several times in Edgartown before Christmas, sitting at the big, candlelit table with Hope and Mrs. Mayhew and chatting about recent events. After supper Hope and I walked along Water Street until we reached the north end, then took our stroll out on the government causeway to Harbor Light. We kissed when there were no people about and talked a great deal about Christmas.

I suppose if I ever had to compress all the Naushon House Christmas seasons into one, it would always be that one. Hope arrived four days early to help Mrs. Robinson and the general bustle and scurry was greater, if possible, than usual.

Judge Folger gave me my present early that year, a complete outfit from the Boston store he used; box-back coat and silk vest, sharp-pressed pants and tie-shoes of finished leather. Shirt with fancy gaiters and a cravat of bright crimson. Altogether a snappy getup that fitted me perfectly. And when I delightedly turned, newly dressed, in front of Hope and Judge Folger she clapped her hands and, grinning, kissed me on the cheek. "Grandfather," she said, "you never have made a mistake, have you?"

Then on Christmas Eve, everything was cleared out of the great central hall of Naushon House except for gaily colored paper streamers, and the dancing party started. Uncle Billy taught us a hornpipe he had learned at the tavern and soon Hope and I, the ever-active, ever-larger Scudder children, and several young ships' officers and their ladies were hard at it with much clapping of hands and shouting of nautical commands until it seemed as

though we might stomp through the floor or launch Naushon House into Hadleys Harbor.

Then Billy looked over at me and shouted, "Buck-and-wing, Abell!" catching up the first strains on his harmonica, stamping his foot, and shouting instructions to the fiddles, who seemed to know the rhythm anyhow. I suddenly found myself alone in a great circle of clapping social guests doing the rhythmic, halting walk, the shoulder shaking and finger-snapping that I had learned from some lively guests during the long days of waiting for ships. Immediately, Hope was up beside me, then Judge Folger and his daughter, for Billy and I had showed Hope and her mother the Negro dance one evening in their Edgartown parlor. The four of us were now abreast, strutting, kicking, and bowing, up and down that wide room, four white Cape Codders, pretending for an instant to be something that we, none of us, could ever quite attain.

After the shout of applause Judge Folger clapped hands smartly and motioned for silence. He stepped up to the musicians seated beneath the big, curving staircase and bowed to Mrs. Robinson at the organ. "Amanda, as both your employer and loyal follower in your never-ending provision of joy and delight for this boisterous company, I now request that you lead with me this band of honest revelers in a square dance, and whoever sits down before us shall pay some forfeit that I will decide. Something to do with kissing, I would think, that kind of thing!"

Mrs. Robinson arose, not quite smiling, but with eyes sparkling, and off we all went, Judge Folger dancing and calling together, the fiddles screeching, the boots thumping, the house rocking and shaking as we circled each other at what seemed to me, after several, hard cider punches, breakneck speed. I faced Hope, Sarah Allen, then the Scudders, then a dozen other women, old and young, their cheeks pink, their hair damp and flying, their smiles and cries so joyous and unrestrained that we whirled and stamped and clapped in what seemed to me an ascending and opening pattern of delight that could only be ended by our all falling senseless.

But the dancers gradually thinned and finally Hope whispered sensibly in my ear. "Come, Abel, let's pay Grandfather's silly forfeit and get some clam fritters," so we dropped out and walked under the archway with the mistletoe, the penalty decreed for those miscreants who left the field before Judge Folger. My beloved Hope, her



smooth cheeks like flames, her lovely neck and shoulders damp and soft with sweat, kissed me lightly on the lips, but I could not let her go, the heat and black hair and perfume smell completely overcoming me until I heard Judge Folger's voice behind me. "Amanda, I think in Abel's case we must henceforth make the forfeit that he shall stay *out* of that doorway. Damn me, madam! The young man has made a perfect mockery out of my attempts at disciplining this unruly mob of revelers!"

I drew back from Hope's lips, my face burning and saw her hot eyes looking intently up into mine, the room and company swirling around us. Dear, beloved Hope!

On Christmas Day the lawn and house sparkled in patterns of crystal, these decorations created by a dense fog followed by a sharp freeze. Inside the dinner surged forward in a babble of talk and toasts and jokes. When dessert came Hope and I were ordered to the right and left hand of Judge Folger—so he might keep an eye on us, he noted sternly—and were plied with a brandy-saturated mince pie.

"And, Hope," said Judge Folger, casually sipping his wine, his small eyes twinkling beads, "I hear you are given to exercising Cannonball along Water Street at odd hours? Some sort of practice for a Paul Revere tableau, I suppose?" The Judge wiped his lips with a large napkin.

Hope shrugged and pursed her red mouth. "Not really, Grandfather," she said coolly. "Great heart cannot be denied. When Cannonball wants to run, off we go!"

Judge Folger laughed long and immoderately at that, then turned to me. "Abel, you are quite at home on Old Columbia, but I suspect Cannonball would be a new experience."

"Cannonball would make a fortune," I said, "except, once you see him, who would bet against him? His head is bigger than *Hero's* rudder."

Judge Folger pushed back from the table and stood up. "Well, my friends," he announced to the drowsy, food-sodden throng. "I now urge you to retire to quiet conversation, coffee, or for those gentlemen needing such a digestive, cigars in the billiard room. And as for you two," he said more quietly turning to Hope and then me, "I suggest a walk. Naushon seldom looks this way, and you should store this vision for the future. Although," and now he winked at Hope, "no doubt other distractions will interfere with such contemplation." Suddenly he hugged us

both, one inside each arm. "My dears," he said quietly, "you are the light of my life."

Judge Folger was right about the sights, and we were not the only ones out walking in that chill, brilliant, quiet air. The entire house was covered with a rime of bright ice, glittering in the thin, winter sun. The lawn was both white and green, patterned with ice platters and frost bridges. Down in the lower woods the white cedars glittered, every branch covered by a thick cylinder of ice. Small branches broke and fell continuously onto the thin ice crust with a snap and clatter. It was a strange, almost deathlike scene, the day still, and the only sound the fall of these small, cold bones onto chill, white surfaces. Hope shivered and I hugged her and kissed her cheek.

"Is this what you sometimes see, Abel?" she asked, "this deathlike coldness?" For I had told her often about my visions and my sight.

I shook my head. "The coldness, yes, and the . . . unhumanness of it, that kind of deadly continual clatter. But not death. The ocean is cold, but always life, fierce life. This is passive."

We turned and walked out of the woods and back up the hill and I saw Naushon House, like a palace of diamonds in the low sun. I suddenly remembered the old midwife and her talk about the Eye of the Ocean. And with Hope hugging me warmly as we walked up the lawn to that magic house everything at that moment seemed possible.

Hope and I rode Cannonball, far more sedately this time, out to Mother Feeney in January. Naushon House had no guests for several days and Peleg had let me come over for a visit. The Vineyard lay in the grip of a cold spell, an inch of snow over everything, and the wind blustery and hard from the north. Mother Feeney lived in a tiny, grey clapboard house surrounded by a decrepit farmyard, a ragged henhouse, tiny barn for her three-legged cow, and assorted junk that had accumulated over the years. We dropped off Cannonball, and the door opened just as we reached it, the old woman peering out at us under her bonnet. Hope thought she never took it off because she was bald.

Inside it was quite cosy, with a glowing wood stove, but since Mother Feeney shared her warmth with a number of bantam chickens, the interior had a certain sense of the henhouse.



"She can ride, that one," said Mother Feeney to me, relevant to nothing and indicating Hope. "You would not believe it, Abel Roon, but I uster ride like the very devil myself, all across this blessed island. Aye, the ground went under me all in black and white streaks, young people. I flew. That's a fine horse, young Hope. Aye . . . a beauty that one."

She certainly seemed talkative. "Mother," I said. "What is the Eye of the Ocean?" Directness seemed appropriate.

She cocked her head and I could see her eyes peeping out brighter and beadier than any bantam hen's. "A place of wisdom, Abel Roon. Where the ocean and man can speak . . . together."

"And where is that place?" My voice was tight and quiet, and Hope put her hand over mine.

"In the other ocean," said the old woman casually. "The whalemén have been there, but it means naught to them."

I took out from under my arm the fine, thick atlas I had borrowed from Judge Folger's library and opened it to a general map of the Pacific Ocean. "Could you show me where on this map you think it is?"

Mother Feeney cackled at that. "You think it be just a place on a map, Abel Roon? You know better. It is in your own eye too, young master."

"It is not a place, then?" I said in puzzlement.

"It is a place and not a place," answered Mother Feeney at once.

I decided that directness was not appropriate. "Have you been to the Eye, Mother?" I asked, hoping to get a story started.

The little woman cackled loudly. "Close, Abel Roon, I been close. They dassent let a woman go to the Eye. It ain't a thing for us, they say, young Hope. But I learned their magic and their talk. Spent two years with them heathen magicians." She suddenly settled back in her creaky rocker and a bantam hen hopped up on her lap. She really seemed at peace now, and she stroked that little hen as one might a cat. "I was young then with old Feeney my fool husband, running a copra schooner. Irishmen never have been worth a damn at sea. Don't know why. It's just true. We were wrecked on an empty bar, some cocoanuts, and nothing else. Old Feeney, he up and died. Couldn't keep going on cocoanuts. Then the magicians came, heathens in breechcloths, and took me to their island. Taught me plenty, them natives. Midwifery their

way. Water Speech. About the Eye and the way the ocean moved. Sometimes I can almost see it . . . hard . . . out of the very corner of your eyes . . . you know, Abel Roon?"

I nodded. "Why?" I asked.

Mother Feeney peered at me for a while, stroking her hen and patting its head. "You look north and west Abel Roon, and you see three . . . mebbe four spires, churches filled with sea captains. Now I been at sea enough to know that while they may be plenty of comfort in praying and thinking about Jesus Christ, there ain't never been a ship yet navigated by spiritual forces. Old Feeney, he believed something fierce, but when we was finally off by sixty miles because he'd been drinking and navigating together, that lee shore was hard as bullets anyhow!" Mother Feeney looked squarely at us and awaited our nod of agreement.

"Now I don't know how much comfort them heathens get out of staring at the ocean, though it seemed a powerful amount for some of them, but them darky navigators can find their ways around a large piece of ocean, and not just find their way, but get fish, and follow currents, see winds. They was ten times better'n old Feeney at all that. So I see them heathens as mebbe not so dumb, kind of combining things together, you might say. Something you might think these so-smart Cape Codders might take to, religion on Sunday and navigating your vessel the other six days."

Hope laughed softly at that. "And they'd have a perfect excuse to talk about the weather in between times," she said.

Mother Feeney cackled again. "Aye, young Hope, and mebbe they could work in corn planting times and when to harvest the cranberries."

I decided that the list of advantages a Cape Codder might reasonably expect of a new religion was a topic too large for any given visit. "How did you leave them?" I asked her.

Mother Feeney rocked and petted. "They up and took me in a canoe for days. We lived in the canoe, ate, all the rest. And then we came round an island and there was a whaleship, right at anchor, getting water ashore. She was the *Almira*, Cap'n Osborne, from Edgartown. The whalemens brought me back here. Didn't know what I was at first, mebbe not later either. Thin, burned dark



brown, short hair. I was sure healthy then. Wisht I was now."

Hope leaned over and patted the small, bony knee. "We brought some tea, Mother. Let me make it for all of us on your fine hot stove." While Hope did that, I at last put the atlas on Mother Feeney's lap and she showed me the central Pacific island group where the magicians lived. I turned to a larger-scale map and soon she was showing me where "Old Feeney" had his final wreck, where she spent most of her two years and where they met the *Almira*. Carefully, I made notes on this map.

"And the Eye?" I said finally. I stood stooped over her right shoulder, the book open on her lap, the bantam hen temporarily on the other shoulder.

She turned and looked up at me. I could see her small, drawn face and the little smile on her thin lips. "They would have to show you, Abel Roon. It ain't only a place, but a time. The magicians say that the ocean speaks the Water Speech itself and that you can listen through your eyes and body. They said there are other Eyes. I never understood some of that. But I think mebbe one is near and so I live here, Abel Roon."

That seemed unlikely to me. Certainly the ocean had held my father in thralldom, but he was born on Cape Cod. And it struck me as very odd that the first whale-ship Mother Feeney met should be passing from one Eye to another.

Hope soon brought us the tea and we passed quite a jolly hour hearing about Mother Feeney's hens and their health problems, her unruly cow, and her few midwifery jobs. When we left, I handed her a purse of coins sent over from Judge Folger. She inclined her head. "I thank you all, Abel Roon," she said and stepped out with us into the snowy yard. As we walked to Cannonball, she made the Water Speech again and I immediately responded, we, back and forth, commenting on the ebb and flood of the waters around us. Hope watched this with wide eyes until I gave her a lift way up on the big back, then made it myself on a run, though awkwardly. He was a tall horse.

Cannonball walked slowly home over the white snow, objecting to the pace with a disgusted snort every thirty seconds or so. Hope sat close ahead of me, our thighs pressed along the horse's back.

"How did you learn to do that, Abel?" she asked me finally.

"I knew," I said. "As soon as I saw Sam Phipps do it in the cabin of the *Four Brothers*, I knew how, and what it meant."

"And you will go to the Eye?"

"I must. There is a part of me that longs for it now. But the whalers go there all the time. It is . . ." and I realized she was crying. I pressed forward, so our bodies were now all together and put my hand to her cheek. "I will come back. You are all I love, Hope."

She snuffled and shook her head. "I know you will come back, Abel. But how? As what? You are so much more than I am now. You grow all the time. You are so powerful." She blew her nose suddenly and loudly on a handkerchief pulled out of her boot. "And Grandfather is all behind you, egging you on. And I suppose Father eventually will be too. You're all of you so together . . . in agreement. Naturally," and she mimicked Mother Feeney's thin, little voice, "they dassent let a woman go to the Eye. Well, I'm going to the Eye, whatever that is or isn't, and anywhere else I want—so there, Abel Roon!"

I felt her strong, soft body, full of life, and tense with anger, and I kissed her neck whispering and believing it at that moment "I can't leave you anyway . . . Hope. . . ."

Hope relaxed back against me, but not completely, and I heard her say, under her breath, as we clip-clopped up Water Street, "Dassent let a woman . . . the hell with them!"

That next year passed so happily and busily that almost no part seems more or less important than any other. There was the glorious Fourth with Hope and me astride Old Columbia at the West End Pond, then at dinner, with jibes and jokes from Judge Folger, and in the evening the fireworks display, me softly kissing Hope's long, smooth throat as the bombs boomed above us. That summer was a busy one, *Hero* often crammed with guests gliding under the Hyannisport hill toward a jolly chat with Alonzo Scudder.

Then one night in October, a brilliant sharp, cold one with the wind slightly west of north and Holmes Hole uneasy in long rollers hooking around West Chop, I came in along the seaward side of the Schooner *Lark* and as



Billy passed lines I waved at Captain Abner Hallet, his cheerful, whiskered face peering over the rail.

"Abel, Billy, come aboard for some refreshments," he called. Normally I rushed off to Edgartown after a Holmes Hole delivery, but Hope was down-island with one or another of the endless Mayhews, so I shouted that we would come up. Billy immediately followed our guests up the ladder, his lips loudly smacking, and I threw over some fenders to keep *Hero* clean. *Lark* was a monster, well over a hundred feet, with three thick masts. She carried clouds of sail and looked, when you climbed over her rail, as wide as she was long.

We were soon down in Captain Hallet's roomy and comfortable cabin, I with a mug of beer and Billy into the Captain's ample locker deciding what he wanted.

Hallet took a pull on his glass and grinned at us.

"Waal, you fellers shore keep busy. Gawd, I never know where yore at."

"They comin' at us like a cloud of locusts, Abner," said Uncle Billy, finally selecting some rum to his taste.

"Waal, the fact is . . ." and Captain Hallet got up and went to shut the cabin door, then spoke quietly, "them planters are right up in arms about all this." He sat at the big table across from me. "They tried to get the gov'mint to do sumthin,' but there wasn't any way that would work. Lots of sheriffs and judges around here, the elected ones anyhow, would just refuse to act, you know, Abel? Anyway, Moses Folger can tell you more about all that political stuff. What I know is this." His eyes, though lined with red veins, were hard and sharp. "Some planters around Savannah have got together to send a . . . waal expedition, I suppose you might call it. North. They're going to pay wages plus a thousand apiece for any slaves recaptured, whatever kind. They figure if they can get a few as proof of the traffic, they can hit the gov'mint over the head and force them to use the Navy."

"Whoremasters!" said Billy appropriately.

Hallet grinned and poured Billy another drink. Then he turned again to me. "Abel, yore a big boy and you seen some hard times and I know damn well you can sail a boat better'n anyone, but, Jesus, Abel, these are hard men! You ain't never faced men like this scum. If they get aboard *Hero*, they'll tear her apart. Don't trust them fancy hiding places, Abel. Keep 'em off you, whatever happens. Cruel, Abel. They be cruel!"

I remembered the Negro mother with the mulatto baby and how the water was alight after I saw the little crippled boy. I looked directly into Abner Hallet's eyes. "There are different kinds of cruelty, Abner, but the Southrons have no special claim to it."

I said this so sternly that Hallet sat back and rubbed his round, full beard. "Waal, mebbe I won't worry so much about you, Abel. You are gettin' older. I shore would like to have you for a mate."

"They ain't getting aboard *Hero*," said Billy, suddenly catching up with the conversation. "We'll give em a whiff of grape they won't ferget, damn bastid spawn of hellfire." His short whiskers vibrated and sprayed rum drops.

Captain Hallet slapped Uncle Billy with a loud laugh and poured out the rest of the rum. "Whiff of grape! Aye, that'll do them! By God, Billy, I'd like to stand in with a seventy-four and give Savannah a whiff of grape! All them rich pinched-in women with their gloves and sun umbrellas . . . dang their souls anyway!"

But I noticed that Billy was not responding and suddenly seemed confused and lost between here and somewhere else.

Christmas was like the others, yet still different and wonderful. Hope stayed until after New Years, and on New Year's Day we had a screaming northeaster that kept me busy all day long securing things in Hadleys. After a warm and welcome supper, Hope and I ducked out in slickers and stood in the lee of Naushon House watching the horizontal rain driving across the bay and the sounds, the wind suddenly gusting upward until you wondered if it would ever turn back. We were then content in each other, holding tightly in that wet, windy dark and I suppose we might have gone on from there to make the same kind of relationship the other young couples who met at Naushon House contracted. But behind, at our back, pressing, forcing, were the slaves and the hunters. I, of all people, should have known that nothing remains, everything changes continuously to something new.

We met them that next June, a warm, blowy, foggy night. The southwesterlies had brought wet air in from seaward and large, low patches of fog blew across Nantucket Sound, so you might now be sailing in a blanket within a fifty-foot circle, then smoothly move into a mile or more of visibility. This meant little to me, heading on a



good reach for Hyannisport, except, I suppose, a reduction in watchfulness. Fog always seemed a blessing on our enterprises.

We had left Nobska, visible for a moment, behind and were skimming steadily east, the fog coming and going. In the cabin we had only two guests, a large, powerful, field hand named Jason and a small, withered woman of unknown years but great age, whom he called mother. Uncle Billy was entertaining below with some new riddles about the Southrons, such as why they don't stick pistols in their belts. Answer, they keep shooting off their . . . well, it all seemed hilarious to our guests.

Then I felt them behind us. Back in the fog but, peering, I could just make out a sense of her sails. I let *Hero* slide up to windward, gradually hardening her tack, but they followed, tight and gaining. They could see me somehow, probably with a man at the masthead, looking through the top of the low fog banks.

"Billy!" He knew that tone and popped his head up immediately.

"We're being chased! Get the weapons out! Jason?" The heavy Negro peered up at me from round, white eyes. "You may have to fight with us, Jason. I think slave hunters are close behind!"

He nodded eagerly, then grinned in a great display of teeth as Billy handed him a large cutlass. "Pull the hatch cover and stay below. Listen to what I say! No matter what else you hear, don't come up unless I call you! You understand, Billy?"

Out of the dark hole of the cabin doorway came a new, clear, oddly young voice. "Aye, Moses, we'll wait for them."

Moses! What was happening? We shot into a clear, moonlit sea space, perhaps a half-mile across, *Hero* leaning hard as they hissed out behind us. How the ocean glowed then! I saw her dead astern, a beautiful schooner, thin, low, and raked with a mass of sails, three huge jibs, all staysails set, a bone of white under her sharp cutwater. The ocean parted before that lovely vessel and as we drove on a line, perhaps sixty yards apart, I heard a hail.

"United States Revenue Service! Heave to!"

I instantly put *Hero* up into the wind, letting her shoot as far as possible to the west off our track. "Steady," I whispered to the cabin. "This may be tight!"

The schooner was well handled and they let her sheets

run the moment they saw me head up, turning back of me and coming up behind with a great, dreadful clatter of blocks and falls. I had my right hand on the Colts pistol in my boot. Captain Hallet had said they should not get aboard, and I had no intention of allowing them. But we also needed some way to delay them. As the long, low vessel slid along our starboard side, I gathered in the threads of the ocean speech through my eyes and my motion sense. I had never seen the ocean so bright, except that one other time, but now, in addition, I *knew* it. All of its motions and movements. How it worked on *Hero* and the schooner as we came together. How the water supported and cradled us. Two men stood at her port side and one of those black figures reached for *Hero's* side stay. I let him take it and watched his foot leave the schooner's rail and move downward toward our deck. That moment I pushed the tiller over. *Hero*, still slowly shooting to windward, rolled to port as the big schooner rolled to starboard. The man fell between us with a shout and I had a sense of him in the water, a spark like the fish but not belonging there like the fish. Knowing exactly how, I reversed the helm and the two boats now rolled heavily together. I felt the round, solid bulk of *Hero* coming against the schooner's own huge, rolling mass. He was between and I felt the boats catch his skull and shoulder and smash them in. He screamed and I exulted in his pain.

We fell off to port away from them and I let us weather around in a wide circle that brought us into the fog again. The schooner lay in irons, a dark, flapping shadow and as we slipped away into the murk we could hear the thin screaming behind. I had felt that wound under my tiller hand as though I had delivered it with an ax.

There was only one course and that was back to Naushon. Peleg and the troopers were more than a match for any schooner and if a battle brought the Navy in, I thought, well we would take them on too! The fog was thicker around Nobska but I had a sense of them behind. We would see how well they navigated Woods Hole in this wet wool!

I seldom went through the Hole to reach Hadleys and tonight I ducked among the rocks at Mink Point and scooted inside low Pine Island along the Nonamesset shore. As I came well inside Hadleys Rock the fog lifted a bit and I saw two rowing boats filled with men laying at



the entrance to Hadleys. Peleg! I came gliding up behind them, shot to windward and caught the thrown line. "They're just behind. Slave catchers! I hurt one! She'll have to come through the Hole."

Peleg jumped aboard and the other men followed. "Shall we go for her here, Abel?" he asked, his wide hand easily enclosing the entire breech of a revolving carbine.

"No," I said, "we'll lead them out into Buzzards Bay. They still don't know if anyone else is aboard. I got away in a kind of accident. They'll figure I went through the Hole south and west hoping to lose them. If they don't find us outside to the north, they're sure to turn back and search this shore."

"Billy, get the guests off," said Peleg sharply.

Billy's old face, for once serious, peered at us in the lantern light. "I bin going on these trips fifteen, twenty years. I ain't missing this one."

"Ah said Ah'd fight for you, cap'n," said Jason to me, standing staunchly beside Billy. I looked at Peleg. "Freedom means all of freedom, Peleg. Let him fight."

Peleg nodded. He helped the old woman over into the leading boat and spoke urgently to Mrs. Robinson, who was capably manning the oars. "Put the old woman to bed! Tell Hallet! Then get across to the town. You know how to send for Moses?" As she nodded, Peleg threw the painter into her rowing boat and turned to me. "All right, Abel," and he motioned for the men to crowd below as we fell off on port haul and headed out into the Hole.

Peleg ducked down on the deck across from me cursing steadily. "It's the slave hunter from Savannah," he said bitterly, "Hallet saw the bastards in Newport. We've been watching all along the islands, both sides, but they got by us in this damn fog! Frank, the Tarpaulin stock boy, rode up an hour ago and said a coaster had seen them in the sound. I hoped you might get to Hyannisport and not meet them until you were coming back. Damn!"

"We met them and we'll meet them again," I said. "How did they recognize *Hero*?"

Peleg snorted angrily. "There's a new Southron customs agent on Nantucket. Oh, we knew he was making inquiries, but there wasn't much we could do." He looked narrowly at me. "Abner Hallet is at Naushon House. As soon as he hears from Amanda that we have left to attack the schooner, he will sail with the rest of my men for Nan-

tucket. We will cut the whole boil out this same night, Abel."

The ocean was afire with movement. I knew every roll, every creak of *Hero*. I held the reins of the bay. I thought icily of genial, capable, deadly Abner Hallet, gone to abduct and murder a customs agent and I felt intense joy. I would have readily murdered half of Nantucket at that moment if I knew they stood against us. Whoremasters! Cowards! What intense power there is in righteousness! I stared eagerly into the fog drifting through the Hole with the bright current, *Hero* luffing along slowly. I didn't want them to miss us! God no, not now! I was on fire with the truth of violence. And I sucked in as I caught her sense again north of us, then immediately tacked and went hard about, letting the rig slap and bang as she went round. "I'm going in close to Timmy Point, Peleg," I said. "She won't try to catch us near rocks. They probably want sea room too."

At that moment we both heard a distant shout. They had seen us again. I looked at Peleg's face and wondered if I seemed to him so cold and deadly. Hallet said they were hard men. What were we?

After we passed Timmy Point, I fell off to a broad reach where *Hero* made her best speed. Also, it was from this point of sailing that I intended to begin our attack on them. As we drove northwest I explained my plan to Peleg and he immediately went below to prepare for the meeting.

The fog was heavy here near the Hole created by the cold water moving in great masses from the sound, but I knew that north up Buzzards Bay the water changed less and would be warmer with less fog.

A mile out we broke into fairly open water. Peleg and two other men lay along the sides of *Hero's* cabin, ropes and grapnels in their hands. The schooner came out behind, heading a bit south of us, but soon fell off on our course driving up behind in the dim moonlight. Visibility improved and I led her into clear water. I didn't want them to think I was running for the fog when I finally turned. She gained and gained and suddenly I snapped *Hero* around to starboard, weathering instantly as we spun and fell off reaching on the other tack, heading right back for her. As we hammered toward each other I gambled they would wait and judge my intent. I stood up so they could see me and began to shout. "Shoal water!



Weepecket Rock! Watch out!" They probably couldn't make out what I said but while they tried, the two boats came rapidly at each other. I was steering to pass us perhaps ten feet from the schooner's leeward rail but at the proper instant I put the helm to port and, flinching for poor *Hero*, slammed us into the starboard bow of the schooner at speed. *Hero* took a tremendous thump and the driving mass of the schooner rolled her hard over to port, but the glancing collision cut our speed to almost nothing.

"Now!" I said sharply, and the grapnels flew across. While *Hero* was banging and bumping along the side of the hard-driven schooner and they snubbed the ropes, I had my pistol out. Sighting along *Hero's* cabin roof I could see her helmsman clearly under the big main boom. I shot him three times, then put *Hero's* helm all the way over to starboard. There was probably no need of that. The huge off-center drag of *Hero*, now shackled to the schooner's side, and the sudden lack of control at the helm swung the schooner, at speed, violently to starboard. I could hear her wheel-spokes strumming as her rudder went right over and she wore clockwise like a thunder-clap. The violent slam of those crossing booms and gaffs brought the foremast down with a snap of doom, and the mainmast also broke about twenty feet up and dropped the staysails over the main deck. I had known that would happen. I had known how to use the ocean to do it. And now we would kill them all.

Peleg, his four troopers, and Jason were aboard her in an instant, running aft over the jumble and confusion. I heard rapid shots astern, then turned to watch Jason, both hands on his cutlass, chop down on a rising shape under the fallen canvas. The shrill scream was followed by a spout, a dark artesian well of blood. He struck mightily again and then ran to another struggling shape, his cutlass up over his head, his teeth shining.

More shots came from inside the schooner and I dropped *Hero's* sails, jumped aboard, and ran aft over the confusion of rope and canvas. The mainsail had come down mostly into the water, so the afterdeck and companionway were clear. Three men lay shot on deck. Uncle Billy and I dashed down the broad stairs into her main cabin, our pistols ready, but the battle was already ended. The revolving carbines and dragoon pistols fired so rapidly that no one below had been able to use a weapon.

But one of them was still alive. He was a young man, about my age, tall and good looking. One of the troopers had caught him with a cutlass, and his left hand clutched his right side, trying to stop the blood pouring from a gaping wound. His eyes were filled with pain and terror—total, piteous, wrenching terror. As I looked around, I saw even Peleg had become irresolute, staring at the boy, his weapon pointed at the floor.

"Please, oh God, don't kill me!" He sobbed and wept, "Ah'm not one of them. Mah father is Senator Claiborne. He'll do anything if you don't kill me! Pay anything. . . ." He blubbered and cried and whimpered at us.

"Why are you with these pirates?" I asked him sharply.

"Watching, just observing. They said Ah could come along. . . ."

I stared at him in complete hatred. He was like me, young, bright, and strong, living in a rich, powerful family. What a lark to sail north with the fierce, tough slave-hunters! Why they might even catch a young, female Negro. He could share in that fun too!

"Your father will never know what happened to you," I said with a deadly quietness, and raised the Colt. I was stronger and harder than any of them then. Stronger than Peleg. Stronger than Judge Folger or Captain Hallet. And crueller. I carefully shot him twice in the heart. As the little Colt boomed in that restricted space, I heard Uncle Billy say softly behind me, "No, Moses. Stop." And as I turned he fell like a sack to the bloody cabin floor.

I picked Billy up in my arms. He weighed very little. "The bodies should all be down here with the hatches shut," I said to them. "We'll have to tie the loose gear to her deck and get that mainmast stump down and lashed. Some fisherman will hook it otherwise. When she's all in one low piece, we'll sink her here. We have eight fathom."

Billy was moaning as I gently carried him down into *Hero's* cabin and laid him on a bunk. His hands were cold and his pulse was terribly weak. His face was sagged and lost. Apoplexy? Some sort of attack?

"Billy?" I said softly.

He opened his eyes and looked vaguely at me. "Surrender, Moses. Give them the vessel. Stop the blood . . . the blood."

Billy was back on the *de Neufchatel*, her decks running in hot blood. The night wild with the screams of hacked



and blasted men in the boats around her sides. "We must give up, Moses," he said again.

"We have won, Billy. We don't have to give up to anyone," I said quietly to him.

He looked up at me and saw me in an instant. His old, simple smile came back on his ragged, bearded face and he squeezed my hand.

"What did we win, Abel?" he asked gently, but before I could answer his heart stopped.

I sat with Billy a bit letting my tears fall on his tired, old face, then covered him with a blanket and went up the companionway. They had found an ax aboard the schooner and Jason, stripped to the waist, was powerfully attacking the thick mast stump. He looked across at me in the lantern light and grinned. "Which way you want to fell dis tree, Cap'n? I'se a woods nigger. Dis is mah business!"

"Right forward, Jason," I called. "We'll lash it to the bowsprit." I watched him expertly bring down that stump, his first woodchopping job in our free world. His black, shiny muscles flowed and worked in the lantern light as the great chips flew out, fast as carbine bullets. "Timber, Cap'n!" he shouted, stepping back, and the stump fell with a crash onto the confusion of stays and canvas.

The schooner was already down by her head. Peleg was opening her up, and we rushed about tying things together to make a huge bundle from which nothing would drift ashore. We jumped onto *Hero* as the bowsprit touched the waves, and I hoisted our main and cast us loose. Peleg was the last to come up and as his boots hit *Hero's* deck he stared at us. "Anybody bring anything off that vessel? Money? Papers?"

We all shook our heads. Peleg smiled like death. "No trace of her will ever be found," he said slowly.

But now I spoke. "Peleg, Uncle Billy is dead."

Peleg's face showed the same angry, helpless pain I had seen that time with the Negro mother. He went below and stayed there awhile as we luffed up, waiting for the schooner to make her plunge.

"She's going, Peleg," I called finally, and he put his head up out of the cabin and turned to stare at the once-sleek schooner, now looking like a hurricane wreck covered with broken spars and lashed pieces. She made a sudden half-turn as her deck came awash and then, silently, she left our sight.

"When we get in, Abel," said Peleg in a calm, low voice, "we will take Billy to the icehouse. Moses will want to be here for the burial."

We rode the buckboard the length of Naushon late that night to the West End Pond icehouse, Peleg and I saying nothing but taking much comfort in each other, and Uncle Billy, silent at last, wrapped in a clean, thick canvas behind us. We swept the sawdust off a huge cake and chopped a hollow, lifted the body in, then pushed another block on top, and left him alone in the damp, cool darkness.

As we trotted back east to Naushon House the dawn was showing. Peleg, the reins loose in his left hand, suddenly put his right arm around my shoulders. He had never done that before, not even in my sight, to Amanda Robinson. "Abel," he said—and his voice was low and filled with a passionate intensity—"praise whatever passes as God in this sick land that you came to us that morning! Moses Folger never made a better choice! I could not have done that without you, Abel. You have saved Naushon House!"

"I have committed bloody, cruel murder, Peleg," I said quietly.

"You made that choice, Abel," said Peleg, peering at me, "the first day Judge Folger took you to the closed room, then asked you to join us."

But that was easily said and easily believed. I was thinking about Hope.

Judge Folger came back from some far place four days later. He spoke briefly with Peleg, then rode west to get Billy's body by himself. We held the funeral that afternoon.

Peleg had made a pine coffin and stained it a handsome, dark brown. Covering it on the buckboard was the old, rotted flag from the *de Neufchatel*, kept somewhere in Naushon House along with everything else. Behind the buckboard, and Old Columbia walked by Peleg, came the troopers with their shouldered carbines loaded with powder and wad only. Then Judge Folger marched alone in his black business suit, his bald head bare, and around his shoulders hung a military drum covered and muffled in black muslin. Then came Sarah Allen, Amanda Robinson, and I, and behind us the rest of the Naushon people from Tarpaulin, and the West End and other farms and the Nonamesset house.



We walked to the old graveyard to slow drum beats in a quiet line, stopping at the newly dug hole. Judge Folger stepped forward and lifted off his drum. He turned to us gathered in a half-circle.

And he grinned. "I didn't dare have a minister here. Billy would have climbed right out of that box and said something awful." People laughed and wiped their eyes. "So I'll say what needs to be said." He looked around at us. "Many of us on Naushon at this time are in doubt about a God or a Heaven in a world filled with the stench of evil. But perhaps we don't understand something and Billy isn't just gone, but gone to some new life. Well, God, if there is a paradise, we ask that you invite this gentle blasphemer into your peaceable kingdom." Judge Folger paused and cleared his throat. "And, God, if Heaven is just some terrible copy of earth without honesty or fairness, filled with the proper and the stiff, so that Billy cannot be admitted, then I, Moses Folger, pray at the end of my time to go to Uncle Billy. If we are damned, we will be damned laughing, and to hell with piety and hypocrisy!"

Amanda Robinson stepped briskly forward and linked arms with Judge Folger, her face stern and fixed. "I will join that company, Moses," she said firmly.

Judge Folger stepped back blinking and Peleg, four troopers, and I now lifted the coffin off the buckboard and lowered it with some rope ends into the earth. Moses Folger lifted off and folded the flag, and we all shucked our coats and shoveled Uncle Billy under. When the mound was neat and patted down, the six troopers, three on a side, fired six rapid volleys into the air over the grave and in the moment of silence afterwards, Judge Folger shouted, "Three cheers for the men of the *Prince de Neufchatel*! Hip, Hip. . . ."

And everyone lustily cried, "Hooray!" three times and we marched back quite jauntily with me playing "Yankee Doodle" on Uncle Billy's harmonica.

That night Judge Folger and I settled down in his study to talk. He had heard Peleg's story and now he listened intently as I described the whole action, my extreme sensitivity to motion and water, the crushing of the man, our run out into Buzzards Bay and the rest. Judge Folger asked a question now and then, but mostly pulled on his cigar and peered at me out of those intense, almost white, eyes.

When I finished he rubbed his hands together and poked the small fire. "You know, Abel," he said slowly, "those were dangerous men on that vessel, cruel and capable, at sea or ashore . . . yet they stood no more chance with you than if they had taken that handsome ship, all sails set, into a typhoon."

"You see me as a monster, then?" I said, suddenly bitter.

"I see you as an absolutely extraordinary person!" said Judge Folger fiercely. "Peleg is still not able to fully explain what happened. He said that great schooner, one of the finest of her size on the coast, came flying down on you under a sky full of canvas and in a moment—an instant—you had turned her to wreck and ruin! Monster, Abel? You read the Greek stories with Sarah Allen? That is what gods do, Abel!"

I looked down at the floor and rubbed my knees. "Hope says you are making me like that. She says I grow away from her." I could not look at him.

Judge Folger cleared his throat and puffed on his cigar. "My granddaughter is a very beautiful and intelligent young woman with ideas on almost every subject." He paused and puffed some more.

I finally looked up at him and saw he was faintly smiling. "Hope has a point, I confess," he said. "I do expect people to behave in certain ways and I think it only fair that I explain these expectations to them. But a young man with your abilities can hardly be turned back to a shepherd, and Hope would not accept that for a second. What other deeds would be more appropriate for an eighteen-year-old man of formidable and unguessed talents, I wonder? Prayer and good thoughts? I think Uncle Billy would have never allowed that. Schooling and bookishness? You already know things I'll wager no other man on this earth knows. No, Abel, I think if Hope is honest, and if she accepts that we are here on this world to do and be our best, and I accept that absolutely, then I maintain I have set you to exactly the essential task in this wretched land today, and you have totally vindicated my choice by completing it with an ease and maturity that staggers my belief."

He stared at me. "How do you think Peleg or I would have made that attack? We would have luffed up, as you did the first time, decoyed as many as we could aboard, then poured out of *Hero's* cabin and fought them on both



vessels. We would have taken heavy losses and injuries, with all the problems of dealing with gunshot and cutlass wounds secretly here, perhaps for months. Probably one or more of them would have gone over the side, as soon as they saw how it was going, and could we have found them later, swimming in that fog? Probably not. We would now be facing a murder investigation by United States authorities. Piracy at sea, Abel! Not to mention the immediate connection of the missing customs agent on Nantucket with this matter. You held Moses Folger, Peleg, Abner Hallet, and the rest in your hand out there, Abel!"

"But I squeezed Uncle Billy too hard," I said tonelessly. "How will I tell about it to Hope?"

Judge Folger took a deep breath and leaned back. The tall, book-lined room flickered in the firelight and his face was serious. "Yes, how do you explain to someone who wasn't there that you committed cold-blooded murder? I have thought often of that, Abel, and I suspect there is no answer. Tell her simply and truly, then go on to whatever you can or will, from there. I can offer you no more than that, Abel. But as to that young man you cut down in the cabin, he surely deserved those shots. His father, himself one of the worst of them in the Senate, sent that young rakehell north to keep an eye on his money—yes, he was a contributor to this wretched slave hunting expedition—and also because that boy was a real problem in the women's quarters at the old plantation. Oh yes, Abel, those pistol shots saved some number of Negro women a degrading and disgusting rape."

Judge Folger lit a new cigar and puffed awhile. Then he looked at me sharply. "You saw yourself in him, didn't you, Abel? Yourself in a kind of reversing mirror?"

I nodded. I had wondered often since that killing whether I might have been him, if my guardian had been Senator Claiborne instead of Moses Folger. "I would kill him again now, to protect us," I said quietly. "But . . . Uncle Billy. . . ."

Judge Folger sighed, "Billy was back on the *de Neufchatel*?"

I nodded. "I could partly see it with him, the boats around you, the men hanging off the chains, the scuppers slippery in blood. . . ."

He shivered. "You could see that! And Billy finally did want to give them the ship. He had a sense of them, the British and our men, hurt, cut, torn up, by those spikes

and bolts we fired into them by the cannon-mouthful, Abel! But I. . . .”

Moses Folger leaned back in his chair and breathed deeply. Now his voice was cool and more distant. “I was not even a member of that ship’s company. Billy, my brother Shubael, was bos’n. The *de Neufchatel* was fat, Abel. She had taken five prizes and the best of their cargoes was below her decks. We had thirty-three men in all, the rest gone off to man the prize vessels, and some of us aboard were merchants and seamen from Nantucket town to dicker for the goods and help the privateer get into port. There were thirty-seven seamen from the prizes locked below decks. It was October, calm and quiet, plenty of clear air, Nantucket a few miles north. We spotted the six boats, over a hundred men from the *Endymion*, at dusk. She was a fine frigate, later on fought and beat our *President*. Our Captain Ordronaux loaded up. We had seventeen six- and eight-pounders, double-shotted with grape, and when they got a hundred yards off—it was about nine at night—we let go at them. They came at us from all sides, and the bow and stern boats got up under us and some of them climbed aboard. Ordronaux fell hurt at once, but Billy was there like a tiger and we drove them off the bow. Then I and two of the gunners loaded up as fast as we could with everything from the blacksmith shop, bolts, chain, everything, and fired down into the boats. Two of them were so close you could see the . . . parts torn off the marines as we fired that metal into their bodies. But they came up over the stern and we cut at each other again. There were only a few of us left but we drove them off, and that attack drove me mad. I went from gun to gun, loading and firing that metal, as much as I could cram in, down into those meat-filled, floating boats, until finally one sank and the rest drifted away into the night. I ran up and down, slipping in the blood and screaming at those gunners. It was at that time that my brother, Shubael Folger, became the Uncle Billy you loved and knew.”

Judge Folger’s voice had become husky, and now he wiped his eyes with a large monogrammed handkerchief. “Those British marines and sailors did not deserve that, Abel, nor did our good men. What set us so madly on each other like that, Abel?” He shook his head. “No, you cannot explain it to Hope. That killing lust!” He leaned back and pointed to his huge, rolltop desk, piled high with papers. “The *London Gazette* a few months back, Abel, fi-



nally lists the naval medals to those British men who fought boat actions here and off France thirty, forty, fifty years ago. There are fifty-four listed boat actions, and of course the *Endymion*, *de Neufchatel* meeting is not among them. The British do not give medals for defeats. Yet there is not a single one of those listed actions that is in any way comparable to that one. Over one hundred men died, Abel. The British only admitted forty, but the Admiralty records I have seen are quite explicit. Out of our thirty-three, only eleven remained alive one week later. It was a great American naval victory, Abel, in many ways the greatest we have ever won. And who has ever heard about the *de Neufchatel*, Abel, or Captain Ordronaux, or bos'n Shubael Folger? He squinted at me. "Victories like that are set aside. They are too terrible to celebrate. The good grey Quakers of Nantucket were wise to put that night behind them, just as we will put your terrible victory on Buzzards Bay behind us. But, Abel," and again he stared at me and spoke tensely, "I went mad on the *de Neufchatel* and I drove my brother mad. We slaughtered our true images that grim night, men as brave and resolute as we . . . but those devils on that schooner . . . you were not mad to slay them, sir!"

He suddenly leaned forward, staring into my eyes. "What do you want from me, Abel? I will deny you nothing within my power."

I stood up and walked over to the wall of books and pulled down the atlas. I knew exactly what I wanted. I had thought about it long and often. "I want passage on a whaleship to the central Pacific along with a small sailboat, perhaps a cabin catboat, eighteen or twenty feet," and I opened the book and sat down next to him.

I did not see Hope until the Fourth. Judge Folger thought it best that I go north with Abner Hallet for a two-week trip and let Naushon House become, for the moment, entirely a rich plaything. While I watched how twelve guests made their final transfer to Judge Folger's Canadian agent in a secret cove near Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Peleg and his carpenters replaced wounded *Hero's* shattered frames and planks in the Hadleys boat shed, and began work on a smaller, stubbier boat, built to the new design of gaff-headed catboat coming into general use along the south Cape. This was *Hope*, my next command.

That Fourth of July was a complicated, wrenching day, in some ways the most difficult I had faced at Naushon

House. While the social guests chatted, paraded, rode, boated, and shot firecrackers, Judge Folger, Silas Mayhew, and I sat closeted that morning in the Judge's study. I had spoken, in all, perhaps ten words to Captain Mayhew, always at Naushon House. He had been in the Pacific throughout my courtship of Hope. Now he was preparing to go again, and Judge Folger was asking that I be taken with my small sailboat as deck cargo and to a specific location, on the great Folger whaleship *Uncle Sam*.

Captain Mayhew was a tall, muscular, handsome man, perhaps forty, his black beard trimmed neatly, his moustache sharp, his eyes flinty. I suppose we saw a certain competitive similarity in each other which led to problems. That and, of course, my love for Hope. Peleg and I had never conflicted, even from the start, because we learned at once what each could do best, and Peleg was too committed to our general good to object if it became obvious that I could do something—often things having to do with boats—better than he. But Mayhew was a crack skipper, at the top of his profession. He was not used to taking suggestions on any subject whatever from eighteen-year-old boys. And he didn't really understand at first that Judge Folger was prepared to sink *Uncle Sam* at the pier if I asked him to do it.

"The location, Moses, is hardly in the middle of the grounds," said Captain Mayhew stiffly. "To use the largest whale ship in Massachusetts to deliver a boy to his manhood ritual with the heathens. . . ."

But Moses Folger, his eyes cold and direct, held up his hand. "Silas, you have made the bank a deal of money and we owe you much for your prudent and fruitful management of our assets, but," and his voice became very flat, "to Abel Roon I owe my liberty, my reputation, my life. You will take him where he wishes, whatever the whales or their lack, or you can relinquish command of *Uncle Sam*."

The two men glared grimly at each other while I stared at the floor in terrified embarrassment. Was this my future father-in-law? What in God's name was Judge Folger doing to me?

Captain Mayhew leaned back and smiled frostily. "I will do it, Moses, because I know you would not ask it that way if Mr. Roon had not performed a very great service."



That seemed to me a reasonably handsome surrender. I dared to look up at them again.

Captain Mayhew gave me an expressionless stare. "What part do you see for yourself in the crew, Mr. Roon, while you are aboard, that is?"

"Ah . . . well," I stammered. "I can certainly row or sail a whaleboat, or navigate some. I'm not a harpooner."

Captain Mayhew looked back at Judge Folger. "Why don't we call him an extra mate, Moses? He can share watches with the third. I'm afraid, Mr. Roon, you will have to take the pilot's berth in the corridor outside my cabin."

"If that is inconvenient, Captain Mayhew," I said evenly, "the fo'c'sle will be fine."

Mayhew shook his head, still with a smile like a cracked ice cake. "No, Mr. Roon. I am most interested in having you back aft with us. My daughter tells me you have a certain . . . ah . . . talent with the sea and fish. I think the whale fishery can always use new ideas."

But the sardonic way he said it suggested strongly that such ideas were not likely to come from young fugitive-runners who made odd, heathen motions and saw crazy things out of the corner of their eyes. I suddenly thought of Uncle Billy. It popped into my head; I killed men to get here, what have you done, you haughty bastard!

"The whale fishery is dying," I said in as chill a voice as his, "but if you want to hunt the rest of them down, I dare say I can show you ways to do that all right."

Silas Mayhew drew in his breath and stared at me in complete astonishment. Judge Folger, desperately biting his lip, pressed his hand over his mouth. But he was my partisan always, and oh, how I loved that old man then!

"Silas," he said intently, "I ask only that you treat Abel as you would any other young man with his strength and good mind. And I would wager with you sir, but I will not because it would not help Abel, that when we discuss this matter again after your voyage you will beg my apology for your coldness! There are very few superior people in this dreadful, sad world, Captain Mayhew, and by God, sir, when one of them is my ward he will be treated as I would be treated myself! You will remember that, Captain Mayhew!"

So I crept from that meeting, my knees trembling, cursing Uncle Billy and myself for our hot tempers, then curs-

ing myself for cursing poor Uncle Billy. And I still had to talk with Hope about it all.

The great holiday dinner was not till four that afternoon, so Hope and I, in a *Hero* well and strong and smelling of varnish, sailed along the north side of Naushon to anchor in Kettle Cove, a small crescent moon of beach on Naushon's northwest shore. I knew there would be no one there and we would talk.

Hope was prettily dressed in a white, ankle-length dress, her shoulders brown and bare and set off by a lacy collar, a purple, silk band around her long neck. I had no idea how to start it and, all of a sudden, found I was weeping. Hope gently held me in her arms and let me talk, about the schooner, the murder of the young man, the death and burial of Uncle Billy, my talk with Moses, and the disaster with her father a few hours earlier.

Hope pressed her warm cheek lightly to mine. "I should never have told father so much about you. It's so hard for me to hide things, Abel, but I know I should! Oh damn!" She drew back and looked in my eyes. "Father is so stern. He and Grandfather never did agree on so many things. I know Father thinks Judge Folger is too radical with the slaves and all of that. Father is so . . . stuffy . . . proper . . . law abiding. And Grandfather is so . . . damn manipulating and opinionated! And oh, Abel, you are so potent and so dangerous! And all of you are just trying to do the right thing your own ways and hurting each other and me and mother and . . ." She gave a great sigh and let her shoulders slump. "I don't want you to be a shepherd, Abel. Or, a bloody murderer either." Her hands began to turn and twist at a handkerchief and she stared at her lap. "Uncle Billy was the only one like me here, and he finally could not bear it any longer . . . the sternness . . . the grimness . . . the terrible stories . . . the endless thirst for punishment and revenge."

But I could not bear that. The tears poured down my face. "Don't hurt me, Hope! I loved Billy!" I cried out. "Do you think if I had known I would have done that! What is right, Hope? What am I to do?"

Now we both wept. Hope took my hand and spoke in a low, hard, little voice. "I didn't mean that Abel. That was a rotten, cowardly thing to say." She stared at the cockpit floor. "I was perfectly happy to help with the joy and beauty and excitement of Arabella's child, Abel. Oh yes, I loved that! And I would have had to be a much bigger



fool than I am, not to know there was always this other side, the side of violence and murder, and the two cannot exist, one without the other. So I was part of that and part of this and it is a cowardly, cruel thing to cry about terrible deeds at this late date!"

We sat silent for a while. Hope's voice now came flat and quiet. "What should you do, Abel? Go with Father to the Pacific. To the Eye or whatever is there. When you come back, and if you wish it, I will marry you then. I don't know what you will be, or what you and father will be to each other, but I will wait for that. I promise you nothing more than that, Abel, that we will marry if you wish." She sighed again. "Do I sound resigned, Abel? I am, my dear. In a way I wish we had never met. But we have and I know that no other man . . . weaker, smaller . . . would . . . well, do."

"Do you love me, Hope?" I asked her softly.

She looked at me and bit her lip. "I don't know, Abel," she finally said. "I am held completely by you. You are more my master than any planter could be over his weakest slave."

So we were all—sitting at the center of the long table with Moses Folger—rather subdued as the feast was set lavishly and endlessly before us by Mrs. Robinson and her many assistants. But Judge Folger chattered along as did, happily, Alonzo Scudder. For all his geniality, there had always been something hard and implacable about Captain Hallet, but seeing Alonzo Scudder so jovial and kindly, and knowing that he knew of the murders, had a very steadying effect on me. I think we all count on certain people's approval and, of all of them, I felt Alonzo Scudder was the steadiest and most honorable, honorable in the complete sense, not just within the constraints of Naushon House. If he could accept me, not as some freakishly powerful oddity, but as a young man in love with a young woman and trying to do his best in the world, then I could more easily accept myself.

And it seemed to me, as Alonzo Scudder chivvied and jollied Hope and me, until her dear cheeks were flaming red and she was in a state of delighted embarrassment, that he was saying the same thing, in a gentle and friendly way, that Judge Folger had told me: we must go on to whatever strengths we can find beyond this point.

It was a larger fireworks display than ever but as I turned to look at Hope while the red and green fire flow-

ers suddenly expanded above us, I saw her eyes brimming and the tears acting as a prism to the colored flashes of light. There are so many loyalties, to oneself and to others and they conflict so hurtfully. And yet, I was suddenly filled with a hollow, excited anticipation. At the Eye of the Ocean, I thought, all of this will become ordered and visible.

Surprisingly little ever came of our deeds on that June night. Peleg showed me some advertisements in the *New Bedford Mercury* and the *Nantucket Inquirer* from a supposed New York underwriter offering five hundred dollars for information relating to. . . . But such notices were not especially unusual and there was no suggestion in these of any suspected foul play. The matter of the customs agent, which had worried Judge Folger somewhat, was even less noticed. As Abner Hallet explained to me one night, "After that feller turned up missing for a few days, they sent an auditor down from Boston. Shore enough, they were some healthy shortages and other little, unusual things. Nawthin we did, Abel, just his own natural crookedness. So they figure he absconded. Got his description up in the Boston post offices, I hear." Hallet grinned in his genial, yet deadly way and stretched. "They aint no way, Abel, that a man can play in a poker game that uses real folks' lives for chips, and not have his own chip up on the table. They shorely are some folks down south right now . . . sech as that famous, bastid Senator, that are larning that lesson."

Through the summer Peleg and I worked on the cat-boat *Hope* when we could, for our movement of guests was now even more circumspect and time-consuming than before. And there were a few times, usually in connection with a Holmes Hole trip, that I courted Hope in Edgartown and had dinner at her house.

*Uncle Sam* was scheduled for departure in October and Captain Mayhew was back and forth between New Bedford and Edgartown organizing the fitting-out of his giant vessel. So there were two or three times when only Hope and I were at dinner and those good times helped to offset the other; the stiff, icy meals with the servants in the cool, spermaceti candlelight when Captain Mayhew spoke formally of *Uncle Sam* in her various aspects and Hope and I stared, mostly silent, at our plates. I soon discovered that saying nothing was much the best response. Otherwise, it seemed to me that Captain Mayhew was



trying to entice me into another reckless statement about the whales—or anything, I suppose—without Judge Folger here to protect me. Hope's eyes snapped and narrowed in anger at her father, and I was in constant terror that she would pop out with something, but we all managed to muddle along. Mainly I think because of Martha Mayhew, a lovely, soft, gentle woman, but with enough spunk to keep chattering on, even in the midst of silences harder and more brittle than the winter ice on West End Pond.

We launched little *Hope* in September, Hope popping the iron-bound stem with a bottle of Naushon cider. At the end of the month, Peleg and I went across Buzzards Bay to load *Hope*, Peleg towing me in *Hero*. *Uncle Sam* was, at that time, the largest vessel ever built for the whaling industry. She was a full ship, almost six hundred tons burthen, and rigged for studding and skysails. She carried great stacks of whaleboats and enough men to put six over at once. Her vast deck could accommodate two complete tryworks that would be built up when she reached the grounds, and it was in the location of one of these that little *Hope* would ride out to the Pacific Ocean.

With the help of Peleg, *Uncle Sam's* first mate Nathaniel Macy, and some crew members we hoisted *Hope*, her stubby mast and spar tied down over her cabin top, on a whaleboat fall and got her settled on the hardwood deck cradles that Peleg and I had made. Macy seemed distant but friendly, and anyway he knew Peleg, so we had a bit of cheer in the expansive aft dining room and I had a chance to gawp around the luxurious officers' quarters on this greatest of the Yankee whaleships.

Then, finally, came the last dinner in Edgartown, blessedly just Hope and I. She trembled tightly against me later in the parlor and her lips were hot. I terribly wanted to touch her then, her breasts, her long legs, but that seemed to me an unfair and unmanly thing to try. I had learned to take, as my due, what I wanted from Moses Folger. He invited that. I would never take from Hope. She would give herself. That was the only way it could ever be right. I drew back and looked at her, my face flushed.

Hope sighed and smiled ruefully. "Lord, Abel. What will you become? You seem to me in a kind of expanding glow of power. A young god, that's how they see you. Even father is dazzled . . . can't make you out."

*Uncle Sam* was towed out of New Bedford on a blus-

tery, chill October day, the north wind giving a suggestion of the winter that lay ahead for New England. The huge vessel was strung with flags and the hoots and whistles from the waterfront as she slowly pulled out past Palmer Island were continuous. On board a gay party was drawing to a close in Captain Mayhew's expansive sitting room, its large curtained windows looking out aft at the entire sweep of the New Bedford water front. Judge Folger, Martha Mayhew, my Hope, other Mayhews, captains, and bankers, were sitting and standing about, richly dressed, and politely toasting the beautiful ship and the success of the voyage.

Out in the bay, but still in the lee of the Fairhaven shore, the steam tug turned back and joined us to take off our social guests. The men clambered down the swaying ladder and made the jump to the pitching tug, but the ladies were lowered in a barrel chair and caught on the tug's deck by several of the crew. As Hope waited her turn in the slung chair, she turned and kissed my cheek, then whispered in my ear, "Remember, Abel. I will marry you if you wish. That will be for you to decide, no matter what happens."

"You are my only beloved," I whispered back, and then she was gone over the side, swinging down to the other deck and we were waving and waving at each other. Behind me, Captain Mayhew looked sternly aloft. "Mr. Macy, square her away. Get those flags off, then set sail."

Soon *Uncle Sam* fled down Buzzards Bay, the chill north wind at our back, her mighty sail plan driving, our white wake foaming like a broad road. Four days later it seemed impossible that we had ever been cold.

*Uncle Sam* was not only the largest whaling vessel at that time, but undoubtedly the smartest. Mayhew needed no green farm boys or crimps to make up a crew. Men fought to go on his voyages, the pay outs at the end spoke to them eloquently. The forecastle sailors and petty officers were mostly Nantucket, Vineyard and New Bedford people, Yankees, Azoreans, and Negroes at the top of their profession and not pulled off a beach somewhere. Indeed, Mayhew's own boatsteerer was the legendary John Micah of Polpis, Nantucket, half-Indian, half-Negro, and all violent muscle and strength.

As we pressed rapidly south, the days were filled with work and boat drill, splicing and reeving of lines, assem-



bly of casks, and general clean up and organization. Promptly at six bells, seven in the evening, the officers not on watch sat down for the formal evening meal. These were the times I dreaded the most when anticipating the trip, but I was glad to see that Captain Mayhew had plenty to talk about with his officers, so that I could usually remain silent. Once or twice he even asked my opinion, brusquely I must admit, on some trivial matter or other. Nathaniel Macy was the one officer who seemed to go out of his way to talk to me and I wondered if he knew some things that most Nantucket people did not, perhaps about our Naushon activities.

I stood watch with the third mate and acted as a kind of petty officer assistant to the other officers. The crew thought little enough of me one way or another. They were used to young friends and relatives of the owners camped back in the stern of whaleships, off to be magically made into men.

There was no stopping or turning from our headlong drive south. The main whale grounds at that time were in the central and northern Pacific, and the faster we rounded Cape Horn and set out into those broad waters, the happier everyone aboard would be.

Our southernmost position came three days before Christmas, and we were passing through the Straits of Magalhaens on Christmas Day. Captain Mayhew treated his officers to a fine dinner; ducks pressed in wine, Naushon turnips in butter, brandied peaches, and cigars. After the traditional Navy toast to wives and sweethearts he turned to me and actually smiled. "I think we must both miss Naushon House on this special day, eh, Mr. Roon?" he said coolly.

I gulped and nodded.

Nathaniel Macy smiled fondly at that, his chin whiskers a wreath around his smile. "Aye, those dancing parties, Silas! Judge Folger knows how to put on a do, he surely does!" He turned to me and winked. "Seems to me I remember young Mr. Roon here giving us quite a lesson in one of them darkie struts."

I gulped twice and nodded again, wondering what Captain Mayhew thought of "darkie struts," but he seemed that day in a benign mood. "Oh, the dancing goes well enough, Nat, but it is the meal that I think caps the celebration, the geese and hot stuffing."

We all thought of such pleasant things as *Uncle Sam*

pitched along under reduced sail against a head tide. It was summer here so the fits of snow were brief, but still the wind was bitter on watch. Finally, struggling against head winds that came from several points of the compass at once, we entered the Pacific and drove northwest. Four days later, we came upon our first whale.

It was just after the noon watch change, the weather chill and fresh. The masthead sang out, "Bloooows!"

Mayhew was up out of his cabin in an instant. "Where away?" he roared upward. "How far off?"

"Three pints off the larboard, two miles! A sparm! Blooows again!"

Mayhew whirled. "Mr. Macy, muster 'em up! You'll have to brace up sharp, I guess. Helm! Steady!" As he spoke, Captain Mayhew mounted the shearpole, vaulted up the ratlines in great leaps and was almost at the top-most crosstrees when the masthead cried,

"There goes floooks!"

Mayhew, one leg over a crosstree, peered out through his long glass. "Aye, there he is! A noble fan, Mr. Macy! A buster! Haul aboard that main tack! Helm!" he shouted down, "keep her just full and by."

While we rowers mustered, waiting expectantly at our respective boat stations, and freed lines ready to lower three whaleboats, Captain Mayhew remained at the masthead watching for the next rising of the whale along with a number of men who had swarmed up into the rigging at the first sighting and now peered, waiting, in all directions. "Are you ready, Mr. Macy," he called suddenly.

"Aye, Cap'n."

"Let them hoist and swing boats, then, Mr. Macy. Mr. Hussey!" This to the third mate. "I think we've run enough, sir! Haul the mains up and square the yards. Now your foresails! Helm! Ease down! Ease your jib sheets, Mr. Hussey!"

We coasted up on the whale's supposed rising place, the jibs rattling, and I had to admit that Captain Mayhew knew these beasts. The whale was now rising close ahead of us. I joined him eagerly, a rising flame of life, as he came up to blow and breathe.

"Bloooows!" came a dozen voices at once. Mayhew came hurtling back down the lines and as he hit the deck shouted, "Lower away! Mr. Macy! Mr. Hussey! Work carefully! If we don't strike on this rising, spread your chances well and don't crowd each other!"



I was rowing stern oar in Captain Mayhew's boat and as we let go the fall and dropped at the speed of a stone into the water he leapt in shouting back at the helm, "Cooper, as soon as we are clear, wear around, you hear! Make a short board and keep to windward all you can, sir!"

We all really leaned to the oars and the boats shot ahead to windward. "Bloooows!" came from Nathaniel Macy's boat and Captain Mayhew turned us a bit to port.

"Peak the oars and take the paddles!" he shouted at us. "Now, lads, face around to paddle and you can see him! John Micah!" This at his boatsteerer, "Stand up, sir! Get your jib tack clear! Scratch hard, boys! We'll have him in two more spouts."

Indeed, we were overhauling that great warm beast, a living flame of energy ahead of us. We were little or nothing to him, floating, dead, uninteresting. We came up abreast of him as he rolled and spouted his stinking breath. "Now, John!" shouted Captain Mayhew. "We're past his hump! Steady!" And the boatsteerer with all his mighty strength drove the iron into the whale right up to its hitches.

That hurt him! He rolled right over in agony and barely missed us with a tail slap as he sounded. "Damn, a fighter!" shouted Mayhew, but I knew it was the wound that made him fight.

The line spun out round the loggerhead, smoking hot, as the whale sounded with the iron point deep into his lung. John Micah threw a second round turn on as he traded places with Captain Mayhew but the line continued to spin downward. "Check him, John!" shouted Mayhew. "Wet line!" as the line went out like the wind, and the boatsteerer poured cooling water on it. The whale was going straight down but the wound in his lung was telling. He was beginning to feel the flooding blood cut into his strength, his ability to struggle. He turned, baffled, and started up.

"Haul line!" shouted Captain Mayhew. "He's coming up! Haul line *us*! Face around here and haul line, boys! Careful, John! Coil that down good. Haul lively!"

Suddenly I realized he was coming up directly under us. "Captain Mayhew!" I screamed out, "he's rising under us. We've got to backwater!" Mayhew turned, the lance in his hand, and stared at me.

I was frantic. He was rising rapidly beneath us and he

was now fully aware of us. "Don't be so damn stubborn!" I howled at him. "Backwater!"

The simple force of my loud cry worked reflexively on Mayhew. "Stern all!" he shouted and we got in three good strokes before the whale came out vertically just ahead of us, an explosion of green water. Black and shiny he rose blocking all the sky and horizon in front of the boat, and I had to credit Mayhew then, for he caught him rising with his lance in a stroke that cleanly pierced that whale's great heart. That surely took coolness and as the beast fell ahead in a bloody flurry, a great cheer went up from the three boats and Mayhew calmly returned to our stern heartily shaking John Micah's hand as they passed each other.

Owen Nye, the second mate, left aboard *Uncle Sam*, seeing gobbets of blood in the spout through his glass, made a short stretch, fetching to windward of us, and then stood along under easy sail. Captain Mayhew got the line clear for running and then made a signal to the whaleship. She immediately ran down for us, luffing-to handsomely with the head yards aback and the foretopsail on the cap. Captain Mayhew streamed the harpoon line on a float to the *Uncle Sam* where they gaffed it in and began to haul. By then the jibs were down in stops and the helm lashed a-lee so as to completely deaden the vessel's way.

With much jolly singing and shouting the whale was hauled down on the ship and by four bells of that watch the monster was securely chained alongside with all whaleboats back on their cranes. I had never seen a crew so cheerful. It was at least a seventy-barrel bull sperm and we only four days into the Pacific. A good omen in everyone's eyes!

The afternoon went busily with Captain Mayhew and his officers cutting into the whale from the starboard cutting stage, but this messy, bloody business was done by dinner when we mustered aft, not too well slicked up I confess, for a jovial meal. I said nothing, letting the officers joke about this whale and the many others, past and to come, but after a generous tot of brandy, "To celebrate our first, gentlemen," as Captain Mayhew cheerily put it, he turned to me. "Ah, Mr. Roon. Could I see you a moment aft, sir?"

I dumbly followed him out into the corridor and then into his wide sitting room, thinking at least, that he would not humiliate me in front of the other officers. As soon as



the door was closed I started. "Captain Mayhew. I want to apologize for shouting . . ."

But he held up his hand. "Stow that!" he said quickly, sitting down on the plush cushions of the long seat curving under the stern windows. "Have a cigar, Mr. Roon?"

Stunned, I took one and lit up. I didn't like them much, but occasionally I smoked with Judge Folger or Captain Hallet.

"Mr. Roon," said Captain Mayhew, blowing out a great puff, "you will never be disciplined on my ship for being right. Just remember that. Now, can you tell me just how you knew that beast was rising to upset us?"

I blew out a bigger puff. These were wonderful cigars, better than Judge Folger's. "I can only tell you that I sometimes have a sense of fish . . . of the ocean."

Silas Mayhew nodded. "So my daughter tried to explain. Frankly, I thought you were both crazy as coots, Mr. Roon. But I have to say that anyone who can read a whale better than John Micah or myself has a decided talent. I'm sorry you won't be with us the entire voyage, Mr. Roon. Tell me, is there any way this ability can be taught to others?"

I bit my lip and thought. "Perhaps," I said. "Mother Feeney, the midwife at Katama, she learned some of it living two years with natives. But perhaps she had a natural ability too. I really don't know."

Captain Mayhew puffed and thought. "We passed certain rather . . . stiff words during that unhappy meeting on the Fourth with Moses Folger, Mr. Roon. You ah, offered remarks about the state of the whale fishery and related concerns. I would now be pleased to hear more, unpleasant or not."

That was a big surrender for Silas Mayhew but I was more than ready for it. I looked him in the eye. "Sir, Judge Folger's Naushon library has all the data on whale-ship returns and cargo breakdowns. If you study that material as I did these past months you see the best year was around 1839 or 1840. Every indication, barrels-per-vessel-per-year, kills-per-crew-member, whatever, gives that same indication. We are now in a steep decline, sir."

Captain Mayhew puffed and nodded. "You are probably right, Mr. Roon. Unfortunately, this is a large and costly vessel. I, my bankers, and my crew are committed to filling it with oil. If you have ideas as to how we can

best go about this in the present situation, I would be happy to listen to them."

I drew in a deep breath and nodded. "Are you familiar with the work of Lieutenant Maury, Captain?"

Mayhew nodded back. "Maury was the fellow who searched the whaleship logs, made maps of catches, size of pods, all that sort of thing. I think I have some reports around here but I never could make much use out of them. Some of the material dates back thirty years or more. No whales in those spots today."

"Yes . . . yes, that's exactly the point! Maury never understood what he was finding and the whale captains didn't see the use of it because nobody wanted to believe what was happening." I gestured at him excitedly with my cigar. "Captain Mayhew. All the fish of the ocean . . . relate . . . in a way we do not understand. They need a certain number of their own kind about, a certain level of population, otherwise they cannot . . . well, connect with each other and the ocean properly. When the whale kill reaches a certain level in a region, the remaining beasts leave to seek a more active, more living ground. The way to look at Lieutenant Maury's material is not as a map of where whales are, but where they are not. Sir?" He nodded. "If you'll excuse me a moment, I'll get my map book." He nodded again and I dashed out to my bunk in the corridor and the drawers underneath where Judge Folger's useful atlas now rested. Back in a moment, I opened to the two-page representation of the entire Pacific basin. I pointed.

"You see, Captain, I've put in Maury's and other data on this in symbols. The southern Japan grounds are about fished out, I would think. But there is one area left that will fill this vessel," and I pointed to the Bering Sea, south of Bering Strait.

Captain Mayhew studied all this carefully, asking questions now and then. Finally I said, "Captain, if you head steady northwest, you'll strike my island landfall almost dead on. Then continue and you should pass through some good fishing northeast of Japan. Arrange to reach the Aleutians in June. The ice should be gone and once inside with this vessel you can roam at will. With six boats out and *Uncle Sam's* length you can have eight or twelve of them along your sides at once. By September or October you'll have to go back south but the north Japan grounds will still have some sperm." I paused and stared



at Captain Mayhew. He was nodding, lost in thought. Finally he looked at me with a thin smile.

"We will talk again, Mr. Roon. I really should have had a better sense of my daughter. I really should have." He smiled quite warmly now. "If you should ever have children, Mr. Roon, I hope you will remember my mistake and pay more attention to them."

On that immensely cheerful note we adjourned to the deck where the trying-out of the old bull was smokily and stinkingly underway. The pine chips were roaring and the first blubber pieces were boiling strongly, the stench already penetrating the entire ship. The flames went higher as they fed them with the tried-out chips, and the firelight flickered on the sails. I stood next to tiny *Hope*, looking forward at the blazing, dull orange flames, the heavy black smoke, and the capering dark figures, for the men were dancing to a fiddle as they watched the blubber boil.

I had a sense of someone next to me and looked up to see huge John Micah puffing on a pipe and peering down at me from dark, shadowed eyes.

"Master Roon," he said in a soft, deep voice. "I am told this was your first whale. And yet you knew when he had turned on us?" He let the question trail away.

I looked at the big, dark face, all red black planes in the firelight. "I had a sense of him. I knew when he became aware of us," I said to Micah.

The big man stared at me solemnly. "Then can you answer me a question, Master Roon?" I nodded and he continued. "Why do they let us kill them, the whales? They know much, Mr. Roon. That I have learned. If they ever decided to attack us, even a half of them, the whale fishery would end. I, most of the crew, would be dead, never returned from our first voyage. Yet . . ." His voice became even softer and more intense. "They do not learn. They run, a bit more, perhaps. They rise more carefully, perhaps. But we kill almost as readily. Why is that?"

I looked back at the flaring tryworks, listening to a wild run from the fiddler and the raucous, happy shouts and songs of the men. How could I explain this to him?

"John Micah," I said. "The whales are not . . . single creatures as we are. They live in groups, together, in a world very different from anything we know. In the ocean there are many more . . . happenings each instant. Much of their attention goes into watching and hearing all this information about their home. A floating whaleboat is,

really, almost nothing to them. It is not part of their ocean but something up above it, dead and different. Oh, they attack sometimes, but only when they are maddened by pain in particular ways." I looked at him and tried to say it clearly. "A healthy whale is a part of the whole ocean, of all the whales, just as a healthy squid is part of all the squids. Sperm whales and squids live, breed, and kill each other within the ocean's . . . rules, boundaries. When we sometimes wound a whale in a particular way, we break him away from this web of his community life. We make him as we are, John Micah, an individual. But there is no way an unhurt whale, excepting perhaps a female separated from her new calf, can be turned from a part of all the ocean's whales into a particular, fighting whale. Am I making sense to you, John Micah?"

The big man nodded and puffed. "What will the ocean be when we have killed them all or all we can reach?" he asked.

"Different," I answered. "Deader and less together in some ways. It will be more man's ocean, something we have made rather than as it is now . . . its own self."

John Micah shrugged his wide shoulders and gave me a thin, fierce smile. "Well Master Roon, be that as it may, the ocean will learn to live with us I expect. When I was little and fishing in Polpis Harbor, that was all I wished to do. This fishing for the whales is all I will ever do in my life. Even if they began to turn on us, I and they will always find each other."

I inclined my head in a single nod. I was in no position to object that his was a completely selfish position. That bloody, cowardly, contemptible young man faced me again. I felt the joy of that Thump! from the Colt, the tear of his jacket where the first bullet struck. Well, we were none of us the sort of people to start throwing thunderbolts at anyone.

*Uncle Sam* took three more whales, all smaller than our first big bull, before we reached my island group. It was a Sunday that Captain Mayhew let the anchor slide into a deep lagoon, surrounded on three sides by island and reefs. According to Mother Feeney, the village I sought lay on the south-facing coast of the group that now lay to our south, but I had decided to get there in *Hope* by myself. Some bad whaleships had made all white men suspect in the Pacific Islands, but a single capable man in his own boat represented neither a threat nor an easy capture.



*Hope*, skidded on rollers to *Uncle Sam's* side, went over on whaleboat cranes, which then aided me in setting her stick in place. I loaded up with provisions and other necessities, then shook Captain Mayhew's and the other officers' hands. He spoke.

"Mr. Roon, when we return to this place we will fire a gun each night at dusk for a week. If you have not appeared, we will work south to the village and make inquiries. If we have found no trace of you then, I will use my discretion. I cannot tell you when we will return." I went down the ladder and dropped into *Hope's* little cockpit, then looked at them all standing at *Uncle Sam's* rail. "If the weather is with you, you will fill in two summers south of Bering Strait," I said firmly. "I will look for you a year from this fall. Good luck, Captain," I nodded up at Silas Mayhew, "and to the rest of you gentlemen." I turned and waved to the crew standing along the rail. As I hoisted *Hope's* small sail, and cast loose, the ship's company gave me three cheers. John Micah shouting the "Hip, Hips" and I leaned *Hope* smartly and drove south away from them heading at last to the Eye of the Ocean.

I sailed south all that day, out of that lagoon and east of the island, then turned west and beat along the reef looking for an entrance to the huge southern lagoon. With my special talents and a handy, shoal-draft, Cape Cod catboat, this kind of sailing was really like eating cake, and I soon spotted a way in through the coral barrier. The lagoon itself stretched for miles and was completely protected. I flew north, tacking now and then over deep, blue water until the village, small, palm-shaded, hidden in the dusk, grew ahead of me and I shot *Hope* into the beach, hoisting my board and letting her coast up the sand. As I dropped the sail in a rush, I saw the men and women standing at the doors of their houses watching me quietly. Throwing an anchor out forward I jumped off *Hope's* bow. In my hand I carried only one thing, the rolled chart that I had found long ago that thundery afternoon in New Bedford. The people of the village gathered slowly as I walked up the dusky beach to the trees. Saying nothing, I unrolled the chart and let it hang from my two hands. Then I laid it out flat on the sand and made the Water Speech.

They were a handsome group of people, large and dark brown, the men with substantial, firm bellies and mighty arms. Their round faces were burned very dark, but their

small eyes were crinkled around with smile lines and they laughed a great deal. A middle-aged, portly man immediately responded, grinning, with a rapid Water Speech, then gave a call while his arms were moving gracefully. At once a much older native emerged from a large house and walked toward me. Like the others, he was mostly naked, only a pair of what seemed to be canvas short pants hanging around his withered legs. But his eyes were very bright. He began to talk to me with his hands and arms, and a bit with his voice. I saw for the first time that the Water Speech could be used for conversation, and that this man was their chief.

From this first moment I completely trusted these people. I never locked *Hope's* cabin and never lost a thing in the time I spent with them. There were some thirty houses in their village, most of them built of posts dug into the ground, thatched with a considerable thickness of long grass and enclosed by reeds that were bound to the round frames of the house by a kind of rivet made from cocoanut husk. These were a wealthy and powerful people at this time. They not only had the rich lagoon in which to spread their nets, and a good crop of breadfruit, banana and cocoanut ashore, but they gained additional wealth from their still-important role as navigators and weather prophets. War and commerce canoes of other tribes occasionally came into the lagoon, never in warlike attack but usually to pick up a navigator for some important, long voyage. Men from other tribes, kings' sons mostly, I learned, lived in the village for a few months as students, learning from these people the arts of offshore sailing, dead reckoning, and some star navigation. All this, of course, was perfect protection from the various predatory island tribes, even, still a few cannibals, some said, in the central Pacific Ocean. To turn these magician-navigators against your tribe was unthinkable. They were too necessary to both commerce and war. I thought that Nathaniel Bowditch and the Christian missionaries would eventually change all that.

Days passed rapidly in this paradise of sun and fertile fishing. Almost every day I gathered with the old man and his middle-aged son. Their names in Water Speech involved about half-a-minute of activity, so I called the Chief, Caloomba, which in their version of Polynesian is roughly, "Friend of the Great Ocean Spirit" and the younger man, Oocaloo, which is a short, "Son of Friend of



the Great Ocean Spirit." Their name for me was in English, for they knew many words in both French and our tongue. After I had been there a week they called me, "Ocean Seeker."

I tried to capture for Hope and Judge Folger some of the "conversations" we had sitting under the trees and chewing an occasional bit of cocoanut meat. Our English language is hard to completely set down in writing because of the difficulty in truly expressing inflections and loudness changes. The Water Speech must be at least four times as difficult to transmit, being much more visual anyway and involving voice and hand sounds that match no reasonable collection of letters on the printed page. This description from my notebook recounts my first attempt to discover the meaning of the fiber chart from New Bedford. I should point out that while the Water Speech is sometimes used for general conversation, every idea, gesture, and spoken sound is referenced to water and the ocean. It is therefore a language basic to island and seafaring peoples when they choose to communicate entirely within this tradition.

Me: (Shrugging, hand up, pointing at spread-out chart. Making general, nonspecific ocean signs.) "Question? Within the life of the ocean, where does this object fall?"

Caloomba: (Very rapid hand and head movements indicating a variety of rough-water motions. Hands spreading, making large spiral forms.) "Tide(?), Map(?), Chart(?), Indication(?) No! Memory."

Me: (Grinning and making specific Nantucket Sound water indication for big Naushon storm last New Year's Day, hands up and working together, fluttering.) "North-east, worst way! Rain in straight lines. Waves . . . chop, cross-seas . . . steep . . ."

Oocaloo: (Hand in sharp movements. Grunt, coincident with snaps of fingers. Water-rise indication using legs and palms.) "Boats strike? Coral?" (Another sharper grunt and handclap.) "Rock strike? Wood parts open?"

Me: (Nodding with waving head and pointing out to sea. My own grunts and hand noises, also foot stamping.) "Rock strikes. Many rocks. Hard to miss."

Caloomba: (One hand and arm in steep water motions, the other steady, withstanding the motions.) "All rock?" (Smooth, slower motions, then smooth only. Other hand underneath, shallow, soft gestures. Eyebrows lifted. Hush noise from mouth.) "No sand shoals?"

Me: (Nodding with weaving head. Hands close together, one over the other. Voice noise a kind of whissssh. Rocking hands steep but motion small. Eyes wide in surprise.) "Shoals too. Some bars very far from land. Boats slide on. Sailors surprised!"

Actually, we did not get back to the chart for two days. Having no plan or particular duty, we easily shifted topics and the Chief and his son had a never-ending fascination with other water areas. They found my description of the south Cape shoals and storms so utterly foreign to their own experience that it must have seemed like a fairy-tale region to them, a water land that never could be.

After a detailed discussion in Water Speech of the current flow and bottom structure of Nantucket Sound, I managed to return eventually to the topic of the chart. I had been thinking about the idea of "memory" and I now felt I knew what the chart was.

Me: (Hand water activity. Eyes open, then almost shut. Hands and arms building up much activity, then decline. Finally small motions indicating human construction, water near, now indicating chart.) "Great storms come and may be forgotten. Storms do special things, must be recorded by making chart. Wave directions, water height, wind speed, tide surges, built into charts like these."

Caloomba: (Grinning and nodding with weaving head. Mouth noise of high and rising wind. Hand moon signal. Claps of waves striking, then finger images in active water motion. Speech hiss. Eyes shut in death-shutting. Water all around, inside and out. Speech gasps then limpness.) "Great storms often the same. Chart remembers when they come and how they rise. Island group in center of chart lose much. Houses under, men and women drowned. Chart remembers directions of worst storms for those people."

As the months passed, I learned a great many things from these strong and cheerful people. They had a much better sensitivity to weather forces than I had ever achieved on Cape Cod. For example, I learned that Uncle Billy's claim that thunderheads would not cross moving water was generally true. Caloomba explained that the "foot" of the storm would not move readily in a direction different than the basic storm track. This would . . .

(Hand gestures large and active, then water motions gentle. Thunder mouth noise, large clouds built by arms and hands. Water slow but firm and steady, powerful, soft



and hard together. Hand storm towers, leaning over. Then . . . one palm slips over the other. A skip!)

Watching this I had the distinct impression of a skater striking steadily along West End Pond in the dead of winter, his skates suddenly catching a rough spot and dumping him head over teakettle.

On the matter of the Eye of the Ocean, they remained . . . not in any way evasive . . . but simply beyond me. When I raised this question (General ocean speech, point to eye, fingers and hands expanding, flowing over everything), Caloomba went into a series of limpid gestures and soft, gentling, swishing sounds that I understood dealt with "ideas" of the ocean rather than the physical ocean itself. That is, the Eye of the Ocean involved the meaning of the ocean outside of its own boundaries, within the worlds of land and air, and the minds of men as well.

When I tried to turn the conversation to a location, a place, Caloomba simply continued his idea-motions and quiet sighs and murmurs. But I did finally understand that the Eye, or Eyes, related to a particular pulse or life-point both in the ocean and also in the men who went there. The old man had been twice to the Eye, his son never, but that good man was waiting with total patience and a steady delight.

So the time passed easily and we came again to my spring, their fall, although the seasons here near the equator were hardly the life and death affairs of New England. One day, as we idly spoke to each other of the new fish coming into the lagoon and the modest current changes due to a collapse of coral on the west side of the barrier reef, the Chief casually announced that in two days time we would leave for a trip to the Eye. I was astonished and immediately asked how he knew this or could plan for it, but he again responded in that more abstract Water Speech that I never fully mastered.

It is my opinion that anyone who has already been taught to write can never properly understand this idea or concept of Water Speech. The human mind, I believe, has a very large, but still a necessarily limited compass. For a given man to fully participate in this idea-speech and be also able to take a star sight with a sextant and find position with an ephemeris would be impossible. We must give up old things to accept new things. There is no other way our limited minds could work.

Seven of us left the village early two days later in their

largest outrigger canoe; the Chief and his son, four large, younger paddlers, and myself. Oocaloo steered, the Chief and I sat on mats within the main hull facing each other, and the four young men, two on the hull and two on the outrigger, rowed steadily. Apparently, one did not use sails to go to the Eye. All the village families were down with us, singing and clapping as we prepared to go. Just as we were pushed off, they all rushed forward into the water, on both sides, dropping breadfruits, cocoanuts, and other supplies into our empty canoe. The Chief explained to me as we moved swiftly out into the lagoon that this method of supply commemorated his people's very first visit to the Eye of the Ocean. At that distant time the Chief was so overcome with his intense vision, his need to go, that he was in his boat and on the water before his people realized what was happening. Rather than wake him or in any way disturb his powerful, magical trance, they dashed into the water along both sides of the boat, dropping in whatever they happened to be carrying, knowing that eventually he would awake and be hungry.

In common with similar, well-organized rituals in Mother Feeney's "captain's churches" on the Vineyard, I was glad to see that what the people just happened to be carrying "by chance" turned out to be a complete and sensible roster of food and gear for an open-ocean voyage of several days.

Everyone, including our hard-paddling rowers, seemed in the very best of spirits. And even though the whole business was, to me, mysterious, I also felt a happy abandon about the trip, really quite like I felt when Hope and I would ride west on Naushon clopping along to nowhere and my heart would begin to swell because I knew a thousand places where we would pause and kiss and touch our bodies on the horse's back. What, in our chill, thin-eyed New England world would be comparable to this journey, I wondered? Galahad and the rest of them on their murderous searches for the Grail? Too rigid and dark, and senseless besides. These large and casual folk would never understand, or want to understand, any of that. Jason and his hired killers after the golden fleece? No, all those classical quests were bloody, driven by greed, and ended badly. But what about a cheerful ride of gossip friends off to Canterbury, England? That idea pleased me much more. Such a journey the Chief would readily approve. I grinned at him and spoke in the water



language. (Arms wide, then finger-forming the boat and town. Gentle hand-boat on finger-water motion. Finger direction and Eye symbol. Hands walking like beasts. Mouth conversation noise. Circular enclosing gesture. Happy, speaking faces interspersed with sky, water, earth, and human motions.) "We friends now make a special trip to the Eye, a holy place. In my world, the other side of here, friends on land travel to a, somewhat like but not the same, holy place and tell stories as we do in love and interest to each other."

This delighted the Chief and he vigorously responded. (Mouth speaking and Water Speech together. Inclusive hand sweep. Rapid alternate water and human-activity motions. Now working toward an extended gesture. Complete hand-arm enclosing of sky-world-people symbols.) "Telling stories to each other, in all speech and all ways, includes all life, every single thing. Stories and trip and friends at the center of this world, all around and outward."

So passed two extraordinary days as we thrust eastward powered by our untiring rowers. They rested through the darkest part of the night while we dozed and spoke lazily in the starlight and moon glitter about the great, wet beasts prowling far below us.

Then, on the third morning, we approached, leaving the dark blue of the deep ocean behind, the Eye itself!

How this amazing area was created, how long it lasted at any given time, and how often it recurred, I have no idea. From the stories of the Navigators, they had been coming to such places eight or more generations, perhaps two hundred years, but I never understood how they became aware of them, then or now.

We came on this area, no land showing above the surface and which I will call a sand bar for lack of a better term, from seaward. Our paddlers must have rowed steadily for many miles over a gradually upward sloping sand bottom. There was absolutely *nothing* there! That was the most remarkable point. As the water shoaled to only a few feet depth, we entered an area of brilliant yellow white light. There was no sky color left in the water. It disappeared as a liquid and the completely featureless, yellow sand reflected the light upward, turning the water into an uncertain golden skin. No fish came into these waters, not even the smallest and no life of any kind was on the bottom for the water was too hot. We finally reached

a depth on this brilliant glowing water-sheet where the canoe gently grounded. Everyone got out and stood stretching in the knee-deep water, then anchored the boat while congratulating each other on the pleasant and rewarding journey. We then all turned to splash along through the shallows to the very whitest, shallowest part of this gigantic sandbar that lay all about us as far as any eye could see, so brilliant that it made a column of white, illuminated air directly upward to the ends of the sky over our heads. But it was the lack of any life sense here that was the most remarkable. The water was near to blood heat and nothing lived or moved in the water or on the white, uniform sand beneath. But as we neared the core, the bull's-eye of this remarkable sandy shallows, I began to understand why this strange sterility was what made the place so splendid, so holy. In hot water no more than ankle deep, a white core of air rising over us, we all seven knelt and formed a circle of hands. The ocean glowed brighter than it ever had at Nashawena. I was in a blaze of wonder! The lack of life on this shoal and its . . . connectedness with the whole, great Pacific gave us a . . . place to see and listen. We could focus out to ice, vast distances to the south. We did that at once, effortlessly, and the blue, cracking bergs fell into flowing chill water. Penguins swam, darting sparks, and we laughed happily. The . . . images, dreams, came on the waves and in the water mass itself. We knelt now at a particular focus of the world. An Eye perhaps, but it was not only the ocean's Eye. We were also fixed at one lens of this glass, peering and peering.

I felt the old man squeeze my hand strongly and as I looked at him, smiling happily, I saw he wanted me to seek my whaleship, somewhere to the north. Was this possible? He nodded and showed me how the focusing came through the water and the skin, every skin nerve. She was a new truth, the *Uncle Sam*, and I saw her north in the Bering Sea, floating in shoals of whales, this last great catch I had given them, the men wild with the bloody joy of work. Whales everywhere! I was drunk in that hot, shallow bath of sensation with spouting, hot whales and their cold-eyed hunters in the northern seas. But they gently coaxed me back from that. They loved to help me but the killing of the whales was a story best put off, some other time or Eye for that.

I assented at once and we rode the surge over the long



reefs to the south where huge rays leapt in their odd joys, and sharks mightier than any ever seen moved in their cold, endless hunger at depths black as a coal mine yet sparkling and twinkling with life. In the cold sweep of polar water, what teeming spangles! Skyfuls, cubic miles of speeding fish, vast sparkling crowds. Such unimagined numbers!

I think at least two days and a night passed us there, perhaps longer. The night was different for we lost our great glowing pillar of air and gained the thin ocean of reflected star sparkles. The skin of the ocean contained all the sky, and we ranged the ocean darks where other lighted stars darted purposely about, killing and eating and moving in such complete and related ways.

Yet the nighttime did not remain pleasurable. Eventually that intense and heartless coldness I tried to describe to Sarah Allen crept amongst us. We shivered in a relentless place beyond cruelty, beyond any ferocity yet achieved by the most depraved humans. The old man and his son helped me then, each with a strong hand, holding me tight. We tiptoed across the black volumes of the seas, trying not to arouse something we could not handle, the old man continually facing down the murky walls of despair that towered about us.

And at the blackest, grimmest time, when we hung together with only love and our huddled life-force remaining, impossibly I heard a horse, a stallion, scream from across a great distance! It was a scream of terror and defiance together and at that instant our tight-shut eyes flew open, the edge of sun peeped over the rim, and suddenly the water again glowed golden and gentle. At once we joined the porpoise, a great nation of them on migration. The porpoise speak to the ocean through their skins. Their main joy and purpose is that constant speech, back and forth, and in this way . . . well . . . in this and many other ways, the ocean is aware of itself. A huge porpoise nation traveling together creates a special system of water flow. Once this wave is set in motion, porpoise communicate with each other and to the ocean most effectively. Sparkling and whistling in this water flow, the porpoise passed over the deeps, a flow of energy through the mighty veins of the ocean. The ocean's pulse is slow, but the porpoise leap in rapid exuberance. Every action and speed is possible and plays a part.

All this truth, this explosion of wisdom, swept us across

the deeps and we laughed as a hundred porpoise citizens burst up through the surface film into the sun and spoke and spoke to us with their bodies and motions until it seemed to me that I was actually dissolving, becoming a part of the deep, heavy, ponderous motions, that the sparky porpoise were bursting up through me telling me of their lively joy.

Finally, one day more or several, the old man squeezed my hand lovingly and when I turned, released me and indicated that our time at the Eye was over. I rose at once, blindly, in complete agreement, for the effect was a growing, cumulative one. I walked woodenly back, sloshing through the golden, magical water, climbing mechanically into the boat. The old Chief seated me so I would not see the Eye as we paddled off and I noticed that neither he nor his son ever looked back over our stern for many miles of paddling. I was drained and exhausted, yet I noted with surprise that we had eaten. Considerable food was gone from our supplies. I remembered none of that and supposed one of the young men broke our circle and went for food now and then. Perhaps I was fed by one of them.

We did not speak now. Caloomba wept slowly, one tear after another forming at the corner of his eyes, then running slowly down one or the other large creases in his cheeks, and finally dropping onto his folded hands. The Navigators seldom wept, there being few reasons for this, but when they performed the act, involving as it did their own water, they spoke completely through it. This old man was weeping because he had been to the Eye, and made his great voyage to wisdom, for his last time. He would be dead before such a time could come again. His life was completed in a way that could not be overcome, by any means whatever. Etiquette demanded that I remain mute in the presence of these tears until I, as his friend, felt they had served their purpose to comment on his particular grief. Since the grief of an old man for his last important voyage is a very great and painful grief indeed, I sat facing him, watching his tears, their run and fall, the wetting of his hands, all speak to me of his loss. For a while the rowers rested and the moon set, so I could see his separate tears in the starlight and, finally, I was able to weep with him, my shock at this intense, dazzling experience worn away a bit.

As the false dawn showed, the wind freshened at our



backs and our large, ever-cheerful rowers started off, humming a chant to each other in resonant activity. The sun was just about to come up and it seemed to me, in an instant, that he had wept enough and that we had all the fun of the voyage home ahead of us. I suddenly began my speech as the sun's edge flashed up, reminding him of those other voyaging storytellers all across the world and how we had much time, as they did, to tell each other tales of life and the moving world.

Immediately his tears stopped. He cheerily indicated that we were hungry and reached for a bunch of bananas. Before peeling one for me, he used it in a rather extended and very coarse story about a young fisherman whose maiden confuses a large, handy beche de mer, or sea cucumber, for something quite different. The son and the rowers all roared at this yarn, driving their paddles down together. Poor Uncle Billy! How delighted he would have been to hear that the village headman and aged mystic had this other side!

The remainder of my time at the village passed in a kind of pleasant reverie, recovering from the numbing effect of our time at the Eye, really the kind of vacation forgetfulness that the Naushon social guests always tried, usually vainly, to find. Our many conversations were effortless and fluid now, rich in images and ideas, and they often darted rapidly here and there like startled fish.

Some days while sailing *Hope* for pleasure, well out in the lagoon, usually with two or three squirming, brown youngsters along, oeing and awwwing over *Hope's* slick rig and hardware, I remembered my vision of *Uncle Sam* and her whales and I wondered where she was and whether those inner sights contained real truth or only possible or wished visions. Our cooler time was passing, the New England fall almost here. Soon the whaleship would have to leave Alaska again. If she was filled, she would drive south away from the cold. Yet, another year, two even, could readily pass. *Uncle Sam* was a huge ship and many whales would be chained along her side before Mayhew turned south again.

Our waters grew slightly warmer, and the mild and quiet changes among the fish occupied us now and then. That, and sailing, speaking, and choosing which of the many fish to cook.

Then one day in November I felt them to the north. It was not a gradual, growing thing, but a sudden sense.

They had not been there, and now they were. I immediately sought the Chief, sitting in the shade mending a net and as his fingers flew he smiled up at me. Reaching a stopping place he put down the net shuttle and bid me good cheer.

(Fingers wiggling down from eyes, but mouth widely smiling. Great hand-described vessel, much deep ocean motion. Now many smiles, lip touching, hands gripping, many faces now all joy. Downward fingers cast away, happy sounds, more smiles.) "I will weep, dear friend, the tears that say we will lose you on a long journey over other waters to those who love and are loved by you. Your joy tells us we must throw our tears into the wind which will dry them. Such blessed delight in your return will set us laughing here."

I smiled down on his lined face. (Gentle finger motion to north. Pointing, then forming stubby shape with hand over water motions. Three fingers, then two. Both small and large boat hand to hand. Smiles and waves. Touch lips and place touch on his forehead. Point to eyes, encompassing gesture, head drops, defeated.) "Come with me, my two dear friends, in my small boat, to the north. It is capable and will see us there easily. I will leave you at the great ship, my dear friends, but you will have my little, useful boat to take you back here. This is my gift to you for the Eye of the Ocean. I can never repay for that with any means, but this boat is all I have to give."

They were all quite overwhelmed by that, and the next morning we headed south to the channel I had used to enter the lagoon, then started a steady reach north along the barrier reef. The wind was stiff and fair and *Hope* showed her best speed, so we were into the northern lagoon area well before dusk. As we came around the northwest edge of the big island, I saw *Uncle Sam*, well north of us in the deeper water, already at anchor. We worked handily north and watched the puff of smoke blossom from her side and then heard the cannon's crump! some time later. I handed the tiller over to Caloomba—he had sailed *Hope* many times and under every kind of sea condition—and went below to check my gear. All I was taking home was the rolled-up chart and my duffle.

Caloomba brought us to the landing ladder just at dusk with a skill at which any Vineyard skipper would have approvingly nodded. The whole crew of *Uncle Sam* was



along the rail, the watch having seen us when we were still well south of them, so when we glided in there were many cheers, shouts, and comments.

Captain Mayhew leapt down the ladder and thumped onto *Hope's* cabin top, grabbing downward at my hand. "Abel Roon! By God it is you, beard and all! Sir, this meeting completes in perfect order an extraordinary cruise." He paused, distressed, and looked about. "Except we have no room for *Hope*, Abel. She is simply not worth her weight in full, sperm-oil barrels."

I grinned up at him. "I've already given her away to these two good men you see. Things will change here, badly I'm afraid, and soon. This modern boat might help them weather the storm of civilization, for a while anyhow."

"Wonderful, Abel! Well . . . come come, let's get you aboard. We have fifty-two-hundred barrels sir! Imagine! Fifty-two-hundred barrels of sperm oil! You will not believe it Abel, but we passed by a sixty-barrel bull two days back. Averting our eyes! Broke my heart, sir! We are absolutely choked with oil. We are . . ." But the crew who had been eagerly listening to all this now began to cheer and shout, and I jumped down, hugged my two fine friends, giving them the Water Speech for love at parting. (Watery hand-motion caressing finger-fish, meeting of many different and gentle hands intermingling fingers. Face-joy.) As they responded, smiling and laughing, I cast off good, solid *Hope*, passed my gear up to two dozen reaching hands and clambered up the ladder. *Hope* fell smoothly away, weathered around briskly, and set off, reaching southwest. They were both turned, looking back at us, and now they simply waved and waved their arms, exactly like white people bidding farewell to a loved friend off on a steamer.

*Uncle Sam* had certainly found her greasy luck. The tryworks were gone, the bricks and much else over the side, and in their place were barrels, acres of barrels on and under the decks, in corners, wherever they could be secured or stored. John Micah described to me a whaleman's dream, a full sea of spouts and targets. Whales tame and not galled by much of anything. The entire ocean, horizon to horizon, containing only *Uncle Sam* and her spouting, sporting prey.

No happier, smarter ship ever crossed these waters. Even the lowliest apprentices would share out hundreds

of dollars, a gigantic sum of money. Nothing approaching this cargo had ever been taken before, and all knew that it would never happen so easily again. Captain Mayhew had been among the best of his profession before. When we arrived back in New Bedford this time, he would stand entirely alone, an eminence like Mount Washington or Faneuil Hall in Boston.

On my second evening back aboard, Captain Mayhew adjourned us after supper to his cabin for some brandy and talk. There seemed to be a certain anticipation among the officers, and we had hardly gotten seated and lit-off our cigars when a knock sounded and Captain Mayhew uttered a stern, "Enter."

In came John Micah, the bos'n, and various other crew members, their caps in their hands, their feet shuffling in embarrassment at being in such an unfamiliar place. "Yes, gentlemen?" said Captain Mayhew sternly, but I could see his eyes were twinkling.

The bos'n poked out his chin whiskers at us. "Cap'n Mayhew, the crew has signed this here letter." Pausing, he handed it formally over. "Every man jack of us, sir, asking that Master Abel Roon, here, be given a mate's share of this here voyage. Mebbe he didn't row much to catch them beasts, but he told us where to go, and that counts for an awful lot."

My face was a hot red. I turned to stare at the officers. Mayhew smiled at me. "Yes, Abel, the officers and I have signed this document too. Such advice as you gave me was far more valuable than what any one of us accomplished in the Alaskan seas."

I was almost too embarrassed to speak. Still, this seemed like as good a time as any to get by another point. I stood and picked up the paper. "You worked while I played," I said to them. "But I accept this, not as anything I earned, but as a wedding present for my beloved Hope Mayhew, Captain Mayhew's daughter. We will marry when this voyage ends. I dearly thank you all now for her."

I watched Silas Mayhew as I said this, but he knew anyway and joined, with evident sincerity, in the cheers and back slaps and more brandy until we all had quite the most happy evening I can ever remember on *Uncle Sam*.

A jolly Christmas passed us before the Cape, then many cold, blustery days, the heavily loaded whaleship



struggling through those deadly waters and currents. My future father-in-law, evidently feeling it was time to get to know me, spent several pleasant evenings chatting in front of the cozy coal stove in his sitting room. Hope hid nothing from her father, and I decided to act the same way. I told him about my visions, my trip to the Eye, and showed him the rudiments of the Water Speech. Mayhew did not get command of *Uncle Sam* by being a fool, but he was an intensely practical Yankee, a very professional, scientific person, and this bent conflicted greatly with mystic visions and a speech method that encompassed much deeper communication than the sailing directions of Tierra Del Fuego or the interest on the bank's money. Once, in frustration, he peered at me and shook his head. "So you have been there with them, Abel. Your head is filled with sights and wonders. You can astonish us with your ways of speaking and your sense of the ocean beasts. But where does this lead, sir? Where does it take you and my daughter? Will your children ride the porpoise, Abel?"

It was good that he forced me to answer such questions, even if they had no central importance to the real truth. I was not, never could be, a Navigator. I was a Cape Cod, seafaring person. I shook my head at him.

"I am like you, Captain Mayhew. A white man. A Yankee. Hope and I will certainly lead the lives that people like you and me expect. But as to the use or meaning of the Eye or the Water Speech. These things are not tools or routes or charts to something. They are the end, the purpose itself. There is no place to go beyond the Eye, nothing to use it for. True wisdom is beyond any purpose, Captain Mayhew. Someday perhaps you will come upon such wisdom and understand what I am saying."

Mayhew nodded in the flicker from the open stove door. His vessel creaked, sighed, and stretched easily in long swells. "I am beginning to rather wish that might happen, Abel. And, some day it may," he said to me in a firm voice.

We came into Buzzards Bay on a stiff, easterly March day, running straight up, our sails all pulling, signals smartly set for a pilot. It was old Isaiah Allen from Cuttyhunk, Sarah Allen's husband, who spryly scampered up the ladder from the pilot sloop and threw a leg over the rail. Captain Mayhew was standing there to greet him, eyes and teeth sparkling. Old Isaiah, his chin whiskers

dropping a notch in surprise, looked around. "Gawd, you was a lovely sight roaring down on us, Silas, but, Lord almighty, this is lovelier still!" He meant the huge deck load of barrels.

Silas Mayhew nodded, grinning. "Fifty-two-hundred sperm, Isaiah," he said slowly, and the duty watch, standing about, leaned forward in delight to watch the pilot's reaction. They would be doing the same thing themselves with various New Bedford citizens for days to come.

Isaiah Allen blinked and his beard fell further toward the deck. He started to speak, then paused, started again, and finally grinned. "I'm blowed, Silas!" he managed.

Then he saw me and gave a great shout for Isaiah was a Folger man and had helped us now and again with guest transfers south of Cuttyhunk. As we walked aft together Isaiah Allen was silent until we were by ourselves. Then he winked at me. "Gawd, Abel! What *have* you folks been up to? You know when Silas told me fifty-two-hundred sperm back there, I kind of choked-up. Honest Abel, all of a sudden I got real weepy thinking about piloting in the greatest cargo ever landed. Or ever will be landed too, you can bet! You know I almost offered to do it for nawthing. Damn! Lucky thing Abel, when I get them weepy, choky feelings, my voice goes. Can't say nawthing, you know? Saves me a lot of trouble, Abel," and he winked again. Then, as a kind of afterthought. "Oh, yes, that young lady of yourn is doing fine. She'll likely be along soon. When *Uncle Sam* comes back, it's kinder hard to keep it a secret!"

In fact, Hope and her mother arrived in New Bedford on the steamer *Telegraph* from Holmes Hole late that afternoon, only minutes after Peleg in *Hero*, with Amanda Robinson along too, tied aft of *Uncle Sam*. He vaulted up over the rail to clasp me in his arms.

What a jolly party started then in Captain Mayhew's cabin. More and more people were coming every minute. The awed congratulations spilling everywhere as the full extent of *Uncle Sam*'s triumph became known. The fo'c'sle men began to dance and sing on deck as Captain Mayhew broke out brandy and some wine that had been husbanded two years for this moment.

Finally Hope and I slipped out into the passageway to above deck and then aft to the stern rail looking carefully at each other. Hope tried to peer at me sternly, but her dimple gave her away and she laughed in a half-serious



yet merry way. "Well, dear Abel! You didn't just win father over, did you? Oh dear, no. Nothing that small and uninteresting! You gave him the greatest whaling voyage that will ever happen!" She laughed some more, shaking and shaking her head.

I must admit I had rather expected Hope to react this way. I could hardly deny to her that I had planned it more or less as it happened. Those many nights in Judge Folger's study, working with the reports and returns, the charts and log excerpts, were done for one purpose, to fill Mayhew's ship with whales.

I looked at her and then took her hand. "Because he was your father and I love you," I said. "I couldn't just half tell him where to go. Once he was there, he filled his giant ship because he is the best of them." I looked into her large eyes catching the moon's glint. "Your father thinks we should marry this next July fourth, at Naushon House. He is certain Judge Folger would be delighted by that. I am willing because I owe Judge Folger everything. And I love him."

"It will be a perfect day, Abel," said Hope, her eyes calm and her lips smooth and straight. "And I love him and I owe him everything too, Abel. We will make him a fine pair, my dear."

I knew she was right, but she seemed so distant. I leaned toward her and we kissed gently. "I am more, Hope. I have seen much. I admit that, my beloved." I spoke more slowly. "You will share me with no one, Hope. I will be yours completely."

Hope coolly shook her head. "I must share you with yourself, Abel. You cannot escape your own immense power. Somehow you are here with us in New England from another time and place. Working along with us in wonderful, magical ways, helping us, loving us, but more than we are. Always more."

I shook my head. How beautiful Hope had become in these two years, tall and full, proud as a young queen, her arms soft and gentle, her throat a curve of perfection. "Then where are you from, dearest Hope? Troy, where whole nations die over lesser beauty? You are more than the rest too. I worshipped you when you were taller than I was and really quite snooty too! . . . yes worshipped! And you are, by far, lovelier now. Do you think I worship you less?" We held each other in the dark while the loud, ever-gayer chatter spilled out of the stern windows, and

forward, now on the barrels, now on the deck, the men jiggled and shouted their success to an astonished New Bedford town.

July 4, 1848, our wedding day, was the most beautiful Independence Day that anyone could remember. The wind blew gently, but steadily, from the west, a clearing wind that sponged the fog from Cape Cod and sharply presented perfect views at every point. Dozens of coasters, white sails firm, moved on both sides of the great lawn of Naushon House. Hundreds of guests, handsomely dressed, carrying frilly parasols and elegant sticks, walked and stood about on the lawn, chatting and waiting for the brief ceremony, then the reception, dinner, and the fireworks. This time, Judge Folger had brought in a packet all the way from Canton, China, the Celestial Empire itself, a huge hot air balloon and fireworks to be carried aloft within it. This gigantic display, lasting, it was said, a good fifteen minutes, would end a day of joy and celebration greater than any in the long history of Naushon House.

Before the ceremony, while the sun was still high, we five principals in our rich white clothes stood stiffly in front of the little man from Boston and his Daguerré shining-brass camera. I was the tallest, dressed in a silk, double-breasted suit, white shoes, satin tie. Next to me was my bride, now utterly, finally, completely beautiful, almost as tall as I, flowingly encased in lace and satin, her lovely form caught and turned everywhere by flourishes of silk. On my other side was sturdy, broad, beaming Moses Folger, his silk lapels and stickpin glinting in the sun like pearl shell. Next to Hope, smiling gently, was her mother, Martha, a lovely full woman, arrow-straight yet curved and handsome in smooth tight satin. And finally, Captain Silas Mayhew, a ramrod in pearl-shine and white silk, his moustache as sharp as a pin, his beard looking like Drake's at the Armada.

After this exposure was finished, Hope lightly called to her father and Judge Folger. "Come dears, I shall have a special picture now with my two other men, one on each side, to show my children how popular and grandly escorted I was!"

They stood three together while the small man did his arcane and chemical things and finally indicated we were finished.

Judge Folger turned to his son-in-law, and threw his



hands wide in pure delight. "Well, Silas! Can we agree that Naushon House will never, in this age of the world anyhow, see a finer day than this one? *Uncle Sam*, the seaman's and banker's delight! Staggering under its oil! You, my finest captain, so fine in fact that we can only hope to someday stuff you and exhibit you to our officers down on State Street! The two handsomest, dearest and most remarkable young people in the entire history of Cape Cod, and yes, Boston too, by God sir! to be joined in matrimony by my very own self, and then a party of an extent and expense, Silas? But why go on? Think how fortunate we are to know, at this instant, that this day will never be exceeded! Never!"

But this observation seemed to make Captain Mayhew more melancholy than delighted. "And yet, Moses," he said in a slow, quiet voice. "This day, like all days, will pass. This pearl of days will slip off the string with all the others, all too quickly."

Hope seized her father's arm at this and stamped her foot. "Father, you of all people I will simply not allow to become philosophical on my wedding day!" Then she hugged his arm and kissed his cheek. "You shall cheer up this instant. I order it! And I will promise that someday, somehow I will put this pearl back on the string for you. There, Father! What do you think of that?"

Silas Mayhew looked at his beautiful daughter and laughed heartily. "If anyone in the world could work that magic, my Hope, it will be you! Oh, yes my dear, it will surely be you!"

Judge Folger, along with his other roles, was a Justice of the Peace in Gosnold Township and he married us on the porch of Naushon House at four that afternoon. Peleg, fidgeting a bit in a trim grey-silk suit with black lapels, but stern when needed, was my best man, while Captain Mayhew, on the other side of us, gave Hope to me at the proper moment.

Judge Folger, occasionally blinking and pausing more than I imagine a regular clergyman would have, requested and heard our soft answers, pronounced us man and wife, and, coughing gruffly, ordered me to kiss the bride.

We gently embraced in the sight of that rich and splendid company. The soft, west wind brought the smells of wild honeysuckle along the length of Naushon to mingle with the piercing sweetness from the solarium. The ele-

gant, smiling people clapped their gloved hands smartly in salute to Hope and me and our fine marriage.

At the center, the core, of that long pearl of a day, was Hope, charming everyone, stealing sweetly, brightly, a dozen or a hundred hearts with her lips, her eyes, her graceful motions. We waited in the dusk finally for the great balloon to make its marvelous ascent, Hope holding my left arm in both of hers and looking fixedly upward, her eyes bright with lovely expectation. The balloon, almost higher than Naushon House's topmost spire, was illuminated from inside by its own propelling fire. Shadows of the many men preparing the machine darted in front and behind the flaring firelight. Judge Folger and several others stood tensely between us and the balloon, watching for the correct moment. The vast, painted globe extended and glowed, itself a gigantic eye in the night sky. The signal was given and the balloon rose, steadily, gracefully, in the almost still air. The Barnstable Fireman's Cornet Band struck up the "Star Spangled Banner," and just about at the "rockets' red glare" part the fireworks began to spill from the balloon, hopelessly louder than the band, in a never-ending cascade of falling light and sound. As the display reached its peak, the noise became deafening. The glowing balloon rose steadily, dropping trails of snakes, fireballs, sizzlers, and flash-bangs everywhere below it.

Everyone cheers and shouts and the band breaks into "Yankee Doodle" with great spirit. I turn slightly to look at my wife in the flashes of the fireworks and find her peering back at me. The curve of her throat and cheek, the full sweet bow of her lips, are finally and completely mine. But how am I to truly possess something so sudden, so delicate? My wife smiles at me, filling me with warmth. I feel blessed.



## Hope Mayhew Roon

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There have always been a tremendous number of Mayhews on Martha's Vineyard, probably too many for such a small island. When I was a little girl and said this to Mother, she always asked sternly what made me think we would be among the ones left after some Mayhew-inspector weeded out the excess. I suppose I just knew we would be. We were among the richest Mayhews for one thing, and the most famous Mayhews for another, and we were Naushon Folgers besides, which was as close to being a Duke or an Earl as you could get on Cape Cod in those days.

Still, having all those relatives, well . . . the young ones anyway, did make it quite a gay time to grow up in. There were always female cousins to visit or have come and spend the night, this accompanied by much silly giggling and discussion of young whaling officers and such. There were handsome male cousins, usually tall and not there very often, who danced with a firm and steady grace, (they practiced on the ships, I suppose) and always tried to get you to go outside and look at the moon . . . or whatever.

Of course the greatest parties were at Naushon House, where everybody came together; Mayhews, Scudders,

Nantucket Macys and Coffins, Boston Folgers and everybody in between. We girls waited for Christmas and the Fourth with gossipy eagerness, I especially, because those days were usually my triumphs at least among the young people. I guess I was a bit gawky before I "filled out" as Father put it, but after my twelfth or thirteenth birthday I only needed to smile and speak anything at all to them, and they surrounded me, bustling, bursting out of their new clothes, grinning and flushing. They brought me drinks and ices, found me seats, and took me rowing, ever-so-gently, in Hadleys, I carelessly arranged in the most languid and attractive manner possible.

My nursemaid, Maria, an old Vineyard widow, had brushed and brushed my hair, black and gleaming, muttering, "This will break their bleeding hearts, the rascals. Aye, this. . . ." And I knew she was right because I could see it, my face inclined in delicate amusement as they shoved and pushed to be near me.

Still, there were many days when we did not go to parties on Naushon. My stern and loving father, driven to be the best in a society that measures best in rigid, uncompromising ways, was not home very much. I had been born and lived in Boston for two years, remembering none of it, at Grandfather's town house on Beacon Hill. When Father came back that time he spent almost a year building our beautiful home on Water Street on the Vineyard and moving us in, and I remember just a few things about that time.

But then he was gone, and gone so much and so often. My mother was a lovely woman when she married, I know, but she was one of those people who became more beautiful as they grow toward thirty-five or forty. Her figure filled in and her height gave her a tall, willowy air. She walked, not in any way provocatively, but gracefully, steadily, a woman of experience who knows herself. She had an . . . appetite for my father. I knew that in many ways. Even our big, solid house could not wholly hide those cries of joy many nights after Father dashed in the door and swept me high into the air. And far more often at quiet breakfasts I could read in Mother's red eyes about the hours of quiet weeping in her bedroom as the years passed and she worried and wondered about Father, and missed and needed his urgent strength. Why, I thought, should she be put through this, this warm, loving woman, who only wanted to give herself, taking, asking



for, only his joy and strength? He had the never-ending triumphs over the sea beasts and storms. What did my mother have here?

On the other hand, the young solicitors and money men from Grandfather's banks might be home a great deal, but they were all terribly white in the summer and not very good with the rowing boats in Hadleys. They soon ran out of breath at the Christmas Eve dances and seemed to sweat a great deal, even when they weren't dancing. Worst of all, they were completely boring, talking of debentures and rates of interest and who cheated who in the stupid State House. Oh dear, I simply couldn't see myself with any of them, and I'm sure mother would have been the first to agree, if I had ever talked about such things with her.

As I got older, I was able to move about more, going to socials on Nantucket and over in Hyannis where I could stay at the Scudders'. It is really terrible to mention it, but I will do it anyway. Before my sixteenth birthday, I had been presented with five proposals of marriage, and all by very well set-up young men. My head was spinning with my own wonderful self then, as you can well imagine!

I rode often, on Cannonball usually, since he needed plenty of activity. Those gallops across the Vineyard on that absolutely masterful and sure-footed beast were probably the most happy of times and what I look back on most fondly. Most of the rest of it, the endless socializing, gossip, and charming of the young men seemed dreadfully important at the time, but now mostly funny and futile and even sad.

That first Christmas that Abel was at Naushon House, I hardly noticed him. He was small and shy and of course we all knew about his parents and what his father had done. Grandfather called all the young people into his study that day before the dance and told us we were to say nothing about it. Well, he threatened us really. Grandfather could be terribly stern and when he told us we would never come back to Naushon House if we said a word to Abel, we knew it was exactly true. Grandfather was a very self-righteous and opinionated person, but of course he was opinionated about things that always needed somebody to look after them. I guess the most annoying thing about Grandfather was his always being right, or if not exactly right, then closer to right than anyone else.

Abel told me I was snooty those first holidays and I know it is true. I was so surrounded and beset by those young men that if I got too interested in one or another of them it became terribly difficult. They always wanted you to *just* dance with them, or go and sit in a corner, or take a walk, and I really wanted to meet more people and dance and laugh. So I was snooty to protect myself, I guess, and I do think it's silly that young people have to act this way with each other. I suppose Grandfather would just say, then find a better way for them to act.

By July fourth, Abel was already much taller and very good looking. I still thought of him as younger than me, but his eyes were large and dark, and his smile was so strong and gentle . . . Well, I spoke to him about sailing *Hero* to watch him blush, which he did handsomely, but then he answered me in a very sturdy way, staring right at me from those deep eyes and I suddenly realized that Grandfather would never put so much trust in anyone so young who was not a very special person.

But I wasn't really paying special attention then to Abel or Naushon House. There was the shearing festival on Nantucket and all that social business. Then Mother and I went to visit some Mayhews, more ship captains, who lived in Gloucester, and there was a tall, dashing cousin, who, and only after a week of our visit, proposed marriage in a choked, tight voice. I was fourteen years old and told him my father would never permit it, but that never satisfies them. They want to know what *you* think. What *you* feel about them. And that just leads to injured feelings and reproaches and other awful and hurting things. The trouble with young men is that they get something going inside their minds, sort of like a story, but they forget that you aren't there in it with them. Then when they blurt it all out, they can't understand why you just sit there and shake your head.

I suppose I was at my worst that awful Christmas when we argued about the stupid antislavery convention. I thought the Nantucket society people, well the partying ones anyway, were just about the most interesting around. Of course they weren't quite the same as the Boston society, but mother and I didn't get to Boston oftener than once or twice a year, while Nantucket was a few hours away on the packet, and had half a dozen Mayhew families to visit. So of course I just had to say something obvious and stupid about the slavery meeting and that got



poor Abel going. How large and handsome he had become, and how masterful! The only thing that kept Grandfather from being completely and totally dominating was his small size and his shining round, bald head. Here was Abel, his ward and mirror, with thick, curly hair partly masking huge, dark eyes, a lovely, big mouth twisted and hard in anger, a firm chin jutting at me . . . and everything he was saying was cruel and true. How devastated I was by that . . . It was utterly different from anything that had ever happened to me! Oh, boys got angry or hurt when you refused them something they had decided you wanted to give them, but this was so different. Abel was attacking me the same way Grandfather would have . . . to change me . . . to make me over . . . and suddenly I was *damned* if I would put up with it! So I just got up and went out into that snow storm with that proper young man from Nantucket, Seth Swain. Oh my, how we kissed! It was a screaming, tearing night, the snow just filling the whole world and making great horizontal lines. If I closed my eyes, I could pretend Seth was Abel, and I held him so hard and we kissed so long! It was . . . very noisy, very wild and . . . very exciting and I guess it was good that it was all cold and blistering snow with no place for us to get inside. Poor, dear Seth, he wrote me bales of letters, from Fayal in the Azores, from the Sandwich Islands, from a gam off Patagonia, and then they stopped and nobody ever heard from his ship, *Young Eagle*, again.

That next summer was quite a happy one, I guess the best of them before Abel. Father was home after a successful voyage but there was a glut of whale oil and the Folger banks decided to hold up any voyage starts. So they gave Father command of *Independence*, a four-masted trader on the Cuban sugar run and Mother and I went along. It was a big ship with a large crew and we had lovely, huge quarters, I with my own little room, closet, washbowl and all. I think my mother had never been happier than that summer and fall. The weather was ideal, calm and hot, and no hurricanes at all disturbed the Caribbean that year. The mate, Mr. Skinner, had his young wife aboard too, so there was always someone to talk with, not to mention the usual young second officer hanging around and offering to get me a drink of water every ten minutes.

We got back to the Vineyard, after some back-and-

forth movements in the Caribbean, in November, and soon it was time to go over to Christmas at Naushon House. We crossed on the packet to Woods Hole and then went through the Hole on the big steam launch Grandfather used as a ferry to Hadleys. I don't know what I really expected to do or say to Abel that Christmas. The whole summer and fall had been so nice and loving, Mother and Father together and so happy, that I really had hardly given him a thought. And of course I had the several, quite a few really, young men who wrote and wrote to me so I suppose I thought I would just let things happen. And of course, nothing happened at all. At the dancing I occasionally faced Abel for a second, but we just smiled distantly at each other and whirled away. Then at Christmas dinner, I sat up with Mother and Father next to Grandfather, and that sort of occupied me for the whole day. I was at an age when I thought relations between men and women rested heavily on "fate." After all, there were magazines that implied that in every story, so I wrote chatty letters off to my admirers and looked forward to . . . I don't know what.

But I learned soon enough, that next November. Father was off, a-voyage-whaling as they say, and mother was down-island helping Aunt Mabel who had a sick child. I pattered downstairs at the loud knocks, and there was Abel again, tall, handsome, intense. That was one of the best nights of my life. I had never seen anyone in pain before, or anyone have a baby before. So I had never seen how a woman can strain and work. We have muscles too, we women! Those black muscles ridged like knotted rope! And Mother Feeney, her little hands moving like white moths on that dark flesh, muttering, pressing, telling me what to do to help. What a triumph it was, the baby's cry and the end of the hurt! And outside, Abel was weeping. He has dominated me always, beloved Abel, but now it is all through gentleness. Gods *must* be gentle, I think, or they become something less.

That was such a fine time. Seeing how Naushon House really worked and being a part of it, then the supper with them all and I suddenly realized how much Abel was at their center. Grandfather had waited all his life for Abel; now he was making him into something strong and special. And suddenly I realized that they were all more than I was. Mother and I . . . just lived, existed. The Naushon people did deeds and lifted hearts. Naushon was far bet-



ter than Camelot because it was really happening, people behaving nobly and unselfishly, righting wrongs, curing ills. And I stupidly blurted out that I did not want to be Elaine or Guinevere, but what I really meant was that they *were* better and they didn't *need* any foolish literary model or educated person's idea of how things should be. And dear Sarah Allen answered me so kindly and warmly, that fine woman to whom we owe everything, Abel and I. Grandfather's ability to judge people was surely one of his most perfect qualities.

And after that lively dinner, Abel told me he loved me. I really didn't expect that, certainly not that soon, anyhow. Oh, I saw how Abel looked at me at the parties, but most of the boys looked that way. And he hadn't made any effort to come over the one Christmas we were at Naushon together after our fight. So I was sort of confronted with it all, all of a sudden, out there on the big, dark lawn. And the moment I thought about it, I knew my life had changed, forever. There was nobody else like Abel. Sitting next to him, after watching how he had taken us about in *Hero*, brought us marching so smartly up the lawn with dear, tiny, Uncle Billy playing "Grenadiers," how he wept when Arabella screamed, well, I was just lost. I tried to talk about it with him, but his presence was too much and I took him and kissed him harder than I kissed Seth. **He could have done anything with me then.** He asked if I loved him. What could I know about that? I was lost in him. He was so strong, strong and gentle together, that my body melted against him. His soft touch on my face, my neck, was a scorch of shivery delight. But of course Abel was the perfect gentleman, always, and so anxious that I should love him and respect him. He could never really see himself. His charm and power over people. His amazing ability to do anything he tried. His mystical depth. This last I came to know fully only later, and when we first touched and talked I didn't know what to make of Abel's "gifts," as he called them. There was certainly no lack of odd and visionary people around Cape Cod at that time. But Abel was quite different in that he seemed to put his power to use. After he told me about the terrible night with his father and that pulse of light in the sea, as he called it, I read at the Edgartown library how small marine creatures can generate light both within themselves and through the action of phosphorus in the water around them. Could such a light be made if they all

acted at once? And even if it could, how would such an unusual occurrence be produced by Abel's danger? Then there is the idea that *I* didn't *see* the glow of light, and perhaps Abel's father did and perhaps not. Then the whole business with the schooner, the whale on father's ship, and the fact that Abel and *Uncle Sam* arrived at the meeting place almost together. Yet much of this could be explained by Abel's immense ability, his intelligence. Other men find fish, navigate ships well, and have a way with boats. And other men are lucky. I did not know what to think about it in the years before our wedding. But what I *could* see was that Abel was growing in strength and ability faster than seemed possible.

Still, it was a fine year-and-a-half, that time when Abel courted me before the schooner came. How much I looked forward to having him hold me at the Harbor Light, where we could kiss and touch.

Sometimes Uncle Billy came with Abel for supper. He was always polite with Mother and me, though still sometimes odd and quirky. He loved Abel, it was so easy to see, and he obeyed his every order. Billy had a way with the Negroes, not, as Amanda Robinson believed, through his coarse talk, though that was a part of it, but because he had learned some of their different elegance, their odd dignity. I came to know them in the next years and it has **always surprised me how most white men miss this elegance** completely. It is in their speech, their mannerisms, and in their dancing. That most especially.

What fun we had before that first Christmas together, when Abel, Uncle Billy, Mother, and I practiced the Negro buck-and-wing dancing. Oh, Billy understood it best, the extravagant gesture and shaking, the movement, not exactly with the rhythm as in a square dance, but shifting around it with your whole body.

Then came the wonderful Christmas with us dancing up in front together. All the boys and girls were envious; the girls of me and the boys of Abel. And that awful, embarrassing kiss under the mistletoe! Oh, my, I had never acted publicly like that before at any party! Abel could just overcome me by touching me anywhere.

But when I saw him doing the Water Speech with Mother Feeney, I just couldn't follow it, make anything out of it at all. And that set me to wondering. People who were sensitive to the ocean, spoke using its motions, and Abel from Nashawena one of them? What was Abel any-



way? Did he know himself? But then when he was with me, I easily forgot all that and we had many jolly times.

So that winter and spring passed quickly and happily. Mother completely approved of Abel. How could she not? He was polite, well-spoken, obviously intelligent, and the apple of her father's eye. How big he had become! And how strong and capable. For the first time I began to notice how the other girls looked at Abel, just as I had noticed how the boys looked at me. But I had no sense or fear of competition. I never had that with Abel, any more than he did with me after the Negro baby came in Cape Poge pond. No, my uncertainty, my fears for our futures and lives, has always been with Abel himself, with his, destiny if you like, and how I might relate to it . . . or not be able to relate to it.

Independence Day found us kissing on the back of Old Columbia at the west end of Naushon. How firm and warm his body was! And our lips moved hotly together! Perhaps if I had led Abel to something more then, and I might have done that for we were both breathing in great sighs, it might have been an easier time later. As it turned out, I was wise not to do that. If Abel had been just a big, handsome boy, oh I guess his hands would have been inside my clothes soon enough, but he was so much more. What I might give him was . . . perhaps a great deal for Seth or the others . . . but really a small part of Abel's spreading world. Did I fear then that my "most" would still be too small? Whatever it was, I finally restrained myself and dear, gentlemanly Abel was as proper as he could be under the circumstances. So we weathered that, and other days, and never once did Abel even hint at a reproach if I drew back flushing and breathing deeply and suggested we take a walk or have a glass of cider.

Still, those months of courtship were very happy ones. During the summer, when the light stayed long, I would climb the stairs to the attic and then go up the ladder to our roof walk. It was easy to see all the way to West Chop from our house then, and often I could make out *Hero* briskly churning southeast toward me. I knew just when to leave the house to meet them at the town dock and to help them tie up. Even if it was late, Mother and I would get them supper, and then Uncle Billy would take *Hero* out to anchor while Abel and I walked out or sat in the parlor and talked and, of course, kissed. Sometimes I would spend a few days at Naushon House, helping

Amanda Robinson and waiting for Abel to come back from his trips out on the sounds. I began then to meet and talk with the fugitives, the "contraband" as they were called in the South. There is no need to repeat their terrible and disgusting stories here except to say that I was totally converted to Abel's views on slavery. I thought then, and think now, that the churches and the compromisers, Daniel Webster included, were utterly in error. Grandfather hated Webster and would never attend a Boston social gathering if he was likely to appear. If the war had begun then, in the late forties, could it have been any more terrible than it finally was? And wouldn't the Negroes, at least, have had a few more years of freedom? Mr. Webster visited Naushon after Grandfather's death, but he was certainly unwelcome before then. In a way, it was good that I had these meetings and experiences because I was far more ready for what happened when the schooner came into our midst.

Abel and I had become the main joy in Grandfather's eyes. Dancing in the lead, nodding and bowing with wide grins at each other, we excited him to cries of delight and appreciation. Now we sat up at the head table where he could josh us at will. But I felt I was competing for Abel then. The point and the problem was simply that Abel was not going to be a banker or a ship's officer, so where did all this social gaiety lead us? Fugitive slave runners had the darkest of futures, it seemed to me. If something eventually interfered with the use of coasting vessels, wouldn't the next step be to ride a buckboard load of rifles out to Kansas territory? Or go with Abner Hallet south to more active and deadly rescues than had been attempted up to then? And Abel's unusual abilities would only make the most desperate attempts seem possible. Yet, we were always confronted with the slaves! And when the schooner came, Grandfather asked that question with no findable answer, what else should someone like Abel do?

Still, I loved being at Naushon House. Taking food to the fugitives, playing with their children, talking about their hopes for Canada and the new lives they would try to begin. Even the most uneducated of them were still superior people. They had proved their intelligence and boldness by getting away and finding a ship. Grandfather was so powerful, so self-assured and dominating, yet I couldn't stay angry with him for long. He would come into



the hidden room, sit down, and light up cigars to chat with a Negro field hand only a few years off a slave ship, yet the two of them would soon be jabbering away, with Grandfather putting the man completely at ease. Abel could do that too. Both he and Grandfather never pretended an interest in whatever their guest was saying, they *were* interested, intensely interested, and that showed.

I guess that stormy New Year's Day next year was the first time Grandfather and I really talked. Abel, Peleg and the rest of the men were out securing the gear and boats in Hadleys. I had taken some food to the hidden room and found Grandfather there chatting with our guests. We left them together and he invited me into his study and the blazing fire. I sat on the edge of a soft, stuffed chair warming my hands while Grandfather walked about, now and then pausing at the window to peer out at the storm.

Grandfather never beat around the bush. "You are concerned with Abel's future, Hope?" His eyebrows were lifted high over his small, colorless eyes.

"Very much, Grandfather," I answered directly.

"Do you think you might eventually marry Abel, my dear?"

"I intend to marry him, Grandfather. I don't know when. He has to work out this business with the Eye of the Ocean."

Grandfather smiled, his round, red cheeks dimpling, his small, pointed nose lifted. "What an extraordinary choice you two have made in each other. If I see anything at all in our world, Hope, it is people with the wrong other people, people doing the wrong things or the wrong things being done to them. Yet you two have somehow discovered the exactly correct. . . ."

I shook my head. "No, you don't see it all, Grandfather. Abel is far more than I am. He is different than I am, than the people I know. You are too, but not as different as Abel. I don't know what is happening, but it's something that I feel I have no control over."

Grandfather sat down in the chair opposite mine and stared into the blazing fire. "Hope, whatever Abel is or is not, he requires you to complete it. If you were a fool, a head filled with cotton, your beauty alone might be enough for Abel. But your mind is every bit the equal of his, probably more than his equal. Still, he has this . . . other."

I really loved Grandfather, no matter what happened.

How much he believed that sensible, New England reason would win out over superstition and cruel myth. The whole slave rescuing operation flowed from Grandfather's belief that pure reason and logic must, in the end, prevail. Human beings must be saved, that was Grandfather's simple assumption. It was the compromisers, the Websters, who spoke madness, irrationality to Grandfather. Yet how to deal with Abel in this same orderly manner? Grandfather said, "this . . . other," about Abel's power, but that other was *all*, the whole of it. Abel was a god, or something frighteningly like one. How? Why? What did it mean for me? I was not one. That, I knew. Oh, I only sensed it all dimly then, but I did sense it. Abel had a real power. Something had happened to him. He was more than we were. "Grant that I am the most beautiful, most intelligent young woman in Massachusetts, New England, the East, whatever . . . And it does not matter, Grandfather. Abel is far more than that."

He pursed his lips and drew down his white eyebrows. "My dear, and accepting everything you say, everything . . . if you and Abel were to wish . . . let us say . . . to change the world, make some great effect on history, which of you I wonder might have the greatest impression? I believe it would be you, Hope. Oh, you might have to be indirect, to use others, but you would accomplish more than Abel, for all his talents. Do not undervalue your life, my dear. There are many powers, besides those inside the ocean. And"—he looked at me intently—"you can learn too, Hope."

I guess I sighed deeply then because Grandfather leapt gallantly to his feet to bend over his liquor cabinet. "Hope, we will now talk of something complicated, interesting, and endless, namely the Mayhews. Now, starting with Gay Head, tell me in a general, sweeping, easterly direction the fortunes and foibles of your extensive clan. And to help us through these, doubtless, troubled narratives, a bit of the finest sherry ever brought over in a Folger packet."

How good and warm it was, the sherry, and what a jolly two hours we had with all my relatives, Grandfather knowing them all and able to comment so decisively and devastatingly on their many activities.

It was almost dark when we heard the men stamping, puffing, and laughing downstairs in the central hall. Grandfather seized a bottle from his cabinet and got to



his feet. "Well, Hope, sherry is fine for stories, but I think those workers will want a spot of something stronger, specifically this Napoleon brandy whose proof and smoothness combine to rejuvenate the tireddest muscles, and most lagging spirit."

They soon got through much of Grandfather's brandy and we all headed into a supper of hot cornbread, Naushon-cured ham, and turnips fried in maple syrup. Afterwards, Abel and I went outside for a walk, to "check the boats," and I came as close then, as I ever did before our marriage, to making love with Abel. Grandfather's powerful brandy had gone to Abel's head and as we kissed and held, I knew his hands wanted to touch my breasts, so I moved, oh, carefully and casually enough, so that his hand was continually confronted with that part of me as it pressed over my shoulders or back. There were a dozen small bedrooms in Naushon House where Abel and I could have gone and spent undetected hours and I thought more and more about doing that as we kissed. Yet I couldn't bring myself to start it. I didn't know quite how to suggest it to Abel, how to give him the idea. And I couldn't get over the thought that once we did that, no matter how lovely and warm it might be, I would have fired off my biggest broadside. What was beyond that? Abel had no limits, he could do anything at all. I thought of that and shivered in his arms and he immediately stopped kissing and walked us inside to a cheerful after-dinner chat between Grandfather and Peleg. As I took off my overcoat and fur hat, Grandfather's small, white eyes peered at me intently, seeing my hot cheeks and my deep breaths, and his face, almost always alert and calm, sagged for a moment. He stared at the floor frowning.

"Old friend," said Grandfather to his caretaker, "there is nothing I would give Naushon up for, nothing but this . . . to be young again. Ah, Peleg, age is the real cruelty, and it lies outside us, beyond us."

Practical Peleg wrinkled his long nose at that. "You have always been a romantic, Moses. Frankly, I can't imagine anything worse. I wouldn't give the leakiest tender in the harbor to be twenty-one again. . . ." He turned and looked at me. "Especially, since Miss Hope seems to be spoken for."

I blushed bright red at that! "How gallant, dear Peleg," I said. "But I'll never cook like Amanda."

Grandfather, completely himself again, beamed at

Peleg. "My, my, I think that brandy speaks in fine ways, my friends." He uncorked the bottle. "We will all have another and I wager that before the night is done, Peleg will manage to say at least one good word about the Congress and, yes, even the President."

"Hanging is too good for them," said Peleg promptly.

"You see!" said Grandfather bursting into laughter. "Ah, the humanizing power of the gentle grape!"

Those months with Abel went by so rapidly, almost like a dream. They were innocent and mostly happy but I was not thinking beyond them very much. We seemed so magically suited, Abel and I, so complete in everyone's eyes, that I just didn't want to challenge that idea. Then Father came home in May of that year, a fine profitable voyage under his belt, and took an immediate dislike of Abel. To be fair, even though I suppose Father would have had problems with anyone I brought home, Abel was huge and handsome and smart. He was mixed up in Judge Folger's "monkey business" and his parents had gone crazy. And of course I had to tell all about Abel's abilities, not really thinking how they would seem to somebody like Father. Mother saved the day. She always spoke staunchly of Abel and, once, she really turned on Father, the only time I ever saw it happen.

Father was holding forth on the whole Naushon situation, about which he knew very little. "Whatever illegalities your father is involved in, Martha, my question is, will Hope become a smuggler's wife, or, herself, a smuggleress, if that's what they are called?" He thought himself quite smart with that quip and gave us a mean little smile.

Mother turned on him and her face was a smooth white with little red hot spots on each cheek. "You know perfectly well what it is they are 'smuggling' as you put it, Silas! And I say it is damnably un-Christian of you to criticize Christian gentlemen whose only thought in this world is the freedom and safety of innocent men and women!" She got up to her feet, shaking in anger, her hair falling out of the big soft bun all around her hot face. How beautiful she was, so tall and strong, trembling in her rage! "You talk about the law of the land, Silas Mayhew, as though it was God's commandment. Well, I think anyone smart enough to be ship's captain should be smart enough to know that saving God's people is at the core of God's law. And if Hope feeds and loves and helps



those people with that big, gentle, beautiful boy, well I say she shall have a place in Heaven! Can *you* promise *yourself* that gift, Silas?"

I instantly burst into a flood of tears while Father got up without a word, put on his coat, and stamped out of the house. We heard a loud "Sirrah! Hup!" and then Cannonball went booming off to the north on a good run. Father took the night packet from Holmes Hole to New Bedford and was not back for a week.

After he left, Mother and I dissolved into each other's arms in storms of tears, parrings and murmurings until Mother unclasped me, stood up, and went to Father's liquor cabinet. "Let's have a sherry," she said, so we had several. It was Grandfather's best and warmest and soon it didn't seem so awful that Father had been told off but more like a good thing. Mother winked at me. "Ships' captains are starched-shirt people, Hope. And New England ones are the worst." She laughed in a bright tinkle. "The thing that annoyed him the most was my using religion on him." She laughed louder, her face alight with fun.

I had never seen Mother like this, and I suddenly felt very grown-up, older and more sober than she. "Mother, what you said was beautiful and true. Don't make it seem cheap."

She grinned at me. "It was true. But, in fairness, Hope, I never have been a very religious person. You know your grandfather well now, and you can see how hard it could be for anyone to get too religious-minded with such a father. And remember, Mother died when I was two. Everything in Boston and Naushon was very rational, very much concerned with whether it would work better, or be made more fruitful. God may provide, Hope, but Moses Folger learned how you made salt in pans from the sea and sun and how you fertilized turnip beds with the inedible parts of fish. Dear Silas," Mother smiled fondly and dabbed at a new tear. "He loves me dearly but he wishes I was just a tiny bit more like the Mayhews, a tiny bit more God-fearing and law abiding and ordinary. We Folgers are different, Hope! And we have always insisted that everyone will accept us as we truly are." Mother looked so fierce that I jumped up and gave her a huge hug and kiss. We had another little cry and some more sherry and I suddenly noticed Mother looking at me very directly. "Abel worships you completely, Hope.

His eyes don't just watch you, they fold you in. What will you do with all this?"

Mother was being direct all right. "Oh, dear," I said and stopped. She stared at me, waiting. "Well . . . I don't really know. Abel is very good at everything, terribly good."

Mother winked and said in a suggestive way, "Oh, I think any woman can see *that* well enough, dear. He's one of Father's extraordinary creations. Why even I have to catch my breath when he takes his coat off those shoulders, and Silas is the finest looking Mayhew on the island." Mother raised her eyebrows and drank some more sherry.

Mother was getting embarrassingly frank and I loved her all the more for it. "The point is, Mother," I said, "that's all I have for Abel, all there is. You see he keeps . . . gaining . . . I don't know where it will stop, or if it will stop."

Mother rocked back and forth in her chair and thought for a while. Finally she spoke. "Abel is something of a puzzle. But he is a man too, Hope, who is completely involved in your beauty. And best of all, he is a *decent* man."

I shrugged. "Decent men are all the more easily enslaved," I said to her.

Mother laughed loudly at that. "Goodness me, they have every possible advantage over you now, in strength, money, power, education, and you talk of slavery." She winked again. "I don't defend this system, my dearest, but it exists and we must take our advantages where we find them. Oh, you and Abel will have your problems, who doesn't? But when the moment comes to set your lives on a true course, speak up, Hope! Don't let him run off to western territory or south to strike at the enemy's heart unless you go too!" Mother looked at me and nodded. "You've already thought of that, haven't you?"

I nodded back. To use my person, my charms if you like, against Abel, had always seemed wrong to me. "He's much stronger and better, Mother," I answered. "He is different, like Cannonball is from other horses. How can I hobble such a person?"

Mother chuckled. "Bring up a filly in high heat and you won't have to hobble Cannonball! The reason men drive themselves to death, drink, and exhaustion is that they think we require it of them. Abel is a little daunting,



a little godlike. I confess it, Hope. But if—no, when—because I have no doubts about you two—you and Abel find your true joy together—and it may take some time, dear—then you will own each other and nothing else will distract or matter. Because it is in his gentleness that Abel is most different. And that is what holds the greatest hope for Miss Hope Mayhew!”

Well, that was gently and sincerely said but it seemed as thin as a summer breeze on Independence Day. Oh, I know now that a strain of violence always runs through the lives of men like Abel. Uncle Billy was a victim of that twice over, once on the *de Neufchatel* with Grandfather, then in the cabin of the slave hunter, that hateful schooner. I was as cruel with Abel that day as I have ever been with anyone. Even now I hate to remember it, how ugly I felt and how I used my sensitivity and cleverness to cut and wound Abel worse than any mad pirate with a flailing cutlass. Because it was all true, what I said. Billy *did* stand for the gentle, the peaceful, the jolly side of Naushon. He and Grandfather each had carved out, formed a piece of Abel, and when Billy saw his part, the soft, gentle part collapse and the Moses Folger part shoot down the wretched, young, Senator’s son, it was Billy’s end. He had lost out on the *de Neufchatel* and spent the rest of his life trying to live in the center of laughter, someplace where the arms and legs of those British marines couldn’t flop about. After the schooner, there was no new place for Billy to go, except to his death.

Yet, what is free will or destiny, anyway? Because this is *always* the way it works, this deadly violence, this death of gentleness. Every time an exceptional, a gifted human appears, his gifts drive him to violence or to violence by those around him. And the grating, beastly thing about it all was that Moses Folger could not be denied when he said Abel did no wrong. What did those men expect in our waters anyway, prepared to kill and seize innocent human beings for money gain? Of course they deserved their bloody deaths, the bastards! But, oh, why did we have to pay with our most innocent soldier?

I think of Uncle Billy often, his strange, little face grinning at everything, his winks to a Negro granny and their immediate sharing of the jolliest, gentlest part of each. To me, Shubael Folger was the real Uncle Sam, the true American, trying to build a bridge between grim, hard, grasping violence and the fun of life, its music and cele-

bration. On that Independence Day I suddenly thought that a great many more Uncle Billys would be brought down in this busy, thoughtless country and I did not want to be part of all that. Perhaps Mother was right, I thought, as I wept for us during the fireworks, clutching Abel's huge, hard arm. I must take a hand in all this.

So I'm afraid I became quite calculating for those few months before *Uncle Sam* sailed off to the Pacific. When we sat alone in the Edgartown parlor I made it quite plain that if Abel wanted to take a memory or two off to the Pacific, he could do it. It wasn't the same as New Year's Day. Then we were both ready for joy and only Abel's total gentlemanliness prevented our love making. Now I was trying to set a hook in him so he wouldn't run far. **I had no idea what he would find at the island he was going to, or what it would do to him, and I suddenly thought I had better get my oar out quickly.**

Thank heaven that Abel readily resisted my movements, and hand pattings. I'm sure we would have both been so stiff and awful that he would have stayed away forever. But Abel had grown again, having performed his bloody, impossible miracle with the southern schooner, and now all he yearned for was to go on his quest. Well, they always must do that, gods, saints, and prophets. And this global reach is natural for ocean-sensitive persons. The very vessels that brought about the conditions for sensitivity allow the quests to become extended. Oh . . . that is all professor-talk from much later. And anyway, it is like trying to catch a great, lovely butterfly in a net of iron mesh.

The two years that *Uncle Sam* was away were sometimes lonely, now that everyone knew I was virtually betrothed to Abel, but good in many ways. Best was the chumminess that grew between Mother and me, our men both away on the same ship, the sherry and the gossip at our elbow. And Grandfather now included us in many more of his social affairs so we spent some time in his Beacon Hill town house, and met the grand people of Boston, providing of course that they were staunch abolitionists, at Grandfather's soirees.

It was Thanksgiving week that next fall that I first met the two people who had the greatest effects on my life to come. Grandfather was an enthusiastic supporter of Professor Agassiz, the noted Swiss zoologist, in his search for funds to build a museum of fossils at Harvard. To as-



sist in such an effort, Grandfather would invite wealthy friends to evening lectures in his big, second-floor living room where the Professor would provide a popular introduction to his amazing study of fossil remains, and then Grandfather would collar people in his own dominating way and get the Professor another room or two.

These were quite grand affairs, the women in bright full gowns of lovely fabrics and the men in formal black suits and stiff fronts. People sat in groups with their sherry and their fans peering at the Professor, who was ably assisted by two young men and a huge, mahogany, double-lantern. We saw slides of reconstructions of the great animals that once lived on the earth and as Agassiz presented the long progression of animal types and explained how they changed as the world changed, an idea solidified in my head.

Professor Agassiz ended his well-planned lecture to applause and then asked for questions. I popped up my hand. Agassiz was a handsome, bearded man with a very European gallantry toward the ladies, especially I noticed, pretty ones. He smiled and nodded at me.

"Professor," I said. "This sequence of types of species of animal families has continued while man has lived on the earth, has it not?"

Professor Agassiz nodded and peered at me with interest. "Oh yes. There is no doubt that man hunted species of tigers and elephants very different from those now on the earth. Their bones and ours are found intermingled, my dear young lady."

"And," I responded, "there are man-made implements which actually show carved pictures of men hunting these creatures?"

Agassiz nodded. "I believe there is a feeling that some of these have magical or religious meaning in connection with hunting."

"Then let me propose this question to you, Professor Agassiz," I said. "Do you think it possible that the continual alteration of the earth's nature and the continual replacement of living creatures might be a reason for the appearance of religious or miraculous ideas and messiahs? I'm suggesting that in a tribe or society, some few persons may have a sensitivity to this change and respond to it in the only way possible, with mystical fervor."

Professor Agassiz blinked several times and then smiled at me most warmly. "Well, Miss Mayhew, if that idea had

come from an advanced student at Harvard, I would be impressed, but coming as a result of this very simplified lecture, I am astonished. "Moses"—he turned to Grandfather who was standing in one corner of the big room puffing owlshly on a cigar and looking immensely pleased—"you have another Folger in Miss Mayhew, I would suggest."

Grandfather beamed at us all. "And better looking than most of us, Professor. But you haven't answered Hope's question."

Professor Agassiz shook his head smiling. "Nor shall I answer it now. Only a charlatan answers such large questions in a moment. It is an idea, Miss Mayhew, that has a certain . . . well, let me call it . . . artistic symmetry. You see, the very weapons on which are carved the magical pictures and which are made of the bones of the slaughtered animals produce the conditions of change and species extinction. Yes, it is an interesting idea, a neat, closed idea. We will talk again, Miss Mayhew, but why not start to answer your own question? You have already read considerably on this, I can see."

I had read whatever I could find in the Edgartown, one-room library. About myth and the different religions of the world. About saints, magicians, and seers, although there certainly wasn't much on Martha's Vineyard about that sort of stuff. I felt quite proud of myself to have gotten to a question that was deep enough to demand study.

Nobody else asked any questions and afterwards I stood in a little group of Grandfather, the Professor, and a plain, severely dressed woman about ten years older than I to whom Grandfather introduced us. This was the famous Maria Mitchell of Nantucket, the first person to use an astronomical telescope to discover a heavenly body, a comet in this case, after the King of Denmark offered a gold medal for anyone performing such a feat. Miss Mitchell was a Folger from old Quaker stock, a tall, thin-faced woman with level, grey eyes, probably quite a daunting person to the swains of Nantucket in her earlier days. She was now the librarian at the Atheneum and, I was certain, captained a very tight vessel.

Professor Agassiz was effusive in his admiration for Miss Mitchell and discussed her great discovery and her own small Nantucket observatory on top of the bank building. Then Miss Mitchell turned to me and smiled quite warmly. "Why not come over and let me help you



with our books, Miss Mayhew?" she said. "We have a much larger collection than the Vineyard and many books in the area of your question."

"Oh," I said. "How nice of you to suggest that. There are many Mayhews there. . . ."

Miss Mitchell gave me her thin, cool smile again. "Please stay with us. We have an extra bedroom and that way I might be able to help you in the evening, if the sky is clouded," she added, smiling frostily at Professor Agassiz.

Grandfather peered at Maria Mitchell, then back at me. "A formidable pair, Professor," he said thoughtfully. "I wonder if we are wise in bringing together the smart women of New England?"

Agassiz did not smile at all. "A stern critic of the world's misrule like yourself, Moses," he said, "should be the first to applaud the presence of women's hands and minds. Personally, I believe we must either share our futures completely or lapse back into brutality. The deliberate failure to educate young women is no more than a trick to. . . ."

Grandfather grinned and puffed his cigar at us. "I know, Professor, I know your thoughts. But do not fear for Miss Mitchell or Hope. They are, either of them, more than a match for any three of us."

"Why is it we must compete?" I blurted out suddenly to Grandfather, and Maria Mitchell answered me.

"It is their world that they have made, Miss Mayhew," she said in a quiet voice. "Someday, when their physical strength counts for less than it does now, when their hunting and warmaking is no longer possible because the world is crowded, then they will need what we are and can become."

I suppose it would have been hard to find two women more different than Maria Mitchell and I. Maria's mother was a grey Quaker, a fundamentalist, and though Miss Mitchell had left the sect in the early forties, its stern requirements still followed her. With my own female friends there was always talk of young men. With Maria Mitchell, men were never mentioned, other than savants and astronomers.

I visited the Mitchells several times during the years Abel was in the Pacific, and each visit was like a term at school. She always had new books for me, new ideas to explore. Maria became interested in the connection be-

tween astronomy and religion, and we spent many hours reading and discussing these relationships.

Of course all of this was only to understand and interpret dear Abel. Maria soon understood this and accepted it. Once or twice she suggested that I might become a student of Professor Agassiz, then a scholar and teacher, but I just honestly shook my head. I could not give up Abel, I told her, no matter what he was or did. Maria Mitchell believed that women were little more than property, doomed to dangerous childbearing and demeaning, stupid work, to waiting and serving and submission.

One snowy, February night, the sky too cloudy for the telescope, we sat talking in the Mitchell parlor. She almost turned on me then in her impatience. "You plan to marry a man even more self-assured than your grandfather," she said with a sudden sharpness. "I know you must be smarter than he, more filled with ideas. Life is long, Hope. Those fleeting moments of pleasure are soon done and the days stretch. Your mother has learned that, my dear."

I nodded at her silently. The fire blazed cheerily in the parlor stove and the snow lay thick on the small windows. The Mitchells lived in a large, second-floor apartment over the Pacific Bank, where Maria's father was cashier. I got up and looked out into the snowy night, down into the main street of the town. Nantucket was perfectly clean and beautiful under the soft, drifting layer, the stores showing dim puffballs of light out into the dark swirl. Two boys were throwing snowballs down the white, cobblestoned street. I felt very comfortable with Maria Mitchell, even if I could never be like her, so self-contained and independent. I turned and smiled, shaking my head. "I know all that, Maria," I said. "But what Professor Agassiz said in Boston is true as well. We must become equal partners with them. I intend to try to be that with Abel. Yet, I may not succeed."

She looked at me with narrow eyes. "Equal with a prophet, a saint, Hope? Hard enough to be equal with an ordinary man."

I don't know if Maria Mitchell really believed that about Abel, but she certainly believed that I believed it. And though Maria was a scientist, she knew much about the whaleships and the voyages to odd places. Maria's father had been an expert navigator and instrument repairer and now Maria gave classes to the young Nantucket



mates in their Bowditches, and repaired and calibrated their sextants. What a fine ship captain Maria would have made, tall and stern, all business you can bet! I said that to her once and she actually *blushed*, so of course I knew she had thought about it herself.

"Grandfather said I should grow," I answered her. "That's why I'm here, Maria, reading these books and talking with you."

Maria sighed and rubbed her hands at the fire. She seemed very old just then, a grey shawl shapeless around her bony shoulders, her hair in a tight, hard bun at the back of her thin neck. "You are a beautiful young woman, Hope. And a smart one too. If what you believe about your lover is true," she casually spoke that word at me but her eyes now glowed with warmth, "then maybe what you want is right, the only right thing. Let me put this to you, Hope, and if it seems blasphemous then I say only that educated persons should be able to discuss any subject in a serious manner. Reading about religious leaders, the messiahs and what they started, I have this thought. Suppose our Lord had taken wife, not just to cook and follow him around, but as a complete partner. Into the wilderness together, raising the dead together, and she taught all his methods and abilities?"

I stared at her. "And would she hang from a twin cross?" I asked her intently. The room was silent and the whole world seemed wrapped in soft cotton.

Maria smiled broadly then, threw back the shawl and clapped her hands, her face now alert and wise. "I don't think there would have been a cross, dearest Hope!"

And then I remembered old Mother Feeney, the Katama midwife, the time she told us that the Navigators dassent take a woman to the Eye of the Ocean. "Of course," I breathed. "That's why they don't want us."

I stared out at the falling lines of white thinking about Abel when Mr. Mitchell strode into the room with a burst of sound. "Ah, talking about church affairs, ladies?" he said in his open, cheerful way.

"Hardly, Father," said Maria drily. "I was just remarking to Hope that if our Lord had married, the history of our society might have been quite different."

"Waal, I should think so," said Mr. Mitchell, his white whiskers moving rapidly up and down. "In the fust place, they would have been lots of little ones with all that problem of who takes over. And if the Missus couldn't get a

good enough lawyer so the Crucifixion went on as scheduled, wouldn't she expect to keep going with, mebbe, one of the Apostles? And which one? No, I don't like it, Maria." The old man grinned at each of us, then put a cautionary finger to his lips as a footfall sounded in the next room. "Don't you dare say I poked fun at scripture," he whispered as Mrs. Mitchell, large and imposing and grey, swept into the room, a full-rigged ship with studding sails set.

That next summer I had my first, what might be called, mystical experience, as well as one of the most frightening moments of my life. It was a bright, sharp June day, the wind southeasterly with a coolness and a little bluster and I was with Cannonball, riding along the beach that stretches most of the length of the Vineyard's south-facing coast. The day was bright and clear, the shadows long in the late afternoon, as we passed the skeleton remains of an old boat poking up out of the sands. Then, slowly, yet continuously, the day seemed to darken, not all over at first but at the corners of my eyes, like a lantern iris closing. I turned my head this way and that, and when I looked at the old boat, it seemed horrible, menacing, ready to eat or cut me. I was seized by the most terrible depression I have ever felt, a hopelessness, a mood so dark that I could not move or breathe. And worse, Cannonball sensed it too. He stopped and whinnied, then began to twitch and back up. I could barely hold his reins. My mind just went down and down into that dark well of fear and terror. The boat ribs were a dreadful white, almost glowing in the strange darkness around us. Cannonball jabbed the ground with his hoofs and neighed in fright. He backed into the surf and I could tell he was working himself up. He jerked backward, shivering, and all I could do was grit my teeth and try to keep my thoughts together. Cannonball swung his huge head this way and that as he clumsily backed into the water. He began to paw and rear and I knew I wouldn't be able to stay on if he really went crazy. What blackness now settled over my mind! So this was death, I thought, how terrible! The separation, the loneliness! The great iris closed and the darkness swooped closer around us and Cannonball neighed and swiveled his head almost backward, left and right, to seek escape. He reared high and almost threw me. That physical event somehow cut through the dark smoke of fear. I desperately dug my knees into



Cannonball's neck and lifted myself up. I never used spurs on Cannonball but I had boots with sharp heels and now I turned them inward and stomped downward with all my weight, raking his neck on both sides as hard as I could with those boot edges.

"Damn you sir!" I cried into that leaden, silent world, "you will run!"

Cannonball was not used to being hurt. He reared high again with what sounded, almost, like a human scream, but when his hoofs came down we were tearing west along the beach. The black edges lay about us still and the horrible, sad fear, but the cutting wind pierced all this and the thunder of Cannonball's hoofs on the hard wet sand knifed into and diminished that soft, blanketing terror. My head cleared and so did my vision. We drove wildly on, now in a kind of exuberance at our escape, Cannonball running with that open, free stride that eats up any distance. As I looked ahead, I saw the sun, now red and large, coming down to meet the horizon. The sea, with its white chop, turned pink. The gulls, they had been silent before, now flew up screaming in annoyance ahead of Cannonball who ran with the joyful abandon of a freed, wild thing.

A year later I learned that on this day, my Abel and the Navigators knelt in the night water at the Pacific Eye and held hands and waited at the bottom of their own well of terror, for the sun to rise so that they could join the sporting dolphins. I would not go through that moment again. Too much chilling of the heart makes life a dead, tasteless thing. But there is wisdom in such moments as well. And most important, most essential to me, I now knew that Abel *had* made the ocean light, *could* sense the toss of the waters and the sparks of fish, and that I had, even if only for an instant, joined him. Abel heard Cannonball's scream across half the world.

Abel and Father came home on a blustering March day. At that time, the first youngster to bring the news of a return to a captain's wife could expect a dollar, gladly given, in return. The news traveled from the Cuttyhunk semaphore across to Gay Head, then east down the island, each station wigwagging its arms at the next. I heard a perfect cascade of knock on the door and there was Jamie Tilton, eleven, panting and screaming at the top of his lungs. "*Uncle Sam* is runnin' in past the Pigs, Mizz

Mayhew! She's under stuns'ls, goin' like Billy-bedamned!"

Mother was beside me in an instant, her hands fluttering with her dress ruffles. "Oh, Hope! Only two and a half years. Oh, they must be full! Oh, quickly. . . ." She turned, then remembered Jamie who was starting to recover his breath. She dashed into the dining room and was back in seconds with her purse.

"Two, Mother," I said, smiling at Jamie. "My captain is back too." Mother dropped the big coins into Jamie's eager hand, then rubbed her cheeks. "We can just get the packet, Hope. Oh, quickly! Joseph! Harness the buggy. You're driving us to Holmes Hole! Now!" My mother turned to me. "Hope! You're just standing there! Aren't you excited?"

I didn't know what I was, I guess. Oh, I longed to see Abel. No doubt about that. But what would I see? I nodded. "This is my first return, Mother. It all catches up with you all of a sudden, doesn't it?"

We soon drove off at a good clip to Holmes Hole and climbed onto the New Bedford steamer. By the time she cleared Quicks Hole and we could see up the New Bedford roadstead, *Uncle Sam* was being warped into her wharf. We chuffed by the ship a mile inshore of us, huge and dominating the busy New Bedford skyline. Even from way out we could see commotion and celebration.

The packet docked at the north end of Front Street, and when we came off the gangplank, there was the Cuttyhunk pilot, old Isaiah Allen. "Waal, ladies. Silas figgured you might get aboard the steamer and asked me to hustle over in a buggy and fetch you back to *Uncle Sam*."

Mother nodded graciously to Isaiah and let him help her onto the wide seat. When we were all settled, Isaiah clucked to the horse and we clopped off toward the whale-ship wharfs. "Did they have a good trip, Isaiah?" asked Mother at once.

"Yep."

Mother stared at Isaiah. "Well, Isaiah, how many barrels?"

"Plenty."

Mother turned, shrugging, to look at me. "Captain Isaiah," I said seriously. "Is there a number that can be put to the barrels? Surely somebody has counted them?"

Isaiah Allen turned and grinned at Mother and me. "If I was to tell you, ladies, then I'd plumb ruin the surprise



of Silas telling you. So I ain't going to tell you." He paused. "I will tell you sumptin else, though. Twas young Master Roon that showed Silas where to get the whales. Figgured it all out, he did, on maps, with numbers." Isaiah shook his head. "Seems the crew and officers gave Abel a mate's share for showing them where to go. Waal . . . them that has lots tends to be generous."

Mother winked at me. "Oh you would have voted to give Abel the share if you'd been in the crew, Isaiah. Otherwise, I imagine they would have thrown you overboard."

Isaiah chirruped at the horse cheerfully. "I'm a great believer in the democratic process, Missus Mayhew. Also a believer in hangin' onto what little I got. But I would have voted for Abel no matter what. He's a fine boy, Abel is. *Fine*, that's all you can say about him."

"Is he changed, Isaiah?" I dared to ask.

Isaiah wrinkled his nose. "Seems biggern ever. Burned dark from the sun. Eyes . . . deep under that hair. Steady." He peered at me. "You two together . . . like people in Sarah's storybooks. Big. Handsome. Royal, Sarah would say."

But Isaiah never finished for at that moment we had drawn up under the high, thick bowsprit of *Uncle Sam* and Abel and Father were running down the gangway with shouts and halloos. And we learned right then of the great catch and the other marvels of the voyage, chattering and laughing. I looked over at Mother, her body pulled tightly in his arm against Father's side, her cheeks pink with joy and excitement as she moved her lips over Father's cheek and back to his neck until he twisted softly against her. How easy that was to do and how I envied her at that moment!

Abel's triumph was beyond hope or understanding. The weather in the Bering Sea was an example. Why did Father get two consecutive years with almost no ice? Ships that went later, many of them, perished or turned south a few days or weeks after daring those waters. The masses of whales seem barely credible, yet *Uncle Sam* was greasy from stem to stern. And then . . . the Eye of the Ocean? Well, I could see, the moment I set eyes on Abel, that he had changed again. He spoke quietly and thoughtfully, his eyes probing into mine. I could hardly bear his gaze for long. He seldom blinked. I felt overwhelmed by the whole press of events.

When we kissed on the afterdeck that night, he told me about the Eye, about the wisdom he had gained. His body was like sun-warmed rock under my touch, his skin a brown gleam in the dim light of *Uncle Sam's* binnacle lamp. I felt his wide, solid chest press against my breasts. How strong he was! He would be denied nothing that he wanted. But, what was he really for? To lead more Uncle Billys to grim and violent endings? To hunt down every great whale that remained alive? To love me and to give me joy?

But I did not think these kinds of thoughts very often during the busy weeks before my wedding. There were trips to fittings in Boston and invitations to write. There was cleaning and organizing the Nonamesset House, where Abel and I would live after our wedding day. Naushon House was prepared in a fury of activity, that last week in June. All the Woods Hole and Vineyard fishing captains were hired to bring the guests across the Hole, and extra railroad cars arranged on the railway. The two steam packets were to make extra trips between New Bedford and Woods Hole on Independence Day. And boatloads of food and drink arrived from Alonzo Scudder's suppliers until it seemed we would burst from it all.

In the midst of everything was Grandfather, scribbling notes, testing the wines, arguing with Peleg over the number of tables needed to seat the guests at supper, dispatching the caretakers on dozens of errands to the Tavern, the Hole, or the West End house.

Of course Independence Day that year was perfectly beautiful. I never doubted that it would be. Grandfather would permit nothing less. Hadleys was awash with white cat-boats, in and out from Woods Hole, filled with smiling travelers in colorful dresses and handsome suits, peering up in wonder at sprawling Naushon House, its windows shining, its lawn dotted with strolling, chatting, elegant people.

That day was Grandfather's final triumph, his entire perfect moment that he had created by his will and his strength. His Abel stood tall and masterful in a fitted white suit. No cut could conceal the breadth of his shoulders, the thickness of his arms. Father too was strong and tall, his finest voyage just ended, a triumph, the talk of New Bedford and Boston. His eyes followed my beautiful, shapely mother, her hand always on Father's arm. I walked through that day in perfect confidence. It was like



a knife edge, my wedding day; beyond it I could see nothing except newness, uncertainty. Yet on that final day of my girlhood, I knew that outwardly I was a match for Abel, not just any match but the only match. There were dozens of young women at my wedding, from Nantucket and the Vineyard, from the Cape and Boston, but none of them could have stood beside Abel while I was there and no young man, but Abel, could have stood beside me. Maria Mitchell's solution I could not accept. And lacking that fortitude, courage, fanaticism, whatever it was, I would marry my destiny. There was no other choice. There had never been any choice, not once Abel had seen me. It is hard to deny some larger meaning to such conclusions. Is it possible that sensitive persons, messiahs if you like, are more prone to a predestined life? And if so, to what purpose? As a model to the rest of us? To accomplish unseen ends? I thought about these things on my wedding day, deep in my mind, while the rest of me strolled grandly and bestowed smiling conversational favors on blushing young (and not so young) men. It was my final feminine triumph, my most dazzling hour at Naushon House. Unlike the other holidays when I had smiled warmly and put my hand briefly on their arms, now I held the arm of handsome Abel, the final proof of my beauty and my character, a young man without equal in that entire, grand company.

Mrs. Robinson arranged cider, beer, and cold meat and cheese on the lawn at noon, for those already arrived, and afterwards we five had our photographs taken. Grandfather had personally arranged for a pale young man, a student it was said of the French genius, M. Daguerre, to come from Boston with his chemicals and equipment to photograph the wedding party. I insisted that he also make a plate of Father, Grandfather, and me, and after that exposure a strange moment occurred. In the midst of all the jolly chatter, Father suddenly looked at me and his eyes seemed suddenly very old, very thin. And he said something in a sad voice about how the day was a lovely pearl on a string and yet it would soon fall off. It was strange for an instant how sad he was, how drooped his face became. I just spoke right up and said I would put that pearl back on the string for him. I promised to do it. It was an odd thing to say. It popped into my head from nowhere at all, but it cheered Father in an instant, and he

suddenly seemed to be himself again, laughing at me quite gaily.

After I said that, I turned and looked at Abel, standing next to the big, brass and wood camera, and I saw he was peering at me with a very intent, yet very loving stare. For a moment I seemed arrested, almost like that time on Cannonball, but without the fear, and then I saw Alonzo Scudder and several of his gigantic children come puffing up the hill from Hadleys and the moment slipped behind me in a gush of laughter and joshing, hugs and kisses until my heart just brimmed over with gladness and joy in the wonderful day.

It was a simple ceremony that afternoon. Grandfather read the service, and when he asked us the questions his eyes glittered with tears. He was always so sentimental at heart and I had a big lump in my throat when I saw how blessedly happy he was. And if I might have done some things differently than Grandfather, I would not have done them as well. He had led a multitude to freedom. Whatever else might come, that was good.

Grandfather said we were man and wife, then whispered, "Kiss your bride, Abel." And we kissed gently and lovingly. It was a good kiss and I knew I loved Abel. I had to love him. There was no going back.

After the brief ceremony, and a kind of walk-around reception on the lawn, we all sat down at the trestle tables for the great Independence Day feast. Abel and I sat with Grandfather, Mother, and Father at the center table facing down on the many long tables that marched across the wide, level part of the lawn. Almost one whole table had the Vineyard and Cape captains, their wives, and some considerable number of children too. Their boats were now tied ten or twelve abreast in Hadleys and after the fireworks they would take the many Boston and Cape Cod guests back to the stages, steam cars and the steam packets at Woods Hole. All the bankers, shippers, and their clerks, old and young, were down from Boston, and their children of many ages too. Tables full of them. Three, almost four tables were loaded with Mayhews, the largest gathering, they said, in the history of the Mayhews. Even Caleb and Henderson J. Mayhew, old codgers with thirty years of hate over a lost farm lying bitter between them, showed up on separate Vineyard boats. Neither could stand the thought of the other getting the eats and seeing the fireworks, and then telling the one who didn't come



about it later. Grandfather soon had them jabbering together and now they were sitting next to each other and arguing over how a wash pond should be opened in the spring. There were deep-water captains in stiff blue suits and flourishes of whiskers and young mates with tight pants too high up above their ankles. Half a table was taken by the Barnstable Firemen, their red uniforms cleaned and bright, their shiny instruments piled behind them. Over near the Cape captains were the whalemens, John Micah, Father's wonderful harpooner, Nat Macy, the mate from *Uncle Sam*, other creased-faced men twisting uncomfortably in formal new clothes. And at our own table, across from us and down at each end were all our special friends, the Scudders, Peleg, Captain Hallet with, surprisingly, a large wife and several children, Maria Mitchell, people from Tarpaulin and the West End farm.

Amanda and the other women swept in with huge bowls and platters as soon as we were seated. There was everything to eat and more; cornbread and baking-powder biscuits with Naushon honey, hot, spicy ham, steamed clams and lobsters in great, hot, earthen bowls. Early corn, salmon from Maine, and oysters on the half-shell from Cotuit, the never-depleted turnips in hot butter, sweet potatoes and baked giant bass with white, flaky meat. West End vegetables of every sort and maple syrup, thick cream, melted butter or spicy sauces to pour over everything else. Wines, liquors, and beers were served on the run by the Tarpaulin stock boys, so that soon a sense of contentment and satisfaction began to infuse the multitude.

I sensed Grandfather next to me stirring himself for a speech, but before he could clear his throat, Alonzo Scudder was standing and calling for quiet. He turned and faced us down the long table. "No, Moses, you have played every piece in this band and called every tune, but you will *not* be the first to toast this young man and woman. The rest of us have some rights, sir! I defy you!"

Grandfather grinned at me, then at Alonzo. "I was only rising to suggest that you might offer such a toast, Alonzo, old friend. Happily you saw the need just at the same proper moment."

Everyone laughed, clapped, and cheered at this while Alonzo nodded in a courtly way at Grandfather. He looked about at the quieting crowd. "We are here, dear friends," he said, "to wish all joy and happiness to the

Prince and Princess of Naushon." Cheers and shouts erupted. "Such royalty as this we have not seen on Cape Cod in many a year, never, I think. And, alas, probably not soon again. Some years back, my friends, the first time I met Abel, he was, if you can believe it, only half this size, perhaps not that. I suggested then that he would soon get his growth eating your food, Amanda. . . ." More cheers and shouts of approval for Mrs. Robinson who now stood tall behind Grandfather.

Alonzo held up his hand. "But I think, Abel and Amanda, it has gone on far enough. We have Chases enough to crack our lintels, shatter our hanging lamps and frighten our horses!" Much cheering and laughter burst out at this. Reuben Chase, sitting with some Folgers, stood up, all of seven feet tall, and pointed across the lawn at his uncle, Old Matthew P. Chase, one of the cat-boat captains, and only an inch or so shorter than Reuben.

"The reason they're agin' us, Uncle Matt, is cause it's so dang hard to fib to a man you got to crane yore neck to see!" The captains stamped and cheered in agreement, soon joined by everybody else. But they soon quieted and looked again at Alonzo.

And he turned to look at me. "And, dear Hope, I called you a princess, but I think queen is more apt a description. Your beauty is a blessing on our summer land, something we will take and hold in the dark winter or when times are less bountiful. So"—he raised his glass—"to your feet my friends, glasses up." And they all rose, that huge company, with a soughing sound like wind gusts through tall beach grass. "To Hope and Abel. All happiness, all love, all joy and success. And thank you for this greatest of days."

While they drank, Peleg jumped up on his chair and shouted, "Three cheers, then, for Hope and Abel. Hip! Hip! . . ."

The hurrahs echoed over the lawn of Naushon House so loudly that the coasters moving slowly or stopped on either side of us set up a responding racket of horns, whistles and shouts.

Abel turned and looked into my eyes, and I stood up and brushed my hands off and smiled at the huge crowd.

"Thank you dear Alonzo . . . and Peleg and Grandfather"—I leaned to kiss his pink head—"and Father and Mother." I wiped my eyes and swallowed a huge lump.



"Oh dear, I didn't mean to get weepy . . ." I said, and everyone cheered some more. "Thank you all for such wonderful wishes and cheers. But we already have all of that happiness you want to send us. Let us send you back an equal share of it. Oh, Abel, wish them that with me!"

Abel stood, tall and dark and handsome in his white suit. "Yes, we two must do that. We wish you a thousand days like this one, every one. We wish you lives filled with summers!"

"This is your day, Grandfather," I said to him. "You deny it, but you must be in touch with the Almighty."

Grandfather could not resist that, and he stood on the other side of me, staring out at his lawn full of laughing guests. "Now, Hope," he said, raising his hand, "there has never been a poor Fourth! Isn't that true, Captain Marden?" he shouted to an old gaffer completely lost in a nest of whiskers.

Captain Marden scratched his thatch of grey bristle and spat. "Seems to me it hailed goose eggs in seventeen or eighteen, Moses."

Grandfather nodded with an impatient grin. "All right. I'll give you seventeen. Name another bad one, Jacob."

Marden shook his head. "They mostly been pretty fair, Moses. It's true. But they still ain't been many like thisun. Today—it's a right humdinger!"

"One more toast, ladies and gentlemen," said Grandfather, now serious. "On this perfect Independence Day, in pain and in love, health to our Republic!" We all raised our glasses and this seemed like a good time to start the band concert. After arranging the chairs Grandfather and his many helpers went off to prepare the much-awaited Chinese fireworks balloon.

The Barnstable Firemen played loudly, and since more than half of them were pretty nearly in tune at any given moment, they made a spirited and quite jolly concert. The coasters, hundreds of them with sails red in the low sun, lay off both sides of Naushon, their rigs backed in the soft westerlies, listening to the music and waiting for the great balloon to rise.

As the dusk grew, Abel whispered in my ear that we should go and watch them light the balloon fires, so we crept around in back of the chairs that had been lined up in rows to face the firemen-filled porch of Naushon House, and ran laughing down the dusky lawn to where

the men labored over a huge bag of heavy paper. Grandfather had held a loaded silk clipper three weeks in Canton so that its Captain, Otis Pyle, might watch at close hand the launching of one of these great, fire-borne devices. Now Captain Pyle, a tall, thin man with very fierce moustaches, stood beside Grandfather intently watching Peleg and the caretakers spread out the huge bag over a network of tall sticks. The painted bag was filled first from a fire built under a kind of umbrella or upside-down funnel of thick, wet wood with a hole in the center. As we watched, the bag began to open up and grow. It lifted off the web of sticks as they stoked the fire under the wide wood funnel. As the fire burned hotter, the bag rounded and, glowing, grew tall. The band had stopped and all the guests were walking down toward the lower edge of the lawn where the fire burned brightly.

Now Captain Pyle leaned tensely forward. "Light it off, Peleg!" he said sternly, and the fire in the metal basket under the open bottom of the balloon envelope glowed and burned. They held the tall balloon by many ropes and as the fire blossomed in the basket, you could see it tugging, wanting to rise.

"Fuses!" shouted Captain Pyle, and then, "Release it!" The men let go of the ropes and stepped back. The glowing balloon rose at once, gigantic, steadily into the evening sky, carried by the west wind. We could see the sparks running along through the chains of fuses and behind us the band started the "Star Spangled Banner." And then the display began, in color and sound, on and on, falling from the ever-rising balloon, the explosions and stars made by the Chinese pyrotechnists, ever-larger and brighter because they were higher. It went on and up in continuous roars of sound and flashes and sizzles of light. Grandfather was now next to us, his head way back, beaming up at a whole sky filled with bursting light. "The glorious Fourth, Hope," he said quietly to me.

I leaned over and held him, still looking up, watching the fading, falling, yet ever-new fireballs. I whispered in his ear. "You have achieved your masterpiece, Grandfather. A beautiful, perfect triumph."

He put his arm around me and hugged. "I have, haven't I? And very few people ever do that, Hope. Very few!"

The fireworks finally fell away to an occasional boom or sizzler, and the balloon, still glowing from the fire be-



neath it, now seemed very small and high up. The great fleets of coasters broke out into lusty choruses of clanging bells, foghorn hoots, a few distress flares and rockets, and roaring cheers of approval. And so our wedding day neared its end.

There was still another strange moment that evening just before Abel and I got off by ourselves. We had said good-bye to everyone, at least twice, and seen them all off down the hill to Hadleys where the many captains waited to take them across the Hole. The two-dozen-odd social guests staying at Naushon House were sent off to bedrooms or out to walks with their cigars, coffees, and brandies, and my mother, gently pulling her hand from Father, said she was going up and urged him to hurry and follow.

It was warm in the soft westerly wind and the long front hall of Naushon House was filled with the scent of honeysuckle and lilac from the solarium. The air was dense with that scent and I felt a bit giddy, from all the wine and food, and now, that almost touchable smell of sweet flowers. Father stood on the stairs, peering down at us, his face seeming now both old and young. His sadness seemed to have returned, yet he was thinking of Mother upstairs and his eyes were glowing with that other fire, too. Grandfather and Abel stood on either side of me at the foot of the stairs. I really felt very faint and held onto Abel's arm for dear life. Grandfather seemed to be turned to me, and Father too, and Abel, but I really had nothing to say to them. I blinked, many times, and things got very, very uncertain, very wavery. But I shook my head then and saw Father a few steps further up the big wide stairs of Naushon House smiling just at me. "I can withstand it," he said to me. "It is a blessed sadness, my beloved," and he turned and went briskly on up the stairs and through the door into the big front bedroom where Mother waited for him.

His words filled me with his sadness, a melancholy that seemed to have no exact origin. I gripped Abel harder and tried to smile. "Oh, I'm fuzzy with all that champagne, Grandfather. I must go up. Oh, thank you for this day."

"I love you both," he said, and standing on tiptoes, kissed both our cheeks. "Well, I'll go say goodnight to Peleg and Amanda." Off he went to the large kitchen where I knew they would all talk for hours about what had happened on that special Independence Day. Abel

and I, finally alone, walked up the stairs arm in arm and went into the largest of the front bedrooms of Naushon House, with huge bay windows that looked out on both the bay and sound. In the exact center was a high, lace-draped canopy bed on a little, raised stage or dais. It was an awe-inspiring place for a wedding night and I had to bite my lip to stop a giggle. I went and opened the casement windows to let in the warm, fragrant breeze and the night sounds of Naushon. I felt very tense and sad, very confused. I turned and Abel was sitting up on the bed and grinning at me. He had thrown his coat onto a chair and his cravat was tied around a bed post. I walked over and sat down next to him. Two tears popped out of my eyes.

"Oh, Abel," I said. "I was so dizzy downstairs in the front hall. And Father seemed so sad and he made me sad. It's true, Abel, everything goes on at such a pace. The day ends so quickly." I looked at him. "You are very handsome, Abel." And the tears really started to flow.

"We will never part again, Hope," said my husband. "You are my only heart's desire now."

I put my arms around him and we kissed. And I trembled. "Abel," I said, looking at his face, "long ago you asked Grandfather to make you as strong as he was. Now you must make me as strong as you are. You are beyond me, my dear."

Abel drew away and grinned, more faintly, again. Then he lay back on the bed and threw his arms over his head. "It's hard to be less when you can be more. My father killed himself over that. Moses is right, Hope! You must be your best. Anything less is a kind of slavery." He sighed and looked at me. "I am *not* more than you. I have planned, lived my whole life to reach this moment, this house, this bedroom. But the goal is . . . still beyond me. Tell me what to do."

"Do not be less," I said intently. "But, make me more, Abel. Teach me the Water Speech. Show me how to see. Make me like you!"

So, though no one probably imagined it, I spent my wedding night sitting cross-legged in my nightgown on a huge, four-poster, canopied bed, learning the vocabulary and logical structure of the Pacific Water Speech from a golden, muscular god who smiled and laughed with the most forthcoming and giving grace imaginable.

When we finally lay down together, clasped in each oth-



er's arms on that wide, formidable bed, Abel fell off into a quiet sleep. My sadness slipped away from me as I held his rocklike shoulders in my arms and felt his quiet breath. I had made no mistake in choosing this gentle, powerful man. I loved him then more than I ever had before. Now, if I could get by this . . . other.

The island of Nonamesset is about a mile long and perhaps half as wide and it forms the west side of Hadleys Harbor. Wide bridges of rough-cut Naushon cedar lead across two, much smaller islands to the southwest corner of Naushon, about half-a-mile from the big house. As the new mistress of Nonamesset House I had a horse and buggy to go back and forth on my errands, and two servant girls to keep the big farmhouse clean and look after the cows and chickens. The Nonamesset farm provided the milk and butter for Naushon House, and some of the vegetables. But it was all done in very modern ways. We had a sheep treadmill to run the churn and the water was pumped by a windmill attached directly to the house up to a second-floor cistern, then fed to the kitchen and the water trough in the cow yard by gravity. The evening milking was done by two or three of the younger caretakers who usually arrived at dusk on large horses. They sang and joshed each other very gallantly and, I'm afraid, quite dazzled my two plain, shy girls whose eyes got as round as milk pails during the milking time. We sometimes fed these young men and Abel joked and chaffed with them in the most easy and careless manner. But there was a certain ruthlessness about them too. They would betray either one of my maids for the pleasure in it, and care little about her ruination later. I think a nation that encourages lawlessness, as America now encouraged the slaveholders and their adversaries, makes a dreadful mistake. It becomes harder and harder to draw lines anywhere.

July and August that summer were not especially easy months for Abel and me. My needs were so lacking in direction or explanation, so without coherent end, that I could see Abel sometimes lost faith in me and fell morosely silent after supper. But I was learning from him all this time. I began to have a sense of the water and the movement of the sound. Nonamesset House had a third-floor walk, from which we could watch the westward-moving coasters for any special signals, and from that eminence Abel and I would look out and talk in the Wa-

ter Speech about the run of the tide. The fish I had little sense of yet. That was a deeper vision, more elusive.

I went often as Abel's mate on *Hero*. I had always had a good stomach for the sea and it was true that the Water Speech did help one in working around a boat. When we had a trip to Holmes Hole, we would go on to Edgartown and spend the night with Mother and Father. Sometimes we stayed at Alonzo's big, sprawling house in Hyannisport.

On these almost daily voyages, Abel and I used the Water Speech together. Once I asked him if the Speech had a vocabulary for love and passion. Dear Abel, he blushed pink! "Uncle Billy would have understood it at once, Hope. It's very coarse."

I shook my head smiling. "I don't mean the basic biology, dear. I meant the joy and love, the being one flesh, as the Bible says."

Abel thought for a while. "I guess they never showed me that. Yet there must be ways. You saw Mother Feeney use the birth gestures on Cape Poge Pond. If there's a birth speech, there has to be the other."

Looking back on the summer it seems to me that we became increasingly . . . well, *involved* with the ocean. I began to have the feeling of a connection, as though it was starting to speak back to us. Our life together had begun on the most calm and perfect of days, the water smooth and completely gentle. But as summer wore on, the ocean began to interact powerfully with Abel and me. I have tried to understand this progression. It relates to the pace and growth of a quest, the quickening relationship between the gifted sensitive and whatever part of the world has touched him. Abel was a teacher; all messiahs are, of course. But the final lessons came from the sea. Abel and I were now on a wave, he holding me on the crest as it grew and curled.

The weather that season was unsettled, steaming hot, then blown apart by windy, wet, southwesterly storms. Near the end of August we made our unexpected trip to Monomoy Island, and I learned there that power and violence and evil cannot be separated from insight and understanding. Lesser men force that truth on their betters, demanding to be led to cruelty and terror, seething for revenge and repayment. How did the teaching of Jesus Christ lead to the Inquisition, the elimination of the Indian nations of New England and almost everywhere else in



the New World, the enslavement of Negro human beings? Easily, step by step, saints and prophets walking a terrible path that is hemmed in and harried by those who are cruel and stupid.

Late in August, we learned from a cipher message delivered by one of the stock boys from Tarpaulin Cove that a ship would duck in past Monomoy and wait for guests in the Chatham roadstead. This was an exposed and difficult place in summer, completely open to southwest and bounded to the south by the vast Common Flats, miles of thin water in which even *Hero* would have difficulty on low tides.

We had to make this awkward rendezvous because the Boston packet was taking our guests offshore, to the Bermudas, the small island group a thousand miles southeast of the Cape and part of Britain. Bermuda had played little part in the escape of slaves until recently, when a sympathetic governor-general had somehow contacted Grandfather and quietly suggested that a strictly limited number of guests could be settled in the islands, providing it was all done with great discretion. The English, to their eternal credit, had discovered the horrors of slavery many years before our own wretched government.

We had two guest couples in *Hero* each with a young girl child. The four adult Negroes were servant people, yard men, drivers and cooks, and were very quiet and watchful. The day was fearfully hot, muggy, and wet, yet with no fog. The wind blew fitfully, then almost died completely in the afternoon as we were crossing Horseshoe Shoal north of Chappaquiddick Island, a place almost out of sight of land, but with water only one or two feet deep in spots. Abel was below, leaving me with *Hero's* tiller, as the boat rolled and slatted about, and we carried only the slightest headway in the Vineyard Sound current starting to run east toward Monomoy Channel. I had a definite sense of something impending. The hot, sweaty weather and the oily sea glittering in the moist sunlight had a waiting quality and, far to the south, I saw the thin, low cloud merging with the horizon where Muskeget Channel runs out to the deep ocean. As I watched, the cloud began to boil and grow, approaching us at a good clip and spreading along the whole southern stretch of sky and distant land. This, I knew, was a line squall, the most dangerous and rapidly developing storm of all. They were summer-time affairs and relatively unusual in these waters. I guess

I had seen two or three in my lifetime. But this one was big and fast, spreading east and west with extraordinary speed.

"Abel," I called. "A squall coming."

Abel poked his head out of the cabin hatch, and peered south. In an instant, he was up like a jack-in-the-box and forward, pulling down our jibs. Rapidly he unhooked two from the forestays and threw them down the forward hatch, finally tying the inner jib down on its clublike boom so only a handkerchief of sail was left. By the time he had finished with the main, reefing it so the gaff yoke was tied directly down to the main boom, only a small, ridiculous triangle of main was left flopping in the calm silence.

But it was not exactly quiet. The squall was building over us at an ever-faster rate and we could actually hear the hiss of the wind, though we were becalmed in a steaming heat. Abel took the tiller and nodded at the hatch. "Get some slickers for them and you put one on, too," he said in his direct but calm way. "I don't know what's in that. Rain and hail I suppose. God knows how much."

Our guests seemed apprehensive as I showed them how to put on the oilskins and explained that we would have to run before the coming wind but that the boat was sturdy and would see us safely to shore. I heard the sudden rattle of our small mainsail luffing and poked my head up. The squall was directly over us, blacking an entire half of the sky, and the light was suddenly strange, a kind of thin, dirty yellow. *Hero* stood up for a moment, and her sails slatted and banged as the fitful wind came from every compass point at once. But we could see the main force of it flying from the south across the slick, soupy water. These were not the cat's paws or ruffles of an afternoon breeze. The intensity of the wind was such that we could see the white chop before it arrived, topped by spray. In a moment it was on us and *Hero* went right over with a bang on her beam ends. I had never seen a wind pick up so fast. There was no way that even Cannonball could have galloped ahead of that gigantic disturbance. The wind came on us with a cruel scream and then it just blew harder and harder. From a kind of hissing silence we were, instantly, in a howling bedlam! Abel put *Hero* up into it and she came back upright, her truncated mainsail as stiff as sheet iron and shaking in a series of rifle shots. The hail followed the wind within moments, big, round, hard pieces. I ducked and pulled the hatch cover to, leaving poor



Abel to face the bombardment. He covered his head with a piece of floor board and tried to hold *Hero* just off the wind and with just enough luff so that we kept moving, but the sail didn't fly into tatters. The thunder of the hail on the boat was deafening below and it seemed impossible that we would not be torn apart by the violent noise and motion. Our poor guests stared at me in silent terror. "My husband," I said to them, "is the best sailor in all these waters. He will see us safely in." They gaped and made no response. Impossibly, the wind went up and up in pitch and the noises of the hail, the sails slatting, and the working of the boat seemed at any moment to overcome us.

It was now as dark as night below. The squall clouds covered the whole of Vineyard Sound and we jerked and jumped as *Hero* began to roll and pitch in large, extravagant motions. We were in shoal water and the seas were already breaking, only five minutes after the start of the line squall.

The wild drumbeats of hail stopped with the same suddenness with which they had commenced and were replaced by a rumbling hiss of driven rain pelting the starboard side of *Hero*. I poked my head out and it was soaked in an instant, the raindrops warm and huge, yet driven at hurtful speed. It was dark and a glaring fan of lightning went down to the Vineyard south of us followed instantly by a deafening thunder burst. Abel peered at me, frowning. "I'm heading for Monomoy, Hope," he shouted. "If it lets up we can go on port haul nor'west and then back to Chatham. If it stays like this, we've got to go in the Powder Hole." He steered with his left hand, using his right now to make the Water Speech in tune to his words. "The squall is backing southeast; in an hour that sound current will be running full almost southeast." His gestures left no doubt of what would follow. As the tide grew, the current would develop rollers about as long as *Hero*. These would steepen rapidly and break violently in occasional cross seas. We would, at the least, shake our mast out and possibly be torn apart.

The Powder Hole was hardly a more appetizing prospect. Almost unapproachable from land because of breakers south of Chatham, or from sea in large boats, it lay at the very tip of ten-mile-long Monomoy Island, itself little more than a huge sand dune. There was a third-order light and keeper east of the Powder Hole on the highest land the lighthouse service could find, but the rest of the settle-

ment was mainly shacks and tents. Some of them lived meanly in their boats, drawn by horses up the sand and propped by sticks. There was a sort of store and it was said that rooms, or at least beds, could be rented, although for what purpose other than cutting an unsuspecting throat, or an assignation, I can't imagine. The people of Monomoy, whispered about on the main and Nantucket, were definitely *not* the sort to be seen at Naushon House on the Fourth. There lived there, it was claimed, murderers who had escaped jail or jumped ship, and these often became the infamous "mooncussers" or false-light wreckers who worked the north end of Monomoy, and perhaps up Truro way too.

These men did not only entice ships onto the vast assemblage of sandbars that lie east of Cape Cod, but under some circumstances, people said quietly, they would murder the stranded crew and remove whatever loot they could before daybreak, riding across the sand on thick-wheeled buckboards, their boarding ladders folded up to appear as nothing more than an extra catboat mast.

Some of the more feeble-minded Monomoy residents grubbed what they could from the clam flats and lobster pots, watched for any passing catboats that they could try to board at night and capture, although that seldom happened any longer. Monomoy had women, too. There were many stories about them, as you might imagine, although these I only heard from Abel. Most men would not discuss such a subject with a woman present.

It was a grim enough place to turn many people to crime and murder. So low in most spots that storm seas sometimes washed right through driftwood houses, Monomoy had no vegetation except low beach grass here and there. Facing the open Atlantic, the sand dunes take the full force of the winter northeasterlies and northers and give no protection or respite to anyone or anything. Even solid Naushon House would have had trouble staying warm at Monomoy. In their mean houses and shacks, winter must have been horrible.

The rain stopped for a moment to be replaced by more frequent thunderclaps and jarring, stark lightning displays that fitfully illuminated the terrified faces of our guests. The squall did not seem to be letting up and I began to wonder about Handkerchief Shoal that lay between us and the south end of Monomoy. *Hero* could pass over the



shoal readily enough, but I felt apprehension about the seas there.

Poking my head up the hatchway again, I presented my fear to Abel completely in Water Speech gesture, the whipcracks of thunder and the blasting wind making mouth-speaking impossible.

Abel responded as best he could with one hand. We would head a bit north, then cross the shoal and try to go to windward inside of Handkerchief. Abel's face was intent and heavy with concentration. He was driving *Hero*, under her two tiny rags of sail, over or around the breakers. I could sense at least some of it, how the waves came at us in pattern, but with irregularities imposed on the pattern. The shoals tripped the larger waves and rapidly changed their form. Waves formed and joined, and broke in two. The roar of thunder echoed all around us and bolts struck nearby, hissing into the wild seas. I had never seen a storm like this in all my life on Cape Cod.

*Hero* fought for us continually, bobbing, rising, moving purposely. It became almost trancelike, my connection with the boat, the waves, and Abel's steering. Fear passed completely from me. No wonder Abel did so well! Fear and knowledge go together, yet they can counteract each other too. *Hero* rolled, heavily burdened but staunch and true. We pounded east toward the great sand barrier of Monomoy.

The rain squalls came and went, and when one lifted I looked ahead out of *Hero*'s forward cabin port to the east. The whole of Nantucket Sound was in a froth of white chop, but ahead I could see the wild disturbance over Handkerchief Shoal. This great wind, starting from the south, had shifted the current run to the north, so it hooked over Handkerchief. There the wind and tide fought each other with complete violence. The whole of the shoal ahead of us was a fury of white smother. Abel let *Hero* fall off to the north as we neared that fearsome water, yet I knew he wanted to cross as far south as possible so that *Hero* would not have to go so hard to windward into the Powder Hole.

Yet how were we to get through? It would have to be done entirely by sense, by recourse to Water Speech. Abel knew how the bottom curved under the shoal and he saw the counterforces of the tidal current and the blasting wind. Suddenly *Hero* hardened her tack and drove

into what looked like vertical, white waves far higher than our cabin top.

"Hold on tight!" I shouted at our guests and threw myself down on the two little girls who were peering at me from wide eyes. *Hero* dropped like a stone and I covered their heads as we three slammed upward into the oak ribbing over the bunk. *Hero* rolled right over, then snapped back up. But Abel had picked his spot. It was a little deeper here and the cross-seas were smaller. For a few more moments we pounded terribly, one thump momentarily convincing me that the keel had torn off, but *Hero* rose and suddenly we were actually *sailing* again!

I let go of the girls and poked my head up. Behind us the awful, white violence of Handkerchief seemed at any moment to chase us up to the beach. But we were in a deep channel, quite close to the shore of Monomoy, and running a bit south of east. The low sand hills gave no protection from the wind, but the long hook that enclosed the shallow Powder Hole gave us a wide wave-lee and the sloppy waves here were no more than a couple of feet high. *Hero* leaned tautly, and I wondered how we would do when we had to start winding up the keel to enter the shallow Hole. Abel would have to hold a deep luff. And would *Hero* go to windward at all that way, especially with the waves set dead against us?

It was very dark outside now, the thick cloud overhanging everything, its lower face torn and turbulent. As I turned to look at Abel the lightning arched over us with a deaf-making crash. Abel was grinning and the sudden white light lit his big mouth and shining teeth. His boldness was a beacon! He could lead men anywhere . . . to anything! I Water-Spoke my questions about *Hero's* windward ability in the thin water but Abel only grinned more widely in answer. I knew at once what he planned to do: Go over the side and pull us in against this wind! Oh god of waters, I thought, protect this good man, thy true and loving son!

And that is exactly what Abel did. When we had the keel about halfway up, its bottom edge touching sand now and then, *Hero* began to slide north, off her course. She still pointed well but the slipping was more than we could gain reaching to windward. We blew down on the south end of Common Flat and Abel beckoned me to take the helm, then dashed forward to drop and tie to their booms our small bits of sail. He took only moments, then turned



and indicated that we should bring the keel all the way up.

Our guests, definitely more cheerful, for it was obvious that we were going more easily, now peered up at me from the cabin and I indicated to the man called Japeth that he should crank up the keel. As *Hero* lost even this little bit of bite, she swept rapidly sideways onto the flats. I held her pointing to windward, using the wind force on the hull and topworks, while Abel crouched forward, a huge coil of line and a forty-pound anchor on his shoulder.

We touched lightly and he went over the side. The water came up over Abel's knees but he strode purposely off toward the lighthouse, whose flashes showed now and then when the rain let up, uncoiling the line as he went. When he found a good foothold he turned and began to draw us in, hand over hand. I helped as best I could by steering *Hero* off the sandbank as she slid ahead. The wind was a constant scream. I doubt that any other man on the Cape could have pulled *Hero* in like that.

After recovering most of the rope, Abel set off again, and we repeated this all the way into the Powder Hole. Sometimes Abel was dragged into deeper holes and fell, but he just dug in the anchor to stop our drift, then got on his feet and found the shallows again. He never stopped to rest or slacken his pace in any way. We moved steadily into the one- to two-foot depths of Monomoy's harbor, the Powder Hole. There was complete protection from the waves now, but the wind and rain squalls still blasted across the low dunes, carrying stinging sand as well.

Abel must have hauled us in almost a mile before we lay in a little more than two feet of water hard against the Powder Hole's eastern shore. While Abel tied a second anchor to our line and buried it in the sand, I ducked below and told our guests to get ready to leave *Hero*. From a fitted cubby concealed by a sliding piece of wood I fished out Abel's small revolver from its green-lined box, checked the cylinder, and dropped it in my slicker pocket. The guests watched this with apprehension and I tried to smile unconcernedly at them. "This place is strange to us. There may be untrustworthy people here. We must stay together when we get on shore," I said in as light a voice as I could manage.

I handed the two girls down to Abel and he carried

them both ashore, one in each arm, while the older guests and I waded in the sluicing water, the rain pelting down our necks and driving into our eyes. The houses of Monomoy lay mainly to the south of the slight rise on which the lighthouse stood. The water, driven by the wind, was rising and we set off in ankle-deep torrents that were coming right over the low parts of the headland from the occasional large waves. We had to get shelter from this! We were drenched and the little girl I now helped was starting to shiver uncontrollably. We crossed the headland and went toward a house, larger than the others, set on the eastern side of the sand spit, and showing a light through the one small window we could see. Perhaps we should have looked in first, but Abel just pushed open the west door of the house and we crowded in behind him.

I knew at once we had made a mistake. There were a dozen or so Monomoy people in this house. Perhaps they gathered here when the weather got really bad, since the rough structure did seem to keep out the driving rain. It evidently served as a store, among other things, for there was a kind of second-floor balcony or walk running all around the one big room and up on this floor were barrels of flour, kegs of rum, rope and supplies, and whatever other foodstuffs the Monomoy people were able to barter, steal, or obtain through wrecking. The main room itself had a few battered old chairs, a wood stove glowing dully, and three or four tables of various sizes. Perhaps they sometimes treated this place as a tavern.

There were two or three women, hardly distinguishable in their heavy clothes and peering at us with a kind of sullen interest. The men were simply . . . dangerous looking. The worst of them, and as it turned out, the most deadly, was a tall, thin, balding man with a truly horrible wound disfiguring his neck. The scarring and puckering had pulled his head down near his right shoulder so that he looked permanently at us out of the left corners of his black, bright, angry eyes, his horrid head cocked, his shoulders uneven and misshapen.

"Well, Master Abel Roon and his wife! We were coming to see you, Roon, but you have saved us the effort." He said this in a cracked, hard voice, thick with cruelty and anger, bright with triumph. I wished then that we were back on *Hero* in the storm. This room had more danger than Nantucket Sound at its worst.



I put my hand in my pocket and gripped the pistol. I had practice-fired it many times and now I went over in my mind how I would pull back the hammer after I got it free of the slicker. Abel stared at the tall, cruel man and pursed his lips. "You have the advantage of me," he said mildly.

The man smiled crookedly, for the huge neck scar whitely pulled down the right side of his mouth. Even his right eye was distended lower on its cheek than his left. The man touched his huge scar and snarled. "Your nigger did this, Roon," he said in a kind of hissing rage. "You didn't just steal them, you bastard! You set the monkeys on us with cutlasses!"

Abel stared coldly back. "That good man who gave you that wound would be distressed that he did not do it better," said Abel, looking evenly from one of them to another.

"Brave talk, Mr. Roon. But your dirty, black savages won't fight for you here. We have the advantage in this place."

That was a stupid and despicable thing to say. It was obvious that our six guests, trembling and silent behind Abel and me, were the most gentle, harmless people in the room. They would no more fight with cutlasses than a Naushon milch cow would attack a wolf.

"When you sank that schooner, Mr. Roon, you thought you had ended the problem. But you didn't look quickly enough under those fallen sails. While you and the rest of Folger's butchers were murdering good men below, I went over the side. Have you ever spent hours swimming in the water trying to force a pair of pants into a wound this size to keep from bleeding to death?" Abel made no answer and the tall man continued. "Now we have you. Six contraband, Mr. Roon. Ample proof to everyone of Naushon lawlessness and Folger duplicity!"

Abel smiled in a calm, deadly way I had never seen before. "If you interfere with these good people, or my wife and myself," and he looked around the room at the other hard-eyed men and women, "Monomoy will become as Carthage was. There is nowhere, north or south, that any of you could escape that sure result. This house, this whole settlement will be as if it never existed."

But at that moment, a shorter, bearded man suddenly stepped next to me and I felt the cold circle of a gun barrel on my right temple. "Talk is fine for the Congress or

the courts, Mr. Roon. But if you attempt any movement that I don't like, your pretty wife's brains will blow all over those niggers. We won't kill them! They will serve us best in Washington and Richmond."

The cold gun muzzle was startling, but I now had a sense of something else. I looked at Abel and saw he was intently staring at the group around the stove. Something was building, heaping up, gaining size . . . what? Abel turned and looked at me with a quick, loving smile. His hands came up and made a Water Speech gesture for large wind waves. That was it! The sea was coming in! I turned and peered at the east face of the house where a solid-looking, closed door and two shuttered windows stared back blankly. For the first time the scarred man's eyes showed doubt. "If you signal your wife again, Roon, we will kill her at once."

I paid no attention to that. The sea was coming! I could feel it mounting outside, the wind scream went up a notch. I held my breath and the sense of a mounting, running, gigantic force overwhelmed me. At that moment the first of the big waves struck the house a tremendous blow. The door and shutters blasted open, and into the room came solid white gouts of water higher than a man. One of the men was swept into the hot stove with a scream of pain and the stove itself went under water with an explosive hiss. Most of the lamps went out, and I felt a body sweep by my legs. We could see nothing. There was steam and water everywhere, but I had Abel's pistol out, and I icily turned to kill the man who had put that gun to my head.

Yes, it is very easy for those who have never faced such moments to talk of peace and love and the sin of murder, easy for those who depend on others to do these things to keep them safe. What kind of law would protect these wild beasts of men while enslaving our two mild, simple families? Such laws deserve not the slightest consideration. I understood finally Abel's joy as he struck that schooner with *Hero*, then shot down its helmsman. Let the congressmen and the Supreme Court justices face the Last Judgment in the latter day. Abel and I have no fears of that test. It is the wealthy, reasonable, responsible men who must explain all this horror to God, if he exists at all. And if he does not, then all the more reason for what we did.

The water burst out the west door of the store and I



could not see my assailant in the steamy dark. Abel caught my arm. "Find the girls," he said urgently. "More coming!"

He was right. I could feel the next wave humping, then cresting over Shovelful Shoal to our east. Desperately I dropped to my knees in running water about a foot deep and found one of the little girls who had been knocked down. "I've got one, Abel!" I shouted, but now I could see a bit better as the steam blew out the smashed rear doorway. The man with the scar was up on his feet. He threw himself at Abel, stabbing with a knife. I fired twice at him as he lunged, but we were superior to them in the end. Abel had his cutlass up and he did not wait the man's attack but caught him as he reared to strike.

Abel's sword went into the man's neck, deep into that huge, tough scar, a deliberate, cruel blow. The man screamed terribly then, and I shot at him once more just as the second and larger wave smashed into the building, knocking it wildly askew and tearing most of its lower parts. "Magician!" I heard the man croak, as he fell into the water surging up to our waists. "Devil!"

Abel had the other little girl in his arms now and he shouted at our other guests. "Cling together! This house is going down! Hold together as hard as you can, all of you!"

The third wave was a thunderclap and it broke the house from its foundation, smashed it into large and small pieces and swept us all down into the Powder Hole. I held the Negro child in both arms tight against me and held my breath. We were down underwater, bumping and being bumped by parts of the house. It was a deadly moment and I thought with anguish that having overcome all else, we would finally die in the water. The child and I were tumbled and battered, but the wave's mighty force was eaten up by its mounting of the land and finally I managed to stop our downward sweep and catch my feet on a rock. I stood, almost shoulder deep in rushing water that was now sinking rapidly around us.

It was very dark and the sheeting rain made looking to windward difficult. I peered, swinging my head wildly seeking the others. Just ahead a figure rose out of the water, a black bundle in its arms. Abel! I ran forward but back into deeper water and fell down, going completely under with my child. In a second I felt Abel's strong arm help me up and guide us back to the shallower bar. The

water had subsided to our waists and Abel was staring urgently about. "Hold them both here, Hope!" he shouted against the wind, "I'm going to look for the others!"

He disappeared in the stinging blackness and I held each of the girls by a hand, they were up to their necks, and tried to see where we were in relation to *Hero*.

In a minute or two Abel was back with the four adult guests. They had been swept more to the north and left in deep water but the current run was less there and they walked out to shoal ground "Steady!" said Abel to me and I looked, with him, to the east, then scooped one of the girls into my arms after passing the other to Abel. What we saw was a mounting, white, mile-long ghost of spray rising over the entire end of Monomoy, gaining in thickness and substance, roaring like the terrible monster it was. It surmounted the headland, broke across it in a terrifying smash of white spray and explosions of black water, then sluiced down, about eight feet high, upon us, foaming and breaking. At that grim, hopeless moment when I realized we could not defeat this final sea a new voice shouted from in front of us. "Quick! I have a rope. Come!"

Abel herded our guests forward and past the black figure who leaned toward us, a thick rope tied around his middle. "Everybody hold on!" Abel shouted, pushing them along the rope.

I looked up and the black and white wave was upon us. The child clung to me and I clung to the rope, holding it so it pressed the little girl to my breasts. The water went over us completely and my feet were swept out from under me at once. We all trailed in the backwash but the rope held and my breath held and suddenly I touched again and stood up. One of the women, Japeth's wife, stumbled to her feet ahead of me coughing and blowing out water, crying and shaking her head. "Oh my Lord!" she cried, "Ah should uv stayed where ah was! God nevah meant us to be free."

I moved quickly along the rope until I was just behind her. "Don't say that!" I shouted fiercely, and she turned to stare in fright at me. "Don't you see? It makes it all *stupid* if all you care about is being safe! If freedom is hard to get, then it must be worth something! Pull yourself into shore!"

She turned and began to half-walk, half-swim to shore along the rope. We were all moving in and the water



seemed to be going down still further. As soon as we could walk easily, Abel turned and shouted that we should get up to the lighthouse. It did seem to be the only place that would withstand another sea like that last one and we began to struggle up the low hill.

Abel was well ahead, and when he reached the lighthouse door he knocked rapidly. The light was flashing quite normally, but no one responded. Abel gripped the handle, put one foot on the lighthouse stone, and pulled. The door and latch withstood this, but the door frame pulled out with a snap of shattered wood and we all crowded into the high, round room.

A dim light came from a candle lantern over our heads. I turned to look at the stranger who had saved us and saw a thin young man, not much older than Abel, clean shaven, with a large Adam's apple and long, lank hair. Abel turned to him also and began to thank him for his timely appearance when we heard a hostile, ancient voice.

"Whadaryu doin' here? This is govinmint property! Ain't nobody allowed."

Abel looked up the stone stairs that spiraled around the wall to the second level of the lighthouse. A stooped, thin, old man stared down at us, his patchy, white beard wiggling in anger.

Abel stared at him. "You have betrayed us, you son of a bitch," he said in the coldest possible voice. "When Peleg Robinson hears of this he will teach you a traitor's lesson."

The old man held a single-shot military pistol in his hand. He stared at us in fear and hatred, then noticed the stranger. He raised the gun. "You, Smithson—you sneaking bastard! You brung them here, sent for them."

"Stop it!" Abel's voice was so loud it boomed all about us in that round, stone room. "If you shoot, I swear I'll break your arms and legs before I kill you, Harry Perkins! Don't think your age or cowardly weakness can save you!"

The old man suddenly turned to run up the stairs and, I suppose, try to lock the trap shut. Abel was on him like a cat, and soon we were all settled in his cozy, second-floor room, with a hot stove, lanterns, some blankets, and a straw pallet to sit on. Abel and the stranger tied up the old keeper with their two belts, Abel cursing him all through it. Apparently this fellow, Perkins, had been given the lightkeeper's job to keep an eye on the

Monomoy community but the bribes of the Southern agents overcame his good sense. Heaven knows how much they had offered him, but he certainly got quiet when Abel coldly mentioned Abner Hallet might have to come to Monomoy to deal with the whole situation. This mean, pitiful, cowardly man stared at us in total fear and hatred. Yet, he was no more than a stupid, weak tool, lacking any idea of proper behavior or loyalty. Is it so terrible to think that a dozen like this one are not worth a single Negro child? The Bible does not deal with such questions in an adequate way. Every life is *not* of equal worth and if God stands silent, someone must choose. Still, we were rich, strong, and powerful and he knew in his heart, bitterly, I suppose, that he was nothing.

We soon learned that our savior, who called himself by the single name of Smithson, was a sometime school-teacher who had had "problems," as he referred to them, and had arrived at Monomoy four months earlier. Probably he murdered someone or stole some money. He was quite glib and certainly bold enough, walking that rope out to us in the water, but I could see that Abel did not fully trust him.

After midnight the rain and wind let up and Abel and I went up to the circular walk around the light to see how *Hero* had fared the storm. Abel had anchored *Hero* to obtain maximum protection from the hill on which the light stood, and we could just see her still bobbing sturdily in the Powder Hole. Most of the large wave groups must have come over the lower headland south of her anchorage. Everybody was warming up and drying off, and after Abel brought up some foodstuffs from the one-room keeper's house that connected with the light tower, we had quite a pleasant night. The little girls, now excited by their adventure, chatted with the young teacher, then fell asleep under blankets.

I dozed off and woke with a start at dawn to see Abel peering out the slit window on our level. He turned to the young man and nodded. "You will come with us, then, Smithson," he said. "Moses Folger will set you on a proper course in return for saving our lives." He said this in a kind way, but there was no doubt that he expected the young man to come. "As for you, Perkins," said Abel, kneeling to untie the sullen keeper, "be glad that we did not lose a member of this party to those Southron thugs.



If that had happened, you would now be no more than a heap of bloody rags."

Harry Perkins drew back at this, his face a scowl of fear. Abel lifted the man's pistol and easily threw it against the stone wall with such force that it broke into several parts. The adult Negroes, stretching and talking quietly together on the other side of the room, looked up startled at the noise. "We will now go to find your vessel," said Abel to them.

We "borrowed" the keeper's rowboat, leaning against his house, to take our passengers back onto *Hero*, then left it swinging on a stone anchor in the Powder Hole. As the sun rose on a Monomoy that now seemed completely without any dwellings or living persons, we stood off westward in a south wind. Each of us was filled with private thoughts, I suppose, and we made a silent run west and north, reaching the Cape about at Harwich Port. Old Stage Harbor, the Chatham roadstead, was empty to the east so Abel ran toward Hyannisport. Off Point Gammon we could see a few vessels huddled in behind the breakwater. We stood a bit offshore as one of them hoisted sail and ran out toward us. They met us south of Bishop and Clerks light and picked up the guests while the big packet masked us from the land. The last one to climb the ladder was Japeth and he turned to me and, surprisingly, gave me a strong hug. "You are both very brave," he said in his soft voice. Was I really brave, I wondered, or just one more example of Abel's complete mastery of events?

The sun shone brightly and we left the packet heading out to sea while we went west to Naushon. I tried to understand in the calm, pleasant morning what exactly we had done. Finally I asked Abel a foolish question. "Did you cause the waves, Abel?"

It was foolish because I knew already that it was not that simple. Yet what was the explanation? Abel did not answer by voice. Instead he used the Water Speech to indicate one of its more subtle and difficult ideas; the concept of "time sequencing" or "multiple contiguity," what people might call fate or coincidence. Abel and I, the storm, the evil men about to attack Naushon, and finally the waves, were all one, all part of a single continuous event with the ocean at its core. I could not take this idea in completely. I have been raised so completely to believe in the idea of cause and effect, that to imagine such a series of events obeying a different logic is difficult. Abel

did not cause the waves, yet I sensed that if he had not been there, they would not have happened. Still, that alternative was simply not relevant since they must, and did, happen. Abel *was* there, and the rest of it all fitted together.

The bony Smithson sat next to me as I steered and gave us a smile as Abel finished his Water Speaking. "So Mr. Roon, you know that, do you? Do you also know the turtle people of the Bahamas, then?"

Abel shook his head. "That Speech is from the Pacific, from a tribe known as Navigators."

Smithson shrugged. "It is similar to what some Caribbean natives use at times," and he made a few gestures crudely describing the line squall and the waves of the past night.

Abel watched this with narrow eyes. "Do these natives speak of an Eye?" he asked, "the Eye of the Ocean?"

Smithson nodded. "I was only with them a few weeks, Mr. Roon. The ship I was on was, well, I think 'pirate' is as good a word as any. We had little success and finally were dismasted. Fortunately I got away and found these simple people who live by trading turtle meat and sponges. They spoke often of an Eye. A place of wisdom, is it not?"

Abel nodded silently, watching him closely. But I did not intend to stay silent. "Where is this Eye they spoke of, Mr. Smithson?" I asked at once.

Smithson winked and grinned at me. "So, you wish to go too, Mrs. Roon. Well . . ." I didn't quite like the expression on his face then. It was a little knowing and I could see he was thinking . . . well, certain thoughts about me, my person, that if spoken would have been most offensive. But he answered politely. "As I understand it, there are a series of deep, blue sinks or holes in the ocean in the vicinity of the Turks and Caicos island group. Under some conditions—the natives believe great hurricanes open them in some way—these flow rivers of fish in the fall of the year, at the end of the storm season. Fishing is supposed to be at its best in winters after the Eyes have appeared, but the natives were evasive about just what happened at such a place." Smithson looked at me again with a sly smile. "The weather has been unsettled all along the coast this summer. I should think this October would be a time to expect the Eyes, if the natives knew anything at all about the matter."



Abel glanced at me. "These holes were in the shoal area, inside the Caicos Islands?"

"East of there. Somewhere on the bank running south and east of Grand Turk." Abel nodded. Of course, he had memorized every chart in Grandfather's library and knew just where the man meant.

Abel smiled at Mr. Smithson. "You have now done us a double favor, apparently. I think we will all go at once to Boston, if that is, you feel able to travel from Woods Hole to Boston on a public railway train?" The man shrugged. "Yes, they are certainly looking for me here and there. But if we can be fairly quick in Boston and go at night, I think I will be safe enough."

"Then," said Abel, "can we discuss what you will, shall we say, *need* from Judge Folger?"

Smithson grinned, this time quite honestly. "You mean how much do I think I can work out of you people with a combination of gratitude and blackmail?"

Abel nodded, grinning back. "That's about it."

"Word is coming of gold in California territory, Mr. Roon. If your patron could find me a ship, not as a seaman but as a passenger at leisure, then give me a small start, that is, a sum of money, when I got there, I think all our debts and obligations would be discharged."

"A sensible request. I'm sure Judge Folger will agree to that," answered Abel at once. "Hope," he turned to look at me with level eyes. "We will pack some thin clothes. After we see Moses with Mr. Smithson, we will seek this Eye to the south."

*Hero* sailed steadily all that morning coming into Hadleys at noon.

After we had told Peleg our story and packed some things, we steamed back across the Hole and caught the four o'clock steam train to Boston. At the Boston terminal we engaged a closed cab which soon drew up at Grandfather's house on West Cedar Street.

The butler, Jabez Sloan, opened the door and gave a smile of pleasure when he saw us. We found Grandfather in his slippers and bathrobe reading a Boston paper. He did not seem especially surprised to see us and accepted Abel's introduction of Mr. Smithson in his typical expressionless way. The butler brought us all some coffee, then Abel quickly told the story of Monomoy and the part Mr. Smithson had played.

At the end of the tale, Grandfather immediately turned

and carefully questioned the thin man. "How soon were they planning to seek us at Naushon, Mr. Smithson?"

The man shrugged. "Soon, probably in a day or two. But they weren't coming by ship. They planned to go north to Chatham in small boats. That scarred fellow had money. They would hire horses and come west to Woods Hole. They planned to capture the Naushon ferry when it went to get the mail. They knew how your schedules worked. How your patrols rotated."

"How many?" asked Grandfather.

"About a dozen. Three from the south and the rest recruited at Monomoy and similar places. Two of the hardest men I've ever seen from the Isles of Shoals."

"Were you part of this group?" asked Abel grimly.

Smithson blinked. "Well, I would obviously say no, whatever the facts, Mr. Roon. But, in truth, I already knew something about you. Well, actually, about the terrible Captain Hallet with whom you threatened the light-keeper. It was evident to me that they would find a rather more forceful defense than they imagined. And it seemed unlikely that there would be no . . . ah, Folger people . . . in and about Woods Hole while these men were locating the ferry and capturing it."

Grandfather looked piercingly at the man. "They would have had problems, all right, Mr. Smithson, but so would we. What was their purpose? What was the point of such an attack?"

"To find evidence of your aid to contrabands. They knew you hid them in your house. They would simply smash their way through it until they found evidence, then burn everything, the whole island. The scarred man—he sought death and violence. He had convinced somebody in the south that this kind of damage would repay a long debt they felt you owed the planters."

Grandfather sat back frowning. How old and tired he looked, and how discouraged. "We sowed freedom to reap violence and murder. I owe you much, Mr. Smithson."

Abel leaned forward. "I've discussed that with him, Moses." He quickly explained about Smithson's desires for California, and also his problems with being seen in the city. Grandfather nodded and called in his butler again. Soon he was scratching a note to some captain while Jabez rummaged to find some used clothing to make up a duffle for Mr. Smithson to take on his journey.

Grandfather gave Smithson the letter, the duffle, and a



heavy purse. "My man, Jabez here, will go with you to a clipper loading for San Francisco. I've written a letter to her Captain Bartlett about you. They will sail in two days. Stay in your cabin until then, and the steward will bring your meals. There is five hundred dollars in gold in that purse. I only hope you can keep it when you get out there. Even Monomoy may seem quite tame, Mr. Smithson."

"Judge Folger, I have seen some tight corners already," answered Smithson.

"I dare say," said Grandfather dryly. "Well, Jabez has put a pocket pistol in the middle of that duffle. I expect that sort of item will be hard to purchase in San Francisco." Grandfather stood and extended his hand. "Good luck and thank you again, Mr. Smithson, or whoever you really are. I hear the rig outside."

Smithson rose and shook Grandfather's, then Abel's hand and turned to me. "I wish you well at the Eye, Mrs. Roon. You are a beautiful and resourceful woman." He looked at me for a moment with an open hunger.

After he left, Grandfather sighed and frowned. "Do you think any were left, Abel?" he asked finally.

"The scarred man is dead," said Abel. "Hope shot him three times in the chest and stomach and my cut on his shoulder went deep."

"How do you know I hit him?" I asked.

Abel smiled. "I saw the balls strike his coat. One tore off a button."

I stared at Abel. "Things . . . go more slowly for you, dear, don't they?"

Abel laughed. "At moments like that they do. But there's nothing miraculous about it. You were concentrating on the shooting, on the trigger pull and cocking. I was concentrating on the man to avoid his knife."

"So, Hope," said Grandfather in a tired, old voice, "we have drawn you fully into our web of violence and murder. Women should not be faced with such choices."

"You did not see and hear that man, Grandfather," I answered at once. "I was completely a part of what happened at Monomoy, with Abel and with the ocean."

Grandfather gave a sudden, wry chuckle. "The pair of you are certainly more dangerous than one alone. The schooner was one thing, Abel, but an entire community, a whole island . . .?"

Abel grinned at that. "Oh I imagine some of them are

still around planning mischief. It's hard to kill people that mean and cussed. There are some shacks north up Monomoy in the sand hollows and I expect some found their way up there. They certainly weren't going to visit with us any more."

Grandfather smiled grimly. "Peleg, Hallet, and a few tough men could go in there and rid us of that infection for good and all."

Abel nodded, but I remembered that frightened, despicable lightkeeper. I leaned toward them and put a hand on each of their arms. "Leave them to Heaven, Grandfather," I said. "Surely we have judged enough? The guests are safe and gone to the Bermudas." I paused, until he nodded agreement. "Go down to Naushon, Grandfather. Talk to Peleg and sit in the summer sun. You seem so tired and discouraged."

He nodded again. "Yes. It is harder to get the Negroes by sea now. The coasts and harbors are built up, busy. There are people watching, roads guarded. The Negroes move west, where the borders are undefended for a hundred miles, but we cannot work with them there. At sea it has been easy, to hide and move them, to communicate and make arrangements. The western plains are vast, Hope, beyond me and my resources."

Abel took Grandfather's hand. "Hope is right, Moses. Go to Naushon now. October is coming, always the finest month. The war will come, Moses, but not yet. October is closer."

"I will!" said Grandfather suddenly, "but not before we arrange your latest junket to the corners of the earth. A Caribbean Eye indeed! But you *should* have a honeymoon and, if the Eye is there, Hope . . . ?"

"It will be there, Grandfather. If it was not to be there, Abel would not be going."

Abel gave me a huge smile. "I think few men enjoy such confidence from their wives, Moses."

Grandfather pursed his lips. Already he looked more alive, more cheerful. "We will see what you say after the trip, Abel. Think! Hope hit that man three times under circumstances in which those bold, skilled murderers were utterly undone!"

He winked at me. "Come, let us have a nightcap and go off to bed. The violence of it, I confess, quite took me aback. Smithson's story of such a cold and deadly plot. But with you two, I feel vital again. We have seen much,



we three, and wherever it ends, I regret no single moment . . . except perhaps," he spoke in a quiet voice, "Billy on the privateer."

Abel lifted the brandy decanter from its silver holder and poured us each a pony. "Let's drink to dear Billy," he said.

I lifted the tiny glass. "Our perfect, gentle knight."

"Amen," said Grandfather.

We stayed with Grandfather in Boston until the middle of September. He soon convinced us that any route to the Caribbean that involved a stop in the American South would be dangerous. "Either one of you would be hard enough to disguise," said Grandfather. "Together they would have you identified within ten minutes in Savannah. I think we must assume they know all too much about us."

It soon turned out that a new American steam frigate, the *Valley Forge*, was heading offshore from Boston on a midshipman training cruise, her destination several cities on the island of Cuba. Somehow Grandfather arranged for Abel and me to travel as observers, or supercargo, or whatever, with our own stateroom aft, next to the officers' quarters. These vessels were often used to carry diplomatic and consular people so our accommodations were quite large and comfortable.

*Valley Forge* was one of those odd sailing ships built at this time with a single-screw steam plant included along with the sails. She carried only enough coal for a few days of steam operation so the engine was really intended for combat or chase situations, as an added advantage. Otherwise, *Valley Forge* was a full ship with topsails. She was a big frigate, with thirty-six thirty-two-pound cannon, eight long chase guns, and a crew of over four hundred men. "She's going to Cuba to show those perfumed Spaniards how tough we are," said Grandfather with a smile and a wink. "I only hope they don't fire up that steam plant. It doesn't look big enough to me to press Naushon's cider." As usual, Grandfather was exactly right.

Those two weeks in Boston were restful and pleasant. We seemed to cheer Grandfather and he and Abel talked and planned on how to guard Naushon more effectively, as well as about new ways of keeping an eye on places like Monomoy. Grandfather soon heard that the light had failed there the night after we left, and a substitute keeper

had gone down from Bass River. Harry Perkins was not going to wait around for Captain Hallet, we decided.

Two days before *Valley Forge* sailed we finally got Grandfather off to Naushon. He didn't seem well and I knew he would be quieter and happier down there with Peleg and Amanda looking after him. But my heart shrank a little when Jabez drove us with our gear to *Valley Forge* for the last time. As he helped us unpack in our roomy, well-appointed cabin he said quietly to me, "Don't be too long down there, Hope. Judge Folger is more disheartened than you can see."

We were pulled out of the navy yard by a steam tug to much hooting of horns and flapping of flags. When abreast of Nantasket, we made sail and set off east in a brisk wind. There was nothing exceptional about the first part of the trip. Abel and I ate in the senior officers' mess, where I, if the truth be told, rather held court. Captain Biddle, an overweight, middle-aged man, was puffy and undistinguished, obviously a political officer. But his First Lieutenant, a Mr. Tom Archer, was young, dashing, and gay. He and Abel hit it off at once. The surgeon, purser, the other lieutenants and the chaplain were all educated men and our table conversations were quite lively and pleasant. The ones who didn't talk much seemed content to watch me. After a few days Abel remarked with a grin that he had never seen a ship where meals were so prompt and well-attended.

"What if I were to stay in my cabin with a headache?" I asked him.

Abel shook his head. "I would have to deal with half-a-hundred suggestions for headache remedies, I suppose."

How patient Abel had become with me. Those men might look and think what they chose, but between us was only the lightest banter and cheerful jests. Abel lay next to me at night, touched and kissed me as I turned, or stood, or bent over him. But I think we both knew in some measure what was to come, that our quest had a certain discipline and even logic. How odd that men have never understood the real meaning of the myth of the unicorn and its capture; of course to understand and accept that wisdom would utterly change the world and the lives of men and women. I wonder how it is that men become so obsessed by power and control. Are these better than that other, the silken chain of joy about their



throats? And having never really chosen that, how would they know?

The weather, hot and fitfully windy well offshore from Hatteras, grew even more muggy and sullen with winds that backed, veered, or dropped without logic or pattern. We were several hundred miles from the Florida coast, when Captain Biddle set us on a more southwesterly course to bring us into Crooked Island Passage in the Bahamas. From this he intended to sail around the east end of Cuba through the Windward Passage to Santiago de Cuba where we would first show the flag to Grandfather's perfumed Spaniards. Abel and I planned to seek a small boat there and continue our own trip to Turks Island.

This was mostly a deep water passage, but it was narrow in places. Abel and Lieutenant Archer shook their heads darkly together staring at the low clouds hanging all about us on the horizon. Once again I began to have a sense of an impending disturbance, of large random forces starting to join and coalesce. That evening the wind steadied and began to blow hard from the northeast.

"She snuffles a bit, madam," said Tom Archer to me with a fierce grin. "It looks heavy to the east."

I gave him a calm smile. "It is a new ship, Tom. And a strong crew."

"Have you seen a Caribbean hurricane, Hope?" he asked me quickly.

"They sometimes visit us in New England," I answered, but Tom Archer shook his head.

"They are usually changed and gentled a bit by the time they reach you there. Here where they are brought to life, they have a special character."

Abel looked at us without expression. "Tom," he said quietly, "this could become difficult. We should seek harbor at once."

Archer shrugged, staring off to the east. "We should indeed, but the Captain has his own certain ideas. We are all weather prophets, are we not? What sailor defers on that subject?"

The sea roughened and the eastern clouds thickened so that by the end of the evening watch we were roaring along at a rapid clip, the wind growing behind us. Before his watch ended, Archer close-reefed his topsails and took in the studding sails completely. Captain Biddle came up and sniffed. "You see a gale of wind coming, Archer?"

"Aye, Captain. It has an ugly look for these waters."

Captain Biddle made no expression at this. "Oh, I think these clouds should break by dawn. If not, we may have a cap of wind indeed. If by four bells I see no let-up, I think we shall light off the boiler."

Tom Archer made no comment, but I saw the look that passed between him and Abel. The Captain's pride was our steam engine, which he seemed to think would solve any problem of weather, wave, or pilotage. As we three left the quarterdeck together, Tom turned to Abel. "If it were me, I would new-lash the guns and put spare gaskets aloft now instead of wasting time on that noisy toy below."

Abel nodded and as we said goodnight outside our stateroom he shook his head. "If this storm tracks across our course, Tom, that engine might as well be clockwork."

Archer winked at us. "Aye. He will find the damn engine cannot reef our main courses nor get the topgallant mast off her. Well, we had best sleep while we can," and he went off to his cabin.

Alone in our room I turned to Abel. "It is coming, my dear. I can feel it."

Abel looked at me in his loving way. "Well, we have weathered other blows, Hope."

"We are meant to go through this storm, Abel," I answered. And I made the same Water Speech gestures that he had made in *Hero* when I asked him if he had caused the Monomoy waves.

Abel put his arm around my shoulders. "You will soon surpass me in that," he said lightly. He kissed my cheek and ear, then said more seriously, "You speak fluently to the ocean now, Hope. If it will only listen." As I fell asleep, *Valley Forge* began to pitch and work, her new timbers creaking and groaning against each other.

By eight o'clock breakfast it was blowing hard, steady to a point, from the northeast, squalls of wind striking us with much force now and then. Everybody seemed preoccupied with their own, busy thoughts, but Captain Biddle acted unconcerned. "It is only a touch of the times, Archer," he said airily. "We shall have a noon sight, I believe. It will clear by noon . . ."

"Or else blow very hard afterwards," answered Tom Archer quickly. "The last of these Caribbean storms I saw had much the appearance of this."

"Well," said the Captain, "we have full boiler pressure."



If we must fact it, we have power," but Archer made no further comment.

We made no noon sight that day, the clouds were thick and the wind a blasting gale. Tom Archer took in the top-sails, then reefed and furled her main courses so that *Valley Forge* ran drunkenly southwest under a mizzen staysail only.

It blew steady now, but harder. Captain Biddle seemed almost gay, cheerful and bright, as though he were somewhere else, hearing about our storm, but not living with it. The watch went aloft with spare gaskets to secure the sails, then squared the booms, made fast the boats on deck in a tight nest of ropes and double-lashed the guns in both tiers. Supper was quick and simple: porter, bread, and cheese. The marine-guard major was white and blinked as we rolled and the lower-deck guns shifted a few inches in the rope slacks with continuous violent screeching. The short, usually talkative surgeon was silent and peering, and the rest of us listened in growing apprehension to the endless, wild noises of *Valley Forge's* struggle.

Now the birds began to come aboard. The terns and gulls came to us, tack and tack, not being able to fly directly against the wind. Once over the ship, they dashed themselves down on the deck and when I picked one up it made no notice. Nothing could make them leave the shelter of our boats and rails.

By eight that night, a hurricane! Captain Biddle engaged the engine, whose steady chuffing was now only audible below, and brought us to under the staysail, laying just off the wind on starboard tack. Abel and Tom Archer stood near the wheel intently watching the *Valley Forge* roll and wallow. We were taking water now over the starboard bow, big waves that broke and swept the gun deck forward in foaming sheets of white. The frigate now lay over to port very pressured by the wind on her bare spars. The small mizzen staysail had finally blown to tatters. Now the furled and reefed mainsails began to rip and fly from their gaskets, torn into long coach whips by the driving wind. "I have not seen that before, Abel," shouted Lieutenant Archer, his eyes staring aloft.

But Abel was envisioning something else. The wind was veering south and we were taking more and more cross-seas, huge lumps of green water, all across the starboard side.

A marine officer appeared at our side, his face a mask of fright. "Good God, Mr. Archer!" he cried. "We are sinking! The water is up to the bottom of my cot!"

"Shut up!" spat Archer at the man. "As long as it is not over your mouth, you are well off! What the devil do you make such a noise for?"

*Valley Forge* was now working so violently that she was opening up and taking water between her timbers everywhere, both sides and decks. Archer turned the watch to on the chain pumps amidships, then peered up at our smokestack from whose top issued almost inaudible barks of steam. "The seas will grow, Abel," he said grimly. "If we take green water down onto that boiler at full duty, she will blow apart."

Abel nodded. "Tom, Cuba is much in our way. And we cannot run on this tack much longer in these cross-seas. We must wear ship, Tom!"

The scene on deck was quite indescribable. These were not the steep, short, chopping waves of a Nantucket Sound storm. This was deep water, hundreds of fathoms, and the seas were gigantic. They were not New England mountains, those rolling, smooth eminences we know, but sharp-edged peaks, like the Alps, ten thousand jagged Matterhorns. The wind roared louder than any thunder, a continuous blast. *Valley Forge* lay over and groaned at each mighty stroke. There was no rain in this great storm, but the absolute darkness all about us was made more terrible by an uncommon blue lightning that fitfully illuminated the violent, towering, breaking seas.

We three stood on the quarterdeck, lashed to windward, and after an especially vicious cross-sea knocked and held *Valley Forge* down for what seemed an eternity, Captain Biddle half-crawled, half-slid across the deck from the wheelhouse, his face rigid, and whiter than the marine's.

"Captain!" said Archer. "We must wear ship. We will be overwhelmed by this wind shift, if we do not strike the Cuban north coast first. We must shut down the boiler!"

The Captain stared at us with empty eyes. He shook his head, stared aloft, then down at the deck running a foot deep with sloshing water. "Captain," Archer began again in a louder shout.

"All right," said Biddle in a voice we could scarcely hear, "loose the lee yardarm of the foresail. When she is



right before the wind, whip the clew-garnet close up, then roll up the sail. It will bring her round."

Abel and Archer stared at each other in dismay. We took another heavy knockdown, the Captain barely catching himself on a mizzen stay, up to his knees in water. His face was blank and white, his eyes darting at us, but empty of force or intelligence.

I leaned and put my hand on Captain Biddle's arm. "No canvas will stand in this, Captain," I said in his ear. "It will fly to ribbons before we are round!"

He shook his head again and blinked at me. Abel let go of his grip on the taffrail and stumbled nearer to us. "Captain Biddle. We will lose some people that way. She will wear by manning the shrouds. The British—"

Biddle blinked and shut his eyes tight, muttering to himself. "We will lose her here. She will not answer. She will not wear."

Abel and I both leaned near Biddle. "She will wear, sir!" said Abel fiercely. "The British first-rater, *Phoenix*, got round that way in a hurricane worse than this one. I have seen her log."

Biddle trembled now, answering us not at all. I leaned closer to see his face and, staring, put my eyes close to his in the wild dark. He only shook harder, unable to say a thing. I turned immediately to Lieutenant Archer and nodded. "Captain Biddle says to try it, Tom," I cried loudly, but downwind, away from the Captain.

Archer turned and shouted for the boatswain. "Muster as many as you can into the foreshrouds, Carter," he shouted. "Damn! We will wear this bitch or smash her to splinters!"

Almost two hundred men clustered forward, then climbed the slanting, shaking ratlines into the forerigging. Abel and I untied ourselves from the rail and slid down into the wheelhouse. The added wind pressure on the men put us over even further and a vast, long backwash surfed aboard from leeward. "Now, Tom!" shouted Abel.

"Port your helm! Hard over!" shouted Archer, and *Valley Forge* paid off to the south, pitching and swooping as more waves took her broadside. She turned further and we caught a gigantic cross-sea all across the quarterdeck soaking us in warm spray and green, angry water.

"Go! Damn you!" shouted Archer at *Valley Forge* as she hung stern-to to the battering seas, forever it seemed. But we had some way to leeward now, with the men's

bodies acting as sails, and the frigate finally answered her rudder and came around on port haul. Abel looked at me and nodded. We were meeting the seas more directly now and as Tom Archer ordered the men off the rigging, the vessel seemed to stand up to her adversaries better. "Now for that damnable steam engine!" shouted Archer, darting below. A white blast of wave crest came horizontally through the open wheelhouse and knocked me down. "We may yet do this, Hope!" said Abel as he helped me up. "Let's get the Captain below."

With the wind gone southeast we had been heading on a fast leeward drift for the rocky coast of Cuba east of Cape Maisi where fierce rocks and bluff headlands would have reduced *Valley Forge* to smashed lumber in moments. Now, the wind to port, we were driven more northerly, back the way we came, into the Windward Passage.

Tom Archer bounced back on deck after finding the engine room a quarter full of water and shutting down the useless engine. Whether the propeller turned made not the slightest difference in our heading or ability to stand up to the waves.

Sometime in the early morning the pumps choked and the sea gained on us. *Valley Forge* lay lower in the water, still desperately pressed by the wind, but now rising only sullenly, sometimes not rising at all between two large seas.

Abel, Tom Archer, and the Second Lieutenant faced each other in the thin, barely noticeable light of dawn. The officers were exhausted, having worked, soaking wet, all night at the pumps with shifts of the crew. The wind still blew strongly and *Valley Forge* now seemed hardly to respond to the changing water surface. She acted waterlogged and indifferent to her duties.

"We will come onto the Bahama Bank at the Ragged Islands," said Archer without emotion.

"She will not wear again," answered Abel in a positive voice. "She is too heavy. We will surely lose her if we try it."

"We will lose her one way or another," said Tom Archer, equally positive. "There is less than a fathom over most of that area."

"There is eighteen feet in normal weather at Nurse Key, Tom," answered Abel. "With this storm there should be much more. If we can strike it right, then drop anchor once we get behind some protection, we might make it."



"She will sink anyway," said the other officer. "We cannot pump forever against these leaks."

"She won't sink far," answered Abel. "There isn't all that much water on the bank, gentlemen."

At noon the wind was a bit less and we could readily see the keys and reefs of the Ragged Island group stretching right across the horizon ahead of us, most of the view being wild, white spray shooting up over the reefs as the hurricane seas came onto the huge bank and broke in shards of white and blue water. With considerable struggle, during which one man fell to the deck and broke his arm, Tom Archer managed to set a mizzen staysail, and this gave us steerage as we bore down on Nurse Key Channel, itself looking formidably rough and treacherous. The Captain, who had fallen into his bunk early in the morning, now stood on deck again with us, much improved in expression, but not saying anything. *Valley Forge* drew twenty-two feet, probably more with all the water in her, and we were heading into an eighteen-foot channel.

"Set the anchor detail!" shouted Archer to his bos'n. "If we get through we'll check her in the lee of these keys. If we hit, we'll stay where we are."

Low Nurse Key passed us close to the south and we soared along now, the seas gentled by shoaling water and the dropping wind. I guess they all held their breaths then, but not Abel nor I. We could readily sense that there was at least thirty feet under us and we would pass easily. Several of the small keys north and south were completely under water now, showing only spouts of spume and breaking water.

"Port helm," said Archer quietly to the helmsman. "By God sir, we've done it!" This to the completely silent Captain.

*Valley Forge* fell off south behind Nurse Key, weathering quite smartly in this calmer water. As she came around on port haul and up into the wind, the watch dropped two big anchors. We hung back off these, while everybody turned to on the pumps. Even Abel put his great strength to this effort, and they gained on the water for a while, though it was obvious that we could not stay in this condition very long.

As dusk came on, Archer approached the Captain. "We've got to beach her, sir. Otherwise she'll sink in this

exposed place. Request permission to take a boat and sound the area."

Captain Biddle nodded. He seemed quite professional again. "Remember, Archer," he said in a brusque but fatherly way, "we can expect northern blows before we clear this bank." I think Captain Biddle had simply put the events of the storm out of his mind. I doubt that he remembered much of it in later years, probably collapsing the whole day of hurricane weather into a few minutes of blow. But what difference did that make? We were at anchor!

By dusk of that day the wind had fallen enough to allow the ship's boats, manned by over a hundred rowers, to tow *Valley Forge* into a hole behind one of the low keys, then right up onto the shoaling ground. We now lay steady, at about a ten-degree angle, the tide falling away from our sides. Somehow the purser and cooks got together a late but hot evening meal for the officers and crew and everything suddenly seemed tremendously cheerful.

"We have given you quite an experience, madam," said the jovial surgeon to me.

I smiled graciously at him. "I think there must be few ships in this area as dry as this one, doctor. You have a fine crew."

Tom Archer looked at us from narrow eyes. "I think there may be none but us left afloat," he said bluntly. "And we should be able to incline and caulk her here but we may need help pulling her off."

After supper I left the men in deep conference and went up on deck. Although I had hardly slept for a day and a half, I was still too full of excitement to go to bed. As they usually do, the storm left us beautiful, clear, mild weather. The spangle of stars arched over our grounded vessel and the breeze was warm and gentle. After a time, Tom Archer came to stand at my elbow. I suppose I should say that if there had been no Abel, Tom Archer would have certainly been a man to catch my heart. He was handsome, open, and bold. Like Father, he commanded men by example. I looked at his shadowed face in the silver light of the half-moon.

"When I was a midshipman on the old *Congress*, we spoke a whaleship with a woman captain." Archer grinned at me. "She was the wife of the previous captain. He had dropped dead. The lady was capable, fifty, with a



considerable moustache and she weighed more than I do now. I think you could command *Valley Forge*, Hope, in a ball gown, parasol, and perfumed hankie."

I tossed my head, but felt a pleasure from this comment. "It's hard to live on an island and not know something about the sea."

"Listen," he said. "I know the Captain gave no order. I could not have defied him and brought *Valley Forge* around without your shout."

"Tom," I said quietly. "Captain Biddle is not a bad man. He is just not right for this duty. He is like Grandfather's bankers and agents in Boston. He should live a quiet, regular life."

Tom Archer nodded. "You and Abel are remarkably suited," he sighed, looking out at the quiet shoals around us.

We stood, silently then, in the warm dark. Tom Archer's yearning for me was not embarrassing nor unwelcome, but at the back of my mind lay my vision of the Eye, the Eye with Abel at its center, the Eye where only Abel and I would go.

"Abel is different from other men, Tom."

"You are both different. I have never seen people so steady at sea. You two were the only ones on this ship that did not imagine and anticipate death in the hurricane."

I could not tell him that death comes only after joy. "My grandfather, Moses Folger of Naushon, said that if you stay busy enough, death will finally slip upon you unnoticed and without fear."

"Easily enough spoken, madam," said Tom Archer. "Most men would find that a thin secret."

"What is all this talk of death?" came Abel's cheery voice from the darkness. "You two will tempt the ocean to mischief again." He put his arm around me and squeezed my shoulder. Our bodies were pressed lightly together. Soon, oh, soon!

*Valley Forge* was inclined the next day with anchors and tackle and lots of hard work. But Abel and I did not see her repairs for we left in a sailing launch with a cockswain and two officers. After much discussion it was decided that we would go to the nearest Cuban harbor, Gibara. The officers, well supplied with ship's money, would find out the nearest harbor where tugs might be chartered, then ride there overland with rented or pur-

chased horses to make the arrangements. Because the horse part seemed the most important, Tom Archer and Captain Biddle held a little question bee among the officers on horse purchasing, finally settling on the Third Lieutenant and a passed midshipman in his late thirties, both of them convincing farmer folk and horse traders.

The run southwest was only about sixty miles and we came into the Gibara roadstead the next noon. It was not much of a town. The harbor was deep enough but completely open to the winter northers. A breakwater would have made it quite cozy, but the Spanish did little enough for their colonies, preferring to tear whatever easy wealth they could out of the ground or the people.

We parted from our *Valley Forge* friends and went poking around the local fishing fleet for a boat. I suppose most Americans, speaking only a few words of Spanish and obviously carrying enough gold to buy a boat, might have been a tempting target for the local people, and even Abel moved quickly so that we might be at sea before nightfall. Actually, we were safe enough there. They were a poor and impoverished lot, demoralized and unhealthy, and not likely to try to take anything from someone like Abel. For what we were offering, we had our choice of just about any fishing boat that was still afloat in Gibara and Abel decided on a Bahamian cutter with a loose-footed main and several impressive jibs. She had a roomy cabin with rough bunks, and we soon equipped her with local provisions, a small coal stove, and other eating necessities. By six that night we were standing out of Gibara Harbor, the wind at our backs, ahead, the Eye of the Ocean.

The purpose of a quest, I think, is to prepare the participants for its completion. Abel and I sailed for two-and-a-half days from Gibara to Turks Island. We, neither of us, had the slightest doubt as to direction, and our anticipations grew and bloomed as the Bahamian cutter flew over the deep waters south of Great Inagua. The banks of Grand Turk lie south and east of the main island and on the morning of the third day we came over these calm, white shoals, our centerboard up, and the cutter ghosting under her main only. We skirted rocks south of Grand Turk, then went east. The above-water sandbanks around the Eye were low, but we knew them. The blue of the deep hole inside changed the color of the sky over it, made it bluer, like an eye above. Our cutter came



aground a few feet off the sandbank, and we stepped ashore and dug in the anchor. My body was filled with a warm, solid sense of completion and success. And a sense of Abel, too. I walked over the little sand rise and looked out on the Eye. It was a round, deep blue basin of fish. There were several outlets or cuts through the sandbars, and these streamed with small fish, almost solid from one side to the other. The fish went only one way, up and out of the Eye, then through the several shallow cuts in the surrounding sand, and finally in great fans of darting life out over the shallow reef. The cut to my left was the largest. I dropped my rolled-up pants onto the sand and stepped over them, then pulled my thin shift over my breasts, and finally tossed my hat on the sand and walked down into the water of the cut. I did not look back. I knew Abel would be following me.

I knelt, then lay back in the flood of warm life that ran through the cut. The fish were a continuous caress on my hot skin. Abel stood on the edge of the cut, his clothes also left behind, looking down at me. He really was a god, brown and gold, his muscles beautiful in the sun. The caress of the fish on my skin taught me a new Water Speech and I made this to Abel, gestures over my loins and breasts that drew his eyes, and finally his own hands, to their tasks. We had waited a very long time and what followed was, at first, intense and swift. Abel's face hung over mine, heavy with desire, then love, finally wonder.

What followed at this place, sought as it had been by us both through a series of wrenching and mounting experiences, became progressively deeper, more inclusive, and finally so soul-rending as to make description difficult. I believe, as did Maria Mitchell, that all topics are suitable for consideration if they are treated seriously and with sincerity. Still, to recapture in words a flight of the spirit so transcendent as ours must always fall short.

The bodily joy of love given me by Abel was, at first, almost unbearable. I clasped him in that warm, flowing water so fiercely that for minutes we were like a single, unmoving rock. But I *had* to move. I twisted and pulled him even tighter because we, together, were going forward. The fish, the whales, all the living things in the ocean have their many pleasures, each different perhaps, but of a total scale and intensity beyond the comprehension of men.

The lust of these creatures is not only without sin, it is

the central fact, the ultimate purpose of their lives. They have killed death, these simple citizens of water, but not as the poet John Donne would have it, depending on a feeble hope of resurrection at the final trump of an un-speaking, male God. The death of death in their kingdom is continuous for they strive only for joy, until death may creep, unnoticed, into that final moment.

Abel and I strove together and with a great gasp he enfolded me with his body, and our eyes met, and our love of each other passed between us thorough our skins and eyes, and hands, and through our loins and breasts. My skin was like fire then. It was an end and yet the barest beginning.

The fear and hatred of lust is a dreadful thing of little men. They are brave and bold enough on their ships and in their banks, haranguing students or speaking to a congress or parliament. But they protect themselves from being overmastered by joy in a thousand stupid ways, such as the almost total slander we suffer in their ridiculous myths; Eve and the apple; foolish Helen and burning Troy; Grendel's mother, more cruel even than the monster son; Kali, the Hindu goddess who feeds on her own children; faithless Guinevere who brings down Camelot.

Abel and I were beyond all of that. Abel looked into my face, down along my body. "Your beauty cannot be true. A dream! A dream, my beloved, perfect Hope."

I leaned again to Abel, the fish running smoothly across my hot skin, touching me everywhere. "We will ride further, dear unicorn," I whispered, and now made that Water Speech that spoke the ocean's lust on Abel's flesh, coolly, inclusively, with the relentless discipline of waves coming ashore.

Heroes perform heroic acts, even the stodgiest retelling of myth in the Martha's Vineyard public library admits to that, but sweet Abel's heroism then, cannot be captured in the dry metaphor of imaginary deeds. We journeyed long and steadily, with joy and effort, feelings of unimagined intensity renewed, made larger, always with my strong god to guide and whisper, our lusts fusing, multiplying, carrying me even farther.

I swooned away then, my body was curved tight against Abel, and we two fled outward to the deeps. My sense was one of encompassing huge areas of ocean, yet a simultaneous awareness of each creature with its particular spasm of pleasure at the core of its life. The wisdom of the ocean



is that its wisdom is lust. The Navigators chose to miss that point in return for certain trivial skills and disciplines.

No wonder the porpoise jump and jump in exuberance! Their whole skin is a great bag of sensation. When they curl upon each other in their lovemaking, it is a total, tingling ecstasy of anticipation. Half out there and half back in the Eye, Abel and I floated into deeper, bluer water and curled together, in that mass of flowing fish, as the porpoise curl, and our touch became so intense that I had to grasp him to me and kiss and kiss him before I forgot I could not breathe the water.

So our day grew and deepened. Now we moved together with a skill and gentleness that brought me again to a swoon, an expansion of body, out through the water, feeling the endless touch of the fish, sensing their own joy as they sought their life's meaning. And I understood at last and completely what Abel meant when he said, "It is not a map to anything, not a tool. It is its own end."

The red sun dropped down on a clear horizon, and with no word or sign, we stood and walked up the sand together, our sides, our thighs, our breasts rubbing and pressing as we kissed and touched. We picked up our clothes and climbed aboard the cutter, swinging gently on her anchor rope.

I was numb with pleasure, made slow and heavy by the great warm paralysis of joy.

"Oh, Abel," I said, helplessly looking down at him seated by the tiller. "We must eat something, dear."

But Abel Water Spoke on *my* body then, and we went to the bunk below and in some ways this was our nicest time there at the Eye, because we were finally just ourselves. "The ocean has had its due," said Abel as he kissed, and caressed and thrilled me.

"You are my heart's desire," I said breathlessly, in an agony of pleasure, for Abel's powerful strength was surely far beyond that of other men.

So the darkness came upon us, and my most wonderful, most important, most extraordinary day ended as it began, in a tender, marvelous journey together until my body arched and I cried out in purest joy and we two fell deeply asleep.

In the early morning we rose and stood on the cutter's cabin roof to peer at the Eye. Marvelous to relate, the flow of fish had stopped, only a few flitting in the cuts, back and forth in random patterns. Abel and I tried to

prepare a breakfast, but we seemed able to do little but touch and kiss. Warm hands and lips made everything else uninteresting and so we lay together on the sand, trying to satisfy our yearnings and our love.

The Eye had changed us, just as it had changed Abel that other time. We could not release each other. Everything we did involved touching, holding, pressing. "Oh, dearest Abel," I whispered finally. "We will shrink to shadows here, if we do not eat something."

How wide and graceful his shoulders were. Mother was right, Abel was truly beautiful. And I could see my own beauty mirrored in his eyes and face. He lay back watching me, smiling, and suddenly we were both laughing at each other and ourselves.

"You have yet a ways to shrink, my love," he said touching my round breasts again.

I pulled him to me, food forgotten, but finally we did manage to get back on the cutter and eat some fruit, and tinned meat, our eyes and hands still fitfully occupied with other still-necessary delights. When Abel looked at me then I knew he would never leave me, whatever else might happen. What we shared now, only death itself might end. I wondered if any other messiah or prophet had ever shared this much with a woman before. What a shame that they became so shrill, so terrified and contemptuous of joy, so obsessed with moral discipline and groundless faith, so besotted with the fear of cold death that they came to fear hot life as well. Mother Feeney had been cheated, and she knew it. Those proper captain's churches on Martha's Vineyard with their two millennia of bloody constraint, pain, fear, and horror hovering darkly behind them, have, in the end, given us *nothing*, neither adequate navigation nor the joy of love. What Abel and I had found at the Caribbean Eye was not a return to paganism, but a glimpse of how much finer our world might have been, if only men and women had been more matched in physical strength and more wise in understanding their world and how it spoke to them.

We stayed there another day, then sailed slowly back across the southern Bahama shoals and banks, crossing Old Bahama Channel east of Andros and finally reaching Havana after two weeks of delights and love beyond anything I had imagined with my giggling female friends as we talked of this or that handsome officer, or by myself late at night, my pillow a shadowy, yet passionate



husband-to-be. Pale dreams indeed, when set against my brown, strong Abel, his gentle insistent caresses a blessed, lovely ache.

At Havana we sold our sturdy sailboat, sadly, I confess, and took passage on a packet for New York. From there we went by steamer to Fall River, then steam train to New Bedford, and finally ferry to Woods Hole, arriving on a blustery, chill December day.

Grandfather had suffered brain fever a month earlier, some sort of stroke that paralyzed his left side. He could speak only with difficulty, but he could see what we had become and his face was alight with love and pleasure.

We passed that winter at Naushon in a time of quiet waiting. Only an occasional group of guests now appeared, plucked somewhere off a palmetto swamp or deserted headland by Abner Hallet or one of his cohorts, so we were not busy. Grandfather could speak only a few words at first, and Christmas was the quietest Naushon had seen in many years. Only dear old Alonzo Scudder and Mother visited with Grandfather when he came down to our shrunken group around the table. But it was quiet and pleasant, and I rather liked the smallness and the chance to talk simply and with close family rather than dealing in the rather grand social complications of those other days. And it was obvious to all, what I had known earlier, that I would bear a child in the late spring or early summer. No mother-to-be had a more solicitous husband than I had in Abel. As I grew larger, he hesitated to touch and caress me, until I made the Water Speech we had used at the Eye. We had learned, each of us, to wield the mighty, silken power of joy, and I was never shy in using that golden weapon of delight.

As the mild winter passed, the winds mercifully muted most of the time, Grandfather slowly regained his speech, sitting in his chair before the downstairs fire, reading the papers from Boston on a stand in front of him, turning the pages with his right hand. Amanda scolded him for this, saying the news only excited him and did him injury, but Grandfather just answered that when he ceased caring about what the criminals, poltroons, and skunks in Washington did, he might be happier, but he would surely be dead.

So a wet spring came to Naushon, then June, and the weather cleared and the bright sun turned the brown lawn green.

I was huge by then, and on a warm, lovely afternoon in late June, Grandfather and I sat in large, twin chairs, in pillow-surrounded grandeur looking out at the white sails on the bay. The west wind still brought the dry smells of winter, now mixed with the fresh, wet smell of growth and green life. Amanda fussed with us both, then left us in the sun. It was one of Naushon's perfect days, and I felt my baby moving, and wondered what he or she would be like.

"It will not be a Fourth like last year, Hope," said Grandfather looking over at me, his left eyelid drooped over a bright eye.

"You said yourself, dear, that nothing could ever equal that day," I answered lightly.

"I did and it was true. But one hates to accept one's own best judgment." He watched me for a while as I smoothed my hair and adjusted the pillows behind my back. "I have heard much of storms and wonders at the Eye of the Caribbean, Hope. But little of the wisdom you gained there."

I stared out at the coasters. "It is hard to put into words, Grandfather. I guess what I really learned is that the Christian church has lied for two thousand years about how men and women can, well, desire each other. The churches are things of men and their main purpose is to protect themselves from joy."

Grandfather gave a bark of laughter. "Wisdom indeed! But not exactly the most welcome message on the Vineyard or in Boston."

"I'm not saying it on Martha's Vineyard or in Boston. I'm telling you on Naushon. I think it is too late to change people anyway. And I really don't care. Abel is my life, and I am his life. We are bound by chains of delight, dear Grandfather."

We sat silent for a while. "That is not so hard to see," said Grandfather finally. "Why is our world not this way, your way, then?"

I thought about what I would say next. I did not want to hurt or challenge Grandfather, crippled and sick, but he had to understand what Abel and I had become. "Dear," I said softly, "I am everything to Abel, just as he is everything to me. No other lusts, money, justice, power, can now draw us apart. If men and women were as we are, wars, whaling voyages, brothels, cruelty, would not



exist. Few men today can imagine such a world. Nearly all men seem to fear it."

Grandfather nodded silently. "Well," he said finally, "what an extraordinary result it has all had then. You know, Hope, it seems only a few months ago that I met little Abel at dawn on this same lawn." He smiled to himself, lost now in remembering it. "I knew he was coming, Hope. I never spoke with any of you about my own special gifts, but as soon as Sarah Allen told me about Abel, about his abilities, I waited for him to come."

I smiled at Grandfather. "Mother knew all about that, dear," I said laughing. "She always said that you and Abel would have found each other in Paris or in Patagonia." I paused, then. "He is strong and bold like you, Grandfather, and oh, very much more handsome."

But now Grandfather was stiffly turned and looking straight at me.

"And he has one more thing. He has achieved the uttermost desire of his heart! Hope, you are not two together, we are three! I do not want you on Naushon, nor in America, when I am dead. Do you understand that? Abel is too good a man to resist Peleg and Hallet and the rest. And he is too capable, too extraordinary, for them to fail to entice him."

I stared at him, but Grandfather was speaking steadily. "My banks have investments in several places; London is one. Through the years we have assisted one Henry Harrison in building an enviable reputation as a fabricator of marine instruments, compiler of tables, and chart maker. Harrison is a garrulous old bachelor genius who will take Abel on as his heir apparent. Who will teach whom the most, I cannot foresee."

He looked at me quite fiercely and even his droopy eyelid was level. "I don't know when the slavery war will come. But you will be over there, working fruitfully and usefully. Have more children! Stay away, my dear Granddaughter, for Abel Roon will never outlive such a conflict if he participates!"

I was astonished. Once again Grandfather was far ahead of me.

"London!" I said softly. "The libraries! The lectures!"

"Yes," said Grandfather quickly. "The libraries. You have been to the Eye and learned . . . well . . . remarkable things, visions, let us say. But the world is old. Others have had visions. If Christ and Paul and Plato were

wrong, then who was right? What happened? Who is Abel?"

I sighed and looked at Grandfather. "I know Abel now. I know him in some ways better than I know myself. The question is: *Why* is Abel?"

"I have not discussed this with Abel, Hope. I wanted to be sure of you first. Is this what you wish for you two, well, three?"

I leaned and kissed him. "Yes. We will go to London, dear, but not for a long time, I know. Thank you for so exactly deciding the best and happiest thing."

We sat together silently then, looking out at the ships until Abel came strolling up to us from Hadleys and Grandfather told him about London.

We talked on and on that warm afternoon, until Amanda came and shooed us all into supper, wheeling Grandfather in herself. It was a fine meal with much joking about how my baby would probably grow larger than the Chases.

"Well, it surely won't be as ugly as the Chases," said Grandfather at once. "Now, I ask, will it combine the remarkable abilities and experiences of its parents and, if so, are we ready for such a phenomenon?"

At nine that night, Abel and Peleg carried Grandfather up the stairs in his chair and got him into bed. Grandfather died sometime in the early morning. When Amanda came in, she found him sitting up, the candles guttered out. He had been reading *Blunt's Coast Pilot* and it was open on his lap to the page on the Elizabeth Islands. Grandfather's finger lay under the entry for Tarpaulin Cove; "In running from Gay Head light into Vineyard Sound, if you wish to make a harbor on the north side, bring Gay Head light to bear SW, and run NE 3 leagues, which will carry you up with Tarpaulin Cove light, where you may anchor in from 4 to 18 fathoms, on fine sand, the light bearing from W by N to SW."

All my study and reading has convinced me that great men can often choose the hour of their death. Grandfather had waited until he had settled our futures. When he left us that night, he wanted to be sure of the way back to Naushon.

My daughter, Martha Hope Roon, was born the first day of July on a hot, quiet night. Sarah Allen and a Falmouth doctor were on hand and if it hurt, I forgot it as soon as my baby began to draw her milk.



Those next months were happy but difficult, for we were preparing to leave for London as Naushon prepared for its new owners. The final leave-taking of the Naushon people was a teary, wrenching day, but through it all Abel's strong arm was around me and his lips were on my neck or cheek.

London seemed a gigantic place, as big as twenty Bostons, but we soon settled into a five-story house in Hampstead with a cook, a nurse, a man who drove us, and all the other pleasant things that Folger money could arrange. Abel and old Mr. Harrison hit it off at once, no surprise there, while I prowled the bookstores around the Museum and the West End. I confess that my scholarly researches soon became quite important to me, the kind of challenge that has its own, personal rewards. I had read about myths and messiahs in generalities on Nantucket and in Boston. Here I could really see what a huge array of beliefs and visions men were capable of holding. I began to spend days in the reading rooms of the libraries, making notes, and following legends back through their sources, often in Latin. At night I talked with Abel, who was always filled with suggestions and ideas about my interests. (And why not? All my research had its focus in Abel!) Then we touched and hugged and had much joy in each other. My daughter grew healthy and bright and so I lived a happy, safe, and eventful life, far from line squalls and the cruel brutality of slavery.

But it was not long before I became aware that many of the savants and professors writing in books and in learned journals were, in Grandfather's words, either fools or skunks. They professed a rigorous adherence to fact and observable events, to scientific methods of theory and its verification. Yet it was evident that they willfully avoided contrary evidence, distorted or misread accounts, made applications to theory that often proved the opposite, and generally seemed to be led more by emotion or propriety than by truth. In any study of religious expression, myth, and human behavior, such mischief is, understandably, widespread.

So I was drawn into this world of so-called scholarship by my impatience and, I do not deny it, the gnawing need to show these smart men that things could be done better! I corresponded quite regularly with Professor Agassiz in Boston, and in one of my letters I enclosed a lengthy response to an article, regarding the random character of

several Near-Eastern religions, that had appeared in the *London Journal of Human Study*. I asked the Professor to read it over and if he felt it made proper points in a scholarly manner, to forward it to the *Journal* with his own comments, or at least note that I was his sometime student.

Professor Agassiz, like most active scholars, delighted in controversy, and sent off the letter with much praise so that it soon appeared in the journal. What I did was to show that the religions discussed in the original article had a variety of commonalities and each came into being at similar historical epochs of the related culture.

For the next few years the controversy I started raged back and forth in the pages of the *Journal*. The difficulty for most of them was simple enough. If what I was showing was correct, then Christianity was simply one part of a large, metaphysical, ongoing activity by men, rather than a unique manifestation at a particular point in the history of the world.

For a while I sent all my material through Professor Agassiz who was delighted with the whole business, sending me comments such as, "That will show them, Hopel" or "Bravo! Even an idiot like Wiggins can understand this!" But this double ocean crossing took so long that H.M. Roon eventually "moved" to a London post office address.

By then my own articles were appearing and I was busily answering other letters, these often stiff with anger and disbelief.

Maria Mitchell visited Europe in 1857 and stayed with us in London. Her trip was a delight. She met them all, even John Herschel and old "toothless" Humboldt, who talked an hour to her about chatting with Thomas Jefferson. She applauded my publications and controversy and, strange to tell, seemed doubtful about becoming a professor at the new college for women being established by wealthy Matthew Vassar, because she had never studied "pedagogy." Abel shook his head at that. "If not you, Maria, in the Lord's name, who?"

My son, Abel Peleg Roon, was born in the spring of 1860. Mother came before to visit and stayed for several months to help, but the war had finally started in America and she became concerned about Father off in the Pacific and went home that summer on a steam packet.

I had two lives by then in London. In one of these I



was the wife of engineer Abel Roon, entertaining and visiting with friends, traveling with my husband and children on holidays and running a large and busy household. In the other I was H.M. Roon, shadowy savant, capable of writing almost any outrage, attacker of religion and morality, responding to challenge with cold, thorny facts. But the day of my great exposure approached. The Society of Human Study always invited a member or fellow to give an annual lecture. They had avoided that with me for several years, but even the most hostile fellows of the Society were finally driven to offering the terrible H.M. Roon this honor.

Abel gave a great roar of laughter when he read the invitation. "They think you are a man. Wait until the most beautiful, most articulate woman in London climbs up on that platform!"

I smiled at dear Abel. "And I can't really tell them anything about it, about you and the Eye and us."

"Well, I should hope not," said Abel with a wink. "Let the stuffed shirts find their own damn Eyes, yes, and their own goddesses too."

As the day approached, I carefully prepared my lecture, which would be both a summary of what I had done so far, and a coherent theory of how messiahs are "selected." I tried the talk several times on Abel, and felt more than ready to face those lesser men with their lesser minds.

On the appointed afternoon, Abel, Martha, and I rode to the main lecture hall of Saint George College on Gower Street and entered unnoticed among the early arrivals in their high collars and plug hats. "That looks like the fellow in charge," said Abel, pointing out a fussy, bearded man on the raised platform. We went up to him and of course he immediately assumed it was Abel who would speak.

He was a kind, little man actually, and bobbed his head continuously as he looked up at Abel. "Mr. Roon, we are delighted to finally meet you," but Abel shook his head.

"I am a simple constructor of nautical instruments, sir," he said in a low, diffident voice. "Your speaker is my good wife, Hope Mayhew Roon. I confess I can't make head or tail out of her jottings," and he shook his head sadly, grinning at me over the fellow's head.

The honorary secretary was thunderstruck. He stared at me and blushed. "You . . . are H.M. Roon?"

I looked down on him coolly, watching his eyes dart, blinking, over my face and figure. "I am. Please have your projectionist show the slides in this order." I handed my lantern slide package over to him. "I will signal him when I wish projection."

The English are polite, at least, so while my introduction to the Society was stiff, he read exactly what I had written down for him, and when I stepped up to begin, he actually gave me a shy smile.

The room was filled with men, many of them in their fifties and sixties, and it was dead quiet when I began speaking. For almost an hour they listened and watched without a rustle or a cough as I explained my theory of the connection between saints and messiahs and the state of the world in which they happen to be living. My slides of artifacts followed one another smoothly, and I made my points, as Abel said later, "With such a lucidity and clarity that even a congressman might have grasped it all, providing he was sober, of course."

But the worst part, I knew, would come with the questions. As soon as I finished, several hands shot up and the secretary recognized the fearsome Professor Joseph Paul Wiggins of Imperial College, historian of Christianity, friend of the archbishop of Canterbury, and a man who, if he ever contemplated women, would never admit it.

He stood, old, white bearded and tall, his voice sharp and sarcastic. "My dear young lady," he said in a dry, sardonic tone. "These webs you spin are provocative, but seem to me dependent on the supernatural, or, shall we say, intuition. Do you really believe that the natural world *speaks* to particular humans?"

Of course I knew it was true that the world *did* speak to particular humans, but science and scholarship are not able to deal with that kind of knowing. So I gave him an icy, calm smile and coolly lied in the name of science. "There is no need to call upon magic to explain any of it," I said in as firm a voice as his. "Surely fishermen do not need séances to discover that the fish are going? Do you really believe that even the most primitive tribe cannot see with its own eyes when the corn becomes stunted by overcultivation of the land? Because these events are often masked by other fluctuations, some men will recog-



nize the future before their fellows. Of course the world speaks to the messiah! It speaks even now, on the plains of America, at the Pacific whale fishery, on this green island now turning black from coal smoke!"

His eyes glittered at me across that big hall but he sat down and said nothing more.

An elderly divine in a reversed collar now stood up. "I hesitate to ask this," he said, his lips thin, "but I presume you can fit our Lord Jesus into all this gossamer theorizing?"

I nodded at him. Jesus Christ is one of many such men, yes and women too. Joan of Arc is an example. Even two thousand years ago the cities had begun to creep outward on the natural land. Jesus and those like him were reacting to this, the most continual and pervasive part of the struggle between man and his world. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is a drama in this struggle!"

He stared at me and smiled even more frozenly. "Yet it is the Christian nations who have, shall we say, subdued the earth most completely?"

"There has always been a separation between the forces that speak to a god and the actions he follows after his identification. Jesus, and the Jewish messiahs and prophets before him, gave us faith and they gave us tools. The faith, we misunderstood. The tools have built London, and Boston, and all the rest. How long do you think this city around us would last without the ethics, laws, and commands of Christianity?" I let my eyes move slowly over the silent room. "Gods made from human clay seldom understand the energizing forces. And their disciples always have other needs and problems. We in London have courts and codes of behavior and land enclosure. The Navigators in the Pacific have navigation and weather prophecy. In each case, the result is the same, and contrary to the impetus that produced the religion. We blacken the green land, as your poet-messiah William Blake clearly saw, while the Navigators and their students use their skills to fish more effectively and deplete the sea. We are above all else, tool users! Somehow, mankind turns every sensibility to a profitable end."

I suppose that many of those men regarded me as a strange American adventuress, displaying her cleverness for some dark, feminine reason. On the other hand, I could see in Abel's grinning face in the first row, and in my daughter's awed, serious one, that I was also beautiful

and strong. And the meeting turned around then. A ruddy, grey-whiskered man who I could see from the way he got to his feet was a ship captain smiled with real warmth at me, then winked!

"Now I'm not admitting, madam, that we can blame the damn parliament on Jesus Christ," he said quickly, "but I would surely like to hear about how religion can help a man to navigate. Do they take sights with their fingers, madam, or rather smell their way around?"

I smiled right back at him. "The Navigators sense depth and current by the water's surface activity," I said. "Pilotage in the shoals around their island is carried out in that manner. They use a language known as Water Speech which enables them to relate their lives to the ocean."

I stepped to the side of the podium and lifted my hands. "I will now introduce myself to you in Water Speech," I said starting the elaborate finger gestures relating to Boston Harbor and its complex of shoals. "The Speaker knows his watcher will be interested in the sea voyage he made to come to this place. Now I have left Boston Harbor and am sailing across the deep Atlantic." I began the large arm motions that show the character of the offshore water mass. The room, quiet before, was absolutely silent. Their eyes were round and they stared in astonishment.

"The English Channel would very much interest the Navigators," I said as I finger-indicated the rough turbulence off Lands End, using my arms for the current run and finally the small gestures describing the calm, shallow Thames. "You see, I have shown you how I interpreted the ocean waters I crossed in arriving before you. To the Navigators each man and woman is established or given importance through his or her connection with the ocean."

Abel was managing to hold in his laughter by intently whispering in Martha's ear, and my serious, owl-eyed daughter was even starting to smile. But as to the rest of the room, well, they mostly had their mouths wide open!

There were no more questions and the honorary secretary nodded at me and enthusiastically extended the Society's thanks. After that there was long, rapid applause, then soft cheers, and finally many a loud "Hear! Hear!" But how much of it was really my scholarship and how much was my black hair and smooth, tight dress is, I suppose, anyone's guess.

We arrived in triumph and laughter back in Hampstead



in the early evening. Nurse had allowed three-year-old Abel to wait up for us and sit at the supper table, so we were soon eating and chattering about the men and the questions and the Water Speech when I looked up and saw Martha peering at me with an intense, hot look.

"You were beautiful and better and stronger than any of them!" Her round little face was pinched by emotion. Her eyes drilled fiercely into mine. "Make me like you!"

Abel and I stared at each other and my eyes instantly got teary. Abel grinned and chuckled and kissed Martha's cheek. "Can you imagine?" he said to her. "The first time I met your mother, she was bigger than I was!" The table was silent until Martha blew her nose.

"I can imagine it all right," she said finally. "I'm just wondering whether I would like it."

It was after the children had gone up to bed that we noticed the letter from America on the sideboard. I opened it, and it was from Amanda.

"Read it," said Abel.

"'Dearest Hope and Abel,'" I began, "'I have the saddest of news to send to you. Our beloved Peleg has been killed in action in Virginia, leading his troop. I cannot write more now, but have copied the letter from his commanding general.'" I wiped my eyes. "Abel, you read it. Oh how awful!"

"'Dear Madam, it is my sad duty to write you concerning the final moments of your gallant husband, Major Peleg Robinson, 8th U.S. Cavalry, Army of the Potomac. Major Robinson, at a critical moment in the battle when the Rebel artillery were having terrible effect on the right end of our line, took his entire troop across an open meadow under intense rifle fire, jumped a stone wall into their guns, and temporarily gained the ground. Major Robinson turned two of the Rebel pieces and fired several rounds of double-shotted cannister in enfilade down the enemy lines.

"'Several hundred Confederate cavalry were hastily sent forward into the area, an overwhelming force. From those few witnesses left alive, I learned that Major Robinson unhorsed the three leaders of the Rebel troop and killed a number more before he was overwhelmed. Most extraordinary of all, madam, your husband was found standing erect. Too many Rebel dead were piled around his body to permit him to fall.'" Abel blinked and peered at me, then read on.

"The 8th Cavalry will not be reconstituted as its casualties in this extraordinary action were over ninety percent. Permit me to say, Mrs. Robinson, that the conduct of your husband deserves only the highest praise and honor. I remain, your obedient. . . ."

Abel put the letter down and shook his head. "Years ago," he said, "after the schooner, when I was wondering how to tell you, he said I had made a choice with Moses . . . on the lawn." Abel shook his head. "But I had not made a choice."

"Any more than I had made a final choice when I took the pistol from my pocket at Monomoy," I answered. "Our choices were made at the Eye, Abel."

But Abel appeared not to listen. "It is the *de Neufchatel* again," he said half-aloud. "No history, no reunions, no one left to remember."

"We remember Peleg, Abel," I said. "Is it so important that strangers must remember him too?" I went over and sat down next to him on the wing couch. "This war is not an adventure at Monomoy or a single schooner, Abel. Even you would finally find those tasks too large and terrible."

Abel leaned back and stretched. "I cannot weep for Peleg now, at this moment. Think of all that strength and courage and cool experience focused, compacted into a single moment of total violence! And yet, Peleg unhorsed no planters or bankers behind that wall. They were just other bold, resolute men, like the British off the *Endymion*, like Peleg."

"Like Abel and Hope Roon," I said.

Abel turned and smiled at me. "That very first night, with Alonzo at Squaw Island, Peleg told us we could only repay the Negroes in our blood. How big and hard he seemed to me then."

Abel and I began to remember and talk, as we often did, about the past days on Naushon. We called up the storms and sails, the rides to the West End, the skating and the dances. And eventually we came to *Valley Forge* and then to the Eye. We hugged each other and went upstairs and undressed. Our pleasure then was piercingly sweet yet gentle too. Abel finally uttered that same great gasp he had first given years ago at the Eye, but this time I seemed to hear so clearly the meaning within that huge sigh of completion. It was the final surrender of a human being who has reached the most sought-for and intensely



felt moment of his life. For a moment, it seemed to me I could not bear so close and open a vulnerability in another person, but then I gasped too and a warm swoon, my own surrender, came over me. We kissed long and passionately and Abel fell deeply, soundly asleep.

I rise from our bed and walk to the wide bay window that looks down the hill from our fourth-floor bedroom over all of London. I am still wakeful. The lecture and its challenges, Peleg and Abel, my dear Martha's cry of love at supper, all have set my mind on a race. The night is warm and bright, the full moon glinting on shivers of the Thames far to our south. I stare at distant, bright Saint Paul's, serenely dominating the sprawling city. A satisfaction, no, really a sense of utter relief, fills me now. Naushon, London, that does not matter. We have survived!

## Martha Folger Mayhew

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When we heard that Hope was to give a lecture before Queen Victoria, I didn't see how we could make the journey. I was so weak and unable to get my breath unless I sat quietly, that the thought of such a long trip was daunting. Silas was little stronger. After the destruction of his steam whaler, *California Rover*, in the ice off Alaska territory in 1872—there were twenty-six whaleships in that final disaster—Silas came home with no fingers on his right hand, sadly crippled by rheumatism, his spirit bent down by hurt and age.

But someone in Father's banks found a young man who was going to London and he helped get us to the steamer, then looked after us during a speedy trip to Southampton. It was early December of 1878, but the crossing weather was clear and crisp, and I actually felt better in that cool air with the familiar motion and activity of the boat after years of waiting for the day when I could no longer draw a final breath in our Vineyard house.

It was all very hurried in England, but the young banker got us into a first class carriage, then a cab across wide London, and I was soon helped up the steps of their fine, tall house, Silas on one side and the young man on the other.



We had arrived only one day before the lecture, and I soon realized that Silas and I looked quite dowdy and old-fashioned in our Cape Cod clothes, but Hope shook her head when I suggested Silas might shop for something more suitable. "The Queen is coming to see the remarkable family of a Yankee whale skipper, not some dandy with lace at his throat and big shoe buckles. We will not cheat her, Mother."

Hope was as beautiful as ever, slender and tall, her neck still smooth and graceful. "The Queen will be looking at you," I said at once, "not mousy, ancient relatives from another country."

Hope tossed her head. "There are many grand, beautiful people here, dearest," she said. "What you and Father will bring is character and forthrightness. That is rarer."

As it turned out, Hope was right. We arrived in two cabs at the lecture hall that next afternoon, and two ushers grandly settled us in front.

The big, dark, shabby hall was almost filled with finely dressed men and women. Even the students looked quite well gotten up. They had set off a section of seats with red ribbons for the Queen and her entourage, and just before Hope was introduced by the provost of the college, Queen Victoria and several of her ladies swept in and very rapidly settled themselves, protected from the rest of us by those bright red tapes and several, stern-looking men with red arm bands.

I had never fully understood all that Hope was doing or finding in her studies. She was the first woman to be made a professor in this school, I guess perhaps the first in all of the English schools, and this talk was what they called there an "inaugural lecture." It was intended to be understood by everyone, not just people in Hope's special subject, and much of it was quite interesting; about the way the heathens relate their speaking and their religious practice, how the western Indians in America were even then creating a whole new religion in response to the killing of the buffalo herds.

But it was afterward, when we met with the Queen, that the nicest moments came. I knew Silas was conscious of his rough clothes and his poor lump of a hand that he kept jammed deep in a pocket, so when we were taken forward at the tea afterwards to be introduced to Queen Victoria, I really had a sense that we might be stared down and abashed.

She was a hard-faced old lady, but a lady without any doubt. We stood, Abel, Hope, Martha tall and pretty, young Abel in his midshipman's uniform, then Silas and I, in a row, and we bowed and curtsied as we were introduced. The Queen turned at once to Silas.

"Captain Mayhew," she said with an even smile. "Your remarkable islands are lost to England, but you have sent us a great deal in return. Without such a lively family as this from America now and then," and she nodded at Hope and Abel and the children, "we should grow quite stuffy and boring here. Don't you think so, sir?"

"Your Majesty," said Silas quickly, "boring is not exactly the word I would give to London."

The Queen looked at Silas and shook her head. "Men who make great voyages always look beyond London. Our horizons here are much narrower."

The Queen, far from being the rather proper, brusque person we had been told to expect, seemed to be acting almost philosophical.

Silas nodded. "Any captain misses that far horizon, Your Majesty. But many men prefer narrower spaces."

The Queen turned to Hope. "My dear Mrs. Roon. I wish you to come and take tea with me sometime in the spring. One of my ladies will be in touch with you."

Hope smiled and blushed. "I would be delighted, Your Majesty. Should I bring notes? Do you wish to hear more?"

The Queen held up her hand and shook her head. "My dear, I am certain that what you have discovered is of immense interest. Otherwise all these men would not have allowed you to stand up and speak. No, I am more interested in how you accomplished all of this, the scholarship, teaching, books, the rest of it."

I wondered later how my daughter might explain to the Queen what she had seen and done. But Hope was a practical person at heart, and I knew that what she would say would be just as true as it needed to be, and no more than that.

Having spoken to us, the Queen left, and soon after that the tea ended and we drove back to the Hampstead house. Many friends from the lecture accompanied us and more appeared at the door to celebrate the great occasion, but I was having such trouble getting my breath that Hope helped me upstairs to my bedroom. I confess I lay down with immense relief. I had spent most of my time



for some years in bed or on a couch and all this sudden moving about was unfamiliar and tiring. "Hope," I said softly, "go to your guests, dear. This is your wonderful day. I will soon have my breath again."

My daughter sat down beside me on the bed and took my hand. "I have seen them all a hundred times and will see them a hundred more. And, anyway, they all wish to hear Father's yarns of the ice and the voyages, and I've heard all of those."

"More than once," I whispered.

Hope's laugh still had a tinkle to it. "They are even worse with boats than Grandfather's bankers, these academic people, but there are a couple of sea captains down there too from Abel's side of London."

Hope's face was thinner now, her hair pulled tightly back, but her eyes were still clear and perfectly beautiful. I squeezed her hand. "Abel still cherishes you most dearly," I said to her.

She nodded. "Oh, that will not end, Mother." Her eyes looked openly and steadily into mine. "Abel and I have a particular relationship that few others can imagine."

Words flew into my head then. Her lecture suddenly made much more sense. "Abel made you his goddess," I said in wonder.

My daughter smiled ruefully. "Do I seem that formidable to you, Mother? But in a sense, what you said is true. When Abel and I made love at the Eye of the Ocean, we came to share a joy and a vulnerability that now bind us tightly. Is Abel a god? I really don't know at this point. If he had gone on, like Peleg, say, he might have become something great and terrible. But now, with me, he is a gentle, handsome, clever man, a success at any task he tries, but not, I think, a god." Hope peered at me and her smile was gone. "His power was almost boundless, Mother, under the right conditions. I was there when the wave came into that house at Monomoy." Hope rubbed her hands together. "If that ability could have been turned to good . . . to . . ."

I was breathing much more easily. Now, I took my daughter's hand in mine. "Perhaps we have enough gods already, dear," I said. "Keeping ships off rocks and bars seems godly enough to the mariner about to strike one."

Hope laughed at that. "I would not change it, Mother. I am too selfish a person to ever wish it differently. Sometimes, with Abel, I can bring those moments, that single

day in the Carribean, almost back, almost here again. My love for Abel is truly without boundary or end."

I suddenly felt very happy to hear my daughter say that. "Hope," I said, "dear, could you get me some warm cocoa? And then I will go to sleep and you can go to the cheers of your guests."

As Hope got up, a light knock sounded on the door and tall Abel came in, filling the whole doorway. "Poor Martha," he said, "we have mercilessly hoisted you from your sickbed to please a busy Queen." He smiled in his wide, open way. "How do you feel?"

"You could not have cheated me of that moment, Abel," I said right back. "Just be happy I wasn't wheezing the way I get in one of those Cape fogs. The Queen would have thought I was run by steam."

Abel sat down on the bed, as Hope left for the cocoa, and stroked my arm. "Silas and some of those other old salts are deep in a steam-propelled argument right now, Martha," he said cheerfully. "The problem with the full-rigged-ship masters, like Silas, is that they were always partly poets or artists . . . maybe wind sculptors. On *Uncle Sam* he was always watching and fussing with the set of her rig, seeing how the sails fitted and worked together. And when she was pulling her best, why, she was at her loveliest."

I nodded. "I suppose the young captains say that a steady chuff-chuff pushing them off a lee shore has a certain beauty too, Abel?"

Abel grinned and his cheeks dimpled as they had years ago. "Aye. They say exactly that, Martha. And many thousands of the Cape men now raking old Davy's hay would second the motion. Still, Silas is talking about lost art and lost beauty."

I thought of Silas's lump of a hand and nodded. "The two destinies of a sailor, Abel; lost at sea, or old and redundant on the beach." I smiled at him. "You and Hope will never become useless. You are both like Moses, at the core of life, the center of meaning."

Abel shrugged. "The core of what life, Martha? Even Queen Victoria will die someday. Do you think that Hope and I understand all this activity any more than you do? Or than Moses Folger did? He told me much, Martha, but never why." His smile slipped away. "My wife will take tea with England's greatest queen. How is that? Be-



cause she has spent her life puzzling about me and what I'm supposed to be doing with my life."

Abel said this very seriously but I answered with a laugh. "What do you think all we wives spend our lives doing, Abel?" I asked him. "Hope just happens to be awfully good at whatever she tries."

Abel gave me a big grin and a sudden hug. "Now you're surely talking like old Moses, that tough old cynic! He never worried about meanings or abstractions, just stumped ahead!"

My son-in-law laughed heartily and I knew the time had come to ask my question. "Abel?" I said quietly. "I wish to die in London . . . with you and Hope." I paused, then. "The Vineyard is so flat and empty, Abel, and the cold sea is so close. And the winter wind will be there now, day after day of the wind. Here in this busy place, I think death will come upon me more quickly, more the surprise I wish it to be."

Abel hugged me again and peered from those deep-set eyes. He spoke with a loving simplicity. "Of course you may die with us, Martha."

Now I had another question. "What will it be like, Abel? The end . . . the passing over . . . ?"

Abel smiled just as Hope had a few moments before, half-deprecating, slightly embarrassed. How much alike they have become, in their expressions and speech! "Is this a professional consultation, Martha?"

"If you have no sense of that journey," I answered, "then who does?"

Abel shook his head. "Ask Hope. She is the student of belief and revelation. Death appears everywhere in her research, but it is always seen imperfectly, from this side."

Hope came into the room then and put the cocoa tray on my night stand. She had heard my question and Abel's answer and she straightened up, tall and grave, staring at us both.

"I will not lie to you, Mother," she said in a level voice. "Every messiah attests; it is the saddest of journeys and most terrible for those most alive before it happens. Yet Grandfather met it calmly and with his melancholy in control."

She paused, then looked down at Abel. "I cannot go with you to the final Eye, Abel," she said quickly. "I entered it once on South Beach. Whatever is there, I am now too weak to grasp it. It will destroy my soul."

Abel soberly shook his head. He spoke more slowly, in a soft voice. "Captains cannot avoid command, Hope."

The room lay silent for many moments as I sipped the sweet, warm cocoa.

I frowned impatiently at them. "Your greatest day, dear Hope, and all I can do is speak these sad and dreadful thoughts. Now, I insist! You both go to your party and your friends, and I will fall asleep and dream of the day I curtsied to the Queen."

Abel gave me a warm kiss and left while Hope busied herself with the lamps and windows. "We will rest you up for Christmas, dear," she said, plumping my quilt. "It will not be as gay as Naushon here, but then nothing has ever been quite like Naushon."

I settled myself for sleep. The excitement of the Queen and being in London again seemed to drain away from me, and I thought about all that Hope had said, about Abel, their love at the Eye, and about Naushon.

There had been one time with Silas that almost matched my daughter's experience. It was the night after they were married on Naushon with that gorgeous day, and festive meal, then the balloon. All through that day Silas was at my side, holding and touching me. I delighted in it and returned his favors as discreetly but as often as I could. After the fireworks, I went up ahead to our bedroom to prepare myself for Silas, for by then I was in a very excited and passionate state. I undressed and put my thinnest nightgown about my shoulders, letting it hang loosely open in front. I was breathing deeply, standing by the bed when I heard Silas's steps, then the door opened and he stood looking at me. His face was intent on me, a mask of desire. I went over and undressed him, and we kissed our way to the bed. But the most wrenching yet tender moment came as I murmured my love for Silas and opened my eyes to see him weeping. Silas never wept, before or after that time, and I was suddenly so overcome by, as Hope had said, his vulnerability, that I suffered a most intense and complete pulse of delight.

I thought warmly about those distant moments, sighing deeply as Hope came up to the bed to dim a final lamp.

"Was that a sigh of pain or happiness, Mother? It was hard to tell," said Hope.

"Both, I think." I smiled up at her, thinking of Silas. "On your wedding night, Silas and I had a special moment, dear. A moment I've always cherished." I shook



my head. "But Silas still went off to the ends of the earth."

I lie down flatter and begin to doze as Hope kisses me and tiptoes out. As I lie waiting for sleep, the distant muffled noises of the celebration sounding beneath me, I think again of that long ago day on Naushon, of Silas's firm touch and whispered breath in my ear, and it seems to me a blessing that I can still remember with such sweet clarity that marvelous Independence Day and my sudden intense passion when I saw the tears in Silas's eyes.

## Captain Silas Mayhew

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My Martha died in London that spring, after Hope's presentation to the Queen, and I stayed on with Hope and Abel for a while. But London was a place where too much moving about was required, and my aches and difficulties from the rheumatism made me little more than a burden to my daughter. I began to miss the Cape Cod Islands and the important, daily changes of weather that seem so insignificant when distantly seen from a city window or out past the side curtains of a cab. Yet I could not bear returning to the big Vineyard house with its memories of Martha in every room.

I wrote that next year to Amos Forbes at the bank, asking if there was any bookkeeping or recording task I might still do on Naushon, as well as a place there for me to live and see the sounds again. Mr. Forbes responded in a most kindly and thoughtful way, suggesting that if I wanted it, the light keeper's job on Cuttyhunk would be mine, and that I might wish to hire some assistance from among the Cuttyhunk residents to aid me in setting and checking the lamp.

So I went back to Cape Cod that next year and was soon settled in the small keeper's house, at the very north-western tip of the island. We lay only about twenty feet



above the water and looked out on Sow and Pigs reef and a full sweep of open horizon, across which I could watch the storms grandly unfurl themselves. For a person who had spent most of his days at sea, I was as close there as I could be to that old life, and I confess that when the northeasterlies swept upon us and the Pigs turned to violent white breakers, I watched it all with much pleasure and interest as well as that certain satisfaction that I suppose all mariners must have at being safe and snug in harbor, while a dangerous storm rages only a few feet away.

Young Sarah Allen, the granddaughter of that excellent woman who assisted at the birthing of Abel and then of my granddaughter, Martha, came to live in and cook for me, while her boyfriend, large, shy Tommy Tilton, assisted with the light and the cleaning of the lens and wicks. Since I could barely mount the stairs in the small tower, those two really served and kept the light, often together, and I was careful not to climb into the tower or snoop around if they were about. They did everything for me and I made sure never to bother them, whatever the pair of them happened to be doing up by the lens or back in my small kitchen. Young Sarah was as bright and pretty as a new frock and I knew she would see to it that Tilton eventually did the proper thing.

Hope wrote often, urging me to come back to England for a visit and always asking if I was not lonely on that wild and deserted headland. In fact, I was neither lonely nor feeling sorry for myself. In the summer and fall, many days saw one or another visitor stopping by to sit in the sun and chat. Sometimes these were captains from past days but still at sea, their ships anchored for the night in the harbor at the east end of Cuttyhunk. More frequently came the banker-sports from the Cuttyhunk Bass Club, fishing for striped bass from the rickety stands built out on the rocks on the west end, then moseying over to talk to me when the tide turned. They were mostly New York financial men, but some of the old ones had known Moses Folger and I told them about the cargoes and risks and journeys of those other times. Now and then a stranger would arrive just to hear about the whaling. My life had almost spanned the life of that industry, and at its end I had evidently become some sort of historical antique.

In the winter, when the winds came, I hunkered down and watched the Pigs blow into wild spume and listened

to the shriek that never seemed to let up. Young Sarah kept the stoves glowing with driftwood fires and in the evening the Tilton boy would row across the pond from town with supplies and deal with the light. Then, as we ate supper, I would tell them about the distant places of the world, how the people lived there, and the storms I had seen, finally to go comfortably off to my small bedroom, leaving my two young lovers to whatever joys they might discover in their strength and affection. It was at those moments, as I drowsily listened to the wind keening around the corners of the dwelling and imagined the lovers whispering unheard in the next room that I most clearly remembered my beloved Martha.

The years passed following this simple schedule until March 11, 1888. On that evening, a dull, blustery one, Sarah was off to town for errands and I was alone, when the door of the keeper's house opened and my son-in-law stood, filling the doorway. I looked into his lined face and knew at once what he had come to tell me.

"Hope is dead," I said to him.

He nodded. "Three weeks ago, Silas. She had been ever-weaker this past year, unable to go up and down stairs without help. We both knew that it was close, and one night I woke next to her and found her gone. She never awakened. I did not cable, Silas, because I knew I was coming to tell you."

To outlive one's only child, and one as beautiful and strong as Hope, is a bitter thing. But the pain in my legs and back was now just bearable and I could only stare at Abel and draw a deep breath. The hurt and loss in his face was as intense as if Hope had died that day, and I had no comfort for him, nor for myself.

Abel closed the door and took off his heavy coat and gloves. He looked at me steadily. "Tomorrow I go to the Eye of the Ocean for the final time, Silas. I have come to ask you to join me in this last quest."

I knew then what he wanted from me, and deep inside I welcomed it with relief. I had lived long enough with unhealing wounds. "I am weak and hurt, Abel. Is this Eye close?"

Abel nodded. "Close in both time and distance. He rose and walked to the mercury barometer hanging next to my framed photograph of *Uncle Sam*. He peered at it, then smiling, at me. "Falling now, Silas. Tomorrow night it will drop precipitously, then pump, as I run south in my cat-



boat, *Onkahye*. It will be a wild but brief sail, Silas, off-shore south of Block Island."

"The storm will be a great one?" I asked, wondering if I could bear the violence and motion, yet suddenly wanting to go with him and see this last blow from seaward.

Abel nodded. "Hope always said she could not make this final sail with me. She said she could not bear it and so she left me before it came." His face showed his tight pain again.

"I will come," I said. "I welcome it, Abel. I have lived long enough, bent over and helpless. Fetch us both some whiskey from that cabinet, Abel, and tell me about my grandchildren."

Sarah Allen and Tom Tilton came back from town and we all had a fine supper of bass, baked apples, and new potatoes. I told them about my daughter's death and that I planned to go with Abel to New Bedford the next day. Tom Tilton looked at me with narrow eyes. "It will blow tomorrow, Cap'n Silas," he said at once.

Abel smiled at the boy. "Aye, Tom, but we will be in safe harbor before the end of it. It is no great run to the mainland."

Abel tended the light that evening, and went off to sleep on a couch in my small parlor. The following morning he walked back along the south side of Cuttyhunk, then sailed his catboat abreast of the West End Pond to tie at a ragged dock the Portuguese lobster men had built near their shacks on the north neck of the pond, behind my house.

I was warmly dressed but Abel had to almost lift me into the boat while my hip joints shrieked at me in pain. "This dock will not be here tomorrow, Silas," said Abel with a thin smile, but not so loud that Sarah, ready on the dock to cast us off, might hear. The wind was north, blowing with a fitful strength, and everywhere was solid cloud, sullen and chill. We set off northwest, waving our hands, and I wished I might have kissed my loyal Sarah before I climbed into *Onkahye*, but I did not want the girl to sense our purpose. How could we explain to this young woman, so newly full of life and spirit, what we intended?

*Onkahye* ran west of Penikese Island. I steered the little cat while Abel stoked up a coal fire in the cabin stove. She worked handily northwest under her double reef, but as dusk came on the gale increased, the wind going west of north and snow squalls coming thickly. The weather

had turned bitingly cold and when Abel came up and took the helm I shook my head at him. "Only two damn fools would set out in something like this," I said above the wind.

"It will get much worse, Silas," said Abel, grinning at me. We jammed along for a while, but Abel finally shortened *Onkahye's* sail to a mere patch as I steered her again. It was almost dark and the seas were becoming huge as we turned south and put the blast behind us.

"We have a ways yet, Silas," said Abel to me then. "The cold is worse. Go below and get under a blanket for a while."

I was unaccountably drowsy in this wild weather and painfully helped myself down into *Onkahye's* low cabin with my hands and arms. The stove had made it quite cozy and I rolled onto one of the two bunks, wrapping a thick blanket around me as I did so, but lying with my head at the bow so I could look up through the open hatch to see Abel. The snow had thickened and blew from behind him in sheets up over *Onkahye's* cabin but his face was firm and set, his eyes bright and eager, staring out ahead of us. I lay thus, half asleep, finally thinking how mad we had become at the end to make this final sail.

Yet as we drove south, the little cat plunging and shaking, a blizzard howl at our backs, I seemed to rest more and more comfortably. My hips and back were blessedly forgotten and I was able to turn and shift without that wince of pain. So I drowsed and dozed, almost ignoring the sudden swoops and snaps, the scream of wind.

Finally, in that early morning blackness, I was able to kneel in the low companionway and poke my head up into the storm. It was astonishing! I had no pain anywhere! I easily stood up through the hatch, my back to the snow, facing Abel. "What sorcery is this, Abel?" I shouted at him. "My pains are gone! Must I now leave the world in perfect health?" I quickly mounted the two steps to the small cockpit and dropped onto the wide, horseshoe seat next to Abel.

The seas were mountainous, yet we seemed to run well before them. The wind was bitter, close to zero now, and the snow so thick that we could see only a few yards into the dark. Yet, oddly, I was warm in the cockpit and I noticed that no ice or packed snow seemed to stick on *Onkahye's* rig. We jammed along, gracefully and some-



how apart from the storm, but my sense of reverie was pierced by a captain's common sense. I felt a first chill and suddenly thought: I am dying now.

And at about that time, or perhaps later, we entered the almost stationary core of this vast hurricane of snow. The wind slackened and became fitful. The still-huge waves here were rounded, confused and seeming to move in several directions. The snow, impossibly, was even thicker, moving about us in spiraling, solid columns that formed and destroyed, each moment, black vaults of space.

"Look up, Silas!" said Abel in my ear.

I did and cried in amazement, "The moon!" for we could now look right up through the top of the storm and bright moonlight fell like shining knives onto the spinning white snow. We were in a bowl of water, the waves heaped higher on all sides, surrounded by white, wildly changing giants towering to the moon itself. I suddenly understood; this was life, violent, utterly powerful life, but also utterly unhuman. No captain had ever been further out of his depth than I was at that moment.

"What place is this?" I said shivering violently. "Fifty years at sea, and there has never been snow like this. Even off Cape Horn or north of Bering Strait."

The snow was thicker and closing us in. The chill closed like a fist in my gut as I shook.

Abel's strong arm stretched around me and his big hand tightened on my shoulder. "The Eye of death, Silas," he said strongly in my ear. "You and I have seen it before in the eyes of storms and of men."

"And at the center of my heart when fear enters," I answered in a thin voice. The blankness and heaviness of the snow beat upon me like dark wings. The bitter chill ate my soul and the sadness of the ending of everything gripped my heart. For a moment I shrank down and down into the black and white maze of the snow. I could not fill my lungs in the dense, snow-filled air. I was smothering in my dread of the snow.

Abel held me tightly, his fingers tense and hard, gripping my shivering shoulder. The snow grew ever thicker and colder. I could see nothing, not *Onkahye's* sail, not the black swirling water. Then, next to my ear, Abel said sharply, "Hope!" and with such great surprise was this name spoken that I turned my head back and forth to see if she had stepped through the slanting snow curtains. . . .

I am Captain Silas Mayhew, back three months from my greatest voyage on the whaleship *Uncle Sam*. Beside me stands my daughter, Hope, for this is her wedding day and she is the most beautiful woman these folk have ever seen. And she is dead a month, her beauty finally gone to worms in an English churchyard.

Carefully, unseen by them, I flex the fingers of my right hand. Those present fingers touch my palm, there can be no doubt! That pain when they came off is vivid, but there is no pain yet. The little man behind the camera cautions us and I clench my right fist, so as to keep touching those fingers, and I stare into the instrument. This is the most perfect Independence Day that anyone can remember.

Moses Folger turns and speaks to me. He says this is the finest celebration that Naushon House will ever see. But I know that is true from bitter experience. Moses Folger will soon be paralyzed and, in less than a year, dead and buried.

"And yet, Moses," I say to him—for I can think of nothing else to say—"this day, like all days, will pass. This pearl of days will slip off the string with all the others, all too quickly."

Beautiful Hope takes my arm in both her strong hands, and orders me to cheer up at once. "I will put this pearl back on the string for you. There, Father! What do you think of that?"

I turn and laugh at her but her eyes are deep and quiet, and I secretly unclasp my fist and understand what is going to happen to me. And understanding that, I turn to look at Martha and I know that she has never been more desirable.

The Scudders are coming up the hill from Hadleys with great exuberance. I put my arm lightly around soft Martha's waist. I lean toward her pink cheek. "After we meet the Scudders, there is time for a walk in the cedars."

Martha turns and brushes my cheek with her lips. "We will see much of the Scudders, Silas. I am ready for the walk now."

As soon as we are amongst the trees and green fern, we kiss most warmly until Martha stares, flushed and breathless, into my face. "You are so forward and passionate, dear sir," she whispers. "I am quite undone by you."

"Stay by my side today," I whisper back. "I must touch and look at you, Martha. You are very dear to me, my beloved wife."



How she smiles at me! I will say those things to her often today. We walk back out of the woods and the crowd of guests on the lawn has expanded. My left hand encircles Martha's waist and I sense beneath my touch the thin, fine fabric and under it the soft, forgiving, familiar flesh. I must now carefully focus my thoughts on that living flesh for Martha lies near Hope in that English graveyard, her labored breath ten years silent.

I become a miser of seconds on that wide lawn of Naushon House. I hold and savor each smile, each glance, each gesture of Martha and my daughter. The cheerful jokes and congratulations from the other captains and the Boston men, I hear and collect with pleasure and I return those jests but each jest is carefully prepared and each friendly chat is heard again and again inside my head. The west wind I study with deep concentration, and the views of the bay and sound I examine from each eminence and vantage point that afternoon, so that all such sights may be compared and considered. Each taste of food requires my fullest attention, but the true flavor of the day, and its center, is my wife, Martha. I study how gracefully she moves her hand to take my arm, and how gently she points out this or that large vessel moving nearby. I see how the fine gown fits over her soft body, how the curving fullness of her thighs stretch and extend the fabric as she turns or walks. I smell the perfume in her thick hair and the sweetness of her breath as she whispers at my cheek. And yet the time roars and races past around me!

There is no stopping the darkness, the steady spin of the world. Naushon House lies in dusk, the great meal lies in ruins on the tables, and the hundreds of guests push back and shift their chairs ready for the band concert. "Martha," I say. "The firemen will have a better sound from a distance," and we walk arm in arm toward the Buzzards Bay cut and the thick poplar growth that overhangs it. The music starts behind us and I take Martha in my arms to kiss and touch her and try to arrest, an impossibility of course, the headlong run of events. Martha holds me tightly, twisting eagerly against me as I caress her.

She smiles her love. "I am perfectly unhinged by your advances, sir," she sweetly sighs. "After the fireworks you will have much to answer for, and much to do!"

But I can only say, "You are my heart's desire."

The balloon is even more marvelous than we expected, a perfect ending to Moses Folger's most remarkable day. As the last sparks wink far above, the good-byes begin on the lawn. Martha and I walk down with the crowds and the chatter, to the shouts of the boat captains, the many waves and cheers. All around me are smiling young men and women. They are gone, drowned at sea, dead in childbirth, maimed and shrunk by pain and illness but now, at this particular moment, I wave and smile back and take what comfort I can in their present happiness.

As we stroll back up the hill, Martha leans and kisses my cheek. "You say my good nights, Silas, but be quick! I will go and prepare so as not to waste a minute," and she walks quickly across the porch, turning to blow me a kiss.

But in that single instant, all is unsteady, gone to smoke! We four walk on the porch of Naushon House, and I am a pace or so in the lead. I turn to look back at them and the sky and lawn are gone! Only the snow is there, swirling, impenetrable, itself penetrating exactly *through* the shaky structure of Naushon House. It lies about us in churning banks, black and dead white, hissing more terribly than a thousand snakes.

I am not yet ready for this! I hurry to the first stair tread and step up rapidly. But I must turn as I mount these wide treads, and now I see them below me and they are grey ghosts, set in a core of white, chill snow. So we finally face each other, here in Naushon House and here off Block Island at the blizzard's strange core.

My dead daughter, great adventures and honors ahead of her, yet done and over, turns to Moses Folger, he to be stricken in a few months and dead these forty years.

"It has happened as you planned it, Grandfather." The shape of her perfect face is uncertain and her eyes are like smudges.

Moses Folger's white face is a mask pinched with remembered pain and loss. But he stares at us, as always, with resolution. His round, bald head shakes at Hope and with an effort he smiles. "There was no plan, Hope. Just we three together. Are you sorry now that you joined us . . . here at the end of it?"

"Never!" says my daughter firmly. She turns to Abel, his large, deep eyes only blank hollows. The candle flames in the hall sconces flicker through and within the heavy snow and their fire now seems as cold as ice. "I



said I could not go with you to this final Eye, Abel. But I cannot escape it, my darling."

Abel nods slowly, his face a blurred, stiff mask of control pierced by slanting snow. "You have become one of us, Hope. We must meet the storm together. It is the way of the world, beloved."

Hope's face is flat and white. Her lips, moving as if they pained her, are ugly, black lines. "I know that now. You, Abel . . . and you, Grandfather . . . were given this grace and this burden for . . . whatever reason. But I have earned it!" She turns fiercely to Abel, then to Moses Folger. The snow draws back for a moment and the candle flames grow brighter. "Three together are stronger than two," she says. "And even you, Grandfather, cannot know the final end of it."

Moses Folger still smiles but his smile is now a grin of death, peering at Hope. The snow hisses and the cold is sharp. "Lead us then, bold woman. This night is black!"

Abel has turned to her too, his face whiter than the deadly snow and harder than the rocks of Sow and Pigs. But his eyes suddenly flicker tiny cores of warmth at their black depths. "Remember, dear Hope, we reached through the Eye and grasped a sunrise once before."

Hope grips his arm more tightly. "I rode free on Cannonball then, Abel. No horse will bear us now. We must bear each other."

Hope finally looks up at me. "I have given you this day again, Father, as I promised," she says in a level voice. "Can you bear the sadness?"

When she says those words, I suddenly cannot bear it. My breath catches in a choke and my limbs turn to water. Everywhere is ruin and loss, grief, pain, age, death. But in that black instant I remember that Martha waits a few steps away and I catch my body before its dissolution and I smile at her dear face. "I can withstand it," I say firmly. "It is a blessed sadness, my beloved."

But I cannot remain here any longer lest my heart should break. I run up the stairs and the snow curtain yields and fades before me. Now I throw open the solid bedroom door and see Martha standing by our bed, her open nightgown concealing none of her soft charms. She walks to me easily, her breath deep and steady, and undresses me, garment by garment, all the time caressing and kissing, so that I ache in the core of my heart at her sweet touch. And now we are together in the bed and I

cannot wholly separate the great blizzard wind and the sharp pitch of *Onkahye* from Martha's urgent, gentle movements. I am overwhelmed by my final passion but far more by my love for Martha. My day is ending. The future storm intrudes, insistent and deadly.

I look into Martha's loving face and I weep. And as I weep, dear Martha gives a cry of pleasure and joy, more piercing and more complete than any before or since. I should have wept more often. I should have touched her more often. There is much I should have understood and seen.

I am Captain Silas Mayhew, recently returned with the greatest cargo of sperm oil in the history of the whale fishery. Next to me, the whole length of her body pressed warmly against mine, my beautiful and loving wife, Martha, breathes deeply in sleep, her face gentle and filled with quiet joy. *Onkahye* drives beyond the great storm. My day is over. Now I will sleep.



## Commander Abel Peleg Roon, R.N.

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The survey vessel I commanded was running depth contours on the Goodwin Sands when a pinnace came out from Dover with orders for me to report to Admiral Benson in London. I turned over command to my First and went in with them at once. I well knew what it was I would hear in London.

The next morning I was ushered into Benson's sanctum at the Admiralty to face my sister Martha standing next to the old man's huge desk. Her face was twisted in grief and she looked at me with angry, narrow eyes. Even Admiral Benson seemed upset and his hands played aimlessly with a paper knife in the shape of a dolphin.

"They are drowned at sea, Abell" said my sister, her voice cracked with grief. "Father and Grandfather together! How could they have gone out . . . ?" Her voice broke and she could not continue.

The Admiral, quite a sentimental old man actually, wiped his eyes and shook his head. "It was a great storm, Abel. From all accounts, the greatest in this century off New England. Your father and grandfather left Cuttyhunk together the day before it blew up. They were heading for New Bedford in a small catboat but were not seen

again. Over one hundred vessels were lost along the North American coast."

I could not weep with my sister. I had done that when Mother died, and again at Victoria when Father said good-bye to me from his compartment on the boat train. Now it was ended.

Martha angrily twisted her handkerchief in both hands. "There were never two men who knew the ocean better than they. How could they have set out in that? How, Abel?"

What could I tell Martha and the Admiral, except the truth? "Father spoke to me at the station when he left, Martha. He spoke very directly and simply." I looked at them both. "He said that he and Mother had lived their lives very much together and that wherever Mother had gone, he was going, too."

They waited silently. I watched my sister, tall and handsome and fiercely independent. "He asked me to comfort you," I said to her. "Tell me how I may do that, dear Martha."

Martha's tears ran steadily down her face. "I never understood them, Abel," she answered in a voice I could just make out. She walked over to me from the desk and we silently hugged each other.

Admiral Benson swiveled around to look out his window and busily wipe his eyes. "They were strong, brilliant, and capable people," said the Admiral almost to himself. "One seldom meets a man and woman so perfectly matched, and so perfectly handsome together." He turned back and peered at me.

"I have a cable from one Amos Forbes of the First State Street Trust in Boston, Abel. They have collected your Grandfather's things from the Cuttyhunk keeper's house. There are financial and other matters to be dealt with. Now, my boy, the Royal Navy cannot provide you transportation for such needs." He paused and winked at me, quite cheerful now. "But a Lieutenant Dyer of the U.S. Naval Hydrographic Office has contacted us about copies of logs from vessels which went through this large storm. They are attempting in Washington to write a meteorological history of the episode. Now, Abel, if you were to go there as our observer for a fortnight, to see how they are accomplishing this and to write us a report on whether we should attempt similar histories, well, I would hardly be concerned if you then took some time to organize your father's and grandfather's affairs in New England."



The old man had always been my patron, and now he beamed at his ability to assist us at this time using his official powers.

I turned to my sister. "Do you wish to come with me, Martha?" I asked her.

Martha, her face dry but still pinched with grief, shook her head. "I am an Englishwoman, Abel. Mother and Grandmother are buried here. I will not go back."

I nodded. "They would want that, Martha. You have your exhibition of photographs to prepare. I only wish Mother might have lived to see it."

My sister's face was set and serious, peering at me. "She will somehow know about it, Abel. I believe that very much."

I arrived in Washington in June and found several young naval officers hard at work on the history of the gigantic blizzard. Copies of logs for the period March 10-15 were still arriving by post and cable. Our work room at the Naval Department was large, and sketch charts and graphic presentations of barometric pressure and wind strength were spread out over several drawing tables.

A breezy young Ensign Wilkinson was responsible for ship's log verification, and his opinion of the merchant service's ability to make weather observations was at its lowest ebb.

"Read this one, Abel," he would say to me in cheerful disgust. "A full two-tenths off from the obviously correct reading! Damn! Another barometer filled with whiskey instead of mercury!"

But Lieutenant Dyer, older and with more time at sea, gave me a wink. "Seems to me," he said, puffing on a pipe, "that a two-tenths-inch error on a vessel rolling sixty degrees in a hundred-mile wind just ain't so awful. God, I can remember. . . ."

So coffee would pour and sea yarns would start and I thought to myself that my father and grandfather might tell these confident sailors some things they had not heard before.

I looked through most of the log accounts and one day came across the following:

*American Schooner Yacht Gitania, Capt. Sherlock:  
March 13—1 A.M.—Twenty miles SE of Block  
Island. Wind NNW, blowing heavy gale with terrific*

squall; wore around and hove to on port tack. 4 A.M.—Wind WNW, blowing heavy gale; snowing hard and could see almost nothing; heavy sea, spray flying, decks deluged with water; got out drags and put out oil-bags on the weather side. Barometer 28.7 and pumping .1 to .2 inch as squalls come over us. 6 A.M.—Wind stronger, a perfect hurricane from NW. Vessel driven well over; only the oil saved us. Saw a small catboat, one man at helm, driven by a thread of sail. Passed us well to the east heading SE, at an astonishing clip. Captain waved to us, then blinding snow squalls masking everything. Ice building on rig and ship straining badly.

The data compiled by the Hydrographic Office indicates that the storm's maximum barometric depression, 28.55 inches of mercury, occurred some twenty miles southeast of Block Island on the morning of March 13. I believe that my father's catboat reached that location at that same time. How he knew that this intense barometric eye would appear at that time and place, I cannot explain.

I received a letter from Amos Forbes inviting me to the Independence Day celebration on Naushon, so on July 3rd I traveled north by train to New York, then east to Woods Hole, arriving there on the morning of July 4th. The day was calm and brilliant, a soft west wind keeping sails just filled.

Naushon's trim steam ferry, *Coryell*, awaited the morning train at the dock and I boarded her with a crowd of well-dressed, handsome people, Forbeses and friends of Forbeses I supposed, and soon we were backing out into Woods Hole for the brief run across to Hadleys Harbor.

I stood at the bow, staring at the island ahead as a tall, severely pretty young woman came up behind me. "Commander Roon?" she inquired.

"At your service, madam," I said at once.

She held out her hand for me to shake. "I am Betsy Forbes, Commander. Amos Forbes is my father."

"You are kind to have me," I said. "It is more than fifteen years since I was last on this beautiful island. Father and Mother have talked so often of it, and especially about the Independence Days."

Miss Forbes lifted an eyebrow. "We are not as grand as



when Moses Folger ran things. Cape Cod is different now, Commander."

"Oh," I said half to myself, as we rounded into Hadleys Harbor and the big house stood huge and rambling on the low hill ahead, "Naushon House seems as huge and grand as I remember it."

*Coryell* ran smartly into her roofed-over slip and we stepped ashore. Miss Forbes led me up the hill and, halfway, we paused as a short, stocky man came briskly toward us.

"Father, meet Commander Abel Roon," she said. "I have told him that we cannot provide the legendary displays and parties that Naushon once could boast."

Amos Forbes shook my hand, then indicated the big house. "We will do our best, Betsy. Come, Commander, no doubt you wish to walk about this place where so many remarkable events transpired. When you were here before, in the seventies, you were far smaller. The tunnel to Hadleys has long been filled in, but there are still a few signs left of those days."

We walked up on the wide, rambling porch of Naushon House. Comfortable rockers, some of them occupied, were scattered about, but Amos Forbes led us directly in the double front door to the huge hall with its central staircase. I stopped then, caught almost in midstep by an intense sweet smell of flowers, dense and thick. I drew in several breaths.

Amos Forbes turned and smiled at us. "We have returned the solarium to its former glory, Commander. When the breeze blows through, the whole house fills with its scents."

He went over to a table and lifted a cardboard box. "Commander Roon, my daughter and I went to Cuttyhunk after the storm to pack your grandfather's property. The letters and other small, personal items I put in this box, the rest is in trunks upstairs." He handed the box to me.

I took off the cover and lying on top was a half-plate daguerreotype showing my mother in her wedding dress, with Grandfather and Judge Folger standing on each side. I peered down at the picture, unable to speak. We had always had other pictures of that day on the walls in London, but this plate I had never seen before. It captured, as nothing since, Mother's perfect, joyous beauty. The

scents of the solarium seemed to paralyze me and I could only stare down at the picture in wonder.

Forbes peered at me intently. "Your mother was the most beautiful woman ever seen in these parts, Commander," he said in an even voice. "When Betsy and I went to Cuttyhunk, almost a week after the storm, the keeper's house smelled of flowers, of honeysuckle. Sarah Allen told us that on the night after they left, when the gale reached its fiercest peak, that scent suddenly and strongly filled the entire house. In March, the outside temperature at zero, the odor was, as the girl described it, overpoweringly sweet."

They were both looking at me from stiff, puzzled faces. The flower smells surely overpowered me, and I was unable to speak for a moment. My mother looked out at me from forty years ago, her perfect face eternally alive with delight.

"Commander," said Miss Forbes in a low voice. "Your father surely knew where he was taking his boat that night?"

What did they want from me, these people? I could explain none of it. Nor could I take my eyes from the daguerreotype. "What they lived is over," I half-whispered to her. "It was not mine to understand, Miss Forbes. I can give you no explanation."

Betsy Forbes looked down at the picture I held. "Your mother died in February. Did he go to her, Commander? What did he find in that storm?"

Amos Forbes, embarrassed by such directness, put his hand on his daughter's arm. "Now Betsy . . ." he began.

I did not resent her blunt, driving questions. She reminded me in that, of Mother. "I cannot say," I told her. "They had lived, together, through remarkable events, here on Naushon and at other places. You said Cape Cod is different, Miss Forbes. The world is different, totally different. Father . . . happened to . . . come along and be both part of the old and new. But all that is behind us. The whales are gone, the Indians subdued, the ships run by steam."

Miss Forbes was tall, and her simple, ankle-length dress fitted a handsome, sturdy, curving figure. Her face peered at me sternly, still unsatisfied, and I suddenly thought that if Mother had been born to this time and place, she would face me with a similar, fierce curiosity. "Do you think,



Commander, that this extraordinary devotion between your mother and father is no longer possible either?"

I had to smile at that. "It is rare enough at any age of the world, Miss Forbes. But I hope and believe it is still possible." I looked directly at her and finally she smiled. She was prettier when she smiled and her level, grey eyes were softened.

"Come, Commander Roon," she said, in a now cheerful voice. "Father and I will show you our ancient wonders here. First, the hidden room, then the hut where *Hero* took the contrabands aboard, next the still-scorched patch where the balloon was launched."

"A bunch of tomfool Yankee yarns," said a chuckling Amos Forbes. "Betsy can take you on the grand tour, Commander. Our fireworks came from Newburyport, Massachusetts, on a buckboard instead of on a clipper from Cathay, but they need looking after just the same. I will see you two at dinner."

And so it is that my first day on Naushon begins.





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