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# There Is Another Shore

by

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*Clan Grandmother danced the hunt and tasted life, tasted richly of it as it flowed imperceptibly upward, everywhere subtle but everywhere present, rising from the impenetrable, stygian depths of the lower world. She had dreamed that this hunt would be good, and all her senses confirmed that on this day, her dreaming would be true. The middle world was heavy with life, thick with undivided, invisible vitality. Surely, surely, there would be large prey as well.*

*She summoned the clan with its name trilled in song. Then "Hunt! Hunt! Hunt!" she sang, and in response to her musical voice her kin fell in behind and moved southward, quickening their swift rhythm to match her own. Third Son advanced to her side, as was proper, but she gestured him a little distance farther away, for it was still too soon, it had not been long enough since Second Son, always her favorite, had died and been claimed by the beings that dwelt in the world below. Clan Grandmother had tried to follow him as he receded, and for a*

*time had sent forth vision into the lower world, far beyond where her physical body could go, until at last he was gone. She had not yet dreamed of him. She wondered if she would. She wondered if any part of his essence had returned as part of the rich life that flowed up around her. In any case, she would remember. Kinship was not to be forgotten. Kinship was important. Kinship mattered.*

*Yet now the hunt must occupy her full attention. The clan spread itself wide, singing as they danced, seeking game with every sense. Small animals scattered at their approach, some escaping in bursts of frantic speed, some hiding, a few changing from world to world, if they possessed some special ability that enabled them to do so. "Forbear! Forbear!" Clan Grandmother sang, that the clan might ignore them all, for today they sought more substantial prey. From time to time she herself shifted briefly, slightly, into the upper world, using her carefully honed senses to detect game at greater range than vision could reach. Conditions were favorable — she could see almost to the edge of the middle world. But there was no prey, not yet.*

*Considering the game and its habits, she led the clan in a wide, sweeping curve toward the east, hoping to find some of the animals feeding where they might be trapped against the border of reality, there where it loomed far away, at the edge of the middle world. She ascended again after a time, and yes, yes, there in the distance was a transient commotion too large to be caused by anything but the great beasts they sought. They were still too remote for the use of vision, but she turned the clan confidently toward them, conveying her excitement with song and increased speed. In time the calls of the game itself became audible, mingling with the voices of the clan, first faintly but soon unmistakably, and then the clan needed no further urging. They accelerated*

*forward, forming a long line beside her, bound together in the cooperative thrill of the hunt, eager for the taste of fresh meat, eager for full bellies, eager for the kill.*

*“Joy! Joy! Joy!”, Clan Grandmother sang, and in flashing exuberance lifted her powerful body entirely into the upper realm, where it hung — huge, dark and glistening — for a moment, then fell back with a thunderous crash, an impact that wracked the boundary with the middle world, tossed up tremendous billows of froth and spray, and scattered myriad upon myriad of tiny droplets, shimmering like promises, shining like rainbows, all quickly snatched and scattered by the wind, skittering hastily away, far away, far, far across the wide and foaming sea.*

Ean McCrae half fell out of the tiny cabin as *Devereaux Island* rounded the harbor jetty and felt the first sharp pitch of the shallow-water swell. He glanced behind him — yes, all the hatches were tight and nothing in his student cabin had come undone — then grabbed hastily for a handrail as an even more severe wave all but tossed him clear of the deck. Somewhere in the bowels of the ship, something medium-sized and loose clanged metallically. He wondered who would suffer the embarrassment of having forgotten to fasten it down. Its irregular rhythm seemed to match his own erratic lurches as he moved from grip to grip, aft through the gleaming white passageway, then carefully — both hands now — climbed the ladder to the main deck. He peered cautiously through the greenish glass of the thick light, to make sure that the decks were clear — *Devereaux Island* had low freeboard to facilitate getting equipment in and out of the water, and in only moderately rough conditions a half meter of sea water might occasionally sweep the area under the tackle for the main winch. Satisfied, he undogged the hatch, stepped over the high threshold, then closed and secured it at once.

Ean was never sure whether the motion was really easier on deck, or whether it merely helped to have a horizon to show which way ought to be up, and a chance to see oncoming waves before they took effect. At any rate, his balance was immediately easier, and his mood improved with the brisk bite of wind in his face. He looked around expectantly. A handful of students sat bravely on the equipment lockers near the entry to the laboratory, some showing real enjoyment at the prospect of an overnight cruise and a few merely trying unsuccessfully to look less seasick than they were. Speaking of which — he sighed softly — there was Chrissy, hanging over the rail.

She had put her hair up for the cruise, but a few long strands had worked loose and now blew freely in the wind. They did not go well with her complexion — icky green and straw blonde were a poor match. He leaned against her, twining one leg around a stanchion to brace himself, and began to massage the small of her back with both hands. After a minute her stomach convulsed, and a few spoonfulls of ropery fluid fell from her mouth, only to be torn apart by the wind before they could hit the water, then swiftly dissipated in the tossing foam astern.

“Did you take any medicine?”

She cleared her throat and spat before answering.

“No. I don’t usually *get* seasick.”

“There’s a time for everything. And it’s pretty rough out here — the storm kicked up a lot of swell. Do you want some now? I’ve got some Bonamine...”

“No. I don’t feel like it will help.”

He sighed and considered, still kneading her back, enjoying the feel of her in spite of himself, wishing he weren’t and feeling guilty, but unable to ignore taut curves and the resilient

flexing of strong, slender muscle under smooth conforming layers of fabric. Synthetics were much sexier than cashmere, no doubt about it. And, hm, maybe that was an idea to make her feel better.

“Okay, but you know, if you’re trying to be macho, it’s not working,” he said, hugging her briefly and then returning to his massage.

“I never remember to practice,” she laughed, and an unexpected smile flashed briefly, warmly, over her thin, wan features.

“Are you sure you don’t want some seasick pills? I don’t think I’ve used them all up yet.”

That brought another smile, and he could feel her muscles relaxing a little. She leaned back against him and put her head against his cheek momentarily.

“Thanks, E’, but...” she wrinkled her forehead thoughtfully, “I just don’t feel like taking medicine today. Damn, though, it just isn’t like me to be sick to my stomach. I don’t know what to make of it.”

“Okay,” he said, closing the issue. “We’re past the worst of it anyway. Look, there’s the front of the outwash from the slough.” He pointed. There was an abrupt color transition in the water between the turbid, milky green of the silt-bearing effluent from the land, and the deeper, more transparent, luminous emerald of the open sea beyond.

Her interest perked, and he had gotten her looking at the horizon. “It looks greener than usual,” she commented. “Must be the start of a plankton bloom. I’ll bet there is a big slug of nutrient upwelling after the storm.”

“And in the runoff,” he elaborated.

“And it’s been a couple of days, so the mixing has slowed down, so the upper layers stay shallow long enough for lots of photosynthesis.”

“You are parroting from the final last year.”

“No. I missed it on the final. But that made me so embarrassed I’ll never forget it now.”

She was laughing again. Gently, but nonetheless laughing. Good.

“I guess I’ll have to get serious about flunking courses,” he said, picking up the thought.

“At least, if I ever want to learn anything, huh.?”

But she wasn’t looking at him, she had craned her head and was peering forward, along the direction of the ship’s motion, toward the far western horizon, vividly clear in the clean fresh air of the open ocean. Very good.

“I’ll bet it gets blue again out past the shelf break,” she mused, half to herself.

“Hey! We’re talking about flunking courses. That’s a tough job, but someone has to do it, right? It takes real sacrifice to make the upper half of the class possible!”

She looked at him sidelong, through lowered lashes. The color in her cheeks was beginning to look more normal.

“You know, if you’re trying to be macho...” she grinned slyly, “it’s not working.”

“Shucks,” he pouted, “will you teach me how?”

She aimed an elbow at his stomach. He dodged just in time, then grabbed frantically at the stanchion as an untimely wave compounded his motion and left him teetering momentarily, hips abeam the top of the rail, in real danger of going overboard. She locked an arm around his waist as his hands closed firmly on the painted steel pipe.

“Ean!” she gasped. “I’m sorry. That was my fault.”

They looked at each other in shared alarm. The sea was rough enough that recovering a man overboard would be problematic, and so cold that even though the shore was still scarcely a mile off, an unprotected swimmer would lose strength and consciousness before being able to swim in, even if the water were calm.

“Aw, I just did it to distract you from being seasick.”

She stared at him, slender hand at the corner of her mouth, real worry continuing in her pale blue eyes. They had both slouched low behind the solid security of the rail.

“Really,” he continued, lamely.

“Well, you certainly gave me something else to worry about.” She actually did look a lot better, all of a sudden. Maybe it actually had helped.

Chrissy continued to look at him gravely, then finally put her hand down and took a breath.

“We’d better get some sack time. Our first watch is midnight to four, I recall.”

“That’s right. But it isn’t ‘we’ — I’m sharing a cabin with Derek. And I’m not so sure I can get any sleep with this much motion.”

She grinned impishly. “Well, there are nine women on board and I drew the single room. And I want some rest, whether I sleep or not.” She turned toward the hatchway. “I’m tired, Ean, and I still feel a little queasy.” She frowned thoughtfully, then glanced briefly at him over her shoulder. “Do you want to come along and just cuddle for a while?” Balancing carefully, she moved away from the rail.

He followed her.

*Clan Grandmother swam slowly beside Third Son as the night fell, stomach full and satisfied, motions heavy and lethargic after her meal, rocking slowly as the swells first lifted her great body and then let it down, not quite asleep but nevertheless only partly aware of her surroundings. And as she expected they would, the dreams came again. To no one else in the clan did they come — to no one else she had ever met did they come — but she, Clan Grandmother, did dream, and this dream she had had before. It was one whose meaning, whose very concept, she could barely begin to fathom.*

*It seemed, in her dream, that she was very small. She did not know how she knew that, but nevertheless, in her dream she was tiny, tinier even than the newest of newborn calves. Her body was covered with... something, something odd and matted, something that was growing out of it. And she was not in any of the worlds, she was in some other kind of place. It was like the upper world, it was a place where vision could not go and even hearing was poor, but it was not empty, as the upper world was. There was something next to her, something huge, a long and rounded surface like one of the prey breasts, but rough and grooved, and not flexible. There seemed to be more like it in the distance, elongated in many different directions.*

*And in her dream, the thing next to her was not merely there, she moved upon it, she interacted with it to move in a manner she could never understand, or even clearly recall when the dream was over. She was in firm contact with the thing, as if she and it were continually colliding, but no, for they never bounced apart. She moved her flippers and motion took place, but no, flippers could not move her in the upper world, no, she knew that. Yet when she moved her flippers — and her hind flipper felt very strange, its two sides seemed to have minds of their own, as if her tail were split in two — but no, she had a tail and also a split hind flipper — no...*



*Clan Grandmother woke up, confused by the dream as she always was. In the dream, she did something incomprehensible with her flippers to the big solid thing, and locomotion took place. It was impossible, but somehow, somehow, nevertheless she moved. Dreams were very strange indeed. What could it possibly be? What could it possibly mean?*

From the boom box in *Devereaux Island's* laboratory, an ethereal soprano sang a haunting, lyrical melody about loss, the sea, and the west coast of Ireland. Chrissy sat in a chair braced carefully in an alcove between one sink and the side counter, unhappily eyeing a kludge of aspirators, clear plastic tubing, and filter funnels that students for years had nicknamed “the Hydra”, on account of its many suction heads. On the counter top to her left was a small basket that had been duct-taped in place. It held opened vials, each eagerly awaiting a filtered phytoplankton sample. Beside it, in a bottle rack — also taped down — were a bottle of acetone and a precision-calibrated dispensing pipette. Fine forceps rattled across the counter top at extreme rolls of the ship: They were used to pry the sticky submicron filters out of the funnels. She rescued them and stuffed them under an edge of tape. It seemed to Chrissy that most of the time, the filters disintegrated and half the sample ended up stuck to the funnel walls. So what good was the precision pipette, anyway?

“Station C4 in twenty minutes.” The second mate’s voice sounded harsh and metallic through the intercom, a jarring clash with the soprano, but somehow far more distant and far less real. Chrissy sighed, pushed back a wayward lock of hair, and turned off the fresh-water tap. *Rrrrip!!* Duct tape parted with an irregular tearing noise as Ean carefully secured the latest crate of filled sample bottles atop the stack in the corner by the big bench. They were out of bungee

cords. There were never enough bungee cords aboard a research vessel at sea anyway, and somehow a newly-made-up box of them had gotten left ashore in the back of some empty-headed unmentionable's truck. Fortunately, there was plenty of duct tape.

"I'm ready for the next batch," she said in reluctant monotone.

"No more!" gushed Ean. "We're on top of them for the moment. Remember, we're still in shallow water, so we've only been taking bottles from six depths."

Chrissy beamed, and her shoulders relaxed visibly. "That's right. Oh, wow! We get to take a break! A first! I don't think I've ever had a break on a cruise before."

"Tell you what," Ean nodded his head thoughtfully. "You go wake the captain and I'll ask him to make a note of it in the log."

"Right," she responded with considered nonchalance, getting up and starting to stretch, "and you come looking when I don't come back." Her neck cracked as she twisted her head from side to side. "Let's see what it's like outside. Where's Joan and Derek?"

"Sacked out in the lounge. Let 'em be — they've got enough to do manhandling the rosette over the side in all this sea." He opened the hatch cautiously, and they eased through.

The waning gibbous moon had floated well up in the southeast, its splendid pallor lending an unearthly quality to nighttime at sea. The sky above was still crystal clear after the final passage of the storm, but fog had begun to form near the ocean surface, so that although the view straight up was all black night sky and bright stars, to look sideways was to look through tenuous irregular tendrils of luminous white, tendrils that stole details swiftly with distance until, only a few swells away from *Devereaux Island*, all was lost in featureless fog, in a radiant mass that seemed to be lustrous moonglow magically made thick and congealed, and almost palpable.

“Are you cold?” Ean asked as they moved carefully across the deck.

“No. I’m Capilene top to toe, so I don’t even know if I’m wet. I’ve got my paddling jacket on under my windbreaker, too.”

“Me, too — aren’t synthetics wonderful? — except for my outer sweater, and that’s wool. But I’m always all wet, so I wouldn’t know the difference. Don’t grab the rosette, it’s not that secure.”

She self-consciously let go of the meter-long water sampling bottle, one of a cluster of twelve, grouped around an electronic instrument package and a hoist point, that she had grasped to steady herself. “How can it not be tied down and still be on board?”

“It is tied down, but you add half again to its weight.”

“More like a quarter! But anyway, it ought to be tied down well enough for when they’re full, and they’re all empty now.”

He considered and shrugged. “You’re probably right.” But she moved to the railing and took hold there, anyway. Ean moved to her side and leaned gently against her, slipping an arm around her slender waist.

“How pretty!” she exclaimed, peering straight down into the sea. “I can’t tell whether the foam is phosphorescent or it’s just moonlight. It’s like a dream. I wonder what it is.”

“Phosphorescence. Tina said it was like this before the moon came up. See how the wake is especially bright, right forward where the bow stirs it up?” Suddenly he leaned and peered intently forward along the ship’s hull. “Hey! What the hell is that?”

“What are you talking about?”

“I thought I saw something long and stiff in the water, on the face of that next swell. Look! There, right under the bow!”

“Ean, be careful! Get back!” Chrissy shouted as she tried to steady him.

But whatever it was, the second mate saw it just at that moment, and put the helm hard over in a desperate attempt to convert a solid collision into a glancing blow. *Devereaux Island* twisted and rolled in sudden evasive action, then lurched abruptly and resounded deeply, like a great, dull drum, as the object collided solidly with the hull, abeam the wheelhouse on the starboard side.

The captain made it to the bridge in nine seconds flat, by which time the second mate already had the twin diesels at idle and had sounded the alarm klaxon. But it was a minute and a half before the inexperienced students asleep below had all been reminded that a muster of hands was the first part of emergency drill. Then Jean, running aft to assemble, was knocked into a bulkhead by the chief engineer, who was running forward to check for damage, and twisted her ankle badly enough to need a full minute to climb the ladder. And Tom and Tina, who had been making out in the flat-bottomed launch on the foredeck, took almost three minutes to work themselves carefully back along the lee outside passage and around the deckhouse to the muster area, where they weren't counted at first because the mate had gone to roust Derek out of the lounge, where against all odds, he had managed to stay asleep even through the sound of the klaxon. So all in all, it was almost six minutes before the captain truly knew that two of his complement were no longer aboard.

*And in that much time*, he thought, gazing helplessly into the fog, listening to the departing feet of a runner sent to check the cabins and lab one more time, *in that much time, with this much*

*wind and how long it took us to get our way off, we might have drifted a quarter mile apart. He lifted his hand to his temples. They might as well be on the moon, he thought ruefully. At least, he sighed slowly as he stared into the dense white luminosity that blocked sight in all horizontal directions, at least, you can see the moon.*

*Clan Grandmother heard the collision as a long, low boom echoing through the middle world, and turned slowly toward it in curiosity. She had been aware of the swimming noises of the great creature that stopped and started as it bobbed across the upper boundary of the middle world, but this was not a sound that she had heard before.*

*She thought carefully. She rather admired the huge, stupid creatures for their power and speed, even if their bodies were rigid and the rhythms of their dance boring, but as a rule she kept the clan well away from them. One such had hurt her terribly when she had gotten too close to it in her youth — she still vividly remembered the pain in the top of her head and the taste of her own blood in the world around her. She couldn't be sure that the sound was really from the creature itself, but the overtones that indicated distance were similar, and there had been no other loud noises from that direction, so it probably was.*

*And it had never happened before. She didn't know what it was, and it might be something she ought to know about. It was her responsibility to the clan to find out.*

*"New?" she sang thoughtfully, mostly to herself, and then continued more loudly, with overtones of decision. "New. New! New!" Clan Grandmother motioned Third Son close by her side, and danced away, in the direction of the noise. The rest of the clan followed, spaced out irregularly in small subgroups of twos and threes.*

“Come on, Chrissy, we’ve got to get out of the water!” Ean clung to the side of the half-waterlogged tree trunk that *Devereaux Island* had struck, trying to hold on with one hand and assist with the other.

“I can’t get any footing, And what if it rolls?” She swallowed salt water, coughed and spat.

“If it rolls, then you’ll just be back in the water and you can climb out again. We’ve got to get out of the water while we still can. It’s too cold. We’ve got to!”

“I know! I know. All right. Let me think. It looks like the trunk tapers down in that direction.” She looked away from Ean, to her right. “Let’s move sideways and see if we can find some branch stubs or something we can use to climb on.”

Three minutes later they had scrambled atop the trunk and were clinging low and close to its surface, face to face, with their bodies parallel to its length. Cold, eager water lapped regularly at their sides, but they were as much out of the ocean as in it.

“What is this thing anyway?” she said.

“The bark feels like a redwood, but I can’t tell for sure. This big, it must be, though. How do you suppose it got out here anyway??

“The northwesterly brought it down the coast and the surface drift pushed it off shore. But I am surprised there are any this big near salt water. I’d thought the areas near the coast highway were long since logged off. Damn, of all the bad luck.”

“Why don’t I try wriggling around beside you. We’ll be warmer if we press together, and then at least one side of us won’t get wet.” She steadied him as he moved, joints slow to respond

in the cold. “If *Devereaux Island* is okay, they’ll be trying to look for us by now. Do you have anything metal, on you or part of your clothing, that might reflect radar a little?”

“Nine dental fillings. A Swiss Army knife. An underwire bra.”

He chuckled in spite of himself. “About eighty-five cents change, my car keys, and the zippers on my jacket. Look, the jacket is just a windbreaker and isn’t doing any good all wet, let’s put all our loose metal junk in one of the pockets and take turns holding it up at arm’s length.”

“Okay.” Her teeth chattered, and she clung close to him.

“The jacket’s got day-glow stripes on it,too. That will help if they come back in visual range.” He paused for a moment, fumbling with the garment. “You can keep your bra on, just for tonight.”

By moonlight he could see one eyebrow lift wryly. “Oh, wow, another first.” But her voice was dull and monotone, and she was shivering. Then, timidly, “Ean?”

“Yes.”

“Kiss me while I can still feel my lips.”

“Mmm.”

After a minute he remarked, trying to be positive, “Chrissy, is it my imagination or does it seem warmer here than it did on deck. I mean, we’re all wet and freezing and all, but somehow the wind doesn’t seem so bad.”

“I guess it must be your imagination, I’ve still got my bra on.” She pursed her lips and considered for a moment. “No, I see what you mean. But I don’t get it.”

“Oh — I do. Look, we’re down so low that when we’re in the troughs between waves we get into wind shadow from the swell itself. We only get the full force when we ride up onto the crests.”

“I don’t care, I’m still too cold.” She winced as a chill whitecap swept the top of the log. “Let me take a turn holding the jacket now. But the sea sure does look weird from down here.”

There was a geographic quality to the long, even swell. When the tree trunk lay in the hollow of a trough, looking down it was like looking down a drainage canal, or down a long valley between mountain ridges, that diminished in perspective until finally obscured by the all-encompassing fog, and the next approaching crest loomed terrifyingly over them, a certain doom promising to overrun and drown them both. But as it drew nigh it seemed to diminish, as if by magic, as the log rose to meet it, until it passed beneath them, the merest ripple, a handspan high, capped with foam and whipped by the suddenly fierce wind. Then the swell grew again, as the watery slope that led deep into the next trough passed beneath them, and the wind died back as they descended into its hollow.

“It’s spooky,” Chrissy said in subdued tones, turning her head from a receding wave to an approaching one, and abruptly screamed, for the great black dorsal fin that had unexpectedly emerged from the water beside them stretched almost six feet from the ocean surface to its glistening, narrow tip, even though the back of the animal that bore it was still submerged and invisible.

*Clan Grandmother waited at a little distance as Third Son investigated the new thing more closely. It was quiet and seemed not alive. She sent vision toward it and found it dense and*



*fairly homogeneous, with a rough surface bearing narrow linear grooves, here and there studded with small nubbins like barnacles, It tapered slightly toward one end, the end with the nubbins.*

*But there was more. There were strange tastes in the middle world here, tastes of an animal — a pair of animals — unlike any she was familiar with. But where were they? Where could they possibly be? Here there was surely no place to hide, and she had heard no sound of anything escaping. She moved cautiously closer.*

“I’ve never seen an orca at night before,” Ean whispered quietly, as he watched the massive animal lying awash beside the log.

“What’s it doing?” Chrissy lay next to him on the side away from the creature, and could not see so steeply down into the water.

“I can’t quite tell. Moving around and nosing at the tree trunk, it looks like.” The animal had progressed by half its body length along the log, moving slowly and systematically. The deep sigh of its breathing sounded occasionally, as its blowhole lifted above water and opened. “Maybe it’s scratching its back. Relax, there have only been a few documented cases of killer whale attacks on humans.”

“And if this turns into an attack, it won’t get documented, now will it? Do you think it knows we’re here?”

“I wouldn’t know.”

“Now what is it up to?” The whale was submerging slowly, descending while floating horizontally. Only a few feet of dorsal fin remained above the water.

“I can’t see — AAAHH!!” They shouted in unison as nine muscular tons of top carnivore abruptly pushed hard against the swell of the redwood and rolled it far to the side. Ean dug his fists and toes under the irregular, shredding bark and remained aboard as the log swayed upright again, but Chrissy had fallen in. He reached desperately for her and almost had her hand when she disappeared beneath the sea, far too fast for any explanation other than unspeakable horror, other than the certain knowledge that something had pulled her under, something that could only be a mouth.

*Clan Grandmother watched from a few body lengths away as Third Son poked at the thing until it rolled, then started in amazement as another thing, a living creature, miraculously appeared in the middle world beside it. She sent vision for a clearer view. Hmn. It was not a fish. She could tell from the arrangement of internal air spaces and the soft skin that it was more like a clan member, or like one of any of several tasty species that they preyed upon regularly. It was almost too small to be worth taking, but perhaps it would be good to eat. It was about the bulk of a calf and had four long flippers, all with bone inside, that looked absolutely useless.*

*Third Son ducked under the big thing, clumsily scraping his dorsal fin on the rough surface, and took one of the little creature’s flippers in his mouth. He drew the whole animal down where there would be no further risk of collision, and started palpating it curiously with his sensitive tongue. “Forbear! Forbear!” Clan Grandmother shouted at him. The creature was struggling desperately, and even if it was good to eat it would be well to learn some more about it before killing it.*

*Third Son, obedient to a fault, released his grip at once, but the creature continued to struggle. How could a thing like that ever dance in the middle world, with only those weak, narrow flippers. And surely it didn't need air again so soon, after so short a time below the boundary.*

*Nevertheless, it was frantic. Clan Grandmother flicked her powerful tail lazily, dove under it, and gently pushed it upward with her massive head, just as she had done with too many new calves to count. She returned it to the boundary of the middle world beside the big thing, right at the point where it had first appeared.*

Chrissy popped half way out of the water like a cork, coughing and trying to shout. "Ean!! E—" Her cries dissolved into a spasm of choking, but he had her upper arms in both hands, holding her against the side of the log, digging his toes into the bark of the great tree.

"It's all right. I've got you. It's all right. You're safe." He thought as he spoke that the last part of his statement was somewhat an exaggeration. She clung to him, coughing and choking, till at last her lungs cleared of water.

"Come on, get back on, you've got to get out of the water." He pulled weakly at her, energy sapped and muscles stiffened by the cold.

She tried ineffectually. "I can't, I can't, I'm too cold and I'm half drowned." She was shaking uncontrollably, body convulsing in huge shudders. "It had my leg in its mouth. I felt the teeth. Then it let go and I thought I was dying, but something, it must be the whale, something pushed me to the surface. What're we gonna do?" She pried her toes into a crack in the tree's

surface and tried to lever herself out of the numbing water, but wailed in frustration when the sheet of bark gave way and broke as she pressed on it.

Then they both noticed that they were not alone.

*Clan Grandmother nosed at the creature she had lifted. It was clearly too weak and ineffectual to present any conceivable hazard to the clan, and the tastes in the water made it clear that it would be good to eat. She was still full from the prey beast of yesterday, but a snack never hurt. Nevertheless, she remained curious. Where had the little thing come from? She had never seen its like in the middle world, and it clearly couldn't last long there anyway, so it must have come from some place else entirely. But where? She sent vision at the creature again, from close range. Its insides were oddly like her own, and oh! — she noted with curious bemusement — it was female. But there was not even any skin between the bones at the tips of the flippers, so they were indeed useless for dancing. This was a mystery. Maybe the big thing had something to do with it. She submerged and sent vision along its length, revealing more detail than before, but nothing really new. Yet vision could not reach all of it, so she lifted her head a little way into the upper world, to use sight. And after a moment's astonished stare, she could only thrash her great tail in amazement at what that lesser sense had revealed.*

It was another orca, an adult, but a smaller one, with its broad head nudging Chrissy's nearly helpless body. "Get it away from me!" she cried, thrashing weakly at it.

"I can't, I haven't any way," said Ean, trying to keep calm, "and let's not get it angry." He was appallingly weakened from the cold.

Chrissy's shaking had diminished.

"How do you feel?"

"Better." She was whispering again. "I think my strength is coming back. I've got all this thermal stuff on so I'm not really as cold as I ought to be. Just scared. Or maybe I'm getting too numb to notice the temperature." Again they tried to pull her out of the water, and again failed. "Let's wait a little, and try again," said Chrissy. Ean had hold of her upper arms, and was trying to brace her as far out of the water as possible. He shifted his position, on hands and knees, to get a better grip.

They looked down at the length of the great animal. It was a female, all right — the dorsal fin was low and broad, not sharply peaked like the male's.

"Will you look at the scars on top of her head," Ean whistled softly. "Looks like a propellor strike. They're really deep."

"I'm looking at her teeth," Chrissy hissed. "Hey! —"

"What!" he replied urgently.

"I felt tingly and warm for a moment. I must be being sonared. There it is again!" Then the female submerged abruptly. "Oh, damn, she's going to go for me!" Chrissy gasped in horror and doubled her legs back against the side of the tree, afraid of being pulled under again, but nothing happened. After a dozen heartbeats the scarred head reemerged from the water, spy-hopping abeam their position, but a little out of reach. The orca turned so that one solemn eye regarded them benignly. Then the animal shot another five feet of body length out of the water, fell back thrashing, and once more disappeared from sight.

*Clan Grandmother was flabbergasted. There was another creature pressed against the big thing, as if it were in constant collision. This must be the second of the pair she had tasted — the male. It was in permanent contact with the solid surface, it did not float away. Did they live there? Who would have thought of such a thing? And what was there for them to eat?*

*The male creature wiggled its flippers and moved a bit against the solid thing, and with dawning awareness Clan Grandmother realized that this was the stuff of her dream, that these creatures locomoted in contact with a surface, just as her dream self had done. She was watching it happen! That must be what the frail flippers were for, that must be what the flippers she had dreamed herself as having were like. And come to think of it, that big thing in the water had the same general shape and structure as the big things she had dreamed of... only there had been a whole lot more of them in her dream, and the dream ones were... fuzzier, somehow.*

*No matter. Oh, the things she was learning! These creatures were kin to her dream self. That made them kin to her! New kin! Oh, what wonders! And if looked as if the one in the middle world, the female, was trying to ascend into the upper world, so that she, too could collide with the big thing, only she couldn't quite manage to get there. But that was no problem. No problem at all...*

The broad back of the scarred female lifted Chrissy from the water as smoothly as an elevator. Too cold even to support herself on hands and knees, she rolled against Ean and he held her against him, held her between his body and the tree, tried to keep what scant warmth remained to her safe from the numbing, vicious, relentlessly deadly cold of the sea. The orca

spy-hopped again, lifting her head a little way out of the water and leaning it against the log within arm's reach, staring at them.

“She wants to help,” Chrissy mumbled half incoherently into Ean's ear, shivering continuously. “She wants to help, and I don't know why. Orcas have such humungeous brains, and they don't care about us at all in the field, they act like we're not worth paying attention to, but this one is interested, this one wants to interact. Thank you, lady, thanks for trying.” She put out a hand and gently touched the side of the animal's expressionless face. “This is a first, a world-class first, and it doesn't even matter that we're not going to live to tell about it, because no one would believe it anyway.” She sniffed and shuddered again. “I wonder if she's as alone out here as we are.”

Ean hugged her and replied softly. The cold was beginning to seep into his bones, too. “I don't think so. Look farther out.”

“Oh, my,” she breathed. “Oh, what a thing to see...” For in scattered groups of twos and threes, there were dozens of orcas within sight of the log, swimming slowly or bobbing in the swell.

“It's too big for just one family group, this must be a whole clan,” said Ean, now shivering uncontrollably himself. “Do you suppose she's the matriarch?”

“Maybe so... Hey! What's happening? Don't leave us!” But as if at a hidden signal, all the orcas had turned into alignment and sounded. The ocean was as empty of them as if they had never been. And in the near distance was another shadow in the mist, a great dark shape drawing inevitably nearer, like some final doom come unfairly upon them in their hour of ultimate distress.

But the loom in the fog was *Devereaux Island*, quartering the ocean on a hundred-meter grid, searching downwind and down-drift of the collision point with all the accuracy of three kinds of electronic positioning system, searching with twenty-five pairs of eyes glued to binoculars, with all lights out for better vision in the moonlit fog. And the sudden dazzle of the powerful searchlight from the bridge was as bright, and as warm, and as welcome, as the first baking-hot rays of the sun on the dawn of midsummer day.

Yet the whales were truly gone.

Ean and Chrissy were back from the hospital in time to help offload equipment from the abruptly aborted cruise.

“I still can’t quite believe it.” Chrissy shook her blonde hair in astonishment as she loaded another box of filled sample bottles onto the hand truck. “We’ve got to follow this up. We’ve got to find that animal again. She was treating us almost like family. This is important! This has never happened before!”

Ean put down his stack of boxes and sighed. “I agree, I really do, but I don’t know what to say. That’s the Pacific Ocean out there. That orca clan may have a range of fifty thousand square miles. You’re not going to be able to find her in a trackless ocean anymore than she can find you here on the land. I wish I had something more to tell you.”

She frowned glumly. “Oh, damn. I suppose you’re right, but I don’t care even if you are. And I still feel cold even though I know I’m not. Do you suppose anybody would object too much if we skipped out early and collapsed on the beach for a while?”



*Clan Grandmother sent vision to the bottom of the world. This canyon twisted thus, that one so, and they joined by that outcropping... no doubt about it. It had been here. Right here. She spy-hopped and stared intently at the strange stationary features beyond the edge of the middle world, then ducked under again and compared them with the orientation of the bottom. And the big noisemaker that couldn't dance had gone precisely that way. The clan was curious and troubled, but they followed her as she moved with determination toward the east.*

“Chrissy, what’s the matter?” She had stripped to shorts and a halter top, and lay on her back on the warm sand, upper arms stretched toward her head and wrists folded down over her eyes. She sighed.

“I really want to find that whale again. Maybe if she looks for us we can find each other. Damn. I can’t get over how gentle she was, how protected I felt when she lifted me out of the water.”

Ean gazed fondly at Chrissy. The halter top was slightly askew, and very distracting. He drew a breath and started to speak, but the sudden loud boom of surf forced him to pause. Breakers from the last of the storm swell were sweeping high up the beach, not far from where they lay. The tide had passed low and was rising fast -- they would have to keep an eye out to make sure they didn’t get suddenly and unexpectedly wet. The harbor across the jetty, where *Devereaux Island* lay at her pier, suddenly seemed a wonderful safe haven in a world wider and wilder than they had ever imagined.

He looked back at Chrissy, limbs akimbo on the sand, and always full of surprises. Surf boomed again. The shore meant safety, but sometimes it seemed constraining, too. And how sad never to know the rhythm of the moving water.

“Well, maybe, but I don’t know how to make it happen. That old female was a remarkable creature, but sweetheart, I doubt we can expect her to have superhuman powers, to know things that we ourselves don’t know. It’s not rational to —”

“Don’t you ‘sweetheart’ me, Ean McCrae! Why shouldn’t she be able to do things we can’t? Why shouldn’t she know things we don’t? Are you telling me she’s human? Is that your idea of what’s rational?”

Ean opened his mouth, closed it, and then opened it again.

“No,” he said firmly, meaning it. “I am wrong. And you are right. I apologize.” He shut his mouth once more, and decided it would be much better to keep it that way for a while.

She lifted one wrist and looked at him with gentleness in her clear blue eyes. “I’m sorry I snapped. My stomach is upset again.” And instantly he was all concern once more.

“Flu? Swallow too much sea water last night?”

“I don’t think so, I really don’t think that’s the problem. But I do think you’re being way too rational today. Silly up, Ean! Logic demands it.” Grinning impishly, she closed her eyes and put her wrists back over them, a picture of trust and of very tempting innocence.

Shaking his head, Ean started to speak but bit his tongue instead, perplexed at the rapidity of her shifting moods. The unfortunate truth was, that she was not likely to find that orca again if she searched for a dozen lifetimes. Then a commotion nearby in the water caught his eye, and he started to turn to see what it was.

*Clan Grandmother spy-hopped and surveyed the border of the world. She really wanted to see those two creatures again, particularly the female. She hoped she could find them! They were kin. Kinship was important. How satisfying it had been to feel the small one's obvious relief at being lifted back to the upper world. The more so — Clan Grandmother remembered the tastes in the water and laughed at the strength of her maternal instincts — the more so because the little female had been pregnant, a life within a life, all cradled on Clan Grandmother's broad forehead.*

*She moved sideways along the border, feeling the rhythm of the swell, the shallow slope of the beach, the safe, slow rise of the tide, spy-hopping regularly. Sure enough, here and there were creatures just like the ones from last night. And luck was with her — two of them looked familiar! She reviewed her plan once more. It ought to be possible, it truly ought to work, if her dream was to mean anything at all. She wondered if they would be surprised to see her again.*

*With muscular strokes of her great tail thrusting her powerfully forward, Clan Grandmother caught the rise of an onrushing swell. Accelerating rapidly, riding the wave, she surfed through the line of breakers, crashed through the borders of her own reality, and coasted gracefully and expectantly onto the wide shore on the other side. And behind her, the clan circled and danced astonishment, crying "Wonder! Wonder! Wonder!", far in the shining sea.*

**— Ends —**