

**Suzanne Palmer is a Hugo Award-winning SFF author whose short fiction has appeared in *Asimov's*, *Clarkesworld*, and other magazines. Her fourth and final novel in the Finder Chronicles came out last year, and a new standalone novel is forthcoming soon. She looks forward to working on short fiction again for a little while. Suzanne tells us she once accidentally ended up at NY Comic Con. While wandering in a daze through the vast crowds she ran into legendary comics genius Denis Kitchen, who proudly showed off some of his collection of turn-of-the-last-century postcards done using the chromolithography technique; despite having done some hands-on attempts at lithography during college, this technique was entirely unfamiliar, and she was fascinated. On the long drive home, the seeds of a story began to appear, but they didn't pull together until she found . . .**

# THE CHRONOLITH- OGRAPHER'S ASSISTANT

**Suzanne Palmer**

**T**homas stood at the top of the weedy stone path that led down the gently sloping hill to where a ramshackle cottage sat sprawled out against the backdrop of a hostile, unforgiving sea. The lingering gray of the morning's storm had not yet fully let go its grip on the land, and though there was a low cliff and long stretch of rocky beach between the cottage and the relentless waves, still, it was hard to make himself walk toward them. He was clenching and unclenching his hands in nervous motion as he finally worked up the nerve to go.

*What if she says no?* he thought. *And what if she says yes?*

He could not bear the thought of becoming a fisherman, though his family had been fisherfolk forever, and likely would continue to be long after he was gone and

his cowardice forgotten. But he had to be *something*, and in Penney Cove, there were not a lot of other options. This was one.

The flagstones varied, the ones further up toward the carriage road worn smooth and half-sunk into the mossy grass, but closer to the cottage they became sharper and newer, clearly laid more recently. Other than ubiquitous partridgeberry vine, bright with white flowers, that was encroaching on the edges of several, they were also better maintained.

Thomas reached the front step, trying to get his hands to stop trembling and his breathing to slow down, before he took a deep, shuddering, anxious breath and knocked on the peeling white paint of the door. Inside, he heard noise, then footsteps, then at last the door opened a crack.

"Yes? What is it?" the woman asked through the narrow gap.

"Mrs. Hammond? My name is Thomas. Thomas Neary," he said, having walked himself through this conversation a hundred times over the last three days, and still feeling utterly unprepared. Belatedly he remembered to take his cap off, and he tried to tuck it under one arm but fumbled, and stood there frozen when it fell to the ground.

"You've dropped your hat, Thomas Neary," the woman said.

"Yes, ma'am," Thomas said, face flushed in embarrassment, and they stared at each other for another few moments before he bent to pick it up, hands shaking so badly he dropped it twice more, put it back on his head, then took it off again and this time successfully stuck it under his armpit. "Mr. Winsor at the store suggested you might be looking for—" A *servant*, Mr. Winsor had said, but some damnable and undeserved little fit of pride seized him. "—an assistant, ma'am," he said. "I came to ask, um, inquire, um, see if that was so, and if I might apply for, um, put myself forward as perhaps—" He took a deep breath. "ma'am, I came to ask for a job."

She opened the door wider. She was short, with mousy brown hair streaked with gray, and was wearing an old, gray apron covered with smears and stains of a hundred colors, almost more than he imagined there could be. She seemed amused, which only made him flush more deeply. "Do you know what I do?"

"You're an artist, ma'am, or so Mr. Winsor says. One of the best, he also says. I am no good judge of such things myself," he answered.

"Aside from hats, can you carry things without dropping them?" she asked.

"Most of the time, ma'am," he answered. "I am not hopeless at either cooking or cleaning, ma'am, and even my mother would admit I am adept with a broom."

"And can you handle heavy things? I work with limestone blocks, and some are quite large."

"I assure you I am entirely fit," he said, desperate that she should not decide against him. "I can also fetch, cut, and stack firewood, and I did once assist my late father, may the Lord rest his soul, with repairing our roof, though I was only ten at the time—"

"And how old are you now?" she asked.

"Sixteen, ma'am."

"And you're not wanted out on a boat?"

Thomas drew in a quick breath, then said the inevitable words, quickly before they could get stuck and turn into shaking. "I have a terror of the sea, ma'am," he said.

"And in a fishing village, that leaves you banging on my door desperate for work," she said. She opened the door the remainder of the way, and leaned against the frame. Her gaze was sharp as a hawk's, and Thomas had to make an effort not to squirm as she studied him for a long moment.

Then she nodded. "Very well," she said. "I am willing to give you a try. Is a dollar for a full day appropriate?"

“Very generous, ma’am!” Thomas said. He had hoped for a quarter that, would have settled for a fifth.

“Before you agree too quickly, let me tell you, I am often ill-tempered and not always in a mood for chatter. Also, there are rules: when I am running the press, you stay out of the studio and you stay quiet. You do not touch my inks or my press without my express permission and oversight. Sometimes I may send you out looking for plants or berries or bark, or other such things, as pigment for my inks, so you need to not mind hiking, even in the rain, or if you last here that long, the snow.”

“I have good boots, ma’am,” he said. *Good* was less than honest, but he had boots, and he would make them do.

“Also, last and most important, there are times when I’m not here, or will tell you not to come here for a few days, and times when you are here and I may tell you that you can’t leave for a while,” she said. “You have to trust me. Would you? I am a stranger, and a strange one at that, but I would not see you harmed or lost.”

“It is a small cove, ma’am, and I can assure you I have tried to get lost in it many times without success, but I am mindful and obedient.”

She laughed at that. “Not too obedient, I hope, or you’ll be dull company. Do you come here hoping to become an artist yourself?”

“Oh, no,” he breathed. “I do not think I could draw even a wobbly line. Unless . . . would you need me to try? I would do poorly at it.”

“I don’t need you to try,” she said. “I need help carrying things, because some days I am old, and I need supplies and foraging and groceries. Does that seem much?”

Thomas thought about being at sea for days on end, constantly rocked and pitched as if the sea sought to throw him overboard, listening to the groan of the hull and the sails straining in the wind and waiting for one of the dark shadows under the water to be rocks, too late, too late, and the terrible splintering. . . . “It is not too much, ma’am,” he said.

“Very well, then,” she said, and reached into her apron pocket and handed him two twenty-cent coins. “Come back tomorrow with bread for us both and an extra loaf for the day after, for I never seem to find the time to bake, and we will see what there is for you to do.”

Mr. Mercer, at the bakery, sold him two large loaves of the morning’s bread, still warm from the oven and wrapped in brown paper. Thomas hurried down the lane and out of town along the rough coastal road to the cottage, the wind beating against him threatening rain, and he worried that when he arrived the bread would already be cold and hard, and he would have failed his first day.

*Like every other day*, he thought. Why should he expect any different?

Mrs. Hammond answered the door on his second knock, and didn’t seem disappointed to see him. She let him in, and he noted that she seemed less tired, and in the sunlight her hair looked less gray. It occurred to him that he had neither any real information about her age nor any skill at judging such about women, but even he knew enough not to ask. He did know she was a widow and an artist, and that her continuing favor was all that kept him from the sea, and he was satisfied with that.

“Thomas, right?” Mrs. Hammond said. “I left myself a note so I’d remember. Come on in. You brought bread?”

“Yes, ma’am,” he answered, as she held the door wide for him and he stepped in, wiped his shoes upon the mat carefully even though whatever rain they were due had not yet come to muddy the roads, then followed her with his parcel of loaves clasped to his chest into her kitchen.

It was a small, tidy space. A cast-iron range stood against the stone chimney wall, putting out tangible warmth despite the breezes off the water coming through the

open windows. It was a comfortable balance, and very unlike the sweltering claustrophobia of his family's much larger kitchen. A kettle sat idle atop the range, and a cup and saucer on the table said it had already done its duty for the morning. Papers were spread out on the table, some bearing light pencil art, others filled with a cramped and uneven handwriting. Hammond picked them up and put them in a stack, then pointed him toward a chair.

"Ma'am?" he asked.

"Sit," she said. "Let me get a knife for the bread, and some butter. Or jam? Which do you prefer?"

"Ma'am, perhaps I should, as your ser—as your *assistant*, I should be helping with these things?"

"Do you know where anything is?" she asked, spreading her arms wide to indicate the kitchen, or possibly the whole of the house.

"No, ma'am," he admitted.

"Well, then there you go. Sit," she said, and he did.

Mrs. Hammond opened what he assumed was the pantry door and stepped within, then emerged a few moments later with a bread board, knife, orange cloth napkin, and several small jars that she placed on the table. As she went to the cabinets for plates, he stood again and took it upon himself to unwrap one of the loaves and slice it, silently willing his hands to remain steady, to cut neatly and evenly, and was relieved that he managed to do a decent job of it.

Mrs. Hammond set the plates down, a thin, elegant porcelain china that would have had his mother in fits trying to figure out how to turn one over to look at the maker's imprint without being caught at it.

"Help yourself, Thomas," she said, sitting opposite him, and tapped the jars one by one. "This is butter, this one a nice crabapple jelly from a friend in Nova Scotia, and the last is an orange marmalade."

"Shall I make you one?" Thomas asked. It seemed like he should offer.

Mrs. Hammond leaned back in her chair and tilted her head to one side, studying him. "Did you come here to be a servant, or my assistant, Thomas? It might be only a matter of words, but while I see myself as the sort of person who might have the latter, the former seems . . . not my style. And I should think an assistant would call me Mrs. Hammond, or even Celia, rather than ma'am, which is a servant's word designed to pretend there is an earned respect, when instead it is only an acknowledgment that the other has power and oneself does not."

Thomas's mother would have taken up vociferous argument with that, and he must have smiled because Mrs. Hammond relaxed a little and tapped the orange jar with one finger. "Try the marmalade, then," she said. "I'm working on a print, and wish to get back to it."

"Yes, m—Mrs. Hammond," he said, and picked up the jar and opened it with a loud pop. It was pleasantly cold, and he spread a smaller amount than he would have if it had been his mother's jam on a slice of bread, so as not to be seen as greedy and wasteful. He took a bite, and savored the wonderful flavor. "So good!" he mumbled, forgetting he had a mouthful of food, but Mrs. Hammond did not seem offended.

"I import it directly from Scotland," she said. "Feel free to have more."

"Oh, no! It must be frightfully expensive," he said.

She got up with their plates and stuck them next to the wash basin. "It's not so bad as you might think. You can get very good prices if you time your shopping properly," she said. "But . . . tell me, do you know anything about lithography?"

"It's Latin, for writing on stone," he answered, then flushed. "I'm sorry. I'm always being told I spend far too much of my time with my nose stuck in books."

"Not Mr. Melville, I assume," she said.

“Oh, no,” he said, his chest and throat tightening in reflexive horror.

“It’s become all the rage lately,” Mrs. Hammond said. “But it’s atrociously long-winded and dull, if you ask me. Not that you did, and I said so anyway, which is perhaps why I have so few friends.”

Thomas had no idea what to say to that, and his discomfort grew until he had to put his hands in his lap to hide that they were shaking.

Fortunately, she turned away, took a large brass key off its hook, and unlocked what he had thought to be a side door. “Come meet Dorothy,” she said. “The steadiest and most reliable companion any soul could have: my press.”

Grateful for the change of topic, Thomas followed her into her studio.

It was a large space, with the back wall nearly entirely given over to windows. He couldn’t imagine the heat from the kitchen stove would be sufficient to warm it in winter, nor did it have a fireplace of its own, and those windows would surely have made it an understandable folly. They looked out over the beach and ocean, and he could just make out the town along the curve of the shore through the handful of scraggly, stunted pines that clung to the rocks at the edge of the cliffs. Rain was finally coming in on the far side of the cove, and the waters were choppy with faint tracings of white wave caps. He turned himself quickly away from the awful lure of the windows to the rest of the room.

Dorothy was a monster.

The press was a thing of dark-stained wood, iron, and brass, elegant in the way of things built to excel at a singular purpose. It was shaped almost like a sleigh, with a raised bar poised above the center that made him think of a guillotine blade, and sat in the center of the studio’s stone floor, dominating everything else around it as if holding court, or more, as if the whole house might float away if not held down so firmly by the weight of its presence. The large wheel mounted at one end could have been stolen directly from the helm of some fantastical ship, with its star-shaped spokes and brass accents that shone not from care but from constant, loving use. On the other end, waiting for its turn to pass under the blade, was a limestone block that gleamed dully in the incoming sunlight.

Aside from the one wall with the impractical windows, and a small door on the adjacent corner, the rest of the room was covered in work surfaces, extensive shelves, and, in one corner, a shallow, square tub. Glass jars and bottles of every imaginable size sat by the hundreds on the shelves, the higher rows tidy and organized, the lower ones more disorganized. Yellowing labels in neat script identified each one, though he was not near enough to read any. A rolling ladder sat covered in dust, with a miscellany of papers and things haphazardly strewn on its lower steps.

The work counters themselves were chaos—flower petals and sprigs of plants lay strewn everywhere, knives and spoons and pestles sticking out from among them. “I mix my own inks, nearly all from natural ingredients,” Mrs. Hammond said. “The colors just look better. Some of what I’ll need from you is seeking out certain plants or flowers, when I run low. Do you know anything about chromolithography?”

“Color stone writing?” Thomas answered. “That’s the Latin, anyway. I did say I spend too much time with my nose in books, yes? And I know it involves passing the stone under the press, with paper atop. But more specifically, I’m not at all sure. I’m sorry. If you don’t want me—”

“Oh shush. Can you learn? If so, you’re fine. If not, we’ll know soon enough.” She must have seen the anxiety on his face, because she added, “At the worst, there will be other chores that need doing.”

“Yes, ma’am,” he said.

She pointed toward a small canvas on an easel he’d missed among the clutter at the back of the room. The painting was of a full moon in a cloudless night sky above

a still ocean. A woman's head and face, her eyes closed, emerged from the water just to her nose. Her hair was an impossibly bright blue, streaming around her, highlighted by the moon directly overhead. It was dreamlike in its calm, until Thomas noticed in the background, almost lost in the gentle folds and ripples of the water and the distorted reflections of the moon, a shark fin breaking the surface. It was both mesmerizing and uncomfortable in its draw, and unlike any other art he had seen, though the realism of the figure and elements individually, if not their composition together, felt whole.

"This," Ms. Hammond said, "is my study for the finished piece."

"It's beautiful," he said, because any other description would take him hours to sort out in his thoughts before he could speak it. And surely complimenting an artist in any way other than briefly was a minefield ready and waiting for missteps.

"Hmmm," she said, as if she wasn't convinced of the truth of his words. She lifted the canvas off the easel and grabbed a slip of paper that fell out from behind it, and showed him. It was the same image as the painting, except as simple outlines. "I call this a guide sketch. The painting helps me think about color, and this helps me think about shape. Both are important."

He followed her over to the cabinets, and she pulled open a drawer to reveal another limestone block. There, a fragmented, incomplete version of the study was drawn out in reverse in black, and she showed him how it matched portions of the outline. "This piece will take eight different images to print," she said. "Each stone is one unique color of ink. Some portions overlap with other stones, so they add to each other, but also there are parts where the color stands alone. This one is for the night sky around the Moon, and parts of the water."

She pulled the drawer out farther, and it came loose from the cabinet, thick metal legs on springs unfolding beneath it, then pulled out and detached three more blocks from adjacent drawers, and lined them all up beside each other and regarded them for a long moment. Just when he began to worry she'd forgotten he was there, she sighed and turned back to him. "I don't have all the inks I need yet, but that can wait. Let me show you how to prep an image on stone."

He reached out to roll the stone closer, but she shook her head. "We'll start with a practice stone," she said, and pointed to a stack of smaller stones beside the end of the workbench. "Bring one over to the table, then we'll see just how terrible your artistic skills are. And here I promised you already I wouldn't, but I won't judge you on it. It's just if I sketch, we'll be here for a month before I can let it be. Draw something simple, anything at all. Even a wobbly line, if you dare."

"I'll do my best, ma'am—Mrs. Hammond," he said, and took the thick crayon she held out to him with a trembling hand.

The days were getting longer, the Sun strong enough that Thomas was beginning to appreciate clouds again as he made the hike out to the cottage with the usual bread order and instructions to be on the lookout for the telltale yellow of marsh marigold in the low-lying areas beside the road. Unsure exactly what a marsh marigold was, he stopped to collect one of every different yellow flower he encountered, and tucked them each carefully, in order, in a fold in his shirt.

He had made the decision to omit flowers that were only somewhat, or partially, yellow, as if Mrs. Hammond had wanted a white and yellow flower, or an orange flower, she would have been specific about that. And anyway, if he'd included them, the small line of wilting blooms in his shirt would have become a muddle with no hope of remembering which one he'd found where.

How many other kinds of yellow flowers would he find if he continued along the road, past the cottage and all the way up the coast to Pine Harbor? He had never

paid attention to flowers of any kind before, and saw little long-term utility in it now, but there was an element of challenge to it that he enjoyed in the moment.

Hammond Cottage, as usual, stood out to his eye as he drew near, even though there was no particular reason it should, except that now it was a symbol of his temporary reprieve from a miserable life and surely swift death at sea: the small house at the bottom of the sloping path, the attached studio, and a small barn at the side that looked poised on the precipice between ramshackle and ruin, and which Mrs. Hammond had told him to stay clear of, as it could very well collapse at any moment. He had no doubts on that. It always felt like he was seeing the house anew, though nothing ever changed except the seasons and weather around it, but this time his eye was drawn to a brown-wrapped box sitting near the lone granite step into the house. Thomas pressed his elbow against his shirt to keep his flower collection safe, then picked up the package by the brown twine tied around it and carried it in with him.

Mrs. Hammond was in the kitchen. She had a smudge of bluish ink on one side of her chin and seemed much older and frailer than usual. Thomas did not know how that should be so, but he understood quite clearly that he understood virtually nothing about women or their shifts or moods or physical troubles. If his father was still alive he would have asked him, but he was not such a fool as to ask either his mother or siblings. Nor was he keen to step foot into the world of female mysteries at all, where surely no man ought to intrude, and from which knowledge there could be no graceful retreat.

“There is a package arrived,” he said, setting it down on the table, followed by the bread. As she brought out jam from the pantry, he lined up his collected flowers one by one down the length of the table, spacing them as he went by his memory of the distance between them, such that they formed a linear map of everything Penney Cove had to offer by way of yellow flowers between town and here.

“Ah?” she said, and slid the box over and around to look at the labels. Even her hands looked gaunt, but maybe it was just a trick of the day’s light. “I wonder what it is.”

“You didn’t order something?” Thomas asked.

Mrs. Hammond frowned. “I’m sure I must have. Or I will.” She turned the package around, then picked up the bread knife from the table, neatly slit the string, and unwrapped it. Inside, the box was filled with something solid and white, like packed snow. Mrs. Hammond pulled out a square of it and set it aside, and Thomas could now see that it was a second, thick-walled box, inside the first, though what it was made of he could not guess. Next, she removed another flat, square object that was blue-white and hard, and she set that on the table with a loud thunk before she began to carefully pull out and sort a number of stems covered in bright, reddish berries that were still fresh and whole.

Her attention on that, Thomas gently reached out and touched the blue block, which was ice-cold; he drew his hand back again in surprise. Mrs. Hammond either didn’t notice or didn’t care, so he reached out again and picked up the white lid to the inner box. This, which he had expected to be cold, was not. It was so light he thought it less like snow and more like solidified sea foam. He brought it up to his nose and smelled it, but there was no discernible scent other than that of berries, and he was just contemplating touching his tongue to it when Mrs. Hammond looked up and gently plucked the lid out of his hands and set it out of his reach on the far side of the table.

“What is it?” he asked.

Mrs. Hammond was frowning again. “*Rhus integrifolia*,” she said. “Lemonade berry. A type of Sumac.”

"I meant—" he started, but she picked up the berries and dumped them back in the box, re-added the lid, and closed it up.

"I don't make this ink anymore, not ever again," she said. "I don't *want* this. Why would I order it?"

"Perhaps it's a mistake?" Thomas asked.

"All the way from Mexico? By *mistake*?" she replied. It was clear he'd just said something extremely stupid, and though he was bursting with questions—how was the box cold? how was it still cold if it had traveled here all the way from Mexico? what was it *made* of? and how did one arrange to get things sent from Mexico in the first place?—he resolved to be quiet and stop touching things before he threw his job away on another misstep. His curiosity would never be strong enough to challenge his fear of the sea.

She picked the box up. "I'm going to put this away until I figure out why I ordered it. Are you ready to work on your rabbit again? It's time to learn how to etch the drawing in. If you can master that, you'll be very useful." She pointed at the hooks beside the kitchen door. "Pick an apron so you don't ruin your clothes, and meet me in the studio. And don't touch anything."

"Yes, ma'am—Mrs. Hammond," he said, and as she disappeared through the pantry door, he grabbed an apron off its hook and followed.

"I think that's good enough with the rosin," Mrs. Hammond said.

Thomas reluctantly set down the brush, then immediately picked it up again and brushed at a corner of his drawing that didn't look as thoroughly covered as the rest. "Just a little more . . ." he said.

"No, really, I think it's good," she said.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm sure," she said.

"It's just . . . well, I've never drawn anything before," he said. "And I probably won't again. And it's not a very good rabbit, but it's my rabbit, you know?"

"I know," she said, and smiled, and Thomas was startled at the idea that someone *understood* him, even if just this once.

"Do you think maybe I need a little more here?" he asked, indicating a section near one of the rabbit's lopsided feet.

"If you truly think so, it won't hurt," she said. "Thoroughness is better over-done than under. Usually."

He gratefully tapped a little more rosin out of the jar into the stone and brushed it in, quickly so as not to try her patience and spoil the moment. Then he set the brush down firmly on the workbench beside the stone. "There," he said. "Is that done?"

She shook her head. "You have barely started, Assistant." She set another glass jar of powder in front of him with a thunk, and took the other away. "Now do the same with talc."

Thomas made his way up the increasingly familiar path, almost—*almost!*—in a mood such that he wanted to whistle, but instead he hummed to himself some song he'd heard and could barely remember, except that it was not a shanty, and that was enough to render it cheerful in his mind.

The cottage ahead was the same to his eye as ever, but something about it struck him as oddly still, almost like it was itself a painting of the thing, rather than its real self. He approached the door and knocked, and the knock made no sound whatsoever. Hesitant, he waited, unsure if it was just his ears that had let him down, or his wandering mind that failed to note the noise, but when Mrs. Hammond did not an-

swer the door he knocked again, and this time, paying attention, he was certain of the silence.

Curious, he tried again, then tried tapping, then boldly tried to turn the knob, but it was as if his fingers could not get any grip on it, and it remained unmoved beneath his flailing hand.

Thomas stepped back from the door. The windows were strangely opaque, as if the day's glorious light touched the glass and vanished, neither reflecting nor lighting up the interior within.

"Mrs. Hammond?" he called, tentatively, then louder: "Celia? Ma'am?"

There was no answer, and only then did it occur to him that she had told him, the previous Friday, that this was a day she was going shopping, and he would not be needed.

The cottage was perfectly silent, as if whatever it was that animated old houses was also taking the day off, which made him think superstitiously about ghosts. But the Sun was too warm on his shoulders to let him feel scared, and the birds nearby had begun to sing again as he stood still long enough that they forgot his brief disturbance.

At last he heaved a deep sigh and turned away, pulling from his bag a book of adventure stories he had started the evening before, and headed across the road and up into the meadows to find a spot in the shade of a tree where he could spend his day. There was something about a day of leisure that was so much sweeter when he was neither dodging work, nor anyone else's expectations, and he could throw himself into the pages and leave his anxieties behind.

His father had told him, many times, that each day was a gift, and for once, he felt he knew what his father had meant by that.

"Jacob Dale has the cough again, so John is looking for more hands aboard the *Blue Gull*," Thomas's mother said, as he was pulling on his boots beside the door. "They're only going to be out three days. It would be good experience for you."

"I already have a job, Ma," he answered. He'd been at it for over two months now, and each morning she seemed less and less thrilled that he was heading out, not toward the docks but down the road.

"For how long, though? And then what good does all this etching and inking and flower-picking nonsense do you? Being a fisherman is an honest living, and your father always said he wanted all his sons to follow in his footsteps."

"I wonder, had someone asked him *after* he drowned, if we'd find he'd changed his mind on that," Thomas snapped. Then, rather than meet her eyes or hear whatever words of grief or disappointment she had for him, he grabbed his hat and rushed out the door, not looking back even once, and didn't stop shaking until he was well away from town.

"Are you okay?" Mrs. Hammond asked, the second time he nearly dropped his tea, after already dropping the jam spoon and leaving a big orange blotch on the white tablecloth. She was younger again today, and for all that he knew it could not be anything more than just some trick of light and his own runaway imagination, after the oddness of the cottage the day before, it felt harder to dismiss.

"An argument with my ma," he admitted. "She doesn't understand me, my . . . *reluctance* for the life of a fisherman. But I should have been kinder. It isn't easy being a widow." He widened his eyes at his own blunder. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to imply—make assumptions—that may be construed as including you."

"You didn't," she said, and began putting the lids back on the jams and marmalades. "I'm not a widow. That would be easier to bear, I think."

"But . . ." Thomas stammered. His shakes from earlier were now back in full, and he sat as rigid and upright in his chair as he could to try to force his panicking body into obedience. "Mr. Hammond?"

"He abandoned me," she said. "Middle of the night, just ran out. We'd had a fight earlier in the day, but I didn't think . . ." She drew in a deep breath, then slowly, almost angrily, let it out. "He broke my heart. Took my dog, too. Can't ever forgive him that last, and nothing has ever been right, since."

"I'm sorry," Thomas said. "How long ago?"

Mrs. Hammond's brow furrowed. "It's hard to say. I was younger all the time, then," she said at last. She tsked, smiled sadly, and cleaned off the table. "You ready to print your rabbit today?"

"Today, ma'am?" he asked, startled. "Surely I'm not ready. The stone isn't ready. What if—?"

"Thomas," she said, and waited for him to stop fluttering his hands and quiet down. "Being ready for things is an illusion. Trust yourself to learn from your defeats, if and when you have them. They often carry far better lessons."

Thomas wrapped up the leftover end of the bread loaf in its paper, tucking it up and over carefully to keep the crumbs inside. "Defeats are all I only ever seem to have," he said.

"Then let's go have one more together," she said, and held up one arm to point, like the Queen commanding, to the door into the studio. "Move."

Though Thomas knew it was entirely his own imagination, when they walked in through the studio door, it felt like the press was impatient. His stone, with its crooked, barely identifiable rabbit, sat at the precipice on Dorothy's rollers, having been talc'd and etched and buffed and greased in a process that was objectively fascinating, for all it was undone by the liability and shame of his own work beneath it. Mrs. Hammond did not seem displeased at his preparations, but as always there was the voice in the back of his mind telling him that it was only a matter of time until he'd be declared useless and booted out to go back home in shame.

He wanted to run away right now, before that could happen. Mrs. Hammond paused, a look of concern crossing her face that only made his desire to flee that much more unbearable, but she turned away again, and he pulled himself together as best he could, taking as much time as he dared just to give himself a moment to breathe.

It was warm out, would have been stifling if not for the constant breeze off the ocean, but the interior of the studio was cool. He desperately wanted to take his shoes and socks off and plant his feet on the stone floor and let whatever chill solidity infused the room crawl up his bones, and maybe make his brain stop being constantly aflutter, overheating itself on all his nonsense fears.

"Thomas," Mrs. Hammond said. "Your stone."

He walked over to the rolling stand with his rabbit stone on it, and a cotton cloth tossed over it as the previous day's etching gum dried. The last few months had been a revelation, that art—something he had always thought of as imprecise and possibly frivolous at its very core—could not only be tied to, but inseparable from the careful application of knowledge, chemistry, and meticulous craft.

Mrs. Hammond threw a drop cloth down on the floor. He rolled the cart atop it and pulled the cotton from his stone. It was hard now to see the lines of his witless scribble, and he was both relieved and anxious for it. He took his apron off the hook and put it on, as she got out a large metal can limned with rust. "Spirit of turpentine," she said. "Very flammable. If you are working with it, be at your most cautious, and do not go anywhere near a flame; the vapors themselves can ignite."

She pried the lid off, and the immediate, overpowering smell was some ghastly mockery of the scent of pine. Setting the can carefully on the stone cart, she opened

a drawer and took out another rag and a well-worn brush with long, stained bristles. "You don't need much," she said, which he was happy to hear. "Use the brush to sprinkle it across your stone, and then rub it in with the rag. Like so, see?" she said, and demonstrated.

Then she handed him the brush and rag. "If you think you can proceed on your own for a little bit, I have some inks to mix up. Where did you put the mortar and pestle you washed—oh," she said, reaching for it on the shelf. "You put it away. Did you . . . move everything around?"

"I dusted the shelves," he said. "And then I put everything back in order by type, then size, and where size was the same, from light-color to dark, and if that was the same—" He realized he was babbling. "I'm sorry, I forgot what order everything was originally in."

"It's *fine*, Thomas," she said, though he imagined there was the faint echo of irritation in there, and he resolved to be less compulsive and more careful from that point on.

As he worked on rubbing in the turpentine, she unrolled a mat of some strange, spongy material across the surface of one of the workbenches, and then started pulling items down off the shelves and out from the cupboards: gum resin he recognized, the others were not ones he'd had to use. When she seemed satisfied with the motley collection she'd assembled, she brought over the small glass vase with the sprigs of bluish flowers he'd scavenged down the coast a few days ago and set it beside her heavy cutting block. Out of her apron she pulled a small, heavily worn brown notebook, and flipped through it slowly and thoughtfully.

Thomas bent, studying his block, seeing how the turpentine and the rag carried away all last visible traces of his drawing, leaving only a pattern of sheen or less sheen that, if he could hold the block up to the light, he might once again be able to make his rabbit out.

Mrs. Hammond appeared at his side, startling him, and handed him another rag, this one just slightly wet. "Good," she said. "Now wipe it down to clean it off, but keep the stone damp. Then you need to pick out your color."

". . . What?" he said, and almost dropped the wet rag.

"Ink. For your rabbit," she said, and shook her head. "I mean, black is fine, but there are other colors in the world. It's up to you."

He didn't want it to be up to him. If he said black, was he demonstrating a lack of initiative, failing a test of aptitude? When she said it was fine, did she mean it? But if not, then what color was a safe choice? He didn't know anything about which were good colors or not.

She waved him vaguely toward the shelves where large bottles of handmade inks stood in row after row, each carefully labeled in her small, cramped, curving letters. All eighty-seven of them (he'd counted) were also now dusted and organized by color, name, and number, where they had been intolerably random the previous week. *Look at them for a while*, he told himself, *as if you are carefully considering the merits of each. And then just pick one. Any one.*

Mrs. Hammond went to one of the other shelves, where there were a dizzying array of bottles and jars of random things such as tree bark, acorns, dried fruit, and leaves, and began selecting the items she wanted and setting them on the workbench. Thomas took a deep breath, as quietly as he could, and let it out in relief that he had not yet gone overboard with his obsessive organization.

She spent some time regarding the jars she'd pulled down, sometimes opening them to poke at the contents, sniff, or add them to the bowl in her hand. More than once she took something out, then picked it out of the bowl and returned it to its jar. He became self-conscious that he'd been staring at the inks too long, and what might

have convincingly looked to be studious contemplation was at risk of being revealed as merely his own habitual, frightened paralysis.

He made a quick choice, not letting himself second-guess or third-guess or stall any longer, and Mrs. Hammond must have heard him pick up the bottle because she turned, and did not look at all displeased with him. "A red?" she asked. "Very nice. Why?"

"Because red is the color of the Sun, setting over land," he said, and did not add, *and it's the opposite of the ocean's blue*. What that had to do with rabbits was nothing at all, but then his drawing resembled a rabbit so poorly he was sure he didn't need an answer for that.

Mrs. Hammond opened one of the lower cupboards and pulled out a large pot, tucked in beside a neat stack of stones, and put it on the bench. One by one she added things, and made a note in her brown book after each. "Let me get this started and on the stove, then I'll show you how to roll your first ink on," she said when done, tucking the notebook back in her apron pocket.

"Do you need me to get water?" he asked.

"No, I filled the kitchen jugs yesterday, after you went home," she said. "If you need something to do, come to the kitchen and start lunch?"

"Yes, Mrs. Hammond," he said, and followed as she carried the big pot out to the kitchen.

It was cool, and he feared her stove fire had gone out. "Do you need me to fetch firewood and re-light it?" he asked. This was one of the few things he felt on safe ground with, as with his brothers usually off at sea, his mother saw it as a rare but welcome bit of usefulness from him.

"No, no," Mrs. Hammond said. "I've got it. Ah . . ." She grabbed the copper kettle from the stove, and handed it to him. "Here. Maybe you could go fill the kettle at the well pump? Dump out what's in there already; this water has gotten stale."

"If the kitchen jugs are already full—" he started to say, but she shook her head.

"I need all that. Fresh is best. Get going." She seemed to almost hurry him out the door, though he could hardly fathom how water could be stale, much less how she couldn't even spare a kettle's worth of water from the jugs she had just minutes earlier told him were full. He was not, however, in any way going to argue with her, and took the kettle without complaint outside.

When he returned, a scant few minutes later, there was a good fire roaring in the stove, and the pot was already starting to give off the first few exploratory wisps of steam.

Mrs. Hammond took the kettle from him and set it atop the stove. "I'm going to make coffee," she said. "Some for you?"

"I've never had coffee," he said. "It's frightfully expensive."

"Oh," she said. "It is, yes, but I happened to get some at a very fair price if you'd like to try it."

"I would," he said, before he could second-guess himself out of imposing.

"Excellent," she said, and disappeared briefly into the pantry, coming back with several glass dishes and a tall metal canister. Setting them down, she pointed to the dishes. "Some turkey," she said, "or if you'd rather, egg salad. You know where the bread is."

He slid the turkey closer, and found the container very cold to the touch. "You have an ice chest?" he asked.

"Yes, yes, I must," she said, and laid a piece of round, pleated paper across the top of a ceramic crock, and spooned a rich, brown, dirt-like substance onto the top of it. When the kettle whistled she poured the water carefully on and through it. "Paper filter. Very recent invention. I think."

Thomas nodded as if he had any notion.

She lifted up the sodden filter and looked at it, then looked over at her now-simmering pot. “Maybe,” she muttered, to herself, then set the paper aside and brought the ceramic carafe over, and then two mugs from where they hung on hooks above the sink. “You may want to put sugar in it, and perhaps a bit of milk,” she said. “Coffee is an acquired taste. And make yourself a bite to eat; rolling ink is hard work.”

He decided, quickly, that acquiring a taste for coffee might be far harder work than anything she had to offer in the studio.

After lunch was cleaned up he followed her back there as she got out a large, soft-covered rolling pin and handed it to him. “First proof is going to be very faint,” she said. “It’ll take quite a few passes before you get a full print, so don’t be disappointed, and don’t expect this to be the easy part. But if you’ve got a knack for it, it’ll be very helpful when I’m trying to do a twenty-color piece to have someone else able to put in some elbow grease.”

Thomas resolved to have as much of a knack as he could manage.

The ink was thick, not at all watery as he’d expected, and she scooped it out of the jar into a slanted tray and showed him how to coat the roller evenly. The red seemed almost like blood, and he half-regretted not just choosing plain, boring, safe black after all.

She watched him roll it onto the stone, her face stern but not displeased. “That’ll do for a first pass,” she said at last, and pulled open a long, flat drawer and slid out a sheet of thin, grayish paper, which she set on the workbench and wiped down with a damp cloth. “We’ll use better paper when the proofs reach their potential,” she said. “Go ahead, roll it on.”

He did, expecting the roller to leave a swath of red its own width in its path, but it seemed like the ink only clung to the stone where his rabbit had been drawn, bringing it leaping out of its subtle hiding place like some sort of fearful magic. “Keep going,” Mrs. Hammond said. “It’s going to take a lot more ink than that.”

There was a strange elation to the work that he had never felt before, strong enough to override his shame at his pitiful sketch that surely never merited any of this effort, so it was almost a shock when she put a hand on his arm to stop him. “Paper,” she said, and demonstrated how to lay it carefully and smoothly over the inked stone.

On top of that she laid a few more sheets of dry paper, then a canvas square, and then stepped back. Thomas looked at her, at the press, and back at her again. “Dorothy is waiting for you,” she said. “Just turn the wheel slowly and steadily and—” She paused, tilting her head, and scowled. “My pot is boiling over. Hold, and I’ll be right back.”

Mrs. Hammond left, and Thomas stood there, one hand poised to take the press’s wheel, like a captain about to take the helm of his own boat. A lifetime of patient acceptance of his lot in life as a failure, a useless, fidgety young man of no destiny, no skill, crashed on him like a wave swamping the imaginary lifeboat of this job of last resort, and in frustration and desperation he grabbed the wheel and he turned it, not forcefully or ferociously, but steady and resolute.

The press ground his stone forward and under the massive rollers, pulling it inexorably, like the tide drowning the beach, and he kept turning, pulling it through and out again, safe on the far side, as it felt like the cottage shook around him with his own foolish daring.

When the paper-covered stone emerged on the far side, he stopped, and took his hands off the wheel and let them fall by his side, and blinked in the brilliant light streaming in the studio windows which, as his eyes adjusted, was reflecting off deep snow as far as the eye could see.

He went to the outside door and flung it open, and the sharp, cold air hit him like a slap in the face. The path up to the road was utterly buried, lost under the smooth blanket of white, and he waded out into it, knee-deep and freezing.

The road was lost, no tracks from carriages or even lone horses, but the snow had that crisp, crusty quality of snow that had fallen days before, softening under the low sun, then refreezing at night. *But it's July*, he thought. Only the tracks of rabbits and the loping trail of a lone wolf or stray dog hunting marred the pristine landscape.

He floundered through the snow along where the road should be beneath his feet and reached the rise where he could look back toward Penney Cove, and there was nothing there. No town, no boats, no sign anyone had ever lived here.

Thomas sat in the snow and wept.

Mrs. Hammond found him about an hour later, and hauled him up out of the cold snow and forced a hot water bottle into his shaking, bloodless hands before she wrapped a thick coat around his shoulders.

"Everything is gone," he said.

"No, it's not," she said. "It just hasn't happened yet. You rearranged my inks without me noticing."

"They were dusty," he said.

"That wasn't an ink you were supposed to touch," she said.

"I'm sorry," Thomas cried. "I'm sorry. Please, can I go home before you let me go? I want to go home. I hate it, but it's all I have."

"Come back to the cottage, and I'll get you home," she said, "but you need to walk, or you're going to get frostbite, if you don't have it already. You're not dressed for winter, you idiot, and I can't carry you."

Thomas giggled, terrified and bereft, as she pulled and pushed and finally got him moving back along the trail of footprints they'd each left through the snow.

Back at the cottage, he found himself wrapped in blankets and sitting at the kitchen table, clinging with both hands to the mug of scalding-hot coffee that now had become a physical lifeline. Mrs. Hammond stood leaning against the kitchen counter, one arm across her chest and her other hand against her chin, regarding him with a clear mix of concern, frustration, and indecision. He knew he'd ruined his chances of keeping this job and knew that he no longer would be able to escape the sea and his death there, but more than any of that he wanted to see his ma and his brothers and sisters and walk the wheel-rutted dirt roads of the town his family had lived in for three generations since crossing the Atlantic. How could any of it vanish so completely, so quickly?

"I don't understand," he said.

Mrs. Hammond drew a deep breath and looked unhappy. "It's not that Penney Cove is gone," she said. Though she'd said this before, with the coffee in him and his feet starting to angrily prickle with life again, he felt more able to hear it. "My best guess is that we are about four hundred years before the first settlers arrived here from England. The first time I used that ink, it was summer, and there was a Beothuk family up on the hillside. I left quickly, rather than disturb them more than I already had."

"The ink?"

"I don't know the why of any of it, before you start looking for details I can't give, but it's the combination of my inks, my press, and maybe me. Maybe not. It just . . . does this, sometimes." She patted her apron pocket. "I had thought my art was a piece of it, but this was your drawing, your rabbit, and nothing of mine but the ink itself. I keep very careful notes, absolutely everything that goes into my colors, even

where I draw the water from. If there is a pattern, an ability to fine-tune where—*when*, really, as the cottage is always right here, in this same place—I have not found it.”

“Then we are lost here?” Thomas asked.

“No. I can always get back again,” she said. “We finish the print run, and the last one . . . we run backward through Dorothy. And then there we are, back where we started, and usually only a short while after we left.”

Thomas had heard of a recent book by an Englishman named Wells that was about time machines, though he had never seen a copy, and had never had much interest in that sort of fanciful nonsense. The snow, though, was utterly real. What if one could travel contrary to the natural progression of creation?

That what if was a momentous notion.

“Can we go back nine years? To the day before the *Fair Tern* sank?” he asked. His father’s boat—his father, one brother, an uncle, and three cousins, lost with all hands.

“It’s not impossible, but . . .” She spread her hands out. “It’s not controllable, Thomas. There is no way to guess what combination would take us there. And not all times are safe.”

“You mean from the Beothuk—” he started.

She shook her head. “No. The only danger there is—*was*—from us to them. There was a time I went to where this land was under miles of ice, and the sound the cottage made as I raced to get back out before it was crushed . . . I barely made it. There are places where the roof has been crooked, the eaves bent, ever since. And times where the land was on fire, with terrible, giant things floating in the sky. I was wrong to hire you, Thomas. This is too dangerous, with your whole life ahead of you, to risk on an old fool for a few dollars.”

“You don’t need my help anymore?” he said.

“I need you to sit here and finish warming up while I get a good proof off your stone, so that we can go home,” she said. “After that, I don’t know. I can’t think right now. Sit, and don’t touch anything, and I’ll go take care of it.”

If the past couldn’t be remedied, the future had no meaning for him either. There was none, not now, other than the drowning death he had thought he had escaped.

He sat, and sipped at the coffee, and tried not to think any more at all.

Ten days later, his mother came into his room carrying a package, flat and carefully wrapped in Mr. Mercer’s bread paper. She handed it to him without a word, the first time she’d not yelled at him since he’d lost his assistant’s job, for having no purpose, no plan, nothing except a stubborn, inexplicable refusal to take up the handful of generous job offers out on the boats that she brought his way. He’d forced himself, once, to walk out onto one of the fishing docks, aware of the ocean stirring like a monster just beneath those thin, weathered boards, but in the end couldn’t force himself more than halfway out before panic drove him fleeing shoreward again.

Thomas took the package, untied the string around it, and untucked the paper. It was his rabbit, the final proof, in the bold, blood-dark red ink he had chosen, set in a mat and simple frame. He set it down on the bed and took several steps back, regarding it with a mix of regret and pride.

“Is that a fish?” his mother asked.

“I drew it, all by myself,” he said, deciding this was one more hurt than he could handle. “I made it. And then I made a dumb mistake, like I always do, and now it’s over.” He picked it up off the bed, clumsily wrapped it back in the paper, and handed it to her. “I don’t want it. But thank you.”

His mother took it from him, and, after a brief hesitation, left without saying any

more. Thomas picked up the book he'd been attempting to read for days, stuck on the same opening paragraphs as if the words refused to stick in his brain, and tucked it under his pillow out of sight. Then he laid back down on his bed and stared at the ceiling instead.

When he reluctantly came down for dinner, his rabbit print was hanging on the wall near the table.

"I decided I like it," his mother said.

His brother Harold, the only one whose boat was in right now, laughed. "You're the only person on the whole of Newfoundland who I can believe has never seen an actual fish. You're always too busy running as far away as you can."

"It's not a fish," Thomas replied.

"Well, thank the Lord for that," Harold said, "otherwise you'd never be able to eat in this kitchen again for fear of it."

"Harold." Their mother gave both of them a stern look, and Harold shrugged and picked up the bowl of peas she'd just set on the table, spooning them onto his plate.

"If it's not a fish, what is it?" Harold asked, under the dire gaze of their mother.

"A rabbit," Thomas said miserably.

He got up from the table, thinking to go back to his room—he hadn't been hungry much lately anyhow—but his mother pointed one finger at him and then back at his chair. "Sit and eat," she said. "Food is hard enough to come by, without you letting it go to waste. I have had enough of this moping about, and it stops here and now. Tomorrow, you will go to work and you will like it."

"Yes, ma'am," Thomas said. His appetite had completely fled, neither the peas nor the fresh chicken had any flavor or texture, and he managed to eat only by force of will and habit.

"*Blue Gull* won't be back for another day," Harold said. "I don't know who else is needing extra hands, much less has room for inexperienced ones."

"I'll take care of it," his mother said, and finally sat down to serve herself. "Thomas, you are on dishes tonight."

"Yes, ma'am," he said again. At least it was something he could do without thinking, and without mistakes.

Thomas got up in the morning when he could no longer justify staying in bed, though dawn had come hours ago without any sleep behind it to make it softer. He had expected his mother, or his brother, to come down and haul him out of bed by his ear, but he heard Harold leaving not long after the sun started peeking around the edges of his window, and his mother left not long after.

After a while he dressed and washed his face and went out to the outhouse, came back in to wash his hands, and found his mother had returned and was sitting at the kitchen table. A plate of toast slices sat in the center, and next to it a familiar jar of orange marmalade that made him freeze in his tracks. His mother gestured to a chair and by sheer force of will he sat.

"This is very nice," his mother said. "A gift."

Behind her head, on the wall, his rabbit looked down at it all without comment.

"Was . . . Mrs. Hammond here?" Thomas asked.

"No," his mother answered. "I went to go speak with her about the problem of my youngest son."

*Me, Thomas thought. The problem is not with me, it is me.*

He watched as she spread some marmalade on toast and offered the slice to him, but he shook his head. "This is the problem," his mother said. "We're a family of fishermen, in a town of fishermen, in a land of fishermen. It's what we do, what we were

born for, what we will be when we die. And it's a good life. But you: I see the way you look toward the sea as if it's the enemy, and sometimes it is. I miss your Pa every day, and William, and neither of them was it their time to go yet. But that's the Lord's decision, not mine, when to take us."

She ate the slice of toast, not taking her eyes off him, but he had no words to add to that. She was right, of course.

"The thing of it is," she continued, "the only time I have ever seen you act as if you are feeling useful, as if maybe this world isn't so unfair and terrible after all, is up there working with Mrs. Hammond. So I went to talk to her, one widow to another, so I could understand. Whatever mistake you made, she seems to think it was at least as much her own fault. She showed me the work you'd done, not just the art but straightening up, moving those stones, all the sorted flowers, and I admit I don't get it, and it seems a strange life, but my son, you have become insufferable, and you have to do *something* other than lie around here as if you are already in the grave. So eat some toast, then get yourself back to work. Mrs. Hammond asked if you would stop at Mr. Winsor's and pick up some flour and eggs on the way."

"Ma . . ." Thomas started to say, but she waved her hand to cut him off and pushed the plate toward him.

"Eat," she said. "Don't thank me, and don't be angry with me either. I can still hope you'll come around in time, but this is for the best, for now. And please thank her again for me for the marmalade; this is by far the nicest I've ever had."

"So," Mrs. Hammond said, after she opened the door and found Thomas standing there, wringing his hands in agitation as best as he could with a sack of groceries clutched to his chest. "Your mother seems . . . very determined."

A smile that Thomas hadn't known was in him burst out, and he laughed and then had to set the groceries down and then sit down himself. "Yes," he said. "There is no harder thing in this world than saying no to her."

"As I've learned," she said. She seemed younger today, moved more nimbly than usual, and picked up the groceries and took them inside on her own. Thomas stood, brushed dirt from his pants, and followed.

Mrs. Hammond was already unpacking the handful of items from the cloth bag. "I'm grateful you didn't tell your family what happened here," she said.

"Would any have believed me?"

"Probably not," she said. "But it would have made matters awkward."

"For the both of us," he said. "Did we . . . did we really travel into the past?"

"Yes," she said.

"And this has happened before?"

"Yes," she said. She put the kettle on the stove and got down teacups and the sugar bowl.

"But you don't have control of it?" he asked.

"Yes and no," she answered. "Once I've gone somewhere, I can go there again with the same inks, the same stones, the same order of doing. Very, *very* slight variations, such as in the viscosity of the ink as it's beginning to age or dry, or if I've mixed a second batch even if using the same formula, results in small time differences on the other end, too, but as soon as the variation in process or material becomes anything more than negligible, the effect on arrival becomes utterly unpredictable."

"And always, you are here. The cottage doesn't move," he said.

"No, which is funny when you think about it, as our planet is always moving, turning as it travels around the Sun," she said. "I have no explanation for that, and think perhaps there is none."

"So, it's magic," he said.

She laughed. "I suppose it must be! Who am I to say, being neither an expert on magic nor on science, or the differences between. I make art, and sometimes my imagination takes me places more literally than most." She held out her hands, palms up, and looked at them. "It's affected me, too, somehow. My physical age seems untethered, and sometimes my memories are out of order. I leave myself notes, at bedtime, so that the next day's me can be sure to be up on events."

"And you are fine with this all happening?"

"I don't have a choice, really," she said. "I could no more give up art than your family can the sea. It started happening not long after my husband left me, and while I wouldn't say it gave me purpose, I would say the curiosity of it has made living worthwhile again. Most days, at least. Your mother and I talked about your father, and how of all her sons you are the one that most looks like him, and how she has trouble reconciling that with your fear of the life he so dearly loved."

Thomas had not considered it from that perspective. He had been seven when his father's boat went down, and his memories of him felt unreliable, like he only knew his father through stories and the single grainy, hand-tinted photograph framed above the living-room mantel.

Except there was also the memory of going down to the sea, and trying to swim to go get his Papa back, and how very, very near he had come to drowning himself. He still remembered vividly the taste and sting of salty water filling his nose and mouth, as strong hands grabbed him and dragged him ashore, and that terrible sense that the sea had not wanted to let him go, refused to leave his lungs until at last it was forced out, like an entire storm exorcised from him by violence.

His brothers and aunts and cousins kept watch on him for weeks, to make sure he didn't sneak down to the sea to try again. How did they not understand his terror, now? And how, he wondered, could he forgive them for needing him to love the sea again, that sea that gave them everything, and took it all back in turn.

Mrs. Hammond put tea in front of him, and he sipped at it, not minding the scalding heat. "You don't have to work for me," she said, "but I could use the help. We just both need to be more careful. And perhaps I can show you some things—some *times*, to be more precise—if you'd like, as long as it remains our secret. I have become rather addicted to some foods that have not yet been invented."

"It . . . doesn't just work backward?" he asked.

She laughed. "No. But right now, I have some stones that need to be sanded down to be reused, and then the studio will need a thorough sweeping."

"Yes, ma'am," he said. He finished his tea, rinsed his cup and spoon, carefully placed them to dry beside the sink, and went to work.

In penance for his unsolicited reorganization, Mrs. Hammond had him carefully catalogue all her inks. She sat on a stool with her notebook open in her lap and a pencil alternately behind her ear, drumming on the workbench in front of her, or dangling unminded from her lips. Any inks that had been part of a print run that had caused a displacement, as she called the movement through time, were carefully noted on the label with a bold X, so no future mistakes could be made quite so easily. For good measure, she also had him note the page on which she'd kept the recipe for cross-referencing.

When she was working on her current project directly, he helped with the preparation and etching, and he found much to his surprise that he had a growing confidence in his skill to properly do them. Mrs. Hammond, who had watched him like a hawk with the first several, eventually declared him trustworthy—*me, trustworthy!* he marveled—and though she never left the studio for long, she let her attention shift to other things.

Once, on one of her young days, she went out with him to collect flowers, declaring herself in need of a walk, and it being a beautiful late summer day likely to be in short supply. He dutifully carried the half-dozen baskets she used for sorting, and followed her along the road.

Mr. Coles approached in his carriage, his horses kicking up a furious amount of dust and small rocks, and when it was clear that Mrs. Hammond was too preoccupied pinching tiny berries off some roadside scrub, he gently took her arm and pulled her off the road. She watched in irritation as the carriage went past. "A careless man," she muttered.

"He is a banker," Thomas said, "and takes pride in having the fastest horses on the peninsula, so that he need not spend a second more out among us small town folk than necessary."

"An asshole, then," she said.

He froze, in shock and momentary outrage, but when she caught his eye, he could not help but smile. "You could say so and, however you might be called on it for impropriety, still not be wrong in your facts," he answered.

She smiled back at him, then pointed into the basket. "Identity, my assistant?"

He peered in. "Blue-bead lily berries," he said.

She waited, and he peered closer. "I don't think I'm wrong, but they are a little more purple than usual."

"Ha! You have a sharp eye," she said. "It's a variety of the blue-bead lily, probably a random mutation. The flowers have thin white striations in the petals, and, as you said, the berries are a little more to the purple side of blue. It makes a lovely ink. They went extinct several hundred years ago, you know."

"What?" he said, and immediately glanced down the road, where he could still make out the distant puff of dust from Mr. Coles' carriage as he neared Penney Cove itself, and the faint, plaintive barking of a dog in his wake. "How can that be? We haven't—"

"Traveled? No. I found them on a foraging trip of my own several years back, and when I researched them later and discovered what they were, went back and dug some up, and started a bunch of little colonies all over the area. If you see them, be sure not to pick all the berries—I wouldn't want to have to start over."

He stared down into the basket. "I didn't think we could *change* things. How can that be?"

"I don't know," she said. When he kept staring down into the basket, she put a hand on his shoulder. "You're thinking about your father's boat again."

"Yes," he admitted.

She nodded. "I have no answers for you. Sometimes I think: can I go back and convince my husband to stay? Not fight that fight? But little flowers are one thing, and changing our own lives is a much more complicated matter. Back to the house now, I think," she said. "Some lunch will help us both."

They had hardly filled the baskets, but Thomas didn't argue; his mind was enough elsewhere, dwelling on the profound incongruity of impossible possibilities, that he would have been of little further use.

Leaves, such as there were in a land of mostly stunted pine, seemed to gravitate toward the cottage's walk. He arrived to find a broom outside propped near the door, and thinking that a hint, took to sweeping them clear. Mrs. Hammond had been traveling again the last few days, and whatever stillness the cottage encouraged did not seem to apply to the yellows and oranges trying very hard to claim its surround.

Mrs. Hammond peered out the door. "Thomas!" she said. "I only just got back an hour ago. Come in while they're still hot!"

He had no idea what she was talking about, but put the broom back where he'd found it, and followed her inside.

The air in the kitchen had a strange, unfamiliar, but not-unpleasant tang to it. She urged him toward a chair, and on the table was her largest casserole dish, a tea towel over the top, and steam gently seeping from its folds along the edges. With a dramatic flourish, she pulled the towel off, and he leaned forward to look more closely. The contents of the casserole dish were a riot of colors and textures, lettuce and cheese and tomato and who knew what else, subdivided by some sort of yellowish thin shell.

"I brought back *tacos*," she declared. "Try one!"

How one did so was beyond him, so he watched as she picked one up herself, first. The shell curved under, fitting neatly in her hand, and kept the contents at least marginally under control, so he delicately lifted up the next and took a bite.

"—Hot hot hot," he said, coughing and wheezing, his eyes instantly tearing up. When he could swallow, he stuck his tongue out and fanned it with his hand until she set a glass of water in front of him. "How can you eat that?"

"These are *mild*," she said, clearly amused.

"Where do they come from?" he asked. "Or when?"

"Mexico. My plant supplier down there. I flew—"

"Flew?!"

"Forget I said that. I *traveled* to see my supplier to ask when I ordered the lemonade berries, and he said it was young me," she said. She was frowning. "I still don't know why I would order *those*, of all things. But I picked up lunch for us on my way back. Something new for you to try. It's an acquired taste, I suppose."

"Like coffee?" he asked.

"Like coffee," she confirmed.

He took another tiny nibble, and was sure he made a terrible face, for all that Mrs. Hammond seemed barely able to contain laughing at him. "And that's mild?" he asked, when he could speak, two more glasses of water later.

"Yes," she said. He noted she had finished her own, and was picking up another with obvious delight.

Thomas stared at his plate a while longer, licked at his burning lips, then took another bite. The shell cracked, sending contents dropping onto his plate like a demented hailstorm of meat and sauce. She handed him a fork, and when he finished what remained in his hand, he scraped up the fallen bits and ate that, too.

"What do you think?" she asked.

"I don't know," Thomas answered. "But I'd have another, if that's all right."

She slid the casserole dish closer to him.

Winter came in early and hard, whipping up off the Atlantic in an early October storm to drive off a still-youthful autumn. Waves churned and crashed high up the cliffs surrounding the cove, blasting bitterly cold rain sideways so that it seemed to seep into every small crack, under every worn wooden roof shingle, stealing and smothering what small warmth could be found until, when the storm finally changed over to snow, and the flakes grew larger and slower and abandoned the earlier horizontal assault, it was a relief to all.

Thomas trudged up the road in his heaviest coat and boots that had once belonged to his lost brother William. They were more worn than he remembered from the previous season, and he didn't imagine any amount of seal oil was going to fix whatever holes the ankle-deep slush was streaming in through, inundating his wool socks until he felt like he was walking in wet, bitter cement.

Mrs. Hammond ushered him in, and had him shuck his wet things near the door and hang his socks near the roaring fire she had going in her small living room. The

house was toasty warm, the heat stinging his face, as she poured and handed him a mug of coffee. "Sit and warm up," she said. "I may have something for you."

He did as she'd instructed him, as she rummaged through a closet at the back of the kitchen, too miserable and cold to worry that he had not even offered to help. The heat of the mug was glorious under his hands, and he wrapped his fingers around it like a lifeline. Despite his earlier conviction, he'd grown a taste for it, after all.

Eventually, she pulled a pair of boots free of the closet's clutter, dusty and covered in cobwebs. "They were my husband's. Old, and a tad smelly, but no holes," she said. "Should be about your size, so if they fit, please take them. Entire icebergs could float through the holes in those boots you wore here, and these are doing nobody any good buried in a closet."

"Thank you," he said, as she rinsed her hands and then set about getting toast and jam. When he stopped shivering enough to sip at the steaming liquid, he nearly choked as he saw the design on the mug. There was a silhouette of a moose—Mrs. Hammond was fond of the creatures—and below it, the caption NEWFOUNDLAND CANADA.

He set it down, and pushed it far enough back from him at the table that he could peer at it warily, worried his brain had incurred some damage from the cold outside, but the lettering remained. "*Canada?*" he asked.

Mrs. Hammond almost dropped the jam. "Oh, sh—" she started to say, then caught herself. "Sorry, I didn't mean to use *that* mug."

"But—" he protested.

"It hasn't happened yet, is all," she said. "I usually keep my anachronisms safely stowed away, but I broke one of my other mugs yesterday, and I wasn't thinking when I pulled that one out of the cupboard."

"It's a future thing?" he asked.

"Yes," she said.

"When?"

She sighed, and sat down at the table opposite him. "1949," she said. "A lot happens between now and then, and much of it is terrible, and the world is never the same after, but I think that part—joining Canada—was a positive thing."

Thomas turned the mug around, and then back around again. "I guess I understand magic that can take us back, but how can we go to places, be somewhere that has not even happened? Does that mean you know what happens to all of us?"

"In a very broad sense? A bit. Individually, no," she said. "I don't want to know. What good could ever come of that?"

Thomas was skeptical, and she must have seen that on his face. "Look, either everything is fate, and you can change nothing, in which case everything you do will feel like you had no choice, no free will. Or it's not fate, and even the smallest decisions you make will feel potentially momentous, fraught with so many immediate and secondary consequences that nothing you do will ever feel safe. For an example, how do I know that the handful of those white-striped flowers I dug up and brought to this time, to reestablish them after their extinction, weren't exactly the plants that, if I had left them where they were, would have been sufficient to keep them from going extinct in the first place? Or that, by the fact that they *did* go extinct, there is proof that I always would have made the choice to dig them up? It's all a dreadful tangle, time is, and the more you look at it, the more choice and fate seem indistinguishable."

"So you are saying there is no way to save my father's boat, even if I did find a way to go back to just the right time?"

"If there was, and you did, you wouldn't have ever met me, and thus . . . you couldn't. See how impossible the knots are?"

". . . Yes," he said.

"Then also consider how easy it could be to let yourself believe that because you didn't or couldn't change a thing that has already happened, it is now your own *fault* that it happened."

"Oh," he said.

"Stay here until you've finished your coffee and warmed up some more," she said, and got up. "I have some things I'm working on in the studio that don't require any extra hands, and the cold will still be there waiting for you when you go."

Now that she reminded him, he could hear again the tiny *tink* of ice against the windows, the flakes having turned back toward frozen rain while they were talking. If the storm was intensifying again, that was bad news, and not just for his walk home.

When the portentous mug was empty, he reluctantly padded into the studio bare-foot. He had expected to see his breath, feel the stone floor chill against his pinkie feet, but despite the wide wall of windows and no fireplace, the room was only a little cooler than usual. Mrs. Hammond looked up from where she was working on a sketch for her next piece, a large moose walking, the full moon snagged on its antlers, leaving a trail of light down its back and the ground behind it.

"Warm enough already?" she asked. "Or do you want to take a supply trip with me, to summer? I had planned to go tomorrow, for a day or so, but . . ."

"I can't," he said. "The storm doesn't seem to be letting up after all, and my brothers are all at sea. I should, if you have nothing immediate for me to do, go home and bring in more wood, and help my mother keep the stove fire going. Our house is drafty and not in the best repair since my father was lost, and the cold seems to work more misery on her each winter."

"This storm will last several days, I think," Mrs. Hammond said, "and then a freeze will settle in for a while after."

He closed his eyes and scrunched up his face, because he did not wish to swear. "For once I hope you are wrong, ma'am," he said. "My brother Joseph was going to haul more wood when his boat returns—he was due tomorrow—but if the storm is this bad, they will put in at a safer port out of its reach until it blows past. We don't have the wood to last more than a day or so."

Mrs. Hammond put down her pencil, got up, then crouched down and pulled a black box out from under the bench. It was a cube, roughly the size of his hands, and she handed it to him. It was hot to the touch, but not unbearably so, and much lighter than he expected. "Are there coals in here?" he asked.

"Sort of. Look," she said. She touched the top, and he almost dropped it when letters appeared there, glowing somehow up through the mysterious material. "If you put your finger on top, and move your finger to the right, it will get hotter. If you move your finger to the left, it becomes colder. If you tap it twice, quickly, it turns either on or off."

She tapped it, and the letters instantly vanished. "Put it somewhere out of sight, but where it gets enough air circulation for the heat to spread. Somewhere in your kitchen, probably, if there's a hidden corner. This isn't an object for anyone's eyes except yours. You understand me, Thomas?"

"I understand, but . . . how do I open it, to add more coal? Or kindling?"

"You don't need to open it, and it doesn't need fuel," she said. "It will last about three days, then bring it back."

"Is it dangerous?" he asked.

"I wouldn't take a bath with it, but no, it's not dangerous. It won't get too hot, and as soon as you touch it or it's moved, it cools. But what eccentricities people accept from me because I am an artist would not extend to magic boxes that make heat from nothing."

“No, I expect not,” he said.

“Then go, tend to your mother,” she said, “and I’ll see you when I get back.”

“Yes, ma’am,” he said, and though his thick wool socks were still somewhat damp to the touch, the boots were only a bit too large, and though the road was now barely traceable under the growing blanket of snow and ice, they kept his feet dry the whole way home.

His mother assumed that newly bearable warmth in the house—especially near her favorite chair, which she was nowhere nimble enough to lift the skirt and look under—was because Mrs. Hammond must have sent Thomas home with extra wood. It was close enough to the truth in effect, if not in the details, that he felt no twinge of guilt at letting that impression stand. His mother, ever one to want to balance the book of favors, insisted he should go back to the cottage and check on Mrs. Hammond, and dig out her door and front walk to show his gratitude. Mrs. Hammond was still away, but he couldn’t exactly explain that to his mother, and anyway, clearing her walk now would make for less work later. Lately, Mrs. Hammond had seemed old, and older, far more often.

The storm had lightened up again, though the air still had that sharp tang of more incoming. He bundled up in his heavy coat and hat and his new-to-him boots and headed up the road, or as best as he could determine where the road was; the walk was familiar enough that even though no one had yet passed through on either sled or carriage, he could keep his bearings thanks to the trees and the slope of the land around him.

*I could draw a tree*, he thought, and then laughed out loud at himself in a cloud of his own breath. Given that his family had thought his rabbit was a fish, what would his family think his tree was? A hat?

He amused himself both with thoughts about how he would draw a tree, and how badly, as he walked, imagining daring two colors this time, and two plates. He’d watched Mrs. Hammond redraw her sketches into each individual color’s areas enough times that he thought even he could figure out two. He imagined himself wetting the stone, seeing the grease lines vanish, only to reappear later under the press, and he wrinkled his nose—still cold, even with his knit scarf wrapped around his face—at the memory of the smell of the etching acid.

Thomas was probably hopeless as an artist, but he was good at the process, and Dorothy’s wheel under his hands as he turned it felt like being in command of something bigger than himself. He wondered, in that moment, if having one’s hands on a boat’s wheel came with that same feeling of momentous control, except magnified by the size of the vessel itself, and if so, he could understand how some men could come to love that life for all its perils. He felt, just the faintest bit, one tiny crack in his fear of the ocean give way to curiosity.

Something was crunching along in the snow further down the road behind him, too light to be a horse, too fast to be a person. He stepped to one side and turned, to find it was a just a dog, heading resolutely up the hill, roughly parallel to his own path.

It was a large hound of some sort, with a long, sharp muzzle, and thick fur in patches of brown, black, and tan, with one perfect white dot of fur over its left eye. It wasn’t one he had seen around town before. It stopped several arm’s lengths away and regarded him warily, as he in turn regarded it.

The dog wasn’t skinny enough to be a stray, though its fur was matted in places and, in the right light, almost seemed rainbow-colored in others. When Thomas made no threatening movement, the dog warily approached, and stretched out to take a sniff of his boots. “Yes, yes, I know, they’re smelly,” Thomas said, and that star-

bled the dog, which retreated, stared at him a moment longer, then took a wide berth around him and away.

"Get yourself home, dog. It's too cold out for wandering!" he called after it, but it paid him no heed, and soon enough disappeared up over the hills toward the wood. The town of Pine Harbor was that way, though quite some distance, and he hoped the dog was taking his advice.

The cottage had that same, almost untouchable air about it that it had the one previous time he'd visited while Mrs. Hammond was away, and the strange lack of sound when he accidentally knocked his shovel against the door while clearing the steps was no less eerie now that he understood—loosely—why it should be that way.

The skies were growing ominous and dark again as he finished, and, sweaty and warm from his exertion, he headed back for home.

"If we were making pen ink, we wouldn't want it anywhere near this viscous," Mrs. Hammond said, as he watched her prepare a new, light lavender from lilac flowers she had brought home from somewhere else, somewhere where springtime was real and not just a fervent wish for something now only half-remembered. She also had a large basket of black raspberries, which she had made clear was "only 75 percent for eating." The other quarter had been carefully rinsed and were drying in a colander on the table, awaiting the inevitable mashing and straining to render them smooth. "I can show you how to make a suitable pen ink, though, if you'd like. If you write letters."

"My oldest sister Anne in Carbonear likes to write letters to my mother," Thomas said. "Her birthday is not until April, but I'd love to learn so I might make her a gift."

"You are very good at processes," Mrs. Hammond said. "It won't be too long before you can teach *me* things."

"Except art," Thomas said, ruefully. "That, I will never be any good at."

Mrs. Hammond shrugged. "Your rabbit print—one plate, one ink, your first try—displaced us in time. Whatever anyone else thinks of your art, clearly whatever magic is afoot here thought it was perfectly fine. Nor, I think, do you dislike it yourself except in how you expect others to judge it."

"Isn't that the point of art, though?" Thomas asked.

"It's a point of selling art, but not at all the point of *making* art," she answered. "But . . . did you want to try your hand again at another piece?"

"I think so," he said, feeling unbearably bold. "I'd like to make a tree."

"How many colors? Plates?" she asked, one eyebrow raised.

"I've been thinking about it," he said.

"Of course you have," she said. "I haven't known you to say much of anything you haven't thought through and agonized over for far too long."

That stung a bit but wasn't wrong. "I think three colors. If . . . if that's not too much."

"No, not at all," she said. "Well, draw it up, and then we can see what we need."

He carefully pulled out the folded piece of paper he'd carried around in his trouser pocket for a month now, waiting to be brave enough to show it. Smoothing it out, he waited as she looked it over, her face giving nothing away, until at last she raised her eyebrows and looked at him. "Three or four colors, maybe? My supply of browns is low right now, so we may need to mix some next, depending on what you want. It's your vision, after all."

"What is this lavender for?" Thomas asked, as he found himself unable to resist plucking another blackberry out of the strainer. "I don't think you've shown me your working piece. Or any in some months now, to be honest."

"Because there is none," she said. "I don't know what to draw anymore, so I'm mak-

ing ink, because it's something so mindless I can do it without having to think much about it. Sometimes I feel like I just have nothing left inside."

"I felt that way for a long time after my father died," Thomas said. "The truth is, it's only recently I've felt like I have any purpose at all."

"My husband didn't die," she said. "He just left. Because I drove him away, and I still don't know how. It's not the same."

"I don't think grief knows or cares about how you lost someone, just that you did."

Mrs. Hammond stood up, letting out a long breath that was shaky, though whether it was sadness or anger at his impertinence, Thomas didn't know. She reached under the bench and pulled out a thick hand-bound album of rag paper and set it on the bench. "My color samples," she said, and ran her fingers along the uneven edges of the pages before flipping it open. "Browns. There are several pages. Greens are toward the back. Look under the acids cabinet to see if you can find some stones the right size that can be sanded down and reused. I'm going to go for a walk and get some fresh air, and I may be a while. Don't feel you need to stay any longer than you wish."

She left without saying more.

Thomas sat, staring at the page of brown paint smudges and the careful lettering underneath each, unable to focus enough to know what he was looking at. He regretted speaking about someone else's grief with such familiarity, regretted asking to waste her time for another chance at his own, feeble art, regretted that he still wanted to make his tree just as much as before. Was his need to share both his grief and his hopes with the one person who didn't see him as utterly useless such a selfish thing?

Too distracted for meaningful discernment between the dozens of careful splotches of brown—*coffee 15? coffee 16? black walnut 5?*—he set the color book carefully aside and went to the cupboard Mrs. Hammond kept old, no-longer-wanted blocks in. There was a stack of several small ones that would be plenty big enough for his tree, and he knelt on the floor, dug out, and dusted off three of them. As he got out the fourth of the smaller ones, a stiff, torn sheet of drawing paper fell from atop the stones further back. Mrs. Hammond had a large cabinet with flat drawers in which she kept all her original gouache and watercolor paintings for each of her prints, but maybe this one had fallen out of reach years ago and been forgotten. Thomas pulled it out carefully and flipped it over.

The painting was of a room, the light streaming through a window, between sashes of crimson, in a profusion of colors onto a deep purple armchair. Sitting upright on the chair was a dog, the focal point of the piece, with its erect, pointed ears, deep black eyes, and brown-black fur. Over its left eye was a white dot that drew his attention, among all the colors, as if the purity of it was burned into the paper.

It was, without any doubt, the dog that he'd seen on the road. On the back, where faded notations of the color recipes were neatly written, there were no dates or count of prints made. Mrs. Hammond was meticulous to a fault about her notes. Had someone in Pine Harbor commissioned a portrait of their dog and then abandoned it? Or had it been intended as a gift but the opportunity passed?

He got up from the floor and dusted off his trousers, and debated whether he should ask about the dog portrait, leave it out in case it had been honestly lost, or put it back where he found it. In the end, he decided to slip it into the drawer with the other finished paintings. Satisfied he'd made the least risky choice, he went into the kitchen to see if Mrs. Hammond had returned to the cottage. It was growing overcast outside, and he could hear the wind beginning to whistle around the eaves of the house. Mrs. Hammond wasn't back yet.

Worry nagged at him as he paced the kitchen, not sure what he should do—was she just in need of time alone, or was something terribly wrong?—until at last he

grabbed his coat off the hook, slipped on his boots and his knit wool hat, and went out to find her.

A few miles up the road from the cottage a path led down toward the cliffs and the sea. Mrs. Hammond liked to stand out there and watch the ocean on bright summer days, though he had never found the same peace there that she had. Now, with the faint touch of rain against his cheeks promising more to come, slush and ice still on the ground, it only served to quicken his anxiety that something must be wrong to keep her out here this long.

The path sloped downward, winding between rocks and the few scraggly, weather-beaten pines that crouched among them, until he reached the overlook. Mrs. Hammond was not there. Terrified now, he walked as close to the edge as he dared and peered down at the waves surging and crashing against the base of the cliffs below, but there was no sign of her there, either. Hanging onto a pine for balance, he leaned out just enough to see along the cliffs in either direction, and spotted Mrs. Hammond's red coat further along the rocks to the north, quite some distance away. How she'd got there, he couldn't guess, but she seemed to be bent over. Crying? Sick? What if she was thinking about jumping?

Thomas climbed up and around the rocks at the edge of the overlook and found the smaller, rougher path she must have taken. Trying very hard not to look over his shoulder at the rumbling, white-capped sea swelling and crashing against the cliffs like a cat impatiently waiting for a fledgling above to fall, he concentrated instead on carefully placing his feet and keeping a grip on whatever he could to steady himself as he went.

When he stopped to catch his breath and wipe cold drizzle from his eyes and face, he could see Mrs. Hammond still ahead. From here, she looked impossibly old, impossibly frail. He called out, both so she would know he was there and he was coming for her, and so as not to surprise her, but the wind and the roar of the waves below stole away his words before they could reach her.

He shifted his feet around, looking for the most stable footing as he considered the best path forward again, until movement caught his eye, and he glanced further up the hillside to see the white-spot dog standing on the rocks above Mrs. Hammond, watching the both of them. He opened his mouth to try calling out again, one arm wrapped around a spindly spruce trunk and his eyes still on the dog, when the dog grew paler, and then vanished as if it had been made of nothing more than clouds.

*A ghost!* he thought, heart hammering in his chest and roaring in his ears. Or was it just some trick of the light, or weather? He looked around him desperately for patches of fog, some rational explanation, and then out to sea, just emerging from behind the cliffs of the peninsula, he spotted his father's boat, the *Fair Tern*.

That moment of shock hit him like lightning, and it was only as his fingers slipped their hold on the spruce that he spied the blue bird silhouette that meant it was the *Blue Gull*, not the red of his father's, but it was too late and he was falling. His knee hit the rocks first, on the edge where he had been standing, and he flailed for a hold on them he couldn't find. About eight feet down he hit another rock jutting out amongst some pines clinging to the cliff edge, and this time he was able to stop his fall, while pain exploded in his side, shoulder, and leg where he had hit.

Everything around him grew hazy, as if his eyes were no longer working properly, and he put all his energy into maintaining his new grip on the trees he had fallen among, and trying to breathe as steadily and calmly as he could, terrified to move and send himself tumbling again.

At some point he noticed Mrs. Hammond's red coat, somewhere up above him, but it required more attention than he could pay to figure out what that meant, until he felt her hands on him, touching him gently.

“Thomas?” she asked.

He managed to focus on her face, through the pain. “Are you okay?” he asked.

“Am I okay?” she asked, incredulous. “Thomas—”

“I was worried something was wrong,” he said. “When you didn’t come back. And then you were all bent over.”

“I was picking some juniper needles,” she said.

“In the rain?”

“I was upset—Thomas, you are badly hurt. Stop worrying about *me*,” she said. “I need to see how bad it is, and I’m going to have to move you a little.”

“If you must,” he said, and then, when she tucked her hands under his back and nudged him slightly upward, promptly fainted.

He awoke again lying on Mrs. Hammond’s coat, at the top of the cliff. He was unbearably cold, and could not stop shaking, for all that every movement filled him with agonizing stabs of pain. There was a low roaring in his ears that grew louder and louder until all at once it stopped, and Mrs. Hammond was there again hovering over him. “Can you help me move you?” she asked. “I got you up the cliff path, but I have trouble staying young for long.”

“I don’t think I can,” he said. “I can’t feel my leg, and it’s hard to breathe, and I’m so cold.”

“There’s a tourniquet on your leg. I only need you to go about six feet,” she said.

“Under?” he exclaimed. “Are you burying me?”

“No, Mr. Thomas Neary,” she snapped. “I just need to get you into my car so we can get you to help before you bleed to death on my favorite coat.”

“Car?” he asked, confused. He managed to turn his head, and there was a long, low, rectangular thing in dark red, like a carriage except shorter and sleeker and shiny. “Your horses ran off.”

She used the coat to pull him toward it. “Never thought I’d appreciate how low to the ground this thing is,” she said. “And don’t you worry about horses, it’s got a hundred and thirty-five of them. Invisible future horses. I dare say you’ll imagine you dreamt this when all is done, if we’re lucky.”

She swung open a door on the carriage with a metallic groan, and then he passed out again as she hauled him through it.

When he woke up next, he was lying flat on his back being jostled and bumped, hard, and the roar he’d heard earlier was all around him. There was a ceiling not too far overhead, some sort of fabric on it, but he could see sky and the very tips of trees out the window, flying by at unreal speed. “What’s happening?” he cried out.

“I’m getting you back to the cottage,” she said.

“Dr. Batten in Pine Harbor—”

“Not good enough,” she said. “This is all my fault. Hang tight; no seatbelts back there. Shit—!”

The car swerved so sharply he would have been thrown from the seat he was lying on if he hadn’t put out an arm to brace himself, and the awful crunch of dust, rocks, and branches hitting the outside of the car as they briefly left the road made him shut his eyes in terror. Then they slowed, and he could see that they were pulling into the small, crooked barn next to the cottage. “Stay right here, don’t move, just keep *breathing*,” she said, as she leapt out of the car. “I have a print ready to go, just for emergencies. It’ll take me five minutes.”

“To get the ink right—”

“It doesn’t need to be pretty to *work*,” she said, and then left him.

He lay there, starting to feel nauseous, things around him becoming indistinct and wavy, as if mirages in the shimmering air over a hot deck, but he was so *cold*. Out-

side, through the narrow view he had from the car to one of the barn windows, daylight suddenly disappeared, as if the whole universe had gone dark at once, and he was certain he had died.

"I'm sorry," he said, although he couldn't have said to whom he meant it, if not most of all himself.

Mrs. Hammond got back in the car. "Hold on just a few minutes longer, Thomas," she said. "Hospital is right down the road."

"There's no—" he started to argue, but she sped up and he fell back against the seat, dizzy and sick, and out the window he could see the reflection of lights in the dark that were too low and near for stars, too steady for gas lamps.

They passed regularly, at the same height, for a while, like a rhythm, and it was several moments before he realized he was drifting again, and the lights had changed and everything outside was noisier, brighter than anything between Penney Cove and St. Johns itself should be.

Then they stopped, and there was bright light everywhere, and two men were helping get him out of the car onto some kind of wheeled cot. "We were hiking and he fell off a cliff," Mrs. Hammond was saying. "Head injury, a few cracked ribs, and his leg."

Someone was putting something clear over his face, full of cold, fresh air, and he hardly noticed as he was rolled, surrounded by faces and people in white, into the brightest, largest building he had ever seen, and if he wasn't certain he would not belong there, he could have believed it was heaven.

Thomas opened heavy, slow eyes to find he was in a bed, his head and torso propped up at an incline, and strange lights and machinery that beeped and flashed and wheezed surrounded him. Mrs. Hammond was curled in an armchair by the window, half asleep, but she roused as he tried to move. There was a thin tube going into his arm, leading up to a bag hung above him, and some strange thing clamped onto his finger. None of it made any sense, and there wasn't even anywhere to start with questions, so he waited.

"Thomas," Mrs. Hammond said. "You gave this old lady one good scare, you know."

"And myself," he said. "I don't understand anything."

She smiled, and got up stiffly to walk over to his bedside "I can try to explain, when we're home again. It'll be a few days before we can go, though. You almost lost your leg; I didn't want to tell you back on the cliff, but you drove a stick right through it in your fall. You lost a lot of blood."

"Oh," he said. "I'm going to lose my leg?"

"I said *almost*. Certainly Dr. Batten couldn't have saved it, and probably not your life either. But here is another story. Listen—" She leaned in closer. "—you have to stop telling people, when they ask, that you were born in 1882. Got it? You're my nephew, and you were born in 1982. Got it?"

"What?" he asked.

"1982," she repeated. "Nephew."

"1982, nephew," he agreed. "Where—*when* are we?"

"1998," she said. "The future. There's a lot of things I like about 1898 better, but the medical care isn't one of them."

"I feel like this is all a fever dream," he said.

"That's not as irrational a response as it could be," she agreed, "but no, we're really here, and you're going to be fine, and I will get you safely home again. If Mr. Coles the banker tells stories about nearly getting run off the road around the bend at Farrow Pond by something fast and red with no horses in sight, you are just going to opine that he drinks too much, and shouldn't be out on the roads in that condition."

He closed his eyes. "If I was imagining this, I imagine I would not have missed seeing that for the world," he said. "But you'll definitely have to explain the vanishing dog."

"Dog?" she asked.

"You know, the dog in the . . ." he trailed off, then decided there was no point not confessing now. "I found the portrait while cleaning up in the studio. The dog with the white spot over its eye? I've seen it around town a couple of times, and it was up on the cliffs just before I fell, and it disappeared like fog fading away and then I thought I saw the *Fair Tern* out to sea, and I slipped—"

"You saw your father's boat?" she asked. "And my dog?"

"It was just the *Blue Gull*, my uncle's boat; they were sister ships. Your dog?"

"My dog, that my husband took with him when he left," she said. "It can't have been. It must have just been similar-looking."

"It was exactly identical," Thomas insisted. "If truth and reality were all very vague and unmoored right now, he was sure of that."

"I don't see how," she said. "It's—oh, Doctor is here again. What did I tell you?"

"1982. Nephew," he repeated.

"Good." She smiled, as an older man with brown skin wearing a white coat, looking very official, came through the door. "Thomas, this is Dr. Okoye."

"But—" he started to say, but the look she gave him silenced him as effectively as if she had put a hand over his mouth. In a world where everything was strange, maybe the only strangeness was him.

"Dr. Okoye is the surgeon who saved your leg. He's one of the best in all of Newfoundland," she said.

The doctor smiled at her, and she smiled right back. "That's very kind," the doctor said. "Let me check your nephew's progress, and then we can talk."

"Great," Mrs. Hammond said. She patted his good knee, very gently, then headed for the door. "I'm going to get coffee, and see if the nurses will let me bring Thomas some Jell-O."

It was four days before they let him leave the hospital. Mrs. Hammond, who had visited him every day, and brought him books, drove her car up to the hospital entrance, and a nurse wheeled him out in a rolling chair.

"Oh, that's a classic!" the nurse said. "Look at the fins! From the fifties?"

"1960 Impala," Mrs. Hammond said. "Best car I've ever owned."

"I bet," she said, and together she and Mrs. Hammond helped him into the front seat of the car. The nurse handed him a pair of crutches, and a bag of medications and other things he would need. "Good luck, Mr. Neary," she said, as Mrs. Hammond got in and they drove away.

They were surrounded by other cars, of all shapes and sizes, including some that looked like little bubbles on wheels that Mrs. Hammond called "bugs." There were no horses anywhere, and more people and things than he had ever seen in his life. "Where are we?" he asked at last.

"Pinewood," she said. "Pine Harbor was renamed in the 1950s, and it's a city now."

"I can see," he said. "It must be one of the most crowded places in the world."

She laughed. Her hands were on a wheel, which she turned to make the car turn, and there were pedals and some sort of lever she kept moving as they slowed down and sped up. "Not hardly," she said.

"I asked Dr. Okoye where he was from, and he said Montreal," Thomas mused. "And there was a nurse, who was his color, and she told me she was born right here."

"We have a few things to talk about, I guess," she said.

"One of the nurses showed me teevee," Thomas said.

Mrs. Hammond groaned. "Okay, make that a *lot* to talk about. In this time, people from all over the world have come here and made it their home, just as you could go almost anywhere and make it yours. And it all works wonderfully as long as people—by which I mean, people who look like you and me—don't get *pissy* or difficult about it."

"That shouldn't be hard," he said.

She snorted. "So you'd think," she said.

The buildings of Pinewood thinned out, and soon they were on a road that seemed, from the hills, to be the same as the one he was familiar with, except it was smooth and black, with a yellow line down the middle of it, and lights along the edges until they were most of the way home.

The cottage looked the same, though the surrounding trees were wholly unfamiliar. The hard surface continued toward the house, and slowly turned back into the rutted dirt track to the barn he knew so well.

They parked, and he leaned on Mrs. Hammond and used one of the crutches to get into the house, where she dropped him gently onto a sofa and went back to get his things. "My mother must be beside herself with worry," he said.

"I came back and told her you'd had a fall, and I'd taken you to a hospital in Gander," she said. "Now sit here while I go run the print back and get us home."

There wasn't much else he could do except sit, anyway, so he fussed at the edges of the thick wrap of bandages on his leg and looked out the window at a world he hardly knew. Cars went by, and a large box-shaped one that was louder than the others, and after it passed the road was quiet again for a while, until the white-spot dog came trotting across the road toward the cottage.

"Mrs. Hammond! Wait!" he yelled. "The dog!"

He could hear the smooth grinding of Dorothy's wheel, a few stops and starts as she lined up the stone, paper, and blade. Not knowing what else to do, he grabbed the crutches from where she'd leaned them against the sofa and struggled to his feet, swaying precariously as he tried to get the things under his arms, find some kind of support. The sky outside was strange, clouds starting to shift in and out, and he lunged for the door and managed to grab the handle just as he lost one of the crutches and started to fall.

Thomas pulled the door open as he fell, and as he lay on the floor in pain, he watched the trees shimmer and dance, and everything outside became one great mass of flux. The dog ran toward him, charging for the door, but mere seconds before it could reach him everything gave one last heave and settled, at last, into the familiar outskirts of the Penney Cove that he had known all his life. The dog was gone.

The sound from the press stopped.

He let his head fall back on the rug, too exhausted to figure out how to get himself back to the sofa, and waited patiently for her to come rescue him again.

Thomas's mother came to visit, along with his brother Jasper, who worked the nets on a boat out of Bonavista and who he hadn't seen in most of a year, and his sister Anne and her husband, who had traveled all the way from Carbonear. They also hauled along Dr. Batten, who asked, several times, which doctor he had seen in Gander, which both Mrs. Hammond and Thomas himself swore they could not recall.

Batten was disappointed, but declared Thomas quite well and healing to what extent he could examine him; with metal staples in parts of Thomas's inner thigh, they were careful not to let him peek too far under the edges of the bandages, only enough to ascertain there was no redness of infection. "You're a healthy lad, no mistake," he told Thomas. "You'll have your sea legs back under you in no time."

At Thomas's look of panic, he put a hand on his shoulder. "Just rest for now, and

let others worry about the work," he said. He packed up his bag and left the room, talked briefly with Thomas's mother in the front hall, before bundling up in his thick coat and letting himself out to where Jasper was waiting to take him back to town.

"You look good," Anne told him.

Thomas laughed. "I do? I fell off a cliff!"

"No, not that," she said. "I mean, you seem . . . happy. Happier, anyway."

"I am," he said. She had left her three children with her in-laws, and he could see the slight swell of baby four on her skinny frame. He hadn't even met his youngest nephew, and already another? But she seemed happy, too, and he said as much. "I miss you," he added.

"You must come visit, when you are recovered and when your work allows," she said. She touched her husband's arm. "I could use a hand when he's out to sea."

"I'll see what I can do," Thomas said.

His mother huffed a bit from the doorway. "Maybe you should take a leave and spend more time with your sister, Thomas," she said. "I didn't think being an artist's assistant would be so dangerous."

"Only when I am not paying attention when I need to be," Thomas said, "which makes it no more nor less dangerous than any other thing."

"You were on a cliff," his mother said. "Whatever could have distracted you so?"

"I thought I saw Pa's boat," he said. "But it was just the *Blue Gull*—a trick of poor light."

His mother sighed, a long and sad sound of old, familiar grief. "I've done the same," she said, "only not while standing on cliffs. You'll come home, when you are able?"

"I will," he promised.

"Dr. Batten thinks you should stay off your feet, and the rutted roads, for at least a few more days," she said. She glanced back at Mrs. Hammond. "If that's not an imposition."

"He was on that cliff because of concern for me," Mrs. Hammond said. "There is no imposition, only responsibility."

His mother nodded. "We should leave you be, then, though I hope you do not mind us visiting tomorrow, if the weather allows?"

"Not at all," Mrs. Hammond said, and though Thomas knew that was probably a lie, she sounded impeccably sincere.

After his family had all left—Anne the most reluctant, as she commented several times, wistfully, how pleasantly warm the cottage was—Mrs. Hammond handed him a plate of the corned beef his mother had brought, along with his next round of pain medication. "I guess you're a captive here a little longer," she said.

"Us both, I suppose," Thomas said. "So, since I cannot make myself useful in any way, nor entertain myself, will you tell me a story?"

She seemed surprised. "A story? About what?"

"The night your dog and husband left," he said, "for I know you don't believe me, but I've seen your dog several times now, *in* several times, and I want to understand. It—"

"He," Mrs. Hammond said. "My dog's name was Magritte."

"*He* is looking for you. I'm certain of it," Thomas said. "As impossible as that seems, is it more so than anything else?"

"Then I'll make you a deal," she said. "You get some sleep, and stop fretting about my life and my mistakes, and if you still want to know the story tomorrow, I will tell you."

Thomas could feel the medicines already making him sleepy. "That's a promise?" he asked.

"I suppose if it must be, yes," she said. "Now rest. If your family is going to be

traipsing in and out of here for the next several days, I have some things to put out of sight."

"Don't forget the moose mug," he said.

"I won't forget the moose mug," she confirmed.

He tried to remember what else, but then he was asleep.

"I am not proud of that fight," she declared, when it was clear he hadn't forgotten he'd made her promise. "It was pointless, and regrettable even before it cost me everything. Anger is like that; once it's ablaze, it wants to keep burning, however flimsy the fuel."

He had, he realized, never seen her angry. Scared, frustrated, sad—sad most of all—and at turns joyous and filled with mischievous energy that reminded him of Anne when they were growing up. It was hard to imagine the Mrs. Hammond he knew losing her temper, but maybe this was exactly why.

"We'd bought this cottage almost a year previously and added the studio, but it was the first time I'd tried to make my own inks, and it wasn't going well," she said. "I'd burned the first batch of berries I was trying to simmer down—those dreaded lemonade berries, in fact, and I've loathed them ever since—and then burned my hand trying to get them off the stovetop in a panic. Mixing up a second batch I rushed and made it too viscous, then slopped a big spoonful on myself and the workbench trying to thin it. By the time I had the ink ready to go, I was in an extraordinary temper, and Arthur came in and suggested I take a break before starting the actual print run. He was right, of course, but I couldn't see it."

It was the first time she'd ever used her husband's name in Thomas's hearing. She had leaned forward in her armchair, her hands clasped across her knees, and she looked the oldest he had ever seen her. He wished he could sit up on the couch, reach out a hand in comfort, but he'd learned the hard way that moving was best kept to acute necessity. And anyway, she'd placed a plate of toast and jam on his chest, perhaps to anchor him in place.

"We fought, then. Well, I fought with him, and he tried to be reasonable, and that only made me angrier. When I finally stomped off to our bedroom, it was more to get away from him than to take a nap, but I fell asleep, which wasn't at all what I wanted but exactly what I needed," she said. "When I woke up, it was dark out, and they were gone."

"Nothing was different, or had been disturbed?" Thomas asked.

"I wouldn't say that," she said. "Magritte must have gotten into the studio—probably I hadn't closed the door, or Arthur hadn't, but who could blame him being distracted, after the tantrum I threw? There was glass from smashed ink bottles in the trash, and rags stained where he'd cleaned the workbench and slate floor, and even Dorothy's bed as best he could. He only missed a few spots, and them under the scraper."

Now he couldn't help himself, and with one hand to keep his remaining slice of toast atop his plate, did his best to lean in her direction. "Was the print ready to go?" he asked. "The block inked and paper in place, then scraped down and set?"

"Yes?" she said, "though I don't see what—"

"Did the block get moved at all through Dorothy?" Thomas interrupted. She could hardly fire him and kick him out now, injured, in pajamas, and with toast on his abdomen.

"Arthur must have rolled it forward to get at some of the spilled ink, but—"

"Don't you see?" he interrupted again. "It was dark out, though, so you wouldn't have *seen*. You woke up, went into the studio, rolled the block backward—"

Mrs. Hammond drew in breath, sharply, and her face became a mask of pure,

dawning horror. “We traveled,” she said. “He must have gone out chasing Magritte, and when I woke up, I didn’t know, and I brought the cottage back and I *abandoned* them in some other time. All these *years* believing it was the other way around . . .”

“Now you know why you ordered those lemonade berries from Mexico,” Thomas said.

“Why? To torment myself further over losing Arthur and my dog?”

“No,” he said and pointed at her emphatically with the skinny corner of his half-eaten triangle of toast, “so we can go back and *get them*.”

The blocks were the ones he’d seen deep in the back of the cabinet, beneath the painting of Magritte. When she pulled them out and set them on the workbench, he found that they’d been coated with a preserving gum and a thin, transparent film laid over it to preserve the etching. “I don’t even remember doing that,” Mrs. Hammond said. “I only remember wanting them out of sight and away. I did think about sanding them down for a new image, but I couldn’t bring myself to even take them out again, much less permanently wipe my images. It would have been admitting there was no hope, and no possibility of forgiveness. And then after a while, I just stopped thinking about them.”

Thomas peeled off the film, marveling at how it stayed intact, and held it up to the light. It was like glass with the thinness and flexibility of paper, and no doubt yet another Future Thing. He set it aside carefully on the workbench.

“It’s just plastic wrap,” Mrs. Hammond said, which meant nothing to him. She was going through her book of ink recipes, trying to find all the ones from the original print run, and occasionally stopping to curse her own handwriting, though he thought it less a matter of the script and more her eyes, as she peered anxiously at the paper from too close, as if her sight was failing.

Maybe it was; Mrs. Hammond almost seemed to be aging before Thomas’s own eyes. “Perhaps I can look?” he asked gently, and she grunted in dissatisfaction, but handed the notebook over.

“I think we have all these things,” he said, “and the stones don’t look bad. How long has it been?”

“I’m not sure,” she said. “I can’t figure it out anymore. Time is so strange.”

“Well, I can help,” Thomas said. His great uncle Martin had been a minister and had impressed upon his nephews the value of being able to read and write and do basic maths. His own father had been no exception, and despite his devotion to the sea, had kept that tradition going, as would Thomas in turn, if ever his life brought him a wife and children of his own. Impossible things, he’d learned, could still sometimes happen. “What year was it when your husband went missing?”

He could see her trying to focus and remember. “1994,” she said at last.

“You mean 1894,” he prompted.

“No, no,” she said, frowning, annoyed. “I remember it was just a few days after the twenty-fifth anniversary of when man first walked on the moon. Arthur always loved astronomy things, and had brought home moon pies.”

Thomas blinked, his hand on the notebook page poised but frozen, as his whole body felt suddenly out of place, doubting his own sanity. “Walked—?” he started to ask, then shook his head. They didn’t have time for this, not now. “I thought you said you hadn’t traveled before that night, but you went to 1994 first?”

“No, I started there,” she said. “I traveled *here*. It was an accident the first time, but then I came back and stayed. It felt like I’d been given a chance at a fresh start.”

“When were you born?” he asked.

“1962,” she answered.

He thought about that for a bit. His leg and ribs were starting to ache again, and

he leaned back in the wheeled chair she'd used to get him into the studio. "I'm older than you," he said. "Eighty *years* older. How does it feel to be so young?"

She snorted, then her face grew serious again. "What if I'm too old and it's too late to fix this?"

"You're old right now, but I'm not," he corrected. "As my eyes are better, I'll read you the materials list, and then you can make the ink while I prep the stones. I'm afraid you'll have to fetch things for me, instead of our usual other way around."

"Yes, sir," she said. He gave her the first few things, and she pulled them down off the shelves one by one, measuring them out in her big bowl before asking for the next. Last, she disappeared into the main house and returned a long while later with tea, warm biscuits and butter, and the lemonade berries.

"I froze them. Once they thaw, they'll be good for only a short time. Oh!" She looked suddenly stricken. "I forgot your mother is visiting again today!"

"She won't come until the rain lets up," Thomas said, glancing back out the big windows to be sure it hadn't already. If anything, it looked grayer, more miserable outside than the last time he'd looked up from his work. "I doubt we'll see her for a few hours, if at all today."

"I'm useless," Mrs. Hammond said. "A few hours, or a month? It doesn't matter. Look how my hands are shaking."

She held up her hands and they were shaking so badly he almost couldn't bear to see it. "Do you trust me?" he asked. It was a question he could never have dared ask of anyone for fear of the answer, because he had never trusted *himself* with anything, nor had ever imagined he could.

"I do," Mrs. Hammond said.

He felt like he could soar, or dance, or laugh until he expired of old age. Was time travel any miracle to compare to someone believing in your competence? "Well, then, go get mashing and boiling those berries, and let me work. Can I . . . can I use the future lamp? It's not very bright in here."

She slid it from her side of the workbench to his, and showed him how to turn it on and off, then left it off and went into the kitchen. He stared at it for a long moment, terrified of breaking it, worried about somehow touching it wrong, then as the rain turned from a slow drumbeat to a deafening roar, gave up, put his finger on the switch as lightly as he could, and pressed. The lamp sprang on instantaneously, and he yanked his hand back as if the brightness could burn, though by now he knew better.

When Mrs. Hammond came back with the mashed, strained berries for the ink, he leaned back in his chair, stretching his neck; it was easy to lose track of time long enough, while hunched over work, that he worried if he was alone he'd forget to move for so long he'd turn to stone without noticing.

Mrs. Hammond also brought a plate with the last few slices of the cranberry pound cake his sister Anne had brought. When he eagerly picked up a slice, he noticed the pills that had been on the plate beside it. Dr. Okoye had insisted he not take the pain medicine on an empty stomach, and Mrs. Hammond was clearly of the same opinion.

"Not yet," he said. "It makes me fuddled, and I need to be sharp for a little longer, until the stone is ready. Another hour."

He glanced toward the window and the gray, close skies outside, worried, and Mrs. Hammond caught the movement. Even when at her oldest, she was still sharp, and missed little. "It's sleeting now," she said.

Thomas took in a deep breath, wincing as his ribs ached, and let it out. "Good," he said, and got back to work.

She finished with the ink about the same time as he finally let himself be satis-

fied that the stone was ready. The sleet outside was relentless now, a non-stop, tiny sharp tapping of ice on the window glass, and he'd never been so happy to hear it. Dutifully, he took his pills and ate the cranberry pound cake, as Mrs. Hammond rolled the stone on its cart over to Dorothy. When the last crumb was gone, he wheeled his chair closer, and together they managed to get the stone transferred to the press bed.

He watched as she triple-checked the viscosity and blend of her ink, then began rolling it on in increasingly confident strokes. It was, he thought, oddly mesmerizing and calming—then he realized that was just the meds kicking in, and that his pain had become less immediate, but also that he very much wanted to lie down. “I’m sorry,” he said, “but I’m fading already.”

“You overtaxed yourself, so it’s no wonder,” Mrs. Hammond said. “Do you need help getting back to the sofa in the living room?”

“I want to see where—when—we go,” he said, and stifled a betrayal of a yawn.

“There’s a big window right behind the sofa,” she said. “I daresay you’ll have a better view from there, if you prop yourself up—not too much, mind—on some pillows.”

“But what if you need my help?” he asked.

“I’m getting stronger,” she said, and held up a hand. They had become less gaunt than this morning, and her face looked younger. “Lately even when I’ve been younger I’ve felt old, and none of it ever as bad as this morning, but something is changing. And if I do need you, I’ll need you rested.”

He had to concede she had a point there, but she caught his expression as he did. “You’ve seen us move before, Thomas,” she chided. “I promise I won’t let you sleep through anything fun.”

Thomas was sure that, at that point, there was little that could come up in the near future that he wouldn’t sleep through, and reluctantly he agreed and rolled himself out of the studio and into the living room, where the view out the window remained its usual self, for now. He was dimly aware of getting himself gracelessly over to the couch and pulling the blankets up over his shoulder, and not much at all after that.

It was the sound of quiet footsteps that roused him, head and body still weighty from not willingly relinquished deep sleep. The room had fallen dark around him, and he pushed himself up carefully to peer out the window. He couldn’t make out more than variations of shadow, but now he noticed that the ever-present rush and roar of the sea was louder, sounding closer. “Mrs. Hammond?” he called out, suddenly afraid.

A hand was pressed gently but firmly over his mouth. “Quiet, and keep your head down,” a man’s voice spoke low in his ear. “Where’s Celia? Who are you?”

“I’m Thomas. Neary. Thomas Neary,” he answered, letting himself fall carefully back onto his stack of pillows. What little he could make out of the man’s face in the dark was hidden behind a bushy, unkempt beard, and under long, tangled hair, not too unlike some of the men who hung around the docks too gone into their drink to be trusted aboard, but dispensing their own loud advice to all who passed within hearing anyway. At least the man didn’t smell of rum. “I’m Mrs. Hammond’s assistant,” he added.

“Assistant?” the man asked, incredulous. “Since when?”

“You’re Arthur Hammond.” Thomas’s brief feeling of elation at their success was drowned in a spike of pain. “Almost a year now.”

Arthur leaned over him, and pulled the heavy curtains closed. “A year?” he repeated. “It’s only been five months since I was stranded here. And how old are you?”

“Almost seventeen,” he said.

“So, you were born in, what? ’80, ’81?”

"Eighty-two," he said.

"So everything probably seems really weird to you right now. You must have seen the movie *Back to the Future*? Where they time-travel in a DeLorean—"

"What's a movie?" Thomas interrupted.

Even in the dark, he could tell Arthur was staring at him. "But if you're from 1982—"

"1882," Thomas corrected.

Arthur sat down hard on the floor. "So she got stranded, too," he said. "That explains why it took so long for her to get back. I'm sorry to tell you this, but as hard as it will be to believe, you've just traveled in time."

"I know," Thomas said. "Do you know when we are?"

"About the year 3050, but that's just a very rough guess," Arthur said. "There was a dark ages of some sort, around 2200, and people lost track of the years for a long time. They reconstructed calendar just called it a century for convenience, and to stop argument from all the factions who had a different calculus on determining time passed, and started counting again from there, but I think it was probably at least three. We need to find Celia—I came in through the studio, but she wasn't there."

"She must've gone out looking for you," Thomas said.

"Shit," Arthur swore, then stiffened up, looking guiltily at Thomas. "Oh. Sorry, 1800s, right, so: darn? Drat? Sugar!"

"I come from a family of sailors," Thomas said, mildly.

"Oh," Arthur said again. "Nap time is over, I'm afraid. We have to get Celia and get out of here before *they* realize the house is back. We'll split up. You take—"

"I'm sorry, but I can't," Thomas said. "I'm on your sofa because I fell from the cliff-side several days ago, and other than carefully and slowly rolling in a chair back and forth through the cottage, I'm not of much use."

"Damn. This is a dangerous place," Arthur said. He rummaged through his bag, and put a small glass tube with a stopper on top of Thomas's blanket. "Look, I'm not going to make the call for you, or judge you either way, but one thing this time has is great medicine. That'll fix up whatever is busted, in a handful of hours depending on how bad things are, but it won't be *nice* about it. I'd try to describe how much it'll hurt, but it can't be put into words. I'm sure you'll heal on your own just fine, in time, without it. But I have to go find Celia before they do, and they're going to come for us all sooner or later. Keep the lights off, keep the noise down, and don't go outside unless you absolutely have no choice. Move slow, if you do—the sentinels alert to movement. Got it?"

"And if I take this?" Thomas picked up the tube.

"Then try to muffle your screaming with the couch pillows," Arthur said. "I'm sorry, that sounds callous, but it's survival."

"Who are *they*?" Thomas asked. "An enemy of the people you got the medicine from?"

"No, *they are* the people. You survive multiple near-extinctions of your species and civilizations, you make some choices to try to keep it from happening again, and I can't say as how I can't see where they're coming from. But my ancient twentieth-century ass couldn't abide giving up who and what I am to be able to live with them, and they didn't see no as an option," Arthur said. "I—and now you and Celia—are a plague, all uncontrolled thoughts and ideas and feelings, and after I rejected their offer of curing me, I doubt they'll extend the same opportunity to anyone else from this house."

"And you?"

"If she's not in the house, there's not too many places she could have gone. I'm going to try to find her before she gets noticed," Arthur said. "If she returns, keep her here. You got that?"

"I'll do my best, sir," Thomas said.

"Good man," Arthur said. "We may be a while, either way. It's been a long time since I've had a good meal, and I get tired much more easily than I used to."

"Take the bread and some marmalade," Thomas said. "There should be half a loaf left. And maybe take the automobile?"

"The car is *here*?" Arthur exclaimed.

"In the barn," Thomas said. "I'm afraid I don't know much else about how to make use of it, but the key for it is on the mantel by the clock."

"You, Thomas, are an excellent assistant," Arthur said, already backing away into the shadows. "With hope, we will both be back soon."

"Good luck," Thomas said, but Arthur was already gone, as silently as he had come. He heard the roar of the car a short while later, and listened as it faded quickly into the night.

Thomas looked down at the pill in his hand, then out the window at the impenetrable darkness of the future, and wasn't sure which frightened him more, nor which should.

It was only after he'd roused himself enough to run to the bathroom and vomit out what felt like most of his organs that he realized, hunched over the toilet bowl, sweating and shaking, having trouble breathing through the pain, that he'd run.

—A frantic scramble, as unbalanced and miserable as the need had been urgent, but nonetheless he had *run*.

Mr. Hammond had not lied about the effectiveness, nor the cost, of his cure. When he could keep his eyes open for more than a few seconds without his stomach lurching up into his throat, he peeled back the bandages wrapped around his ribcage. The swelling had subsided, the bruising almost completely faded, though there was a glittery, metallic sheen to his skin that was an all-too-familiar type of inexplicable.

Thomas was certain Mrs. Hammond had not returned since Mr. Hammond had left, as he doubted she would have left him in the state that had gripped him for some unknown number of hours. Still, he checked the cottage again—growing steadier on his feet, and the pain lessening by slow increments—to be sure. Thinking of Mr. Hammond's warnings about danger, he checked that the block was ready to go back through Dorothy at a moment's notice, but not positioned such that it could be nudged by accident and leave them stranded.

Then he went to the studio door and peered carefully out.

His eyes were already adjusted to the darkness, and the Moon, steadfastly there in every time they had gone, shone down three-quarters full. Still, it took him some minutes to make sense of what he could see.

The stone path that led to the front door, then across the front of the cottage to the studio, was the same as always, but past it where he expected the uneven shadows of grass or the brightness of snow in moonlight was only formless shadow. Thomas stared at the dark, trying to find its shape, when it struck him that there was no shape at all. The reason the crash and roar of the sea was so loud was that the cottage and its immediate perimeter was now only connected to the land by the stone path and the thin strip of ground to either side of it.

Once that perspective clicked, he could make out scorching along the rock face across from him, as if the land had been blasted away, leaving only that one, tenuous bridge. Remembering how the cottage had felt when he'd visited, that time Mrs. Hammond was away, he was certain that the path had obstinately persisted through the destruction, rather than been intentionally spared. Mr. Hammond's warnings about the people of this time seemed too little in the face of that.

A sudden fear that perhaps Mrs. Hammond, not knowing the land around her

home had been blasted away, had fallen, grabbed him. He went back into the house and retrieved one of the electric lanterns, but left it off both to spare his night vision and keep himself still somewhat hidden. He also took his coat and gloves, and a small kit of medicines that Mrs. Hammond kept near the door.

Thomas was halfway across the path to the new shoreline when the seething anger of the waves got to him, started him trembling, and in fear of falling he got down on his hands and knees and crawled, lantern handle in his teeth, the remainder of the way.

Only after reaching the far side did he think to look back and over, and sure enough, a much wider and less treacherous strip of land connected the small barn to the rest of the land. He lay on his back in the dry, stunted grass, staring up at the stars and tried to calm his breathing, trying not to cry or laugh at his own foolishness for not having thought how Arthur had taken the automobile out. Did he think it had flown?

Though, to be fair, how did he know it couldn't? It wasn't something he'd asked about, and he knew all too well how quaintly inadequate his assumptions about how anything worked had proven to be.

The curve of the land muffled some of the sounds of the sea, and he listened intently for the automobile in the distance, or any voices or cries or other signs of her presence nearer. He heard nothing.

The temperature was cool, though not unbearably cold, a typical early spring or mid-autumn night. There should have been at least a few sounds of hardier insects, maybe some birds, but there was nothing but a steady, low whirr somewhere far off, too steady and unbroken to be natural. If he'd scared any creatures with his scramble across the path, he'd been quiet and unmoving long enough now for them to have forgotten.

Doing his best not to think about it, he got up and walked closer to the cliff, body still stiff but complaining less with each step. Once he was as close as he could bear, he got down again on his hands and knees, and then his belly, to approach the edge.

The grass closest to the cliffs had been seared from the ground. His movements stirred up the smell of smoke, and his hands came away from the ground coated in ash; for a moment he panicked about what his mother would say, when it came time to wash his clothes, but the ridiculousness of worrying about that in the face of his current situation forced a low chuckle from him. His own amusement seemed to feed his resolve, and he dragged himself over to where he could look down toward the sea.

The moonlight shimmered and danced across the lines of the incoming waves, and caught the edges of the spray where they crashed and were thrown back. He'd expected the cliff to be nearly vertical, but it looked like the destruction had been accomplished in stages, leaving narrow, terraced steps on the way down that were mostly in shadow.

Thomas slid open a narrow window in the lantern cover and pointed it down before switching it on, amazed as always at how the light was instantaneous and strong, bathing the landscape below in its cold white light.

There were no bodies, to his immense relief. He swung the light up and over, at the bridge left under the stone path, and the house itself. There, the rock was a smooth, vertical sheer, the perfect footprint of the cottage and its perimeter carved down fifty, sixty feet to the water swell. The rock shone, almost as if it had been melted to near-glass, and what power that must have taken frightened him enough that he switched the lantern off and waited for his spoilt night vision to return.

The whirring sound from before sounded closer now. There was something else, too—the crackle and swish of something running through the dry, dead grass.

Mr. Hammond's warnings still sharp in his ear, Thomas clipped the lantern

around one of his suspenders and turned, sliding himself over the crisp, clean edge of the cliff. His boots found the first ledge on the rock face just where he'd expected to. He crouched down slowly out of sight, his stability and balance good enough despite stiffness and residual pain from his injuries that he had the confidence to let go and lean against the rock, pressing the side of his face to the cliff where the cold solidity was a comfort. Satisfied he could not easily fall from where he was, he closed his eyes and concentrated on listening only to what was above, not below.

Whatever was coming through the grass stopped near the cliff edge, just above where Thomas crouched. He heard fast panting, as it tried to catch its breath; the whining sounds still seemed farther away, where he judged the first hill on the road toward Pine Harbor was, or whatever it was called now, if it existed at all.

He dared to straighten up, fingers splayed across the rock face, and peered nervously over the edge.

Something furry touched his face and, startled, he nearly fell. "Magritte?" he whispered, and the dog leaned its head over enough for him to see him in silhouette against the moonlit sky, the one white dot over his eye almost luminescent in shadow. Now he could make out other colors, the spilled inks the dog had run through on his fateful first escape from the cottage the night of the fight. Those colors glowed too, faint in the fur but decidedly *there*, and he wondered if the dog's wandering through time was because he was still, somehow, tied into whatever magic process moved the cottage.

Above him, the dog faded, moonlight passing through where his body had just been, catching last on the hints of color and leaving, for an instant, a ghostly outline in the air.

In the distance, a tiny red flash had caught his eye, and he turned his face toward where he thought he'd seen it, scanning the ground and sky, and waited as patiently as he could stand for it to happen again. When it did, he could make out the small, dark shape stationary in the sky, neither near him or the cottage. He thought it might even be beyond the ridge, though it was hard to be sure without knowing how big it was.

Magritte reappeared and licked Thomas's ear. "Good boy," he reassured the dog, keeping his voice low so that his words would not carry far, drowned in the ocean's dreadful noise. The dog let him pet his nose, and then scratch his ear.

"You're a very good boy," Thomas said again, and then pointed toward the cottage. "Your master and mistress are here. Do you understand home? You can go home now."

The dog tilted his head, regarding Thomas, then stood up, shaking his body as if shedding his fur of rain. As if he'd understood permission granted, he loped for a short distance before breaking into a run, racing along the cliff edge for the cottage.

Thomas felt lighter than he had in a long time. Arthur would bring Celia back, and then they could all go back to where they belonged. Surely they would stay in Penney Cove, of Thomas's time, and—

—the thin red streak of light across the sky caught his attention, and his smile slipped away as the object from the ridge came flying toward them faster than Thomas could have imagined, the whine a rising crescendo. Magritte tried to dodge, but the object collided with him, hitting him hard and low in the side, and sending the dog and itself sailing over the cliff edge.

"No!" Thomas shouted.

The dog hit the water below and went under, as the thing glided free just out of reach of the swells and rose back up into the sky, turning toward where he stood on the cliff ledge.

He froze.

The thing slowed, its red eye blinking again, as if it were seeking. *The sentinels alert to movement*, Mr. Hammond had said, and he cursed himself for not remembering that when he'd told the dog it was okay to go home.

Where he stood on the ledge he was mostly in shadow, and very, very slowly he hunched his shoulders and tilted his head to one side over his shoulder, to duck more fully out of the moonlight. The thing—the sentinel—came toward him, nearly at eye-level, floating steadily and effortlessly as if it cared not for wind, much less any other law or force of nature.

When it was barely a few feet from his face, him holding his breath and terrified to blink, some instinct kicked in and he swung the lantern up, with all the strength he had, and bashed the thing out of the air. It hit the cliff wall beside him, then the ledge, and was righting itself when Thomas stomped on it as hard as he could, several times, then picked it up and slammed it into the rock until pieces fell off, and it stopped moving, and the terrible whirring stopped.

Thomas threw what was left of it into the sea.

It took everything he had, including what was left of his anger, to peer down into the water below for the dog. The water was inky dark and opaque, the moonlight barely brushing the tops of the swells below. *That would only need one color plate*, he thought, *and no second pass for highlight at all*.

He tried the lantern, but even that seemed to make no difference, and his heart sank at the recognition the dog was surely lost, another soul taken by the depths. Feeling sick, he turned his head away, and saw in his peripheral vision something, near the base of the unnatural cliffs, further down. It was bobbing in the water, and did not seem to be moving except with the waves, shoving it up against the rock again and again.

Thomas knelt carefully on his ledge, then swung his legs over and let himself drop to the next one. One hand against the cliff wall, he walked as fast as he dared on the slick rock to where he was above whatever was in the water. Then he dropped down another level, and knelt there to peer down.

It was the dog's back, and he could see now he was making feeble effort to get his head above water, and failing against the never ending drumbeat of the waves. Lying on his stomach, Thomas reached down and tried to grab it, as a new wave brought it briefly closer again, but although he managed to brush his fingertips against the sodden fur, even on the highest waves it was just out of reach, and just the touch of the water on his hands felt like death reaching for him, too.

He sat up. Arthur and Celia would be back soon, and they could save the dog, right?

He hated himself the moment he had that thought, hated everything he had ever been, was now, or would ever be: the coward, and never the slightest thing more. "I can't," he told the dog, and the ocean, and the world. "I can't!"

And then, because there was no one else, he did anyway.

Lowering himself over the edge into the heaving, malevolent swell made him involuntarily cry out in terror, and he got a mouthful of sea water that brought memories of him being dragged from the sea by an uncle, lungs filled with water, as if the ocean was trying to devour him from both inside and out. He remembered lying in the cold, hard-packed sand and pressure of hands on his chest as the water was forced to give and retreat, and how it seemed like it was years before he didn't still feel cold, *invaded*, as if a promise had been given, and would inevitably, someday, be collected upon.

The next swell brought the dog up against him, and he flailed with one of his arms to grab the animal around the torso, but the waves danced it away again as he slipped further down into the frigid water.

Then, like some miracle, his foot found a rock, some fragment no doubt blasted from the cliffs, and though he barely had a one-handed grip now on the ledge, the waves lost some of the punch of their push and pull. Enough that the next time the incoming waves pushed the dog at him, he was able to wrap his free arm around it, and in one desperate heave, he shoved the dog up onto the ledge.

It took nearly all his remaining strength to pull himself back up out of the water to lie beside the dog, who wasn't making any noise or moving. But its chest was rising and falling, and Thomas wrapped his arms around it as he waited until he caught his own breath, and let all the grief and terror settle, and subside, and let go of his heart and mind.

When he could, he pushed the now-shivering dog up onto the next ledge, and climbed up after. When he reached the last ledge, he peered fearfully over the edge, looking for more of those red lights, listening for the whirr of the flying things, but he could only hear the ocean now.

Inside the cottage, he wrapped the dog in a towel and set him on the sofa. In the back of the cottage, he found Celia's closet and, after peeling off sodden layers of no longer needed bandage from his leg, changed into some of Arthur's old clothes. He didn't think the man would begrudge him that liberty, and anyway, he was too exhausted and wrung out to fully care if he did. With hands so cold and stiff he was half-certain his fingers had lost all life in them, he managed to fumble his way through making himself a cup of tea in the kitchen, gulped it down still scalding hot, and then curled up around Magritte and pulled the blankets around them both.

Commotion woke Thomas from a light, uneasy doze. The dog was no longer shivering against him, and breathing more smoothly in his sleep. It took him a moment to push through the wool in his thoughts to recognize the sound of Mrs. Hammond's automobile, in between thunderous booms that sounded like the trio of cannon on the Penney Cove common that were fired off to celebrate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, when he was a small child. He remembered, viscerally, squeezing his father's large, rough hand, frightened by each blast, and his being held securely in turn.

When he rose to turn around and peer cautiously out the window, his body was stiff, a deep ache settled through his bones. He groaned as loud as he dared, which wasn't very loud, and got a single ear-twitch from the dog in sympathy. Dawn was just starting to lighten the sky, day still some time away, but he could see a plume of smoke over the hills.

*No, he thought, after another few moments' study, make that two.*

The roar of the automobile was still growing louder, so whatever was on fire, at least it probably wasn't that. As he watched, there was a whistle, and then an explosion, throwing up clouds of smoke and flame, along the ridge. The boom rattled the cottage's windows. He saw a flash of something red through the stunted trees, moving away from the new fire. Following overhead, a swarm of dozens of floating machines like the one that had knocked Magritte off the cliff chased after, and another stand of trees erupted in fire.

Thomas ran from the living room, through the studio, then out and around to the barn. He threw the doors wide, and propped them open with two old bricks sitting at the edges of the drive. Mrs. Hammond's automobile was out of the trees and rushing toward the cottage at alarming speed, staying just barely ahead of pursuit.

Thomas thought they weren't slow down, not until the last possible moment, and mindful of that, he stepped well away from the entrance. This time he heard the low whistle of the incoming projectile, and the car dodged just in time to avoid becoming part of a new crater. Someone—Arthur? *Yes, Arthur*—pulled himself halfway out the window, and hefted a thick metallic tube up onto his shoulder.

The whistle of the return fire was identical in sound, but this time the target was in the air, and disappeared in a puff of flame and smoke. "Yes!" he shouted, with an intensity that surprised him.

The automobile leapt over the last, short hill and hit the rutted dirt of the drive with a spray of dust and gravel, heading directly for the open barn doors.

Thomas moved further away, and stood against the outside wall of the studio. He could see Mrs. Hammond's face through the front window, blood on her forehead, determination clear even from where he stood.

When he was already certain it was too late, she slammed on the brakes, and the automobile's wheels locked up and it skidded, with a terrible squeal, through the open doors. Thomas winced as he heard it hit things inside, but no final crash of the car passing through and out the rear wall came. Instead, Arthur came dashing out of the garage, his unkempt hair loose and wild around his head, and handed a second of the big tubes to him. "You think you can hit a sentinel?" he asked.

Celia emerged from the garage, limping, and he saw she had blood not just on her forehead but down her side. "Are you all right?" Thomas asked.

She frowned at him. "Are *you* all right?" she asked in return. "Should you be up on your feet?"

Thomas turned to watch as Arthur fired again. The sentinels scattered, and the shot missed, but it slowed them down. "I'm better now," he said. "The print is ready to go."

"I'll get us out of here, then," she said, and disappeared into the studio.

"Look through this eyepiece, and when you see the 'X' on what you want to hit, push this button on the side," Arthur said, showing Thomas on his weapon. "The drones move fast, so shoot a little ahead of them."

"Yes, sir," Thomas said.

"I can cover this side if you can cover the other," Arthur said. "Remember we're just buying time. You don't have to hit them, as long as we make them back off."

"Yes, sir," he said again. Arthur had taken up position at the corner of the barn, so he crossed over along the thin strip of yard and walkway to stand in front of the cottage door.

Thomas's father had made sure that he and his brothers—and Anne, who had insisted—were all comfortable with using his Winchester rifle, and though the future gun that Arthur had handed him bore little resemblance, there was enough to figure it out. He raised it up onto his shoulder and put one eye to the long, thin tube mounted atop the larger barrel, and raised the gun until the blurry shape on an incoming sentinel appeared in the X in the middle of the view. Before he could even shout over a question to Arthur, the view focus sharpened.

The sentinel drone was a frightening thing, magnified by the eyepiece; spinning blades atop it seemed to be what kept it aloft and moving, while the underside was an array of tubes that seemed nearly identical to the one he had resting on his shoulder. Arthur must have stolen them, he decided, and felt not at all bad about that.

There was a flash, and moments later a projectile from the leading sentinel hit on the shore right near the walkway bridge, sending up fragments of rock and dirt with a tremendous boom. He turned away as gravel pelted him, and when he looked back, the end of the walkway had been severed from the land.

The cottage and its surroundings, which had been so utterly impervious to destruction when it wasn't actually present in this time, was clearly vulnerable now.

"Gotcha!" Arthur shouted, as the sentinel that had just fired exploded in midair.

The rest of the drones, or whoever was behind them, must have realized the cottage could be damaged, because they sped up, trying to close the distance to where the lead had been in range to fire.

Thomas peered again through the eyepiece, lined up the sight, and pressed the button. His gun whined, and a half-second later when it fired it nearly knocked him over backward. "That's for Magritte!" he shouted as he hit, and his target disappeared.

He lined up on another, braced himself against the door behind him, and fired again. "And that's for making me go in the water!" he yelled, as the next sentinel disintegrated and fell in pieces.

"Good shot, Thomas!" Arthur called over to him. "Four more to go, at least until reinforcements arrive."

Thomas lined up on the next one, but when he pressed the button on his gun, instead of a brief whine, it beeped once and then the sight turned dark. He lowered it. "I think I need to reload," he called over to Arthur. "How do I do that? And with what?"

"Not the slightest idea," Arthur said, as another bomb took out a chunk of the drive, and he had to duck away from the blast debris. He straightened up, and pointed; in the distance, Thomas could see another, larger swarm of sentinels coming their way. "Go help Celia! We are running out of time."

Thomas hated to leave him alone, but Arthur was right that he could do a lot more inside than out here. He ducked through the cottage door and raced to the studio, to find Mrs. Hammond struggling to turn Dorothy's wheel. She was shrunken and frail, the oldest he had ever seen, and tears stained the papery skin of her cheeks. "It's all my fault. They're going to kill us before we can get out of here," she said, "and the wheel is stuck."

Was she getting older as he watched? Thomas stepped in, and put his hands over hers on the wheel. "We're going to make it," he said. "Arthur is here, and—"

"Why are you wearing Arthur's clothes?" Mrs. Hammond asked.

"Mine got wet. We need—"

"How did they get wet?" she asked.

"I had to go into the sea to save Magritte," Thomas said. "The sentinels—"

"You went in the water to save my dog?" she asked. "Weren't you terrified?"

"Beyond words," Thomas said. "But I did it, and we can do this. It's time we go home."

"Yes," she said, and together they hauled on the wheel. It didn't budge at first, but then it turned just slightly under their hands, and with that movement, Mrs. Hammond's skin grew just slightly pinker.

"Magritte is here?" she asked.

"Sleeping on the couch, safe and sound," Thomas said.

Mrs. Hammond smiled.

He hauled on the wheel again, with all his strength and her help, and the wheel began to turn more and more easily. With it, Mrs. Hammond became younger and younger before his eyes, until all of a sudden the cottage began to groan and shake around them, and the sky through the windows began to flicker.

Arthur ran into the studio and slammed the door, dropping his weapon on the floor. He had dirt in his hair, and a bloody gash on one leg, but he was grinning like life was the best it had ever been. The sounds of explosions approaching from outside became muffled, crackling as if sound itself was breaking up, and then the print was back through and the cottage settled back into the grayish daylight they'd left so long ago.

The rain had stopped, and everything was quiet except for the three of them breathing. Arthur broke the silence by bursting out laughing and wrapping Mrs. Hammond in a tight hug. "We made it!" he said.

There was a banging from the main part of the cottage, and they all froze. "What's that?" Arthur asked, flinching at the sound. "Did they somehow follow us through?"

"Worse," Thomas said, recognizing the repeating one-two-one pattern of the knocking, becoming more insistent. "I think that's my mother."

"So, you're Mrs. Hammond's . . . niece? And husband?" Thomas's mother asked, sitting on the couch with a cup of tea untouched in her hands. "The resemblance is remarkable."

"My mother and Aunt Celia were twins," Mrs. Hammond lied smoothly. She was sitting in an armchair, with Magritte curled up happily at—on—her feet. "It seems the apple doesn't fall far from the tree in my family."

"I see not," Thomas's mother said. "And she's . . . ?"

"She had to travel to meet an art dealer in St. John's," Arthur said. He'd managed to quickly change, shave, and get his hair tucked under a cap, before joining them in the living room. "We said we'd keep an eye on the cottage and Thomas for her, but he's well enough he doesn't really need us."

"I'm sure, then, we'd both be happy for him to come home with me, and not be a burden on you any further," Thomas's mother said. She finally took a sip of her tea.

"I have a few chores to finish, and then I'll walk home," Thomas said.

"Chores?" his mother exclaimed. "I don't think you should be put back to work, so soon after being hurt."

"But—" Thomas started to say.

"Thomas, we've already talked about this. You can show us what needs to be done *tomorrow*, and we'll do it," Mrs. Hammond said. She turned to his mother and rolled her eyes, shaking her head. "My aunt told me about his work ethic and his stubborn streak, but I'm sure you must know both all too well, Mrs. Neary."

The confirmation that her youngest son was coming home was enough, and Thomas's mother smiled and set the half-empty teacup down on the table. "Thank you both, for traveling all this way from—"

"Twillingate," Mrs. Hammond supplied.

"—from Twillingate to look after Thomas," his mother finished. "Please also give my thanks to Mrs. Hammond, when she returns, if I do not see her first. I'm afraid this cold is a bit much for me to be out and about in, at my age." She laughed. "Don't you breathe a word of that to my other children, as they are conspiring to send me off to live with my daughter Anne in Carbonear. I'm not that old yet, if you know what I mean, though I suppose you both are young enough not to, not for many years yet."

"My aunt likes to say you're exactly as old as you feel," Mrs. Hammond said, and Thomas had to put a hand to his mouth and turn away not to chuckle at that.

"Your aunt is a strange one, but she's not wrong on that," Thomas's mother said, standing up and fetching her coat from where it hung near the kitchen stove. She looked back expectantly at Thomas. "Are you coming?"

"Yes, ma'am," Thomas said.

Mrs. Hammond handed him some coins. "Bring bread tomorrow, Thomas?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am," he said. He got his own coat and boots, gave Magritte one more pet on his head, then walked home with his mother down the carriage road, along the cliffs, toward Penney Cove that seemed not quite the same anymore, and maybe never would be.

"Niece and nephew?" Thomas exclaimed, setting three loaves of fresh bread down on the kitchen table, then held his hands over the warmth of the stove. It was a frigid, cloudless, blue sky winter day, and he had run on the clearer stretches of the carriage road to keep his warmth up.

"It was a necessary lie," Mrs. Hammond said. "After all, I could hardly explain how I've become younger again, and she does believe me to be a widow. Sorry, Arthur. Townsfolk jumped to that conclusion and it was easiest to just let it be."

Arthur looked almost like a different man, with his hair trimmed short again, as he picked up the different jars of marmalades and jams one by one, and studied them, as if trying to make the most important decision of his life. "Clearly we have a lot of catching up to do," he said.

"Arthur and I need some time together, after everything that's happened," Mrs. Hammond said. "We've decided to do some traveling, and then spend a while in our own time. I didn't leave much behind there, but Arthur has family, and his own work."

"Oh," Thomas said. He felt suddenly cold all over, inside and out. "Does that mean . . . you're letting me go?"

"No!" both Hammonds said in unison.

"You're kind of family, now," Arthur added. "You want to talk to him alone, Cee?"

"Yes, please, if you don't mind," Mrs. Hammond said.

Arthur winked, picked up one of the loaves and three jam jars, and left the two of them alone. Magritte, who had been scrubbed clean of his color patches, got up lazily and followed.

"I don't understand," Thomas said. "If you leave, what will I do?"

"I'd have hired you to be caretaker of the cottage in our absence, since I don't know how long we'll be gone, but the cottage becomes physically locked when we're in another time," she said. "I've done some thinking about it. Tell me, honestly: have you enjoyed the work of being my assistant? Because you have become very, very good at it, but I know you came here as a last resort to avoid the fishing boats, and not because of the work itself. Take whatever time you need to answer."

She unwrapped and cut several slices from one of the remaining loaves of bread, as Thomas got two small plates out of the cupboard. It was a familiar routine, done almost without thinking, and the grief that this might be the last time made him fumble and almost drop the plates before getting them to the table. If Mrs. Hammond noticed, she gave no sign of it.

Thomas sat, at least half out of fear of what other clumsiness he might have waiting in him, and because his old anxiety was welling up as if it had never left, as if nothing had changed.

But it had. He'd been terrified, but he'd gone in the water, and he'd saved the dog, and he'd lived.

"I didn't expect to feel much either way for the work itself," Thomas said, speaking slowly as his thoughts laid themselves out one by one. "I knew I had no business being an artist in the usual sense, but I didn't expect to find art I can do in the process. And yes, I have come to enjoy it very much."

"Is it work you would wish to continue doing, if I were not here?" Mrs. Hammond asked.

He put butter on his slice of bread and ate it, before answering. "I like working for you," he said, "and I think that's part of what makes me love the work itself. But it's work I would still enjoy, and feel pride in doing, and I can't think of any other job that I would feel that way about."

"It's not my place to decide for you, but as I said, it's hard to know how long we will be gone. It could be a matter of a few weeks here, or it could be many months, maybe even years. I'd hope not anywhere near that long, but time is fickle, and I don't want to leave you without any good choices," Mrs. Hammond said. "I have a former colleague in Chicago who runs a small underground press, and who has approached me before about doing art for him, but my own art is not the style he needs, and I don't

have much interest in doing the hard work for someone else's. You could learn a lot there."

"Chicago?" Thomas squeaked out.

"Also, it's 1972. There would be more than a little culture shock for you, but also, you will not be bored."

Thomas got up to wash his plate. "You said choices? Is there another?"

"Boston, in this current time. There's an artist down there that's a pioneer of chromolithography, and he's already made quite a name for himself and his studio. You would be a perfect fit, and it would pay well, but of course . . ." she trailed off.

". . . of course?"

"Thomas Neary, ye who is terrified of all things boats, you live on an *island*," she said. "In other times, there are ways to avoid sea travel, but not here and now."

"I'll need to think about it," he said.

"Of course. You don't need to decide right away," she said.

"I don't want to make you wait on me."

"There are so many peculiar and inexplicable things about what we do, that as soon as I think I'm starting to understand how all the elements—ink, stone, art, paper, press—play their parts, the more suspicious I am that I must be wrong. But one thing I have never had the slightest idea about, or how—if—it related to anything else, is how the *mail* keeps finding the cottage," she said. "If you send a letter, I don't doubt it'll find its way to us. Or vice versa, whenever we are. When we settle, whether it's here again or in 1994, we'd both be happy if you wanted to rejoin us, if you haven't already made a new life of your own."

"Thank you," he said. "I don't know what I want."

"When you do, we'll be there for you," she said. She got up, rummaged through the pantry, and handed him an unopened jar of orange marmalade. "For your mother. Please tell her that old Mrs. Hammond thought the world of her youngest son, and never had a better assistant, or indeed, friend."

"Yes, ma'am," he said. He got up and put his coat and boots on, and slipped the jar into one of the pockets. "Until we meet again, then."

"Until then," she echoed, and Thomas let himself out.

He took his time, walking slowly, his mind whirling with possibilities and impossibilities, and wondering where between them the preposterous, terrifying, no longer *quite* inconceivable idea of voluntarily setting foot on a boat could fall. He'd been hunted by mechanical monsters in the sky—how hard could one ferry ride to the mainland be? Or he could go to the future, see a larger, brighter world than he'd ever imagined, full of all kinds of people, and maybe even fly somewhere on what Mrs. Hammond had called a jet, though he thought the wind must be terrible in your face up that high. He had never thought to have a future at all, much less too many to choose from.

It was along one of the many small crests of the carriage road, halfway back to Penney Cove, that he felt something, almost like gentle pinpricks on his skin. When he glanced back, the cottage looked exactly the same, but he knew with certainty it was gone. The stiff breeze off the ocean was growing stronger, and carrying the scent of incoming freezing rain, so he took his hat out from under his arm, put it firmly on his head, and hurried home. ○

