

PRAISE FOR *OUT FRONT THE FOLLOWING SEA*

“An absorbing, painstakingly researched read that, like the sea itself, mirrors the beauty, cruelty, enormity, baseness, and wonder of human nature. It is chilling that Angstman’s debut novel set in seventeenth-century New England captures the horrors that continue to plague contemporary America, particularly with regard to imperialism and patriarchy. It is heart-swelling that, in these pages and in life, the best of humankind resists and endures. I’ll remember this book as a historical tale woven with wry humor, striking detail, lush prose, daring characters, and a belief in glorious possibilities.”

—Ethel Rohan, author of *In the Event of Contact* and *The Weight of Him*

“Rich in deeply researched detail, and peopled by complex characters, *Out Front the Following Sea* is a fascinating story that is bound to entrance readers of historical fiction.”

—Kathleen Grissom, author of *The Kitchen House* and *Glory Over Everything*

“From the squalor, prejudice, and violence of seventeenth-century America, Leah Angstman has summoned to life the most extraordinary young woman. Ruth Miner insists on surviving, building a life, and being true to her odd independent self, despite the whole world seeing her as worthless filth. Angstman creates a hypnotically real and brutal world and then manages to infuse it with humor and beauty and a moving tale of love. The reader will follow Ruth Miner anywhere, and be the richer for it.”

—Heather O’Neill, author of *When We Lost Our Heads*

“Lapidary in its research and lively in its voice, *Out Front the Following Sea* by Leah Angstman is a rollicking story, racing along with wind in its sails. Though her tale unfolds hundreds of years in America’s past, Ruth Miner is the kind of high-spirited heroine whose high adventures haul you in and hold you fast.”

—Kathleen Rooney, author of *Lillian Baxfish Takes a Walk*

“With *Out Front the Following Sea*, Leah Angstman reveals herself as a brave new voice in historical fiction. With staggering authenticity, Angstman gives us a story of America before it was America—an era rife with witch hunts and colonial intrigue and New World battles all but forgotten in our history books and popular culture. This is historical fiction that speaks to the present, recalling the bold spirits and cultural upheavals of a nation yet to be born.”

—Taylor Brown, author of *Pride of Eden* and *Gods of Howl Mountain*

“Steeped in lush prose, authentic period detail, and edge-of-your-seat action, *Out Front the Following Sea* is a rollicking good read. Leah Angstman keeps the story moving at a breathtaking pace, and she knows more 17th-century seafaring language and items of everyday use than you can shake a stick at. The result is a compelling work of romance, adventure, and historical illumination that pulls the reader straight in.”

—Rilla Askew, author of *Fire in Beulah* and *The Mercy Seat*

“Leah Angstman has written the historical novel that I didn’t know I needed to read. *Out Front the Following Sea* is set in an oft-forgotten time in the brutal wilds of pre-America that is so vividly and authentically drawn, with characters that are so alive and relevant, and a narrative so masterfully paced and plotted, that Angstman has performed the miracle of layering the tumultuous past over our troubled present to gift us a sparkling new reality.”

—Kevin Catalano, author of *Where the Sun Shines Out* and *Deleted Scenes and Other Stories*

“*Out Front the Following Sea* is a fascinating book, the kind of historical novel that evokes its time and place so vividly that the effect is just shy of hallucinogenic. I enjoyed it immensely.”

—Scott Phillips, author of *The Ice Harvest*, *The Walkaway*, and *Cottonwood*

“*Out Front the Following Sea* is a meticulously researched novel that mixes history, love story, and suspense. Watching Angstman’s willful protagonist, Ruth Miner, openly challenge the brutal world of 17th-century New England, with its limiting ideas about gender, race, and science, was a delight.”

—Aline Ohanesian, author of *Orban’s Inheritance*

“Leah Angstman is a gifted storyteller with a poet’s sense of both beauty and darkness, and her stunning historical novel, *Out Front the Following Sea*, establishes her as one of the most exciting young novelists in the country. Angstman plunges the reader into a brilliantly realized historical milieu peopled by characters real enough to touch. And in Ruth Miner, we are introduced to one of the most compelling protagonists in contemporary literature, a penetratingly intelligent, headstrong woman who is trying to survive on her wits alone in a Colonial America that you won’t find in the history books. A compulsive, vivid read that will change the way you look at the origins of our country, Leah Angstman’s *Out Front the Following Sea* announces the arrival of a preternatural talent.”

—Ashley Shelby, author of *Muri*, *South Pole Station*, and *Red River Rising*

“Rich, lyrical, and atmospheric, with a poet’s hand and a historian’s attention to detail. In *Out Front the Following Sea*, Leah Angstman creates an immersive world for readers to get lost in and a fascinating story to propel them through it. A thoroughly engaging and compelling tale.”

—Steph Post, author of *Holding Smoke*, *Miraculum*, *Walk in the Fire*, *Lightwood*, and *A Tree Born Crooked*

“It’s a rare story that makes you thankful for having read and experienced it. It’s rarer still for a story to evoke so wholly, so powerfully, another place and time as to make you thankful for the gifts that exist around you, which you take for granted. *Out Front the Following Sea* is a book rich with misery, yet its characters are indefatigable; they yearn, despite their troubles, for victories personal and societal. Leah Angstman’s eye is keen, and her ability to transport you into America’s beginnings is powerful. With the raw ingredients of history, she creates a story both dashing and pensive, robust yet believable. From an unforgiving time, Angstman draws out a tale of all things inhuman, but one that reminds us of that which is best in all of us.”

—Eric Shonkwiler, author of *Above All Men*, *8th Street Power & Light*, and *Moon Up, Past Full*

“A challenging, exquisitely researched, epic, and stunning work of historical fiction that we don’t expect but definitely need, *Out Front the Following Sea* magnificently captures the color of its time and settings.

Angstman is an old soul who writes with the same flair that Hawthorne displayed in *The Scarlet Letter* and Jack London in *The Sea-Wolf*. She paints a past America without concealing its flaws, creating a lucid, masterfully crafted narrative and a fascinating fusion of history, intrigue, adventure, action, and romance that will immediately pull you in from the very first page. Angstman is a powerful writer, showing us bold imagery, nail-biting conflicts, and history that comes alive in the paragraphs, including banned languages and interesting dialects. You may forget you're reading a book and feel like you're living with the characters. The pace is perfect, and the action is enough to make you hold your breath."

—Readers' Favorite (five-starred review)

"A sweeping tale of intrigue, romance, and feminist power amidst the tumult of colonial North America. ...Historical fiction, romance, and action-lovers alike will find something to enjoy in *Out Front the Following Sea*. Keeping readers on their toes with ever-changing scenery and vibrant characters, Leah Angstman has recreated British Colonial America with a modern twist... [Her] story will beguile and compel readers, leaving them waiting for Angstman's next book."

—Independent Book Review

"This book moved me in ways that I didn't expect. ...The deeply researched and historically authentic world is vivid and immersive, and it captivated me from the first pages."

—One Book More

"Ruth is an unforgettable strong woman with the independence of Kya Clark from *Where the Crawdads Sing* and the fortitude of Demelza from the Poldark series. I wanted to know whether Ruth survived and, if so, how she conquered the challenges she faced as an orphaned young woman in a harsh, patriarchal environment. ...Angstman uses a broad vocabulary, brutal descriptions, and colloquialisms (i.e. God's teeth!) to immerse you in the time period [and] the characters were phenomenal. ...I recommend this book for anyone who loves historical fiction or stories about strong women."

—Book Picks and Pics

OUT FRONT THE FOLLOWING SEA

A Novel of King William's War
in Seventeenth-Century New England

Leah Angstman



Regal House Publishing

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For Mom, my war ship.

*If you want to build a ship,
don't drum up people to collect wood
and don't assign them tasks and work,
but rather teach them to long for
the endless immensity of the sea.*

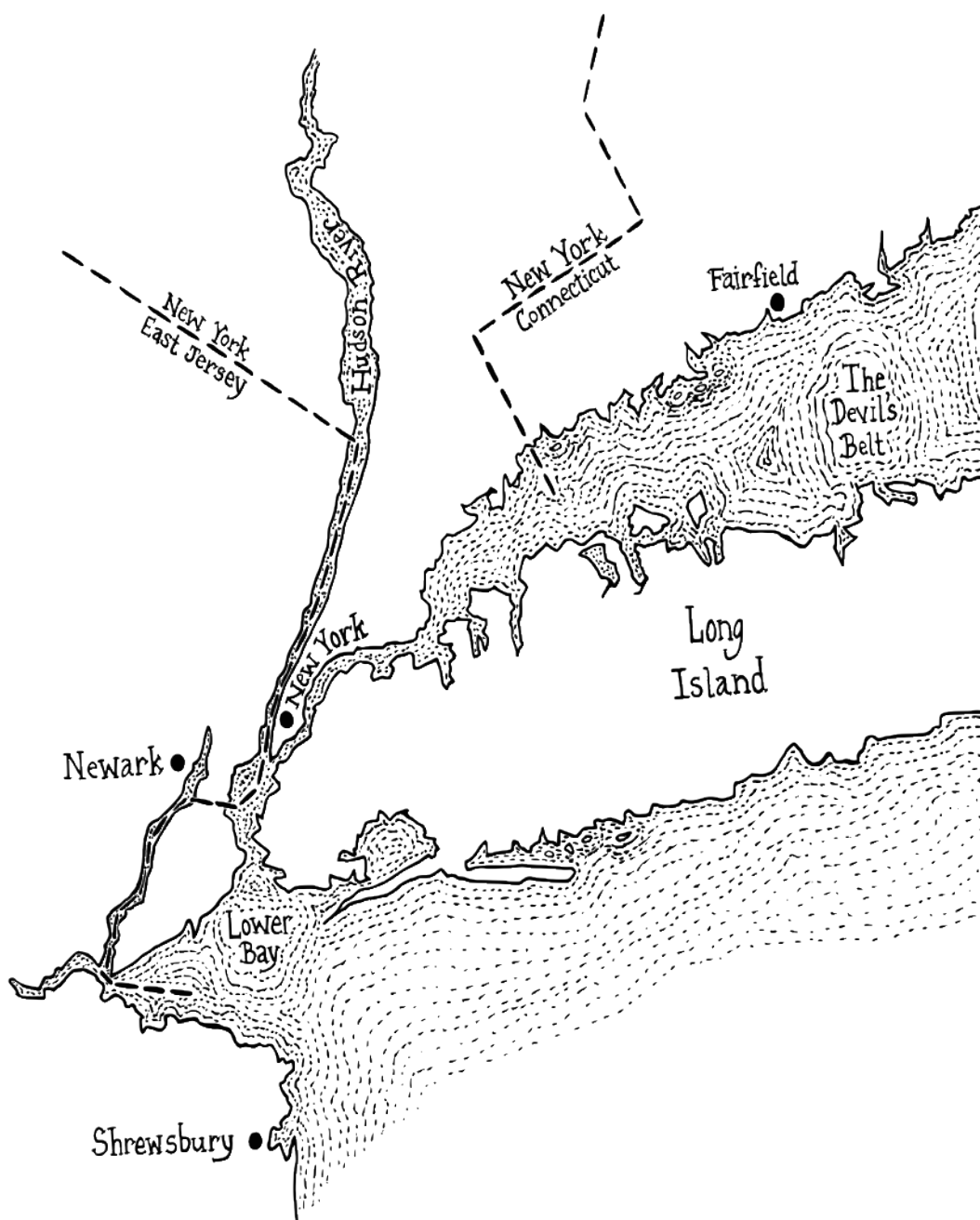
—Antoine de Saint Exupéry, translation from *Citadelle*

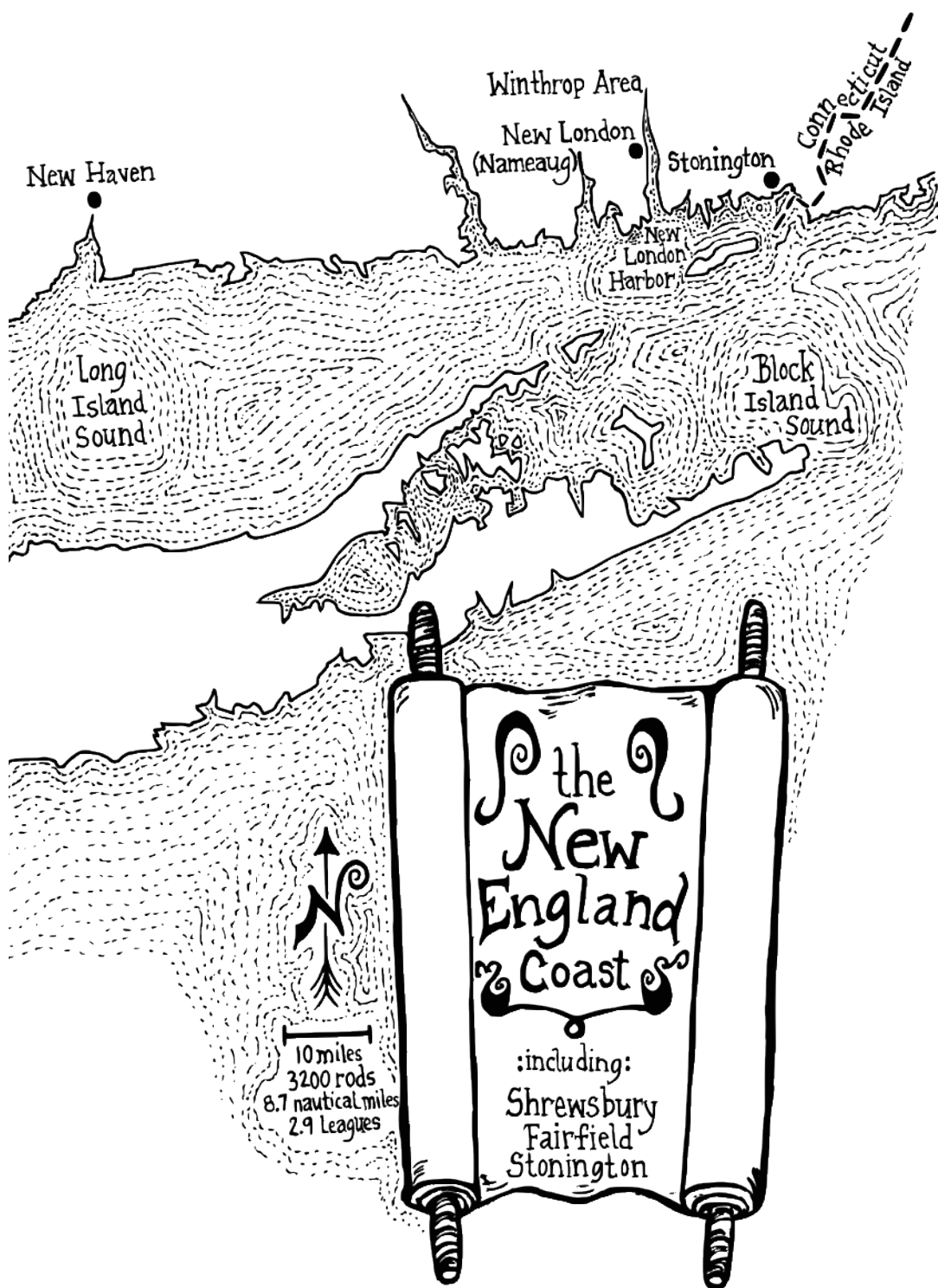
*Every story, new or ancient,
bagatelle or work of art:
All are tales of human failing;
all are tales of love at heart.*

—Tim Rice, *Aida*

ACT I

The Winter's Tale





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Island
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Winthrop Area

New London
(Nameaug)

Stonington

New
London
Harbor

Connecticut
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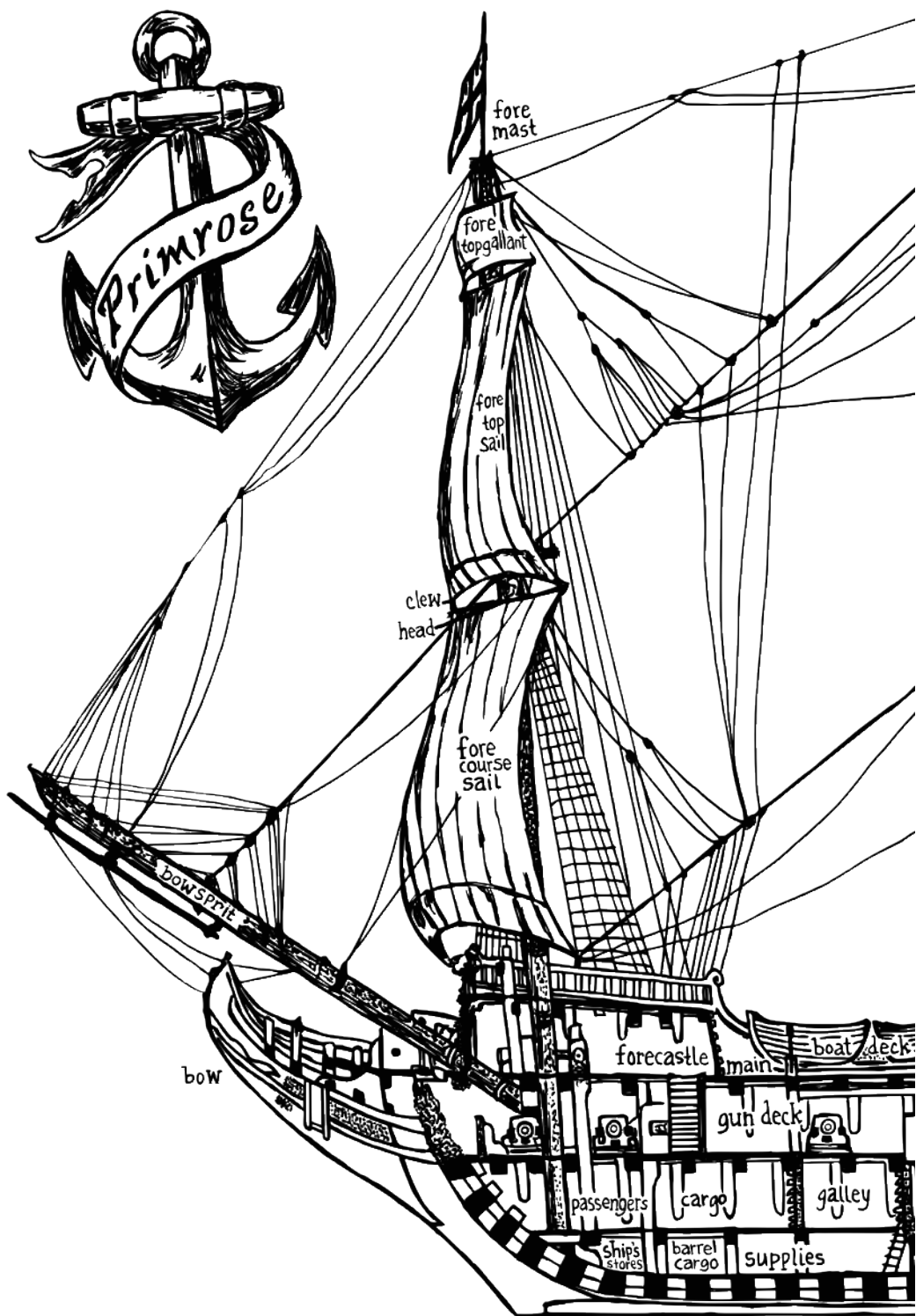
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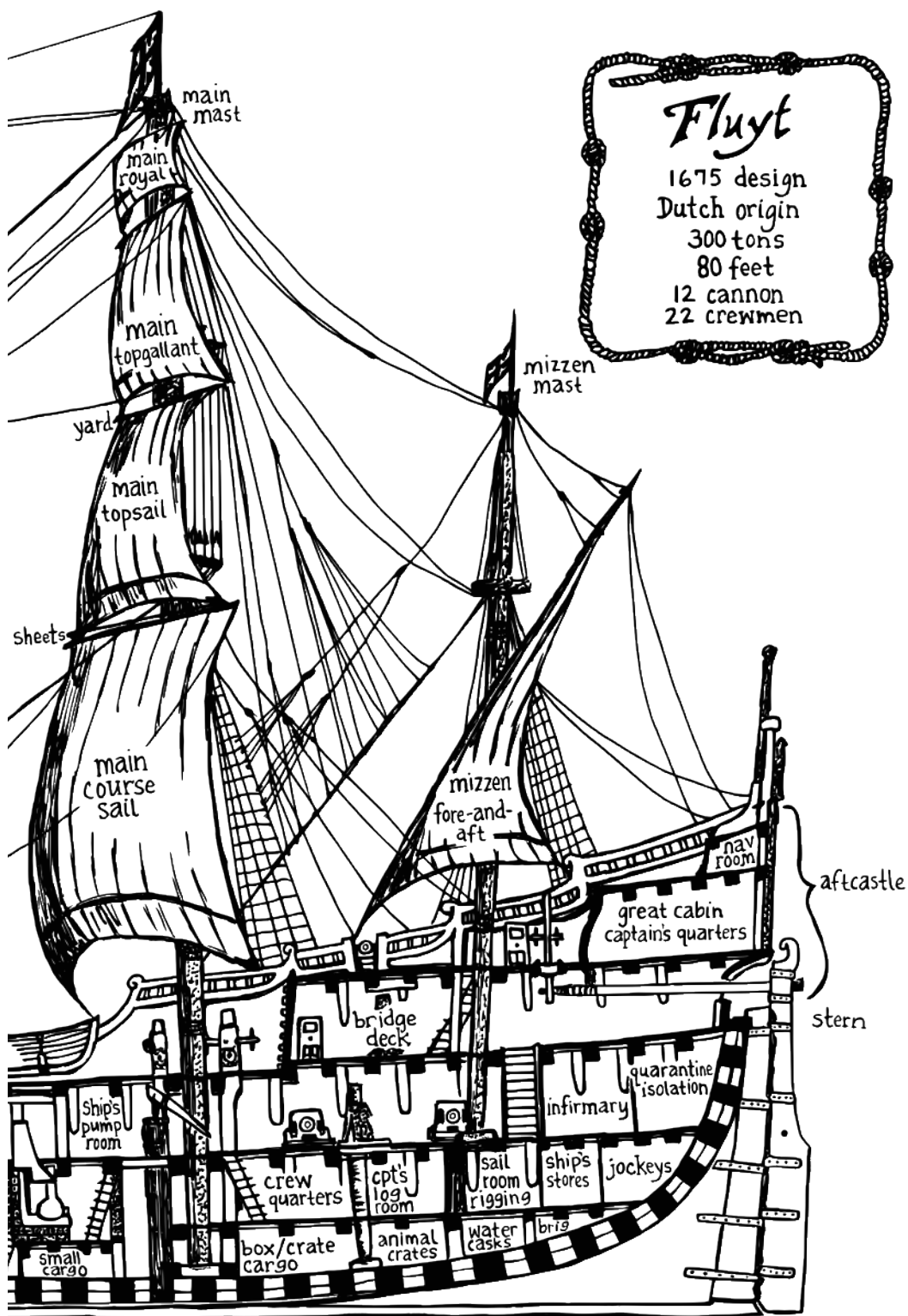


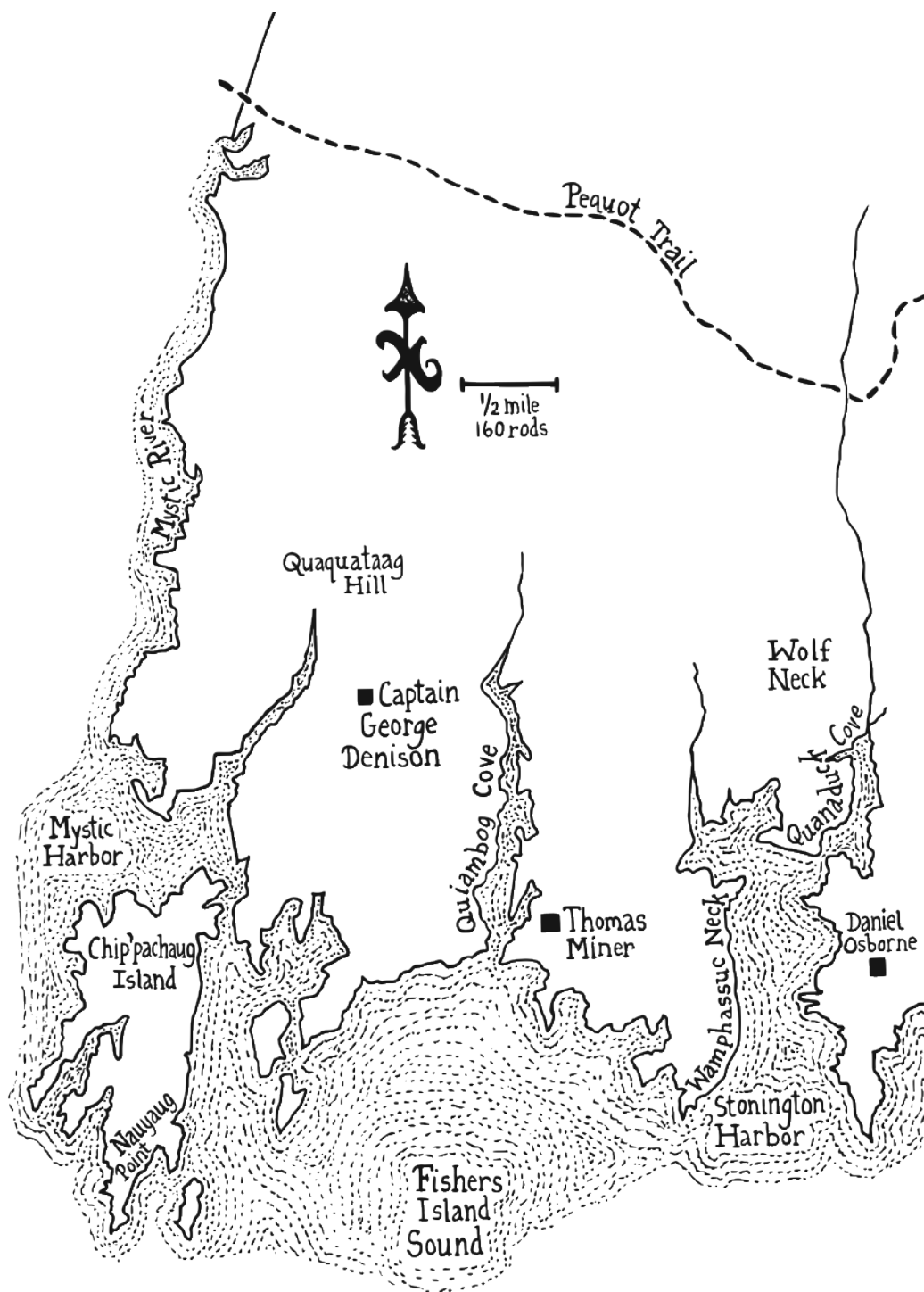
10 miles
3200 rods
8.7 nautical miles
2.9 leagues

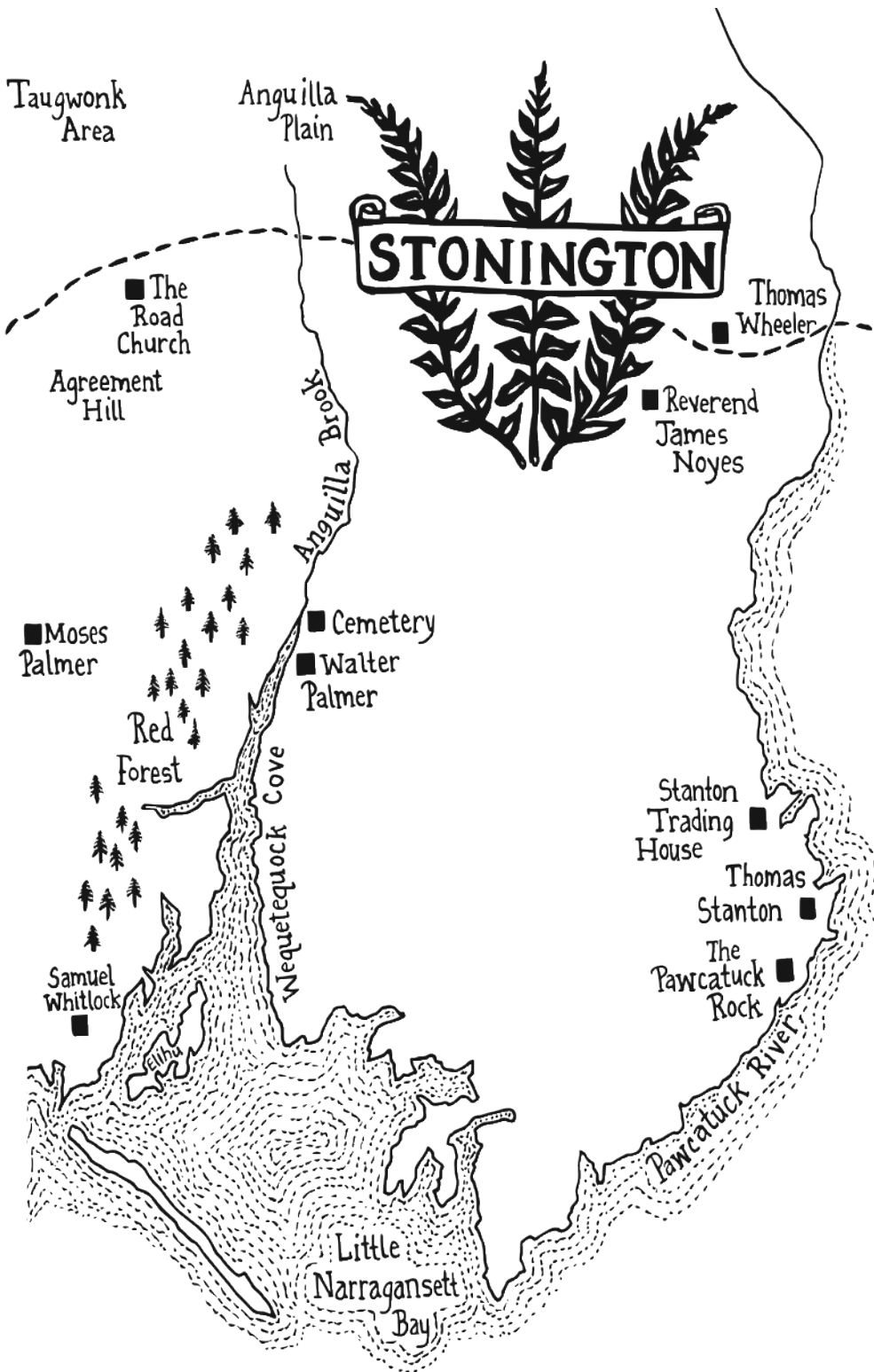
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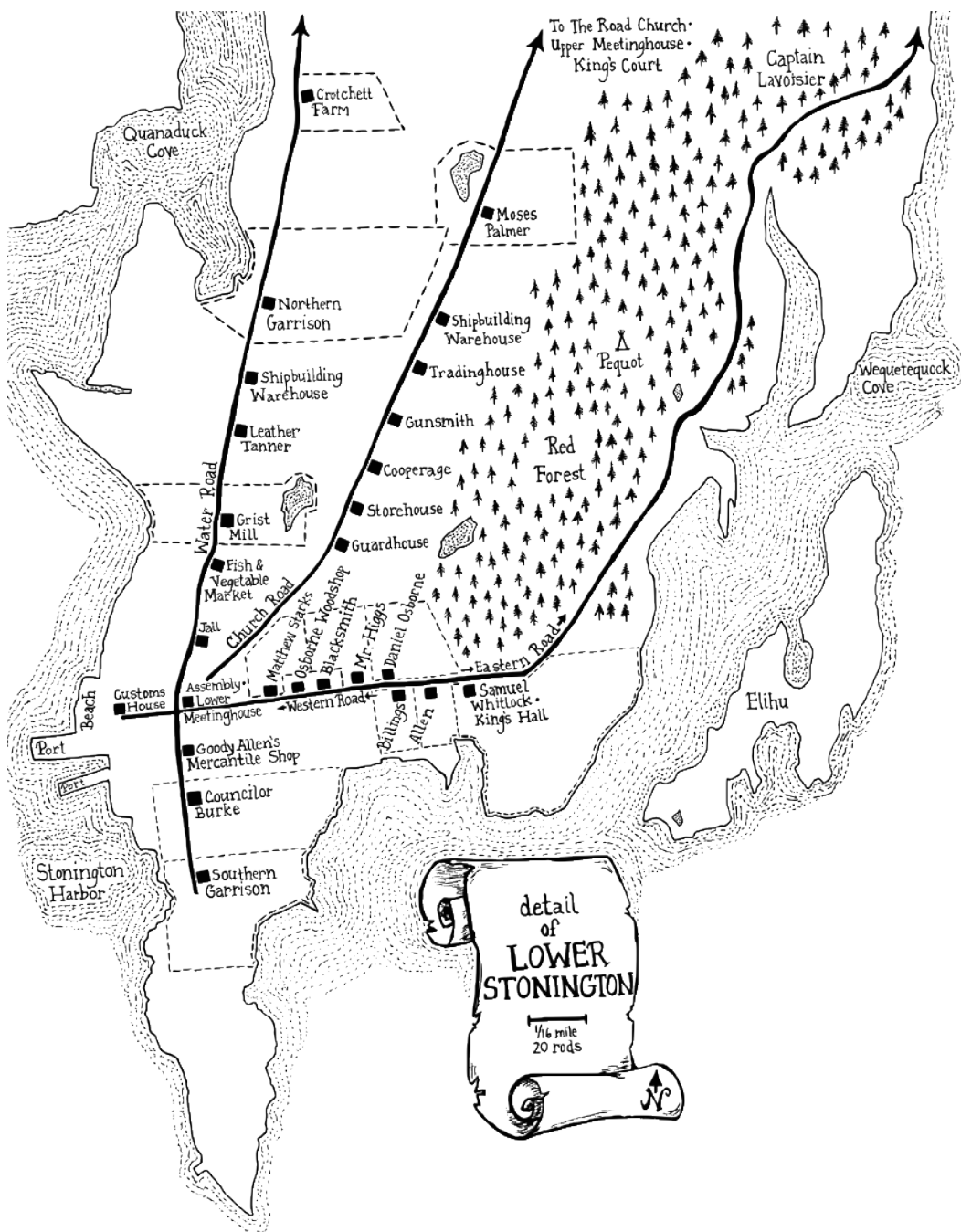
:including:
Shrewsbury
Fairfield
Stonington











CHAPTER FIRST

Autumn goes; or, the exposition

*There must be a beginning of any great matter,
but the continuing unto the end until it be
thoroughly finished yields the true glory.*

—Sir Francis Drake

November came. Autumn licked flat the fields, blew odors of lye and burning animal fat and manure across East Jersey Province. Ruth tugged at her nose, unable to reach the vinegar of Middle Colonies clinging inside it. Spikenard and staghorn reddened out before her. Sawtoothed panic-grasses crunched beneath hooves along a trail and fanned to the rolling dunes that emerged from the marsh like white chalkstones abrading outward to the Mid-Atlantic seaboard. Blue-winged teal and snowgeese honked overhead, and brant, with their loon throats and beady black eyes, agitated around her with abandon. An early frost that prematurely killed the harvest left only tasteless root vegetables in Shrewsbury's marketplace, where she rode Copernicus from the marsh edge to the mill, alighted, and tied the gelding to the post nearest the few carts of what remained unspoiled. A Dutchman's sneer at the animal—an impressive carting Friesian, blue-black and iridescent as a flea beetle—morphed covetous and violent, hands clenched, balled around a pail. Ruth Miner had ridden a valuable farming horse uncartered through a swamp.

"Mrs. Pieterszoon." Ruth nodded to a frumpy woman sitting behind the first cart. "Parsnips all that survived? What will you trade for them?" Ruth moved her hand toward the cart and got her fingers swatted away.

"Ga weg! Ye'll starve for what I care of it," Mrs. Pieterszoon said. "Ye shrivel them parsnips like ye shriveled the rest of the crop, and ye'll be eating a coring iron."

The woman's chin jutted, a landing rock that ships could spy from sea, and Ruth hastened along to Mrs. Janszoon at the next cart, who wouldn't deign to reply but threw a sheet over the vegetables. Ruth groaned and continued down the line. A father covered his son's eyes; a group of mothers lowered their shawls over their baskets, hurrying their

daughters and goats on by. From the upper window of a brick one-and-half story Dutch colonial, a wealthy merchant's daughter laughed at Ruth, then slammed the shutter. Ruth looked up slowly, frowning from the half-door to the double pitches of the gambrel roof to the matching stone chimneys on either end. What she wouldn't give for a house like that. The next and next, their gables rolling into steep pitches, were similar except for the cheaper clapboard, and another building on the end of the row had a wide, wishbone-shaped stone chimney up the front of it, standing in for an entire facing wall. Behind these, a row of tall, slender homes stood gable-out, so close together a body couldn't fit between them, their stonework mounting up the roofs in a series of steps that looked like tiny stairs leading to and from the peak. In front of every fourth house, a post was erected for a lantern that, in accordance with law, had to be hung by the respective resident to light the dirt street at night. Towering behind the row of homes, down near the oceanfront, the clapboard-beam rotatinghouse windmill gazed out at the harbor and revolved without pause. She watched absently, and as her fingers rested on an undersized root, a wooden rod came down across her knuckles. She withdrew her hand, the flesh stinging.

"You fewmet of a boar!" the third cart's proprietor, Kees Karelszoon, shouted. "You stealed one." That embittered widower—undoubtedly, he blamed her for that, too—burst out of his bombast-stuffed doublet while his stockings waged battle with his fleshy legs. He leaned in for another strike with his stick.

Ruth grasped her hand. "Ale-soused applejohn! You could spare a parsnip or three if I had stole one."

The murmurings of the patrons built and shifted her focus, leaving her hand exposed to the stick's unmerciful swing. A second thwack sent pain rippling up her arm. Mr. Karelszoon's eyes narrowed to dangerous slits, and the crowd gathered tight.

"She's a thief and a liar," Mrs. Pieterszoon piped, and echoes of "To hell with lies and liars!" and "Strike down the pettifogger!" followed, chants among pews of circling women. Mrs. Janszoon jeered, wrung her cloth sheet into a whip, and snapped it at Ruth. The sheet spit hard against Ruth's side, then fanned open into her skirt layers, creating a mess of cloth to detangle.

Widower Karelszoon snarled. The man was a hound of teeth and mange. Before Ruth thought through her action, she picked up a parsnip and lobbed it at his face. He bounded toward her with his walking

stick thrust high—Moses parting naught but air. The hissing sounds that slithered through his lips would have rattlesnaked a horse, and Ruth's eyes widened. She swiveled, narrowly avoiding his grasp. Her feet led her behind another cart, dodging, then back toward the marsh dropoff at the edge of town. The townspeople at her back rallied in support of Mr. Karelszoon's pursuit, and he gained on her in the marsh, swinging his stick wildly at every turn, ensnaring the seams of her dress and tendrils of her hair in the bellicose motion. Her dress snagged and tore at the hem.

"I stole nothing, you, you mule-brained pumpkin. Were your parsnips as plump as you, they still wouldn't be worth stealing." Her words fueled him. The marsh slowed her down, and she sank to her ankles as Mr. Karelszoon descended upon her.

"You've stealed enough—God's mercy from us. His good grace. Replaced it with dried-up parsnip rubbish! You've brought the Wrath down upon us."

He lunged at her, knocking her off balance. Her boot stuck in the suctioning mud. She lifted her stocking-clad foot out of the boot and stepped down into swampwater. The unexpected coldness of it surprised her, and she wobbled, fell into muck, then sloshed to find something to wield in defense. She anticipated the stick cracking down upon her back, and then her fingers struck a rock and worked it forth from the mud, prying, her knees sinking into the wet marsh grasses. The rock loosened from soil, and she clenched it. At the edge of her vision, the stick sliced through the air. She spun out of its path, hurling the rock at the widower. It smacked against his knuckles, and the stick flew from his grasp like a marsh sparrow. Both the snarling man and Ruth dashed for it, but she reached it first, swung it, clipped him at his knees. His footing slipped from under him, and he landed gracefully as an ox in the mud. When he wiped the splashed swampwater from his eyes, he opened them to find his walking stick level with his nose, the traced length of it leading to Ruth's grasp.

"God's teeth." She punctuated her words with the point of the rod. "Get up."

Widower Karelszoon swallowed audibly and shook. Seizing the reprieve, he lumbered to his feet, then inched backward toward the town. He took off at an approximation of a run when out of striking range but fell in the mud once, twice, before clearing the marsh at the end of the town street.

The sound of sardonic, slow applause came from behind her, and Ruth turned, cupping her palm over her eyes, to confront her taunting audience. She blinked, then blinked again. The windmill chopped the salty air and made a repeated click-creak where it hooked on a catch with each rotation. Silhouetted against it, the buildings rose like a line of jagged mountain peaks, their matching A-slant roofs like fangs against the sky. And there, a sailor, clad in a cap-sleeved, bluish-russet jacket with brass buttons in a line down the front; thigh-high, beaten-leather boots pulled taut over hose up to cottonade breeches; baggy ivory sleeves rolled into cuffs across worked upper arms; and a billed woolen cap stretched over black hair that hung shaggily around his ears and neck. He was still clapping. Ruth blinked again, then threw her eyes toward the harbor, beyond the windmill. There she saw the freight fluyt *Primrose* anchored outside the eastern dock. The great square-rig was never docked at Shrewsbury so late in the season. *So, he wasn't an apparition.* The sailor's attention flickered between her kneeling in the mud and his ship's shallow bateau unloading at the dock, and Ruth's eyes collapsed to quick, thin lines.

"Thank you for the help," she said.

"Didn't appear you needed any. You scrap like a sailor." His smile was brash, genuine. "I had this niggling suspicion you'd light to that stick before the fat man could." He hooked his thumbs into the waistband of his breeches. "Right, per usual."

She grunted and tossed aside the stick.

"A grunt is all you got for me? Hello to you, too. What are you doing out of your cage?"

"Scavenging." The cold dampness clung to her stockinged foot, and she rutted around in the mud like a farm animal, hoping to find her sunken shoe. She shook the remaining tremble out of her fingers as she laced them through the muck.

He watched her steel herself. The corner of his lip twitched. "You're unscathed, though, aye? Say you're not, and I'll stock-iron the brigand to Antigua on the next breeze."

She gave up on the boot and stood, flipping mud from her dress. "Unscathed." The throbbing of her knuckles reminded her she was a terrible liar.

"A jaunt, then?" He removed his cap and took an unnecessarily long bow, lifting her muddy boot from the marsh on his way back up. "To the dock. I've items."

Scowling, she took the boot. A glance inside didn't promise comfort, and she shook the miserable thing upside down. Mud oozed out onto her dress. She frowned toward the harbor's small incoming boats only a short distance away, dwarfed by the mighty *Primrose*, then back to town equidistant behind her, then down at the mud caked on her arms and along her hemline. "Like this?"

"Like what? Something different about you, mon petite amour?" he said with charm only a licentious Frenchman could exude. "I'll feign for modesty that all the mud covers what you think you're hiding. Consider this: Widower Karelszoon might have been chasing you for another reason entirely."

"God's teeth."

"I swear you was a scrawny mutt last I saw you."

"God's teeth," she muttered again.

They reached the harbor, and he guided her toward the flatboat, where he withdrew a bundle, looked both ways, and slung it over his back. He tried not to think of it as reparations, but he knew they'd get to that later. The pilings stretched out into the Atlantic at the end of a long dock that flooded over with each wave. Fog moved in and gradually turned the land into fuzzy, gray felt. Grazing among offloaded firkins and kilderkins, he kicked the staves and pretended preoccupation, but his attention rested on the young woman, dressed in shades of murrey and lace and mud, shoulders curved away from the mirth of the sun, too old for her time. Her hair draped in auburn rivulets, not pretty, not unpretty, about her angled features. *Wild*. She looked feral and unbound. Her slender sixteen-year-old frame was adorned in colors too dark to be worn so soon before winter, as if in mourning or expecting to usher in the cold with her very presence. No other townswoman would have been caught entering the busy marketplace or harbor without her hair drawn beneath a coif, but convention escaped Ruth, and she, it. From the corner of his eye, he saw a deserter running inland, to the south, dodging behind the windmill, but he thought: *Let him go*, and couldn't break his gaze from Ruth. He watched her, just standing, stark and cold and breathing, shivering somewhat. Hair down, dress muddy. What a creature to reckon with. He would, someday. Not today.

"It's been a turn since I rescued a demoiselle en détresse."

"Was that rescuing?"

He smirked. "I oversaw. Overseeing is crucial to the rescuing."

"Perhaps you'd like, then, to oversee," she counted off on her fingers,

“stuffing rags in the wall cracks between planks, binding shutters in place, making vats of candles, scraping ash from the fireplace to reap enough soap for winter, bringing maize garlands from the shed into the pantry, soaking the salted pork butts overnight—”

“Removing caked mud from your dress didn’t fit that list, eh?”

“I’ll not ask you to oversee anything that involves ‘removing’ and ‘dresses.’”

He laughed, but his eyes darted to her hands as she wrung them. “That crawthumper did hurt you!”

She shook her head, sliding her hands behind her back. “Just mud. Mud washes.” She bit her lip and stood straighter. “Tell me what I owe your unseasonal company to, First Mate Townsend. I assumed your slippery mouth would be on its way to Antigua by now.”

“Are we to titles? You only get particular when you’re sore at me.”

She *was* sore at him, the scoundrel, the rat, the knave. Owen Townsend, the captain’s son. He’d been her neighbor in another life; she’d known him as long as she’d known anything, and he’d been a scoundrel for all that time. She couldn’t remember a time she wasn’t sore at him, the scoundrel.

Owen grinned. He glanced about the docks and stepped closer to her, turning her toward the budding port settlement and away from the freightmen who watched her alarmingly. “Surely you know no painted Indian lady could keep me away while witch hunters are after my charming First Mistress Miner with sticks, aye? What theater I’d be missing.” He winked.

She hrmphed. “Sakes! Out with it. I hadn’t set to hear your squalid profanity again this season. I’d planned on having until spring to purify my ears. There’s enough wind blowing in your sails to send you back out to sea without a boat—”

“Ship.”

“—ship, if I’m unfortunate enough to hear you warble on about it—”

“Her.”

“—her. This is not your choice port for evading alcohol duties.”

He put a finger to his lips, and his brows V’ed. “A sailor can’t pass a chance to muss a skirt.”

“Achh. You’re impossible.” She threw her hands up and walked faster ahead of him, then stopped abruptly and looked back. “Then you came for me.”

His smile dropped. “No. Emphatical no. Hors de question.” He made an effort to look disinterested as they waded back through the marshy meadow, but her mouth snapped shut, and he winced. “Not yet. Not for some time. Don’t be in haste to spend a lousy turn at sea with a sailor. You’re not exactly a pick, all smelly of marshwater and salted fish.”

“And you don’t smell like fish?”

He wiped a wet glob of mud from her shoulder, held it toward her face as if in evidence, and shook it to the ground before drying his palm across his breeches. “You’ll be a spinster before a man took a witch like you for exchange.”

She missed a step. “I’d rather be a spinster than a—”

“Aht. Don’t say coward. I won’t be punished for it today. You got the rest of the town to chase you through the mud. Today, I’m just a missionary who heard Grand-maman wasn’t faring good.”

Ruth froze.

“She’s not, is she,” he said, not asking. “She’s...”

Ruth at once appeared faint. She wrung her hands again and concentrated through an unwelcome daze. His face. That face she knew too well. It turned so quickly sullen. His mother’s French cheekbones, angled jawline, dark features. Rosalie’s same pointed nose. *What words did he say?* Ruth stared voidedly into his hooded gaze, masked with thick, black lashes and dark brows of his mother, making him appear ever quizzical. Had he spoken? His mother’s replicated robin-egg eyes intensely flashed like Banded King Shoemakers he’d once brought to shore from the Indies. He’d been his mother’s son for all of his twenty-one years. Images of Rosalie flitted through Ruth’s mind, to distract. What words had he said? She sputtered to find her own. They weren’t found.

“This coming cold will be hard for her,” he said. “What if...”

“Aye,” she finally managed.

Grandmother Helen was her last tie to this town, this land. The woman had been a founding member of the colony, and her husband its first selectman. Their lastborn son, Ruth’s father. Out of the town’s residual respect for Helen Miner, Ruth was only relegated to the mere trifling of wooden rods and marketplace snubbing, but the elder suffered from a crippling dementia brought on by contaminated water and too much mercury in her bloodstream, and if. If she died. *When* she died. Ruth shook her head of the thought. The people would not be so compelled to trifles.

Owen said, "Have you still got that barrel of aqua vitae I gave you month-last? Enough wood? Haven't much time, but I could hew more on the heel. Food?"

She snapped-to. "Yes, yes. I manage. If you could by grace make a goat appear, I might believe in miracles."

"You'd durst not believe such frivolities." He poked her shoulder.

She'd had to slaughter the goats right after he'd come, month-last. She couldn't milk them both morn and night, so they stopped producing. Mutton became all they were good for, and she had been without milk since. The weakness from it replaced her bones.

"Gran's got this stubborn fever, and she's talking in circles, sometimes thinks Fa—hpm—Father is still alive." She looked again to the marshy ground, but no answers came from her soaked feet. Her eyelids fluttered closed. "I'm laboring on the Sabbath, heaven forgive."

He took her hand, and she startled at the feel of human skin that wasn't her own. His hands were callused, his grip as if yanking a halyard. "Just don't eat blackberries after Michaelmas, Ruthie, even if you're starved. That'll land you in the devil's briar for good." His fingers played over the swollen knuckles of her hand, and he scowled. "Why don't you get the reverend?"

"He won't come."

A growl thrummed long through Owen's throat. "I'll be back for Gran in the spring. I'll take her to Fairfield. To my mother."

"Take her now." She squeezed his hand and ignored the throb. "Spring is too late."

"I can't. Please don't ask it of me now. We won't be back to Fairfield before the cold is out. She'd be a winter at sea before I got her back to the colonies."

Ruth stared off, over her shoulder, through the low incoming fog clinging to the edge of the dock, at the gray turreted altocumulus forming over the ocean, virga shafts threading below it. Winter skies. They'd sweep over the land, blot out the blue, wrack what remained of the glasswort and narrow-leaved cattails of the saltmarsh, and freeze the mud solid with all its lumps and bumps until the uneven paths broke a horse's pastern. Saltmarsh sharptails that hadn't yet flown south probed through the mud for insects and seeds. Their raspy trills blended with Owen clearing his throat. He slung the bundle from his shoulder, eager to divert further talk of winter travel. The winter ocean would be

the death of him someday; they both knew it, but only one of them accepted it.

"I took some of the downs bound for Boston, this heavy cloak—"

"Of course you did, you thief." She jolted out of her mope. "You're the one who should've been on the receiving end of Widower Kar-elszoon's stick." Her face lit as she perused the goods. A copper kettle, a thin cast-iron flatpan. A blanket of feather down. "What if they find out you took this?" She rubbed the soft material against her cheek, and it caught on rough skin. "It doesn't feel English-made."

"French. Only the finest for my doxy. À ton service." His pride shone like a banner on a new ketch. "Leave a man to his trade without question, my blush. I dare just one of them to accuse the," he emulated the captain's gruff voice, "honorable Captain Jacob Townsend of shorting the order, when it could just as right have been one of their own deck hands."

"I should think your father was not so pleased to come back here."

"Nay the slightest. It was my mother guilted him by reminding him Grand-maman was midwife to all his sons. In fact, Captain's glassing me." He looked back at the ship. "I can't afford to dally on these grounds, or the English loyalists, thumb to 'em all, might keep me docked a bit more," he made a guttural sound, "permanent."

Her brow arched. So dramatic he was.

"You haven't heard? King Louis besieged a Philippsburg fortress and took Mannheim. Him and Louvois have set out to destroy the Palatinate, Baden, Württemberg. Land expansion."

"You can't know what any of that means any more than I do. I'm inclined to say bless you."

"It means the English and the French are at war. It means the Treaty of Whitehall is dead. New France will surely war with New England, right here, beneath our feet, despite the treaty's promise of keeping Old World conflicts off these shores. William of Orange took Torbay, but if Louis attacks Dutch lands, then even Shrewsbury will join the fray."

"Bless you."

"I plan on keeping my French feet far from here."

"Not too far, I hope." She grinned. "You're only half French, so you have only one foot to worry about." Then she looked as if struck by lightning. "That means Governor Andros' Dominion of New England can no longer enforce the quit-rent for Gran, nor the Navigation Acts for you, aye?"

“Snuff that thought.” He glanced around himself quickly. “Nicholson won’t allow dissent on these grounds, and his fellow Andros is all too happy to extinguish anyone, dissenter or no. And half French, well...that depends who you ask.” He tapped the tip of his pointed nose, looked toward the woods to her grandmother’s halfhouse tucked out of sight, and felt Ruth’s eyes follow his lead. “I must be off to the marketplace to pick up a barrel of oats from Willemszoon’s. Then, quick to the dock to rally deserters.”

“I have to go back to the carts, too, much as I dread it. Copernicus is hobbled there.”

“You rode him into town? Sakes, you really don’t want friends, do you. Walk with me, then.”

He splayed his hand in the direction of the marketplace as they left the marshy meadow that connected the harbor dock to the edge of town. The row of Dutch houses loomed, and the slow churning of the mill wheel made a grinding whine, followed by a clunk at the end of each rotation. He felt his breaths synchronize with it. A young woman, too close to the harbor for modesty’s sake, stared hard at him beneath her starched, triangle-flapped bonnet, until an elder scolded her loudly and dragged her back to the row of houses. The mill wheel continued its whine-clunk, whine-clunk.

“Have you thought on what you’ll do if I can’t come back?” he said quietly.

“How have I had time to think on it? This is the first I’ve heard of it.”

“Well, then, have you thought of what you’ll do if this winter is too hard? How much longer can we keep meeting like this before your reputation is questioned and we’re not just a couple kids getting reacquainted anymore?”

“My reputation? Questioned?” She rubbed her swollen knuckles and gasped deeply. “Heavens, no. What will they think of me? Do you think there will be rumors? Perhaps wooden rods? My, what if they prejudge my character?”

He smirked. “You should go get married, Ruth.”

She stopped.

“Find a warm house to move Grand-maman into, get some of the burden of providing off my shoulders.” He didn’t notice that she’d stopped.

“Who else would marry me?” she retorted too loudly behind him,

not caring that the Dutch women of the vegetable carts could hear every word. She marched up to him. "Don't tell me to go get married as if it's that easy." Her arms flailed like an injured bird. "Look at me!"

He did look at her, always did. Mud didn't hide her.

"I can't trade a parsnip! Or shall I remind you of that day when you—"

"Cease." His eyes flashed, then darkened. He didn't need to remember what never left his mind. "I didn't come here for that. Let the past have the past." He had the good grace to look away. "You're a stubborn one, Ruthie. It's no wonder no man'll have you. I'd be like to find his body floating facedown at sea, closer to me than he ever got to you."

"Hmph, go get married. No one in this town would have me."

"Then get out of this town." He ignored the hollowness of his advice as he entered Mr. Willemszoon's shop. He focused instead on oats. A load much easier to lift.

Ruth paced. *How dare he?* She had no means to leave the town without him. She'd die from the elements before she reached the closest settlement, wherever that was. She waited while Owen was inside, treading dirt, tapping her foot, switching the gift bundle from shoulder to shoulder. She thought about taking out the flatpan and cracking it across his nose, the blackguard. When the door opened, she spun to fire another salvo across Owen's bow, but was met instead with Kees Karelszoon walking out of the shop, his puckered, red knuckles holding a cheesecloth over a freshly bloodied nose. She took a step back to bolt for Copernicus, but Mr. Karelszoon nodded his wide-brimmed hat and stepped past her, averting his eyes, mindful to avoid brushing shoulders. She exhaled the breath she'd been holding and eased.

When Owen exited the shop with the barrel of oats thrown over one shoulder, he pulled something from his breast pocket and dusted it on his breeches, feigning ignorance to Ruth's chagrined new expression. He placed a fabric-encased book into her hands. "I near forgot this."

"Oh! A new one." She read the inscription: *The Injur'd Lovers, or The Ambitious Father*, William Mountfort, London, The Year of Our Lord Sixteen Eighty and Eight. "A drama—dreadful! How did you ever afford—"

"Avec plaisir. I didn't afford it."

"Of course you didn't. You can't just—"

He rested a finger over her mouth. "It'll be our secret. Like everything between us."

The touch didn't go unnoticed by the town's Dutch women. One of them pipped like a surprised mouse. Another tapped the tip of a butter churner onto the side of her cart like a schoolmarm getting the attention of unruly pupils. The Dutch-Reformed, with their identical broad-brimmed, low-crowned hats, stood in a line outside the meeting-house and shook their heads in unison. Ruth collected herself under their judgment, but the onlookers didn't faze Owen.

"Why, hello, ladies." He removed his hat and set the barrel of oats on the ground next to their carts. "Looks like you got some fine parsnips here and, I must say, a deft green thumb to keep them alive during the frost. Almighty impressive."

The women blushed.

"How much for a parsnip today?" he asked.

"For ye," Mrs. Pieterszoon fair hummed, "there be no cost." She cast a superior smirk at Ruth, who scowled in return. To Owen, she added, "Do tell your father good day for me, will ye?"

"I will, indeed." He lifted the fattest parsnip he could find in the cart and nodded. "He will be most delighted to hear it."

Mrs. Janszoon said hastily, "Ye can have two parsnips from me, dear boy, and do tell your father that I gived you twice the bounty as Betje." The woman piled two plump roots into Owen's hand.

"Oh come, Saskia!" Betje Pieterszoon retorted. "Don't listen to her. Take another parsnip from me, too, Mr. Townsend."

"Thank you ever so kindly, ladies. Shall we make it three apiece?" He took two more roots without waiting for a reply, pressing the six dirty parsnips against his chest in one arm and squatting to lift the oats in the other. "The captain will be delighted. Have your lovely selves a lovely day." As he stepped away from the carts, he dropped the six parsnips into Ruth's apron, avoiding her disgusted glare. "There. I got you six parsnips and had not a time of it. Heaven knows what you thought was so hard about that."

He walked her to Copernicus, then helped Ruth strap the stolen material bundles, copper kettle, and down blankets across the horse's back. His eyes settled on a branded W that marked the animal's hindquarters. A breath left him sharply. He knew the derogatory brand wasn't a chosen monogram and was the reason Ruth still owned the valuable horse that could otherwise have purchased her years' worth of comfort, could she only find a buyer of little enough superstition not to consider the beast cursed.

"I still can't believe you rode him to town."

"I can't spend all day getting here just to return home empty-handed. There is naught faster than a good horse."

"My ship is faster than a horse."

"Impracticalities excluded," she laughed, unroping Copernicus, then walking, the three of them, back toward the marsh. "I can't very well boat across these saltmarshes, now can I?"

"I spoke nothing of a boat. Your horse is faster than a boat."

"Ah, boat, ship: when will you ever get over that nuance?"

"When you've finally corrected it." He turned, and his second mate's voice called out across the marsh. "Ah." Owen's crest slumped. "Looks like *Primrose* will be first mateless if I don't go...although you'll be mateless if I do go. Quite the predicament for a man with any conscience. Lucky for me, I haven't got one of those useless things." He grinned, but not quite. "Adieu, Ruth Miner, you muddy creature. Until spring, doxy. You fare well, you hear me?"

She watched him walk the short distance across the marsh, silhouetted by the harbor, creating a bustling halo around his figure. The birds stopped chirping, and he kicked up flocks of sparrows from the tall spike grasses and bulrushes. They swarmed like dark winter clouds around him, until they separated and darted after waterbugs and dragonflies that hadn't yet migrated. She was still watching when he shouted across the meadow.

"Go get married, Ruthie! You'll never last the winter!"

Abashed, she turned her focus to the few harbor patrons and marketplace women who had heard his shout. When she looked back to where he had been, he was a speck of movement and reflected light on the dock, some glinting buttons, a wash of russet, climbing into the last loaded tender headed toward *Primrose* with the surefootedness of a cat on a ledge. Ruth made herself turn away.

She mounted her gelding, cast Copernicus' muzzle toward home, and came back into herself when she neared the entrance of the marshy woods that led to Grandmother's halfhouse. As the horse hit the first soggy steps of the woods, Ruth looked back toward the harbor. *Primrose's* sails were much smaller now, dollhouse-sized and floating with a ghostly ease. The fluyt would not return until winter's icy waters gave way to spring.

At the sobering thought of winter, she shivered and released a desperate sound, the chip-note of a caged swallow. Her horse continued

on, unguided, toward the wooden halfhouse nestled in the clearing, its faded clay-red paint coming into view, dulled on the southern boards that received the sun's waning rays. The sun, though, was of little matter: the house would be unbearably cold in a week's time, and that dear fireplace had to be filled faster than the heat could surface from it. But the smoke rising from the chimney and the floating scent of soaking salted alewife and clippers mixed with her spicy gingerbread, sugary olykoeks, and barleyloaf gave Ruth the bones she needed to stable Copernicus and leave the harbor behind for the season.