





CALL ME BATHSHEBA.

It is not my name, but the name I use for this story. A name, I hoped, that would be free of prophecy, free of the burden of a future placed upon it, free of any destiny that would tear it from my hands and destroy worlds.

You think I overstate. You are wrong.

We are a people of prophecy, and when I was a child and still a stupid calf, ignorant of all beyond the reaches of our own stretch of sea, my grandmother had said, simply, “You will hunt.”

It carried the weight of prophecy.

“But we are not hunters,” my mother had replied with the fearful bafflement that was her regular face to my grandmother. “We do not hunt. We have never hunted.” Her voice took on a hopeful and hopeless tone, the one that used to irritate me into fury but the memory of which now breaks my heart quite in half. “Unless you mean the small hunts,” my mother said, hopelessly hopeful, “the

ones that every family must—”

“I do not,” said my grandmother.

She did not.

And everything I might have been, the different futures I might have taken, all my different lives and deaths that existed in their endless possibilities were extinguished in a single repetition of her three words. “You will hunt.”

Was it prediction? Had she had a proper vision? Or was it a command, as it so often feels in the case of the prophetic? When you predict the future, when you do so strongly and you cling to it, how much of that future do you then cause to happen?

These are questions that haunt me.

At the time, though, they weren’t allowed to matter, for into training I immediately went — my mother never strong enough to overrule my grandmother — into the schools and the vocationals, into a new way of life until, at sixteen, the age of Apprenticeship, there I was, where this story begins: harpoons strapped to my back, swimming along the decks of the great hunting ship *Alexandra*, our sails catching the currents, the Abyss below us, the ocean our sky.

And all that might have been was long, long gone.

For I, a lowly but eager Third Apprentice, was about to

begin the final hunt that ever was. The hunt for a legend, a myth, a devil.

Pray for our souls.

Because this is the story of how we found him. ♦



“LOOK SHARP,” SAID CAPTAIN ALEXANDRA. As is traditional, our ship bore her name, much like her body bore most of the *ship*, the ropes from the bow tied to her fins, broad as any three of my young shipmates. The Captain pulls her ship, as is right, as is proper.

We sailed silently over the Abyss. I was Watch Left, swimming above and to the side of our Captain, matched further out front by First Apprentice Treasure and to the side by Second Apprentice Wilhelmina, “Willem,” Watch Right. We scanned the surface of the Abyss below us, its sun shining from underneath, like sailing across boiling light.

Behind us, on the *Alexandra*, our sailors made ready. The Captain was sure we were close to a prize. She could smell it, she said, and though this seemed improbable, we had learned in the months of this voyage not to doubt her.

Never to doubt her. Captain Alexandra was both famous and infamous, little of it for good reason past her success at the hunt. Everyone knew about the short, rusted end of a man's harpoon still sticking from her great head. She was the Captain who'd survived, the Captain who even though the harpoon must, on some level, impede her echolocation, nevertheless persisted, thrived, became the one thing that everyone, *everyone*, was sure about Captain Alexandra: she was the best hunter in the sea.

"Something approaches," she said, eyes forward, great tail increasing its kick. "Something rises."

"Where?" whispered Willem to my right, desperately searching the white froth below us.

"Quiet," Treasure said back. She was senior Apprentice. How often do you suppose she let us forget that?

The water filled with the clicks of our echolocations. The Captain left us to it, trusting her sense of smell, her eyes, her clairvoyance, for all I knew.

"Less than a league," Treasure said. "Center right."

"Look sharp," the Captain said again.

"Yes," Willem answered. "Yes, I've located it."

"And our Bathsheba?" the Captain asked, not looking back.

For I had remained silent. I had not located it yet.

I furiously sent out my clicks, waiting for the responses to echo off the great ball of waxy liquid in my forehead. I heard nothing from the center right, from where Treasure and Willem were claiming such certainty. I clicked again, and nothing. All I sensed there was empty ocean. I was the newest Apprentice, barely a year into our hunt, but I was not incompetent. And though my anxiety was growing, I also began to suspect Treasure and Willem were lying to impress their Captain, perhaps falling into one of the traps that even I knew she occasionally set for unwary Apprentices.

“Bathsheba?” the Captain asked again, her voice somehow both playful and menacing, as if I were prey kept alive only at the whim of its predator.

I clicked. Again, and nothing. Again, and—

I turned sharply left. “Not center right,” I said, surprised even at myself. I clicked once more. I was nervous. But I was sure. “Third of a league. Left and left again.”

“No—” started Treasure.

“Is it?” said Willem.

“Quite so, our Bathsheba,” said the Captain, surging forward, pulling the great ship behind us to the left and a notch left again.

“I’ve found it!” Treasure said, too loud because too late.

“It rises,” said the Captain. And the hunt was on. ♦



