

THE TRAITOR BARU CORMORANT



SETH DICKINSON



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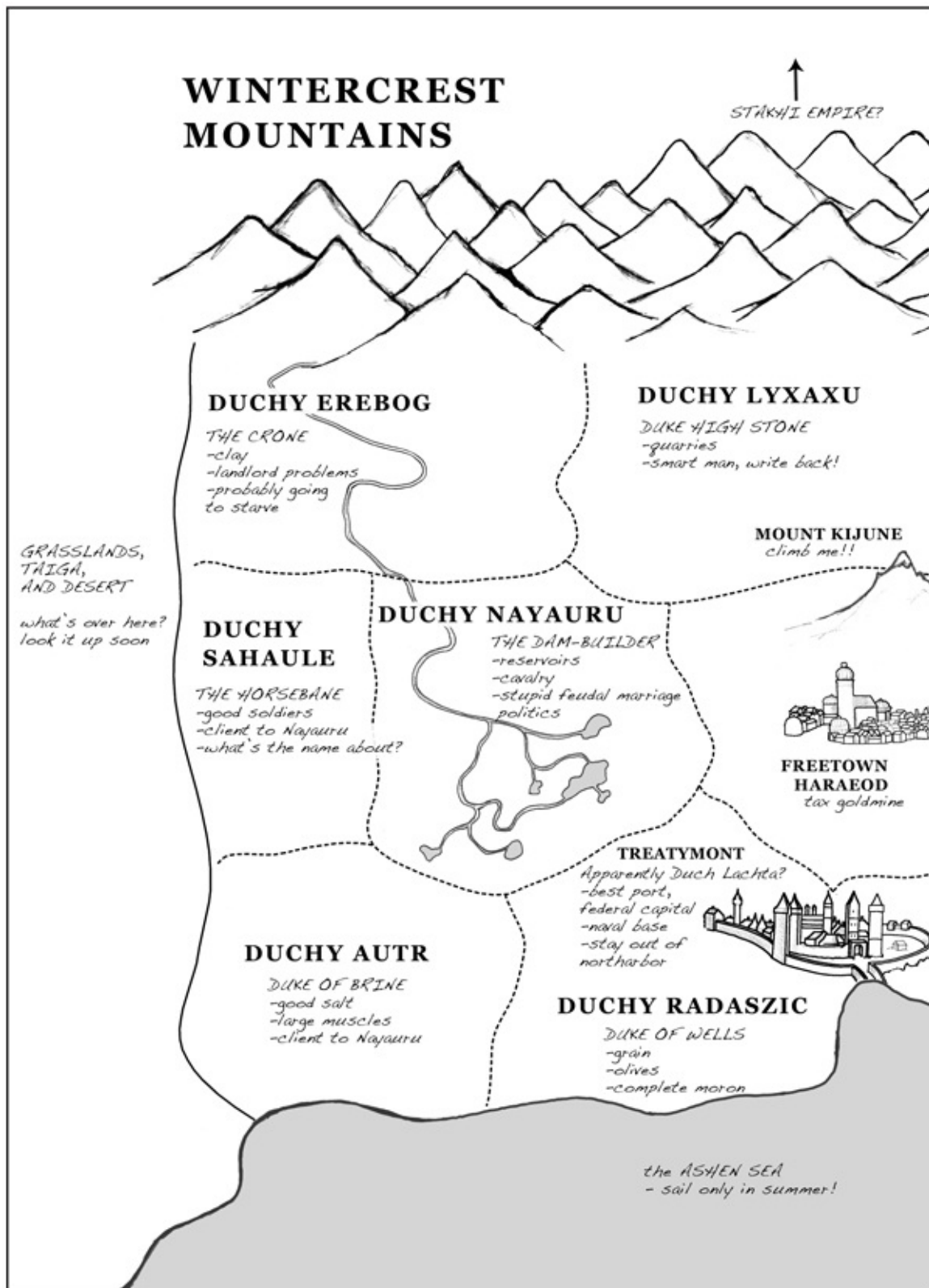
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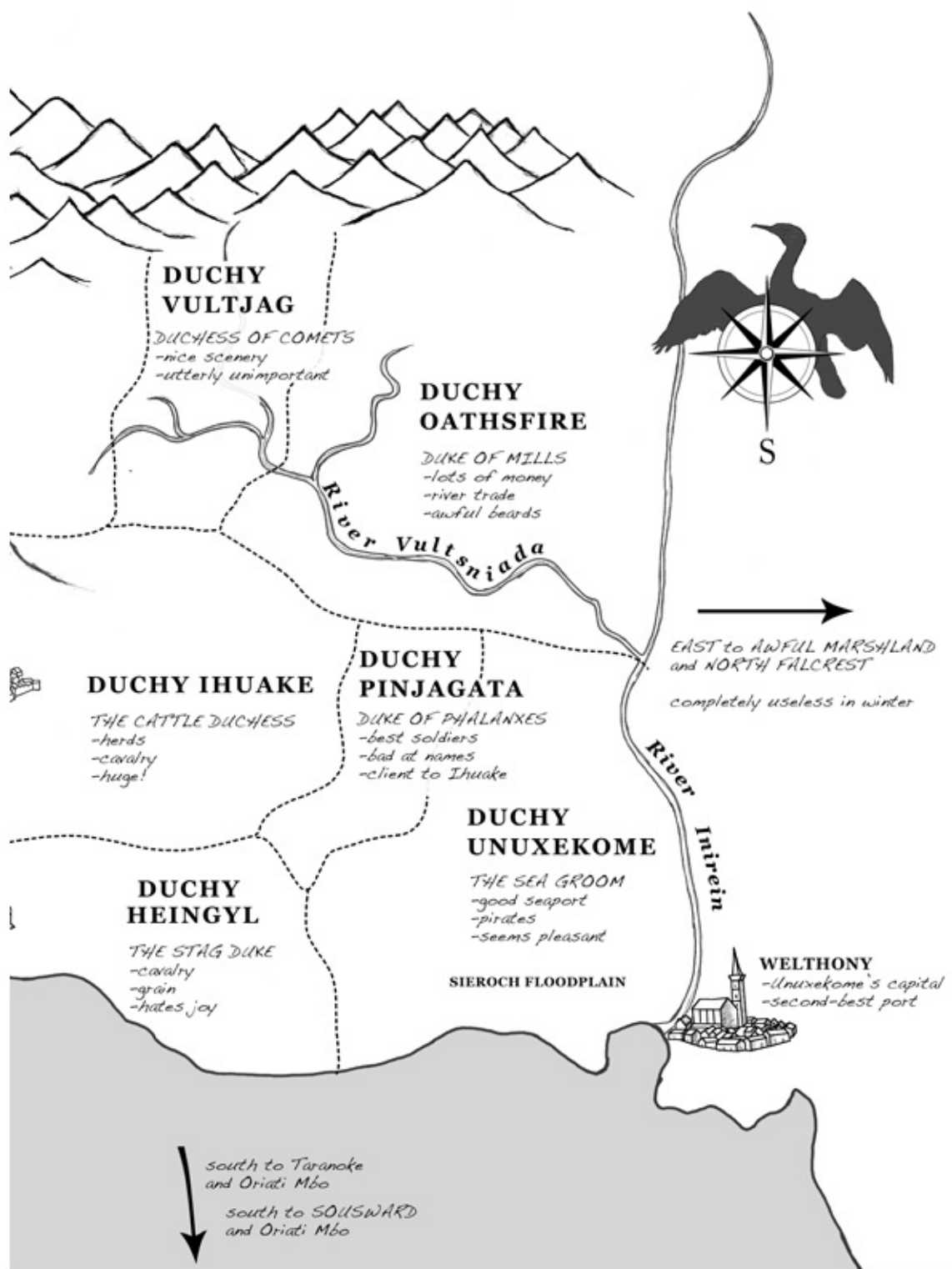
For Gillian

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Sine qua non: Rachel Sobel. Jennifer Jackson. Marco Palmieri.

Sophia and colleagues. Jackals, Blue Planet, my brother, and a loon.





A PROMISE

This is the truth. You will know because it hurts.

ACCOUNTANT

1

TRADE season came around again. Baru was still too young to smell the empire wind.

The Masquerade sent its favorite soldiers to conquer Taranoke: sailcloth, dyes, glazed ceramic, sealskin and oils, paper currency printed in their Falcrest tongue. Little Baru, playing castles in the hot black sand, liked to watch their traders come in to harbor. She learned to count by tallying the ships and the seabirds that circled them.

Nearly two decades later, watching firebearer frigates heel in the aurora light, she would remember those sails on the horizon. But at age seven, the girl Baru Cormorant gave them no weight. She cared mostly for arithmetic and birds and her parents, who could show her the stars.

But it was her parents who taught her to be afraid.

In the red autumn evening before the stars rose, her fathers took Baru down to the beach to gather kelp for ash, the ash meant for glass, the glass for telescope lenses ground flat by volcanic stone, the lenses meant for the new trade. When they came to the beach, Baru saw Masquerade merchant ships on the horizon, making a wary circuit around Halae's Reef.

"Look, Das," Baru said. "They're coming in for the Iriad market."

"I see them." Father Salm shaded his eyes and watched the ships, peeling lips pressed thin. He had the shoulders of a mountain and they corded as he moved. "Go fill your bucket."

"Watch." Father Solit, keen-eyed, took his husband's hand and pointed. "There's a third ship. They're sailing in convoys now."

Baru pretended to dig for kelp and listened.

"Pirates make a good excuse for convoy," Salm said. "And the convoy makes a good excuse for escort." He spat into the surf. "Pinion was right. Poison in that treaty."

Watching their reflections, Baru saw Solit take Salm's shoulder, callused hand pressed against his husband's bare strength. Each man wore his hair braided, Solit's burnt short for the smithy, Salm's an elaborate waist-length fall—for glory in the killing circle, against the plainsmen.

"Can you see it, then?" Solit asked.

"No. It's out there, though. Over the horizon."

"What's out there, Da?" Baru asked.

"Fill your bucket, Baru," Salm rumbled.

Baru loved her mother and her fathers dearly, but she loved to know things just a

small measure more, and she had recently discovered cunning. “Da,” she said, speaking to Solit, who was more often agreeable, “will we go to Iriad market and see the ships tomorrow?”

“Fill your bucket, Baru,” Solit said, and because he echoed Salm instead of indulging her, Baru knew he was worried. But after a moment, he added: “Grind your glass tonight, and we’ll have enough to sell. You can come along to Iriad and see the ships.”

She opened her mother’s hand-copied dictionary that night, squinting at the narrow script in the candlelight, and counted through the letters of the Urunoki alphabet until she came to: *convoy—a caravan, or a group of ships, gathered for mutual protection, especially under the escort of a warship.*

A warship. Hm.

It’s out there, father Salm had said.

From the courtyard of their ash-concrete home came the shriek of stone on glass and the low worried voices of her mother and fathers, a huntress and a blacksmith and a shield-bearer. Worrying about *the treaty* again.

She looked that word up too, hoping to understand it, as understanding gave her power over things. But she did not see how a treaty could be poison. Perhaps she would learn at the Iriad market.

Baru put her mother’s dictionary back and then hesitated, fingers still on the chained stitches of the binding. Mother had a new book in her collection, bound in foreign leather. From the first page—printed in strange regular blocks, impersonal and crisp—she sounded out the title: *A Primer in Aphalone, the Imperial Trade Tongue; Made Available to the People of Taranoke For Their Ease.*

There was a copy number in the bottom corner, almost higher than she could count.

* * *

WHERE the sea curled up in the basalt arms of the Iriad cove, beneath the fields of sugarcane and macadamia and coffee that grew from the volcanic loam, the market preened like a golden youth.

Since a time before Baru could remember how to remember the market had filled the Iriad docks, the most noisy and joyous thing in the world. There were more ships in harbor this year—not just Taranoki fishers and felucca, not just familiar Oriati traders from the south, but tall white-sailed Masquerade merchant ships. With their coming the market had outgrown the boardwalks and drifted out onto bobbing floats of koa and walnut where drummers sounded in the warmth and the light.

Today Baru went to market with a new joy: the joy of plots. She would learn what troubled her parents, this knot of warships and treaties. She would repair it.

Her family went by canoe. Baru rode in the prow while mother Pinion and father Salm paddled and father Solit kept nervous watch over the telescopes. The wind off the sea lifted flocks of scaups and merganser ducks, gangs of bristle-throated alawa giving two-toned calls, egrets and petrels and frigate birds, and high above great black

jaegers like wedges of night. She tried determinedly to count them and keep all the varieties straight.

“Baru Cormorant,” mother Pinion said, smiling. In Baru’s eyes she was a coil of storm surf, a thunderbolt, as slow and powerful as sunlight. Her dark eyes and the teeth in her smile were the shapes that Baru imagined when she read about panthers. She worked her paddle in strokes as smooth and certain as the waves. “It was a good name.”

Baru, warm and loved and hungry to impress with accurate bird-count, hugged her mother’s thigh.

They found a quay to unload the telescopes and the market swept up around them. Baru navigated the crowd of knees and ankles, trailing behind her parents because the commerce distracted her. Taranoke had always been a trading port, a safe island stop for Oriati dromons and islander canoes, so Baru grew up knowing a little of the structure of trade: arbitrage, currency exchange, import and export. *We sell sugarcane and honey and coffee and citrus fruits*, mother Pinion said, *and buy textiles, sailcloth, kinds of money that other traders want—Baru, pay attention!*

Lately she always paid attention. Something fragile had come into the air, a storm smell, and not understanding made her afraid.

The market smelled of cooked pineapple and fresh ginger, red iron salt and anise. Through the drums and the calls of the dancers and the shouts of the audience in Urunoki and Oriati and the new trade tongue Aphalone came the ring of hard coin and reef pearl changing hands.

“Sol-i-i-i-i-t,” Baru called. “I want to see—!”

“I know.” Solit spared a smile from his work. He had been a smith, and he was generous to everything he made, including Baru. “Go wander.”

Excellent. Now she would pursue the true meaning of *treaty*.

She found a foreign trader’s stall painted in Masquerade white. The man who watched over the piled broadcloth—woven from sheep, which she understood were large dull beasts made entirely of hair—could have passed for Taranoki from a distance, though up close the different fold of his eyelids and flat of his nose gave him away. This was the first impression Baru had of the Falcrest people: stubborn jaws, flat noses, deep folded eyes, their skin a paler shade of brown or copper or oat. At the time they hardly seemed so different.

The man looked bored, so Baru felt no qualms about climbing up onto his stall. He had guards, two women with shaved heads and sailors’ breeches, but they were busy trying to bridge the language barrier with a young Taranoki fisherman.

“Hello, dear,” the man in the stall said. He moved a stack of samples and made a space for her. Baru made curious note of his excellent Urunoki. He must be a very dedicated trader, or very good with tongues—and cultures, too, because traders did not often understand how to be friendly on Taranoke. “Do your parents need cold-weather cloth?”

“Why are they bald?” Baru asked, pointing to the guards. By gesture or linguistic

skill, they had made their fisherman friend blush.

“There are lice on ships,” the merchant said, looking wearily out into the market. He had heavy brows, like fortresses to guard his eyes. “They live in hair. And I don’t suppose your parents need cloth, given the climate. What was I thinking, trying to sell broadcloth here? I’ll go home a pauper.”

“Oh, no,” Baru assured him. “We make things from your cloth, I’m sure, and besides, we can sell it to traders headed north, and make a profit. Do you use the paper money?”

“I prefer coin and gem, though when I buy, I’ll pay in paper notes.”

He had to his left a stack of sheepskin palimpsest—ink-scratched records that could be scraped clean and used again. “Are those your figures?”

“They are, and they are certainly too important to show to you.” The broadcloth merchant blew irritably at a buzzing fly. “Do your parents use paper money, then?”

Baru caught the fly and crushed it. “No one used it at first. But now that your ships come in so often, everyone must have some, because it can buy so many things.” Then she asked about something she already knew, because it was useful to hide her wit: “Are you from the Masquerade?”

“The Empire of Masks, dear, or the Imperial Republic. It’s rude to abbreviate.” The man watched his guards with a paternal frown, as if afraid they might need supervision. “Yes, that’s my home. Though I haven’t seen Falcrest in some years.”

“Are you going to conquer us?”

He looked at her slowly, his eyes narrowed in thought. “We never conquer anyone. Conquest is a bloody business, and causes plagues besides. We’re here as friends.”

“It’s curious, then, that you’d sell goods for coins and gems, but only buy with paper,” said Baru. The shape of her words changed here, not entirely by her will: for a few moments she spoke like her mother. “Because if I understand my figures, that means you are taking all the things we use to trade with others, and giving us paper that is only good with you.”

The broadcloth merchant watched her with sudden sharpness.

“My parents are scared,” Baru added, embarrassed by his regard.

He leaned forward, and abruptly she recognized his expression from markets and traders past. It was avarice. “Are your parents here?”

“I’m fine alone,” she said. “Everyone here knows everyone else. I can’t get lost. But if you want to buy a telescope—”

“I *crave* telescopes,” he said, perhaps thinking she had never heard of sarcasm. “Where are they?”

“Up there,” she said, pointing. “My mother is the huntress Pinion, and my fathers are Solit the blacksmith and Salm the shield-bearer.”

At that his mouth pursed, as if the idea of fathers troubled him. Perhaps they had no fathers in Falcrest. “And you?”

“My name’s Baru,” she said, as names were gladly given on Taranoke. “Baru Cormorant, because a cormorant was the only thing that made me stop crying.”

“You’re a very clever girl, Baru,” the merchant said. “You’re going to have a brilliant future. Come see me again. Ask for Cairdine Farrier.”

When he came to speak to her parents later, he could not seem to stop looking at her fathers, and then her mother, and pursing his lips as if he had swallowed his own snot. But he bought two telescopes and a set of mirrors, and even wary Salm was happy.

* * *

THE last Masquerade convoy of the trade season circled Halae’s Reef and anchored off Iriad harbor in the company of a sleek red-sailed frigate—the warship that father Salm had expected. Barking sailors swarmed her deck. A child with a spyglass might, if she were too curious for her own good and too poor a daughter to attend to her work, climb the volcano and watch their proceedings all day long. Baru had such a spyglass, and she was just that kind of daughter.

“They have soldiers on board,” Baru told her parents, excited to discover such a portentous thing herself. Now she could be included in the courtyard councils and whispers of poison treaties. “With armor and spears!”

But father Salm did not buckle on his shield to fight them. Mother Pinion did not take Baru aside and explain the taxonomy of sergeants and officers and the nature and variety of Masquerade weapons. Father Solit fed her no pineapple and asked for no details. They worked in the courtyard, murmuring about treaties and embassies. “Once they have built it,” Salm would say, “they will never leave.” And Solit would answer in flat fighting-without-fighting words: “They will build it whether we sign or not. We must make terms.”

Feeling neglected and therefore unwilling to attend to her chores and figures, Baru nagged them. “Solit,” she said, as he bagged their kelp harvest to carry to the burners, “when can you start smithing again?”

When Baru was young he had made beautiful and dangerous things out of ores that came from the earth and the hot springs. “Once the trading season’s over, Baru,” he said.

“And will mother go across the mountain, into the plains, and use the boar-killing spear you made for her?”

“I’m sure she will.”

Baru looked happily to her mother, whose long strides and broad shoulders were better suited to the hunt than to telescope-making, and then to her other father, who could drum as fiercely as he could fight. “And when the soldiers come, will father Salm use the man-killing spear you made for him?”

“You’re covered in filth, child,” Solit said. “Go to Lea Pearldiver’s home and get some pumice. Take some paper money and buy their olive oil, too.”

* * *

BARU read at great length about *treaties* and *currency* and *arbitrage*, and when she could read or understand no more, she bothered mother Pinion, or sat in thought. Clearly there had been some mistake: her parents had been happier last year than this.

The trend would have to be reversed. But how?

At Iriad market the merchant Cairdine Farrier sat in his stall with his two guards, who had the satisfied look of gulls. That market fell on a stormy end-of-season day, gray and forbidding, close to the time when the Ashen Sea's circular trade winds would collapse into winter storm. But the Iriad cove sheltered the market from the worst of the chop and the drummers still drummed. Baru made straight for the wool-merchant's stall.

Farrier was speaking to a Taranoki plainsman who had clearly come all the way across the mountain, and Baru had always been taught not to speak to plainsmen, so she went to Farrier's guards instead. The bald women looked down at her, first with perfunctory regard, then irritation, and then, when she stayed, a little smile—from one of them, at least. The other woman looked to her companion for guidance, and thus told Baru that they were probably soldiers, and also which one was in charge.

Her reading and her thought had not been idly spent.

"Hello, little one," the woman in charge said. She had skin the color of good earth, wide lips, and brilliant blue eyes like a jungle crow. She wore a stained white tunic with her breeches. Her Urunoki was as superb as Cairdine Farrier's.

"You've been here all season," Baru said. "You never leave with the trading ships."

"We'll go home with the last convoy."

"I don't think you will," Baru said. The other woman straightened a little. "I don't think you're Cairdine Farrier's personal guards, or even merchants at all, because if you were you would have learned by now that you don't need guards at Iriad market, and he would have sent you to find more business."

The stiff woman said something in Aphalone, the Falcresti language, and from reading the dictionary Baru caught the words *native* and *steal*. But the woman with the blue eyes only knelt. "He said you were a very clever girl."

"You're soldiers, aren't you," Baru said. "From that ship. The warship that stayed here all season, anchored out of sight while the other traders came and went, sending back your reports. That's obvious, too. A trader wouldn't learn a little island's language as well as you have, which makes you spies. And now that the trade winds are dying, your ship's come in to harbor to stay."

The blue-eyed woman took her by the shoulders. "Little lark, I know what it means to see strange sails in the harbor. My name's Shir and I'm from Aurdwynn. When I was a child, the Masquerade harbored in Treatymont, our great city. They fought with the Duke Lachta, and I was scared, too. But it all ended well, and my aunt even got to kill the awful duke. Here—take a coin. Go buy a mango and bring it back to me, and I'll cut you a piece."

Baru kept the coin.

At the end of the day the red-sailed frigate in the harbor put down boats. The

soldiers began to come ashore, led by officers in salt-stained leather and steel masks. Through her spyglass Baru watched Iriad's elders escort the Masquerade soldiers into their new building: a white embassy made of ash concrete.

Later Baru decided this must have been when the treaty was signed: *An Act of Federation, For the Mutual Benefit of the People of Taranoke and the Imperial Republic of Falcrest*.

At sunset they raised their banner: two open eyes in a mask, circled in clasped hands. And the next morning they began to cut tufa to build the school.

* * *

STORM season blew down on Taranoke and everything began to fall.

Baru relied on her mother's love of knowing and telling to understand. But Pinion grew distant and temperamental, her loves overshadowed by a terrible brooding anger, and so left Baru to piece together the clues herself.

This was how she explained it to some of the other children, Lea Pearldiver's and Haea Ashcoke's, her second cousin Lao oldest among them and already growing into a long-limbed stork of a person who had to fold herself up between the salty rocks of their secret seaside bolt-hole to listen to Baru's stories—

"The plainsmen are angry with us," Baru would say, "because of the treaty. They say it's because Taranoke stands alone, and we've betrayed that by letting the Masquerade build an embassy. But we know better." (At this everyone would murmur in agreement, having been raised to know the jealous ways of the soggy people from Taranoke's eastern plains.) "They think we've bought a foreign ally to hold over them. They think we want a monopoly on the new trade."

And events proved her right. Early in the rainy season all the children from around Halae's Reef packed themselves into their briny seaside fortress so Baru could explain the fires. "The plainsmen sent a war party," she told them, relishing the power to make them gasp and lean in, and especially the power to make Lao hug her knees and stare at Baru in terror and admiration. "They came over the mountain and burned some of our sugarcane and coffee. It was a message, you see? So the harborside families took council at Iriad, and sent out a war party of our own. Champions to bear their shields east and answer the challenge."

"What will they do?" Lao asked, to Baru's immense satisfaction.

"Talk if they can," Baru said, playing at nonchalance by tossing a stone to herself. "Fight if they can't."

"How do they fight?"

How extraordinarily satisfying to be the daughter of Salm the shield-bearer and Pinion the huntress, foremost among the harborside champions. "Wars are fought between champions in a circle of drums. The drums beat and the champions trade spear-cast and shield-push until the loser yields or dies." Baru cracked her throwing stone against the stone beneath her, to make them leap. "And then the plainsmen go home to sulk, and we sell them textiles at outrageous prices."

But it didn't happen this way. When the war party set out to cross the mountain and challenge the plainsmen, the Masquerade garrison marched with them. The treaty spoke of *mutual defense*.

This was where Baru lost track of events, because mother Pinion and father Salm marched with them too—the war party with their shields and man-spears and obsidian knives climbing the flank of the mountain in a motley peacock throng, Salm's braids a mark of glory among them, Pinion's spear strapped across her brown back. And the Masquerade garrison masked and columned behind them, banners flying, churning the road to mud.

It had been a long time since war between harborside and plainsmen. Around Iriad there were old vendettas, wives who would not take plainside husbands, men who would not add their seed to a plainside woman's child. But it had been easy to forget that hate as long as times were fat.

Baru and father Solit stayed at home. The glassmakers had stopped burning kelp and so there were no mirrors to grind. Without Masquerade traders in harbor the paper money was worthless, except it wasn't, because everyone wanted to have it when the trade winds picked up again, and bartered outrageously for even a few slips.

The wool-merchant Cairdine Farrier came in person to invite Baru to attend the new school, a great tufa-walled compound above the cove. "Oh," father Solit said, his voice hard. "I don't know. What could you teach her that she couldn't learn from us?"

"Lands around the Ashen Sea," Farrier said, smiling conspiratorially at Baru. "New sorts of arithmetic and algebra. Astronomy—we have an excellent telescope, built by the Stakhieczki in the distant north. Science and the disciplines within it. Various catalogues"—his smile held—"of sin and social failure. The Imperial Republic is determined to help those we meet."

"No," father Solit said, taking her shoulder. "Your help is a fishhook."

"You know best, of course," Farrier said, though the avarice had not gone from his eyes.

But without Salm and Pinion, father Solit was lonely and disconsolate, and Baru insisted that she be allowed to attend this wonderful school, which might be full of answers to questions she had barely begun to form—*what is the world* and *who runs it* and more. Whether because she made Solit furious, or sad, or led him to realize he no longer had any control, her pleas struck home. (She wondered about this often, later, and decided it was none of that. He had seen the fire on the horizon and wanted his daughter safe.)

She went into the school, with her own uniform and her own bed in the crowded dormitory, and there in her first class on Scientific Society and Incrasticism she learned the words *sodomite* and *tribadist* and *social crime* and *sanitary inheritance*, and even the mantra of rule: *order is preferable to disorder*. There were rhymes and syllogisms to learn, the Qualms of revolutionary philosophy, readings from a child's version of the Falcresti *Handbook of Manumission*.

They know so much, Baru thought. I must learn it all. I must name every star and

sin, find the secrets of treaty-writing and world-changing. Then I can go home and I will know how to make Solit happy again.

She learned a great many other things as well: astronomy and social heredity and geography. She made a map of the Ashen Sea and its seasonal trade winds, which carried ships in a great easy circle that ran clockwise (another new word) around the ocean, starting at Falcrest in the east and running south near Taranoke and Oriati Mbo, onward past lands with many names, all the way north to Aurdwynn and then back to Falcrest again.

So many lands. Oriati Mbo below, learned and fractious, a quilt of federations. Cold Aurdwynn above, where instead of a storm season they had *winter*, and no decent fruit, and wolves.

And Falcrest. It must be full of secrets to learn.

“You *could* go to Falcrest, Baru Cormorant!” The social hygienist Diline, a gentle man the color of whitefish, aimed his stylus at her. “At the end of your schooling, every child of promise will sit the civil service exam, the Empire’s great leveler. Through the methods of Incrastic thought, we will determine your social function. You may become a translator, a scholar, even a technocrat in a distant land.”

“Does the Emperor live in Falcrest?” second cousin Lao asked. At night they whispered rumors of the silent Emperor and the Faceless Throne on which he sat.

Diline smiled blandly. “He does. Who can recite the Hierarchic Qualm?”

Baru could.

The civil service exam became Baru’s guide-star. It would ask her to recite the secrets of power, she imagined. It would require her to make father Solit smile again.

But that very same day Diline taught them the proof of strict limited inheritance. “One male father,” he said, watching the class carefully, as if waiting for a boar to burst out from among them. “One female mother. No less. No more.”

The class did not believe him. Cousin Lao began to cry. Baru tried to disprove this idiot *proof*, and had her first shouting match. She was the daughter of a huntress and a blacksmith and a shield-bearer, and now they would tell her she was *not*?

She had to ask mother Pinion.

But Pinion came home alone.

Came home from the war, the blood-soaked catastrophe at Jupora, where Masquerade marines shot dead the plainsmen champions and slaughtered their war party. Cradling father Solit’s trembling face in her hands, she rasped her own catastrophe: “Salm vanished on the march home. There were men among the foreign soldiers who hated him. I think they took him.”

“For what?” Solit’s voice sealed, frozen, desperate to keep things within or without. “What could they find to hate?”

“You. None of these men have husbands. They *hate* husbands.” She lowered her forehead to his. “He’s gone, Solit. I looked—I looked so long—”

When this happened, it was because of the class on Scientific Society and Incrasticism that Baru could only think to ask: “Was Salm my real father? Or was he

only a sodomite?”

It was because of this that father Solit cried out, and told mother Pinion about the school. It was because of this that mother Pinion struck her in rage, and cast Baru out of the courtyard to run sobbing back to the white walls and the masked banner.

Her mother came to apologize, of course, and they cried and were reunited as a family, or at least a grieving part of one. But the hurt was dealt, and the school seemed to know more than even mother Pinion, who taught no more—only whispered with Solit about fire and spear and *resistance*.

“Stay at school,” Solit said. “You’ll be safest there. The Farrier man”—his nostrils flared in disgust—“will not let you be harmed.”

I must learn why this happened to Salm, Baru thought. I must understand it, so I can stop it from ever happening again. I will not cry. I will understand.

This was Baru Cormorant’s first lesson in causality. But it was not quite the most important thing she ever learned from her mother.

That came earlier, long before the school or the disappearance of brave father Salm. Watching the red-sailed warship in Iriad harbor, Baru asked: “Mother, why do they come here and make treaties? Why do *we* not go to *them*? Why are they so powerful?”

“I don’t know, child,” mother Pinion said.

It was the first time Baru could ever remember hearing those words from her.

2

SHE lost her father Salm, and from this she nearly lost her mother, too.

“You cannot believe what they teach you,” mother Pinion hissed in her ear. (They smiled together at the chaperones who brought Baru to visit her home, which seemed strangely squalid now.) “You must remember what they did to Salm, and give them nothing. The families are taking secret council. We will find a way to drive them back into the sea.”

“They will never go back,” Baru whispered, pleading. “You cannot fight them, Mother. You don’t understand how huge they are. Please find some way to make peace—please don’t die like Salm—”

“He isn’t dead,” Pinion growled. “Your father lives.”

Baru looked at her mother, at Pinion’s eyes red with fatigue, her shoulders bunched in anger, and wondered what had happened to the woman who was a thunderbolt, a storm cloud, a panther. Of all things Pinion looked most like a wound.

And Pinion, looking back, must have seen an equal disappointment in Baru’s eyes. “He lives,” she said again, and turned away.

The argument grew between them like a reef.

By Baru’s tenth birthday, she came to expect visits from the wool merchant Cairdine Farrier more often than her mother or father. He always had advice. Dress this way, never that way. Befriend her, or him—but not him. She liked his advice better than Pinion’s, because it was full of things to accomplish now rather than things to avoid forever.

The school’s Charitable Service instructors came from many foreign places. There were more and stranger people among the Masquerade garrison than Baru had ever seen at Iriad market. “If they can be teachers,” Baru asked, “then I can be one, too? I can go to another land and make little girls stop reading at unjustly early hours?”

“You can be anything you want in the Empire of Masks!” Cairdine Farrier, grown fat these past few years on island life, tugged affectionately on her ear. “Man and woman, rich and poor, Stakhieczzi or Oriati or Maia or Falcrest born—in our Imperial Republic you can be what you desire, if you are disciplined in your actions and rigorous in your thoughts. That’s why it’s an Empire of Masks, dear. When you wear a mask, your *wits* matter.”

“You don’t wear a mask,” Baru said, studying him intently, wondering if there might be flaps behind his ears, fastenings in his hair.