

11. Where tomorrow lies

"Clap on! Mr. Keyes, and you'll be up in an instant." Red Sam leaned over the rail and grasped the outstretched arm. A moment later, Tom Keyes was standing on the deck of the *Jonathan*, looking out over a sunlit Plymouth Sound. More than two weeks had passed since the *Jonathan*, *London Merchant* and the *Duty* had cast off from the London quay, tided glided down the Thames, and then beat their way west along the coast, a few miles a day until they had finally reached Plymouth, the last real port before the open Atlantic.

"So how is our Plymouth Town?" asked Sam with a smile.

"A fine city, Sam and what a port! Why, there are more ships in less space in the Pool than you would ever think possible; you couldn't fit so much as another dinghy! But then, you know Plymouth perfectly well, I suppose."

"Tolerably, sir; and it's right snug when you've passed the Barbican, that's for sure. We watered there and added stores last year, too, and I had a good ale or two -- or a tad more, sir, to tell the Gospel truth, and with the whole crew. It won't be like that this year though. No sir! Most of the crew won't have much of a chance in town this time 'round."

"Why not?" asked Keyes. "Why can't the others go with you? And why are our ships the only ones moored over here in Mill Bay instead in the Pool? I was only joking about there being no room in the port."

"Why as for that, Mr. Keyes, it's not for me to be told the whys and wherefores, if you take my meaning. But Captain Each has made one thing clear as Venetian glass: he won't have no runnagates from *his* ship!" He nodded significantly towards the bow where the prisoners were getting their time on deck. "Last year, we carried mostly gentlemen like yourself, sir -- along with a half-dozen or more families with all their household, everyone all paid up full if you follow me: children, servants and all. If they wanted to go into town and not come back before we sailed for Virginia, that was their own affair. More food and water for everyone else! Not that any run off, of course: they were like you, Mr. Keyes, sailing to make their fortunes in Virginia. So, we could moor right against the wharf in Plymouth proper -- no more than a hundred paces to the best ale-houses in Dorset. Me and the hands had liberty near every day, waiting for the wind to come 'round right. We didn't have any felons or horse thieves last year like they've got on *Duty* this time. But we did have a load of London brats, not as many as we've got this year, but enough, and some of 'em jumped right onto the quay one night and took off, which the Company in London took badly when the news got back.

"This year's different, with all the riff-raff we're got, not to mention all the rogues on the *Duty* who'd be hanging on the gallows if they hadn't been transported. There'd be a half-dozen jumping ship the moment you turned your back and go sidling through town robbing every merchant and his mistress and then slipping out into the countryside and back to Cheapside to start all over again! Think Captain Each would put up with that?"

Sam scratched his beard. "It's a bit different with these City nippers and idlers from Bridewell, of course. With their mouths they say they'll go anywhere other than back to London Town. But their eyes say they're lying and they'll jump ship the first chance they get. See how they stare!" he continued as a group of Bridewellians emptied bucked over the side. "They didn't have much in London, but even so, most of 'em would head back if they could. That little blow we had off Beachy Head last week gave 'em a taste for what the sea can do, and even the ones that didn't sit all night with their head over a bucket had enough."

Keyes grimaced at the memory. It wasn't just the prisoners who had had the head over a bucket!

"You see," continued the mate, "adventure is fine and good, but it's best left to me and my mates -- and men like you who know why you're putting up with it all! So like I said, if we moored next by the wharf in the Pool, there'd be two dozen gone like that!" Sam snapped his callused fingers with such force that a dozen startled Bridewellians turned to stare. Sam met them with a stone face.

"Captain said the Company would fine him ten pounds sterling for every runaway on his watch! So the Captain tells us it's either ten pounds or ten times that in lashes, and seeing that neither me nor the hands have ten pounds sterling at hand, it's the lashes that we'd worry about."

"Ten pounds sterling," repeated Keyes quietly. "Hard to believe they're worth as much as that."

He watched the youngsters shuffle around the ship's waist with their hands stuffed in their pockets or leaning against the rail and gazing absently at the water. Scattered around the Bay were oystermen, cocklecatchers, netfishers

and every kind of local fishing boat coming in on the tide, trying to catch the wind, or drawn up along the banks. While some the the Bridewellians gazed at the boats, others peered longingly at the roofs and spires of Plymouth Town that spiked above the meadows beyond. A few others stared at the mouth of the Bay, where the south wind was whitecapping the open waters of the Sound and driving breakers against the flanks of Mount Edgcombe. Farther still, the heights of Maker parish and the barren rocks of Penlee marked the deadly Cornish headlands that closed the Sound on the west.

There was one lad, however, who ignored these sights and fixed Red Sam and Tom Keyes instead. He stood at the foot of the ladder up from waist and seemed to be edging toward them. "

"In London," said Keyes, "before we sailed, I heard that the City had paid five pounds to the Company just to be rid of them. If the City's already paid for their passage, why should anyone care whether they jump ship or not?"

"When you put it like that, sir, I can't rightly say. Someone must think they're good for something in Virginia, though it's hard to see why!" He laughed.

"Excuse me, sirs." It was the lad who had been eyeing them. He kept at a respectful distance, just close enough to the other prisoners to avoid a reprimand from the turnkey, Old Ugly Jackson himself. "I'm Will, Will Micklewood. May I have a word with you? Please?"

Red Sam shrugged. "All right by me, mate." He nodded his approval to Jackson and gestured for Will to climb the ladder. Jackson scowled, but didn't interfere. When Maggie saw Will climb up, she hurried to join him.

Red Sam had noticed her before, more than once in fact -- she was a fine-looking wench, after all. Tom Keyes had noticed her too. She was prettier than his Martha, he had to admit; rounder, too, though she couldn't be more than a year or two younger. And, Keyes told himself, he wasn't really engaged, not fully. Still, he turned his gaze away.

"I'll leave you to your duty," he said to Sam. "I must put these things away downstairs, or, uh...stow them below," he added with some pride, gesturing to the purchases he had brought back from the town. He gave Maggie no more than a kindly glance and walked away.

"What's on your mind, lad?" asked the mate. "Out with it!"

"We want to know if it's true," mumbled Will, trying hard to look Red Sam in the eye.

"Know if *what's* true?"

"Go ahead, Will," said Maggie softly. "Tell him." She put her hand on his arm. "Tell him what Tom said."

"Tom *who*," demanded Sam. "You're not making any sense, lad. What's this all about?"

"Why, Tom Cornish, sir," said Will. "In London, he said --"

"Another Cornish troublemaker!" interrupted Red Sam. "They give you nothing but trouble! Who let him into London, anyhow?"

Will ignored the question and pushed ahead. "Back in Bridewell, you see, well, Tom said his old uncle was Cornish and told him once that if you climb the church steeple atop the hill west of Plymouth -- if the sun's bright and the air's right -- well, that you can just see Virginia, lying low at the very edge of the world. So, is it true?" he added.

Red Sam looked down at the two expectant faces -- fearful, hopeful, desperate faces -- and remembered the departure last year. There had been faces like that among the children last year when they'd first set sail, but those faces disappeared long before they reached Virginia and had been replaced by tired, seasick, homesick, heartsick, hungry faces. Would they have wished for such a fable?

"If I tell you, can you keep it a secret?" Red Sam whispered at last. "Both of you?"

Will looked up solemnly and nodded, looking Sam straight in the eye; but Maggie just stared at him and Sam looked away.

"Well, they don't like to let it be generally known, you know, but, uh, well, Virginia ain't so far as you hear say sometimes. See, if every Tom, Dick and Harry in London Town knew how close Virginia really is, why they'd be thousands and thousands going, rushing off to make a new life. Just like that Mr. Keyes who was here just now. We'd have to beat 'em off with boat hooks if the word got out! You see up there?" -- he pointed south to the barren Maker Heights, perhaps two miles away -- "that's where Cornwall begins, right there, on the far side of the river. Nothing but stone and sand, maybe a bush or two -- and Cornishmen babbling away so foreign you wouldn't know you're still in merry England. Well, just a little bit farther, past the Point, hat's Rame Head."

As Red Sam pointed to the west, Will rose on his tiptoes and stared. "And it's pretty close to what your friend said: there's a church up there with a steeple so tall it's in the clouds half the time! Mark my word, lad, if there's any place where you could make out Virginia, it'd be right

there, that's for sure. Why on a fine spring day, you could see *tomorrow* from up there!"

Red Sam felt the force of Maggie's knowing gaze and was suddenly ashamed. She was old enough to have been told too many sweet lies to fall for such a tale. But it wasn't being caught out by her that shamed him. That was all just fun. What shamed him was the way she stood by Will, knowing Red Sam's lie for what it was, yet saying nothing. Sam felt his cheeks grow red beneath the beard but couldn't stop himself, half hating himself and half hating her for knowing and not telling.

"Uh, and you know what that means, don't you?" he continued. "If you can see Virginia from Rame Head, then when the light is the other way 'round, you ought to be able to make out Rame from Virginia, don't you see? So, when you get to Chesapeake and you're feeling low and thinking of Red Sam or your friends back London way, find yourself a good hill, look back east over the sea, and maybe you'll see all the way back home!"

"Then it *is* true!" cried Will, his eyes burning.

"Of course it is!" whispered Sam as he motioned Will to lower his voice. "Whoever heard a sailor lie about the sea? Right, lass?" he ended, turning suddenly to Maggie: "Would I lie to this lad?"

It was a risk, but Sam understood Maggie as well as she understood him. "Of course not," she said, "we'll look for the highest hill on the coast of Virginia, soon as we get there-- and we won't tell anyone else," she added to Sam.

"Sam! Red Sam, there!" roared Captain Each, as he came out his cabin. "Get the boat ready, I'm going ashore." Sam leapt to his feet, laid a finger to his lips, winked at Will and Maggie, and strode away. The other Bridewellians were

being cleared from the deck and taken below. Ugly Jackson summoned Will and Maggie, and they were soon climbing down the main hatch ladder with the others. Just then, Tom Keyes came up from the ladder below them. Will and Maggie edged to the side of the narrow steps to let Keyes pass. But Keyes pulled off his hat as soon as he saw Maggie and made an awkward effort to bow before her on the ladder. "After you, Miss," he said.

Maggie hesitated not an instant but straightened as tall as the ladder way allowed and passed before him with the sternest expression she could muster and the most discreet of nods. Despite her effort, Keyes saw the hint of a smile, or thought he did; and he stayed motionless watching her until Will slipped down the ladder in front of him with a mumbled "excuse me then sir".

Will paid no attention to his fellows as they were all hurried below. There he lay, hands clasped behind his head, staring thoughtfully at the ceiling and wondering how he might find a way to mount Rame Church's steeple and glimpse his tomorrow.