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Opening extract from

A World Away

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Secota, The Americas, 1586

Nadie

Flames light the length of my mother's body and lick around her slender neck. Above her, leaves shrivel and branches blacken. Pale men, their armour glinting, swing their fire torches against the early sunrise.

What have they done?

Behind her, flames leap from the roof of our house. On the steps, painted pots shatter in the heat. I run towards her, calling for my cousin. My mother has not made a sound until she hears my voice. Then she

screams at me to stay away.

I stand still, breathing in the scent of her burning flesh, crying out until a pale man, his cruel eyes taunting between beard and helmet, drags me away. He pulls me down to the creek and throws me into a boat full of pale men. Some pull the oars. Others level their muskets towards the bank, where my cousin Seekanauk stands and calls my name.

Seekanauk dives. The man sitting next to me fires his musket, sending out sparks of fire and hurting my ears and I dare not look at the water. I fix my eyes on my village, Secota, half-hidden in the smoke, until we round the headland, where the fishing boats rock in our wash. I cannot take in what I have seen, what my father has not seen because he is away hunting.

Who are these men? Where are they taking me?

Salt from the spray stiffens my skin as I watch the smoke curl into the dawn. My father will come for me. When he returns from the hunt, he will ask our chief, Manchese, to let him fetch his canoe and find us.

Wingina, chief of all the village chiefs, welcomed the pale men when they came across the great salt water,

and permitted them to build a fort on one of our islands. When they came to Secota, they came in peace with gifts of gaudy glass and a metal cooking pot. One of their men marvelled so much at our corn and copper that he painted pictures of us. He laughed when he told me his name. Not all pale people are called White he said. His work was to show my land to his people across the sea.

I learned to speak his tongue so well that I helped to interpret for the other pale people. It suited me, because I do not like women's work: softening the deerskin to stitch into skirts, pounding the corn into flour.

But my father changed. His bright eyes darkened. He cursed the pale men because they brought a spotted sickness that killed Seekanauk's father and sister. *Keep away from them, Nadie,* he said. *They want to take our women to breathe life back into themselves. They are bloodless. Their hair hangs from their faces. They foul the water that we drink. What creature would do that?*

We skirt my land all day. The rattle of the oars startles the seabirds. The men curse as they slap mud. One of

them offers me a green fruit, and I take it for its juice because my throat is dry. At last, I see Roanoke Island on my right, the last island inhabited by the Secotan people before the great salt water that stretches to the horizon.

On the mainland, opposite Roanoke Island, is the village of Desamonquepeuc. This is where Wingina lives. I respect him, not just because he is the great chief of all the village chiefs, but because he is intelligent. He does not believe that the pale men have come back from the dead. They eat and drink too much for that, he laughs.

My heart lifts as we come to shore. *He* will punish the pale people for what they have done today.

There are more pale men waiting for us, wild-eyed and shooting fire into the air as I am pushed from the boat. I think this is their greeting, for two men in silver helmets come from the trees, carrying Wingina. How peaceful he looks as he stares at the sky. Turkey feathers decorate his hair, turkey claws hang from his ears. Clay splashes his forehead and face like dried blood. Copper and pearls coil around his neck and down the lion skin wrapped around his body.

I kneel. The men halt in front of me, laughing as they tip him from their shoulders, laughing as Wingina's head rolls onto the sand, his ragged neck soon gritted with fine shells. The seabirds shriek back at me. I beg the gods in the Upper World to receive him; I ask my mother to care for him.

Then the sky and the sea tilt, green and grey, into a darkness so deep that even the shadows disappear.

Plymouth, England, 1586

Tom

It's too hot to hammer the horseshoes in the forge.

I open the door and let the smoke find its way into the street. I've never been so busy, for the harvest has been cut early and the plough horses have had to be shod many times. I glance at the second anvil, closer to the fire, the one that my father used. I miss the rhythm of his hammer with mine.

From the doorway, further down the steep street, I can see Abigail in front of her father's shop. Even her pale face is scarlet.

Not a breath of wind to bring in the ship.

I saw it last night from the tavern steps, settling on the horizon like a giant seabird, sails glinting under the harvest moon. Although I know the name of every ship – and every famous seaman that sails in and out of the harbour, the sight of the sea makes me shudder. How can men set sail, not knowing whether a storm will sink them in a squall?

I like the walls of Plymouth. I like belonging to a family of blacksmiths that's worked here as far back as anybody can remember.

But that waiting ship's brought a ripple of excitement. It's part of Sir Francis Drake's fleet straggling back across the great ocean from the New World, where it rescued a small English colony from a place called Virginia.

The seamen from the first ship told us in the tavern that this one carries a young girl from Virginia with breasts as big as ale jugs, skin as dark as burned

wood, wearing a deerskin that hardly covers that private part of her – and enough copper to make a kettle.

Not a breath of air. I pray for the wind to come, to bring us the cargo we all want to see.

Nadie

Every time I open my eyes, I see the shifting flames of a candle. I shrink away from its heat, away from the tangled hair on the face of the man who is holding it.

I *know* him. Master John White, the man who came to Secota to paint pictures of my people.

Now words pour from his mouth. I understand that I am on a ship sailing to his land, England – to a town called Plymouth – and that we have already sailed too far to turn back. His eyes brim with tears as he tells me. But no

words come to me, either in his tongue or in mine.

I refuse to leave that little room, sliced by grey light from chinks in the wood. And I refuse to leave the bench where I lie to look through them. Master White brings the food of my land to tempt me: corn, beans and berries. Sometimes, another man comes with him, soothing me in my tongue, for he speaks it well. He is Master Hariot, a young man who sailed with Master White, who smokes tobacco in a pipe as our men do.

"*She* will do more for Raleigh's next colony than all your paintings, John," he says. "She is young and beautiful and pure – and ready for the taking, just like Virginia. *She* will persuade people to come with us next time. Yes, Sir Walter Raleigh will be pleased. She will do much to make up for the disappointment of abandoning Virginia."

Master White clenches his fists. "You fool, Thomas! What have you done? You have taken her from everything she has ever known – dashing our future hopes and dreams in a moment of foolishness. How will her people ever forgive us? How will we ever be able to go back?"

If you do not speak, people forget that you can hear. In this way, I learn that the pale people are planning to live again in my land, that they will take our wood to build new ships, that they will search for copper and gold, that they will stop the Spanish people from moving north to take my land, as they have already done in Florida.

Let them think I am an ignorant savage.

I press my face against the gaps in the wood. Sea spray stings my eyes. No land beckons.

I lie down once more.

I count forty more days on that ship until the days cool – forty days of drizzling mists and howling winds. Then the sun comes back, lighting a path along the sea, and through my wooden world. Above my head, I hear running feet and rough voices calling out words I do not know.

Master White coaxes me from my lair. We climb a flight of wooden stairs and step into daylight, where water rises and falls around me. Grey smudges the horizon and seabirds squawk over our heads.

The world does not end at the horizon, my mother used to whisper. But I hoped that it did, for I was happy in my world, in my village perched between forest and creek, knowing that I was becoming beautiful by the way the young men looked at me. But when I was thirteen summers old, and restless, I stared out to sea with my mother and we saw what we thought was an island floating past our creek, its treetops lost in billowing clouds.

But now I know that it was not an island. There are no leaves on those tall trees, only men – ragged and hairy – running up and down ropes, grabbing at white cloth, which slaps their faces. I am on a wooden ship, far bigger than any canoe that my people can build.

Master White stares at the sky, murmuring words I do not understand. Then he kneels on the tilting deck and clasps his hands, repeating words so melodious that tears come to my eyes. Some of the men leave their work to join us, and they call out *"Amen"*.

My heart quietens. I follow Master White's eyes. That is where my mother and Wingina are, in the Upper World, where everything is pure and perfect.

I want them to hear *me.* Stretching out my arms, I sing my own lament.

As the smudges sharpen to land, I glimpse a river snaking from the sea to the trees on the horizon. Men fish around us. Late summer sun reddens the water as we sail past a small island. My heart leaps.

Have we come back to Roanoke Island? *Has* Master White brought me home?

I shall see my father. I shall honour my mother's grave.

But stone towers guard the harbour here, holding huge chains that have been pulled back to let us enter. Houses, their stone walls gleaming, cling to a hill. A wide street twists up towards a building towering against the sunset. Tumbling down to the sea is a green hill, guarded by another stone building with four towers.

I look away, fearful.

Now I am certain of one thing. I am not in my land.

How can I live without my own people?