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1

Captain Daybright

The waves were slow and long and emerald green, washing up on the sandy white beach. Twenty feet out in the surf a gray rock rose like a bald head. The breakers threw white droplets over the two boys standing on it.

"Oh, come on, Reb. You're not going to get hurt. I'm surprised at you." The speaker was a small black boy wearing a red bathing suit. He was much smaller than his companion, who was tall and lanky with bleached hair and very light blue eyes. "It won't hurt you. It's just water."

Bob Lee Jackson, known as Reb to his companions, shivered and stared at Wash Jones. Then he sat down abruptly on the rock and shook his head. "Never did like water," he mumbled. "Give me some old flat Texas desert every time." He looked mournfully out at the breaking surf and said, "I'll never get used to this."

Wash grinned, his white teeth shining against his dark skin. "Shoot! I never thought I'd see the day you was more scared of something than I was."

This was true enough. The two boys were members of a group called the Seven Sleepers, teenagers who had been thrust into an alien world after the earth was ravaged by a fierce nuclear war. They had been preserved by being placed in sleep capsules programmed to keep them alive. Many years afterward, they awakened and found themselves in a world far different from even what they had seen in *Star Wars*. Much of what they had known was gone, and the planet now was inhabited not only by hu-

mans but by strange beings that sometimes seemed to come out of very bad nightmares.

Reb looked up and shook his head sadly. "Just give me a horse, and I'll be all right. But this water—it ain't natural to be swimming around in a thing like this."

"Funny thing to me," Wash said merrily, enjoying himself immensely, "you didn't mind facing a dragon back at Camelot, and now you're scared of a little old fish." He referred to the fact that Reb had almost jumped out of the water a while ago when a small fish brushed against his leg.

It delighted Wash—at fourteen, the smallest of the Sleepers—that here at last he had found at least one area in which he outdid the boldest and most active of the Seven Sleepers.

"Come on, then. Let's get off this blamed rock before an octopus or something gets us!" Reb stood to his feet, stared longingly at the shore, and then with a shout made a wild jump. He hit the water, went under, came up sputtering, and clawed his way toward the beach.

Wash made a clean dive and swam alongside.

"Come along. You can do it, Reb. Let's see you swim!"

But when they were only five feet away from land, Reb gave a terrible cry. "He got me!" he screamed. "He got me!"

"What is it?" Wash stopped swimming in alarm. He knew there *were* dangerous things in the sea, such as sharks and barracuda. He grabbed Reb's arm. "What is it? Are you hurt?"

Reb shook him off and floundered to shore, then fell on the sand and held his foot. "He got me!" he said. "I don't know what it was!"

"Let me see." Wash leaned over and grabbed the tall

boy's ankle, then said with relief, "It's OK. It's just a jellyfish sting. You must have stepped right on it."

"It's killin' me!" Reb moaned. "I didn't know a jellyfish had teeth!"

"They don't have teeth," Wash said, "but they've got little stinging cells, I guess. Come on, we'll put something on it."

He pulled Reb to his feet and helped him limp down the beach to where two other Sleepers were sitting on the front porch of the shack where the group was staying.

"Sarah!" Wash yelled. "You got any meat tenderizer?"

Sarah Collingwood, a small graceful girl of fifteen with brown eyes and long black hair, got up at once. She was wearing a white bathing suit that set off her tan. "What's wrong?"

"It's Reb."

"What do you want meat tenderizer for? You're not going to eat him, are you?" Josh Adams was a gangling boy with auburn hair and blue eyes. Also at fifteen, he was tall for his age. He had not filled out completely but gave evidence of being a strong man when he did. He was the leader of the Seven Sleepers.

He came off the porch and stared at Reb, who sat down, holding his foot again. "What's the matter?"

"He stepped on a jellyfish."

"Well, what are you going to do with meat tenderizer?" Reb demanded.

"Best thing in the world for a jellyfish sting or just about any other kind of sting. You got any, Sarah?"

"I don't think there is anything like that in Nuworld," Sarah said doubtfully. "Anything else work?"

"Well, some of that stuff we use for mosquito bites, I guess. That might work."

The three tried to comfort Reb, who looked very little like the courageous young man they all knew. He was bold as a lion about most things, but he hated the sea. He hated water of any kind. He also was a terrible patient.

Then two other members of the group came up. Jake Garfield was fourteen and small, with red hair and brown eyes. "What's the matter with Sir Jackson?" he said. He was jealous of Reb for his strength and made fun of him whenever he saw a weakness. "Did he stub his toe?"

The sixth member of the troop, Abbey Roberts, now joined the onlookers. She was a beautiful fourteen year old with China blue eyes and long blonde hair; and even though she wore a rather worn swimsuit, her face was carefully made up. "What's the matter, Reb?" she asked, kneeling down to look at his foot.

"I was attacked by a sea monster," Reb moaned.

"No, you weren't. You just stepped on a jellyfish." Josh laughed. "Come on, Sarah, get him some lotion."

That was the end of that adventure, but Reb did not let them forget about it. Even the next day he limped around, saying, "No, I'm not going in that water. No telling what would happen. I'd probably get bit into by a gigantic whale. That ocean ain't nothing to fool with!"

All except Wash were sitting on the front porch as Reb made this declaration yet again. They had just finished an early supper of fried fish, hush puppies, and a salad with a secret dressing that Sarah refused to identify.

It was a beautiful evening. The sun was a huge red disk in the sky, and the waves were gently lapping at the shore.

Jake leaned back, put his hands behind his head, and half closed his eyes. "This ol' beach looks like a postcard of the Gulf. I used to go down to Gulf Shores, Alabama, with my folks," he said thoughtfully. "Sure was fun." Si-

lence fell over the group, and he added, "I'd like to do that again."

It was a familiar theme. All of them in one way or another longed for the homes that were forever gone. And all knew that they could never go home again. Still, from time to time, one of them would voice that longing, as Jake had just done.

For a while the only sound was the wind blowing through the tall sea oats and the murmuring of the ocean as it rhythmically lapped onto the shore.

Then the silence was broken as Josh sat up, saying, "There comes Wash, and he's got somebody with him."

"It's that sailor that's been taking him fishing," Sarah said. "Ryland Daybright."

Abbey sat up and began to smooth her hair back. "I declare, he's the handsomest thing," she said.

"You *would* notice that." Dave Cooper grinned. He was the oldest Sleeper and was used to Abbey's ways—she had been accustomed to admirers all of her life in Old-world and still wasn't past such things. He stared at the pair approaching and said, "They sure make a contrast, don't they? Like Mutt and Jeff."

"Who's Mutt and Jeff?" Jake demanded.

"You don't know? Characters in an old, old comic strip."

He was right about the contrast. Wash was under-sized, and Captain Ryland Daybright was well over six feet. He had blond hair that came almost down to his shoulders and a pair of cornflower blue eyes that glittered in the sun. He had a tapering face, and his skin was tanned a copper color. He looked very strong and confident. Wash had met him a month earlier and had spent most of his time since then with the captain, who was teaching him to sail, he claimed.

"Hello, Captain Daybright." Abbey smiled and got to her feet. "We've just finished eating, but there's some supper left. Sit down, and I'll get you some."

Captain Daybright flashed her a quick grin. "That might be pretty good, Miss Abbey," he said. He sat down on the porch and stretched out his long legs. He was wearing a pair of ancient white pants that were cut off above the knee and a white shirt that left his powerful arms bare. "I guess you could eat a bite, couldn't you, Wash?"

"I sure could, Cap'n." Wash grinned.

Abbey and Sarah brought out some leftover fish and hush puppies, and as they ate, Wash spoke with excitement. "Y'all ought to come on the *Dolphin*. It's the coolest boat there ever was!"

"Why'd you call it the *Dolphin*, Captain?" Josh inquired. He admired the handsome face of the captain as well as his obvious strength and agility.

"Oh, I always liked dolphins," Captain Daybright said. He washed down the last of his meal with a long drink of cool water, then held the cup in his big hands. "They stay together like family, you know. You've seen them out there, coming up out of the water with those fins of theirs. They make a pretty sight, don't they? Well, I'd like my ship to be able to sail just like that."

But even as he spoke, a frown creased Daybright's face. He shook his head and said no more.

The others talked for a while, and finally Sarah, who was always perceptive, asked, "Something wrong, Captain?"

Daybright shrugged his broad shoulders. "I guess something's always wrong, isn't it?"

His reply was so bitter that all the Sleepers turned to look at him. They had visited the ship he had been working on when they arrived at the coast and had found him to

be a cheerful, optimistic young man who knew lots of songs and endless stories about the sea.

"Not like you to be so down in the mouth," Reb said. "What's the matter?"

Daybright turned the cup over in his hands. "I'm having trouble getting a crew," he said slowly.

"Why, I wouldn't think that would be hard," Wash said. "A beautiful boat like that."

"It's a *ship*, not a boat," Daybright said sharply. "If you're going to be a sailor, Wash, you've got to learn to call things by their right name." He grinned briefly at the others and said, "He called the deck a *floor* this morning. I almost pitched him over the side."

Abbey moved a little closer to the captain, her eyes fixed on his sunburned face. "I'd think that with a beautiful ship like the *Dolphin* you wouldn't have any trouble finding a crew."

"Ordinarily I wouldn't, but I've got a chance to make a voyage that most sailors would avoid." He swept the Seven with his eyes and said, "I don't guess you've ever heard of the Lost Sea?"

"I've seen it on the charts," Josh said. "Way out in the middle of nowhere."

"It's mostly uncharted waters," Captain Daybright said. "Way off the shipping lanes. All we know is a little about some of the lands that lie just on the edge of it."

"Why do you want to go there?" Dave asked. "Just for the adventure?"

"No, I've had enough adventure to last me a lifetime." Daybright smiled briefly. He set the cup down, clasped his hands together, and stared at them. "There's a man who wants to hire my ship. His name's Mennic Catalina. He's got lots of money, and he wants me to take his daughter to her wedding. Actually, he couldn't find another captain and crew willing to go."

"She's getting married to somebody out in the Lost Sea?"

"Well, there are some pretty big islands out there. The way Catalina tells it, the king of one of them has contracted to marry his daughter. The ship's captain who takes her to him will be richly paid—by Catalina and the king as well."

An irritated look crossed Abbey's face. "Why doesn't the bridegroom come for her—get married here in *her* country?"

"Can't say." Daybright shrugged. "I guess kings do pretty well what they want to."

"But what's the problem?" Dave demanded. "If her father's rich, why has he had trouble hiring a ship and crew to take her?"

"This kingdom his daughter's going to is deep in the Lost Sea. The people there are good sailors and send their ships here to the mainland often—but there are some bad currents and some seasonal winds out there. Lots of ships have started out from here for that part of the world and just never showed up again. Some say they fell off the edge of the earth." He grinned. "I know better than that, but they don't return."

"Maybe a sea monster grabbed them and pulled them down," Reb suggested. He had a vivid imagination about bad things in the ocean. "I wouldn't want to go out to a place that had things like that."

"There's nothing like that out there," Daybright said, "but there are bad winds and bad currents to drive a ship off course." His broad shoulders slumped, and his lips drew down in a frown. "This was my big chance. I've put all I could beg, borrow, or get credit for in the *Dolphin*. If I don't pay the money back right away, I'll lose her to my creditors."

"Looks like there'd be *some* sailors that would go," Josh offered. "Maybe you could promise them a bonus."

"They're all afraid of the Lost Sea—" Daybright hesitated "—and they're afraid of the ship. It's the first one I've ever built. They don't think it'll hold up in heavy seas under those winds. But I've made it better than most ships!" he said defiantly. "Put some of my own improvements in it! They say it'll break up the first time the wind blows or the waves get high."

"I'll bet it won't." Abbey smiled. "I bet it's the best ship out there."

At the age of twenty, Daybright felt a hundred years older than any of the Sleepers. But he had heard of some dramatic things they had done. He grinned at Abbey. He had known she was a flirt the first time he saw her.

Then he looked around and said longingly, "If you were all about five years older, I'd recruit you. You wouldn't be afraid to go, would you?"

"Well, I wouldn't exactly be afraid," Josh said, "but I'm pretty cautious."

"What do you mean, five years older?" Wash demanded. "I'm fourteen years old—and Dave there, he's sixteen and big as any man. We're big enough."

"Well, it's not a matter of being big or even old enough, really." Daybright smiled fondly at his small friend and slapped Wash's shoulder lightly. "You see, some people just don't do well at sea."

"That's me." Reb nodded. "I wouldn't do well at all on a long voyage. I'm not cut out for it."

"Some people aren't," Captain Daybright agreed. "You're out of sight of land. The only thing that you've got to look to is the ship that's under you and the courage of the captain and the crew."

"That sounds great," Wash said. He turned to the others, his eyes bright with excitement. "We've been fussing because there was nothing to do—that Goél hasn't given us any assignments for a while. Well, here's our chance. We can go on this voyage with Captain Daybright. It'll be fun."

Reb said, "No, it wouldn't be fun! We'd all probably get drowned."

"Oh, I don't think that would happen," Josh said quickly, "not with a good sailor like Captain Daybright. But we're not experienced sailors."

Daybright looked them over. They were a hearty-looking group of young people. Josh, Reb, and Dave were tall and strong. The others were healthy enough. The captain said slowly, "Well . . . ordinarily I wouldn't even think of it . . . but if you'd come with me, I'd train you, and I could pay well—as soon as the king pays me—and you'd get to see some exciting things. Sailors do get to see the world."

At once an argument broke out. Josh and Dave wanted to go. So did Sarah and Abbey. But Reb and Jake were doubtful if not downright loud in their arguments against it.

Wash, of course, was jumping up and down with excitement. "We can do it!" he cried. "We can do it! You'll just have to teach us how to raise the sails and that kind of stuff!"

Daybright nodded. "I would do that." Then he got to his feet, saying, "You talk it over. If you'd like to make a nice voyage, here's your chance. A little danger is involved—" he paused and looked around "—but I understand all of you have seen some of that. You're young, but you've lived a pretty full life, if what I hear is true."

After the captain left, the seven engaged in an argument that lasted until bedtime.

Finally Josh said, "Well, we'll all have to agree. We're here for a rest after our adventures, and maybe a sea voyage would be fun—though I think it'd be a lot of work."

"I don't mind the work," Dave said eagerly. "Just think! We could learn how to sail a ship. That could come in handy a little later. We don't know what we'll be doing for Goél."

Goél was the mysterious figure who guided their activities. He came and went without warning, often asking them to go to dangerous places.

"Well, that's just it," Wash said. "He might come at any time and ask us to go down the cone of a volcano, right into the fire. That's the kind of thing he does. Not that I mind," he said hastily, "but I think we deserve a little relaxation once in a while. I vote that we go."

Josh insisted they hold on a decision until they all were perfectly agreed.

The next morning, those in favor of the voyage began a pressure campaign, and by noon they had almost convinced Jake and Reb that a sea voyage would be a good way to spend a few weeks.

Reb was the last to give in, but finally even he threw up his hands, saying, "All right! All right! You're worse than a blasted parrot, Wash! I'll go on this old trip just to get you to hush!"

Wash let out a yell and called the others around. "Reb says he'll go! Come on, let's go tell Captain Day-bright! I feel like a sailor already!"

The Seven Sleepers made their way down to the harbor, where the *Dolphin* was riding on the small swells.

Captain Daybright saw them coming and came to greet them. He met Wash's big smile with "Well, it looks like I've got me a crew. Come on aboard the *Dolphin*, then. We'll start teaching you a few things about how to sail a ship."

Reb was reluctant even to step onto the ship. He finally crawled aboard and held to the mast as if the vessel were going to drop away from under him.

"I don't like this," he said to Wash. "I'm doing it for you. So the next time I want to go on some kind of wild goose chase, you've got to pay me back."

"Yeah, sure. I'll do that," Wash said. He looked up at the mast, swaying as the ship rolled, and said happily, "This is going to be a fun time!"

2

Hoist Sails!

The *Dolphin* nuzzled into the sea, settling its prow into the foam. Then it lurched forward, and a cry went up from Abbey. She had been hauling on a rope at a command from Captain Daybright, but the sudden roll threw her off balance. Waving her arms wildly, she flew through the air, coming to land on the deck with a solid thump.

Dave, who had been pulling a rope on the starboard side, waited to see if she was hurt. Seemingly satisfied that she was not, he laughed loudly and said, "That was a neat trick, Abbey. You ought to do it again."

Getting to her feet, Abbey stared at him furiously. The fall had not hurt but had offended her sense of dignity. Rubbing her hip, she glared up balefully at the billowing sails. "I'll never learn all of this stuff!" she moaned. "It would be a lot easier if this boat had a steam engine."

"Not boat—*ship!*" Captain Daybright was standing with his feet wide apart, braced against the rolls of the vessel. He grinned at her, then came over, picked up the rope, and handed it to her. "You're doing fine, Abbey. Just give another haul now, and we'll catch a little more of this breeze."

Abbey took the rope gingerly for she had developed blisters on both hands, as had all the Sleepers. Carefully she began to pull on it and saw the white sail climb upward as she kept pace with Dave. Then there was a popping sound, the mainsail billowed out, and she felt the ship surge forward like a living thing.

Despite herself, Abbey laughed. "You know, this would be fun if it wasn't for the blisters and falling on the deck."

The *Dolphin* was out to sea on a trial run. For a week now, Daybright had been drilling the young people hard every day. They had memorized the names of the sails, the ropes that hauled them up, the spars, the ratlines, most of the parts of the ship.

It had been an exhilarating time for everybody—except Reb. Usually the most energetic and active of the Sleepers, he was one of those individuals who got seasick very easily. Once he even got seasick inside the harbor when the ship was almost as steady as the white sand on the beach.

As the *Dolphin* skimmed along over the blue-green surface of the water, Reb was standing on the spar that held the mainsail. He was not afraid of high places as a rule, but now he looked mournfully over at Wash on the other side of the spar. "I just wish this thing would stand still," he complained. "I don't care how high a tree is. I can stand that. But this here ship—it's always bobbing up and down like a cork. Or skidding sideways."

Wash knew he had an advantage over the other Sleepers. He had already been out on the *Dolphin* several times with his friend Captain Daybright. Besides, he was a born sailor, enjoying the salt spray in his face, loving to climb up to the crow's nest on the top of the mainmast. Now he looked upward and said, "Let's climb up there. We can see better, Reb."

"I can see plenty from right here!" Reb stated flatly. "You go on if you want to break your neck."

Wash laughed.

The ratlines were ropes tied in a ladder formation anchoring the mainmast to the sides of the ship. Like a squirrel, Wash stepped onto the ropes and scampered up-

ward. When he was at the top, he popped himself into the small bucketlike structure that formed the crow's nest.

Being some thirty feet above the deck, the top of the mainmast swayed alarmingly. But Wash only grinned as the crow's nest moved from side to side and dipped forward and backward. "Better than any carnival ride I ever had," he called down to Reb. "You ought to try it."

He saw Reb merely shake his head.

Looking over the prow, covered with white-and-green foam, Wash saw the horizon hard and flat ahead. Then he heard Captain Daybright call out a command and watched Dave and Josh scurry to change the position of the sails.

"They're doing pretty good," Wash said, "for landlubbers, that is."

He leaned back in the crow's nest, looking all around. They were out of sight of land for the first time, although he knew the shore lay only a few miles over to his left. Gazing out over the open sea, he nodded with satisfaction. "I bet we'll leave for the Lost Sea tomorrow," he said. "We can sail this old ship. It won't be any trouble for us."

Down on the fantail—the stern of the ship, which Sarah had disgraced herself by calling "the back of the boat"—Captain Daybright found Sarah and Jake sitting on the rail. "Well," he said, "what do you think you're doing? Sailors don't sit on the rail like that."

"I don't see why not." Jake popped off, shrugging his shoulders. The wind ruffled his red hair, and he ran his hand through it. "I'm just about covered with salt," he said.

"That's because the water's salty." Daybright grinned. "That's why they call sailors 'Old Salts.'" He looked at Sarah and asked, "How do you like the sea, young lady?"

Sliding off the rail, Sarah flashed him a smile. "It's fun. I'd never been on anything much larger than a row-

boat, but I can see how one could get caught up with ships and sailing."

"It's all I've known all my life. I was born on a ship," Daybright said.

"Where do your parents live?" Sarah inquired.

"Well, I don't have any. They got caught in a storm and went down. They had left me on shore with an uncle."

"Oh, I'm sorry," Sarah said.

"It happens at sea," Daybright said slowly. He looked out over the ocean, rolling now in longer swells that lifted the *Dolphin* up with a much slower motion. "It looks smooth right now, but I've seen it rise up like an angry beast." His expression grew hard, and he said, "The sea's got two faces. One is nice and full of sun and bright green water. The other is a beast that will smash a ship like an eggshell. I've seen waves higher than where Wash is up there on the mast, tearing everything to bits that got in their way."

Jake shifted nervously. "I hope we don't run into anything like that."

"I try to avoid it whenever possible." The captain laughed shortly, then said, "If you're the cook, Jake, you might go down and make us a little supper. I'm getting hungry."

Jake grinned. "Try to hold this thing steady. It's hard to cook when everything's banging all over the place."

"You're doing fine," Captain Daybright said affectionately. He had learned to appreciate the young redhead, who complained a lot but was always faithful.

After Jake and Sarah went below, Daybright strolled forward. He took in many things at once—the winds, their force and direction, a series of menacing-looking clouds rolling across the horizon in the east, the pitch and yaw of the ship itself. A lifetime at sea had made him aware of

these things without his paying attention—things that a landsman would never notice.

Then he saw Josh and Abbey standing to one side of the forward mast, looking up at some gulls that were following the ship, their harsh cries on the air. He ambled over to them. "I guess we'll put about now. By the time we get back to shore, it'll be nearly dark."

"How do you know where we are?" Josh said, looking around. "On land you've got a tree or mountain or canyon as a marker. Here—" he waved his hand over the endless expanse of blue-green water "—it all looks alike."

"Except for the clouds," Abbey added, "and they're changing all the time."

"Well, *that* doesn't change." Daybright pointed at the setting sun, a red globe in the blue sky. "It's always the same, and at night you've got the stars. They don't change much either."

"How did you learn all this—the names of the stars and things like that, Captain?"

"Been doing it all my life. Just like you know your ABCs, I learned the names of the stars. I'll teach you more of them as we go along."

"Must be wonderful to be able to get out on the ocean and find a little pinpoint of land," Josh said wistfully. "I don't think I could ever learn how."

Daybright clapped him on the shoulder. "Sure you could, Josh. You're as bright as I was or maybe even more so. Tonight when we get in port, I'll show you some star charts. Then we'll go out and look up, and you can start memorizing the heavens."

Abbey shifted nervously then, looking at the darkening clouds on the horizon. "I don't like the looks of those," she said.

"I don't either. That's why we'd better put about."

Daybright called up to Dave, who had relieved him at the wheel. "Get ready to put about!"

"Aye, sir."

For a few moments there was activity as the sails were shifted and the ship wheeled sharply over to starboard, laying its mast alongside. Wash cried out in delight, and soon the *Dolphin* was under full sail, driven back toward the land by a following breeze.

Three hours later they pulled into the harbor.

As they nudged in and dropped anchor, Jake popped his head up from below, calling out, "Supper's ready! Come and get it before I throw it out!"

They all clambered down the ladder leading below deck to the galley where Sarah had laid out plates. Jake had fried up some steaks and added baked potatoes with them. And after Josh asked Goél's blessing, everybody plunged in. Josh noticed that even Reb, who had a queasy appetite, seemed to find himself hungry.

Daybright certainly ate with obvious enjoyment. "You're better than any cook I've had, Jake," he said. "One of them I thought we'd have to throw to the sharks."

Jake looked pleased. He said he'd always liked to cook but found it a challenge to keep the fire going in the small galley. "What do you do when a storm comes?"

"You have to douse the fire," Daybright told him. "Just one spark on this dry wood and the ship's on fire. Then you're in real trouble."

"Tell us some of the troubles you've had—adventures," Abbey said.

The Sleepers listened as the captain spoke of several dangerous times, and finally Daybright grinned. "Well, that's enough for now. Tomorrow we'll leave for the Lost Sea."

"What is the bride like?" Abbey asked, always interested in weddings and brides and romantic things like that.

Daybright shrugged. "I have no idea." He leaned back and ran his hand through his slightly curly blond hair. "I expect she's ugly as a mud fence. Her father had to sell her sight unseen to get rid of her."

"You don't mean that!" Sarah said.

Daybright laughed. "I guess not. Seems a little strange to me, though."

"It does to me too," Abbey said indignantly. "I can't imagine marrying a man I'd never even seen!"

"Well, we'll see her tomorrow," Daybright said. "They say all brides are beautiful—but I've got my doubts about this one!"

After supper they went up on deck and spent a little time tying the sails down, as they did every evening.

Suddenly a strange-looking bird appeared. Everybody looked up, and Josh asked, "What kind of a bird is that, Captain?"

Daybright stared at the bird, and Josh saw that he was troubled. "What's wrong, Captain Daybright?" he asked.

"It's an albatross." He hesitated, then shrugged, giving a half laugh. "Some sailors say it's a bird of ill omen. Bad luck."

"You don't believe that, do you?" Dave asked.

"Well, I'm not very superstitious. Not like most sailors."

However, something about the way he said the words alerted Josh. He whispered, "He really is superstitious, I think. That bird bothers him."

Everyone watched the large bird wheel, circle the ship, seem to look down at them.

"I wish he'd go away," Daybright said shortly.

"What do the sailors say?" Jake asked.

"Oh, they say when an albatross flies over a ship the day before it sails, it's a sign that the voyage will be ill-fated."

"Well, I don't believe that," Wash said defiantly. He looked around. "If I had a rock, I'd knock his head off."

"Don't do *that!*" Daybright said, his voice sharp. "I don't believe in things like that, but they say it's bad luck to kill an albatross." Then he looked at the somber faces of his youthful crew and grinned. "But all sailors are superstitious. Don't pay any attention to me. Go get a good night's sleep. We'll leave at dawn and go pick up the bride."

"It's gonna be a fun thing," Wash said, nodding emphatically as he and Reb splashed ashore. "I believe it's gonna be the funnest thing we ever did."

Reb shook his head. "I don't know about those albatrosses. The captain was sure bothered. I'd just as soon that varmint hadn't showed up."

But Wash slapped his tall friend on the back hard, saying, "Shoot, I ain't gonna let no bird spoil my vacation. We're gonna have a great time. You'll see!"