

WHISPER OF THE WAVES: A NOVELLA EXPLORING THE TRANSATLANTIC  
SLAVE SHIP EXPERIENCE

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## Dedication

Writing has always been a passion of mine, one that I never had the courage to pursue. Coming into college I felt a barrier between my thoughts and my pattern of words, coupled with a massive insecurity in articulation and expression. I would like to dedicate my first novella to Mrs. Stephanie Noll, a bright light who has emboldened me to pick up the pen from the beginning to end of my college career. Mrs. Noll— I endlessly thank you for your support and encouragement, it means more to me than you will ever know. I would also like to thank and dedicate this to Mr. Twister Marquiss, without your help, the complexities of plot structure and writing would still be lost on me.

I thank all of my History and English professors that have brought me to a culminating and merging point in my studies.

I thank my mother and father for always making me feel like I am capable of everything, and a half. My strength and confidence stem from the untethering roots of your love and support.

## Abstract

A vehicle for the rise of Capitalism, the transatlantic slave trade changed the trajectory of the whole world's history. The slave ship was the engine of the Atlantic trade, carrying cargo, culture, money and lives through the Atlantic world.

"Whisper of the Waves" is a historical fiction following the chronicles of Phineas, a nine-year old sailor boy from the slums of Liverpool. The value in historical fiction is the genre's ability to humanize events from the far past that are often clouded with figures and facts, while also resonating with relevance to today's human conditions. For historical accuracy, I have been informed through primary sources of the time such as documents, letters and journals from the slave trade, Liverpool and the Eighteenth century. I have also used a variety secondary sources of historical scholarship, such as the work of Marcus Rediker on the slave ship and trade.

The horrors of the slave trade are revealed through the lens of young Phineas, as he explores self-development, the intricate slave ship, Atlantic waters, slave-holding castles and ports off the coast of West Africa. Phineas has joined the slave trade as a means to pull his family out of poverty, but he quickly learns the toll of the trade on the human heart. The slave ship produced deplorable conditions for all residents, but the human cargo experienced the most inhumane treatment. The crewmen were merely investments, and the enslaved were solely for profit. Along the emotional and physical tumult of the voyage, irony intersects as pirates ultimately play the moral agents. A former sailor, in company of abolitionists, raid the vessel and take Phineas, along with other crewmen and slaves, under their protection. In this coming-of-age tale, repression

of guilt and morality are central in the greedy endeavors of the Captain, merchants, traders, and even general crewmen.

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## I: Lost in Liverpool

We all shuffle, step and wonder under the same sky. One man wakes up in stained sheets and a creaking bed, while another wakes up in satin sheets and a framed bed; so long as both men possess the ability to see, they have equal access to observe the sky. The sky does not discriminate. The sky does not tax or fail in presence. It is untouched but a powerful force: dawning, setting, leaking and beaming.

I never truly understood my mother's relationship with nature's wondrous ceiling. It seemed to me that this was simply one of her mechanisms of convincing me we were living as normal lives as the more fortunate half. The days we lived off a mere loaf of bread, we saw the most beautiful sunset: nature's best attempt to uplift us. A spurt of blood orange dancing with the streaks of pink and purple, all right above my head. There was not much I could have, but the sky was always mine. That was my luxury.

I flew my kite through the sky, imagining the friendly wind at the waves that crashed the ship I would soon be boarding. I was the captain of this kite, and I could already see the day where I would be the captain of that ship. The sea was nature's juxtaposition of the sky, inhabiting the deepest parts of the world, and boats get to rest those earthly secrets. There are wonders within, and adventures about.

I skipped forward over the sharp rocks, because I knew the soles on my shoes would lose the battle between rock and shoe, but also because I enjoyed the movement of the kite weaseling through the sky as if it had to reach every meter. As I set down that second step, I heard "rat!" I whip around and notice its Charlie. Charlie was my truest friend. His life looked a lot like mine: rugged and hungry with a hint of hope. We both dreamed of escaping

the gates of poverty, but our families laid in a deep foundation of saturated struggle.

“I reckon you are leaving in two short days lad! How are you feeling?” asked Charlie.

“My thoughts are more twirled than the wind around this kite. I feel happy. Hopeful. Sad. Happy for a new environment. Hopeful for what this might bring me. Sad because I am leaving my friends and family behind,” I replied.

Charlie’s misfortune was of a deeper thread than mine. He was charged to the parish and the English church assisted his living. Nevertheless, Charlie’s bright blue eyes told a rich story; his energy carried a wealth of fire. There is no need for money when you have that spirit. His abnormally short stature and thick frame never seemed to bother him. I admired that, as I always found a disillusionment with my thin and towering self of a structure.

“You were always one to think like a baby! Be excited. You’re entering a new life. A new surrounding. I know you want to be captain one day! No cock-fighting for you. I want to be captain one day. I wish I could leave; I wish I could look forward to days where I would not be trapped in this dirty port town,” he exclaimed.

“I guess I should look at it that way, but the words are much different coming out of your mouth. I have to go for supper now. Are you coming to my going away gathering?” I asked.

Charlie responded, “If my mother allows! Good day!”

I turned around and hurried home. I knew that supper wouldn’t be for a bit, but I did not want to discuss leaving. I could not help but feel guilty that I was leaving my best friend alone, that I would no longer be limited to the bounds of our town; I was soon going to explore the



world. I knew Charlie's future was probably destined for cock-fighting and immoral means for slimy economic ends. That was what most of the poor was left with in Liverpool.

The slave trade shaped Liverpool into what it was today. Merchants, traders and ship owners toyed with the politics of the town. To be part of the slave trade was synonymous with spoils and success, but those outside of the business were left on quaky financial grounds. The population only continued to grow; resources stayed stagnant. Money reached the port but the rich filtered it out. The roads were littered with trash, feces and corruption. There was no place like Liverpool.

I entered my house and I sat. I sunk into the nicest woven wood chair we had and felt locked into it.; the chains only multiplied. The chains of guilt, fear, and excitement were heavy; it was easiest to just sit still. If there was one thing I did not know in this moment, it was how to feel. Sometimes the dawn before life changes paralyze you; you know that this is the last time you view life through specific specs. Will the sky look different with a different set of specs? Will my kite follow a different wind?

I heard creaking outside, someone was surely approaching. My twenty-minute pause on life was coming to an end and I found my stomach turning with ambivalence. It didn't make sense that I was dreading moments with my friends and family, but I was. The dread was loud.

I tried to focus on the ridges on the chocolate floor, but they rattled as the foot neared. I tried to avert my attention to the clock as a means of relaxation; it was blue and blue always calmed me. The clock was a family gem. It was a gift to my mother; possibly the nicest object we own. Counting the petals on the clock's beautiful floral border kept me calm for a couple seconds.

*One yellow petal, two pink petal, three violet petal...*

*CRICK CRICK*

*Four orange petal, five...*

*CRICK CRICK*

*Six...*

*CRICK CRICK*

The floral lining was not beautiful enough to disassociate the clock from the passing of time, the nearing of time, the stomp of the steps. I dreaded the goodbye. I welcomed the change.

*CRICK CRICK*

“Phineas, are you there darling?” my mother asked as she swung open the door.

“Yes, mother. I’m about to begin preparing the fire,” I answered.

“Wonderful, I will start chopping the food,” Mum gathered the ingredients we were lucky to have that day. We were usually merely left with bread for dinner.

My brother Albert began to set the table with flamboyant skips. Sometimes I just observed his way of moving through life. He was young, vibrant and inquisitive. He was constantly searching for new ways to see or set up his world. His thin brown hair flopped as he skipped to the other side of table to shift the plates he already set three times; aesthetic was always his concern.

The domino effect took over as we gathered on the table: Albert was always the first and I was always the last. Although father passed years ago, I still feel the heaviness in

walking to a dinner table without the presence of my father. My mother has always handled it well; I always wondered how she managed to maintain her grace, along with our existence.

“Alright, children. This is our last family supper before we are split for some time.

Phineas I am so proud of you my darling boy. What a lucky mum I am.”

“Thank you, mum. I will work hard for you. I can not wait to come back and tell you all the stories!” I said.

Albert interjected, “so many sights you will see! Remember them as best as you can so when you come back you can tell me about it. I can draw it.”

“Sure, brother. I will try to remember as much as possible for you and mum.” I assured.

“Sweet son, there will be a lot of men and women you meet. Make sure you keep sight of those that are good and bad. I don’t want you around the bad lads,” my mother insisted.

I quickly responded without a doubt, “Certainly!”

The issue with good dinners were that they finished much quicker than the normal ones. I ate so fast that I felt it in my stomach but never tasted it in my mouth. Time and consciousness are only salient in times of discomfort. Comfort could be so blinding.

Since Albert set the table, it was my job to clean up. I did not mind it though, there was something relaxing about ridding the table of the dirty plates and used silverware. Once I was done with that I was able to go to sleep. I took longer than usual, as I brought the cloth back and forth past impeccable cleaning. Being done meant going to sleep; going to sleep meant waking up tomorrow. Waking up tomorrow meant facing everyone at my farewell gathering.

My mother called upon all of our friends and family to join her in saying farewell to me. Initially, I was filled with excitement. Now, I felt an inching worm ferociously eating at the pits of my uneasy stomach. I had never experienced so many people gathering for the purpose of me.

Behind all that anxiety I felt a warmth within, the change I have always wanted. I will be Phineas when I come back, and this will still be Liverpool, but I will be a man! Such a different life that title demands. A title I've been longing for. These thoughts distracted me as I was putting my blue dotted pajamas on and fell as my knee was bent to slide on my pants. I missed the pant leg and flopped on the floor. I giggled; it was a while until this nine-year-old would become a man.

The beaming sun breaking through the curtains barriers woke me up, and just like that it was my last day in Liverpool. I picked up my favorite shirt and put it on with eagerness, then proceeded to lightly comb my hair. If I was going to see Rose today, I had to look my ultimate best. I'll leave her with a handsome image of me, and she won't forget me! I hope so. Dapper and ready. I walk out to help my mother with the last minute set up. It was nothing short of a huge deal to have a gathering on our side of Liverpool. Birthdays and casual celebrations did not receive this attention. Not many got to leave this town, and that deserved a celebration.

"Sweet son, Charlie has arrived. Will you two take the soup to the table?" said my mother.

"Yes mum! Hello Charlie. Thanks for coming! Come help me out?" I asked Charlie.

"That's gonna cost you, Mr. Sailor boy!" responds Charlie as he walks over to help me with the soup.

We carry the soup over to the table, I grabbed one side and Charlie grabbed the other side. The big pot synced a ripple of soup waves with our steps. You could see the pieces of stew float back and forth as if they were boats in the sea, riding the rhythm of the tides.

“Which meat boat will you be? Im that big on right in from you! Waiting on the edge and safe until I spot some gold. A potato!” Charlie jokes.

“I’m the one in the middle! Ready for any risk the soup ocean brings my way!” I respond.

Charlie tips over the pot to the side to create an even bigger wave in the pot.

“Well, look here! Weve got a piece of potato on the horizon! Who will win it?!” yells Charlie.

“Boys! Stop playing with the food. Placing food on a table is a simple task.” yells my mother.

“Yeah, boys!” I hear behind me.

“Uncle Robert! How are you? It has been too long. How great it is to see you,” as I saw my uncle sporting a brown cap and a grey monochrome outfit.

Uncle Robert excitedly said, “Phineas! You’ve grown too much for my comfort. Where do the years go?”

Uncle Robert was a light and a mystery within the family. A blond man with streaks of white peaking out and strong stature, he would spontaneously leave for periods of time and come back without a single story. No one seemed to mind, as he possessed a spirit that passed the borders of his body. He achieved this sense of openness, while still having the invisible walls of self-disclosure up. Everyone loved Uncle Robert.

“Uncle Robert, it’s only been a few months. Not years! I haven’t even grown an inch. I can’t deny I’m getting wise though. That might have added a couple of years to me” I said sarcastically as I let forward a playful bow.

“Wise! Sure, boy. Wise boys certainly play with the steaming soup,” rebutted my Uncle.

“Good point. How have you been Uncle Robert?” I asked.

“It’s been okay my lad. I won’t lie, it’s been tough. But cock-fighting is way short of glamour. It can get real dangerous sometimes.” Replied my uncle.

“That’s why I’m so happy to go out in the sea! I have an opportunity for a real respectable job at this young age. I’m going to meet so many people, touch new soils, taste new flavors!”

Uncle Robert grew uneasy as my words developed. He was doing that thing he does when he is not sure of how to break the truth. A squint in his eye, a lift in his left eye brow and a slight twist in his mouth.

He scratched his beard and warned me “son, make sure you look at the negatives of the situation. It isn’t going to be rainbows and sunshine everyday; you have to think about the days with wicked waves and risky rain. It’s going to be dangerous. A storm can come any moment and wipe the ship out. Pirates can come and disrupt the trade. Disease can break out. I had a Sailor friend who once told of the horrors he experienced. His captain was a wench, full of seventy percent alcohol, ten percent water and twenty percent poison. He abused his crew and the crew abused each other. A ship can get lost, or the ship could lose you. Much can happen son.”

I took a sip of my juice to stall my response. My uncle's intentions were unclear to me. This was the first time anyone brought up the negative sides of being a sailor boy. Sure, they were real concerns but how could a cock fighter make this argument? Maybe it was true concern enveloped in judgment. Either way, I felt like a dull-swift. Naïve and unaware.

"I didn't know all that. Ill have to look out for it. I hope I get a good captain!" I said, coupled with limp in my voice.

Hearing this was something I had to hear. But hated hearing. It is rare to find a time good expectations did not fail; imagination always made a loser out of reality.

"Uncle Robert! I see Rose coming up the yard. Oh, I am nervous. How am I looking? What should I say?" I panicked, in the most positive way.

I saw her coming with a twirl in her step and stars in her eyes. Rose roamed around blessing Liverpool with her bouncing curls and gapped teeth. I met her at church on a rainy Sunday. All of her actions were accompanied with grace and charm. She often shared her food with as many people as she could when others were in need, even if her hunger was loud. Today she floated in a paled pink intricate dress.

"Hello Phineas. This is fun! I have never had a celebration like this. Do you feel special?" she asked.

Attempting to conceal all the jitters, I replied "I think this is the most attention I have gotten since my birth! I hope you keep this a secret, but I kind of like it."

"Secrets are my specialty! You should like it. You're off to do something amazing. Life without mum would be hard but you will see the world! You'll probably be able to have

unlimited amount of candy! Think of all the sugar. Wow, you will be front and center to all the sugar they bring!” she spitted excitedly.

I joked, with matched enthusiasm, “Maybe it’s the sugar that lured me in more than the money! I always had a sweet tooth.”

“Bring me something nice and sweet! I would be so happy. Also bring stories! I want to hear about the friends you make and seas you see,” Rose demanded.

“All of that I will bring, you just wait,” I asserted.

This was my chance to prove to Rose that I was more than just a Liverpool street boy and I was going to do it. No whip or wave can stop me.

Upon the arrival of most of my friends and family, we began to kick around the football. I kept my eye on Rose on the side. Her eagerness spread onto my mental state. The boat awaited me.

Saying goodbye to the people, pieces, in my life was nothing short of difficult. A true tug on the heart. That should be the hardest part of this, though. Now, a monumental phase in my life was going to begin. I laid down for some rest but rest never paid a visit. I experienced that feeling where I can feel the approaching of change in my stomach, as it creeps to my heart; it was hard to decipher if it was going to be good or bad change, so I just let the feeling linger until the morning.

I popped up. I gathered the lasts of my belongings. It was not too difficult, as my material belongings were less than the fingers on my collective hands. Our family’s financial situation limited our allowance to own things. Surprisingly, that comforted me. The more



things I had always took a weight on me— draining energy with its demand for attention and maintenance. I always wondered how the rich did not get overwhelmed with the abundance.

My mum and Albert accompanied me to the Port. Every step was a pump of excitement, and every word made it more real. Walking up the port, there was enough going on to overwhelm an observer. Crates lifted and dropped of in various directions, sailors lounging, vendors crawling, captains ordering, ships being repaired. There was so much life in such a small space.

My mum and Albert pulled me in for a hug and their love and hope converted into something I physically felt in my arms and chest. They believed in me and my journey. I believed in me and my journey. I pulled away and looked at them both, “this one is for you two.”

I said goodbye, trying endlessly to ignore the tears escaping my mum and Albert’s eyes. If I acknowledged them, it would start a movement of cries in me and I couldn’t allow my captain and fellow sailormen and boys to see. So I whipped around, and marched to the dock of the ship.

## II: A Ship’s Manifestation of *Hope*

The vessel before me was an unusual breath to take in, with its twenty-meter slope towering over the humans running around the port. It looked like the height of four of my white wooden homes stacked up. I found my way to front, standing there in pure amazement of the genius of this massive object; I felt so small.

A grunted voice approached me, “Kid. No time for standing. You work here or just making our day harder?”

“Hello, it’s my first day. I’m here to check in for my sailor position. Phineas”, I responded, with a quick concealment of nerves.

His raise of eyebrow made me question my own honesty, even though I knew I was supposed to be there. He scattered through the sloppy handwriting on the paper in his hand. I see a squint coming from his eyes, but the kind that is motivated by suspicion rather than confusion. I feel a tension in my feet makes it way from my knees to my stomach and my hands. After a series of long seconds ended, he finds me gives me a wink.

A sense of relief filled me, but I wasn’t sure why I was anxious about it in the first place. I was supposed to be there.

“They keep recruiting them younger and younger. Alright, kid, follow me. You ready to work like a grown man? Here, we are all the same age. Remember, rules in Liverpool no longer apply as we hit the sea,” he stated as he funneled me through men throwing crates, and others inspecting the inches and ends of the intricate vessel.

We entered under a deep arch and I quickly observed the limited space I would soon be left to. On my way to meet the other ship boys and seamen, I caught a quick glimpse of the captain. The shade of the stairs dimmed half of his face and body, he seemed to be talking with someone of high importance, possibly a merchant. He may have felt my gaze, as he quickly shifted his eye and held a powerful contact with mine. The energy from the one eye I was able to see insinuated a wave of shrill in my nerves. His power loomed the whole ship.

“Hope you were listening, because that the last time I give that speech kid,” asserted the manic seaman, as he left me with a group of kids and men.

Truthfully, I did not catch a word he said. His words were merely background noise to overstimulation entertaining my eyes, like trying to listen to crickets under a starry sky.

“Well are you going to stand there or help me with this?” asked the well-groomed seaman as he gripped on to the ends of a slipping box.

His maturity and build revealed that he was more than just a boy, but much short of a grown man. There was a sense of urgency in each step and word, that made my spirits accelerate much quicker than before. With him, movement was key.

“Yes! Let me grab the other end” I responded as I helped the young man.

“What is your name?”

Without a turn back, he yelled “Harvey. I’m an apprentice seaman on this ship. That means you respect me, I’m not the average seaman. I’m working hard under the captain to follow into his footsteps. Ill be running a ship like soon. Now grab more of the weight on this alcohol, you’re doing close to nothing in helping me.”

I shifted more of the weight of the box into my hands. The crate held the most important liquid in seafaring, besides the liquid the ship sat on, the alcohol. Alcohol was essential to the trade, what else would such a large group of men do to keep themselves company?

The ship carried a larger crew than I could even had imagined. The Dolden Act, the Slave Carrying Bill of 1788, ordered there to be a surgeon on board. Our surgeon, Dr. Bartholomew, an aged man nearing his sixties, lounged on the end of the ship with a cigar and a slight smirk. I traced the line of his eyes and noticed an absence of anything in the direction of the smirk. I imagined him imagining the wind of the waves softly crashing his body once we leave the port. I hoped his role on the ship to be minimal, as he kept records of the sick and death on the voyage.

The Boatswain stood near, inspecting the cables and the heavy anchors. He tall and lanky with a playful edge to his personality, as he spewed jokes to the armorer. The Armorer seemed to be the tallest man I had ever seen, and his presence exceeded his shadow. He smoothly slid his fingers left and right as he inspected the firearms hanging on the wall. His job was to oversee firearms, ammunition, the artillery and the locks and chains.

“That man you are staring at is crucial around here. This might be your first voyage, but soon you will learn the warfare we face,” informed me Harvey.

I attempted to keep my composure, as the statement left my mind circling around the word “warfare.” Uncle might have been right about the dangers of the sea, but I was not aware of my position as an economic soldier in small wars over cargo. Countries went to war over religion and territory, seamen went to war over cargo. We were not to fight soldiers; we were to fight pirates. Robbers of the sea were now my main concern.

Leaning over the alcohol crates we were moving further into the vessel were the Carpenter and the Cooper. I could not decipher much of their conversation, other than their recognition of how well they have executed the ship. We finished with the lasts crates and Harvey took me, along with other ship boys, to meet the cook. I looked over the ship boy next to me and declared, “we must make it on the cook’s good side, it might even be more important than the Captain!”

Turning the corner, and entering the deepest end of the ship holding the stove, we stationed in front of our cook. Surprised by the ebony masking his skin, I stood there in front of our black cook with a face of confusion. The man who I deemed most important on the ship was a man who was once enslaved. A death in his eyes floated through our countenances, then he slowly turned and continued to organize the bread on the deep shelves.

Harvey continued to lead us to the areas we would be able to sleep. He suggested a spot under the longboat, as the structure could mimic the function of a roof in protecting one from the earth and sea's rage. The longboat was to be reserved for anyone who was sick, the threat of their sickness reaching the immune systems of others was far too dangerous. Without thought, I grabbed a hammock and hung it under the shadow of the longboat.

As the ship inched further from the steadiness of land, I let the wind jerk me back and forth with the rhythm of the indigo waves. My journey was soon to begin, and despite the surprises, I was ready to play a major role on this ship.

I plopped myself onto my hammock, focusing on the acoustics of the crashing waves and whistling birds. I attempted to match my breathing with the waves, but I quickly recognized that there were millions of waves surrounding us and just one beating heart in me. I thought of the lives of the creatures below us, surely they had seen more than the average human being. Waging their own war against being caught for commerce, the fishes had witnessed more sea warfare than most. Their whispers echoed in the waves, it was as if I heard them yell "beware!" but I chose not to listen. It was too early to resign my faith in this voyage and my character.

Storming outside of his less than luxurious chambers, the captain ordered his crew to the front of the ship. I quickly hopped out of my hammock and sprinted to the captain. If I was going to be on this voyage for a year, I certainly had to reach his good side. Shuffling through the faces of his crew, he spoke with a stern voice and a high chest. There was a silence prevailing the air, but not one of the crew diverted their eyes from the Captain's attention, that would be a bold act for the first day of the voyage.

He began, “Welcome aboard the *Hope* ship. We begin this journey with a strong crew, as I believe in every one of you. As you know, the ship will be reaching the West African Coast and then swiftly moving on to the Carribean. We will be picking up slaves, selling them in the Caribbean and bringing back sugar and rum to Liverpool. Our success is dependent on everyone’s submission to my rules and order. Breaking my trust, whether it is an accident or not, will be met with severe consequences. I have a chief mate, second mate and third mate; Andrew, Matthew, and Louis, respectively. Their orders are also to be respected and followed with enthusiasm.”

My consciousness to the serious nature of the situation I, along with the rest of the crew, am in sunk in with the ferocity of an anchor racing to the bottom of the sea. I escaped a look to the sky, as it allowed me to harness the strength my mom use to gather from just glancing at the skies. The sky was bright and accentuated with just enough clouds to instill a thrust to the challenge before me. The ship would be my vehicle to manhood.

I quickly averted my attention back to the pattern of indentions on the Captain’s face, his expressions were enough to keep me awake at night.

“Alright go make yourselves useful. Supper will be announced,” finished the Captain.

I rushed off to Harvey attempting to keep my head from imploding from the tension of questions bouncing off the walls of my mind.

“Hello Harvey! I know you are probably busy with a lot right now, but I was wondering if I could help you with what you are doing? And maybe ask you some questions,” I asked as I picked up the rope he was reaching for.

“I was hoping I would not be the one with answers for a rookie, but I could use your help right now. Fire away, kid. Don’t expect me to answer it all though. Some, I rather not repeat,” he responded.

“Thank you. How many voyages have you been on? Do you like your work here? Have you ever been in a position of danger? Have you experienced a slave uprising? How are the slaves? What about the weather?” I spitted out with the inability catch my words for a pause or breath.

“Kid. I need you to calm down. Your heart beats so abruptly that I feel it leave your body and nearly punch me in the face every other second. And your eyes, retract those a bit! They’re bigger than the fishes they capture in the sea below us.

Sigh, I remember having every single one of those questions when I joined my first voyage.

To begin, I am fifteen. This is my third voyage. I am honored to be here, as my parents paid the Captain for my apprenticeship here on the ship,” he disclosed with pride and propped chest.

I continued to stare at him, with a thirst for more information, but now with a calmer frame.

He continued, “Honestly, I have yet to experience a raid on our ship in the sea. That is a huge risk sometimes, as pirates search for trading vessels and attempt to steal the cargo by force. I have seen an attempt at a slave uprising though. It was not pretty. The Captain took the ingenious slave and had us tie him to rope that could be lowered into water. The thing’s body was lowered into the water surrounding the ship. Everyone thought he would drown and that would be the end, but the thunderous shriek in his voice was caused by more than

just the water. Water's most fearful inhabitant, a shark, swallowed half of his body in a mere couple seconds. His body was raised back up to incite fear in other slaves, but it incited fear in everyone in the ship."

I felt my eyes retrieve to the fish form that persisted earlier, as a nasty chill ran through every single nerve of my body. I was waiting for the part where he assured me he was just joking, but that part never came. I had heard from others that sharks were something to be wary of, but never took it seriously.

"You probably don't believe me right now but you will see. Everything changes when slaves board the ship. The sharks begin to follow and normalcy begins to sink. You'll get used to it kid. Don't you want to do your family good?" he reminded me.

Right as I thought I was going to need the aid of the doctor on board, the thought of my family back in the impoverished Liverpool lifted my morale. I pictured my mother in yellow checkered cloth rocking back and forth with the wind's gust, looking out to the sky for answers for our family's hardship.

"Yes. That's all I want to do. I came here to help my family rise above their conditions. I just have to grow a stronger stomach and I should be fine. Everything will be fine." I wasn't sure everything would be fine, but it was necessary lie I needed to tell myself and Harvey at the moment.

"Our experience here depends on two major factors: the weather and our captain. The weather has been pleasant lately, so it looks like we won't have to worry about that. We'll just have to wait and see how our captain is," said Harvey.



I shrugged, and wandered my eyes to the oscillation of the Sails mirroring the boat's motion. I observed the sails resign all of their rigidness and control in movement, as they became subjects of wind and motion.

I finished up helping Harvey organize the ropes. He was actually performing a duty of the boatswain, but Harvey felt the boatswain should get enough rest before the enslaved women boarded the vessel. The boatswain often kept the ladies in order, while keeping up with his other duties.

Once we were done, I parted with Harvey to explore the ship for myself, without the assistance or words of anyone. I wandered to the front of the ship with a sense of alertness with every step. I wanted to catch a glimpse of the captain, but rendered no excuse to speak or search for him. I proceeded with a quick jump in my step, until I reached the captain's quarters over the whipstaff steering. The whipstaff steering allowed for seamen to control movement of the ship. I heard the Captain speaking to his chief mate, "Look. I really think this one is going to be a good one. I'm ready to get that human cargo in and let the real part of the voyage begin. Do you want to make any bets about what is coming our way? Any attempts at an uprising? How many days of rain? Got to keep this entertaining some way or another."

I continue to eavesdrop as I candidly peak through the stairs of the captain's quarters. His chief mate says, "I will predict thirty-nine days of rain. But what I find entertaining is the crew moving at any snap we make, the animals downright fear us. I find it comical."

"Sure, you find it funny now, but it's not comical when the air heads do otherwise. It is worse than my children disobeying me."

I continue to listen, fully aware of the possible consequences attached to spying on the captain and the chief mate. I felt the tips of my fingers begin to tremble with anxiety, but I couldn't get myself to retreat.

“You're right cap—“

The captain popped up, stomping near my direction with a mission to kill communicated by his popping eyes and grunted sprint to the door. The nearing of his stomps, made my stomach and heart drop lower than depths of the sea.

*SMACK*

I resist falling from the aftermath of the captain's violent slap to the wooded walls. I was almost sure I had been spotted.

“Damn spiders! Not in my quarters,” said the Captain.

I let out the twenty last breaths that I had been holding in with ease. I let my luck take me away, as I used the tips of my toes to reach the top of the stairs. Trying to keep my composure and return to my hammock, the black cook sneaks up, “don't wanna start problems wif the captain. He get real wicked, real fast. You gon see.” The cook passed by me to tell the Captain supper was ready.

I wondered how long the cook had been there, had he seen my covert listening? I moved my legs with the urgency of a sprint, but my chest and arms kept the composure of a walk to lessen the transparency of panic if anyone saw me. Once I reached the middle of the ship, I felt ease again.

I pondered on the thought of my role once the enslaved arrived. Surely, it was not going to be easy but my fear of the captain exceeded my fear of guilt.

The announcement of supper didn't excite me, as the last memory of supper with my friends and family a long day ago was imprinted on my mind. I made my way to the food anyway, seeing if the sight it would excite me. We were given a slice of bread, a small portion of beef and butter; not much more than what I got at home. I found a seat on an emptied barrel near the crew's quarters and slumped down on it. "Hi! I'm sitting here," said a fire-headed boy with a plump frame.

"Sure. Go ahead," I said as he scooted his bum to force himself some room.

"I'm Samuel. Another one of the ship boys, just like you. I'm finding this more interesting by the second! My mother and father aren't here to yell at me every five minutes and I don't have to do any of that stuff they call 'education' here. Wooh! Don't you feel the freedom?"

Samuel's spirit had a bigger fire than his hair, but I found it settling. By his dress and mannerisms, I could tell he came from a family much more well-off than mine.

I responded, "I guess this is as free as it gets for a young boy. I never really got yelled at by my mom and education is a luxury we can't afford."

"I have never been more jealous of a poor boy. Hey, want to play hide and seek in the ship? I bet if we get enough people in it can be real fun."

"If you find enough people and ask the captain, I would play."

"I should have known you were uptight with the lack of life in your steps"

"So humorous, you," I said as I walked back to my safe haven of a hammock.

His comments lingered in my mind. Maybe what Samuel said was true, I was taking everything a bit too seriously. The situation I am in is not changing, only I could change. I

rushed back to Samuel and agreed to play with a tone of accomplishment accompanying my words.

Samuel looked at me, “too late. I want to play something else now.”

Every face muscle fought roll of my eyes, so I turned and walked back to my hammock. The sun was beginning to set with a slow ease. In this moment, luck was to see the sunset from a ship in the middle of the sea. My eyes trailed the blurry lines in the sky where pink turned to orange. The orange dipped into a light red, following a tremendous swirl between the two tones. I ran to my bed to shut my eyes before the sky was overtaken by the darkness of the night. I didn’t want to see the night sky today. Just daylight.

### III: Castles of Glamour and Gore

The brisk touch of wind slapped my face into wake this morning. I extended the tight crouch position for a stretch and quickly retrieved the self-made blanket. A couple weeks into the voyage, it is beginning to get colder and my weakness in adjustment lived in the cold-induced bumps on my skin. My physical adjustment was troubling, but I was beginning to become accustomed to the relational and work dynamics of the ship. Harvey was the person I went to for any question, and Samuel was the person I went to when I wanted to feel better about myself.

I finally pushed my legs out and whipped out of my roped hammock. I recently grew a tendency in watching the armorer inspect our protective resources. Counting guns and inspecting cannons was not an orthodox form of entertainment, but upon every third count of guns I felt a burst of ease reach all areas of my mind, like paint poured onto a canvas. The armorer never asks why I’m there, but a sly grin escaping his mouth relays his appreciation

for my enthusiasm in his work. Samuel often jokes about my sanity; he felt there are murderous bones within my frame and my obsession with the armorer was a leaking clue.

My observations were cut short with the Harvey's call for sailormen and sailorboys to the corner near the whipstaff steering. I enjoyed being in that area, as I could capture a glimpse of the Captain and his men. There was something interesting in watching men in power; their voices are crisp and actions are sharp. At this moment there was no one of interest in the area, and Harvey held all of my attention.

He whipped around and paralleled the movement on his hands to the dance of the waves across the indigo horizon. He started, "children and men, we are all here for one purpose. We are movers of culture through products and people. We have been blessed to witness the gifts of our sea from the floors of our ship. Now we are entering a new phase of the voyage, as we approach the West African coast."

Following his feet, I saw the line he retraces over and over with his aggressive steps and momentous pauses. He continued. "Things will be different, people will be different, and you will be different. I need you all to understand the importance of following orders and retaining composure in challenges. One moment of weakness can leave you in a worse position than the lesser slaves. In the next hour, we will reach land, as many of you may see on the left. Be ready."

I fixated on the land mass we were approaching as my sailor counterparts scattered to get work done around the ship. Some sailors shifted crates to make space for the new cargo. The cook relayed more food to his area, as we were about to get a hefty load. Others were simply running around, acting as if they were doing something productive when they really

were not. I went on to help the boatswain prepare the rope for the landing of the ship on the English port off the West African coast.

The boatswain's face carried a more serious expression than ever, as all of his features seemed to come closer together like someone was squeezing his face: a pinch in the eyebrows that created a wrinkled line in between coupled with tightly squeezed lips. I followed his circular motion in extending the ropes from their stagnant position. The words spoken were simply for clarification, there was no conversation.

"This won't be a short stay. We will use two anchors for this landing. Help out with that other large rope," said the boatswain.

I nodded and hurried to another rope, falling into a meditative state through the repetitiveness of the action and cloudiness in my mind.

The land was getting closer and closer, but I observed no factory that the veteran sailors were telling me about. Factories, which were sometimes referred to as trading houses or castles were ways in which the English government assured each slave ship would be full of cargo. Human cargo.

"Where are the castles?" I asked the boatswain.

"They are further out, kid. We use pirogues to bring the slaves onto the ship. Didn't get a good deal with lots of slaves this time, we have to take a couple trips until we can get this ship the fullest possible. I think we will about 200 on this ship," he responded.

My mind worked hard to imagine an additional 200 people on the ship, there was no logical mental map I could make that fit us all, but I guess I am simply a kid that doesn't know the ways of the trade.

I heard a loud noise culmination of crunch and screech crash my ears as we finally reached land. The wind hit my pores, passed through and heavily set in the bounds of skin. I felt the environment in me and a slight panic overtook me. A panic I had to settle in a short time span because it was my duty to assist the boatswain. The pulled lever that anchored the ship with the face of bad smell, except this was caused by exerting force and not imposition of a smell. Upon finishing, I felt an ease in my thoughts and body.

“Alright, you are one of the sailor boys on the first porigue being set up. You go prepare, while the Captain speaks to the traders of the port,” said Harvey.

The port is an interesting place, and there was a clear difference between Liverpool and this African port. Peeking through the ropes and sails that blocked my view of the port area, I saw the new culture birthed from the close proximity of Englishmen and Africans. Both have come together in the name of money. A mix of African and English clothes, embellishments and shoes, both borrowing from each other’s style and tradition. Examining the body language of the individuals exchanging words and products suggested that there was an equal dynamic between the inhabitants of the port. In Liverpool, most African migrants would naturally fall in the fortunes on the lower statuses. Now I was beginning to recognize that discrimination and prejudice were subjective characteristics of an environment, nature played no role.

The Captain approaches with steps of determination, followed by his chief mates.

“You all are heading out in the next thirty minutes. You will be picking up about 130 slaves. I want no mistakes, this is where the serious work begins,” said the Captain.

I looked over and around the small vessel for anyone around me that I could mask my emotions with, but Harvey, the boatswain and anyone else I liked did not have a place in this

vessel. I scanned and stopped at Samuel. The playful attitude in him was just as present in serious times. I recognized some excitement in his smirk and feet sliding, he didn't seem to care that we were about to be in charge of over a hundred of human cargo. Most of these men and women are going to be older than me.

A drop in the boat begins and the land on the water felt harsher than my bum falling on wooden floor. Soon the vessel is off to the British castle, *Victoria*. The ride was not long until we reached the fort. My first sight of the castle was from afar, as it was the size of a church in Liverpool. The internal activities of the castle are opposite of the church though, as the second thing I notice are the series of cannons lined up for the unwelcomed. Swaying closer to the structure, I attempted to imagine what was waiting for us. Do the slaves know they are about to be the product in a trade transaction? Are they going to be violent with me? Do I have to be violent with them? The questions sped through my mind, as the boat slowed in the water. I look at Samuel and attempt to adopt his ease, even his excitement, but there was no susceptibility to relaxation.

This vessel only needed one anchor because it was less than half the size of the trading ship. I realized I was about to step on land imagined how my feet would feel on stable grounds again.

“Alright, everyone ready to hop out? Stay stern, my men. We are about to meet our cargo,” said the captain's first chief mate.

One by one, fifteen of us felt the sensation of land for the first time in weeks. Some of the men were used to it, but for me and others on their first voyage, the sensation sparked positive



enthusiasm. We had reached the land, in Senegambia. My first impression was that the African ports possessed a more powerful beauty than the ones of Liverpool .Liverpool ports were polluted with ships, workers and buildings. The West African ports of Senegambia recorded my steps with the impressionable sand at the ports. The palm trees scattered across the scene easily became my new favorite green product of nature at first sight. The sky favored the palm trees, as the sun shined through the gapped leaves of the palm trees.

“Follow me this way, crew,” stated the chief mate.

My feet printed their arrival on the sand as we approached the large castle before us. I did not foresee the possibility of the slaves being held in such lavish quarters; they had probably been living better than myself these past weeks, or even home life. When we got to the front of the rusted ivory colored building, I stood in awe of the number of palm trees and twisted stairs the place before had. I felt that I was in the home of a wealthy merchant in Liverpool. Upon turning the corner, I observed the chief mate’s communication with the English men of the fort.

Samuel enthusiastically yells, “Do you think the Captain will let me stay here?” For once me and Samuel shared the same excitement and sentiment; we were wide-eyed and steps moved with a sort of hop.

The man the chief mate was talking to wore his wealth, with a macaroni hairstyle and a short rose red waistcoat, and elegant breeches. The macaroni hairstyle was always one that interested me, as the intricate curvature of the hair and sky scraping lengths had to cause a sense of discomfort. I wouldn’t know though, I was just a poor boy from Liverpool.

Observing the animation in the chief mate's actions, I detected a clear disappointment that escalated to a fit of anger. The elegant man was unbothered by the rage of emotions, slipping a simple shrug while calmly walking away.

The chief mate turns around with the exact opposite composure, spitting furious words out to himself. He reaches us, "Alright men. There is a reason we bring our stuff with us on these journeys to the forts and castles. It seems that we have been left with a shortage in slaves and must wait here until we reach at least our quota of slaves. If the rate is quick, we might wait for even more slaves. The wait is uncertain; it could take weeks to months."

Samuel yelled, "my dream came true! I live here!"

I looked at Samuel and slightly agreed. Staying in a place so beautiful may prove to be one my biggest blessings in life, aside from the tender moments spent in company of my family. I wished Charlie could experience this with me, I wished my mother could spoil in luxuries of this structure, I wished Albert could be here to use Senegambia as inspiration for drawing. The crushing reality was that they are not here and I had to accept that, so I stopped the rush of thoughts and emotions and continued with the men receiving a tour of the area.

I observed the luxury the men the British employed for the job were enjoying. They had African slaves cook for them and clean for them. The African slaves assisted, or fully carried out, the challenging and undesirable parts of the Europeans lives, as they did just about everything for them except for wiping their bum after a visit to the toilet. I would not be surprised if it got to that point one day though.

Reaching the bottom half of the castle brought back the feelings of nausea I experienced on the ship. The area reeked of pure sweat and bodily fluids, smells that never pleasantly met the nose. The numerous empty heavy iron chains scattered through the floor

suggested that we would likely be here for a while. Towards the bottom right end of the lowest part of the structure revealed the deplorable accommodation conditions of the enslaved. All of my feelings of ease and fascination instantly disappeared with the first sight of the living people struggling with the chains on their hands and limbs. At this point, I am not sure if the smell of bodily fluids came from the slaves or the crew, as a hurl could make its way out of my mouth any second now. The slaves were thin and moved with such struggle that they seemed intoxicated. The only toxins in their life was the ones who placed them here.

I look over to one of the Englishmen working in the fort, “How do we get these men? Why is it them and not other people?”

He replied, “Many of these are criminals and people who are indebted to others. They are no use for social good, so we will use them for economic good. African slave traders collect them from the inner regions of Africa. Us Europeans can not venture out into that land, it’s the White Man’s Grave that only rare British men can survive. There are all types of diseases out there. You will see the African slave traders soon; they should be arriving with a new load very soon.”

I sat there with a blank stare into the desperate excuse for quarters surrounding me. I guess this was a proper proxy prison for those who had posed a threat to the harmony of the society.

After the tour, I lounged out in the open space facing the rusted black cannons facing the ocean. The close proximity of cannons and palm trees was unsettling, yet a nice view to observe the sunset.

A fierce rattling of chains, interrupted my moments of observing the sky and castle's beauty. I heard a holler in an unfamiliar language. A couple seconds later I saw the arrival of a line of panicking Africans getting closer to the gates. Their panting could be heard from miles away. Their expressions of panic, fear, sadness and uncertainty were the kind that any man would find difficult to erase from their memory. There were traces of vomit along the chest of a woman, as she pushed through with the force of her fellow slaves attached to the same chains and padlock. Each slave was in shackles, and all shackles were attached to each other. They entered their doomed nightmare in a line formation. It was evident that the slaves had been lugged for hours, maybe even days, as their drooped eyes and slowed movement highlighted their exhaustion.

My hammock was the most comfortable consistency I felt this whole voyage, and even it's station under two palm trees. The thoughts that settled my mind were all about my mom, Albert, Charlie, my Uncle and Rose. My mental journey skipped from person to person wishing I could explain the beauties and horrors I have seen. My mum is the toughest human being I have ever witnessed, and I carried an imaginary mental conversation with her over my tumultuous emotions. I imagined myself telling her the ways in which my Uncle was correct, but that I understood my purpose on this voyage was to inspire a financial breakthrough within the family, as little as it might be. I continued to imagine my vent include the question of her convincing me to go on this trip as a half payment for her indebted past.

I created her response in my head, "Sweet son. You shall not worry about the path God paved for your role in this great journey and opportunity, but you shall seek the ways you could gain emotional strength and economic stability. The fellow crew's need for you is

evident with it's quality of close spatial proximity, but your utility is amplified when you consider how much your family needs you there too.”

I imagined us conversing, observing our infinite skies, wiping away the anxieties woven into our lives.

The conversation was completely created in the depths of my troubled mind, but it was the closest thing I had to consultation with my mother. It was enough to put me to sleep for the night. For each of the following nights in the proceeding two months, I went to sleep with same ritual of imagining myself conversing with the gems of my Liverpool world.

A short two weeks later, the last batch of slaves reached me with the same sensations: I saw the agony in their eyes and movement, I smelled the rancid bordering stench around their bodies, and I heard the yells, cries and grunts. The sensation was the same, but perception was of a different nature. The sight of their agony left a minimal tug on my heart, the smell faded quickly and the noise was easily thrown into the selected noises I ignore in everyday life.

Once we reached 147 slaves at this fort, we were prepared to return to the English West African trading port we originally boarded the small vessel in. In the same manner the slaves were brought in, the slaves were brought out. The connection of the chains made all of their suffering into one massive nightmare. One by one the slaves exited the castle's door of no return and entered the depths of the small vessel. Not one piece of wind reached the pores of most of their slaves as they were crushed together without a waste of space between them. It was like a three dimensional puzzle filling the deplorable volume of the bottom of the vessel.

Once all of the enslaved were brought in, we lifted our anchors and set out the bigger ship. It was nice being back on the water roads, the stability of the sand made the situation feel like I was there to stay forever. There was a certain movement in the water that illuminated the temporary nature to any circumstance, the water below us will not be the water below us tomorrow. Drawing near the large West African port where the big slave ship was anchored initiated a new sense of excitement. The energy of the Port's life could be seen from far, with various ships entering and leaving and interactions between all kinds of individuals. The life of the castle was limited to the arrival of animalized humans and spoiled wealthy men. Here there was an exchange of culture, goods, and money.

Reaching land again so quickly made me miss the water but I knew I would soon be back on the waves. The Chief mate sported his newly develop belly, from the spoils of the castle, off the vessel and ordered the sailormen to get the products of the small ship. An enslaved man dared to drag his feet and knees through the grassy land. The structure around his neck brought down his slave counterpart with him, violently crushing over a child's head. Both men were wiped by my fellow sailormen, as many have quickly developed an easily relievable itch for power. We were all ordinary citizens before, living the daily activities of Liverpool, and now we had power over a crowd of sad, angry, and sometimes resistant, individuals.

Once the man received an adequate whipping, he painfully stood on his feet. Many tears seemed just as loud, or even louder, as the times they arrived to the trade houses they were initially brought to. They must have a keen eye for monstrous power as the cries seem to have amplified at the sight of the Captain and his folded arms. A tap in his step revealed a sense of impatience prevailing his mind. Once we reached him he ordered for the quick

transfer of slaves into the large slave ship. His vision was fixated on the chief mate, with a occasional glance at the sailormen. His eyes never reached the trembling slaves.

Our portion of the crew carried on in sending the slaves to their new equally pathetic shelter. Matching the speed of the wearied slaves placed me on the same rhythmic and temporal level as the slaves, reminds me of the other similarities we carry, such as a heart and a brain. Those are the thoughts I actively try to suppress. There was much left to the journey I committed to, and it is imperative I distance their humanity from mine to complete my duties.

Through a rigid line formation of dejectedness and aggression, the slaves were funneled into the large slave ship. There were men and women of all sizes, even many children forcing their steps to their mobile prison. I was standing at the opposite end of the entering cargo, with a flog in hand prepared to retaliate on those who attempt to stray. I shifted my eyes through from their bodies to the chains to the heavy wooden blocks on their necks, but fell into an impetuous moment of prolonged and fierce eye contact with a young slave near my age. His eyes were the major projectors of his fears. His mouth communicated disbelief, as it sat there still without one movement from his lips tight grip. His eyes were the darkest eyes I had ever seen, his ribs nearly ripped through the barriers of skin, and something about him made me feel. Just like that, all the internal parts of my throat ran together and formed a ball waiting to be released in the form of tears. A quick glance at the Captain at the end of the ship quickly disseminated the emotional ball residing in my throat. Then the next ebony figure continued in.

#### IV: A Warm Welcome for the Human Cargo

The pour of slaves made me wonder where they would all fit. Did the captain misinterpret the holding number of the ship? The male slaves were put below deck, where they were chained to the ground and limited to a mere patch of four inches. Men over five feet three inches were subjected to crunching their backs along the roof. Similarly, to the castles and forts, the men, women, and children were all split into three separate groups sharing different spaces. I saw children stretch from the port holes. They were supposed to be for circulation but they also teased the slaves from the outside environment they were deprived of.

They were not to see a sunset, or sunrise this whole voyage. We had actively stripped them of the luxury of the sky. Those who were to fulfill nature's sentence to death will never see the sky's glory ever again. Were they even human if they could not experience life's most accessible quality?

Once all of the cargo from our castle was on the ship, the cargo from the other group began to file in. There was approximately a whopping 180 slaves. The slave ship was going to hold about three hundred slaves; that took a long moment to settle in. I felt that there was no possible way we could fit so many more bodies in such a tight space. I wondered if that meant some were going to be brought up to the deck area.

It was a true surprise but each slave fit packed into their four-foot space, their aching bones and muscles were only going to ache that much more. The slaves possessed a more fearful expression that I have ever seen in my short exposure to them. Many flinched at any movement towards the black individuals, others shined in defiance.

The ship had still been docked, but the resistance already began. The slaves were doing everything their limited bodies made possible. Scratches along began a trend and soon



most slaves were attempting to scratch, hurt or even kill themselves. With his nail, a man followed a strict path back and forth on his chest until blood came out. He continued until the blood hurried out faster than his tears. The look in his eyes reminded me of the time I thought I was in company of a devilish ghost, wishing death rather than retreat. I am quite pale, but far from a devilish ghost. I wished I could have communicated that to him.

To prepare for the departure of the ship, there was a net that was overthrown the surrounding area of the ship. This netting was used as a mechanism to capture the slaves that would try to jump off board at any time. I observed the new addition to the slave ship and imagined my own self falling on top of the holes of the net, floating through the whisk of the waves. I went up on top of deck because I could not even manage the simplest observance of the human cargo below. There was something peculiar about the air sitting over the ship, I am not sure if I changed or the ship changed but things were not the same. I walked over to Harvey, who I had not seen since our departure to forts. He also seemed different. There were so many stains on his clothes that told stories of the struggles he faced at the fort he was at.

“How was it down there for you? I asked him.

“I don’t really fancy talking about those experiences after. Ask me anything else but not that.”

That night, I went to sleep with a heaviness in my breath. As much as I tried to deny the life below me, the cries were most salient at night.

The following days consisted of an excess in slave resistance. I wondered if it was always this bad or if this was an unusual case. Everyday at least one of the enslaved would attempt to jump over board but would always fail. Failures did not dampen the spirit of

revolt, as the first few weeks of the slaves' voyage characterized the most extreme actions against the self I have ever witnessed. Men would starve themselves for days; there was not much strength left in them but all the strength migrated to the closure of their mouths when we tried to force feed them.

The armorer searched through his collection of tools with the urgency of a madman. The Captain ordered him to find a tool that will force accessibility to food to the throat. A light took over the armorer as he found what he called a *speculum oris*, a wooden device to force nutrition in the slave's bodies. It would be a major waste of him for the crew and the captain if the ship's cargo lost all of its quality.

The armorer handed the tool to a fellow sailorman. The sailorman took the tool and inspected it as if he was searching for the answers to life's questions on it, while also testing the scissor mechanics of it with his vicious grip. He pulled over the naked and starved male by a handle on the neck, wiping him over to his knees. The sailorman turned back and grabbed a spoonful of brightly boiled rice, and jerked open the slave's jaw. A grunted yell flew out of the slaves' throat, while food funneled in. The build up on food in the chambers of his mouth generated a substantial amount of vomit. The vomit raced down the neck and chest of the starved soul, also landing on the shoes of the sailorman. The merciless sailorman swallowed a heavy breath and knocked the slave with the same tool he used to force feed him. I searched the room for reactions, some sailormen seemed to enjoy it. Others, lacked concealment of the universal face of disgust. Some faces were void of emotion, suggesting their habituation to the horrors of the floating prison.

Women and children observed the treatment their fellow slave received; they were simply left to witness and relay to the other men of the ship. Harvey had warned me of the

possibility of a gruesome exhibitions in the name of repression, but I did not recognize it would happen so fast. The overt fight against the only piece of autonomy the slave held, eating, warned the other slaves of the possibilities looming the ship.

The ordeal quickly ended, as it was no reason to cut into the slave's daily exercise. When I lived in Liverpool dance was something I held close to my heart. Me and Charlie would foolishly create terrible, but entertaining, routine out of any rhythm. It was our deposit of energy into the environment, with kicks, leaps and twists and turns. When Harvey told me of the daily dancing, I was pleasantly surprised, I even hoped I could join. Samuel was too, as he said "A daily dose of dance keeps the doctor away, this is a true fact!"

The slaves were deficient in enthusiasm, as their frail frames dragged through the top deck. Shackled and chained they moved like badly built puppets, no emotion and stiff movements. The Captain's frustration escalated to an unseen level, at least by me. I was standing next to him and I could feel bubble of fury radiating from his body.

The Captain oriented himself in my direction and said, "Kid. Go grab a cat-o'-nine-tails whip right now. I have no toleration for this laziness."

A cat-o'-nine-tails whip was a memorable one, leaving a physical and emotional mark on the unfortunate. The knot at the end of the whip was unforgiving, and the fury of all nine of the tar cords could be felt. I ran over to grab the whip, and hurried my way back with an enemy the name of guilt growing in my stomach. The banjo in the background resembled me and Charlie's favorite song. I closed my eyes and witness our skips back and forth, as we both lifted a mirrored bent leg up and down. The cobbles on the ground added to the beat, and joy founds it way out through our physical movements. Opening my eyes to the chaos

before simulated an impression of a different dimension than the one I have lived in my whole life. The music was fine and dandy, the cargo was dejected and groggy.

I divert my attention to the Captain as I hold up the fetched whip he requested. He gives me a simple point, accompanied with a nod, to a woman with locked knees and shut palms. The confidence in my step concealed the shudder in my arms and hands. There was a look of intimidation she never resigned, especially when I stood before her. Her age was surely a triple of mine, yet I was the one with the reprimanding weapon. It wasn't natural. I generate a ferocious flog with just a quick pause one it neared the body to lighten the blow a bit, but I knew the Captain was watching and I needed him to believe I was committed to the trade. The same dejectedness started a movement within me, from my hands to my stomach and my mind. By the fifth whip I had completely forgotten my sense of presence. Maybe it was because of the woman's dignified composure, maybe it was the final poke to my soul's bubble, leaving all the air out for an emptiness inside. Whatever it was, something changed within.

Once the enslaved got their unfair share of exercise and sunlight, the men were led back down to the depths of the floating hell.

Women and children were to be left on the top deck for one more hour, then they were sent back to their less than desirable shelter. Trying to depart from my mental script replaying the events of the last two hours, I begin to observe every inch of my surroundings. There was a sense of ease that complemented my practice of using sensation to reject perception. I detected the lack of synchrony in the sails and waves, with the waves having an advance on the masts. I exercised the touch of my fingers along the wooden structures of the

ship, carelessly collecting splinters. I absorbed the noises of the the clash of waves, tools and rope. A stimulation of senses had always been the remedy for mental discomfort.

As I strained my hearing, I picked up on one of the sailormen harassing an enslaved woman. Her squinted eyes and scrunched eye brows suggested disgust, but her wide open mouth with a straightening of the bottom lip asserted fears. Some women simply allowed for the men of the ship to impose their sexual desires on the women, as a means for the women to get better treatment. Select sailors condemned the indiscretions of their perverted counterparts, but only because of their fear that the women would gain access to manipulation, breeding some sort of rebellion.

I continued to take my moment of sensations elsewhere, as the only thing I could do for the enslaved woman was make it worse. I peered over board, and felt a tingling in my toes and feet for the distance between the cobalt horizon and myself, but also because of the ominous presence of sharks creating a moving border of fear around the ship. The Captain possessed a symbiotic relationship with the finned predators; they followed for human sustenance, and the Captain gifted them slaves when the slaves' insurgency exceeded his toleration. Harvey told me Captain's also do this to make an example out of the courageous men; fortunately, I have not witnessed that yet.

I heard a creak behind me, but did not care to turn around at the moment. The cook greeted me, "don stand too close, them sharks git you faster than you sailors eat my food. They gobble you up in a short second."

The dark cook always perplexed me, as his English was proficient and he walked around the ship with an impressive sense of freedom. I heard he was an old slave that eventually was set free by his master and joined the crews of the slave trade. He must have a

remarkable ability to deactivate his emotions, as it can not be easy to see the human cargo as reminder of his past.

“How many people have you seen thrown over board in all the times of being on a slave ship?” I asked.

“More times than I able to count. Slaves, sailors and even captains have been thrown over. No one is ever truly safe on the slave ship. Some even have thrown themselves off board. It a wicked life,” he revealed.

“I understand that this is not the best living, but why would the slaves kill themselves? This has to be the worst of their experience, right? I don’t know about a slave’s life, but I know about a poor man’s life and there is always a chance to be better,” I argued.

“You know about the poor kid’s life, an experience much different than chattel slave. In many of them African cultures, we believe in the transportation to the homeland after mortality. Suicide missions just a way for the people to find they way back home,” he explained.

“I never thought of how different the people of Africa could be. I know we are different cultures, but we don’t even follow the same God!” I said surprised.

A slight smile made it’s way out of the Cook’s mouth, while he looked out passed the netted perimeter of the boat.

“We all have different beliefs ‘bout where the wonders of Earth come from, and no one knows who is right and wrong. No way to prove it. We all people.” He slid away into the cooking area around the corner.

## V: Stormy Weather, Stormy Mind

After the first four weeks of the voyage, the resistance and deaths began to plateau. The slaves and sailormen were becoming as habituated as possible to sea faring life and chained strife. I walked through the ship with more ease, but the same disgust. My disgust was dug deep in the corners of my mind, hiding from the awareness of my peers and Captain. The Captain could sense moral agents, and I had a suspicion he would not handle them with care. Sailors were investments, not profit and we could be left on the next island if we did not abide the the Sailor's expectations, whatever they were.

Harvey once told me about the perils of being left behind, as a fellow crewman was left behind after dropping the cargo in the New World on his first voyage. The captain and the crewman were both hotheads with the inability to maintain their composure in times of frustration. Once they the crewman had served all financial purpose for the captain, the captain made a small detour and dumped the crewman on a quiet island. The rest of the crew never heard of the sailorman again.

Today I decided I would ask the doctor for some advice on a stomach knot I have been dealing with for the past two weeks. I feel as if there is a knot in my stomach tightening and releasing, tightening and releasing, with increased pain at random intervals. I recognize that it is beginning to impede on my work.

I reach the doctor's office, and he seems to be inspecting Samuel's head. Samuel was always in and out of the doctor, I reckon they must be best friends by now. That or the doctor must be exhausted of Sam's carelessness and unceasing voice. The careless boy makes me feel like I am closer to Harvey's age than his. I let out a light knock on the frame of the entrance to let the doctor know I am there. The doctor was constantly swamped with slaves,

crewmen and even the Captain at times. Diseases plagued all men of the ship, bacteria and virus made no discriminations. We have already lost a couple of men and dozens of slaves. I saw James in there, a slave boy that the Captain favored as a James rather than the name, Olamide, his parents gave him.

I had developed a strange relationship with the freckled slave, possibly because he shared the same physical stature as Charlie. Me and him faced a barrier in communication, as he could only speak the same language of a small portion of the cargo, and he certainly did not understand English. Despite our communication barrier, our parallel energies and expressions disseminated the cultural hurdle. The children were able to play at the top of deck, and him and I would often find ourselves playing footie. It took him a while to truly understand the nature of the game, with his constant instinct of scooping the ball with his hands. I throw up hands and cross them to clarify that the hands are not a part of the game. Only feet and the football. He nods, but I never truly know if he understands.

When we gather up the slaves to go back down, I always made it a mission to scramble to the other side of the ship. I grabbed a random slave that never interacted with Olamide. I feared he would halt association with me at the sight of my hands touching his peers.

“Kid, I will not be able to see you for a while. Definitely not today. Remember, the cargo is always first,” as he pointed at the long line of slaves brushing near the gradient ends of death.

I nodded, and slumped my back as I slugged away. There was an interesting spin on inferiority depending on the value at hand. When it came to financial value and health, I was



inferior to the slaves. When it came to power, the slaves were inferior to me. We were all inferior by the bounds of the slave trade one way or another.

I hop inside the comfort of my hammock. Under the roof of the longboat above me, I peak at the sky's melancholic display. I couldn't tell if the sky was grey or blue; some streaks were still recognizable as blue but grey prevailed along the presence of the sky. The lightness of the clouds was concealed by the torment of the elements. We have had a couple days of rain, but this coming rain was surely going to be the worst. If the thunder's vocal threats did not assure me, it was the weaving lighting, up and under the clouds. There was something admirable about the last lightning I saw before closing my eyes, as it branched down to meet the horizon of water. The luminous streak connected nature's roof and base, the sky and the sea. I felt comfort in two entities of nature meeting as one.

Hours passed, as I dreamed of being back home roaming the streets of Liverpool with Charlie. My sleeping imagination had me going to church with Rose, drawing with my beloved brother and helping my mother prepare for supper. There was no room for anything extraordinary, as the reality of my life these past couple months sufficed in my demand for extraordinary.

Challenging my sleep, the wrath of the water, winds and sky pushed and yelled harder than ever. I reckoned I was about to experience my first storm on the sea. This was one of the two major perils the crewmen would always talk about, aside from the ingenuity of the enslaved. The other perilous fight slave ships often face is the malevolent pirates. Pirates were the bandits of the sea, irritating the Captain's voyage with raids and wrath. Some pirates had always been pirates, while others are former crewmen familiar with the workings of the slave trade. Luckily, that was not the issue we were facing now. Something the past couple

months have taught me was that malicious fouls were much more toxic from humans than the elements; human possess the sinister ability to direct their actions through target and discrimination.

The culmination of violent waves and thundering clouds kept me up. It was not long before the wails and worries of my fellow men forced me to pop out of my sleep sack. There was a sense of panic overtaking the countenances of everyone around me, the enslaved and the crew. Even the captain. A stillness within strapped my feet to the ground. I felt the residual wind of everyone running past me in all directions, trying to make sure equipment does not escape us and that nothing breaks.

Harvey runs past me, “you just gonna stand there?! Make yourself useful, go down and check on the slaves.”

I add a hint of urgency in my step for the purpose of looking productive, but I knew there was not much I could get done with the confusion riddling my brain. Could these shallow breaths be followed by death? Was this normal?

Stepping down the steps that were stained with every bodily fluid the body can produce, I began to monitor the slaves. Their puzzled faces looked for answer in my face, and I knew my troubled expression disappointed. I had been so used to seeing fear in their face, but here they saw my fear. I spot Olamide on the corner, crying as the push and pull of the ship knocked him into his peers. For once, we were all united in fear. It was all of us against the forces of nature; the wind held the whip this time.

I heard yelling above, and sprinted to the origins of the vocal terror. The reprimanding tone of the Captain unleashed on Harvey’s conscious, as Harvey readily arched his back for the next shape in this pattern. The Captain could probably swallow all of Harvey

and not look an inch larger; such a big frame was sure to knock the past, present and future out of Harvey. And there it was. The Captain brought back his arm for a charged slam against Harvey's rose-irritated cheek. The slap resonated with my pain receptors, feeling his effects on my own temples. There was a sense of resignation bleeding through the pores of my peer's face, without a single push of reaction.

The Captain yelled, "You are lucky I went soft on you, only because of who your father is! Never leave that tool out again. If a slave would have gotten it, you could have been the sole cause of a slave uprising."

The battered sailor simply nodded along with the Captain's yell, as the Captain polished his hand for another meeting with Harvey's face.

Visual resistance whipped my neck into any direction far from the Captain's mercilessness. Focusing my eye on the otherness of the situation guided me to a figure peaking from the sea. In a moment where everything around me was characterized by movement, I focused on the still figure showing itself for only a moment at a time, before the vehement waters attempted to blanket it. But it stood there, untethered and statue. I felt a pull of energy bringing me closer to my instrument of ease, before I realized it was literally getting closer. The ship may have also been attracted to the figure, as it ambivalently swayed to it. A squint and strain in my right eye revealed the true nature of it: it was a rock. Rocks always put up a fight, and we all know they never lose. They are nature's longest lifeline.

Without a search for audience, I yelled, "Rock! Rock! Someone please, a rock!"

My nine years of life were most evident in this moment, as my high screeches reached no one. I ran towards the Captain, interrupting his vocal and physical assault on Harvey.

I said, “Captain! We are approaching a rock. I was on my way to tell the whipstaff but I found you first.”

In a single second, Harvey’s trepidation bled onto the Captain’s face, starting at the pull down on the ends of his mouth, to the widening of his eyes. Without a word, he took off to the whipstaff, grabbing our arms as leashes to follow him. I allowed the guidance while concentrating on the nearing structure residing in the sea. We arrived to the spatially limited whipstaff room, all four of us experiencing half the cramp of the enslaved.

“Rock. Left back side, quickly emerging. We will steer with the same force of the winds around us. We must not lose everything!” the Captain said.

We all partake in the attempt to dodge the resting rock, without an utterance of fear or hope. I sense a changing orientation of the ship, but don’t recognize if it is enough. I meet Harvey’s swollen eyes with much anxiety, but this time he cannot help me. No one can. The cheers from the endangered end of the ship settled the speed of my heart.

One of the Captain’s officials stormed in and said, “It’s been avoided! Now just the storm.”

We all let out a healthy breath of ship air, one I appreciated more than ever. There is a moment of silence surrounding the four of us, as we examine our partners in avoiding the wreck. The Captain laid his heavy hands on my shoulders with a simple smile I had not witnessed before, other than when he was enjoying the pain he inflicted on his crew.

The Captain said, “Son. You were phenomenal. I can’t believe you were the first to tell me. Such a young lad. You must stay by my side and learn from me, there is a future for you in this life.”

With a shy tone, I said, “Thank you Captain. I’m only doing my job.”

The storm progressively tamed itself, beginning with the thunder and lighting and ending with a beaming sunshine. It felt odd seeing the sun again, I suspected Earth had taken that luxury away from me. Along with the sun, I was now beginning to experience other luxuries on the slave ship. The Captain developed a liking for my character and often asked me to join him and his officers in cards and drinking. I often pondered on how the ship did not sink with the amount of Whiskey weighing it down. I opted out of the paralyzing liquid. Something about the smell made my organs twitch.

I enjoyed the Captains treatment, mostly because he did not ask me to deal with the slaves as much as before. I couldn't remember the last time I fought someone's dragging feet with forceful push on the shoulder. I was able to play with Olamide and not feel ashamed of my duties and assaults on his fellow slaves. Olamide was a wild one; he would tap my back and quickly run away. He hid until I found him, and furiously chuckled when his spot was revealed. The light he emitted to me and those around him, brightened the conditions of the decks.

After the storm, the weather was significantly better with memorable sunsets and spiritual sun rays. Good weather meant the slaves were brought back up for mandatory dancing, despite their frail frames. They marched with the urgency of a criminal walking to his death sentence, with sad patterns overtaking their faces. Olamide was one of the only enslaved with a neutral countenance.

The banjo began with smiles and cheers emitting from the crewmen surrounding the enslaved. One of the officers grabbed the arm of a woman and dragged her with dancing fury around the deck. Another officer walked around with a threatening whip to inspire dance within the subjects. Some attempted to physically parallel the rhythm of the banjo, while

others embraced resistance. I chose to look away for a bit, and fixated on the sharks that were our best audiences this whole journey.

Unfamiliar shrieks called upon my attention. By now, I was familiar with the screams of those who best expressed their pain through their voice. This time it sounded different, with a higher pitch. I found that it was Olamide. It was clear to me that Olamide had hurt his ankle, maybe through a twist or a turn. My fellow crewmen did not recognize that, as he stretched his leg along the wood floor. The crewmen put practice to their whips, unceasingly lashing his crouched back. Olamide's cries only got louder, and the only reaction my mind vended was to intervene. I quickly approached my merciless peers.

"Stop! Stop! Don't you see he is hurt, stop!" I said.

"Kid, this is not your friend. He is a product! That is all and right now the product needs to be fix. No room for bad sugar in a crate," the sailor responded.

"No, he's hurt is what I am saying! You are making it worse," I said as I grabbed his arm with a deep pull to avoid another lashing.

I quickly recognized that was not a good idea. A complete pause took over his movement, as he slowly tilted his head down to the lingering prints of my fingers on his arm. He traced his eyes from his arm to my eyes, but with the speed of the slaves walking to their quarters. Once he met my eyes, he released a whip that I thought would touch Olamide's skin once again. But it did not. Instead, the whip was summoned to my leg, leaving a sting to stay. I fell to the ground, sharing this moment of neural chaos in my leg with Olamide. The Sailor pushed a giggle through his lips as he wandered away. No guilt, no remorse.

There I was, unified with Olamide once again. This time it wasn't our age, a game or energy that brought us together. Our bruised innocence and stinging sensations lifted the

curtain of power dynamics; the one that never let me see how similar me and Olamide really are. The color of my skin and location of my port was supposed to be a sufficient reason to separate me and Olamide, the crew and the enslaved, but the reality of our similarities still prevailed. We shared the same cry upon lash, the same agonizing sensation when it met our body, and same confusion as to how we deserved the life's most recent dealing. The money-eyed men of both of our countries have convinced us, along with the whole crew and the nations we take the cargo to, that we are not of the same species. A constructed reality resting over the roots of greed. African merchants and traders claimed to give us the bad batch of their nation, such as prisoners and debtors, but I no longer believed it. They stole Olamide from his life, just like the Captain stole me from my life back home. Our victimization was just a byproduct of other's insatiable hunger for wealth and power. Now I see the price of wealth, only exchanged with the currency of selfishness and immorality.

I bent my leg and pushed a new force forward as I stood up, balancing myself with the ship's movement. I look back down to Olamide, and extend the only thing I had to offer him: my hand. He extended his arm as he shifted all of his weight on his untwisted ankle and my arm as he pulled himself up.

The Captain called for the slaves to be escorted to the bottom decks of the ship once again. This is one of the moment I felt fortune in my small frame, as I weaseled through the bodies around me, sneaking to my hammock. I did not fancy the invisibility of the hammock in this moment, so I hopped on the longboat above. I could not even get myself to care about pool of sickness. A bed of bacteria was not so bad when I have already been around a different type of sickness this voyage, a virus of the mind.

I sat there with the image of Olamide being whipped overtaking my eyes, and the screeches of his pain infiltrating my ears. The tapping of my feet reached new levels, as the long boat began to rock back and forth. There was so much uncomfortable energy oscillating in my small body. Making myself a meal for the sharks even crossed my mind. But Charlie, Albert, my mother and Rose floated through my mind, too. They had no idea what was going on here, and I had no idea what was going on there. Usually that thought would kill me, but in this moment I felt comfort in knowing their perception was far from reality. Thinking of my family made me think of not only Olamide's family, but the families of everyone here. sailors, enslaved and the captain. Did the captain's wife and children know the cruelty he induced? I wondered where Olamide's family was. It was clear that he was here alone, as he never showed evidence of past relationships with anyone on the ship. I imagined his family scattered over the ships of the Atlantic, accepting the fact that they would never see their loved ones again. Now I understood the tempt of the afterlife.

## VI: The Black Skulled Flag

The days following me and Olamide's whipping, I retreated from socialization. Talking felt like heavy lifting with my weak lips, and playing any type of card or ball games was a forced fatigue. I did my job and went straight to my hammock. The Captain would often invite me to join him and his officers for solitaire, drinking and supper but the fervor of my thoughts stole my presence. Spending time with them brought different variations of the question: "You alive, kid?" They sensed something was wrong, and I was thankful that they never truly asked where the melancholia was coming from.



For once, I felt a calm on the ship. Everything seemed quiet, I could not even hear the cry of the slaves or the laughter from the drunken sailors. I guided my eyes to the skies, the only continuity in my life. One that never failed me, and never lost its beauty. Sometimes I chose to stare straight into the sun, it blinds me but allows for a whole new vision. For a couple seconds I am somewhere else, wherever I chose. As my eyes began to assimilate back to the sky's bright blue, I heard a shot. My first thought was that a slave had been disobedient and the captain was making an example out of him. Sometimes the captain chose to throw them overboard, I guess today he chose his musket. I attempt to ignore it, intervening in this one might mean death. I continued to fixate on the cloudy skies and saw a fire coming at our ship. It was in the air, and it clearly was aimed at us. The startle in me had me leaping out of my hammock, and before my feet hit the ground full panic was evident. I peaked in the direction the fire came from and I saw the black flag approaching us. Coming at us slowly, the staple ebony flag with a piercing skull confirmed that they were pirates. This is the moment many had talked about, something much worse than a storm.

I heard rowdy yells inch closer and closer. Squinting my eyes, I was able to make up the drunkenness of the sailors. They were screaming, each with a bottle in hand. I could not make out their words, but their dance moves were clear. They hopped, leaped, skipped and sung. Hooking arms and jumping around. I was frightened, but it was also the most fun I had witnessed in the last year. There was genuine laughter emitted in our direction, and soon it would be at our expense.

I heard the captain a couple feet behind me let out the nastiest combination of words possible. The yells never stopped.

“Look at the damn vapping! Those thieves don’t know that that scare me away! Not my crew, not today!” said the Captain.

I wanted to believe him, but I was scared. There was nothing scarier than firearms, evil and laughter combined. Especially when you fit alcohol into the equation. I hoped they were so drunk that they would miss, but something told me they were quite experienced. What I found most interesting was the women on the ship. They accompanied the men twirling to the beat, singing, and drinking. There were no clear divisions, everyone was consumed by fun and laughter.

“Everybody get firearms, be prepared! Cannons ready!” said the Captain.

I was having one of those moments again. The moments where the commotion around me paralyzed me. It was like the men running around me with firearms and fear stole all my energy; they were more proactive than usual and I could not get myself to release a step forward. I soon saw two other smaller ships treading on the sides of the large brigantine. It was clear that they were well prepared the battle they were about to wage.

Our men naturally formed a line throughout the floors of the ship, extending their firearms prepared for the inevitable. Once the sea thieves revealed themselves, they almost never backed down. Once they recognized that we were not going to simply just hand them cargo for the mere purpose of fear, they got their muskets ready.

There we were on a liquid battlefield. It was our trembling faces versus their insidious laughter. The Captain went to the back, attempting to hide the moneybox. I ran down to get a look of the chained men below deck. They were completely unaware of the madness that was about to break out. I sat there for a bit, I wondered if I was around their ignorance long enough that it would seep on me. I did not want to face the fact that the men of the

nearby ship might leave my life to sink to the bottom of these seas. After sitting on the stairs in silence for minutes, I began to hear the rapid firing. The exchange was evident; the direction of the shots was illustrated in the noise of the fires. My near dead eyes made contact with Olamide, he was just as confused as I was. I knew what was happening, but I did not know why it was happening. This could be God's form of message, we had not exactly been model humans this past year.

The muskets and cannon from both parties were working endlessly. I did not want to see who was winning. I knew that some of our men had to have gone down by now and I felt guilt for hiding with the cargo. I did not feel guilty enough to join though. My feet were planted to the safety of the bottom deck. I heard a small crash onto our boat and the acoustics began to amplify on our boat. The pirates had made it onto our ship.

Their screaming, laughing, and singing persisted, as if they were the paid entertainment at my hometown festival. It only continued to escalate. I began to inch up to get an up close glance at our opponents. I tried to dehumanize and make them into animals, but the reality was that they were just as human as us. The women looked motherly, and the men were almost respectable. A woman with a cinched white dress, with massive sleeves and a pink bow spotted me and quickly rushed in my direction. Just like that, the paralysis that prevailed this whole battle ceased and I was able to run faster than I ever have. There was musket half the size of her in her hand and I knew her mission was to send me to the heavens, or hells. Afterlife did not seem so appealing anymore. Every five steps I made sure to knock chairs, sailors, alcohol or anything I could find to slow her down. She was yelling something, but I was not attempting to hear a word she uttered.

“Son! Son! Stop running. You don't have to stay here, you can join us,” she said.

My mum taught me to never trust a word from a criminal's mouth, so my quick feet continue around the ship.

"I promise I will not hurt you! I would just like to speak to you! I will even put my musket down," she said.

I slowed my pace at the sight of her surrendering her musket. I let her continue to move forward, as there was a sort of tenderness in her expression. Nevertheless, I was still not trust her. I heard the pirates enjoyed making a game out of raiding, digging their knife deeper into wounded skin. With a thick, translucent, barrier sitting in between us, I let her begin.

"I know that you have been taught to hate us. I know that we seem like the bad guys in this situation. We may be. It might be the case where it is just two devilish groups against each other," she said.

I could not tell where her words were taking her, as her attempt in equating us was so strong. She bent down to my level and rested her arm on my shoulder. It reminded me of when my mother tried to make me feel safe. This lady was good. I was not aware of the level of sophistication in the characters the pirates would play to fool us. I ambivalently stepped back to assure her that my youth did not equate to stupidity.

"What do you want? Why are you talking to me? Can't you just grab the cargo and go?" I said.

"Sure. We will be taking some of course. But we hope to be taking some of your sailors and enslaved too. Many of our pirates are former sailors and slaves. We have given them the opportunity to escape the authoritarianism of the slave ship. On our ships, everyone

is equal under the black flag. In each of our actions, you can find a thread of influence from every crewman on our ships,” she said.

It began to seem like less of a joke to me. I could not make sense as to why she would be trying to make me go with her so badly. She did not seem all that bad. There was a soft smile in all of her words; it could be heard as the rhythm of soothe. There was a depth to her eyes, with a teal that surrounded a light green.

“Why would you want me to go?” I asked.

“Right now, all of our men are approaching your men with the same proposal I had for you. I always make it my mission to find the children crew members and bring them on board to our ship, because often it is them who have been subjected to some of the worst treatment on the ship. We want to offer you a way out. You can still make money this way, except you won't be under a tyrannous Captain!” she said.

Her arguments were beginning to sound more convincing, but I could not imagine myself just leaving this ship. How would I get home? What if I never saw my family again? I would take the whips from three hundred sailors before I made a decision that would keep me from my family forever.

“But I don't want to live this life forever. I came to make money for my family, not to neglect them. I need to see them again. They are all the way in Liverpool. There is no way I will go with you,” I said.

“Son! Liverpool is one of the biggest ports in the world! Of course we will be going near that area. Our pirates work towards a democracy and you will have the right to leave and be with your family again when you choose. Can I just ask you one question?” she asked.

“Go ahead” I said, as I used my hand as a gesture to rush her. I was afraid my Captain or someone else would witness this interaction. Who knows what would happen to a betraying sailor, but I certainly did not want to find out.

“Do you like how you are forced to treat these people below deck? Do you identify with them in the least bit when you see them eat, sleep, cry, or hurt?” she asked, engaging in a deep trance of eye contact with me.

I broke eye contact and shifted my eyes to the alcohol and blood-stained wooden floor. I was searching for my answers on the very floor that I laid next to Olamide recently. Truthfully, I did not have to search. I knew how I felt, the answer laid within the patterns of my nightmares and dwelling heart these past couple months. Nonetheless, there was a force in throat so used to filtering the truth out that I could not find a way to verbalize that guilt and immorality. I could feel the sense of disgust seeping into the corners of my face.

“I do not like it. I don’t know why, but I do not like it,” I quickly said, as I turned to see if there was anyone to hear my controversial response.

“Then come with us. We are abolitionists, which means we work along the pirates to fight for the abolition of the slave trade. Your experiences and testimony could greatly help us in building an even stronger case against the floating prison and hell you have been living in this dreadful voyage” she said.

An abolitionist? I did not understand too well what she meant, but I did understand that she could take me and Olamide away from these poisonous decks. I heard that she could take me back home. At any point during the voyage, the Captain could choose to leave his sailors off in the middle of nowhere; there may be less risk in me going with the pirates. Their black flag with a menacing skull appealed to me for some reason too. It reminded me

of how I thought of the afterlife: no rules, no norms, no tyranny. The men of the pirate ship lived outside of the law and rules, but that necessarily did not mean they were immoral. Sometimes using the law and norms as a moral compass could be the very mechanism to destroy the goodness in one. Everything on the slave ship was legal, authorized and encouraged by the wealthy and politicians of the Liverpool, Africa and the New World, yet there were people dying and being abused every day for a simple penny.

Behind me, I hear a glass thrown at the the ridges of the wooden floor. I saw little pieces of glass scattered everywhere around my feet and the lady in the white dress quickly grabbed me. At first, I thought this is where they reveal their joke on me, but then I realized she was using herself as a shield for me. Coming from the direction the glass flew from, footsteps approach cracking the particles of glass even more.

“What in bloody hell are you doing? You are a dull-wit kid. How will you ever be a man when you can be convinced so easily by the enemy? They have come to attack us and now you consider leaving with the enemy! With that mind, you will be stuck in a perpetual life of a cowardly boy. You haven’t even helped your men one bit during this attack,” yelled the Captain.

What I had feared most was occurring. The Captain overheard me and the lady speaking, and now I could probably never fix the Captain’s perception of me. I am not sure if I even wanted to. What he said was true. I hadn’t helped any of my fellow crew members since the pirate attack began. There was a default still my body subscribed to every time the energy around me got chaotic. Even if I could do much, I was against men who were double my size and triple my experience. The truth was that the Captain, along with the rest of the crew never saw me for what I really was. That was not their job; their job was to squeeze all

the duties out of me to assure I was an investment and not a financial loss. I now understand that, and I see that my fellow crewmen understand that too. They took the treatment for the little money they could make. What truly troubled me was the complete disregard for the brains and hearts of the chained individuals in the deck below. In the process of forgetting the humanity of our walking cargo, I almost forgot my own. A part of my heart and mind was deactivated, by my own choice. I could no longer live with half a heart and mind; the only way I can live with the fullness of an empathetic heart and rational mind is leaving the practices that deter me from them.

I turned up at the ruffled fluffs sitting on the pirate's arm, and brought my eyes to meet hers.

“Do I just hop on your boat? Can I bring a friend?” I asked the lady.

“Of course! But you must hurry, we do not have much time!” she said.

I began to ran off to quickly gather my things and Olamide. I had to bring him with me. I was not sure how I would communicate this to him or what this could mean for him, but I'm sure growing up in the democratic realms of the sea would be better than the dictatorship of enslavement, on sea or land. As I was running through the ship, I felt like I was before a theatrical performance of madness, violence and savagery. Living in the depths of the Liverpool's poverty was ugly; but this was a different kind of ugly I never thought I would see.

There were bloody scenes, but this time it was the blood of my fellow white men. There were slaves running around, unaware of what step to take next. I think some of them just enjoyed the first seconds of freedom in their life, simply jumping and running about.



Others were being funneled onto the other ship. There was a complete new energy in the air, and I could feel the dewiness of it on my pores. I almost enjoyed seeing the madness.

Finally, upon turning the corner by the cook's space I found Olamide. Olamide was crouching in the comfort the the Cook. He was not even half as amused as I was. There was a tremble in his lips, vibrating back and forth.

"I think dis remind him of when they took him. This the kind of madness you see when you taken from your home and sold into the slave trade. It a different skin tone, same process. Stealing through force. He probly think he gon get taken again and he could be" said the cook.

I turned around and imagined the horror of this happening in my own home, with Albert and my mum around. I couldn't imagine what the thoughts consuming Olamide's head could be, but I am sure they were not pretty. I observed him closing his eyes and shaking his head with full force.

"These are good pirates! We could go with them be free and safe. I promise. Come with me! You will see" I said.

"They aint always like that. Sometimes they try to sell the slaves on they own" he said.

"I don't think so! Not these people. They said they were abolitionist trying to break the slave trade. Why would they tell me that when I am not an African?" I asked.

"Alright. I have heard some stories of the good pirates. Never thought I would come across them. Maybe we better go" said the cook.

He grabbed Olamide's shaking body and guided him in my direction. I walked toward the flock entering the pirates ship. I spotted Harvey getting on it too. That made me feel a

million times better about my decision, his experience always informed him well. Running through the ship, I caught a last glance at the Captain as he fought one of the pirates, I wondered what this meant for him. He lost over half his cargo, as some were set free and others joined the buccaneers. About half of his crew were leaving him too. The ship owners were surely going to make him pay.

One by one, men, slaves and pirates shifted from one ship to the other. Just like that the Captain and his officers were stripped of the power they thought was absolute. I never thought about it until now. The power he held over me and peers, that fear that persisted, was only a product of our conformation. One simple breach in the power dynamic changed everything, and the Captain, officers and enslaved were now all ordinary people again.

Once I hopped over to the pirate's ship, there was a flow of relief pulsing from my heart to my mind. Seeing Olamide and the Cook step on it as well, brought me to another level of comfort. The ship's dance over the waves felt the same as the slave ship, but there was no fear roaming in the air. I could hear the Captain yelling from the other ship, every possible derogatory term you could think of. I felt nothing for him. I was not happy this was happening to him, but I also was not upset. He had to understand the perils of immoral work, and if not he was surely learning right now. We began to inch off, and as we parted I studied the ship that a different version of Phineas entered, one that this version of me left.

## VII: Open Eyes

There was an interesting mix of men making up the population of the black flagged boat. Young, mid-aged, old, white, black, good and bad. There were no lines of division in work or treatment. It was a floating democracy rooted in egalitarian mischief. The first part

of the permanently borrowed cargo that was brought out, other than the humans, was the alcohol. Bottles and bottles of whiskey and rum were opened, with no intention to close. The pirate ship veterans were dancing, singing, drinking basking in their gains. Some slaves were confused, while others understood. The ones that did understand fashioned a smile; something I previously thought the Africans did not share with the rest of humanity.

The ship was pure chaos, but in the most celebratory manner. Everyone was cheering from a win. Harvey was even dancing and singing. I always suspected he harbored a deep hate for the slave trade in the deep corners of his mind, as well as the pockets of his heart. I looked around and searched for Samuel, but I did not find him anywhere. I guess that dense brain of his couldn't fathom the problems coming for the Captain and anyone by his side.

"Alright lads. Welcome to the *Eye*, a ship in search for people and prizes. I am Henry and we hope you don't regret your decision, but if you do we are sorry. Not really, though," said a dark-haired man. He seemed to run the ship, as his aura of wisdom and experience could be detected from across the ship. His ivory top was ripped and bottoms were bright red.

"Hello, I am Therese. Our main purpose in seizing the cargo of slave ships roaming through the Atlantic is because we find their work deplorable, in every aspect. Lives of sailors and the enslaved are disregarded, simply for the prize of profit. We want this to stop, even if it is one ship at a time," said the lady who brought me here.

Therese was one of those people you wanted to be around. Without even attempt, she made others feel like things were always going to be okay. She was the ship's holy mother, on standby for help at any moment. I had no idea where I was going next, and I didn't know when I would be home but I knew I would meet my family and friends again. There was not

even a hint of doubt. I also knew I would not meet them with the heavy pounds of guilt that sat on my shoulders before.

Once Therese was done speaking, I made my way to find her. Just like my first day on the slave ship, my mind was flooded with questions. As she passed by me, I tapped her arm.

“Hi Therese. I have some questions. How do things work here?” I asked.

“That’s a broad one, but I can try and help explain. We simply just search for nearby ships, sometimes we eye them for days and then launch an attack. We only search for slave ships because many of us are abolitionists,” she said. As she began organizing the alcoholic cargo into a corner of the ship.

“So did this begin as an effort to abolish the slave trade?” I asked.

“Not exactly. I actually was staying off a Caribbean port in the New World gathering data so we could build a case before the Parliamentary. We have been successful in small doses but we want the whole slave trade to be abolished for good. I met Henry at the same port, as he was observing the manners of the Captains and crew to find their weaknesses on the sea” she said.

“So Henry was not an abolitionist to begin with?” I asked.

“Not exactly, and I am not sure how much of an abolitionist he is today. We just became great friends at the port and figured we could benefit each other’s causes” she said, as searched for more boxes to organize.

I continued to observe the ship. It was the same as ours, in terms of the brown build and white masts. Except there was nothing in the middle of the ship to keep the slaves in control. There were no sharks following us, as the smells of blood were not present. I finally

felt like I could breath normally without getting the scents of death in my lungs. The bottom deck of the ship was simply for storage of materials, no humans. Everyone had the same quarters and access to goods. Each approach to slave ships was the product of everyone's input. We were all equal: age, shape, wealth, and color played no role.

I found a corner of the ship to place my hammock, and near that corner I found Olamide. I waved my hand in the direction of my hammock, hoping he would station next to me. He understood me; I was beginning to think he understood the difficulties of the English language. There we placed our hammocks and laid. We just stared up, no words had to be said. The sky was our common language and we just basked in it intricacy. The cloud was a vibrant ivory today, looking like white roses floating through a peaceful teal backdrop. I looked over at Olamide and there was a look of pure amazement taking over his countenance. He hadn't been able to wholly enjoy the favors of the sky in shackles or chains, especially not below deck. Now, the wind was hitting his face with friendliness and comfort. Life felt exactly as it should be, with the freedom to feel the wind and observe the sky. The luxuries we are born with.

## Afterword

The world of market and international politics we know of today were all shaped by the perilous slave trade. Resting on the roots of Capitalism is the Transatlantic trade, the banning of the slave trade shaped international politics and human rights into what we know today. Without the ban of the slave trade, international law as we know it today would be immensely different. These are two effects of the slave trade that we see lingering in today's society; two of the reasons why I found it so important to narrate an experience on a Transatlantic slave ship. The slave ship story brings back the immensity of these institutions to a system of humans. I attempted to write this piece with similar language to the abolitionists of the time; doing this exhibits how words can inspire an ethical revolution. Although writing and researching this topic has been an emotional storm for me, I find it really important to keep the horrors of history alive in today's public conversation.

The Transatlantic Slave Trade seems like something so far removed from the present moment but it is what has shaped us into the modern society we have today. Not only has the slave trade shaped our modern world, there are ways in which we can still relate to all parties involved. We understand the poverty Phineas lived in, as it is still present today. We still hear of the abuse of large groups of humans for the financial desires of a small groups of individuals. We can feel the pain, in our hearts and in our bones, when reading about the treatment of the enslaved.

A goal of mine in writing this novella was to humanize the events that the history books make people feel so far from. Furthermore, I hope that reading this has encouraged readers to questions the lucrative institutions that are so prevalent today. What is going on behind closed doors of these major institutions? There was a time where there were not

enough questions over the slave trade, as it prevailed for hundreds of years. Not enough questions, and a excess of greed, can leave large groups of people to do things that are so clearly against humanity. Making greedy practices into norms can lead individuals like Phineas and his family to believe in the opportunity and hope in joining the slave trade, without thinking of the moral perils of the decision.





