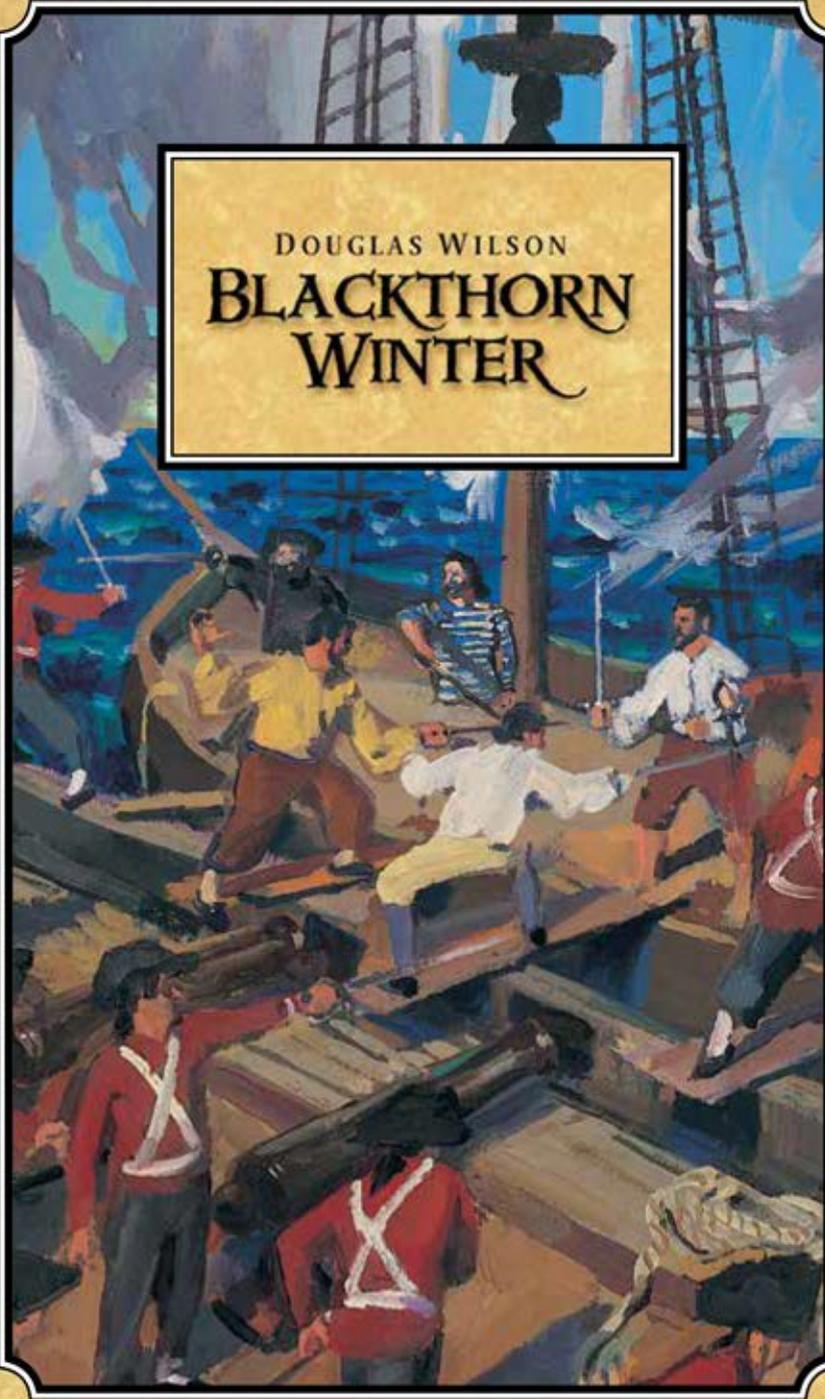


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BLACKTHORN
WINTER



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*For Rory Douglas Wilson.
May you always defeat the pirates.*

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FASCINATION

A NUMBER OF YEARS AGO, probably when your grandfather was a little boy, there was another young boy named Jim Monroe who lived alone with his mother. Her name was Sandra, and she was by nature a very pleasant woman. But even so, because of her circumstances, she was harried and somewhat distracted. A few years before our story begins, her husband had been killed in the Korean War, and she was left to provide for and bring up her son and manage the small remains of a once-large estate. But that requires more of an explanation, and so I suppose I shall have to give one.

Because of the nature of the story I would like to tell you, I cannot say exactly where they lived, but since the story itself will give some things away, I can tell you that it was somewhere in the Tidewater area of southern Maryland or northern Virginia. Beyond this, I am afraid I have to ask you not to be too curious. Honesty

also requires that I tell you that I have changed around the names of some of the towns and rivers I mention just to help you not be more curious than you should be. So if you have done well in your geography lessons, you will notice some inconsistencies in the following descriptions.

But though I have told you not to be, Jim was curious, and that is why I have such an interesting story to tell you. He was not curious about everything, but on a few subjects you have probably not met a more curious boy. His brown eyes were deep and inquisitive, and when it grew long enough to see, he had dark hair. Jim had a pleasant nature, like his mother, but I have to say that he was quite a bit more adventurous. One of the things that fascinated his curious heart more than anything else was the whole subject of pirates. Whenever he had a free moment, his thoughts would drift naturally and easily back to his favorite pirate caves and coves, pirate treasures, pirate battles and crimes, and of course to the great pirate captains. He did not admire them at all, but they did thrill him. On rainy afternoons especially, he would seek out his favorite books to read and reread some of the stories.

You may think that this was just a short enthusiasm. Young boys often have such great interests that only last for a short time and then fall away as soon as they are distracted by another one. But Jim loved his pirate stories faithfully. The interest had come upon him one day in the previous school year, when his teacher, Miss Robinson, had mentioned in passing that the great pirate Blackbeard had once landed several miles from where the school was, and a very short way from his house.

Up to that point, Jim had known a number of pirate stories, just as all boys do, but they had all been “simply stories.” He had thought of them the same way you might think about *Treasure Island*, as an exciting story that could never happen anywhere, to anyone. But for some reason, the fact that Blackbeard had landed on the banks of a creek just down the road from his house made everything very close and very real, and for the first time an interest in pirates seized Jim by the throat. What used to be remote and distant was now ever present in his imagination. That very afternoon, Jim had checked a book out of the library on Blackbeard. And when he lay in bed reading that night, he came to the story of how Lieutenant Maynard had sailed against Blackbeard down in Caroline and fought a glorious battle with him, bringing the pirate’s head back to Virginia hanging from the bowsprit of his ship. Jim set the book carefully down on the floor beside the bed, turned out the light, and for the next several hours he had been too excited to sleep.

Your grandfather and Jim almost certainly never met, but they may have lived in the same kind of house. Jim and his mother lived in a grand old house that the family had built around the turn of the century. It was red colonial brick, but the style was too sturdy and close to the ground to be considered in the colonial style. Though this house was built around 1910, the Monroe family had actually been living somewhere on the same property since the early eighteenth century. The Monroes had once been very well-to-do, but this was sadly not the case now. This is where the “remains of an estate” I mentioned earlier come in. In the very early



years, the Monroes had been wealthy, but the family fortunes had declined markedly after the War Between the States. Even so, they still maintained a respectable place in the community for quite a long time, and when Jim had been born, the estate still had several hundred acres. But after Jim's father had died in the war, the various taxes they had to pay had imposed a horrible burden, and his mother was forced to sell off some of that acreage. But even this did not end their financial troubles.

Because she could only work part-time, Jim's mother had not been able to keep up on the property taxes for so much land—they owned about fifty acres still, down to an inlet south of their home. Sandra sometimes felt that it would be far easier to just sell everything and buy a house in town—but when she reflected on the fact that Jim was the last of the family with the name Monroe, and that the family had been on this land for hundreds of years, she kept trying to work out a way to stay. She had not been born a Monroe, and she did not feel right making that kind of decision for Jim. When he was grown, he could move away if he wanted, but she did not want the responsibility of trying to explain to him why she had not kept their land. And so she determined to remain until there were no choices left.

Their property taxes had been in arrears for several years, and they had another court date scheduled in several weeks' time. The judge had said at the last hearing that he was very sorry, but that if payment of five thousand dollars was not made to the county clerk by the next hearing, then the government would have to take direct action to collect their back taxes. And that meant seizure of

the property, she was sure. The judge had said he was sorry, but Sandra didn't think he looked sorry. His name was Jonas Beard, and he was a very important man in their small community—he now served as judge, and before that he had spent many years on the school board. But for all his apparent public spirit, he was still a puffy and self-important man.

There were no relatives to help them, and no one to borrow money from. But one day, Sandra had an idea. The attic contained a few notable family heirlooms, objects she would never part with. But the attic also contained much older furniture, significant to no one, but which might attract the attention of antique dealers. So she decided to have a sale and emptied most of the furniture out of the attic down into the garage. The dark wood attic now seemed enormous and very dusty, and it somehow looked older and far less familiar than it had been before.

When they had cleared everything out, Jim and his mother found a trunk of old books in a back corner. Most of them were history books, but there were also a few books of theology and some old grammars. Sandra gave Jim the job of sorting out any books that he might want, and to set the others aside for the sale. And that is how Jim found the old letter in the attic on a very rainy day. On both ends of the attic, small windows opened up to a gray sky, and Jim did not know why, but all of it seemed very appropriate.

As he rummaged through the box, the title of one book caught his attention immediately. It was called *A General History of Pirates* by a Captain Robert Johnson. The date of publication was 1852,

but the book had been written a century before that. The pages on the side had that rough cut which old books sometimes have. Jim started to read through it, and felt the familiar lump of excitement well up in his throat. But then he remembered he had a job to do, and reluctantly set the book aside to take down to his room later. But as he did so, he noticed a piece of paper sticking out the side, near the back of the book. At first he thought it was one of the rough cut pages that had come loose. But when he looked closer, and opened the volume again, he saw that it was an old letter.

He gently opened it. There were five or six pages to it, and the paper was water stained and yellow. The paper creaked when it opened, and Jim had to handle it gingerly. In places, the ink was smudged by the water but fortunately most of it was legible. It took him a few moments to figure out who had written the letter and who had received it. But the date on it was 1935, and the name of the recipient was Leonard, and the one who had written it was your "affectionate grandfather." Jim's father's name was Leonard. There were no last names anywhere. For all Jim could assume at that moment, it was just an old newsy letter to his father that would make his mother cry. But even so, before he read a word of it, he knew that it was far more important than this. When he thought about the moment of discovery later, he concluded that his knowledge came from a combination of the gray sky, the pirate book the letter was in, and the desperate circumstances he and his mother were in. "It was just a pirate kind of day," he explained to me later.

So it was probably a letter to his father, written when his father was a boy, and it was written to him by his grandfather. The letter was telling him how the family fortune had been made back in the first part of the seventeen hundreds. And it had been quite a fortune. "Dear Leonard..." the letter began.

But of course, now I have to back up for a moment. This letter that Jim found certainly did not contain everything that I am about to tell you. But the letter did lead to a number of other discoveries, and during the course of these discoveries, many other interesting facts came to light. For example, Jim's mother remembered some things her father-in-law had once said, things she had not understood at the time. She also found some interesting written comments made in some old family histories and genealogies. And a few of the family members in the early years had even been important enough to have had biographies written about them, and Sandra carefully read through them, trying to piece things together. Jim, for his part, not only had found the letter in the book, but also was able to contribute what he knew about pirates. And he also played a very important role later on, which I will have to tell you about when we get to that place in the story.

So, though I suppose I could tell you the story as it came out for them, in dribs and drabs, I do not think that is really the best way to do it. Although it was very exciting for them at the time, it would be very poor story-telling on my part indeed. And so I have decided to tell you all the facts as they looked once they were finally sorted out and placed in a proper order.

I suppose I should introduce myself as well. I was a friend of

Jim's father in the war, and after the war, I looked in on Sandra and Jim from time to time to see how they were getting on. At first I did this because of my friendship with Leonard, and a sense of duty I suppose. But as time went on I found that I had a keen interest in Sandra. But all that had already started some time before this adventure started. Nevertheless, because of it, I was close enough to the whole thing to be able to tell you the details of the story. And so I suppose I had better get to it now.

A VERY IDLE BOY

THOMAS INGLE WALKED SLOWLY DOWN THE STREET. The year was 1705, the third year of the reign of good Queen Anne, and Thomas was now fifteen years old. He had been born in the second year of the reign of King William and Queen Mary, and he had grown so quickly he was almost ready to go out into the world. But the world was already very different from the one he had entered just a short time before.

Just like Jim Monroe, he lived alone with his mother, who supported them both by working as a day servant in the home of a wealthy tobacco merchant, a man named John Hutchins, who was a friend of the governor. Tom's father had been lost at sea five years earlier—whether to a storm or to pirates, no one knew. All they knew was that his ship had left the mouth of the Chesapeake in late spring, and that it had never arrived in England.

Thomas had stayed at home to finish his schooling, at the insistence of his mother. He had asked her many times if he could apprentice himself as a ship's boy, and she had always said, "Someday, Tom. But you must master your books first." And so he had worked hard, but felt badly because he was doing nothing to support his mother. She was only able to make about ten pounds of tobacco a day—tobacco was the currency in those days—and so they lived at a very modest level indeed. Thomas would tell her often that when he could go to sea, he would soon enough make their fortunes, and he would then come back, and they could buy a small farm. Land was not that expensive, but it was still beyond their means, and there was even more money to be spent in setting up a farm. She was glad for his desire to work in order to help, but warned him more than once that fortunes are not obtained just by going to sea, and that words on their own can't fill a bucket. Once he had pressed the point, and she had said, "Mere wishes are silly fishes." She was always saying things like that.

Thomas was a well-built boy, and handsome in appearance, as his mother told him once. He had sandy, blond hair, which was tied off in the back. His breeches and shirt were home-spun, but well-kept up for all that. But his shoes were old and tattered, and the buckles on them were starting to come off. Shoes were expensive, and after his lessons were done every day, Thomas used to spend many hours walking along the creek banks and in the woods, thinking and dreaming about the sea. His mother had told him not to be so hard on his shoes, but it was difficult for Thomas to walk without being hard on them.

As he walked down the street, Thomas suddenly stopped in order to listen to a commotion that was taking place in the shop he had just passed. He turned around just in time to see a young man tumble headlong down the front steps of the candlemaker's shop—that candlemaker being one Mr. Jos. Whidby, as it read on his sign. He was a small, rotund man, but he was energetic, hardworking and strong. These were all characteristics that made him most impatient with his apprentice, Isaac Taylor—the young man who was now lying on the street at Thomas' feet. Mr. Whidby stood in the doorway of his shop with puffed out cheeks, which were purple and unused to this uncharacteristic temper. He then clambered down the steps, pulled Isaac to his feet, boxed his right ear, and said, "There! That's to send you off with! Tell your father that your apprenticeship is over, that you are a lazy no-account of a boy, and that if he wants to settle the money with me, he may come see me at his leisure." With that, Mr. Whidby hit him on the side of the head again, turned abruptly, and stumped up the stairs and back to his candles. Most of the time, he was a jolly and pleasant man. Thomas heard him muttering as he went back into his shop, "It could rain porridge, and he'd have lost his bowl!" The door slammed tight.

Isaac just stood there for a moment, rubbing his ear. He had a shock of disheveled brown curly hair, puffy lips, and an unpleasant complexion. Thomas did not like him, but he also felt sorry for him sometimes.

"What did you do, Isaac?"

Isaac looked up startled. "Oh, hullo, Thomas." He continued to rub his ear.

“What did you do?”

“I was just resting and thinking. Mr. Whidby seems to care more about his candles than important things.”

Thomas knew Isaac to be a very idle young man, and so he said nothing. They started to walk down the street together.

“My father told me that if this apprenticeship failed, then I had to make my own way. I can’t go home now.” Thomas knew that Isaac was seventeen, and that it was long past the time for him to be out in the world, and so he nodded silently. Mr. Taylor had tried three times before to set Isaac up in an apprenticeship, and now this was the fourth failure. So then Thomas asked, “What are you going to do?”

“That is what I was thinking about when Mr. Whidby interrupted me. I didn’t like making candles. Who wants to make dumb candles? I am going to make my fortune, and I am not going to do it the way these stupid shopkeepers do, a penny a day. I met some gentlemen at the Oar and Compass last week, and they invited me to come to sea with them.”

“Oar and Compass? Isaac, those men were pirates and villains! Governor Seymour sent word to the tavern and ran them off.”

“Pah!” Isaac puffed his lips out further. “The governor here is hot and unhappy, just like Mr. Whidby. But these same men have dined with the governor down in Caroline. They are just gentlemen of fortune. And they have been most welcome in Pennsylvania.”

“Isaac, they are not gentlemen at all. They are buccaneers. If you go with them, you risk swinging.”

“All I know is that they have their fortune. You should have seen how they bought drinks for everyone, out of a sack of pieces of eight.

They were generous and full of adventure. Not like Mr. Whidby. And besides, Thomas, nobody really knows what a pirate is. Some folks call them pirates, but lots of them are privateers. And most everybody buys things from them sometimes—even Mr. Whidby did once.”

“That’s different,” Thomas said. “When the king says you can’t buy things you need from anyplace but England, and England doesn’t send it to you, and the pirates have it, I don’t think there is anything wrong with it.”

Isaac snorted, “Thomas, when you are as old as me, you’ll know better. If it isn’t wrong to be with the buyers, why would it be wrong to be with the sellers?”

“Because the sellers are murdering pirates! They kill people—they probably murdered my father.”

Isaac decided against arguing the point, and the two walked down the street together. After a few moments, Isaac spoke again. “I am going to go home—I have to get a few things. And I can say farewell to my mother before my father comes home.”

Thomas decided to try a different approach, but he had to think for a moment about how to do it. He had to appeal to Isaac’s laziness without calling him lazy. “Isaac, the pirates aren’t going to make you first mate when you get there. You’ll have to do a lot of work you don’t like. It’ll be worse than Mr. Whidby. And my mother says that fair dealing brings wealth slowly.”

Isaac shook his head. “Yes, slowly. You didn’t talk to them, Thomas. These men know how to live. You should have seen them. I’m sure they will have a good place for me. Thomas, they invited me! I need some adventuring. It will be good for me.” But Thomas

thought to himself, “If an ass goes traveling, he’ll not come back a horse.” So he decided to stop arguing. “And when I come back,” Isaac said, “the first thing I am going to do is take one of my gold pieces, go back to Mr. Whidby’s shop, and buy me a candle!”



Thomas told his mother about Isaac that night. Sarah Ingle was a very pretty woman, about thirty-three years old. Like many women in that day, she had had a case of the pox when she was younger, but it had barely left any scars at all. Unless she told you about it, which she was not likely to do, you wouldn’t know there were any scars. But still Thomas knew she was sensitive about it, and that she thought it was the reason she had not married again.

Thomas and his mother had two rooms off the back of one of the town’s thriving inns, a place called Reynold’s Inn. The owner and his wife felt sorry for them, and so they charged a very reasonable rent, and in exchange, Sarah Ingle helped in the inn during busy times when she could, and Thomas sometimes helped with the horses.

Thomas had a cot in one of the rooms, and his mother had a bed, slightly nicer, in the other. In addition to the cot, Thomas’ room had a small table, where he kept his few things, and his books. He was working through his last book now, a primer on navigation. His mother’s room had a small, writing desk, and a bookshelf where she kept her Bible, her prayer book, and her copy of Baxter’s *Everlasting Rest*.

When Thomas had first gotten home that night, his mother was not there. He looked at the shelf, and her prayer book was gone, so he knew she was across the street at St. Anne's. She would often go there for a few moments of quiet after her day of work. He waited, and after about ten minutes, she came in, and he told her about Isaac.

"It doesn't surprise me," Sarah Ingle said. "A cask savors of its first fill. He has always been a very idle boy—and he always brags of many goodmorrrows."

"Mother, I don't know how he thinks he can find the pirates again."

"Mr. Hutchins said today that the pirates didn't leave the colony, but just moved down the coast toward Virginia. They are just taunting the new governor. I am sure they know the king's frigate is at the northern end of the bay. Sure, Isaac can find them quickly enough. He probably has enough money to take him that far."

"Should we talk to Mr. Taylor?"

Mrs. Ingle shook her head. "No. We have nothing to say to him. Isaac is a lazy boy who wants to be rich. Mr. Taylor is the same way, only a little less lazy. If Isaac was a dog, he'd lean his head against the wall to bark. We can pray that God has mercy on Isaac's soul, and that he learns from the pirates what he could not learn at home."

"How can he learn anything good from pirates?"

"He might learn that he doesn't belong there. And he might learn that Mr. Whidby is a wise and kind man."

"Still," Thomas said, "I feel sorry for Mrs. Taylor."

"The pirates are a wicked lot, and I feel sorry for Mrs. Taylor too. She married unwisely, and her son is a fool like her husband—he has a bone in his arm and so cannot work. But even so, there is still

hope for Isaac. And, leaving the pirates out of it, there is only one thing worse than a boy who leaves home,” she said, “and that is a boy who doesn’t.”

At these words, Thomas knew it was time to ask his mother again. He took a deep breath and held it for a moment. “Mother, I am almost done with my last book, the one on navigation. May I go down to the docks tomorrow and speak with Mr. Jenkins?” Mr. Jenkins was a harbor merchant they knew and trusted in the parish, and he would know which captains would be good to apprentice with, and he could give Thomas a letter recommending him. He owned a warehouse down by the harbor, and he had dealt with most of the men who sailed the Chesapeake for many years. He knew which were honest, and which were not, which obtained their goods by trade, and which by piracy, and which were harsh with their crews, and which were wise.

Sarah Ingle was quiet for many minutes. Thomas knew that something was different, because whenever he had asked before, she always said no right away. “Thomas, you know that the Ingle men have always gone to sea. I have known since you were born that you would go to sea—you were bred to the sea, and you have the bent of your father’s bow. But I lost your father there, and I do not want to lose you there.” With this her eyes filled up with tears. “I am very sorry, Thomas. I wasn’t going to cry. Yes, you may talk to Mr. Jenkins.”

Thomas didn’t know what to do. He had a lump at the top of his chest in sympathy with his mother, but his stomach was churning with excitement. So he just sat where was. After a few moments, he thanked his mother, took her hand in his, and promised her he would come home safely.

“I won’t require it,” she said, “but I would prefer that you ship with someone who trades with Jamaica or Bermuda, instead of England. That way you will be home more often, and I will know how it is with you.”

“Yes, ma’am,” he said.

“And promise me that you will stay away from rum and bawdy houses.”

“Yes, ma’am,” he said.

“And we will have to buy you a prayer book to take with you.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“And I hope the cold I feel in my bones is just the cold of late April. I hope this is just my blackthorn winter.” Thomas was silent.

THE MULBERRY TREE

THOMAS HAD NOT BEEN ABLE TO SPEAK with Mr. Jenkins for two days after his mother had given him permission. On the first day, Mr. Jenkins was too occupied in business, and on the second he was home ill. But on the third, Thomas presented himself to the merchant and made his request.

Mr. Jenkins rubbed the back of his neck. He was a grim but kindly man who had left Edinburgh ten years before. He had been a faithful covenanter in his days there, but everything was different on the Chesapeake, and so he was willing to offer his own form of dissenting worship at St. Anne's. Still, he was completely unrepentant about his past and had once told Thomas some stories about the killing times that had filled Thomas with a mixture of horror and delight. Once when the rector at St. Anne's had mentioned those days in a sermon (with his Anglican view of them), Mr. Jenkins had

walked past Thomas after services, muttering and shaking his head angrily. “Ye kin call a sheep’s tail a leg, but that don’t help him to walk. Murder is murder for a’ that.”

But now Thomas was standing in his warehouse, holding his hat nervously in front of him. “So, ye want to go to sea, lad. Tis a good thing—I was starting to wonder about ye. Aye, I can give ye a letter—your mother is a good woman—and I can tell ye who to take it to. The *Prudent Hannah* is due to return from Jamaica in about a month. Her captain is John Monroe.”

Thomas was thrilled. “I might be able to go to sea in a month?”

“Naht s’ quick, laddie. The *Prudent Hannah* is due to be careened, and Captain Monroe told me she needs many repairs beyond that. But once that is done, he wants to get in one more Caribee voyage before winter.”

Thomas was grinning widely, and so Mr. Jenkins glowered in his kindly way. “But I can only recommend ye, I can’t add you to his crew. He is a good man, but he is a stickler for work. He will probably have you work for him in port before he takes you in his crew.”

“I can work,” Thomas said eagerly.

“Nah duut,” the Scotsman said.



With the prospect of going to sea looming before him, Thomas finished the navigation book with a will, and then tried to fill his days doing odd jobs at Reynold’s Inn. But there was not much for him to

do, and so he took to filling his afternoons by taking long walks. He knew he would miss that when he finally got to go to sea.

One afternoon, he was a number of miles south of town, and he stood alone at the end of a small inlet off the Severn River. He glanced at the sun, and estimated that he needed to start walking home soon. The inlet gradually worked its way toward the solid ground by means of a marshy strip, covered with cattails. Thomas quietly stood in thought, throwing bits of stick into the water. The day was quiet, and although it was summer, it was not too humid. The green trees around the inlet hovered over the face of the water, and reflected a deep green all around the edge of the water.

Suddenly, a bowsprit appeared to the left, out in the river, belonging to a small sloop coming upriver. He didn't know why, but Thomas quickly stepped back into the trees. There was a sharp hill behind him, and Thomas scrambled quickly up the hill. He remembered a good view of the inlet from the top when he was walking down. This was an isolated area—no inhabitants for miles north or south, and any ship like this was as likely to be a pirate ship as not. I need to make myself scarce, Thomas thought.

Thomas stood quietly at the top of the hill and watched as the small sloop hove into the inlet, and dropped anchor. After about fifteen minutes, a shoreboat was lowered from the side, and three men got in it. Two of them began rowing straight in Thomas' direction, while the other sat in the stern looking intently at a package in his hands.

The boat disappeared from his view, and Thomas looked around. Near the top of the hill was a gigantic wild mulberry tree. Thomas

could have escaped detection easily by heading inland but by now he was very curious. He decided to stay in order to find out what they were doing, and to climb the mulberry tree to avoid being discovered. It was a good climbing tree, and Thomas was able to get high up in its branches. He lodged himself in a crook near the top, knowing that he was completely invisible unless they climbed up the tree too. He hoped to be able to hear what the men were doing, and possibly to catch a glimpse of them.

“Here’s a big tree, lads. Can you remember this?” Thomas realized with a shock that the voices were coming from the base of his tree. There was no answer, probably because the two oarsmen just nodded. Then one of them, a different voice, spoke. “I don’t like it, O’Conner. If Cap’n James finds out we’re crossing him, he’ll stick his gold toothpick in each of our eyes, and that would just be to start with.”

“We’re not crossing him.” O’Conner’s voice was soothing. “Leastways, not that anybody knows. This package probably ain’t worth nothing—I’m just curious about it, that’s all.”

The other voice joined in. “I dunno, either.”

“Look,” O’Conner said, a little loudly. “James made us the prize crew, didn’t he? He told us we could have whatever was on board, didn’t he?”

“That’s because he thought there wasn’t nothing on board.”

“Well, you two are too far in now, anyhow. You were hot for the plan a whiles ago. And James will do whatever he wants just because you came this far. Let’s just bury this, and we can come back later for it. Can you remember this tree?”

Two reluctant voices replied, “Aye.”



“Now, dig the hole. We have to head south so we jin up with the others there in a reasonable way. We don’t want the lads thinking we sailed up to Philadelphia. If they start asking questions, you two sisters would probably tell them everything you know, which ain’t much. But it would be trouble enow.”

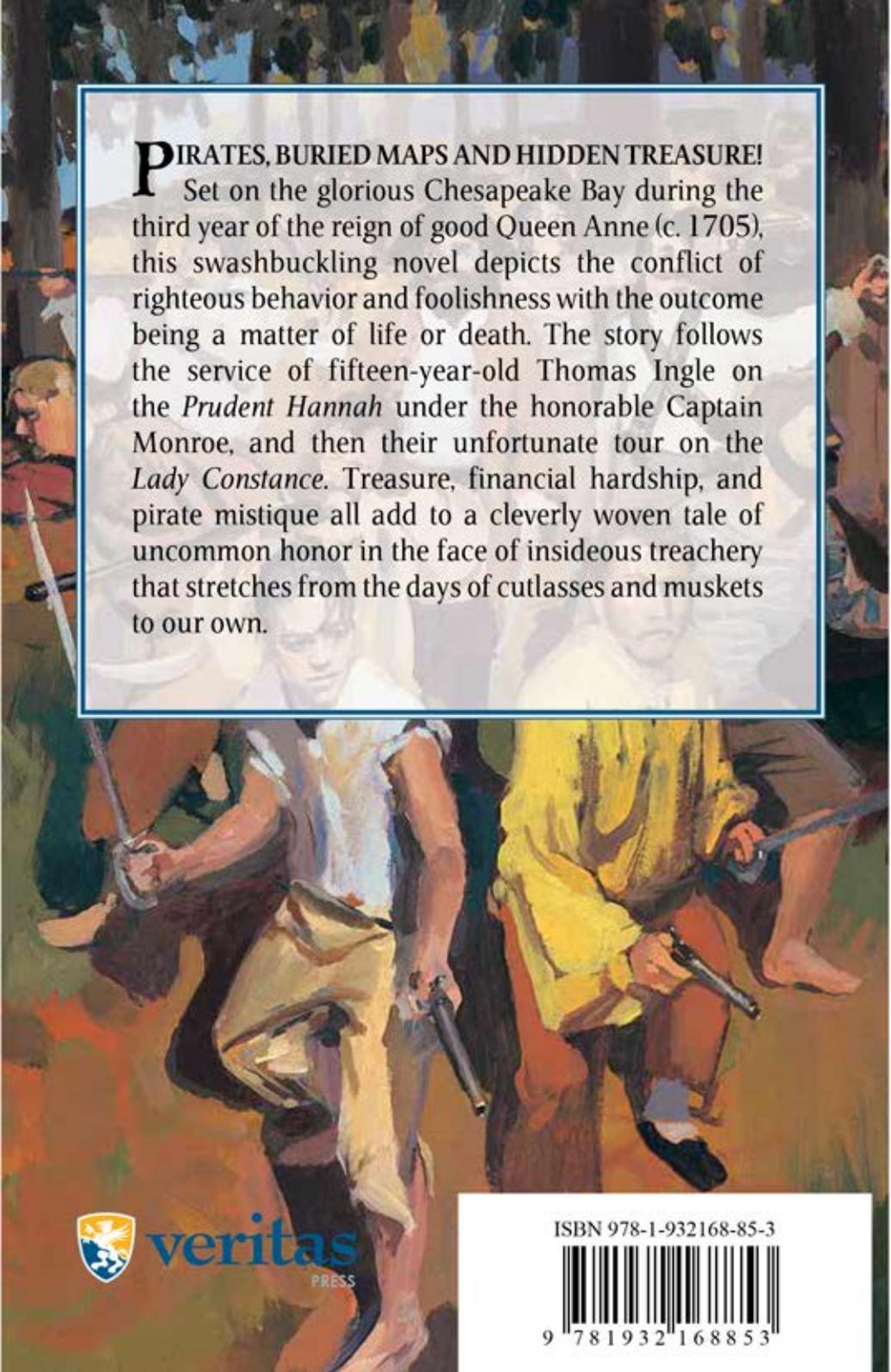
Thomas sat quietly in his crook, and listened carefully to everything. After the space of twenty minutes or so, the brief comments, grunts, and scrapings from down below stopped. “Good work on’t. Let’s go, lads.” Thomas, looking out, could see the inlet, and there was the sloop rocking back and forth on its anchor. He could see two or three other hands moving around on deck.

Thomas waited a long time before he could see the boat again. The man named O’Conner was at his place in the stern once more, this time with his back to Thomas, and his two confederates were steadily rowing. Thomas continued to watch them, expecting nothing but to see them depart as they had come. But what he saw next filled him with horror, and almost caused him to fall out of the tree. When they were a boat length from the sloop, with one motion, O’Conner pulled two pistols from his belt and calmly shot both men at the same moment. In one instant, Thomas saw two puffs of smoke, one of the men stand and topple over the side, and the other one slump over his oar. He saw O’Conner stand and bend over the seaman still in the boat, and then he heard the dull crack of the pistol reports. He was sick at his stomach, and his hands were instantly clammy. He watched with a horrified interest as O’Conner hoisted the second oarsman up, and pushed him into the water.

He continued to stare, and O'Conner reached the ship, secured the boat, and hoisted anchor. The other sailors were apparently in on it, for they gave O'Conner a hand up as though nothing had happened. Thomas wondered vaguely how O'Conner was going to explain the loss of his two men to Captain John James. James was a notorious pirate on the Chesapeake, one who had filled the authorities with consternation more than once. Thomas watched silently as the sloop disappeared out of the inlet.

When he had climbed down from the tree, he had little difficulty in finding the place where the hole had been dug. He had no shovel to dig with, but he brushed away the leaves with his hands, and started to lift the loose dirt out with his hands as well. The hole was only about two feet deep, and at the bottom was a small oilskin package. The shallow burial either meant the contents of the hole were not important, or that O'Conner was only intending to hide the package there for a very short time. But one of these options was not a reasonable one—Thomas knew that the oilskin package at the bottom of the hole was something worth murdering two comrades for. And that meant that O'Conner would be back soon enough.

On his knees, with trembling hands, he opened the package and stared at the contents, mystified. There were two pieces of paper, one of them a folded chart. It had no peculiar markings of any kind on it, and was the kind of hand-drawn chart Thomas had seen countless times before. The other was a simple piece of paper, covered with strange ciphers. He stared at both for a few moments, but realized that this would take a great deal of study.



PIRATES, BURIED MAPS AND HIDDEN TREASURE!

Set on the glorious Chesapeake Bay during the third year of the reign of good Queen Anne (c. 1705), this swashbuckling novel depicts the conflict of righteous behavior and foolishness with the outcome being a matter of life or death. The story follows the service of fifteen-year-old Thomas Ingle on the *Prudent Hannah* under the honorable Captain Monroe, and then their unfortunate tour on the *Lady Constance*. Treasure, financial hardship, and pirate mistique all add to a cleverly woven tale of uncommon honor in the face of insidious treachery that stretches from the days of cutlasses and muskets to our own.



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