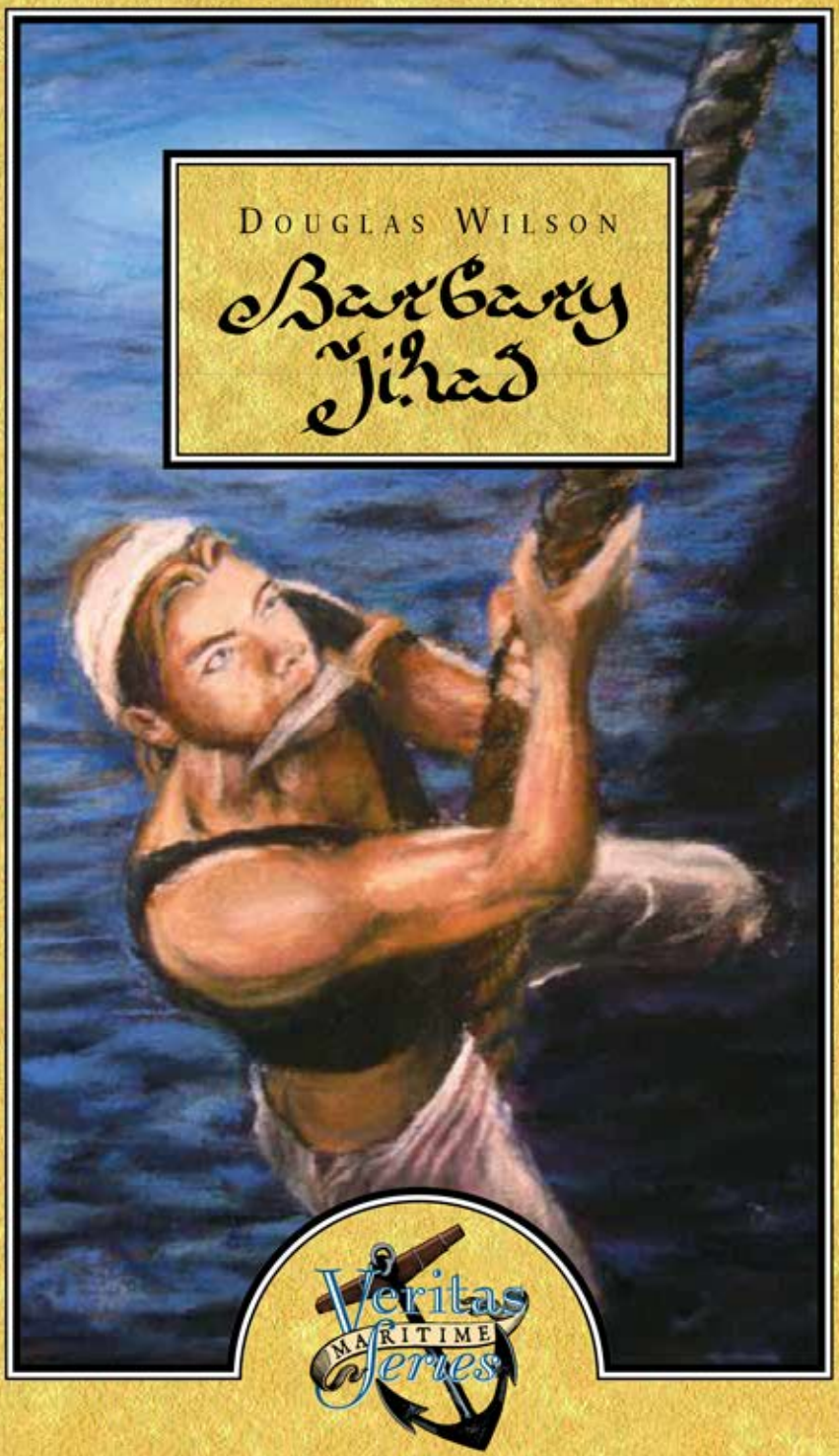
Douglas Wilson
Barbary Jihad
Veritas
Maritime
Series

DOUGLAS WILSON

Barbary Jihad

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For Seamus James Wilson,
with great respect.
You will get your chance
soon enough.

A Note on Historical Fiction

In order to make this story fit together as I desired, it was necessary for me to fudge on some historical details. I suppose this is something of a necessity in all historical fiction, but I also suspect that I have done this a little more than is normally done. For example, there were no American fatalities in the raid on the *Philadelphia*, but in this book there is one. Neither were there any rescued hostages, still less a beautiful one. There are more things like that, but you get the picture. The downside of this is that an unsuspecting young reader might not be getting his history from a pristine mountain spring, but rather out of the tap in the kitchen. The upside is that any old-fashioned blunders of mine will most likely be chalked up to the author's creativity instead of to his ignorance.

Contents

Three Escapes

THOMAS WATSON KNEW that he had to be breathing somehow, but he couldn't exactly remember the last time he had actually taken a breath. His master, the bashaw of Tripoli, had left their sloop for the evening at the invitation of the English ambassador to Spain, whose ship was across the harbor, and Thomas was now outside that sloop's main cabin, looking at the small lights along the shore. He was almost certain he could make it there by swimming, provided he could get into the water without alerting the watch. Spain wasn't his native Maryland, but it *was* European and not that cursed Tripoli, which had been his prison home for the last five years. His master almost never sailed anywhere—this

was only the second time since Thomas had been his prisoner—and if he was going to make an escape, now would have to be the time.

Before his capture, Thomas had been a mate on the *Blue Heron*, a merchant ship out of Boston, and they had been taken by the Barbary pirates just south of Sicily. He had been held for hostage along with the rest of the crew, according to the Barbary fashion, and then after about six months, the bashaw had gotten the idea into his head that he needed an Anglo cupbearer in order to impress his visitors from the other cities along the north coast of Africa, not to mention the occasional embassies from the infidels. Thomas was a good-looking man, well over six feet tall, strong and well-built, and unlike some other members of the crew, still had all of his teeth. Despite his experience at sea, he was still relatively young—about twenty-one when he was captured—because he had first put out to sea as a ship's boy when he was very young. He looked far more presentable than the other hostages, and with his shock of sandy blond hair, he stood out drastically from the other servants in the palace at Tripoli. And so he had been chosen to wear the bashaw's livery, worse the luck. "Well-favored is ill-favored," he used to say to himself.

Matters only got worse as the rest of the *Blue Heron* crew had been quietly ransomed three months later when a payment arrived from a British bank in London, one

which specialized in routing ransom payments that the new American government didn't want to admit publicly to having paid. The system of hostage taking in the Mediterranean was a game that everyone played, but the Americans were becoming restive about it. They begrudgingly played along but didn't want anyone to know about it. So secret payments were made under the table, and at the same time demands were beginning to grow in the United States for the government to do something about these pirates. No one wanted the hostages to languish, but no one wanted to admit to paying the necessary ransom.

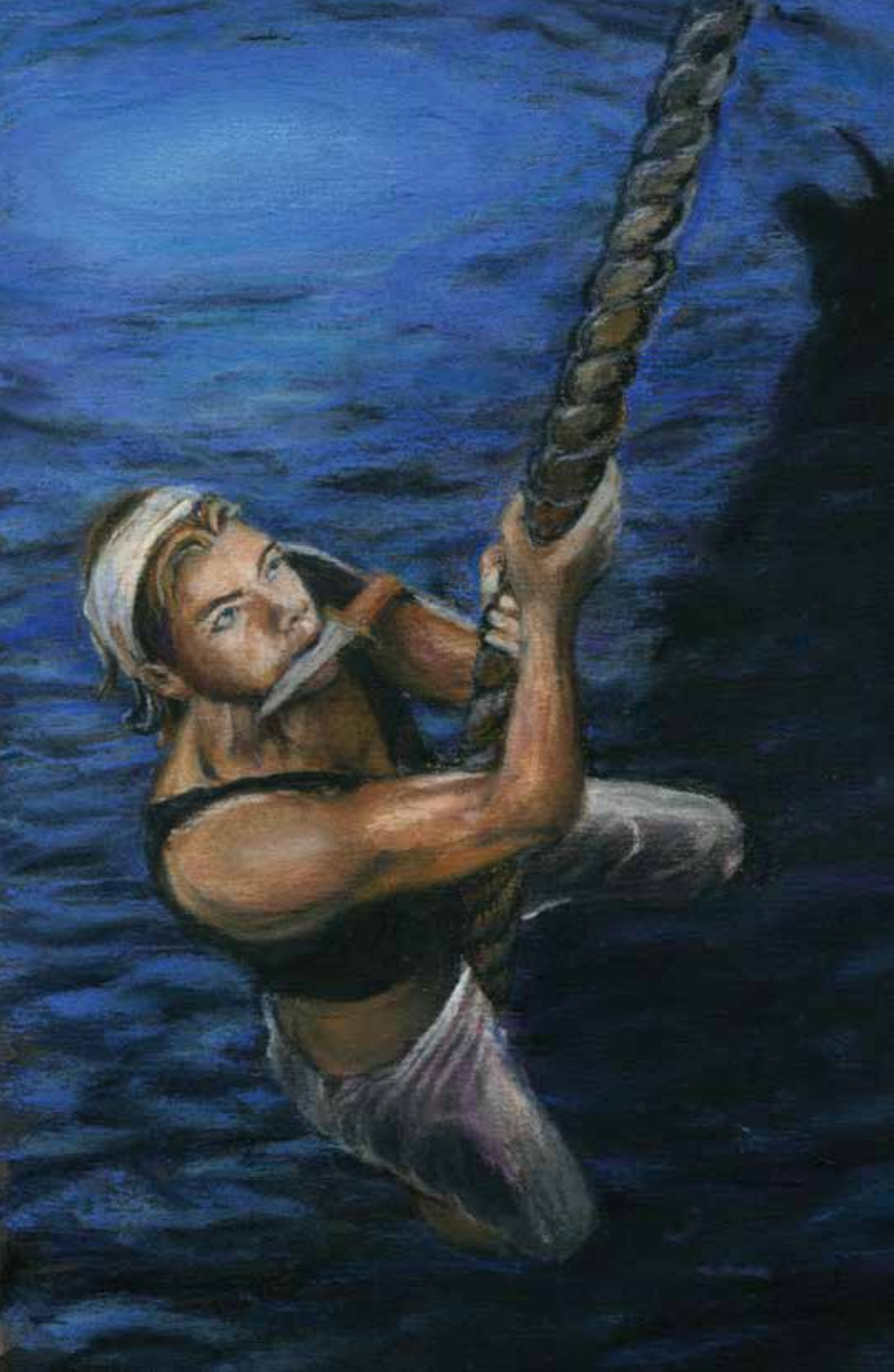
So Thomas continued to languish quietly, serving the bashaw, and did not know if anybody even knew where he was, or if anybody was even trying to ransom him. For all the crew of the *Blue Heron* knew, he had been taken off and killed. Thomas had been encouraged by the outbreak of open war with the pirates after the election of President Jefferson, but there was never much news, and not all of what news there was even reached him. And from what he had heard, he didn't think that President Jefferson was really in favor of a strong Navy—and his enslaved condition, it seemed to him, called out for a strong Navy. The stronger the American Navy was, the better he liked it.

The night air was clear but heavy, and rich scents coming from shore wove their way around Thomas. The moon was full, with the occasional backlit cloud scudding across its

face. Outside the places set off by the moonlight, all was black in effect, but a heavy and dark purple in reality. Thomas had been standing in one place so long that one foot had gone to sleep. He shifted and let the blood rush back into his foot. The air was balmy, cool, inviting, and occasionally warm.

So here he was now, just a mile from that Spanish shore, with his first clean opportunity to escape. Now that the time had come upon him, he hesitated about what to do. His first thought had been to creep up behind the watchman standing silently by the helm, cut his throat, and be on his way. And there were some of the bashaw's men who would have deserved the sharp justice of that kind of knife edge—a kitchen blade he had stolen from the galley—and he would have been in the water and swimming with a clean conscience. But the man who had the watch this night was Hamet, the one man in the bashaw's entourage who had been even partially decent to him. No, it would have to be stealth down the anchor line. He moved quietly and eased over the gunwale.

Every small sound clattered, squeaked, and roared in Thomas's ears. He could not understand why Hamet did not leap to his feet, shouting at whoever was making the ferocious and infernal racket. But for anyone who did not already know that an escape was in progress, the evening was gloriously quiet, broken only by the regular slap of water against the hull. The full moon hung over the harbor at Rota, and a shimmering reflection of that moon ran straight across the



harbor from the shore to the ship, providing Thomas with a pale, jagged white road that he was going to swim alongside, just outside the light in the silent blackness. It was the spring of 1803, and Thomas slipped into the water, tucked his knife in his belt, and began a methodical and quiet breaststroke. When he was a hundred yards from the sloop, he dropped his jealous guard against the sound of his breathing. Nothing could keep him from making that shore now.

Jules Monroe stared unhappily at his cousin, Samuel, who had caught sight of him making his way down a red clay dirt path toward the road that ran along the river and into town. Samuel had chased him down, and Jules turned around, prepared for a stiff argument.

The unseasonably muggy Maryland air hung about the two of them, but they were both native to it and noticed the humidity no more than any one of the crabs in a nearby inlet might notice the water. A high line of heavy green trees, a giant's hedgerow, ran along each side of the road, hemming the two in. In the quiet before either of them spoke, crickets and birds chattered madly in the spring background, each trying to be heard above the other.

Jules was broad in the shoulder and more than six inches taller than Samuel. Samuel was not slight, but rather muscular and wiry. Jules was not fat, but obviously powerful. The two stared at each other for a moment, and they did so with the same clear eyes. But Jules was a black young man, the mulatto son of Samuel's Uncle Henry. Henry had been the youngest and most irresponsible of six sons and had gotten Jules by one of the house servants at his parents' plantation farther north, and he had then run off in disgrace when the affair was found out. Samuel's father, John Cochrane Monroe, the second oldest of the clan, had agreed to take Jules' mother to his plantation house, a tobacco farm in southern Maryland.

He had freed Jules' mother before Jules was born so that Jules could grow up with at least some measure of freedom. But it was apparent to everyone by the time Jules was six that he would have a hard life in one direction, and an impossible one in the other. His mother had died when he was just three, and he had been educated right alongside Samuel. On the Monroe plantation he had all the privileges of a scion of the household, but that all ended necessarily at the property line of the Monroe place, and all the wishing in the world wouldn't change it. He had his grandfather's high intelligence and his father's energy. He loved Samuel's father and mother as his own parents and was as loyal to them as anyone could possibly be, but he was miserable and, furthermore, completely and utterly trapped.

"Where are you going?" Samuel said.

Jules nodded toward the road, which was now in sight. "Baltimore," he said.

"Why?" Samuel said.

"There's a letter on the mantelpiece," Jules said. "I didn't want to go without saying goodbye, but I *have* to go, and I don't know that you can let me. But I have to go . . ." Jules trailed off.

Samuel just stared at him. Jules kicked at the dust on the road. "I can't go north . . . no place for free blacks, especially free *educated* blacks. I sure can't go south, and I can't stay here. I think I can sign with a ship in Baltimore—out at sea, a man's a man. At least more of a man, that's what I hear. Or they at least let you *try* to be a man."

"Well, I don't know what they'll . . . we'll . . . do. But Jules . . ." Here Samuel held out his hand, and Jules brushed past it to embrace him. They held each other close for a minute, and then Jules pulled away, tears in his eyes. "Bye, Samuel," he said.

"Bye, Jules," Samuel said. He watched until Jules disappeared around the turn where the path met the road, then turned around and ran back to the plantation house.

Susannah Wilcox closed the lid of her trunk with a flourish. She was going to visit her uncle and aunt in Naples, and she was as excited as she had ever been about anything. Her uncle had been the ambassador there for only about a year, and when his letter had arrived inviting her to visit them for six months or so, the decision took about two weeks for her parents to make. Susannah's parents were not thrilled with the prospect of her traveling across the ocean, but at the same time they knew it would widen her experiences, and it would finish her education off with an impressive flourish. She would almost certainly be presented to the King of Naples. In her politics, Susannah, like the rest of her family, was a fierce republican, but she also kept thinking about which of her dresses she should wear to the court. Perhaps the purple . . .

Susannah's mother, a handsome and obviously kind woman named Clara, swept back into the room, carrying another dress. "Are you sure you don't want this one?"

"I'm sure, Mama. Look at the hem."

Her mother looked at the hem, fussed over it for a minute, and then burst into tears. "Oh, Mama," Susannah said. They held each other for a few moments and then pulled back again.

"I will only be gone for six months, or perhaps just a few more. And it will be *such* an adventure . . ."

Clara nodded, wiping her eyes. "We know. It is good. It *is* good. You will write?"

"With all the news, as much as I can. And not very *much* gossip . . . just small enough to avoid the Rev. Smythwick's understanding of St. Paul's censures." They both laughed. The sermon the previous Sunday had circled endlessly around precisely that, one of the pastor's favorite sins to preach against. "Upon my word, Mrs. Wilcox," Susannah's father had said, "if that good man preaches against gossip one more time, the devil will be plainly out one good tool from his toolbox."

Clara took the frayed dress back to the closet in the next room and reappeared a moment later, saying, "Well, come down now. Robert will get your trunk. I am sure breakfast is waiting, and your father will be back from the stables momentarily. He is getting the coach ready, and we decided that he should take you to Baltimore. We will have breakfast, then all pray together, and then you can go, leaving your mother most disconsolate."

"Don't talk like that, Mama." They both walked out onto the spacious landing and then descended the staircase at the end of the hall.

Susannah's uncle had been a strong supporter of Mr. Jefferson in Maryland, and after the election the ambassadorship had been a natural reward. But it was not an abuse of spoils, because Susannah's uncle, her father's older brother, was one of the most able men in the state. No better man could have been picked, and even Jefferson's political enemies

acknowledged it. Her uncle's name was James Wilcox, and he was already being spoken of in the capitals of Europe as a fair credit to the new republic. But Susannah remembered him from her time growing up as one of the kindest men in her life. She was looking forward to seeing her uncle and aunt as much as she was looking forward to Italy, and that was a great deal indeed.

Samuel was a good runner, and he ran the mile back to his home quite easily. A servant at the front door saw him loping up the drive, and opened the door to tell someone inside that something seemed amiss. After Samuel bounded up the steps, the servant pulled the door wide open as Samuel ran through it. "Thank you, Aeneas," Samuel panted and headed straight for his father's study.

After Samuel burst in and told him what Jules was doing—and about the letter on the mantelpiece—the first thing Mr. Monroe did was turn and order one of the servants to saddle two horses. Then he hurried to get the letter from the mantelpiece, shouting for Samuel's mother, Molly, as he went. She joined him when he was halfway through the letter, and he silently handed her the first page. They both read

through it quietly, and just stood silently for a moment when they were done.

John Cochrane said, "We waited a week too long to talk to the boys about our decision." His wife nodded.

Aeneas appeared in the doorway. "Your horse is ready, sir," he said, and disappeared again. The Monroes walked slowly out the front door of their stately home.

"I knew he was unsettled, but I had no idea he was so unhappy. I will bring Jules back," he said, mounting. "You tell Samuel what we have decided to offer them. I will tell Jules. When Jules and I get back, we will speak of all the details over dinner. It appears we have a great deal to talk about, matters that should have been discussed some time ago."

I Would Be Honored, Sir

WHEN THOMAS FIRST ARRIVED back in the United States, he was the toast of Baltimore. News of his daring escape from the bashaw had been celebrated in newspapers from Boston to Savannah, and he found himself invited to call on scores of the nicest aristocratic homes in the city, where he was prevailed upon to tell his story over and over again. At first it was gratifying, but he was beginning to grow heartily sick of it. But during that time, and in the course of those visits, he had kept his wits about him, and had also met some men who were interested in developing land tracts

in Kentucky. Thomas was deeply interested in going there because Kentucky seemed to him to be about as far from the deep blue sea as it would be reasonable for a man to live. Kentucky had its perils—bears, Indians, revivals, and assorted other bad customers—but it seemed unlikely to Thomas that there would be any Muslim pirates. Still less would there be any Tripolitan slavery. Some of the conversations Thomas had had with these possible investors seemed quite promising, and he felt that it was only a matter of time before he could go off to meet the great Daniel Boone.

At the same time, the whole town was humming with excitement. An expedition of naval reinforcements was soon to sail against the Barbary pirates, and so some of the great ladies of Baltimore determined that before they departed, a suitable ball simply must be held in their honor. Susannah Wilcox had just arrived in town with her father, and as the brother and niece of an important ambassador, they were invited, and it was also only natural that Thomas—adopted hero of Baltimore—would be invited also. When he was captured, he had only been a ship's mate, but now he was a national celebrity, his lowly origins now forgotten.

His grandfather, when a young man, had paid for his own passage over from Glasgow by indenturing himself as a printer's apprentice. And Thomas's father had eventually purchased that same print shop a generation later, but it was too small a business to support the future vocation of all *his*

sons. Thomas had been the fourth of five sons, and so the sea had seemed a natural and inevitable choice. It was a long way around, Thomas thought, to get an invitation to a ball like this one.

Since he had come home, he had been to Annapolis twice, where his father's printing shop was, and where his mother did very little other than talk with him and cook for him. Thomas had been fed well in his slavery, but nothing like this. His family had long given him up for dead, and when he had just appeared one day in the door of the shop, there was much shouting and jubilation. Their small home was upstairs, above the shop, and when his mother was drawn downstairs by all the commotion, she had taken one look at Thomas and had collapsed in a heap. But she was only unconscious for less than a minute, as if she knew that her son would be there as soon as she awoke.

Mrs. Anna Watson was a devoted mother, and though she "had given up hope," she had not given up praying against hope. She tried to get Thomas to promise that he would never go to sea again, and he said that he was trying with all his might to avoid it, but he couldn't promise: "I don't know if I will be able to make these Kentucky investments work. If I can make the arrangements, then you can start praying about bears instead of pirates. But God can deliver me in the West, as He did in the East."

His father, Alexander Watson, was a taciturn man, quiet

and solid. He was overjoyed with the return of "good Tom," as he called him, but placed his joy in just a handful of well-placed words. But at the same time, he did nothing but beam for a month afterwards.

After his second visit to Annapolis, Thomas made a point to arrange his affairs such that he would be able to return to Baltimore in time for the ball. He showed the invitation to his mother, who was amazed by it. "At the *mansion*," she said. Though he was tiring of the greatness of Baltimore society, for some reason Thomas felt drawn to the ball. It seemed important to him somehow, but he had no real idea how important it was going to be.

The evening of the ball, Susannah gazed out the window of their black carriage as it swept up the drive toward the Carroll mansion, where the ball was being held. Her father, Charles Wilcox, was sitting silently beside her. She turned to him and said, "If life is so splendid here in Baltimore, what will *Europe* be like?" She was young and quickly impressed. Her father cocked an eyebrow at her, and she laughed: "I know, Papa." She was also responsive enough to his good sense not be too *deeply* impressed. The carriage rolled to a stop, and

when it had stopped rocking Charles Wilcox stepped briskly down and turned around to offer his hand to his daughter. He presented his right arm to her, and they walked slowly up the steps to the great house. When they got to the top of the stairs, they turned around for a view of the harbor. The lengthening evening was full of honeysuckle. Susannah took a deep breath and smiled widely.

As it happened, Thomas was about ten feet behind them, which is why he ran straight into her smile, and staggered slightly. He recovered quickly, but not very easily. When he got to the top of the stairs a moment later, he was still somewhat shaky and noticed that one of the porters had a knowledgeable air about him, as though he had taken in everything that had just happened, which he actually had. Thomas stepped over to him and said, "Good sir, could you . . ."

"Miss Susannah Wilcox, sir."

"I am greatly in your debt." Thomas bent his head slightly and walked into the ball in an exalted frame of mind. But after about fifteen minutes of inquiries, he was despondent. He had quickly discovered that this Miss Susannah Wilcox was going to be sailing for Naples in just three days. Why on earth would anyone that beautiful sail in *that* direction? He felt he had to get an introduction. But what good would that do?

He was fortunate. One of his acquaintances who was also interested in the prospect of Kentucky investments was a friend of Charles Wilcox and agreed to present Thomas to them.

Thomas followed his friend through the crowd, his mouth full of cotton, and then, long before he was fully prepared for it, he heard someone saying, "Mr. Charles Wilcox, Miss Susannah Wilcox, may I introduce Mr. Thomas Watson?"

Her eyes got wide, and Susannah smiled again, which was the first blow, and then she said, "Not the *great* Mr. Watson?" which was the second blow. Thomas remained upright, but he was staggering around inside. There were no railings inside to hold onto.

"I . . . I beg your pardon?" Thomas managed to say.

"Are you the Mr. Watson who escaped from the pirates? I have heard *so* much . . ."

"Well, yes . . ." Thomas answered, and he was in a state of exaltation again. This was not worth those years of captivity, but it was already worth about half of them. If the conversation continued beyond another half an hour, he reckoned he would be to the good.

The man who had introduced them had excused himself right after formalities were made, for he had business colleagues to greet, and he disappeared into the crowd. They were standing off the ballroom floor, next to the windows, and the crowd there was quite dense—which provided a thicket of people that anybody could disappear into. And so the three of them were able to speak, uninterrupted, for a while. Thomas had recovered all of his wits and some of his tongue, and found that Mr. Wilcox was a very amiable fellow

indeed. His daughter was lively and engaging, and they could have gone on happily for any length of time, and Thomas found that he was actually not tired of telling his adventure at all. He remembered additional details as they went on. At the same time, he was careful not to boast, and only brought out new aspects of his imprisonment when the father and daughter asked him directly about them.

But during a break in the music a very young naval officer approached them from across the dancing floor. "I beg pardon for the interruption," he said, bowing stiffly. It was not stiff because it was an awkward bow, but stiff because it was the polished custom.

Charles Wilcox was acquainted with the young officer—he was the one commanding the expedition being honored by the ball—and so he gladly introduced him to Susannah and Thomas. "Lieutenant Stephan Decatur," he said, and Thomas bowed and Susannah curtsied. "He is the captain of our force against these cursed pirates . . ."

"I thank you, sir, but I am only in command as we cross the Atlantic. When we get to Gibraltar, we will all answer to Captain Preble, sir. I am one of Preble's boys."

Charles Wilcox apparently looked baffled, and so Decatur went on to explain.

"The pirates keep to the Mediterranean, at least for the most part. If we encountered them out in the Atlantic, before we come under the authority of the commodore, I would be

delighted to lead our boys in action against them. But that is unlikely to happen, worse the luck."

"Is Preble not fit for command? Why would the president appoint him . . ." Susannah started to ask.

Decatur laughed. "Well, if he *were* unfit, I would be honor-bound not to say anything about it. But I can say that he is a fine man, and a great officer. I have heard he has something of a temper and does not suffer fools gladly, but it is my conviction that this is part of why he is a great officer. If anyone can thrash these pirates, he can. I look forward to serving under his flag. I spoke only of my own eagerness to fight pirates in my own name. That is no doubt just some sort of weakness and vanity of my own."

If it were vanity, Thomas thought, he could not speak of it so easily.

Another officer stood discretely behind Decatur, junior to him in rank, but perhaps fifteen years older in age. His name was Henry Montrose, but he had only recently joined the Navy. He had been sailing on various merchant vessels for a number of years, but the previous year had narrowly escaped capture by pirates in the Mediterranean and had vowed that he would do more than sail around as a tempting prize for the pirates. So when he had returned to the United States, he had found an old friend who was willing to obtain a junior commission for him, despite his age. He was a capable seaman, but had never served on a ship of the line, and so he had to

be content with a lesser position. Although he chafed at this sometimes, the opportunity to sail with a man like Decatur made the whole thing go down easier.

Decatur turned back toward him and said to Thomas and to the Wilcoxes, "I beg your pardon . . . May I present my aide, Ensign Henry Montrose?"

Greetings were exchanged, and Thomas and Henry spoke briefly about places in Sicily and Italy they had both been. After the pleasantries appeared to be in decline, Charles Wilcox turned back directly to Decatur.

"And when do you . . . Preble's boys, was it? . . . sail? And are your preparations coming well?"

"We hope to sail by the end of the week. And as for preparations, that is one of the reasons I dared to intrude upon your company . . ."

"Sir, I assure you again, no intrusion at all, but what do you mean?"

Decatur turned to Thomas and said, "I will come straight to the point. I am in need of your service. Your country is in need of your service."

"But how . . . but . . .?" Thomas said. He quickly imagined once more what he had thought Kentucky would look like, and then watched as those green hills started to fade away from him.

"I need a translator to sail with us. Mr. Jefferson, God be praised, has finally recognized the need to do something with

this pirate plague. But the president still doesn't like it and is still reluctant. I believe he is under great pressure from some in his Cabinet. And he is no friend of the kind of Navy we actually need, and we are under strict orders to be as cautious as we can be."

Charles Wilcox nodded his agreement: "I speak as one who respects Mr. Jefferson—his intellect, his learning, and his commitment to the land. But it is the rare farmer who understands the importance of sea power. Perhaps it would be too much to expect that a man of such rare gifts as the president has to have this one also."

Decatur said nothing at this, not because he differed with it, but because as a naval officer, he felt that it would be best if he avoided direct criticism of the commander-in-chief. And so he simply added, "We have the *Constitution* and the *Philadelphia* over there now, and I believe if we whip these pirates we can show the need for a stronger Navy yet. But we still must be careful—we are not even permitted to take prizes except under the strictest of conditions. But to be able to accomplish our mission without incurring the president's disfavor I need a man who is quick with their tongue."

"You know that I escaped from the bashaw . . .?"

"Yes, I have heard that. Remarkable story, sir, remarkable story."

Thomas was going to go on to say that after the escape, he had heard numerous reports about how furious the bashaw

had been about his escape. He knew that if he were to fall prisoner again, that would be the end of him. He was going to *say* that, but then he caught a glimpse of Susannah's face as she was waiting for him to answer. Thomas thought he had never seen anyone wait so beautifully. He was glad to be of service to a man like Decatur and glad to be of service to his country. He also realized that to accept the offer would be to sail in the same direction that Susannah was sailing.

"I would be honored, sir," he said.

Joining the Navy

JOHN COCHRANE MONROE sat at an inn table in Baltimore, his back to the wall, and Samuel and Jules sat on either side of him. After they were seated, the innkeeper walked by once, just checking. "That your boy?" he said, nodding toward Jules. John Monroe nodded in return, happy to let the misunderstanding go. John, Samuel, and Jules had a routine whenever they traveled, making no trouble, at least not as they could help. If Jules were reckoned a house servant, they could usually get away with staying together with no real trouble. But this time, trouble came to them, and

no one else in the inn could fault them at all.

They were talking about places John Monroe had sailed when he was a young man, and he was telling them what they should do if they ever found themselves in Italy, or Greece, or perhaps up north, putting in at Amsterdam, or Glasgow. He was full of stories, and the boys, who were going to be parted from him shortly, were eager to listen—even to the ones they had heard before. As eager as they had been to go, and they really were, the weight of leaving was beginning to settle in upon them. They were both of them eager, nervous, lonely, ambitious, and straining to go—after one more story.

A sailor across the inn was in his cups and had been so for a couple of hours. He was the sort of man who grows surly when he drinks, and he was surly to begin with. He was accompanied by several companions who simply were looking for the exuberance of a fight. They were thinking of fists, not swords, but any sort of a melee would be all right with them. Before they had left their ship that afternoon, there had been broad discussion of how they needed to go ashore and "take their entertainment as they found it." Their leader in mischief, whose name was Bill, had taken an arbitrary dislike to John Cochrane Monroe as soon as he came in the door, and the way he justified it was that here was *clearly* a Tidewater plantation owner, an aristocrat who thought himself far better than other people. His clothing was not homespun, and he seemed—in the untutored eyes of Bill—to be something

of a dandy. To anyone who had a more sober eye or disposition, the powerful frame of John Monroe could be easily made out beneath his tailored clothes. But Bill sat for half an hour or more, muttering in his ale, to the great merriment of his companions, who thought they knew what was coming. When Bill had gotten to the point where the temperature was just right, he rose from the table slowly, and sauntered over to where the Monroes were sitting, quietly eating and conversing with each other.

As he walked by, he clearly and deliberately threw his hip into the table, spilling their drinks all over the table. "I beg your pardon," he said, not doing anything of the kind. He went over to where the innkeeper was standing, watching nervously, paid for another drink, and began making his way past the Monroe clan again. As he clearly began to swing his hip again toward their table, John Monroe, who was prepared for him this time, swung the handle of his walking stick at him, catching him just below his left eye. Bill's three companions jumped up with a shout, as Bill fell over backward, falling heavily to the floor. Samuel and Jules both scooted out from the bench and took their place on either side of John Cochrane and awaited his instructions. The innkeeper was shouting, "Outside, outside!" Mr. Monroe nodded in his direction, as much as to say that he would take it there as soon as he was able.

But there was barely a moment even for that nod. Bill's friends came howling, and the first one came running up to

John Cochrane with a singular lack of wisdom and was felled with a stroke. The other two of his friends stopped to help him to his feet, along with Bill, who was still down, and as they were thus occupied, John gave the innkeeper a few quick coins for their food, still largely unconsumed, and nodded to the boys that it was time to step outside. When they got outside they walked out about ten feet into the street, and then turned around to face the door of the inn, where they felt certain they would soon see four men boil out. Jules was at John's right hand and Samuel to his left. They did not notice the naval officer who had been walking past with two of his men on the far side of the street. They had stopped to watch what was clearly going to be an excitement.

Bill was the first to emerge from the inn, roaring with displeasure. After he had been helped in clambering to his feet, the welt under his eye and the rum in his brain combined to make him as furious as he had been in many months—and he was an angry man generally. His friends clustered right behind him, less sunny and cheerful than they had been. The fight had somehow turned more serious for them than they had thought it would be. They generally got the best of these exchanges, and they were irritated at how their afternoon was proceeding.

"Where is the lout who struck me?" Bill shouted.

"Here, if you would like to come and take your pleasure again," John Monroe said pleasantly. He now had freedom of

movement in the street and was not at all worried.

Bill broke into a run, with his head down and fists twitching on the ends of his arms. His three companions jumped after him. One veered off toward Samuel and the other toward Jules. Bill and the fourth man after him were running toward John single file.

Jules, who had more pent up inside him than anyone in the family, simply waited for his assailant, and when he was a few feet away he leapt in his direction with a haymaker of a blow. That sailor gave at the knees, fell on his face, stunned, and decided to remain there for a moment to collect his thoughts. That proved to be harder than he had first assumed it might be. Directly behind Jules, the watching naval officer nodded with appreciation. "That was well struck, sir, *well* struck," he said.

Samuel didn't have Jules' power, but he had all his brains. So for his part, he simply waited to the last minute, darted to one side, and wheeled, striking his attacker in the small of the back with his elbow. That man staggered, running forward, and fell into a watering trough. One horse was there and shied back startled. Then it came forward again, stepping heavily on the leg of the man, who howled in pain.

While this was happening to his son and nephew, John Monroe stepped forward to meet Bill, grabbed both lapels of his sea jacket, and lifted him effortlessly above the ground. He would have fallen over backward if the man running

behind Bill had been able to reach them, but that man was now somehow down on the street with Jules on top of him. And so John simply turned Bill sideways and threw him to the ground on his back, knocking the wind completely out of him. Jules was on his feet again, and the man beneath him on the ground was holding his face and moaning. John caught Jules' eye. They both turned around to see if Samuel was all right, which he was, standing over a man who was writhing on the ground holding his knee. John smiled broadly at the boys and said, "Come. Let's find another inn, one where a man might finish a dinner in peace."

The men on the ground did not ask for quarter, but they acted as though they had and got slowly to their feet, collecting themselves with a sort of sullen pride. They limped away, and after they were across the street again—and a safe distance away—Bill turned around and exploded with a few chosen curses. When John Monroe heard this, he swiveled on his heel and looked across at them with a stare cold enough to chill the marrow, even at that distance. As soon as this happened, Bill redirected his curses at his companions, who simply accepted it as something they were used to. They then disappeared, quarreling as they went.

At this, the naval officer stepped forward. "Before you take your leave, sir, and then to your dinner," he said, "I would like to salute you for as brisk a bit of business as I have seen in some weeks."

John Monroe bowed his head slightly in greeting, as the boys stood ramrod straight behind him. "John Monroe," he said, extending his hand.

"Stephen Decatur," came the reply, and the men shook hands. The boys' eyes widened. Decatur had served in a brief sea conflict with France just a few years before, in what was called a Quasi-War, and the Monroes, who had long been a sea-going family, had followed the news of those conflicts carefully. John Monroe would pore over the newspapers for accounts of the battles and had a map hanging in his study with pins in it to mark the places where the battles had occurred. He would call the boys together after dinner sometimes, explaining to them the tactics that had been used and what they were called.

Decatur was one of the few officers who remained in the fledgling navy afterwards. Samuel and Jules had heard John Cochrane Monroe say many times, if he had said it once, "upon my word," that the United States were destined to have one of the greatest navies in the history of the world: "We have a vast continent before us, but vaster oceans on either side. This nation will be a naval power or it will be nothing. A great navy, I say."

"And as long as we do," he would add, "the name Decatur will be remembered in it. He has served with distinction thus far, but mark it well, he will be remembered for far more than that." And here he was, standing in the street, right in

THE WAR IS PAST, AND THOMAS JEFFERSON is the president of a young nation. The days of Blackbeard are only memories, but pirates are still a plague on the high seas. These new scourges, however, are from the Barbary Coast. Muslim pirates terrorize ships sailing around the Mediterranean Sea, and even American vessels are not safe.

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