

THE
THREATENING
FOGG



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THE GOOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL LIBRARY



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It was the jangling doorbell that had wakened him. Eben Tyrell Hall struggled up out of the depths of sleep desperately, like a swimmer trying to reach the surface. He rolled over and threw off the bedcovers, peering groggily at the luminous dial of his clock. It was only eleven thirty. He and his mother had been to the movie on the base and had come home a little after ten, so he hadn't been asleep long. He stumbled toward the closet to get his bathrobe and heard his mother hurrying down the corridor.

"Coming," she called out, and the lights in the living room went on.

Eben found his robe and hurried down the hall. As he stepped into the living room, his mother took the night chain off the door and opened it.

"Why, Colonel Wilson!"

“May I come in, Harriet?”

“Of course. I didn’t—”

The slender, erect air-base commander stepped over the threshold. He nodded briefly at Eben, then turned his eyes on Mrs. Hall.

Harriet Hall stood with both hands pressed so tightly against her cheeks that they were white.

“Oh, no,” she said softly. “Something’s happened. Something’s happened to Johnny!”

“He’s all right,” the colonel said quickly. “They had a crack-up, going in for a landing near Stuttgart, but Johnny’s all right. Pretty badly hurt, but all right.”

“Oh, dear—oh, dear—”

His mother seemed to sag, and both Eben and the colonel jumped to her side. They helped her to a chair, and the colonel said, “Some water . . .”

“Yes, sir.” Eben ran to the kitchen.

Stuttgart. That was German. His dad was a B-47 squadron commander, and the flight was off on a training mission. Eben knew they often flew overseas, but usually it was a nonstop flight, with them refueling over Europe or Africa, then returning to the Texas base. If they had cracked up landing, something must have gone wrong in the air. He got the glass of water and hurried back to the living room.

The colonel took the water. “Here, Harriet, drink this.”

She sipped and smiled through her tears and drew a long, broken breath. “You’re sure?” she asked unsteadily. “You aren’t just making it easy?”

Colonel Wilson shook his head. “No. Broken bones and concussion, but the report is he’ll make it all right. Young Vernon wasn’t so blessed—he bought it. Tom Riley walked away from the wreck with hardly a scratch.”

Eben caught his breath. Young Lieutenant Vernon was a cheerful fellow, not married, who liked to fish and hunt. Eben had often been out with him in his old jeep, bumping around the countryside. It was awful to think of him being dead so suddenly. But things happened quickly in the air. Everybody knew that; nobody expected it to happen, but it did.

“A fuel line broke, and they had to go down; the field was short and not very well lighted. It’s one of those things.”

“Will they—can they bring him home?”

The colonel shook his head. “Not yet, I’m afraid. It may be quite a while, Harriet, before he can be moved. If you want to go over there, we’ve got a courier flight to New York tomorrow night. We could help you get a commercial jump from there. You could probably be in Stuttgart sometime Monday.”

His mother looked at Eben. She smiled a little, her eyes glistening, then nodded and turned back to the colonel.

“I’ll go.” She turned to Eben. “I’m sure Uncle Silas will be glad to take you, Eben. There’re only three more weeks of school, and I guess you can afford to miss that. You’ve wanted to see Rockhaven. You wouldn’t mind spending a few weeks with Uncle Silas?”

“I’d rather go see Dad,” Eben said.

Silas was his uncle Silas Tyrell, his mother's brother who was fourteen years older than she was. He was a bachelor and lived alone in the old hometown of Rockhaven, Massachusetts, where he did lobster fishing and some farming. Eben had never seen Uncle Silas, but he knew the Tyrells had been important people in Rockhaven for a long, long time.

"Better not plan on that yet," Colonel Wilson told Eben. "Your dad's got a long, tough row ahead of him. He might worry if you were over there too."

"You won't mind if I leave you?" Eben's mother asked again. The color was coming back in her cheeks.

He smiled quickly at her. "It's okay, Mom."

She slipped her arm around him and pulled him down for a quick kiss on the cheek. "You run along back to bed, honey. I'm all right now."

"I'll stay a while," the colonel said. "I might even be able to use a cup of coffee, Harriet."

She stood up and laughed a little. "I know. Therapy." She walked with her arm around Eben's shoulder as far as the door, then bent, kissed the top of his head, and sent him on down the hall.

Eben lay on his back in the darkness, listening to their voices in the other room. Now that the shock was passing, he felt a little sick to his stomach. It didn't seem possible that his dad, who only yesterday morning had roughoused with him before he left for school, could now be lying in a hospital in Germany.

Suddenly he rolled out of bed and said his prayers again, adding a long one for his dad. When he got through, his throat was tight, and he had to swallow hard to get the lump out of it.

Back in bed, he thought about Uncle Silas Tyrell and Rockhaven. All his life he'd heard his mother talk about her family of seafaring people. He'd never heard of a single one that wasn't a captain. It was *Cap'n Ben* and Cap'n Emanuel and Cap'n Erie. It got so bad, one time, Eben could remember his dad grinning and asking, "Weren't there ever any privates in your family?"

His mother had wrinkled her nose at that, but she hadn't said anything. Later on, Eben's dad had explained. The Tyrells had lived in Rockhaven for generations. They'd been fishermen and whalers and privateers and probably, his dad said—looking over his shoulder—pirates now and then when they could get away with it. But they'd all been sailors of one sort or another, mostly with their own ships. The most famous, of course, was the one they called Cap'n Tyrell. He'd been captain of a clipper ship when he was only twenty-four years old. He had been real gung-ho, Eben's dad said, a regular tiger. He was the one whom people in that part of the country called the "Merchant Prince." Tough and smart, he'd ruled the roost for a long time. And he was Eben's great-grandfather, for whom he'd been named.

There was a not-very-good painting of Cap'n Tyrell's clipper, *Stormalong*, in his mother's bedroom. Whoever had made it had known all about sails and ropes, but not much

about painting. The ship was cluttered up with ropes, each one in its proper place, but the sea it was sailing on didn't look right.

Still, Eben liked the picture. When he looked at it and thought about his great-grandfather, he could occasionally feel something stirring around inside him, as if he too could take a big ship out and sail it clear around the world to China in a hundred days or less.

It seemed a little odd, sometimes, when the fastest and newest jets were all around him on the air base, to think so much about ships. The other boys kidded him about it, because they all wanted to fly jets and didn't talk about knots, or miles an hour, but spoke about Mach numbers, the jet term for speed. But they didn't have the family background he did. There was just as much seafaring stock in him as if his name had been Tyrell, instead of Hall.

Not that he wasn't glad his name was Hall. His dad had been an orphan, with no brothers and sisters, and there wasn't any family left on that side at all. On his mother's side there was only Uncle Silas, but behind him in Rockhaven was a long history of Tyrells. Eben felt close to Uncle Silas, even if he could never remember seeing him. They had often talked about visiting him, but his dad's duty had always kept them away from the East Coast, and somehow or other they had never made the trip. Moving from base to base, there'd never been any place Eben could really call home, and through the years he had come to think of Rockhaven, Massachusetts, as "home." He'd heard

so much about it from his mother that he felt he knew the town well.

It had once been a booming seaport, with clippers and whalers and fishermen making it important. But steam engines had driven away the sails, and petroleum had stopped the need for whale oil, and the big railroad centers like Boston and New York had taken away even the coastal trade. The ships were gone, and almost all the Tyrells were gone, but the name remained there in Rockhaven. The museum was filled with pictures of things the Tyrells had done, and to a boy who'd never had a place to set his roots down, it seemed as if Rockhaven must be a wonderful, quiet, homey sort of place.

Maybe there was some truth in the idea that you might have salt water in your veins, because ships and the sea had always fascinated Eben. He read sea stories and collected pictures of ships, and from the dictionary he had learned all the sails and most of the principal lines of a ship. He knew the difference between a brig and a topsail schooner and a bark or a brigantine. His dad had once grumbled that if he knew as much about his school subjects as he did ships, he'd be a straight-A student.

So if he had to stay home while his mother went to Germany, Eben was glad there was Uncle Silas to go. They'd get along fine, and even if his mother stayed all summer, it would be all right. He could help with the lobstering and the farming, and all the time he'd get acquainted with Rockhaven. Eben suddenly felt eager to go.

He settled back under the covers and waggled his toes, torn between concern for his father and the exciting prospect of visiting his uncle. The voices in the living room grew fainter and developed a slow beat, like surf, maybe, on a seashore. And then he was asleep.



The hot Texas sun was slamming in through the window when he wakened. He could hear his mother moving in her room, and he hurried in there. She was packing and looked tired, as if she hadn't slept much. Her eyes were red, and he knew she'd been crying.

"What do you want me to do, Mom?"

She turned quickly and kissed him, ruffling his hair.

"Hi, there." She laughed a little. "There's so much to do that I hardly know where to start. I'm glad it's Saturday and you can help. After breakfast I want you to lay out all your clothes, and we'll see what we think you'll need."

She held up a dress, eyed it, and shook her head.

"Oh, I've called Silas. It wasn't a very good connection, but he's looking forward to you coming." She smiled at Eben. "Said he'd make a sailor out of you before your father got off his crutches, or he'd know the reason why."

Eben grinned. "It'll be fun."

"It'll be work too," she said. "I was only thirteen when I went away to Aunt Emma's, but I can remember how hard it was. You'll have to help Silas all you can. He's been a bachelor all his life, and he'll be pretty set in his ways. And the house won't have all the conveniences we've been used to."

"I'll like it," Eben told her. "I know I will. We'll get along fine, Mom. That's one thing you won't have to worry about."

"I'm not going to worry about you," she said quietly. "I can't. I've got your father to worry about now."

She turned away, and Eben felt his own throat grow tight. He hesitated, then went off to dress.

When he went out to breakfast, she was smiling again.

"Colonel Wilson said the flight is scheduled for five or five thirty. You can take quite a bit if you want to, because they have a light load and have plenty of room. You'll go up to Rockhaven on the train from New York. We'll have to sit up tonight, but I guess we can do that for once."

"Sure thing," Eben said. "I put out my clothes. A lot of them are pretty old, Mom. Maybe I ought to get all new things in Rockhaven. You know—sea stuff. Slickers and sou'westers and boots; it's gonna be pretty sloppy, lobster fishing."

She laughed. "If I remember right, most of the men wear the oldest clothes they have. You've been seeing too many movies. Eat now, and then we'll decide."

It was a long day. There were so many things to do all at once that Eben thought they'd never get through. But late in the afternoon, they had their bags packed and the house straightened, and suddenly there was nothing to do but wait. The house, of course, belonged to the base—it would be kept for them, just as it was. While he stood in the window, waiting for the car that would take them to the

flight line, Eben looked out at the green lawns and all the kids at play.

They had lived there longer than any place he could remember: nearly five years. It was almost like a home. He'd miss the kids and the noise and the excitement of an air base, but he'd have something else to think about in Rockhaven. It would seem strange, being in a place where almost everybody and his father and grandfather before him had always lived in the same house. Some of the families there, his mother said, went back over a hundred years.

He hated to leave the base, but still, a place like Rockhaven, where everything stayed the same, sounded wonderful. He turned suddenly from the window.

"Here's the car, Mom!"

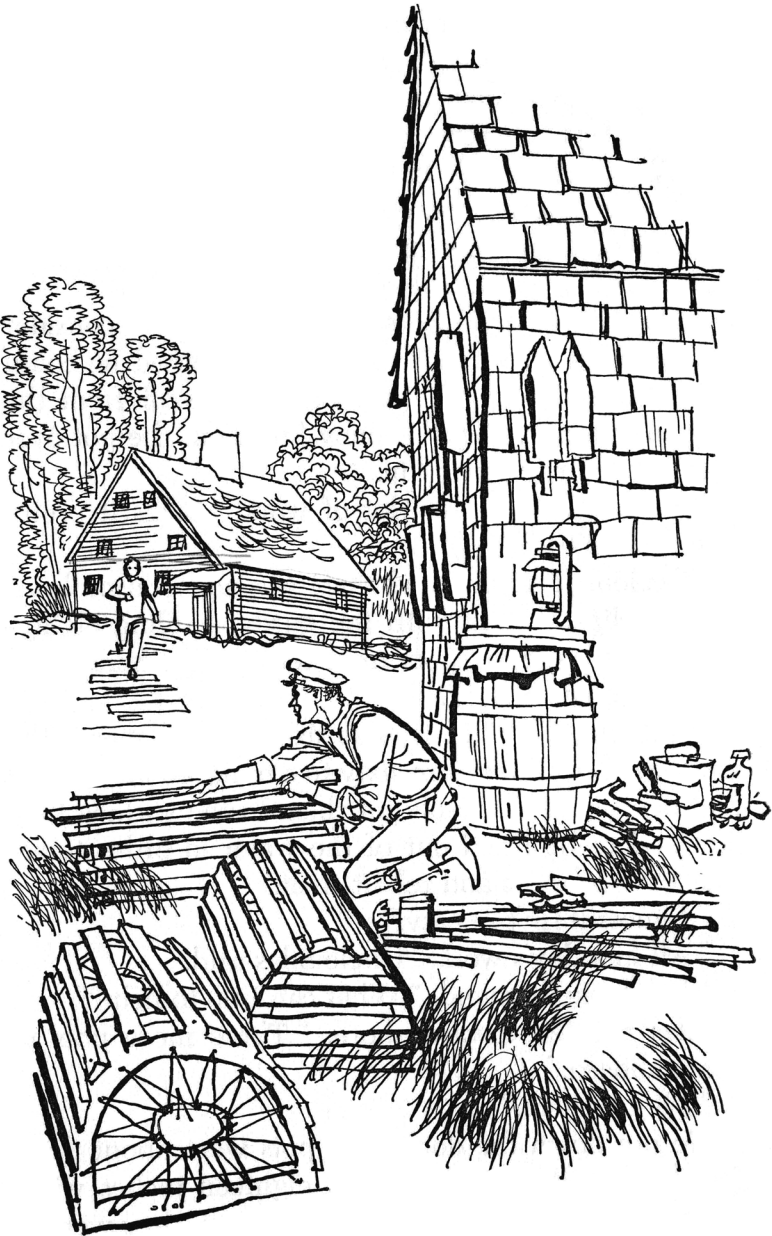
An airman helped Eben carry the bags out and then waited while Eben went back to the house. His mother stood in the living room, looking around, biting her lips.

"We've been happy here," she said, and dug into her bag for a handkerchief. "You lock up, honey," she said in a choked voice.

Eben went carefully through the house, seeing that all the doors and windows were locked. It was what his dad had always done when they went away for any length of time, and he had to take his dad's place now. When he was satisfied that everything was all right, he went out the front door and closed it tight. The latch clicked loudly, and in that moment, he felt he was closing the door on more

than the house; it was as if he had come to the end of a part of his life—as if everything from now on would be changed, completely different. He turned quickly and ran down the walk to the waiting car.

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Eben's family, the Tyrells, have been seafarers for as long as anyone can remember. When Eben goes to spend the summer with his uncle Silas, a lobster fisherman who lives in the little seaside town of Rockhaven, he feels his dreams have come true. However, Eben soon finds out that nothing in Rockhaven—from his strange, quiet uncle to the Tyrell family name—is as he imagined. Through a series of maritime adventures and meaningful new friendships, Eben begins to uncover his family's mysterious legacy while discovering his own hidden strength.



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