



No.

I shove hard out the door, through feathered people, blue arms, gray uniforms, and I'm running, running, running through a corridor lined with hammocks.

"*Magonia*," Jason said. But we were talking about fairy tales, not reality. He was talking about history and hallucinations. It was crazy! I was sick!

I push past the crowd, the bird inside my lung screaming at me. *Respect your station! Zal's the captain! Salute her!*

I slingshot myself up the ladder to the upper deck, push open the hatch, and sprint out into the light.

I'm expecting to breathe in the fresh air and cough, to touch the hospital gown embroidered with my name, and to feel frozen on my back where the thing gaps, but I stumble out into the cold air, and there's no parking lot. No *EARTH*.

No.

There's only a sky. A huge sky.

And it's full of ships.

All directions, at all distances, all kinds—small sailing



vessels, big ships similar to this one. Ships veiled by their own weather.

A bank of vessels moves together, bringing a larger storm with them. Little boats, catamarans, yachts, freighters—all moving through the sky.

All flying. The ships are flying, yes, yes, that's exactly what's happening, and they don't have wings. They're just . . . floating along in the middle of nothing.

And I'm standing on the deck of a huge ship too. Sails and rigging. Planks. We rock gently in the breeze.

In a moment, Zal's behind me, holding me up, because I'm swaying like I don't even have legs, a jellyfish.

"Aza Ray Quel, this is your country," she announces, her voice booming over the deck. "These are your country's ships. *Amina Pennarum* is first among them. There is no better and no braver than she."

A crew of blue people clusters around us.

"These are her officers."

"Captain's Daughter," they say in unison, these uniformed blues with their impossible whistling voices. They raise their hands to their brows. They salute me in the same way everyone saluted the captain.

Throwing up is the only rational option.

I lean abruptly over the rail and look into the tossing clouds there, stomach spinning.

Something enormous looks back at me. Sleek silver skin with a slight pattern on it, tiny eyes. It blinks, opens its feathery fins, and scatters drops of rain. It fountains a gust of wind and rain out of its . . . blowhole?



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It swims sideways through a cloud, and as it swims, it sings.
Sea of stars, it trills—in words, kind of, but not. *Greetings*,
it sings in a beautiful voice. *Sea of rains and snow*.

Legions of therapists have tried to make me understand the
supposed healing powers of tears. I've never understood them
until now.

"Don't cry, Captain's Daughter. It's only a squallwhale," says
a feathered crew member from behind me.

Indigo mohawk. The blue jay girl, I realize.

Only a squallwhale. I glance over at the giant creature—it's
not below us now, but above the level of the deck rail.

"One of our pod," says Zal. "They make storms to hide us
from drowner eyes. They're part of our camouflage."

I stare at the shifting vaporous edges of these creatures, half
whale, half climate.

"Not all the clouds you've spent your life looking at are
squallwhales, but some are."

More of that, then. "Not all, but some."

I look down, past all the ships in the sky, past the cloudy,
misty whales, and suddenly below me, there is a checkerboard
of green fields and roads and buildings. Earth. I'm paralyzed
with wanting, but I'm not allowed to keep looking down.