



Edward Coley Burne-Jones, "This Demophon Com Sailing in the See," from *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (1896)

MICHELLE WAMBOLDT
MEERES RAUSCH

I PITIED HER—I TRULY DID. I had been cruel, and she hated me for it. She was only ten when her mother washed off the rocks in a storm. Her father died only two years ago. He was one of three lost fishing out on the Banks when she became just another orphaned girl. She prayed to me every day. “Bring him back,” she screamed, arms raised and feet planted firmly in the sand. “I can’t be alone forever. I need someone. Please send him back to me.”

Then, one day, she thanked me for her fortune and forgave me for my cruelty. She came up over the dunes early in the morning, as she always did. It was foggy, and the wind was gentle as it moved steadily down the beach, sending her red curls in a tangled frenzy. She picked up a stick and dragged it behind her, marking her progress in the sand as she made her way down to the surf. She walked close by as usual, avoiding my touch for the most part but sometimes letting me wash over her bare feet and ankles. It was hard for her to resist me, even back then. I was as much a part of her as the sun, the moon, and the wind in her hair.

She could only see about thirty feet in any direction. It was like being in a bowl of smoke, undetected by the world and unable to see what lies ahead. As she looked up, searching for gulls she could hear but not see, she tripped on what she thought was a lump of seaweed entangled on a piece of driftwood. As she wiped the seaweed and sand away, she realized it was a man. His blond hair was matted to his beautiful face, and his pale flesh was cold as ice. Oddly enough, she remained quite calm. She put her ear to his chest and was elated to hear a heartbeat. She whispered to me, “Thank you.”

He had not a stitch of clothes on, and she wiped as much seaweed from him as she could. He was not a large man—hardly bigger than herself. She took him by the wrists and dragged him through the sand, over the dunes, down the path, and through her front door.

She knew no one would see her. Fog or not, she was isolated out here

on the Cape. The peninsula was only sixty feet across and no more than two hundred feet long, and the small village of fifteen families, known as the Knob, lay two miles north. It was connected to the Cape by a sand beach that held them together like a crown supports the two flukes of an anchor.

Once home, she put the man in her father's cot, buried him in a mound of blankets, and made a fire, feeding it with log after log. She closed every window, locked the door, and sat in the rocking chair, waiting. He did not move for the next two hours, and she eventually busied herself making soup, as she knew he would be hungry when he woke. She was cutting the onion, one eye on the knife, one eye on him, when she saw his lips move. "Meeres Rausch." She dropped the knife and rushed to his side, kneeling on the floor, her ear pressed to his lips. His head moved back and forth, and he said it again, "Meeres Rausch."

She knew he was speaking German, the language spoken by her great-grandmother, and she knew it would be safer to keep him a secret as a distant war still raged between their countries. She stroked his forehead and whispered back, "Hello, Meeres. My name is Madeline, and I'm going to look after you." He was silent again, and she smiled.

He murmured the same words several times over the next few days as he drifted in and out of sleep, "Meeres Rausch . . . Meeres Rausch . . ." During this time she washed the walls, scrubbed the floor, and baked a cake. It smelled like a home, clean and fresh.

On the third day, he sat up and saw her sleeping in the rocking chair beside him. Her red hair sparkled in the light coming through the window, and her freckled face was the most precious he had ever seen. She looked to be eighteen or so, the same age as his sister back home. He looked around the small shack and knew they were alone. He listened to the waves washing over the rocks beyond the walls, and he took comfort in their rolling rhythm. He sensed her love for him immediately, and he welcomed it. He reached over and took her hand. "Meeres," she opened her eyes and smiled down at him.

"Ja," he said. "Danke." They held hands and smiled into each other's eyes.

"Yes," she whispered to me. "Thank you."

She kept him hidden for just over a year, and as they learned to speak to each other they fell deeply in love. When she felt it was safe, she took him to the Knob and introduced him as a distant relative and her new husband.

The villagers were happy for her. Most of them had suffered losses over the past years, and they had known her heartache as well. They did not ask any questions, and they embraced Meeres as their own. He proved to be a skilled carpenter, and he became a valued member of the community. The happy couple were always referred to as Mr. and Mrs. Rausch from the Cape.

Over the years, many of the men invited Meeres to go out on the boats to earn some extra money. He would smile and thank them, but he always declined. She was grateful for this, as she knew she could not have let him go. Though she had thanked me again and again, she remained wary of me. Her trust was like a loose feather, forever afloat and always just out of reach.

When they were old and grey and could no longer climb up to the sleeping loft, they snuggled together on the cot beside the warm stove. One such night, Meeres took Madeline in his arms. "I should have told you this years ago," he said. "*Meeresrauschen* is the German word for the sound of the sea."

She turned and slowly smiled at him—the same smile she gave him all those years ago. "I know," she said. "I have always known."

That night they fell asleep as they always had, content and in love, listening to the sound of my voice.