

Misunderstanding resolved in YA story set on an idyllic island.

Whispers in the Wind

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WHISPERS IN THE WIND

Annie Laura Smith

CHAPTER 3

Students, ready for morning classes, arrived promptly at nine. Cassie wondered if all of them lived on the island or if, perhaps, some had come over on the ferry from the mainland.

"Cassie, I'd like for you to meet Janice Hunter. Her son, Jason, works at the Marina with Colin," her aunt said.

A chestnut-haired, middle-aged woman with deep blue eyes smiled at Cassie. "How nice to meet you, Cassie. Marie and Colin have told us so much about you."

"It's my pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Hunter," Cassie said shyly.

"I believe you're the same age as my son, Jason."

"Sixteen?"

"Well, he just turned 18."

Cassie didn't mention she'd be 17 on July 20.

"A senior?" Cassie tried to appear interested although meeting any guy, even if he were a potential sailing teacher, had very low priority on her list.

"No, he just graduated," Mrs. Hunter said proudly.

"He'll be going to the Air Force Academy in August. He's taking a summer course in calculus at the Community College."

'I wish him luck,' Cassie thought. The last thing in the world she needed this summer was to get to know someone well who was studying a course, especially a math course.

"Ready for class, Mrs. Hunter?" Susan asked, wiping clay from her hands.

"Yes." Jason's mother turned to Cassie and nodded toward her teacher. "She thinks she can make a potter out of yours truly. It'll take the soul of patience."

Susan laughed and handed her student an apron. "You

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threw a beautiful bowl last week. I couldn't have done it better."

"Flattery . . ." Mrs. Hunter laughed and followed her teacher to the potter's wheel, tying the rough textured apron on over her clothes.

Cassie lingered and watched Laurel warp a tapestry loom. Her hands moved effortlessly over the frame as the parallel rows of yarn took shape.

"That looks like fun," Cassie noted, watching with fascination.

Laurel nodded and continued threading yarn through the loom. "I'll be glad to teach you how to weave."

"Oh, would you? I'd love to learn." Cassie's hazel eyes shone in anticipation of mastering a new craft.

"Good. We'll plan some sessions later," Laurel replied, finishing the warp and tying off the cord.

"Hello, everyone," Colin Burke said cheerfully as he entered the Gallery carrying a handful of nautical charts.

"Hi, Uncle Colin. Did the charter boat get off okay?"

Her uncle took off his cap and held the charts aloft. "Yes, they are on this course. They left several hours ago. They're probably pulling in the big ones just about now."

"If they're not sea sick," Laurel said ruefully, remembering her disastrous deep-sea fishing trip.

Colin laughed. "Now Laurel, nearly everyone has better sea legs than you do!"

Laurel grimaced and continued working on the tapestry loom.

"How about a tour of the Marina, Cassie? Think Marie can spare you for a couple of hours?"

Marie overheard the conversation. "Certainly, Cassie. Do go."

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Cassie and Colin walked the short distance to the Marina, which was located on the leeward side of the island. The building, constructed of rough-hewn cypress, nestled under towering cedar and palm trees.

“What a perfect location!” Cassie observed as she saw the new Marina in the picturesque cove. “It looks like one of Aunt Marie’s paintings.”

Her uncle’s eyes crinkled in the corners as he smiled. “She did help me choose the site.”

Waves lapped rhythmically against the dock pilings as Cassie stood for a moment watching a school of minnows dart about in the shallow water.

“Hello, Jason, I’d like for you to meet my niece. Cassie, this is Jason Hunter, my right hand man this summer.”

Cassie turned to meet the pair of incredibly blue eyes of the person she’d seen sailing earlier. He was tall and lanky with a shock of straw-colored hair. His skin was a burnished bronze, a stark contrast to his white bathing suit, which seemed tailored on his muscular body.

“Hi, Cassie,” he said, extending his right hand, yet barely looking in her direction.

Cassie blushed and awkwardly shook hands, never taking her eyes off his features. “Ah-h, hello, Jason,” she stammered.

He turned to Colin. “The *Destiny* just radioed in for help. They’re taking on water, and could be in danger of sinking because their pumps have failed. I’ve called the Coast Guard and reported their location.”

An uncharacteristic frown crossed Colin’s face. “What were the last coordinates? That’s the boat we serviced this morning. It just got out of our maintenance last week.”

“Twenty-seven degrees north, eighty-three degrees

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west," Jason replied and went with Colin inside the building.

Cassie followed them and heard her uncle on the ship-to-shore radio. "Destiny . . . this is Pelican's Cove Marina . . . Do you read me?"

There was only static as a reply.

Her uncle dialed the Coast Guard station frequency. "Coast Guard, this is Colin Burke at Pelican's Cove Marina. Do you have any word on the *Destiny*?"

The radio static subsided. "Mr. Burke, this is Officer Stanton. Our cruiser is en route now. They should reach the *Destiny*'s location in approximately 30 minutes."

Colin looked at his watch and sighed. "I guess there's nothing more we can do." He managed a weak smile. "I'm sorry, Cassie. Things aren't usually this frantic around here." He turned to Jason. "I should stay by the radio. Would you show Cassie around?"

"Sure," Jason replied warmly and opened the door. "Let's start out on the dock."

They walked to the end of the wooden pier where tall-masted sailboats were anchored in the deep water. Cassie looked across the horizon to the endless stretch of blue water wondering how something so beautiful could be so treacherous.

"Will you be a senior next year?" Jason asked with interest, the blue eyes flickering with good humor.

"Yes."

"That will be a year to remember," Jason said, stepping across the dock to the deck of the *Seabreeze*. He held his hand out to help Cassie board the sailboat.

She felt a tingling sensation as his strong hand took her arm.

"Colin has completely refurbished his sloop. It really looks super," Jason said.

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Cassie looked across the deck at the riggings and gleaming brass fittings that reflected the sunlight like a mirror and nodded.

Jason unlocked the hatch and ducked to go down the stairs to the cabin.

Cassie followed and saw the miraculous transformation of the interior. The old wood had been completely replaced with shiny new teak. Tailored curtains, obviously her aunt's touch, fluttered at the portholes.

"I understand you like to sail," Cassie said, glancing around the interior.

"Yes. I have a windsurfer and a Hobie 16 catamaran, and help Colin crew in the regattas, too."

She noticed the way Jason's eyes seemed to deepen their blue color when he talked about sailing.

"Isn't it terrific?" Cassie said with enthusiasm, rubbing her hand over the smooth teak of the kitchen counter.

"Yes. I'll really miss sailing when I go to school." A troubled look crossed Jason's face. "But," he added cheerfully, "at least I have three more months here."

"You're going to the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs?"

"Yes. I'm studying hard this summer so I can have a good foundation in calculus."

Cassie stiffened. She hoped her aunt or uncle hadn't revealed her straight A record, and especially that calculus was one of her favorite subjects. Tutoring Jason, or any guy, this summer was something she certainly didn't want to do.

"I'm sure you'll do well," she said quite matter-of-factly.

If Jason noticed, he ignored her change in expression. "I'm sure you're dying to see our maintenance department."

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Laughing he led the way back to the edge of the dock.

“Sure. Lead on,” Cassie replied with forced enthusiasm.

A workman washed the hull of a boat while several others painted the exterior of a cabin.

“Ahoy, Mates,” Jason called. “This is Mr. Burke’s niece, Cassie Andrews.”

The men nodded in greeting. One of the workers came over to Jason. “Any word on the *Destiny*?”

Jason shook his head.

“They just refinished the *Destiny*,” Jason added as they continued on the dock, “and are friends with the crew. I know they’re worried about them, too.”

Cassie hadn’t realized the enormous responsibility her uncle had taken on in opening the Marina. She thought it meant gassing up boats and perhaps some bait and ice. Maybe that was why Aunt Marie was displeased. She just didn’t understand the magnitude of his responsibility.

“I didn’t know the Marina repaired boats as well,” Cassie admitted looking around at the number of vessels in various states of disrepair.

“That’s our main business. This is the only repair facility in the area.” Jason took her by the arm. “Let’s go back to the building. I imagine you could use a cold drink.”

Cassie smiled as the sun beamed down on her face. “That would be nice,” she agreed, pushing a damp curl from her forehead.

Her uncle was still on the radio when they entered the Marina office. She heard the officer’s voice. “The Coast Guard has the *Destiny* in tow . . . all aboard are safe . . .”

The tense lines on Colin’s face relaxed. He slapped Jason on the back. “They got there in time and fixed the pumps! The *Destiny* is no longer in danger of sinking. How’d

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you like our little business, Cassie?" he asked, turning to his niece as he wiped his forehead with a handkerchief.

"It's much more than I ever imagined, Uncle Colin. And the *Seabreeze* looks terrific!"

"We'll take her out Saturday if Jason will help us to crew. I need to give her a shakedown cruise before the regatta next week."

Cassie was excited at the thought of a sailing trip. She looked across at Jason who watched her with a faint look of amusement. He could be a nice safe friend for the summer, especially one to share sailing trips. They just wouldn't talk about the calculus course.

She looked out of the window and saw the *Seabreeze* bobbing at anchor by the dock, reflecting the serenity and renewal she knew the summer would bring.

"Cassie, we're ready to leave," her aunt called from the kitchen.

"Coming, Aunt Marie." Cassie put the finishing touches to her makeup. She looked forward all week to the day's outing on the *Seabreeze*.

A glance in the mirror showed the happy anticipation in her face. Her hazel eyes sparkled and her cheeks glowed.

Her aunt was putting ice in the cooler when Cassie entered the kitchen. "Everything's packed and ready to go," Marie said.

"Here, let me take that," Cassie offered reaching for the heavy cooler.

"Thanks, Cassie, but Jason's coming to help. Leave that for him. You can take the towels and serving utensils." Her aunt handed her a brimming canvas bag.

"Marie!" They heard Jason's voice on the front porch.

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“Come in, Jason. We’re in the kitchen.”

The screen door slammed shut as Jason entered. His usually windblown hair was combed in place and his blue eyes seemed to look through Cassie when she spoke.

“Good morning, Jason. How are you?”

“Fine. Looking forward to sailing?”

“Oh, yes!” she replied excitedly. Cassie really couldn’t explain the thrill she felt in anticipation of going out on the *Seabreeze*.

“Here’s the cooler, Jason. Can you handle it?” Marie teased.

“Sure.” He hoisted the fiberglass container onto his broad shoulders.

They followed Jason down the narrow path to the Marina. Cassie wondered how they must look struggling down the hill with an assortment of cooler, bags, and picnic hamper.

Her uncle had brought the *Seabreeze* alongside of the dock. Jason put the cooler on the deck, and then held out his hand to help Cassie aboard.

She tried to ignore her feelings as his strong hand gripped hers while she boarded. As he helped her across the railing on the deck of the sailboat, their eyes met. She sensed a look on his face that was hard to define, and felt a confusing rush of reaction.

“I’ll help Colin raise the sails,” Jason said, breaking the awkward moment. “Be back in a minute.”

“Let’s stow these things below,” Marie suggested as she started toward the cabin with the food. Sunlight flickered through the louvered hatch to the cabin below, the bright rays reflecting off the burnished finish of the teak interior. Cassie and her aunt put the food and drinks away in the compact galley, then returned topside where Jason and Colin were busy

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raising the mainsail.

“That’s fine, Jason. Secure the lines now,” Colin instructed as the sails billowed in the breeze.

When her uncle untied the mooring line that secured the sloop, the *Seabreeze* slowly moved away from the dock, gaining speed as the breezes freshened.

Cassie stood by the rail and watched the sloop cut silently through the waves. The beauty of the softly rippling water almost hypnotized her.

Jason’s voice startled her. “Ready to work as crew?” he asked. “We need to practice for the regatta.”

Cassie couldn’t believe it. She would actually get to help practice for the first regatta! “Sure!” She followed Jason to the mast, trying not to look too eager.

“Let’s go over the mast, riggings, and sails first,” he suggested.

The terms sounded like a foreign language to her, but she could tell by the tone of his voice it was his native vocabulary. “The sail I recognize.” She fingered the white cloth billowing in the breeze.

Jason grinned. “Good . . . that’s a start.”

“This is the mast.” He put his hand on the tall fiberglass pole. “It holds the sails up . . . and this is the boom. It holds the main sail out.” He pointed to a pole perpendicular to the mast. “Watch out for that,” he cautioned, “and be ready to duck! When we jibe or tack, it can swing around quickly.”

“I will,” she promised.

“The riggings are the tricky part,” he explained pointing to the maze of steel cables. “They form the supporting system. You’ll get a chance to work them when we start our practice run.”

“How do you judge the wind?” Cassie asked, hoping

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she had asked an intelligent question.

“That’s a good question.” Jason seemed pleased with her interest. “Colin’s the master at that, but I’ll try to explain. True wind is the strength and direction of the wind recorded by someone who is not in motion. But what you feel on your face now is apparent wind.”

He reached out and touched her cheek.

She warmed at his touch.

He continued. “It’s the total of the true wind and the ‘wind’ created by the *Seabreeze*’s movement. We depend on a masthead fly--it’s like a wind vane--to detect apparent wind.” He pointed to a small instrument mounted on top of the mast that looked like a pennant flag.

Cassie looked up and nodded.

“Let’s try running now. That’s sailing with the wind astern. Your first lesson, okay?” His eyes crinkled in the corners with his usual good humor.

Cassie followed Jason to the wheel where her uncle steered the sloop.

“Ready to try your hand at sailing, Cassie?” He moved over and gave the wheel to her.

“I’ll try, Uncle Colin,” she replied with a lump in her throat. What if she did something really stupid? What would Jason think?

She took hold of the smooth teak wheel. Cassie felt a thrill when the sloop responded to her touch and raced southward across the Gulf.

“Stay on the same course Colin set,” Jason cautioned. “Watch the compass. It’s shallow out of the channel.”

“I will,” Cassie agreed, glancing at the compass. She kept her hands on the smooth wood, and planted her feet firmly on the pitching deck.

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"I'll go below and get some coffee while the boat's in such good hands." Colin went to the cabin leaving Cassie and Jason alone on the deck.

"You're doing fine," Jason encouraged as he sat on the deck beside her.

Cassie held tightly to the wheel of the *Seabreeze*. As she stole a glance at Jason, she heard whispers in the wind. She looked up at the mainsail. Did she dare ask Jason if he had heard it, too?

Jason saw her looking up at the mainsail. "Do you hear that sound?" he asked.

"Yes ...it sounds like singing."

Jason laughed. "I'm afraid it's only the wind moving through the shrouds and the stays."

Cassie blushed. She couldn't dare let him know that she felt it was the wind whispering to her. It was not an echo of the events last fall in Dallas, but a promise...

She glowed with the combined excitement of sailing and having Jason as a teacher. She was amazed at his extensive knowledge of sailing. She was glad they would have this summer -- together.

CHAPTER 4

Cassie felt like a veteran sailor, yet the exhilaration she experienced while guiding the sailboat across the open water was a new feeling. Engrossed in her euphoria, she failed to notice a sudden shift in wind until Jason's voice called, "She's jibing . . . duck. Before Cassie could move, the swinging boom passed just over their heads with great force.

She fell to the deck, momentarily letting go of the wheel. It spun wildly.

"Cassie, are you all right?" Jason exclaimed, lunging for the wheel.

Her face was red with embarrassment. What a helmsman she'd proven to be. Some sailor she'd make when she couldn't even handle a slight change in the wind!

"I'm fine, Jason. Just surprised." 'He probably thinks I'm a real klutz. Some impression I've made!' she thought.

"I'm glad you're okay," Jason said with relief in his voice. "That was a good lesson. It could happen to anyone." His eyes expressed warm assurance.

'I'll bet he's just saying that to make me feel better,' Cassie thought. . 'It's probably never happened to him or Colin.'

She recovered and asked, "What should I have done?"

"That was a jibe," Jason explained. "When you fail to control the boom and mainsail properly, you'll get an accidental jibing with violent motion of the boom when it changes sides."

Cassie looked puzzled.

"It was my fault," he assured. "We hadn't gotten into controlling the boom and mainsail, but we'll try that later." He smiled and suggested, "Let's try reaching now. We'll be sailing

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with the wind near the beam. That's a beam reach."

"You really think I'm ready for anything else?" Cassie asked in disbelief.

"Sure . . . it's experience . . . both good and bad that counts in sailing."

Her heart quickened as he moved to release the wheel to her. The sun reflected off his tanned skin and made his straw-colored hair glisten.

"We need to take in the main sheet until the wind's on the boat's starboard quarter. Then the jib will fill with wind. Ready?"

'Sure I am,' thought Cassie, 'if I just knew what main and jib meant.'

Noting her hesitation, Jason asked, "Is there a problem?"

Cassie hated to appear so dumb but there was no way to hide her lack of sailing knowledge. "Just a minor one," she acknowledged. "What are a main and a jib?" She hoped her expression didn't reveal her embarrassment.

Jason roared with laughter. "My, we do have a problem."

He seemed so genuinely amused, Cassie laughed with him.

"Lesson number two," he said patiently. "The mainsail and jib are the two working sails." He pointed to each of the sails on the mast.

Cassie nodded and repeated, "Mainsail and jib."

"Luffing means the sails are rippling . . . ready now?"

"Yes," Cassie said and took the wheel with renewed vigor. She wouldn't let it jibe on her this time.

"We'll have to trim or ease the sheets quickly to adjust to every wind shift. You're the skipper . . . just tell me when,"

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Jason said.

Cassie checked the masthead fly to note the wind direction, and saw the wind vane turn slightly.

“Trim!” she called.

Jason sprang to his feet, and winched the lines tighter. The boat responded and heeled to its side.

“Excellent,” Jason encouraged, securing the lines.

Cassie felt like a child with a new toy. The response of the boat to her touch and the refreshing cool wind in her face gave her a total feeling of renewal -- and to have such a good teacher as Jason Hunter at her side made it all perfect.

Her reflections were interrupted by another shift in the wind. Before the boom had a chance to swing over, she said, “Ease!” and Jason eased the sails again.

She thought, ‘We make quite a pair -- the perfect sailing team.’

“I think you’re ready for beating,” Jason noted.

“Did I really do that badly?” Cassie teased, hoping beating certainly had a different meaning than the usual one.

Jason shook his head and laughed. “No, it’s not the usual kind of beating. This kind of beating is sailing upwind, close hauled.”

“Okay,” Cassie replied. “I’m ready.”

She turned the wheel and moved the *Seabreeze*’s bow toward the eye of the wind.

“We’ll pull the mainsail in as far as it’ll go. The jib’s most important in this technique.” Jason adjusted the sails accordingly.

Cassie handled the sailboat uneventfully as Jason continued to trim the sheets for her.

“How about changing jobs,” he suggested, “so you can learn to handle the sails, too?”

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“Sure.” She released the wheel to him and stood by the riggings.

“Trim!” he cried as the wind shifted. She trimmed the mainsail and adjusted the jib sheet like an expert.

“Perfect,” Jason complimented, looking at her with genuine admiration.

She felt an excitement she hadn’t known before. Here she was sailing with the best looking guy she had ever seen and he had said, “perfect” about her sailing!

“Let’s try coming about now that you’re an expert at sailing and changing headings,” Jason explained further.

“There are two tacks port and starboard. When I say, ‘ready about’ and ‘hard-a-lee’, let the jib sheet run free and move out of the way of the boom.”

Cassie nodded and reached for the jib’s ropes, wondering if she would be able to do everything with split-second timing.

“Ready about . . . hard-a-lee!” Jason called.

Cassie followed his instructions and the boat made a smooth transition. The starboard tack was completed without incident.

“Great!” Jason said, looking at Cassie with a fond expression.

Cassie wiped the salt spray from her face and felt a sense of proud satisfaction.

Colin appeared on deck with a steaming mug of coffee in his hand. “Who’s responsible for the smooth sailing and expert tacking?” he asked.

“Cassie’s our expert sailor today,” Jason said, looking intently at her.

Cassie blushed. “I have a good teacher.”

“Why don’t you two take a break? I’ll handle it alone

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for a while. We'll practice running the course on our way back."

Colin took over the wheel as Jason and Cassie went below.

Marie was stretched out on the cabin's sofa reading a weaving magazine. She put the magazine down and looked up when they entered. "How's our student doing?" she asked.

"Excellent!" Jason answered.

"If you don't count an unintentional jibe," Cassie said laughing.

"That's a good learning experience," her aunt commented. "As long as you don't get hit in the head by the boom." She rubbed her head as though she had painful memories of her last jibing accident.

"That's what I told her," Jason agreed, getting two sodas out of the galley's compact refrigerator. "Would you like one, too, Marie?"

"No, thanks. I'll take some coffee topside and join Colin."

Cassie swallowed hard. She wasn't sure if she could talk with Jason alone for very long -- especially if they weren't discussing sailing. She was so afraid the topic of his course would come up -- what could she possibly say if it did? And what if he should ask her to help him study? After all, he was teaching her to sail.

Cassie sat on the upholstered seat that encircled the galley table and watched Jason open the sodas. She would have to write Katie about her sailing lessons -- and, of course, about her new teacher. How could she describe Jason so Katie would know how really handsome he was in person?

Lots of guys had blond hair and blue eyes. But somehow on Jason they were unique. His features, coupled

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with his perfect tan, made him look like a model for a suntan commercial. And then there was his pleasant personality.

“A penny for your thoughts?” The blue eyes crinkled around the edges as he handed her the drink.

“Ah-h,” Cassie hesitated, glad Jason couldn’t read her mind. “Just thinking about writing my friend, Katie, about our sailing trip. It’s been fantastic.”

“You will be a good sailor someday,” he said and sat down across from her.

Cassie blushed and was momentarily at a loss for words. She wasn’t accustomed to receiving compliments from guys, especially a guy like Jason.

Jason broke the awkward pause. “Would you like to have a picnic over at Lighthouse Point tomorrow? I’ll show you how to sail the Hobie catamaran . . . it’s quite different from sailing the *Seabreeze*.”

“Yes, I’d love to go,” she replied without hesitation.

Marie’s voice echoed down into the galley. “Ready for the trial run?”

Jason stood and finished his soda. “The moment of truth . . . we’ll see how well she handles the course.”

Cassie and Jason returned to the deck where Jason helped Colin tack to get into starting position. She marveled at the close zigzag course the *Seabreeze* made as the sloop tacked into the wind. She especially noticed how skillfully Jason and Colin worked together. They were, indeed, a perfect team and would be hard to beat in any race. Cassie wondered if she would ever be a competent enough sailor to join them.

Jason set the stopwatch as Colin brought the boat into stays to play for time. The luffing sails of the *Seabreeze* fluttered gently. “Now!” Jason shouted as the *Seabreeze* crossed an imaginary starting line ready for the race. Clouds of flying

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spray shot over the boat dosing Cassie and her aunt with salt water.

Marie laughed and wiped her face. "You'll get the feeling of a real race now!"

The boat heeled with the leeward rail well under the water and sailing fast while Jason lay out on the hiking board as human ballast.

Cassie held her breath as the boat seemed ready to capsize, but it was quickly righted and the rail emerged from a broad river of foam. The *Seabreeze* took the first buoy with ease and rounded the second with sails billowing.

As they crossed the finish line, Jason shouted. "We did it! We bested our last time!"

A broad smile covered Colin's face, as he thumped Jason on the back. "I knew the ole girl could do it!"

Marie commented, "You'll never see a happier person than Colin when he wins a race. I think Jason's almost as excited."

In the excitement of the moment, Cassie jumped up from the deck and hugged Jason. Seeing the surprised look on his face, and realizing what she had done, her oval face turned a rosy red.

"Oh, Jason, that was terrific sailing! You and Colin are quite a team."

Jason nodded. "Your uncle's quite a sailor . . . and a good teacher, too."

"Don't pay any attention to your modest friend," Colin replied. "He could win a race any day at the helm of the *Seabreeze*."

"Let's get some lunch ready," Marie suggested to Cassie. "I imagine our sailors here are starving."

Jason nodded as he coiled some of the rope on the deck.

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“I’ll second that,” Colin agreed, turning the *Seabreeze* toward Pelican’s Cove.

Marie put her arm around her niece’s shoulder when they reached the galley. “I don’t believe you have to worry about Jason. He isn’t like Chip Henderson at all.”

“I know,” Cassie said softly, putting the silverware on the table.

The ship-to-shore radio crackled. Marie moved across the galley to the set and adjusted the dials.

“Attention all ships . . . this is a weather advisory from the National Hurricane Center in Miami . . . an organized tropical depression has been picked up by satellite. It’s centered about 600 miles east of the Leeward Islands. All maritime interests in the Caribbean Sea are cautioned to listen for further advisories.”

A chill swept through Cassie. She prayed the tropical storm wouldn’t build to hurricane strength. She had been through Hurricane Eloise as a child; that was enough devastation to last her a lifetime!

“I’d better tell Colin,” Marie said, heading up the steps. “He needs to alert the men at the Marina.”

Cassie peered out of the porthole at the cloudless sky and shimmering blue water. It seemed impossible to believe that a storm, an ocean away, was turning the beauty of the sea into a scene of savage fury.

Colin came down the galley steps two at a time. “I’ll call Steve. Storms in the Leewards sometimes turn northeastward from that location, but we can’t be too careful.”

He flipped on the transmitter. “Pelican’s Cove Marina, come in. This is the *Seabreeze*.”

A faint voice replied. “Go ahead, *Seabreeze*.”

Colin explained about the storm in the Atlantic and told

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Steve to monitor the Coast Guard channel for further word. Turning off the transmitter he sighed. “All we need is a hurricane at the Marina.” His brow furrowed as he ran his hand through his black, wind-blown hair.

Marie put her hand on his shoulder. “It’s as least four days away, Colin . . . and not a real hurricane. It could turn north or maybe even die out.” She looked at his troubled face with understanding concern.

“Sure it will,” Colin agreed and seemed to relax. “Let’s head for the Marina so we can check the rest of the equipment for the race.”

“I’ll call you when lunch is ready,” Marie commented, obviously trying to convince herself after Colin left.

She and Cassie finished fixing lunch without further conversation. Cassie noticed the worried look on her aunt’s face and decided it might be best if she didn’t try to ask any questions about the storm.

“Soup’s on guys,” Marie called up the galley steps.

Colin bounded down the stairs. “My first mate’s minding the store while the skipper eats. Rank does have its privileges,” he teased, placing his visored cap on Cassie’s auburn curls.

She laughed. “I’ll go topside and keep first mate company.”

Colin winked at Marie. “I bet you will!”

Cassie blushed and went on deck.

Jason stood at the wheel reminding Cassie of one of the Greek gods at the helm of his sailing vessel. She looked at the brilliant cloudless Florida sky and smooth Gulf water. She sensed peace and contentment from its reflection.

“Any new word on the storm?” Jason asked.

Cassie sat cross-legged on the deck beside the mast.

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"It's 600 miles east of the Leeward Islands. Does that sound serious?"

"Not if it follows a northeastward track," Jason acknowledged.

"We'll pray for that," Cassie remarked quietly.

"It certainly won't be a problem tomorrow for our trip to Lighthouse Point. In fact," Jason noted, "it probably won't even be a problem for the regatta next week."

Cassie felt a wave of relief. She still had nightmares about the hurricane she had been in when she was 12. She could still hear the winds howling over Pelican's Cove. The sea came up so fast they didn't have time to evacuate. The night in the Burkes' darkened house when all the electricity went off was the worst night she had ever lived. She remembered clinging to her father and crying most of the night. His calm reassurances got her through it, but she wasn't sure she could survive a repeat experience. She had never known real fear until then. But when they got out the next morning and saw the devastation left by the storm, she felt lucky to be alive.

"Were you living here when Eloise came through?" Cassie asked.

"No. We were on the mainland and only got heavy rains," Jason replied. "I saw later what it did to the island. Were you here then?"

"Yes." Cassie shook her head. "I can't remember a worse time. I thought we were all going to die. The surf was pounding so hard and the rain came in sheets. That howling wind was the eeriest thing I've ever heard." She shuddered at the memories.

"Well, I'm sure you don't need to worry about this storm. Besides, it's only a tropical depression now. Certainly not anywhere near hurricane force."

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Jason's calm voice made her feel better. She looked up at the bright sky wondering why she was worried anyway. A storm wouldn't dare to intrude on their idyllic sailing adventure.

"Would you like to take the wheel for a while?"

"I'd love to!" Cassie sprang to his side, feeling a thrill as he brushed against her to make room at the helm.

"Just keep a steady course. We're headed for the channel into the Marina."

Cassie nodded and felt excitement as the boat responded again to her hand at the wheel.

Jason leaned against the mast and watched her as the wind ruffled his hair on his forehead. The unruly hair gave him an aura of casualness that Cassie found quite attractive.

"I can't believe you've never sailed before," Jason said.

"Not really," Cassie admitted. "Unless you count the times Uncle Colin led me around the cove in *Summer's Fun*.

"*Summer's Fun?*" Jason raised his eyebrows questioningly.

Cassie laughed. "You mean you haven't heard of that world class racer? It was the boat to beat . . . let me tell you."

"No, I'm afraid I haven't," Jason admitted laughing.

"I have some pictures in Aunt Marie's album," Cassie said. "I'll show them to you later. It's a classic boat."

"If you say so," Jason replied, giving her a long, keen look.

"When do you leave for the Academy?" Cassie asked, hoping his answer would be September or later.

"The end of August. I have to report August 31." He grimaced and added, "I'll have my calculus final August 25 so that'll give me a few days to relax before I leave."

'Now why did he have to bring that up?' Cassie thought crossly. 'Well,' she admonished herself. 'You brought up his

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school. There's no need to blame him.'

She managed a smile. "I'm sure you'll have no problem with that exam."

"I hope not," he said, reaching up to free the mainsail that was caught on a sheet.

"What are your favorite subjects?" he asked, taking her by surprise.

"Math and science." She hoped he didn't pursue that line of conversation.

"I can't believe the types of problems I'm having to do in this calculus course."

'Please,' she prayed silently. 'Don't ask for help . . .'

"Look!" he said pointing across the bow. "There's a school of porpoises."

Cassie followed his direction and spied a group of porpoises frolicking in front of the boat. They seemed to be playing games with each other as they thrashed in the water.

"They're probably after a school of fish," Jason noted.

Cassie watched them, trying to steer the boat around the group.

"Don't worry. They won't let you run over them if that's why you're changing course."

She relaxed her grip on the wheel and turned the boat back to its normal course.

"What's it like to live in a big city?" Jason asked.

"Well, Dallas is big," Cassie answered, "and has lots of traffic. I especially like all of the fabulous art galleries. The one at SMU is really nice. The Fine Arts Museum at Fair Park has some priceless paintings."

"Do you think you'll make art your career?" Jason asked with interest. Those blue eyes seemed to look through her as he questioned her.

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“No. I hope to go into some area of math or science. I haven’t made up my mind, yet. I’d like to have art as a hobby, though. It’s so relaxing . . . and I really enjoy it.”

“Marie should be a lot of help. She’s good with seascapes,” Jason noted.

Cassie was surprised and thought, ‘Most guys wouldn’t have noticed such a thing as a good watercolor. Marie should be quite flattered to have someone like Jason compliment her work.’

“Yes, she’s promised to help me this summer. I hope there will be enough time for some lessons. I need lots of help.”

“I doubt that,” Jason remarked. “Not if you paint like you sail.”

Cassie blushed. It was still hard to accept Jason’s compliments. “What are your plans at the Academy?”

“It will be a combined math-science major. Then I’ll be commissioned and have to serve four years in the Air Force. After that, I just don’t know. Perhaps graduate school.”

Graduate school? Was Jason smarter than she thought? Maybe she had misjudged his ability. Or was he just wishfully thinking . . .

“I imagine your tour in the Air Force will give you some ideas for what you’d like to do, don’t you?”

“Yes, I hope so. Unless I’m stuck in Thule, Greenland, or some other remote area.” Jason grimaced at the thought.

“Can you imagine sailing in Greenland on an ice boat rather than a sleek sloop like the *Seabreeze*?”

Cassie laughed. “Yes, if you have a mate to chop ice floes out of your way.”

Jason shuddered. “Don’t even think of that!”

Cassie hoped, too, he wouldn’t be in Thule, Greenland.

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She wished he could be in Pelican's Cove on her summer visits from college. It just wouldn't be the same now if she came and he weren't there.

"Will you get any time off from school this year, or do you have to go straight through?"

"I'll have two weeks at Christmas. That's all.

Otherwise it'll be a straight 12 months a year from now until graduation."

"That's a long time," Cassie whispered.

"Steer a little to starboard," Jason suggested, noting some seaweed in front of the bow.

Cassie eased the boat around the grass and resumed course.

"You're sailing like a veteran," Jason complimented.

"You should praise my teacher," Cassie replied with a shy smile.

Jason put his hand over hers on the wheel. "No, you catch on quickly."

Cassie thought she would melt on the spot! What would she do if Jason kissed her?

Misunderstanding resolved in YA story set on an idyllic island.

Whispers in the Wind

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