tunic as if it means to antagonise me and set ablaze the little peace I have left.

I take a deep breath and try again. "We dock at Corcusia, the city of dreams."

"Ah." A glimpse of joy runs across his face, making sure to vanish as quickly as it arrived. He lights the pipe and turns towards me.

"Tell me, oh captain, do these eyes look like they need more dreams?"

I don't know what bothers me more, his back or those eyes. They reflect a dark emptiness. A blackness so deep, I know not where it ends. An abyss of misery. They used to be brown, a beautiful dark brown. Now, you can very clearly see in them—nothing. I am often plagued by the thought that if I inspected a dead man's eyes, they would look exactly like his. But I stop myself. I would rather try to forget than find yet another bleak truth about my brother's present state.

Yes. Beneath that unkept beard, the matted hair, and the perpetual intoxication lie the remains of the man who was once my brother. It's hard to believe that he is the same man who cared for me after my accident.

"Let's go out tomorrow. A change of scenery might be good," I say, hoping that the gods will smile upon me today.

"You may leave now," he mutters, blowing a ring of smoke towards the ceiling.

"Is seven years not long enough?" I foolishly allow some of my helplessness to slip through.

Now, *my* hands are trembling, my mouth a little dry, as I continue to scorn the Goddess of Luck.

"How dare you?" He gets up in a fit of rage and hurls the chair against the wall. "Get out of my sight!" he shouts, pointing at the door.

I look down, lean on my stick and squeeze out of his chambers. Soon enough, the door is slammed. I hear the barrel being dragged back into its place. I should remember that the next time we go to the trouble of arranging for his rum.

His hostility no longer bothers me, nor does his anger. These are merely ways to make me stop coming. To make me give up. What *does* bother me are the countless days of silence that screech through the recesses of my

## **Ned-Har**

"Will you get off the ship tomorrow?"

I peer into Andahar's cabin and find him sitting at his shabby desk, trying to fix himself a pipe. With those trembling hands? He may be here until hell freezes over.

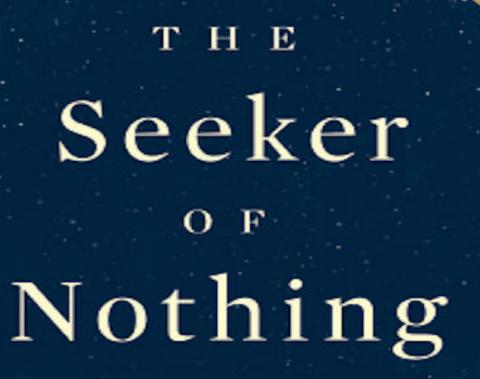
I use my stick to push my way in as much as I can. The door only opens a little. What could be blocking the way always escapes me. He never seems to change his clothes, so I don't think there are many of those lying around. Although he could not be called a poor man, a peasant is likely to have more possessions than he does, prized or otherwise. Yet, something obstructs the doorway.

"Is it sinking?" Andahar says without shifting his gaze from the mission at hand. The storm outside does not make his task any easier.

The gatekeeper of heaven must be more welcoming to the greatest sinner than Andahar is to anyone who would dare to enter his cabin. Sinner or not, today I push the door harder and begin to move a little further into the room. Even with only half of me inside, it's difficult to ignore the assault on my senses. Having lived on a ship for so long, I may have been a constant courtier to a larger variety of sharp odours than anyone else. Whether it is the stench of moisture and mould where he lives, the barely edible, gnarly-smelling meat on his plate, or the clothes soaked in bodily fluids on his men, a sailor would be damned if he stopped to think. Or smell.

But Andahar's cabin is unbearable. The air is stale. It reeks of sweat and an overpowering wetness. His foul breath fills the small chamber, stinking of meat and rum. Lots of rum. I can't help but let out a cough as I squeeze through from behind him and open the window, testing the limits of my courage.

He glares at me before getting up and slamming it shut. He sits down again, takes a huge gulp from the black bottle, re-adjusts his position, and resumes attending to his immediate objective. Although I have been trying my best to avoid it, my eyes meet his neck. I shut them immediately. How I hate seeing that crinkled leathery skin, which creeps out from under his dirty



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Om Swamiji, words cannot encapsulate what my heart knows. This book is yours. Thank you for being by my side every step of the way. Your grace and blessings make my life beautiful.

Mom, this would not be possible without you. Your thoughts, input, and support have been invaluable in making this a reality.

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