

# Sundaken Squall

## Chapter Three Crowded Waters

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**THE STORY SO FAR:** It's 1884, and the *Neptune*, a side-paddle freighter, is racing for New York City. Thaddeus wishes his pa, Captain Bates, would let him do more on the boat. Meanwhile, the first mate, Mr. Oliver, is sick. And a squall is bearing down.

Side wheels churning through dark blue waters, the *Neptune* moved from the Jersey shore. The winds picked up. Waves rose and broke. As the ship pitched and yawed, Thad noted that Pa was gripping the rudder wheel tightly. Thad reminded himself that neither the weather, nor the way the *Neptune* was handling, was unusual. He'd seen worse. But it was spring, and everything was unpredictable.

The *Mermaid* was bouncing about too. But they had drawn closer. Thad was glad. Beating their rival would put Pa in better spirits.

Thad sat on the floor of the pilot-house and reviewed his notes, checking the farmers' names and what they'd brought on board. Everything needed to be right. That would help with Pa too. But Thad had to give up. The *Neptune* rolled so, he couldn't focus on the writing.

He looked back. A seagull was following them. A fish leaped from the water. And the heavy ocean mist was still advancing from the northeast. That could mean a real storm—a nor'easter. Up ahead the *Mermaid* was picking up speed. But the *Neptune* was still gaining—if slowly. Now that they were well under way and racing, Thad had to admit it was exciting.

Twenty minutes later they entered the Narrows. Port side were Staten Island's green hills; starboard, the rocky coast of Brooklyn. The Narrows channel was often congested with boats tossed by rip tides. Those tides made the way tricky, and with a squall gathering, potentially treacherous.

Thad noted an unusually large number of boats in the Narrows as ships raced to seek storm-safe New York Harbor. But just as many boats were heading out, trying to gain a weather advantage, hoping to run south before the same conditions. As Thad knew, ship captains often took risks.

The *Mermaid* was pulling ahead again. Abigail cried, "We're falling back!"

Captain Bates leaned toward the speaker tube. "More steam!" he shouted. "With the wind coming in, it might be a bit rough.



Hang on. Abigail, ready on the whistle. We're going to need it. Don't often see the channel this crowded."

Thad knew you could not halt the forward motion of a boat quickly. Not like a horse. A ship took lots of time and space. The bigger, the more powerful the boat, the more distance you needed to stop. You needed to calculate carefully—something like a geometry problem. Long ago Thad had decided it was like his feelings: once they got going, it wasn't easy to stop them.

He studied his pa. The captain was grasping the wheel tightly, tense as he scanned the water, the sky, and other boats—particularly the *Mermaid*. Sometimes Thad could imagine Pa piloting a gunship. Of course, there weren't enemy ships in the bay, but plenty of captains didn't follow rules. Pa often said, "Bad weather makes bad seamen worse, good ones better."

Deep into the Narrows, Captain Bates called into the tube, "Power down to three strokes, Mr. Pordine. Too crowded here."

"I hear you," the engineer called back.

"You going to let the *Mermaid* get ahead?" asked Abigail.

"I'm going to be safe," Captain Bates said.

Thad felt admiration for his pa. He was really looking out for them all.

The captain looked around, "Thad, any idea where Mr. Oliver is?"

Thad leaned out of the window. "Probably below deck," he said. "Remember? He wasn't feeling well."

Captain Bates steered the *Neptune* carefully, staying clear of all other ships, often calling on Abigail to blow the whistle.

Moving steadily, the *Neptune* eased out of the Narrows and into New York's lower harbor. It was even more crowded there. As they caught up with the *Mermaid*, rain began to fall.

"We're going to win!" cheered Abigail.

"Look over there!" Thad called. He pointed to a large sailing ship, the *Bonnie Brea*, not far from where they were. The *Bonnie Brea* had been entering the harbor. Directly in front of her was the *Columbine*, also under sail. "Doesn't that ship know the harbor rules?" Thad wondered aloud. "Pa? Shouldn't she be tacking left, not right?"

"Sure should," agreed Captain



Bates. "Landlubbers," Abigail sneered. "Pa!" cried Thad. "They're going to crash!"

The two sailing ships tried to veer off. The combination of wind, waves, and momentum proved too strong. The ships collided. A sound of splintering wood rolled across the waters.

On impact, the *Bonnie Brea* lost its topsail. Even so—lifted by the wind and waves—she was able to fall off and continue sailing toward the city. The *Columbine*, however, had lost its rudder.

Thad shouted, "The *Columbine* can't steer!"

"She's lost control," agreed Captain Bates, looking grave. "If she's not careful," said Thad, "she's going to smash other ships." "She can't be careful," said Captain Bates. "Not without a rudder. We'd better offer help before she hits someone."

"What about the *Mermaid*?" said Abigail.

"She can be first today," said an upset Captain Bates. He called into the speaking tube: "Ease off on the power, Mr. Pordine. Real slow! Got a disabled ship out here. We need to help!"

"What's the weather?" returned Mr. Pordine's voice.

"Bad. And likely to get worse. So if we let that ship drift," said the captain, "she'll create havoc in the lanes."

"Good luck," said Mr. Pordine. Captain Bates swung the wheel around and aimed the *Neptune* right for the *Columbine*.

Thad swallowed hard. There was no choice. *We've got to help that boat before a worst disaster occurs.*

The rain now came at them in gusts, blowing in through the open windows.

*It was another race!*

*(To be continued.)*

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## Service News

### VanMatre receives commendation

United States Navy Seaman Recruit Adam C. VanMatre was presented with a letter of commendation Oct. 24 by the commanding officer of recruit training at Great Lakes Naval Air Station in Illinois.



VanMatre

VanMatre was selected by fellow shipmates for the award due to his demonstrated attention to duty, military conduct, responsiveness to orders, cooperation, loyalty and comradeship.

VanMatre is the son of Ruth and Gary VanMatre of Delphi.

weapons, chemical warfare and bayonet training, drill and ceremony, marching, rifle marksmanship, armed and unarmed combat, map reading, field tactics, military courtesy, military justice system, basic first aid, foot marches, and field training exercises.

Medina is the daughter of Tracey Dunnaway of Delphi. She is a 2006 graduate of Delphi Community High School.

## Menus

### Carroll

Mon., Nov. 20 – Breakfast: Cereal, elf grahams, juice. Lunch: Corn dog, macaroni and cheese, peas, fruit. Choice: Grilled chicken.

Tues., Nov. 21 – Breakfast: Pop tarts, juice. Lunch: Porkburger, tater tots, fruit, oatmeal cream pie cookie. Choice: Meatball sub.

Wed., Nov. 22 – Breakfast: Cereal snack, juice. Lunch: Cheese pizza, corn, fruit, cookie. Choice: Nachos and pretzel with cheese on salad bar.

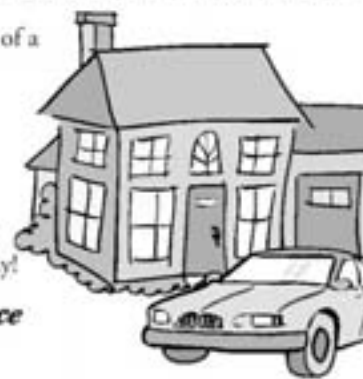
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