

That Day at Sea

*T*he seize and rescue wasn't meant to be any different than the countless others. But it was.

Chief Sea Wind, commander of the ship, *The Ekta*, and leader of the crew of Apache Sea Warriors, observed the ship in the distance through his spyglass. He recognized its lines, though it wasn't a cargo ship used for slave transports.

The Sea Warriors were from America and Mexico. They had been trained by the French as a colonial defense against the British during the Seven Years' War, many serving in the French navy. After wartime, many tribes took to the sea, attacking European settlers sailing to the New World. On their own, though, they were no match for the strongest naval fleet in the world, and the number of Sea Warriors had dwindled over the course of the last hundred years. Now only a handful remained with a new battle to fight—seizing slave ships and freeing people who'd been taken from their homeland. Instead of fighting against the English, they helped uphold the loosely followed Slave Trade Act that had been put into law in 1788.

Sometimes the Sea Warriors took people back to their homeland, risking being taken themselves; but most often they were taken to a country where they could remain free.

Yet, this chase—this ship—was not the same as the others. Something was amiss.

Chief Sea Wind lowered the spyglass and turned to the young women standing with him at the helm. “Sees Beyond, are you for certain that this ship is one we should be after?”

“I am, Chief,” she said firmly. “My spirits said as much to me last night. They had told me we must seize the ship voyaging through the Middle Passage that will be passing the Western Sahara as the sun touches the center sky.”

Chief Sea Wind glanced up at the sun where it hung directly overhead. Never had he ever disputed Sees Beyond's guidance. She had joined his crew after they had returned home to Sonora, Mexico, days after a deadly hurricane in the Atlantic had claimed her husband, Cochise. Like her mother and grandmother, Sees Beyond had a connection to the ancestors. She was a psychic, and had helped the crew of *The Ekta* avoid storms, steered them to the next slave ship as well as away from enemy vessels.

Her tone allayed his doubts to continue with the pursuit.

“They are a great distance away,” he said, folding in the spyglass. He stepped over to the brass speaking tube that made his voice audible throughout the entire ship. “Fire up the fans!”

In moments, the crew emerged from below, carrying bundles of firewood. They brought the wood over to an old locomotion steam engine, located behind the mainmast, and threw logs inside the firebox. Once the firebox was stocked full, the wood was set ablaze. Water from the sea would then be sucked in through the centrifugal pumps, located on both sides of *The Ekta*, and brought up to the steam engine to boil. The steam would then travel up smaller pipes latched

to each mast, and power the incredibly large fans stationed behind the sails.

The ocean winds were calm, which would grant them the advantage to quickly catch up to their quarry.

“Drop canvas!” he ordered loudly to the crew on deck. “Prepare to attack!”

Some of the crew broke away from the pack of busy seamen and clambered up the shrouds to release the sails from the riggings.

“Wind in the Sails,” Chief Sea Wind said to his first mate at the wheel.

“Yes, Chief?”

“I’ll have Waban take your place. I want you with me as we intercept.”

“Of course, Chief.”

His first mate was a good leader and one of his most honorable warriors. His keen eye and quick thinking in the heat of battle made him Sea Wind’s most valuable fighter.

“I will fight as well, husband,” announced his wife, Waves of Strength, coming up the stairs toward the helm.

His mood dropped. He hated when she wanted to join the skirmishes. Unlike Wind in the Sails, Waves of Strength fought with too much passion. The woman simply had no fear in her. When she attacked, her red vision kept her from spying other threats around, which made for a number of close calls.

“Not this time,” he told her, already anticipating an argument. “That is a prison hulk ship, and by the size of it, there will be dozens of guards, perhaps even military. There will be chaos when we take them.”

“All the more reason you will need me, Sea Wind,” she pressed. “I believe you shall need all your warriors.”

She left him with little choice.

“I cannot put you in danger like that. Not like last time.” He causally rubbed his arm where he had been shot in order to save her life. He slightly bowed his head and added, “What if I’m unable to protect you?”

He waited a beat before switching his eyes up to meet hers. She was a lovely thing, as he always thought when looking at her. The sun had granted her darker skin without withering it, her high cheekbones meet up to eyes of sandstone. Never could he image his life without her.

Waves of Strength stood before him, a look of disarm and guilt on her face.

In a sorrowful tone that barely broke past a whisper, he pleaded, “Stay on board, wife. Just this one time.”

And the time after that, and the time after that.

The fire in her eyes still blazed, but she yielded with a nod nonetheless.

The water inside the steam engine boiler began to produce steam, and pump power into the fans. The giant steel blades slowly began turning, eventually speeding up to where the blades became one circle. The rumbling roar could deafen anyone too close to them. White steam billowed out from the exhaust pipes on either side of each fan. *The Ekta* jerked forward as her pace increased, cutting through the water at a rate that could outmatch any steamer.

“Load all guns,” Chief Sea Wind ordered through the speaking tube.

The gunners below would now be at work, preparing the cannons for when the time came. However, those weren’t the ship’s main weaponry. At both the stern and bow there were three-barreled rotary cannons, one to fire upon oncoming vessels, and the other to shoot at any enemy ships in pursuit.

As they drew closer, just out of firing range, the chief said to Sees Beyond, “You should go below now. We will be attacking soon.”

Sees Beyond was no cowered, in fact, she’d fight to the death if need be, however, she was no warrior. She was also a great asset to *The Ekta* and to their cause.

To his surprise, though, she said, “With your permission, Chief, I prefer to remain at the helm for this one.”

Never had she requested such a thing, and for her to do so there was reason for it. He had no time to ask when a voice of one his gunners from the bow came in through the speaking tube.

“We are prepared to fire on your orders, Chief.”

The prison hulk was coming up fast. The vessel was a monster, 60 meters long. A retired warship, its massive size dwarfed their Spanish galleon. However if she wasn’t armed as she had been in her heyday, taking her wouldn’t be too difficult.

Chief Sea Wind judged the distance, waiting for the precise moment. When it came, a surge of excitement ran just under his skin, raising every hair on his dark-skinned body.

“Fire!”

A blast that he felt in his chest, exploded from one of the long guns. The windows of the captain’s quarters, shattered in a mixture of glass shards and splinters of wood. A gunner by the rotary cannons turned the crank, revolving the guns around to fire again.

“Fire!” the chief ordered into the speaking tube.

The second blast hit their target the hardest. The cannonball broke through the mizzenmast, weakening it enough to topple it right over with loud bone breaking cracks. Like a tree, the mast pitched forward, and vanished as it collapsed over the helm.

“Kill the fans! We must broadside them!”

The Ekta came alongside the prison ship as they slowed. The Sea Warriors grabbed grappling hook rifles and took aim. Since the prison hulk was higher than their own vessel, they would need to *ride* up to the deck. They fired the grappling hooks, letting their crooked teeth catch in the shrouds. Once the lines were secure, the Sea Warriors flicked the retractable latch on the rifles and hung on tight to the handles as they launched into the air. Chief Sea Wind had done the same. The wind flew past him as he soared through the air, heading up toward deck as his line wound itself back inside the bulky rifle. Just as he reached the deck, he caught sight of the helm where the mast had fallen, the rigging suspended over the main deck. The captain had survived, and was shouting orders to open fire on *The Ekta*. With the amount of firepower that the chief had sadly observed as they came alongside the vessel, the damage to his ship and crew would be great. He needed to stop the captain.

He let loose the rifle and dropped down onto the deck, ready to fight when a surprising scene

nailed him in place. Men were attacking each other, but none involved were Sea Warriors. Was the crew fighting each other? He soon eyed a young man with shoulder length hair, heading up to the helm, armed with a rifle. He appeared as though he was trying to keep from being noticed by the captain. When he reached the helm, he shot the man down, grabbed the wheel, and turned it. Sea Wind nearly lost his balance as the vessel quickly shifted direction, a rumbling beneath his feet vibrated when the guns below exploded. Most of the cannons shot away from *The Ekta*, missing her completely. Only a few managed to actually strike her.

“Wind in the Sails!” he called to his first mate nearby.

“Yes, Chief!”

“Follow me.”

He and Wind in the Sails hurried up to the helm where they found the youth rummaging through the dead captain’s pockets. He brought out a set of keys.

“Shite!” he shouted in English when he spotted them.

No doubt the chief and his first mate looked intimidating to the boy. Chief Sea Wind stood very tall, his body well-built from years of fighting and from a lifetime living out at sea. He looked to the chains on the Englishman’s ankles.

In Apache, he said to Wind in the Sails, “I do not believe this is a slave ship.”

His first mate nodded. “I agree.”

The chief looked to the Englishman. He only hoped he could communicate with him. Like nearly the entire crew of *The Ekta*, except for Sees Beyond, the chief understood English, but refused to learn it. Instead, they spoke Apache, or French when around the whites.

Parlez-vous français?” the chief asked optimistically.

“*Oui*,” the boy replied.

In French, the chief asked with relief, “What sort of ship is this?”

“It’s a transporting ship. It ferries convicted criminals to penal colonies in Australia and New Zealand.”

“Of course,” Wind in the Sails said in Apache to his chief. “The prisoners of this ship were attacking the guards. They must have seized the moment when we advanced upon them.”

“I should have known,” the chief retorted vexingly. “Sees Beyond was wrong. Go back to the deck. Help clean up this mess. I will handle the boy.”

“Yes, Chief,” he said, taking his leave.

“I saw what you did,” Chief Sea Wind said to the Englishmen. “What is your name?”

The boy was quiet a moment, clearly afraid.

With a deep nervous breath, he answered, “Pierce Landcross.”

“Pierce Landcross, I thank you. I am Chief Sea Wind, leader of the Apache Sea Warriors. The man with me was my first mate, Wind in the Sails. You saved our ship and therefore I will give you the chance to take up arms and fight alongside us.”

The young man looked more than willing to do so. He unlocked himself from his restraints with the keys he found, took the dead captain’s rifle, and went back into the fray. The chief stayed at the helm to steady the ship so that Waban could bring *The Ekta* back beside them again.

The scene below was hectic, just as he predicted. Two crewmen tried killing him and reclaiming the helm. Chief Sea Wind killed them both, one he shot, and the other he wrestled and broke his neck. During the scuffle, the battle had turned in the Sea Warrior's favor, but not without some casualties.

"Chief!" one of his crew shouted, rushing up the stairs.

Winded from his life and death struggle, he said, "What is it?"

"It's Wave of Strength, Chief. She's been *shot!*"

"Shot?" he said, his mouth suddenly drying. "How? She was on *The Ekta!*"

The informant shook her head. "No, Chief, she came aboard. You must come."

When he reached his wife, she was lying on the deck floor upon her belly, holding her hip. She was bleeding and cursing very loudly.

"My wife," he said, dropping to his knees beside her.

Blood soaked her buckskin dress. He couldn't even tell where she had been wounded.

Oh Great Spirit, please tell me she hadn't been shot in the back. Would she ever be able to walk again?

"I want him dead!" she seethed at him.

He knitted his eyebrows together. "Who?"

She pointed to someone behind him. "That one!"

The chief craned his neck around, his sights snagging on the young man, Pierce Landcross. He stood amongst the throng of Sea Warriors, looking petrified.

Chief Sea Wind rose to his full height, which only made Landcross's eyes grow wider. He held no weapon, which made no difference to the enraged Apache who would walk through a volley of gunfire to reach him.

"You shot my wife after I spared your life!"

He approached Landcross with the intent to kill, when Wind in the Sails jumped in his path.

"It was an accident, Chief. He was trying to shoot at another prisoner held on this ship before he could harm one of ours, and Waves of Strength ran into the path of his bullet. He wasn't aiming for her."

His quick explanation cooled the chief's bloodlust just enough to halt him a moment. To the panicked youth, he said, "If you've killed or severely hurt her, I'll sail you out in the middle of ocean and throw you overboard myself."

Landcross swallowed thickly. "She . . . she'll be fine, I promise."

"He shot her in ass, Chief," Wind in the Sail explained, with a hint of amusement in his tone.

The chief's violent intent drained from him. He looked back at his wife. Someone else nearby pointed to the gunshot wound, nodding. She'd been hit right in the front left cheek. Although he shouldn't have, he wanted to laugh, and bit hard on his lower lip to keep himself from doing so.

Chewing on his thumbnail to stifle his need to surrender to the hilarity of the situation, he returned his attention on Landcross. "You actually shot her in the rear?"

"Kill him, husband!" his wife demanded hotly. "Cut his throat!"

At this, Landcross clutched his neck. A scar already stretched across his throat. The traumatic look on his face suggested that there was something personal that came with that scar.

“Chief Sea Wind,” came the voice of Sees Beyond.

She stood on the inner edge of the enclosed circle surrounding Waves of Strength. With her was *The Ekta*’s physician, Heals with Nature, who went to Waves of Strength’s aid.

“Sees Beyond,” he said to her in Apache, “your spirits told us wrong. We should have never invaded this vessel.”

“No,” she disagreed. “We have succeeded in what we were sent to retrieve.”

She approached him, her eyes on his. He did not understand, and then her dark, insightful eyes shifted over to Landcross. She stopped and stood before the young man, seemingly to study him. Landcross looked confused by her actions, and yet a certain spark glimmered in his green eye. He was taken in by her. Chief Sea Wind understood that. Sees Beyond matched Landcross in years and even a married man like the chief could not ignore her perfect beauty. The woman was wise well beyond her years, like her mother and grandmother, but her outer appearance was a blessing from the Great Spirit. Landcross simply could not help but be captured by such a lovely flower.

“Are you telling me that we were meant to attack this vessel for *him*?” he asked her.

Without diverting her gaze from Landcross, she answered, “Yes. They told me, find the one with eyes of spring, look into his soul, and you will know.”

“Why?” the chief demanded.

She looked away from Landcross, almost grudgingly, to face him. “There is something exceptional about him. It’s in his bloodline. We must bring him with us.”

“No!” Waves of Strength bellowed hatefully. “He is not welcome on our ship.”

To this, the chief stiffened. He went over to her and crouched down so to speak to her privately.

“I had asked for you to stay onboard *The Ekta*.”

She shook her head slightly at him. “I wanted to help.”

“But you defied my order, and in turn you almost got yourself killed again. *You* did. Your blame ought to be placed somewhere else, my wife.”

With that, he stood and turned back to Landcross. Whatever reason the spirits had told Sees Beyond that they needed to come for this young Englishman, it must be something important therefore he would respect and honor it.

“Landcross,” he said in the deepest tone he could muster.

He wanted to put a little more fear into the boy, just for fun. It worked. Landcross approached, trembling, looking as though he was getting ready to meet his end.

“Aye, Chief?” he said in English.

Chief Sea Wind took in a breath before saying, “I grant you permission to join us.”

Landcross’s relief could not be hidden in his wide, thrilled expression.

“Aye? You mean it, Chief?”

He liked that the boy referred to him as chief rather than captain like most Europeans did. It just felt more natural.

“*Oui*. But only if you behave yourself, be useful around the ship, and don’t shoot any more of my crew.”

And like that, Pierce Landcross came into Chief Sea Wind’s life, and never did he ever regret it.

The End

