

CHAPTER ONE



Cropfodder

A Pumpkyn may remayne Wholesome the Winter through.
Gut the Fruit, then cut in Pieces and String it. 'Twill drie
lyke Apples.

—*A Frugall Compendium of Home Arts and Farme
Chores by Capability C. Craft (1680), as Amended and
Annotated by the Island Council of Names (1718–1809)*

WHEN MEDFORD thought about it later, that day in
Hunter's Moon was a good example of Before.

Before Transition.

Before the Goatman.

Before life changed forever.

Before, before, before.

He and Prudence Carpenter were on the beach, watching the Farmers gather seaweed for winter mulch. Grover Gardener, Councilor for Physick, was there, too, hands red with sea slime. So was anyone whose kitchen garden needed mulching, which was almost everybody. That morning's sky, the departing birds, and Emery Farmer's

bones had announced that seaweed gathering soon would be a chore rather than a pleasure.

You'd gather the seaweed anyway, of course, pleasure or no. Seaweed was Useful and that was that. The Book even named specific types: Cropfodder, the kind most people were after today; Windbegone, which Grover gave to patients who had digestive troubles; Bone-mend, which he dried for chewing when you'd broken your leg.

Medford and Prudy were ignoring seaweed. It was still Before, and they were being Useless. *Run, run when young*, the Book said. *Later in the day, settle and stay*. Time enough to be Useful after Transition.

They were knee-deep in sea-foam, bare feet numb, clothes salt-spattered. Waves hissed in over the sand, then sighed back out again. The sun-drenched air was warm but sharp. The winter winds had come early this year, whipping up the waves. Two weeks from now the sea would be stone gray and the monthly Mainland Trade would be over until spring. Boats would hunker down on shore and people would eat salted Common Fish.

Medford stood still and let the retreating water slip over and around his frozen feet. It ate away the sand at his heels until he teetered and almost fell over. Fifty feet out, a Nameless brown bird made a clumsy splash landing in the water while a Nameless gray bird swooped over its head, laughing. Medford flailed his skinny arms to keep his balance, laughing himself, his scraggly brown hair wild in the breeze.

Skinny and lanky and practically Nameless, he had a lot in common with that brown bird.

Seabirds had no names, regardless of color. *No Use, no Name*, the Book said. And names were what mattered here, thirty-five chilly miles east of Mainland. Mainland maps called the place Fools' Haven. But the people who lived on it called it Island.

Island was ten miles long, north to south, and seven miles wide, west to east. Its principal town, on the western shore closest to Mainland, was called Town. The town hall was called Town Hall and said so on a plaque over the door. Town Hall was on the main street, which was called Main Street.

Islanders liked names that said exactly what a thing—or a person—was or did, and nothing less.

Islanders liked things (and people) to do what their names said they would. Nothing more.

Islanders who fished were called Fisher. Others had names like Carpenter, Merchant, Tailor, and Miller. So what would you expect of a thirteen-year-old foundling called Medford Runyuin?

Not much.

In fact, you might want to keep your eye on him. And you'd be right, but so far Medford was the only one who knew that for sure.

Beside him, Prudy plunged her hand into a retreating wave, one blond braid dipping into the water. "Ooo, look,"