5

That night was the most terrible time in all the memory of Ghalas-at. When the fateful day had dawned the tribe numbered forty-two men, counting those who were too old to fight. When night came and the women had carried back to the village those who had died on the beach of Coral Cove, there remained only fifteen. Of these, seven were old men.

There was no woman who had not lost a father or a husband, a brother or a son.

The storm lasted two days and the third day we buried our dead on the south headland. The Aleuts who had fallen on the beach, we burned.

For many days after that the village was quiet. People went out only to gather food and came back to eat in silence. Some wished to leave and go in their canoes to the island called Santa Cataina, which lies far off to the east, but others said that there was little water on that island. In the end a council was held and it was decided to stay at Ghalas-at.

The council also chose a new chief to take my father's place. His name was Kimki. He was very old, but he had been a good man in his youth and a good hunter. The night he was chosen to be chief, he called everyone together, saying:

'Most of those who snared fowl and found fish in the deep water and built canoes are gone. The women, who were never asked to do more than stay at home, cook food, and make clothing, now must take the place of the men and face the dangers which abound beyond the village. There will be grumbling in Ghalas-at because of this. There will be shirkers. These will be punished, for without the help of all, all must perish.'

Kimki portioned work for each one in the tribe, giving Ulape and me the task of gathering abalones. This shellfish grew on the rocks along the shore and was plentiful. We gathered them at low tide in baskets and carried them to the mesa where we cut the dark red flesh from the shell and placed it on flat rocks to dry in the sun.

Ramo had the task of keeping the abalones safe from the gulls and especially the wild dogs. Dozens of our animals, which had left the village when their owners had died, joined the wild pack that roamed the island. They soon grew as fierce as the wild ones and only came back to the village to steal food. Each day towards evening Ulape and I helped Ramo put the abalones in baskets and carry them to the village for safekeeping.

During this time other women were gathering the scarlet apples that grow on the cactus bushes and are called tunas. Fish were caught and many birds were netted. So hard did the women work that we really fared better than before when the hunting was done by the men.

Life in the village should have been peaceful, but it was not. The men said that the women had taken the tasks that rightfully were theirs and now that they had become hunters the men looked down upon them. There was much trouble over this until Kimki decreed that the work would again be divided - henceforth the men would hunt and the women harvest, Since there was already ample food to last through the winter, it no longer mattered who hunted

But this was not the real reason why autumn and winter were unpeaceful in Ghalas-at. Those who had died at Coral Cove were still with us. Every- where we went on the island or on the sea, whether we were fishing or eating or sitting by the fires at night, they were with us. We all remembered some- one and I remembered my father, so tad and strong and kind. A few

years ago my mother had died and since then Ulape and I had tried to do the tasks she had done, Ulape even more than I, being older. Now that my father was gone, it was not easy to look after Ramo, who was always into some mischief.

It was the same in the other houses of Ghalas-at, but more than the burdens which had fallen upon us all, it was the memory of those who had gone that burdened our hearts.

After food had been stored in autumn and the baskets were full in every house, there was more time to drink about them, so that a sort of sickness came over the village and people sat and did not speak, nor ever laughed

In the spring, Kimki called the tribe together. He had been thinking, he said, during the winter and had decided that he would take a canoe and go to the east to a country which was there and which he had once been to when he was a boy. It lay many days across the sea, but he would go there and make a place for us. He would go alone, because he could not spare more of our men for the voyage, and he would return.

The day that Kimki left was fair. We all went to the cove and watched him launch the big canoe. It held two baskets of water and enough tunas and dried abalone to last many days.

We watched while Kimki paddled through the narrow opening in the rocks. Slowly he went through the kelp beds and into the sea. There he waved to us and we waved back. The rising sun made a silver trail across the water. Along this trail he disappeared into the east.

The rest of the day we talked about the journey. Would Kimki ever reach this far country about which nothing was known?

Would he come back before the winter was over? Or never?

That night we sat around the fire and talked while the wind blew and the waves crashed against the shore.

6

After Kimki had been gone one moon, we began to watch for his return. Every day someone went to the cliff to scan the sea. Even on stormy days we went, and on days when fog shrouded the island. During the day there was always a watcher on the

cliff and each night as we sat around out fires we wondered if the next sun would bring him home.

But the spring came and left and the sea was empty. Kimki did not return!

There were few storms that winter and rain was light and ended early. This meant that we would need to be careful of water. In the old days the springs sometimes ran low and no one worried, but now everything seemed to cause alarm. Many were afraid that we would die of thirst.

'There are other things more important to ponder,' said Matasaip who had taken Kimki's place.

Matasaip meant the Aleuts, for it was now the time of year when they had come before. Watchers on the cliff began to look for the red sails and a meeting was held to plan what to do if the Aleuts came. We lacked the men to keep them from landing or to save our lives if they attacked us, which we were certain they would. Plans were therefore made to flee as soon as their ship was sighted.

Food and water were stored in canoes and these were hidden on the rocks at the south end of the island. The cliffs were steep here and very high, but we wove a stout rope of bull kelp and fastened it to rocks at the top of the cliff so that it hung to the water. As soon as the Aleut ship was sighted we would all go to the cliff and let ourselves down, one at a time. We would then leave in our canoes for the island of Santa Catalina.

Although the entrance to Coral Cove was too narrow for a ship to pass through safely at night, men were sent there to watch the cove from dusk to dawn, besides those who watched during the day.

Shortly afterwards, on a night of fine moon, one of the men came running back to the village. Everyone was asleep, but his cries quickly awakened us.

'The Aleuts !' he shouted. 'The Aleuts!'

It was news we expected. We were prepared for it, yet there was much fear in the village of Ghalas-at. Matasaip strode from hut to hut telling everyone to be calm and not to lose time packing things that would not be needed. I took my skirt of yucca fibre, however, for I had spent many days making it and it was very pretty, and also my otter cape.

Quietly we filed out of the village along the trail that led towards the place where our canoes were hidden. The moon was growing pale and there was a faint light in the east, but a strong wind began to blow.

We had gone no farther than half a league when we were overtaken by the man who had given the warning. He spoke to Matasaip, but we all gathered around to listen to him.

'I went back to the cove after I gave the alarm, he said. ‘When I got there I could see the ship clearly. It is beyond the rocks that guard the harbour. It is a smaller ship than the one which belonged to the Aleuts. The sails are white instead of red.'

'Could you see anyone?' Matasaip asked.

‘No.’

'It is not the same ship which was here last spring ?'

'No.’

Matasaip was silent, pondering the news. Then he told us to go on to where the canoes were and wait for him, for he was going back. It was light now and we went quickly over the dunes to the edge of the cliff and stood there while the sun rose.

The wind grew cold, but fearing that those on the ship would see the smoke we did not start a fire, though we had meal to cook for breakfast. Instead we ate a small quantity of dried abalone, and afterwards my brother Ramo climbed over the cliff. No one had been down to the rocks since the canoes were hidden so we did not know whether they were still safe or not.

While he was gone we saw a man running across the dunes. It was Nanko, carrying a message from Matasaip. He was swearing in spite, of the cold and he stood trying to catch his breath. We all waited, urging him to talk, but his face was happy and we knew that he brought good news.

'Speak!' everyone said in a chorus.

'I have been running for more than a league,' he said. ‘I cannot talk.'

'You are talking,' someone said.

'Speak, Nanko, speak,' cried many voices.

Nanko was having fun with us. He threw out his chest and took a deep breath. He looked around at the circle of faces as if he

did not understand why everyone was staring at him.

'The ship,' he said at last, saying the words slowly, ‘does not belong to our enemies, the Aleuts. There are white men on this ship and they have come from that place where Kimki went when he left our island.'

'Has Kimki returned?' an old man broke in.

'No, but it is he who saw the white men and told them to come here.'

'What do they look like !' Ulape asked.

'Are there boys on the ship?' asked Ramo, who had come back with his mouth full of something.

Everyone seemed to be talking at once.

Nanko made his face stern, which was hard for him to do because his mouth had been cut in the battle with the Aleuts and ever since it had always seemed to smile. He held up his hand for silence. 'The ship has come for one reason,' he said. 'To take us away from Ghalas-at.'

'To what place?’ I asked.

It was good news that the ship did not belong to the Aleuts. But where would the white men take us !

'I do not know to what place,' he said. 'Kimki knows and he has asked the white men to take us there.'

Saying no more, Nanko turned back and we followed him. We were fearful of where we were going, yet we were happy, too.