

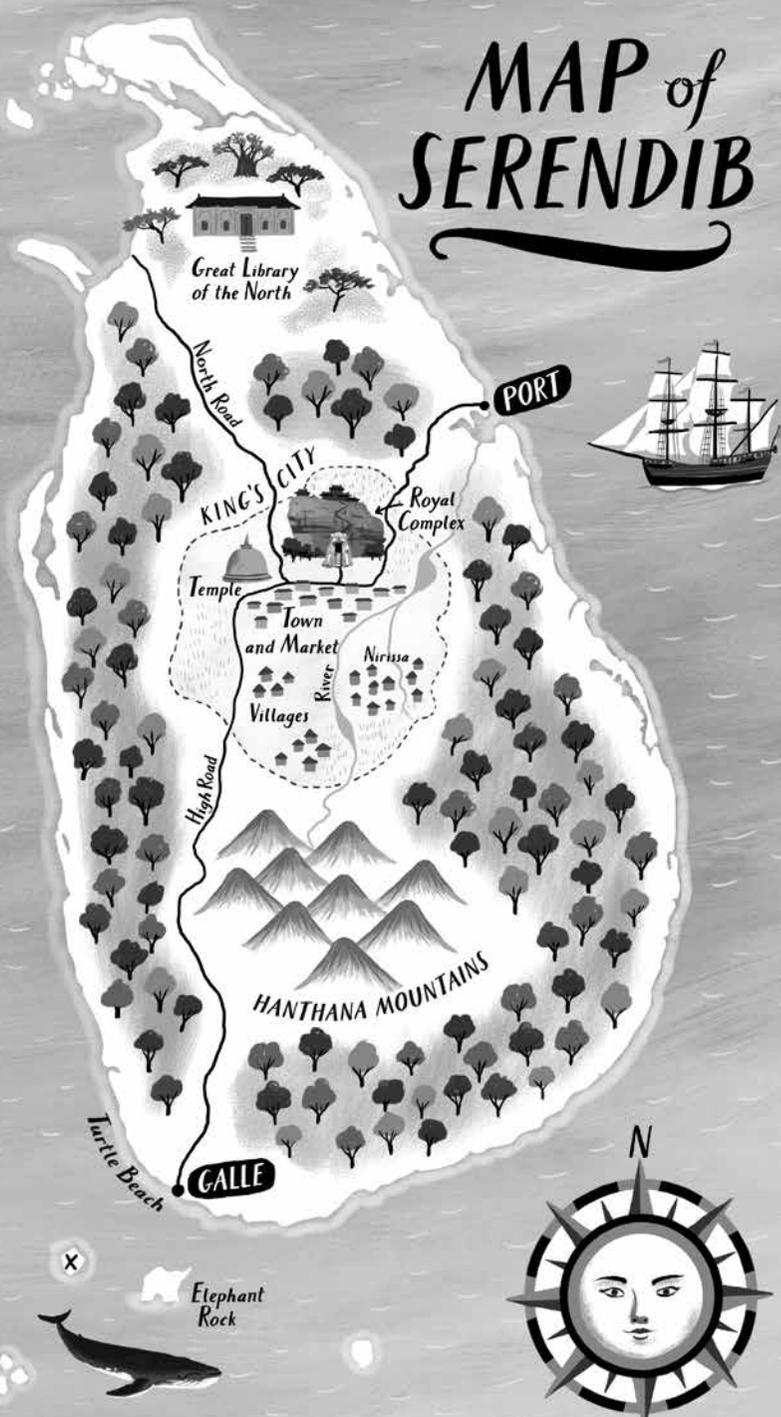


THE BOY
WHO MET
a
WHALE

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MAP of SERENDIB







Chapter One

The boy clung to the rail with a death grip as the ship lurched violently in the storm.

It was sinking.

All around him was darkness and the roar and crash of waves as the ship buckled and rain lashed down. The wind was shrill and whip-sharp. But for all the noise, the ship was empty of people. Where was everyone? The boy ran along the deck, slipping and sliding to the wheelhouse.

It was deserted.

He sprinted down the length of the ship, hurtling below deck to the captain's quarters. He pounded on the door, desperate to be heard over the sound of the thunder and the howling of the wind. But it was impossible.

The door opened suddenly and the first mate slipped out, a long leather pouch clutched in his hand. He started when he saw the boy, and quickly hid his hand behind him.

“Sir, the storm—” began the boy, but the man shoved him aside and hurried down the passage.

The boy held on to the side for balance and stumbled into the cabin. The captain was lying in his bunk, fast asleep. The room had been ransacked: drawers were hanging open and books had been tossed all over the place. The ship listed sharply and the debris on the floor slid to one side of the room where water was pooling, creeping darkly over fallen books.

The boy froze in shock. The crew had *known* they would be sailing into a storm. Why was the captain asleep so soundly? Why was the *whole ship* asleep? Apart from...

He stormed out of the captain's cabin and scrambled up to the deck. A lifeboat had been lowered into the sea, and the first mate was getting ready to climb down,

accompanied by a man the boy recognized as the ship's cook.

He stared at the men, a cold fear clamping around his heart as the rain soaked through him. "Marco!" he screamed. "What did you do? Did you *drug* them?"

The first mate looked back and shrugged, not even bothering to deny it.

Rain pelted the men as they prepared to get in the boat. Something snapped in the boy, and he raced toward them and plucked the leather pouch from the first mate's pocket.

Yelling, the men gave chase as the boy sprinted away down the ship. Lightning lit up his running figure. The ship groaned and shifted. The men stumbled and one fell as the boy doubled back, jumping over the fallen man and speeding past his furious companion. The first mate took out a knife that flashed silver in the gloom of the night. He ran fast, closing in on the boy as water filled the deck and crept up his ankles.

It was over. The ship was going down, and it was too late to save anyone. The boy wailed in anguish as he threw himself over the side and into the lifeboat. The ship tilted and groaned, making a huge cracking sound as it broke apart. The men ran to the railing and yelled at the boy, but the rain blotted out everything as he

rowed swiftly away. The last he saw of the ship was it careening jerkily off course.

The boy screamed into the wind and wept for his lost friends.