

The Three Sailors





The First Sailor

I boarded the Hoodman's Ferry. I paid him with petals from the River Rose so that he may deliver me to the hollows across the Pale Lake.

Its waters lie still. They reflect no light, they ripple with no disturbance, they appear lifeless. And their appearance proves no illusion: what life attempts to cross is drawn beneath. Even the air is pulled under the water to drown, making deeper and deeper gasps yield less and less breath for those who manage to stay above.

And above we stayed, protected inside of the dark wood of the Hoodman's craft, which looked almost skeletal in its alignment, its posture, its gait over the water. It assumed the resemblance of nature absent its flesh.

The living scaffold of those empty bones carried us as they rode across the pale depths, steady, resisting its gravity, with neither rudder nor oar guiding its course. And at the far shore, the hollows burrowed to a deeper kingdom, and deeper still, finally plumbing the Well of the Upper Seas, the source of the oceans, the rivers, and the rains. It is there that I came to understand and learned to control our world's waters, their currents, and their tides so that I may sail among their waves.



The Second Sailor

I boarded the Hoodman's Ferry. I paid him with thistledown from the Wish Willow so he may deliver me to the heart of Thorn at the Crooked River's end.

We entered the backward delta – the mouth that swallows the sea – without sails to guide mast and hull. As we piloted the river, the cold air it cradles gave rise to wind; wind became gale; gale became tempest. Yet the dark beams of the ferry cut through the air as though it remained still. Our bearing was steady; our aim was true.

As we approached the heart of Thorn, all life, even that belonging to the winds, seemed to expire. The air now journeyed as departed spirits beholden to pursue their final resting place abroad.

And in Thorn's center glade, enclosed at the river's end, upon an islet inhabited by nothing, blazed a fire tended by no one. Its flames gave rise to, and then let fall, all the gusts that are born to roam the seas in search of their rest.

It was at the Everlasting Fire that I came to understand and learned to control the winds above the waters so that I may sail against their waves.



The Third Sailor

I boarded the Hoodman's Ferry. I paid him with acorns from Nemusenex so he may deliver me to The New World, a dark land surrounded by moat and monster.

Encircling the fortresses of our homeworld, deep water channels cut through the traversable expanses of earth, permitting entrance only by bridges undrawn.

Encircling The New World is an empty ether, the Starless Crossing, a great void where no skyborne guide offers a lamp to chart or correct one's course. When the land behind disappears from sight, so vanish all lights in the firmament. When the new land reappears ahead, so reappear the stars. But they have rearranged their locus.

Since the first generation, we've been drawing gods in the skies, connecting every dot that flickers brightly in the night. These six stars over here: if precise lines are drawn from spark to spark, we reveal the figure of the water bearer, that great serpent whose spout fills the skies with its rains, bringing the oceans to our fields. Those seven stars over there form the albatross, whose wings bring the evening winds. And those eight stars between the serpent and the albatross form the firefly, who summons the rest of the fires flickering in the night's sky.

After a long voyage aboard the Hoodman's Ferry, when the sleeping stars were awoken over The New World, they contained no trace of their old tales. Here, the celestial artists must draw new lines, create new gods, invent new myths. It was in this world that I learned to sail by the direction of the sky. The serpent, the albatross, and the firefly were no longer children's gods of water, wind, and sky; they became the seafaring compasses guiding our reckoning so that the waters and the winds would never again send us astray.