

MIGRATIONS

A NOVEL



"Extraordinary."

—EMILY ST. JOHN MANDEL, author of *Station Eleven*

CHARLOTTE McCONAGHY

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For Morgan

*Forget safety.
Live where you fear to live.*
—RUMI

PART ONE

The animals are dying. Soon we will be alone here.

Once, my husband found a colony of storm petrels on the rocky coast of the untamed Atlantic. The night he took me there, I didn't know they were some of the last of their kind. I knew only that they were fierce in their night caves and bold as they dove through moonlit waters. We stayed a time with them, and for those few dark hours we were able to pretend we were the same, as wild and free.

Once, when the animals were going, really and truly and not just in warnings of dark futures but now, right now, in mass extinctions we could see and feel, I decided to follow a bird over an ocean. Maybe I was hoping it would lead me to where they'd all fled, all those of its kind, all the creatures we thought we'd killed. Maybe I thought I'd discover whatever cruel thing drove me to leave people and places and everything, always. Or maybe I was just hoping the bird's final migration would show me a place to belong.

Once, it was birds who gave birth to a fiercer me.

GREENLAND NESTING SEASON

It's only luck that I'm watching when it happens. Her wing clips the hair-thin wire and the basket closes gently over her.

I sit up straighter.

She doesn't react at first. But she knows somehow that she is no longer free. The world around her has changed just a little, or a lot.

I approach slowly, reluctant to scare her. Wind screams, biting at my cheeks and nose. There are others of her kind all over the icy rocks and circling the air, but they're quick to avoid me. My boots crunch and I see a ruffle of her feathers, that hesitant first flap, the will-I-try-to-break-free moment. The nest she has built with her mate is rudimentary, a scattering of grass and twigs wedged into a crevice in the rocks. She doesn't need it anymore—her fledglings are already diving for their own food—but she returns to it like all mothers unable to let go. I stop breathing as my hand moves to lift the basket. She flaps only once, a sudden burst of defiance before my cold hand closes over her body and ceases her wings' movement.

I have to be quick now. But I've been practicing and so I am, my fingers swiftly looping the band over her leg, shifting it over the joint to the upper

stretch beneath her feathers. She makes a sound I know too well, one I make in my dreams most nights.

“I’m sorry, we’re nearly there, nearly there.”

I start to tremble but keep going, it’s too late now, you have touched her, branded her, pressed your human self upon her. What a hateful thing.

The plastic tightens firmly on her leg, keeping the tracker in place. It blinks once to tell me it’s working. And just as I am about to let her go she turns very still so that I can feel her heartbeat pounding inside my palm.

It stops me, that *pat pat pat*. It’s so fast and so fragile.

Her beak is red like she’s dipped it in blood. It turns her strong in my mind. I place her back in the nest and edge away, taking the cage with me. I want her to explode free, I want there to be fury in her wings and there is, she is glorious as she surges. Feet red to match her beak. A velvet cap of black. Twin blades of a tail and those wings, the sharpness of their edges, the elegance.

I watch her circle the air, trying to understand this new piece of her. The tracker doesn’t hinder her—it’s as small as my little fingernail and very lightweight—but she doesn’t like it. She swoops at me suddenly, giving a shrill cry. I grin, thrilled, and duck to protect my face but she doesn’t swoop again. She returns to her nest and settles over it as though there is still an egg that she must protect. For her, the last five minutes never happened.

I’ve been out here on my own for six days. My tent was blown into the sea last night, as wind and rain lashed it from around my body. I’ve been pecked on the skull and hands more than a dozen times by birds who have been named the most protective in the sky. But I have three banded Arctic terns to show for my efforts. And veins filled with salt.

I pause on the crest of the hill to look once more, and the wind calms a moment. The ice spreads wide and dazzling, edged by a black-and-white ocean and a distant gray horizon. Great shards of cerulean ice float languidly by, even now within the heart of summer. And dozens of Arctic terns fill the white of sky and earth. The last of them, perhaps in the world. If I were capable of staying any place, it might be here. But the birds won’t stay, and neither will I.

My rental car is blessedly warm with the heating on full blast. I hold my frozen hands over the vent and feel my skin prickle. A folder of papers sits

on the passenger seat and I fumble through them, looking for the name. Ennis Malone. Captain of the *Saghani*.

I have tried seven captains of seven boats and I think maybe the persistently mad part of me wanted them to fail the second I saw the name of this last boat. The *Saghani*: an Inuit word for raven.

I scan the facts I've managed to learn. Malone was born in Alaska forty-nine years ago. He's married to Saoirse and they have two young children. His vessel is one of the last legally certified to fish for Atlantic herring, and he does so with a crew of seven. According to the marina schedule the *Saghani* should be docked in Tasiilaq for the next two nights.

I put Tasiilaq into my GPS and set off slowly on the cold road. The town will take all day to reach. I leave the Arctic Circle and head south, pondering my approach. Each of the captains I have asked has refused me. They don't abide untrained strangers on board. Nor do they like their routines disrupted, routes shifted—sailors are superstitious folk, I have learned. Creatures of pattern. Especially now, with their way of life under threat. Just as we have been steadily killing off the animals of land and sky, the fishermen have fished the sea almost to extinction.

The thought of being aboard one of these merciless vessels with people who lay waste to the ocean makes my skin crawl, but I'm out of options, and I'm running out of time.

A field of green stretches to my right, punctured with a thousand white smudges I think at first are stalks of cotton, but it's only the speed of the car blurring everything; in fact they are ivory wildflowers. To my left, a dark sea crashes. A world apart. I could forget the mission, try to swallow the compulsion. Find some rustic hut and hunker down. Garden and walk and watch the birds slowly vanish. The thought darts through my mind, inconstant. Sweetness would turn sour and even a sky as big as this one would soon feel a cage. I won't be staying; even if I were capable of it, Niall would never forgive me.

I book a cheap hotel room and dump my pack on the bed. The floor is covered with ugly yellow carpet but there's a view of the fjord lapping at the hill's foot. Across the stretch of water rear gray mountains, cut through with veins of snow. Less snow than there once was. A warmer world. While my laptop powers on, I wash my salty face and brush my furred teeth. The shower calls, but first I need to log my activity.

I write up the tagging of the three terns and then open the tracking software with a lungful of air I'm too nervous to let out. The sight of the blinking red lights melts me with relief. I've had no idea if this would work, but here they are, three little birds that will fly south for the winter and, if everything goes to plan, take me with them.

Once I'm showered, scrubbed, and warmly dressed, I shove a few papers in my backpack and head out, pausing briefly at the front desk to ask the young receptionist where the best pub is. She considers me, probably deciding which age bracket of entertainment she should recommend, and then tells me to try the bar on the harbor. "There is also *Klubben*, but I think it will be too ... fast for you." She adds a giggle to this.

I smile, and feel ancient.

The walk through Tasiilaq is hilly and lovely. Colorful houses perch on the uneven terrain, red and blue and yellow, and such a contrast to the wintry world beyond. They're like cheerful toys dotting the hills; everything feels smaller under the gaze of those imperious mountains. A sky is a sky is a sky, and yet here, somehow, it's more. It's bigger. I sit and watch the icebergs floating through the fjord awhile, and I can't stop thinking about the tern and her heart beating inside my palm. I can still feel the thrumming *pat pat pat* and when I press my hand to my chest I imagine our pulses in time. What I *can't* feel is my nose, so I head to the bar. I'd be willing to bet everything I own (which at this point isn't much) on the fact that if there's a fishing boat docked in town, its sailors will spend every one of their waking moments on the lash.

The sun is still bright despite how late in the evening it is—it won't go down all the way this deep in the season. Along with a dozen snoozing dogs tied to pipes outside the bar, there is also an old man leaning against the wall. A local, given he isn't wearing a jacket over his T-shirt. It makes me cold just looking at him. As I approach I spot something on the ground and stoop to pick up a wallet.

"This yours?"

Some of the dogs wake and peer at me inscrutably. The man does the same, and I realize he's not as old as I thought, and also very drunk. "Uteqqissinnaaviuk?"

"Uh ... Sorry. I just..." I hold up the wallet again.

He sees it and breaks into a smile. The warmth is startling. "English, then?"

I nod.

He takes the wallet and slips it into his pocket. “Thanks, love.” He is American, his voice a deep and distant rumble, a growing thing.

“Don’t call me love,” I say mildly as I steal a better look at him. Beneath his salt-and-pepper hair and thick black beard he is probably late forties, not the sixty he appeared at a glance. Creases line his pale eyes. He’s tall, and stooped as though he’s spent a lifetime trying not to be. There is a largeness to him. A largeness of hands and feet, shoulders and chest and nose and gut.

He sways a little.

“Do you need help getting somewhere?”

It makes him smile again. He holds the door open for me and then closes it between us.

In the little entry room, I shrug off my coat, scarf, hat, and gloves, hanging them ready for when I leave. In these snow countries there’s a ritual to the removal of warm gear. Inside the bustle of the bar there’s a woman playing lounge music on the piano, and a fireplace crackling in a central pit. Men and women are scattered at tables and on sofas under the high ceiling and heavy wooden beams, and several lads are playing pool in the corner. It’s more modern than most of the undeniably charming pubs I’ve been to since I arrived in Greenland. I order a glass of red and wander over to the high stools at the window. From here I can once more see the fjord, which makes it easier to be indoors. I’m not good at being indoors.

My eyes scan the patrons, looking for a group of men that could be the *Saghani*’s crew. I don’t spot any who particularly stand out—the only group big enough has both men and women playing Trivial Pursuit and drinking stout.

I have barely taken a sip of my overpriced wine when I see him again, the man from outside. He’s down on the water’s edge now, wind whipping through his beard and against his bare arms. I watch him curiously until he walks straight into the fjord and disappears beneath the surface.

My wine nearly tips over as I slide off the stool. There’s no sign of him returning to the surface. Not now, or now, or now. God—he’s really not coming back up. My mouth opens to shout and then closes with a snap. Instead I’m running. Through the door to the deck, down the wooden steps so slippery with ice I nearly land on my butt, onto the cold muddy sludge of the bank. Somewhere near a dog is barking with high, panicked yelps.

How long does it take to freeze to death? Not long, in water like that. And he still hasn't resurfaced.

I plunge into the fjord and—

Oh.

Out flies my soul, sucked through my pores.

The cold is familiar and savage. For a moment it grips me and forces me into a cell, the painted stone cell I know like a lover, for I spent four years inside it, and because the cold sends me back I spend too many precious seconds wanting to be dead, just for it all to be over, right now, I can't wait any longer, there is no part of me that isn't finished—

Clarity returns with a punch to the lungs. Move, I order myself. I've always been good at cold—I used to swim in it twice a day, but it's been so long that I've forgotten, I've become soft to it. I kick my waterlogged layers toward the large body below. His eyes are closed and he's sitting on the bottom of the fjord, and he is unnervingly still.

My hands reach slowly to encircle his armpits. I press off the floor and drag him up to the surface with a mighty gasp. He is moving now, taking a great breath and wading free with me in his arms, like he is the one who has rescued me and not the other way around and how the hell did that happen?

"What are you *doing*?" he pants.

There are no words for a moment; I'm so cold it hurts. "You were drowning."

"I was just taking a dip to sober up!"

"What? No, you..." I drag myself farther up onto the bank. Reality sinks in slowly. My teeth are chattering so hard that when I start laughing I must seem like a lunatic. "I thought you needed help."

I can't quite recall the logic that brought me to this moment. How long did I wait before I ran? How long was he under?

"For the second time tonight," he says. Then, "Sorry. You should get yourself warm, love."

More people have emerged from the bar to see what the commotion is about. They are crowded on the balcony, looking puzzled. Oh, the humiliation. I laugh again, but it's more of a wheeze.

"You right, boss?" someone shouts in an Australian accent.

"Fine," the man says. "Misunderstanding."

He helps me to my feet. The cold is inside me and—shit, the pain. I have felt this cold before, but not for a long time. How is he standing it so

well?

“Where are you staying?”

“You were under so long.”

“Good lungs.”

I stumble up the bank. “I’ll get warm.”

“Do you need—”

“No.”

“Hey!”

I pause and glance over my shoulder.

His arms and lips are blue, but he doesn’t seem bothered. Our eyes meet. “Thanks for the rescue.”

I salute him. “Anytime.”

Even with the shower on as hot as it will go, I’m still cold. My skin is red raw, scalded, but I can’t feel it. It’s the two toes on my right foot that I can feel tingling as though with the return of heat; strange because they were cut off some years ago. But then I often feel those phantom toes and right now I’m disturbed by something else, by how easily my mind went back to the cell. I’m frightened of how simple it was to dive into the water instead of shouting for help.

My drowning instinct.

When I’m wearing every item of clothing I own, I find my pen and paper, sit down at the crooked table, and write a clumsy letter to my husband.

Well, it’s happened. I’ve embarrassed myself so thoroughly that there’s no coming back from it. An entire village of people saw a strange foreign woman fling herself into an icy fjord to inexplicably harass a man who was minding his own business. At least it’ll make a good story.

And don’t even try to use this as another excuse to tell me to come home.

I tagged my third bird this morning and I’ve left the nesting grounds. Lost my tent, nearly lost my mind. But the trackers are working, and I’ve found a man with a vessel big enough to make the journey so I’m staying in Tasiilaq while I convince him to carry me. I’m not sure I’ll get another chance and I don’t know how to force the

world into a shape I can manage. Nobody ever seems to do what I want them to. This is a place that makes you very aware of your powerlessness. I never had any power over you, I sure as hell don't have any over the birds, and I have even less over my own feet.

I wish you were here. You can convince anyone of anything.

I pause and stare at the scribbled words. They feel silly, sitting there on the page like that. After twelve years I'm somehow worse at expressing how I feel, and it shouldn't be like this—not with the person I love best.

The water was so cold, Niall. I thought it would kill me. For a moment I wanted it to.

How did we get here?

I miss you. That's what I know best. Will write tomorrow.

F x

I put the letter in an envelope and address it, then place it with the others I haven't yet sent. The sensation is coming back into my limbs and there is an erratic pulse in my veins that I recognize as the marriage between excitement and desperation. I wish there were a word for this feeling. I know it so well, perhaps I ought to name it myself.

In any case the night is early and I've a job to do.

I'm not sure when I first started dreaming of the passage, or when it became as much a part of me as the instinct for breath. It's been a long time, or feels it. I haven't cultivated this myself; it swallowed me whole. At first an impossible, foolish fantasy: the notion of securing a place on a fishing vessel and having its captain carry me as far south as he is able; the idea of following the migration of a bird, the longest natural migration of any living creature. But a will is a powerful thing, and mine has been called terrible.

I was born Franny Stone. My Irish mother gave birth to me in a small Australian town where she'd been left, broke and alone. She nearly died in the birthing, too far from the nearest hospital. But live she did, a survivor to her core. I don't know how she found the money, but not long after we moved back to Galway, and there I spent the first decade of my life in a wooden house so close to the sea I was able to tune my swift child's pulse to the *shhh shhh* of the neap and spring tides. I thought we were called Stone because we lived in a town surrounded by low stone walls that snaked silver through the hilly yellow fields. The second I was able to walk I wandered along those curving walls and I ran my fingers over their rough edges and I knew they must lead to the place from where I truly came.

Because one thing was clear to me from the start: I didn't belong.

I wandered. Through cobbled streets or into paddocks, where long grass whispered *hish* as I passed between. Neighbors would find me exploring the flowers in their gardens, or out in the far hills climbing one of the trees so bent by the wind that its brittle fingers now reached sideways along the earth. They'd say, "Watch this one, Iris, she's got itchy feet and that's a tragedy." Mam hated me being critiqued like that, but she was honest about having been abandoned by my dad. She wore the wound of it like a badge of honor. It had happened all her life: people left her, and the only way to bear it was proudly. But she would say to me most mornings that if I ever left her that would be it, the final curse, and she would give up.

So I stayed and stayed, until one day I couldn't stay any longer. I was made of a different kind of thing.

We had no money, but we went often to the library. According to Mam, inside the pages of a novel lived the only beauty offered up by the world. Mam would set the table with plate, cup, and book. We'd read through meals, while she bathed me, while we lay shivering in our beds, listening to the scream of wind through the cracked windows. We'd read while we balanced on the low rock walls that Seamus Heaney made famous in his poetry. A way to leave without really leaving.

Then one day, just outside Galway where the changing light leaches the blue from the water and drapes it over the long grass, I met a boy and he told me a story. There was a lady, long ago, who spent her life coughing up feathers, and one day when she was gnarled and gray she stretched from a

woman into a black bird. From then on dusk held her in its thrall, and night's great yawning mouth swallowed her whole.

He told me this and then the boy kissed me with vinegar lips from the chips he was eating, and I decided that this was my favorite story of all, and that I wanted to be a bird when I was gray.

After that, how could I not run away with him? I was ten years old; I packed a satchel filled only with books and I heaved it over my shoulder and set off, just briefly, just for a nose about, a wee adventure, nothing more. We rolled out with the storm that very same afternoon, and wound our way up the west coast of Ireland until his great sprawling family decided to turn their cars and caravans inland. I didn't want to leave the sea, so I snuck away without anyone noticing and spent two days on the stormy shore. This was where I belonged, where all the silver walls led. To salt and sea and wind pockets that could carry you away.

But in the night I slept, and I dreamed of feathers in my lungs, so many I choked on them. I woke coughing and frightened and knew I had made a mistake. How could I have left her?

The walk to a village was longer than any I'd tried, and the books grew so heavy. I started leaving them on the road, a trail of words in my wake. I hoped they would help someone else find their way. A kind fat lady in the bakery fed me soda bread, then paid for my bus ticket and waited with me until it arrived. She hummed instead of talking and the tune got stuck in my head so that even after I'd left her at the station I kept hearing her deep voice in my ears.

When I arrived home my mother was gone.

And that was that.

Perhaps the feathers had come for her, like they whispered they would in my dream. Perhaps my father had returned for her. Or the strength of her sadness had turned her invisible. Either way, my wandering feet had abandoned her, like she'd warned me they would.

I was taken from my mother's home and sent back to Australia to live with my paternal grandmother. I didn't see the point in staying in any one place after that. I only ever tried once more, many years later when I met a man called Niall Lynch and we loved each other with brands to our names and bodies and souls. I tried for Niall, like I did for my mother. I really did. But the rhythms of the sea's tides are the only things we humans have not yet destroyed.

TASIILAQ, GREENLAND NESTING SEASON

Take two. There are no men outside the bar this time, only the dogs, who look at me sleepily and then lose interest when I stride past without offerings.

As I enter, an odd rustle moves through the patrons and then, almost in unison, they erupt into applause. I see him at one of the tables, smiling broadly and clapping along with everyone else. People thump me on the back as I head for the bar, and it makes me laugh.

Someone meets me there with a grin. He's maybe thirty, handsome, with long dark hair in a bun. His bottom teeth are noticeably crooked. "The lady's drinks are on us tonight," he tells the barman, and he's either a different Australian or the one who called out from the balcony earlier.

"No need—"

"You saved his life." He smiles again, and I don't know if he's taking the piss, or if he actually thinks that's what happened. I decide it doesn't matter—a free drink's a free drink. I order another glass of red and then shake his hand.

"I'm Basil Leese."

"Franny Lynch."

"I like the name Franny."

"I like the name Basil."

"You feeling all right now, Franny?"

I never like this question. Even if I were dying of plague I would dislike this question. "It's just cold water, right?"

"Yeah, but there's cold and there's cold."

Basil takes my drink and carries it back to his table without asking, so I follow. He's with the "drowning man"—who has also managed to change into dry clothes—and a few others. I'm introduced to Samuel, a portly man in his late sixties with a luscious head of red locks, then Anik, a slender Inuit man. Next Basil points out a younger trio playing pool. "Those two idiots are Daeshim and Malachai. Newest and dumbest members of the crew. And the chick is Léa."

There is a scruffy Korean guy, and a gangly black guy. The woman—Léa—is black, too, and taller than both the men. All three are in the middle of a heated argument about pool rules, so I turn to the drowning man last, expecting to be introduced, but Basil has already launched into a detailed complaint of the dinner he's been presented with.

“It’s overcooked, heavy-handed on the oregano, and way too buttery. Not to mention the pitiful bloody garnish. And look—look at the piss-poor presentation!”

“You asked for bangers and mash,” Anik reminds him, sounding bored.

Samuel hasn’t taken his merry eyes off me. “Where are you from, Franny? I can’t place your accent.”

In Australia I sound Irish. In Ireland everyone thinks I’m Australian. Since the very beginning I’ve been flickering between, unable to hold fast to either.

I swallow my mouthful of wine and grimace at the sweetness of it. “If you want you can call me Irish Australian.”

“Knew it,” Basil says.

“What brings an Irishwoman to Greenland, Franny?” Samuel presses. “Are you a poet?”

“A poet?”

“Aren’t all the Irish poets?”

I smile. “I suppose we like to think so. I’m studying the last of the Arctic terns. They nest along the coast but they’ll fly south soon, all the way to the Antarctic.”

“Then you *are* a poet,” Samuel says.

“You’re fishermen?” I ask.

“Herring.”

“Then you must be used to disappointment.”

“Well, now, I suppose that’s true.”

“Dying trade,” I comment. They were warned, time and again. We all were. The fish will run out. The ocean is nearly empty. You have taken and taken and now there is nothing left.

“Not yet,” the drowning man speaks for the first time. He’s been listening quietly and now I turn to him.

“Very few fish left in the wild.”

He inclines his head.

“So why do it?” I ask.

“S’the only thing we know. And life’s no fun without a challenge.”

I smile, but it feels wooden on my face. My insides are churning and I think of what this conversation would do to my husband, who has fought for conservation. His scorn, his disgust, would know no bounds.

“Skipper’s got his heart set on finding the Golden Catch,” Samuel tells me with a wink.

“What’s that?”

“The white whale,” Samuel says. “The Holy Grail, the Fountain of Youth.” He makes such an expansive gesture that some of his beer slops onto his fingers. I think he’s drunk.

Basil gives the older man an impatient glance and then explains, “It’s a huge haul. Like they used to catch. Enough to fill the boat, and make us all rich.”

I consider the drowning man. “Then it’s money you’re hunting.”

“It’s not money,” he says, and I almost believe him.

As an afterthought, I ask, “What’s your boat called?”

And he says, “The *Saghani*.”

I can’t help laughing.

“I’m Ennis Malone,” he adds, offering me his hand. It’s the largest hand I’ve ever shaken. Weather-bitten, like his cheeks and lips, and there is a lifetime’s worth of dirt tattooed under the fingernails.

“She saves your life and you don’t even tell her your name?” Basil says.

“I didn’t save his life.”

“You meant to,” Ennis says. “Same thing.”

“You shoulda left him in there to drown,” Samuel says. “Serve him right.”

“You could tie stones to his feet—that would drown him quicker,” Anik offers, and I stare at him.

“Don’t mind him,” Samuel says. “Macabre sense of humor.”

Anik’s expression suggests there is no humor about him whatsoever. He excuses himself.

“He also doesn’t like to be on land too long,” Ennis explains as we watch the Inuit man’s elegant passage through the pub.

Malachai, Daeshim, and Léa join us. The men look annoyed, sitting with identical frowns and folded arms. Léa is amused until she sees me, and then something wary chases its way through her brown eyes.

“What now?” Samuel asks the boys.

“Dae likes to pick and choose the rules he obeys,” Malachai says with a broad London accent. “And when he’s feeling really poorly he’ll make up his own.”

“Boring otherwise,” Daeshim says in an American accent.

“Boredom’s for people without imaginations,” Malachai says.

“Nah, boredom’s useful—it makes you innovative.”

They look sideways at each other and I see them both fight not to smile. Their fingers entwine, argument concluded.

“Who’s this then?” Léa asks. Her accent is French, I think.

“This is Franny Lynch,” Basil says.

I shake their hands and the boys seem to brighten.

“The selkie, huh?” Léa asks. Her hand is strong and stained with grease.

I pause, surprised by the reference and all the echoes in a life.

“Seal people who take to the water, only they don’t rescue folk like you did, they drown them.”

“I know what they are,” I murmur. “But I’ve never heard of a selkie drowning anyone.”

Léa shrugs, letting my hand go and sitting back. “That’s ’cause they’re tricky and subtle, no?”

She’s wrong, but I smile a little, and my own wariness is kindled.

“Enough about that,” Daeshim says. “A question for you, Franny. Do you obey rules?”

Expectant eyes rest on me.

The question seems sort of silly, and I could almost laugh. Instead I take a mouthful of wine and then say, “I’ve always tried to.”

At one point Ennis goes to the bar for another round, Samuel disappears to the toilet for the fourteenth time (“When you get to my age, you won’t find it so funny”), and Basil, Daeshim, and Léa go out onto the cold deck to have a cigarette, so I find myself cornered on the sofa next to Malachai, even though I’d prefer to be outside smoking. The bar has thinned out a bit—the piano player has knocked off for the evening.

“How long you been here?” Malachai asks me in his deep voice. He has a fidgety quality about him, like an excited puppy, and dark brown eyes, and fingers that tap along to music even when there’s nothing playing.

“Only a week. You?”

“We berthed two days ago. Be leaving again in the morning.”

“How long have you been with the *Saghani*?”

“Two years, Dae and me.”

“Do you ... like it?”