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THE CURSE BREAKER

An Isle of Ever Novel

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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ENTRY 11

*From Evelyn Terry's Private Journal,
Dated June 10, 1825*

I looked out at the dark
churning sea and couldn't
believe my eyes. The island
had vanished into thin air and
taken my friends along with it.

"No!" I cried out. My voice seemed to echo in the growing darkness on that private stretch of beach. It took me a moment to realize I was not alone. Someone else was shouting too. I spun around.

Captain Jonas Kimble stood behind me, his expression one of utter disbelief as he looked from the water—where the island had been, moments before—to me.

“Kid,” he said hoarsely. He let the lantern in his hand clang to the ground and the flame inside went out. “What did you do?”

I was afraid to answer.

We stared each other down as the wind gusts that accompanied the approaching storm threatened to blow us both out to sea. Aggy’s words, spoken only moments before she ran onto the island without me, still echoed in my mind. *Be patient with Kimble. Don’t hate each other for what happens. You will need each other in the end.* I held on tight to the note Aggy had given me, the one I still didn’t understand.

She knew all this would happen, I realized. I would have laughed if I hadn’t been about to cry. I sunk onto my knees in the cold, wet sand. “I didn’t do anything.”

Islands did not disappear. Where were my friends?

Kimble glared at me, his blue eyes wild. “I’m no fool, kid.”

No, he wasn’t. I suspected this man out of time, one I’d only recently learned didn’t age (he appeared much younger than Papa, but older than my brothers), had the answers I sought. He did not look like he was in the mood to share them.

“Sparrow!” he thundered as the storm boomed. “Tell me what you did.”

Sparrow. Kimble remembered the nickname my friends had given me. Aggy. Gil. Thomas. Laurel. Where were they right now? Was that rat Axel with them? They'd followed Axel onto the island only minutes before, and now the island was gone.

How? Why?

Questions swirled in my head like the storm closing in. Was this the Blood Orange Moon's doing? This strange celestial event my father so feared occurred every two hundred years. It happened when a lunar eclipse, two full moons in one month, and an orange moon (when the sun and moon converged in the sky at the same time) all came together, wreaking havoc on the weather and causing wicked storms.

It was here. Now. And Kimble had told me that he needed to find the missing treasure by the Blood Orange Moon. Every piece needed to be returned to its chest. Once it was, he said he'd be free.

But now I knew Kimble had failed. Because of me.

Kimble sounded eerily calm. Like my father, whenever my brothers had done something wrong and hadn't confessed yet. "You found the treasure, didn't you?"

I couldn't look at him when I spoke. Strands of my wet brown hair blew in front of my face, hiding my shame. "Yes."

I knew now that Kimble hadn't aged a day since the last

Blood Orange Moon, in 1625, when *he* had been the one to take treasure from the island. And that he'd spent the last few weeks trying to make the treasure whole again, to break his curse.

Is that what living forever was? A curse? I'd seen it as a gift, one that I was convinced would save my friends' lives. But now my friends, with their shiny cursed coins, were gone, along with an island that had mysteriously appeared to us only weeks before.

My island. It had first shown up like a mirage, calling to me. *Welcome home, Evelyn Terry! Welcome!*

Now it was silent.

"And what did you do with the treasure?" His voice was strained. "Did you take some?"

I nodded ever so slightly, waiting for him to explode.

"For yourself?" I heard his voice crack.

"No." I shook my head. "I gave coins to my friends." His eyes flashed dangerously. "They were dying of the Cough," I blurted out. "I thought the coins would save them. But the coins didn't do anything, so I told them to run onto the island to make them work."

"*Work?*" His voice rose again, and he started to laugh deliriously. "Do you have any idea what you just did, kid?"

Remind Kimble: another moon will be here—in two hundred years. Isn't that what Aggy had said?

Now did not seem like the time to bring that up.

Kimble reached out and ripped Aggy's note from my hands. She had given it to me only moments before she ran onto the island.

"Find Everly Benedict, age twelve, June twenty twenty-five," Kimble read aloud, the water soaking the page and making Aggy's handwriting smear. "She is the key to saving us all." He looked at me again. "What does that mean? Who wrote this? Who is Everly Benedict?"

I stood up fast then. "My friend Aggy wrote it. She has a gift. She can see things that will happen in the future." He laughed again. I snatched the letter back. "Fine. Don't believe me, but it's true. And this letter is mine."

Kimble's face came dangerously close to my own, the blond stubble on his chin visible up close. "And that treasure you stole, kid, was mine!" He faltered. "Well, not mine exactly, but I was finally going to return it all and be done with this blasted treasure, and now—" He growled like a rabid dog and spun away from me. "Don't you see what you did? You've trapped me here! For another two hundred years of this!" He motioned to his own body. "And your friends too!"

"No." I shook my head vigorously. "I saved them!"

"How?" Kimble questioned, spitting his words. "Who is going to rescue them from that island? Not me in two hundred

years. And certainly not Grace. If she finds her way back on that island, we're all doomed."

"Who is Grace?" I asked, my heart starting to pound with fear. "Where did the island go?"

"How the hell should I know? When it's gone, it's gone." He stared up at the orange eclipsed moon as a flash of lightning lit up the sky. "You think I understand the place? I barely remember how I got on it in sixteen twenty-five, and now... You think I'm going to remember anything by the time we get to...get to... What year did that letter say, twenty twenty-five?" Kimble pulled his hat off his head and threw it on the ground. The wind started to carry it away, and he ran after it, not willing to part with it after all. "This is bad. Real bad." He looked around suspiciously. "When Grace finds out you know about the treasure..."

"*Who* is Grace?" I asked again.

He rubbed his chin, the frown on his face deepening. He didn't answer my question. "I haven't seen her, but she wouldn't miss this moon. And when she learns the island disappeared with the treasure again, she won't be as calm as I am."

"This is *calm*?" I asked.

He threw his hands up, his wet shirt billowing in the wind. "You know what? I don't care! I'm getting as far away from this blasted place as I can. I have options you know. *Some* options.

The island doesn't let me go far, but it will take me far enough. I bet I could make it to New York City if I wanted to."

I didn't understand what he meant, but it seemed best to just let him rant.

Kimble shook his head. "This is all your fault! The treasure is gone! You've cursed your friends to two hundred years on that blasted island! And you"—he pointed a shaky finger at me—"won't live long enough to help them."

I hate to admit this, but when he put it that way, I burst into tears. Thunder crashed, lightning flashed, and then moments later, the sky began to brighten. It was still raining, but the eclipse had ended. And if Kimble was to be believed, any chance I had of saving my friends and the island was gone.

"Cry all you want." Kimble looked up at the sky. "It won't change what you've done. And one thing I know, kid, is the years may feel short, but the days are long. Good luck." He turned to go.

"Wait!" I jumped up and grabbed his coattails. "You can't leave! You're the only one who knows about the island! You have to help me bring it back!"

Kimble kept walking, dragging me along with him till he finally grabbed my wrist and pulled it off his coat. In despair, I just stood there as he walked away. I'll admit I was feeling

pathetically sorry for myself. I'd lost the people most important to me. All I could do was sob.

Then I heard another voice, smooth like velvet, saying my name. I looked up in time to see a woman emerge through the trees just beyond the seagrass of the shore. She smiled kindly.

“Hello, Evelyn.”