

Jess stands by the graveside, alone in the world now. She tightens her fist around the amber necklace that had been her mother's and whispers one last goodbye. She turns and starts down the hill.

In the busy port town, she slips into the shadows. She stands still and silent until she becomes shadow. From there, she watches the world. Fishermen hold their catch to the sky, voices rising over the screams of gulls. Farmers pat vegetables like proud fathers. Butchers with bloodied aprons boast the tenderness of their meat.

Jess has nothing to sell. There is the amber necklace. But she would rather starve.

A possibility pokes at her mind. Immediately, she casts it aside. If she *has* inherited her mother's powers, she does *not* wish to know. She will find another way to keep her belly full.

Her eyes are drawn to a string of men on the quay. Cap in hand, they stand one behind the other in the shade of a faded ship docked alongside, groaning in the gentle swell of the sea. At the head of the line, a seaman sits at a table so small that it makes him seem gigantic. Quill in hand and a great ledger open in front of him, he questions each man, then either points to the ship or back toward the town.

Jess has seen all manner of man visit her mother's hut. But none like this one. Under his jacket, his chest is bare. On it, lies a necklace of wood. A feather rises from black hair that falls in two plaits on either side of his head. Below his left eye is a moon-shaped scar. He looks up suddenly and into her shadow as if he is seeing right into her soul. With a gasp, she drops her gaze to the table.

Oh, but what a table. The color of pale blue eggshells, it has swirls of gold on the most delicate of legs. To someone who has never known furniture to be anything other than functional, it is the most exotic thing Jess has ever seen. Watching it, she feels her heart expand.

Jess's stomach growls with hunger. She looks back at the seaman. He has moved on to the next hopeful. Jess wonders how he chooses. She watches but can see no pattern. That the strong are refused as often as the weak is encouraging to someone her size. For she has decided: a job aboard "The Constance" would mean food, board and a new start. She doubts that there would be a wage – given the state of the ship. Shells and starfish cling to the hull. Paint peels in places. Patches adorn the sails. The crew, clearly, take no pride in their appearance.

And yet this sad, tired ship calls to her with one word, “Constance”. Regular reward for regular work. It is what she begged of her mother, to lead a simple life. But her mother had a gift, a gift she said that had to be honored. To Jess, it was not a gift but a curse.

She looks at the man behind the table. He has no reason to hire a scrawny girl who has never been to sea. Unless...