

**HASELEY
HINTON**



**Shadow
of the
Seacrow**

An exclusive extract from the novel (1 of 2)

THE MAIDENS' VOYAGE

The day of leaving dawned dry but breezy. The pennants flapped and Maina's cloak billowed from time to time as the procession passed through the town. Eager faces lined the streets and children threw down petals at the feet of the Temple Maidens as they had done every round of seasons on this occasion. Maina thought wistfully back to the carefree days when she and Wyn had seen the maidens off with baskets of petals gathered from the palace gardens.

The harbour was calm but the boat rose and fell gently as it nudged the wall. The four oarswomen stepped aboard and took their places, two on either side, and Wyn, the captain of the crew, sat between them to take charge of the little sail. There was a maiden sitting on a tiny seat at the rear by the rudder arm and between that and the sail there was a raised seat with a canopy on a little platform. This was the place set for the Most Honoured Maiden.

On the lowest exposed harbour step, damp and slippery from the previous tide, Maina glanced down and saw deep into the cold green waters. Pale shapes seemed to be moving far below her as the light distorted the images coming from the harbour bed. She hesitated. She anxiously watched the gangplank moving up and down above the water as it balanced between steps and boat. Then she felt a warm hand grasp her own. Bradmutt, her father's Chief of Warriors, had come down the steps to steady her. Husband to Maina's wet nurse and father to Wyn, he had welcomed Maina into his family from the first. Bradmutt had been like a second father, in many ways more approachable and more supportive than her own had been. Comforted by his steadying arm, Maina successfully stepped across to the boat and took her seat of

honour in the stern. She rested her feet on the chest of gifts that her father was sending to the Ship Prophet.

Trumpets sounded and the boat was cast off and pushed out into the harbour. The maidens, like those who had gone before them, had practiced hard for this journey. They began to row out of the harbour in perfect time. Maina looked towards her father, and Bradmutt, who was back at her father's side. She bowed her head to take her leave and then raised her chin proudly and stared ahead as the boat glided through the harbour gates and out to sea.

Krista was at the rudder. She was the slightest of the maidens and the least powerful rower but she was an expert navigator. The little boat turned northwards and began to follow the coast.

The sun passed its zenith and the voyage was going well. Maina was confident that they would reach the Sacred Mountain well before evening. But then the breeze began to strengthen and blew in a heavy bank of cloud. Maina shifted uneasily in her seat as the awnings began to flap around her. The breeze gave way to lively gusts of wind that whipped up substantial waves. The boat rocked and Krista had to tug with all her might to stop the wind blowing them too close to the cliffs of the shore.

Suddenly an almighty crack told them the boat had struck a rock. Krista gave an agonised cry and the rudder arm swung wildly around. Krista was cradling one arm with the other, her face contorted with pain. The other maidens were all struggling to help Wyn to lower the sail and Maina was the only one free to catch the rudder. She began to wonder if her fear of water was about to be justified. She climbed down from her seat of honour and signalled to Krista to yield the rudder seat.

"You can't," protested Krista.

"I must," said Maina. "You will have to tell me what to

do.”

Maina sat and Krista crouched in the bottom of the boat near to her feet.

“Turn the boat to face the waves. Pull the arm towards you, hard!”

“Gorlan, great God of the sea, protect these, thy maidens!” Maina shouted into the wind as she wrestled with the flailing length of wood.

The boat rocked violently as a wave hit them broadside. Women were thrown from one side of the boat to the other and Wyn, captain of the crew, was thrown against Maina.

“Perhaps your prayers are not yet strong enough,” she said. “You must try again. For all our sakes pray harder, or we will all be lost.”

“No, it cannot end like this,” Maina cried, seeing fear in her sister’s eyes. “My mother died to give me life. It cannot have been for naught! Gorlan, great God of the sea, these maidens wish to live. Save them, save them, please. Almighty Tarn, God of the sky, keep these, thy maidens, from the sea and they will serve you all their days.”

She pulled harder on the rudder and the boat turned sluggishly towards the foaming crests.

“Rocks to port!” went up the shout.

“Ease up!” shouted Krista, then “Pull hard again. Pull hard!”

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THE DEBUT NOVEL BY HASELEY HINTON

Shadow of the Seacrow

The deeply spiritual peoples of Morth and Xoutha are divided by their beliefs in different gods. But they both lay claim to the Sacred Mountain and to the mysterious Ship Prophet who has lived there for generations. Now, as a new war for the mountain threatens to erupt, the Ship Prophet sets a task for two young pilgrims. A trainee Xouthan priestess and a Morthern monk must journey together to reveal a truth that could change their world forever.

Shadow of the Seacrow is a compelling coming of age story set in a hauntingly realised mythical world. Hinton's extraordinary debut novel is both richly imaginative and profoundly human in scope.



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