

It Was You Who Made My Blue Eyes Blue

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Content note: *suicide.*

Day Zero

It all started with an ignorant white guy.

His name was Alonzo de Pinzon, and he'd been shipwrecked. We heard him yelling for help on the rocks and dragged him in, even though the storm was starting to get really bad. He said that his galleon had gone down, he'd hung on to an oar and was the only survivor. Now he was sitting in our little hunting lodge, shivering and chattering his teeth and asking us questions in the Polynesian traders' argot which was the only language we all shared.

"How big is this island? How many of you are there?"

Daho answered first. "11.8 miles from the easternmost point to the westernmost point, 3.6 miles from the northernmost to the southernmost. Total area is 14.6 square miles, total coastline is

dependent on how deeply you want to go into the fractal nature of the perimeter but under some reasonable assumptions about 32 miles long. Last census said there were 906 people, but that was two years ago, so assuming the 5.1% rate of population growth continues, there should be closer to 1000 now. Everyone else is back at the village, though. The five of us were out hunting and got caught in the storm. We figured we'd stay at this old hunting lodge until it cleared up, since it's 5.5 miles back to the village and given the terrain and factoring in a delay because of the storm it would probably take at least 9.5 hours to get back."

Pinzon blinked.

"Problem?" asked Daho.

"But – " he said. "That is the sort of answer I should expect from a natural philosopher. Not from a savage."

"Savage?" Calkas hissed. "Really? We rescue you, and the first thing you do is call us savages?"

The sailor looked around, as if anxious. Finally, almost conspiratorially: "But I heard about your island! I heard you eat people!"

Calkas smiled. "Only as a deterrent. Most of the time when European explorers land somewhere, they kill all the men and enslave all the women and convert the children to Christianity. The only places that escape are the ones that get a reputation for eat-

ing said European explorers. So we arranged to give ourselves that reputation.”

“And then we had to go through with it a few times in order to make the deterrent credible,” added Bekka, my betrothed. “And you guys do taste really good with ketchup.”

“It’s a savage thing to do!” Pinzon said “And you even look like savages. You wear bones in your hair”

“Just Enuli,” I said. “She’s going through a Goth phase.”

“My name is Morticia now,” said Enuli, “and it’s *not a phase!*” She did have a bone in her hair. She also had white face paint and black eyeliner.

“More roast pig?” Bekka asked Pinzon. The sailor nodded, and she re-filled his plate.

“I just don’t get it,” he told us. “Everyone else in this part of the world lives in thatched huts and counts ‘one, two, many’. We tried to trade with the Tahitians, and they didn’t understand the concept of money! It was a mess!”

Bekka rolled her eyes at me, and I smiled. Calkas was a little more tolerant. “The sacred plant of our people is called sparkroot,” he said. “When we eat it, we get – more awake, I guess you could say. We try to have some every day, and it helps us keep track of things like the island size and the population, and much more.”

Alonzo de Pinzon looked interested. “How come you haven’t done more with your intellect? Invented galleons, like we Spaniards? Set off to colonize Tahiti or the other islands? If you are as smart as you seem, you could conquer them and take their riches.”

“Maybe,” said Calkas. “But that’s not why the Volcano God gave us the sparkroot. He gave us sparkroot to help us comply with his complicated ritual laws.”

“You need to be smart to deal with your ritual laws?”

“Oh yes. For example, the Tablets of Enku say that we must count the number of days since Enku The Lawgiver first spoke to the Volcano God, and on days whose number is a Mersenne prime we can’t eat any green vegetables.”

“What’s a Mersenne prime?” asked the sailor.

“Exactly my point,” said Calkas, smiling.

“That’s not even the worst of it!” Daho added. “The Tablets say we have to bathe in the waterfall any day x such that $a^n + b^n = x^n$ where n is greater than two. We got all confused by that one for a while, until Kaluhani gorged himself on a whole week’s worth of sparkroot in one night and proved that it would never apply to any day at all.”

“The Volcano God’s yoke is light,” Calkas agreed.

“Although poor Kaluhani was vomiting for the next three days after that,” Bekka reminded us, and everybody laughed remembering.

“Oh!” said Daho. “And remember that time when Uhuako was trying to tattoo everyone who didn’t tattoo themselves, and he couldn’t figure out whether he had to tattoo himself or not, so he ended up eating a whole sparkroot plant at once and inventing advanced set theory? That was hilarious.”

Everyone except Alonzo de Pinzon giggled.

“Point is,” said Calkas, “that’s why the Volcano God gives us sparkroot. To follow the rituals right. Any other use is taboo. And I’m okay with that. You Europeans may have your big ships and your guns and your colonies across half the world. And you might think you’re smart. But you guys couldn’t follow the Volcano God’s rituals right for a *day* without your brains exploding.”

Pinzon scowled. “You know what?” he said. “I don’t think you’re Polynesians at all. I think you must be descended from Europeans. Maybe some galleon crashed on this island centuries ago, and you’re the descendants. That would explain why you’re so smart.”

“You know what else we’ve invented with our giant brains?” Bekka asked. “Not being racist.”

“It’s not racism!” said Pinzon. “Look, there’s one more obvious reason to think you’re descended from Europeans. You may have dark

skin, but this is the first place I've been in all of Polynesia where I've seen even one native with blue eyes."

Bekka gasped. Calkas' eyes went wide. Daho's hands started curling into fists. Enuli started to sob.

I looked at them. They looked at me. Then, as if synchronized, we grabbed Alonzo de Pinzon and crushed his throat and held him down until he stopped breathing.

He tasted delicious with ketchup.

Day One

The next morning dawned, still grey and cold and stormy.

"So," I said when the other four had awoken. "I guess we're all still here."

I said it glumly. It wasn't that I wanted any of my friends to commit suicide. But if one of them had, the horror would have stopped there. Of course, I knew it couldn't really be over that easily. But I couldn't have admitted I knew. I couldn't even have suggested it. That would have made me as bad as the Spanish sailor.

"Wait," said Enuli. "I don't get it. Why wouldn't we still be here?"

The other four stared at her like she was mad.

“Enuli,” Calkas suggested, “did you forget your sparkroot last night?”

“First of all, my name is Morticia. And – ”

“Shut it. Did you forget your sparkroot?”

Finally she nodded bashfully. “I was so upset about that awful man making fun of my hair-bone,” she said. “I guess it slipped my mind. I’ll have some now.” She took some raw sparkroot from our bag, started to crush it with the mortar and pestle. “In the meantime, tell me what’s going on.”

“Alonzo de Pinzon said at least one of us had blue eyes. We all know what the Tablets of Enku say. If anybody has blue eyes, and knows that they have blue eyes, they must kill themselves.”

“So what? I see people with blue eyes all the time. Of course at least one of us has blue eyes.”

Concerned looks from the others. I reflected for a second, the sparkroot smoothing the thoughts’ paths through my brain. No, she hadn’t revealed anything extra by saying that, although she would have if she had said it before the sailor had spoken, or last night before we woke up this morning. She hadn’t made the problem worse. Still, it had been a slip. This was the sort of thing that made forgetting your sparkroot so dangerous. Had it been a different time, even Enuli’s comment could have doomed us all.

“It’s like this,” I told Enuli. “Suppose there were only the two of us, and we both had blue eyes. Of course, you could see me and know that I had blue eyes. So you would know that at least one of us had blue eyes. But what you wouldn’t know is that I also knew it. Because as far as you know, you might have eyes of some other color, let’s say brown eyes. If you had brown eyes, and I of course don’t know my own eye color, then I would still think it possible that both of us have brown eyes. So if I in fact know for sure that at least one of us has blue eyes, that means you have blue eyes. So you know at least one of us has blue eyes, but you don’t know that I know it. But if Alonzo de Pinzon shows up and says that at least one of us has blue eyes, now you know that I know it.”

“So?” Enuli poured the ground-up root into a cup of boiling water.

“So the Tablets say that if anyone knows their own eye color, they must commit suicide at midnight of that night. Given that I know at least one of us has blue eyes, if I see you have brown eyes, then I know my own eye color – I must be the blue-eyed one. So the next morning, when you wake up at see me not dead, you know that you don’t have brown eyes. That means you must be the blue-eyed one. And that means you have to kill yourself on midnight of the following night. By similar logic, so do I.”

Enuli downed her sparkroot tea, and then her eyes lit up. “Oh, of course,” she said. Then “Wait! If we follow [the situation](#) to its [logical](#) conclusion, any group of n blue-eyed people who learn that at least one of them has blue eyes have to kill themselves on the n th night after learning that!”

We all nodded. Enuli's face fell.

"I don't know about the rest of you," said Daho, "but I'm not just going to sit around and wait to see if I die." There were murmurs of agreement.

I looked out at my friends. Four pairs of blue eyes stared back at me. Everybody else either saw four pairs of blue eyes or three pairs of blue eyes, depending on what color my own eyes were. Of course, I couldn't say so aloud; that would speed up the process and cost us precious time. But I knew. And they knew. And I knew they knew. And they knew I knew I knew. Although they didn't know I knew they knew I knew. I think.

Then I looked at Bekka. Her big blue eyes stared back at me. There was still hope I was going to survive this. My betrothed, on the other hand, was absolutely doomed.

"This sucks," I agreed. "We've got to come up with some kind of plan. Maybe – Enuli wasn't thinking straight yesterday. So her not committing suicide doesn't count. Can we work with that?"

"No," said Calkas. "Suppose Enuli was the only one with blue eyes, and all the rest of us had brown eyes. Then she would realize that and commit suicide tonight. If she doesn't commit suicide tonight, then we're still screwed."

"Um," said Daho. "I hate to say this, but we get rid of Enuli. There's a canoe a little ways down the beach hidden underneath

the rocks. She can set off and row for Tahiti. We'll never know if she killed herself tonight or not. Remember, right now for all we know Enuli might be the only one with blue eyes. So if there's any question in our mind about whether she killed herself, we can't be sure that the rest of us aren't all brown-eyed."

We all thought about that for a moment.

"I'm not going to row to Tahiti," said Enuli. "In this storm, that would be suicide."

The rest of us glared at her.

"If you don't get off this island, then for all we know all five of us are going to have to die," I said. "You included."

"Well Ahuja, if you're so big on making sacrifice why don't *you* go to Tahiti?"

"First of all," I said, "because I'm not leaving my betrothed. Second of all, because it doesn't work for me. I knew what was going on last night. We already know that I'm not the only blue-eyed person here. And we know we know it, and know we know we know it, and so on. You're the only one who can help us."

"Yeah?" said Enuli. "Well, if two of you guys were to row to Tahiti, that would solve the problem too."

“Yes,” said Daho patiently. “But then two of us would be stuck in exile. If you did it, only one of us would be stuck.”

Enuli gave a wicked grin. “You know what?” she said. “I’ll say it. I’m not the only blue-eyed person here. At least one of the rest of you has blue eyes.”

And there it was.

“Ha. Now I’m no worse off than any of the rest of you.”

“Kill her,” said Bekka. “She broke the taboo.” The rest of us nodded.

“So she did,” said Calkas. “And if we had a court here, led by the high priest, and an executioner’s blade made to exactly the right standard, kill her we would. But until those things happen, it is taboo for us to convict and kill her without trial.”

Calkas’ father was the high priest. He knew the law better than any of us. The five of us sat quietly and thought about it. Then he spoke again:

“But her soul may well burn in the caldera of the Volcano God forever.”

Enuli started to cry.

“And,” Calkas continued, “there is nevertheless a flaw in our plan. For all we know, three out of five of us have brown eyes. We cannot tell the people who have blue eyes that they have blue eyes without breaking the taboo. So we cannot force blue-eyed people in particular to sail to Tahiti. But if two of the brown-eyed people sail to Tahiti, then we do not lose any information; we know that they would not have committed suicide, because they could not have figured out their own eye color. So sailing to Tahiti won’t help.”

The rest of us nodded. Calkas was right.

“Let’s wait until dinner tonight,” I suggested. “We’ll all have some more sparkroot, and maybe we’ll be able to think about the problem a little more clearly.”

Day Two

The sun rose behind angry storm clouds. The five of us rose with it.

“Well, I guess we’re all still here,” I said, turning the morning headcount into a grim tradition.

“Look,” said Bekka. “The thing about sailing to Tahiti would work a lot better if we knew how many blue-eyed versus brown-eyed people were here. If we all had blue eyes, then we could be sure that the Tahiti plan would work, and some of us could be saved. If some of us had brown eyes, then we could choose a number of people to

sail to Tahiti that had a good probability of catching enough of the blue-eyed ones.”

“We can wish all we want,” said Enuli, “but if we explicitly knew how many people had blue versus brown eyes, we’d all have to kill ourselves right now.”

“What about probabilistic knowledge?” I asked. “In theory, we could construct a system that would allow us to have > 99.99% probability what color our eyes were without being sure.”

“That’s stupid,” Enuli said, at precisely the same time Calkas said “That’s brilliant!” He went on: “Look, just between the five of us, everybody else back at the village has blue eyes, right?”

We nodded. It was nerve-wracking to hear it mentioned so casually, just like that, but as far as I could tell it didn’t break any taboos.

“So,” said Calkas, “We know that, of the island population, at least 995 of the 1000 of us have blue eyes. Oh, and since nobody committed suicide last night, we know that at least three of the five of us have blue eyes, so that’s 998 out of 1000. Just probabilistically, by Laplace’s Law of Succession and the like, we can estimate a >99% chance that we ourselves have blue eyes. Nothing I’m saying is taboo. It’s nothing that the priests don’t know themselves. But none of them have killed themselves yet. So without revealing any information about the eye color composition of the current group, I think it’s reasonable to make a first assumption that all of us have blue eyes.”

“I’m really creeped out at you talking like this,” said Daho. I saw goosebumps on his arms.

“I do not believe that the same Volcano God who has endowed us with reason and intellect could have intended us to forego their use,” said Calkas. “Let’s assume we all have blue eyes. In that case, the Tahiti plan is still on.”

“Waaiiiit a second – ” Bekka objected. “If probabilistic knowledge of eye color doesn’t count, then no information can count. After all, there’s always a chance that the delicious sailor could have been lying. So when he said at least one of us had blue eyes, all we know is that there’s a high *probability* that at least one of us has blue eyes.”

“Yes!” said Daho. “I’ve been reading this book that washed ashore from a shipwrecked galleon. Off in Europe, there is this tribe called the Jews. Their holy book says that illegitimate children should be shunned by the congregation. Their leaders thought this was unfair, but they weren’t able to contradict the holy book. So instead they declared that sure, illegitimate children should be shunned, but only if they were *sure* they were really illegitimate. Then they declared that no amount of evidence would ever suffice to convince them of that. There was always a possibility that the woman had secretly had sex with her husband nine months before the birth and was simply lying about it. Or, if apparently unmarried, that she had secretly married someone. They decided that it was permissible to err on the side of caution, and from that perspective nobody

was sufficiently certainly illegitimate to need shunning. We could do the same thing here.”

“Yes!” I said. “That is, even if we looked at our reflection and saw our eye color directly, it might be that a deceiving demon is altering all of our experience – ”

“No no NO,” said Calkas. “That’s not right. The Tablets of Enku say that *because* people must not know their own eye color, we are forbidden to talk about the matter. So the law strongly implies that hearing someone tell us our eye color would count as proof of that eye color. The exact probability has nothing to do with it. It’s the method by which we gain the information.”

“That’s stupid,” Bekka protested.

“That’s the law,” said Calkas.

“Let’s do the Tahiti plan, then,” I said. I gathered five stones from the floor of the lodge. Two white, three black. “White stones stay. Black stones go to Tahiti. Close your eyes and don’t look.”

Bekka, Calkas, Daho, and Enuli all took a stone from my hand. I looked at the one that was left. It was black. Then I looked around the lodge. Calkas and Enuli were smiling, white stones in their hands. Bekka and Daho, not so much. Daho whined, looked at me pleadingly.

“No,” I said. “It’s decided. The three of us will head off tonight.”

Calkas and Enuli tried to be respectful, to hide their glee and relief.

“You guys will tell our families what happened?”

They nodded gravely.

We began packing our things.

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The dark clouds frustrated any hope of moonlight as Bekka, Daho and I set off to the nearby cove where two canoes lay hidden beneath the overhanging rocks. The rain soaked our clothes the second we crossed the doorway. The wind lashed at our faces. We could barely hear ourselves talk. This was a *bad* storm.

“How are we going to make it to the canoes in this weather?!” Bekka shouted at me, grabbing my arm. I just squeezed her hand. Daho might have said something, might not have. I couldn’t tell. Between the mud and the rain and the darkness it took us two hours to travel less than a mile. The canoes were where we had left them a few days before. The rocks gave us brief shelter from the pelting rain.

“This is suicide!” Daho said, once we could hear each other again. “There’s no way we can make it to Tahiti in this! We won’t even be able to make it a full mile out!” Bekka nodded.

“Yes,” I said. I’d kind of known it, the whole way down to the cove, but now I was sure. “Yes. This is suicide. But we’ve got to do it. If we don’t kill ourselves tonight, then we’ve just got to go back to the lodge. And then we’ll all end up killing ourselves anyway. And Calkas and Enuli will die too.”

“No!” said Daho. “We go back, we tell them that we can’t make it to Tahiti. Then we let *them* decide if we need to commit suicide or not. And if they say yes, we draw the stones again. Four black, one white. One chance to live.”

“We already drew the stones,” I said. “Fair is fair.”

“Fair is fair?” Bekka cried. “We drew stones to go to Tahiti. We didn’t draw stones to commit suicide. If the stone drawing obliged us to commit suicide, they should have said so, and then maybe we would have spent more time thinking about other options. Why do we have to die? Why can’t the other ones die? Why not Enuli, with that stupid bone in her hair? I hate her so much! Ahuja, you can’t just let me die like this!”

That hurt. I was willing to sacrifice my life, if that was what it took. But Bekka was right. To just toss ourselves out to sea and let her drown beneath those waves would break the whole point of our betrothal bond.

“Well, I – ”

“Ahuja,” said Bekka. “I think I’m pregnant.”

“What?”

“I missed my last period. And I got sick this morning, even though I didn’t eat any extra sparkroot. I think I’m pregnant. I don’t want to die. We need to save me. To save the baby.”

I looked at the horrible waves, watched them pelt the shore. A few moments in that, and there was no doubt we would capsize and die.

“Okay,” I said. “New plan. The three of us go back. We tell them that we couldn’t get to Tahiti. They point out that another night has passed. Now four of us have to die. The three of us vote for everybody except Bekka dying. It’s 3-2, we win. The rest of us die, and Bekka goes back to the village and the baby lives.”

“Hold on,” said Daho. “I’m supposed to vote for me to die and Bekka to live? What do I get out of this deal?”

The Tablets of Enku say one man must not kill another. So I didn’t.

“You get an extra day!” I snapped. “One extra day of life for saving my betrothed and unborn child. Because we’re not going back unless you agree to this. It’s either die now, or die tomorrow night. And a lot of things can happen in a day.”

“Like what?”

“Like I don’t know. We might think of some clever way out. Enku the Lawgiver might return from the dead and change the rules. Whatever. It’s a better deal than you’ll get if you throw yourself into that water.”

Daho glared at me, then weighed his options. “Okay,” he snapped. “I’ll vote for Bekka. But you had better be thinking *really* hard about those clever ways out.”

Day Three

“So,” said Calkas the next morning. “I guess all of us are still here.” He didn’t really sound surprised.

I explained what had happened the night before.

“It’s simple,” Calkas declared. “The Volcano God is punishing us. He’s saying that it’s wrong of us to try to escape his judgment by going to Tahiti. That’s why he sent the storm. He wants us all to stay here until the bitter end and then, if we have to, we die together.”

“No!” I protested. “That’s not it at all! The taboo doesn’t say we all have to die. It just says we all have to die if we figure out what our eye color is! If some of us kill ourselves, we can prevent that from happening!”

“The Volcano God loathes the needless taking of life,” said Calkas. “And he loathes his people traveling to other lands, where the sparkroot never grows and the taboos are violated every day. That’s what he’s trying to tell us. He’s trying to close off our options, so that we stay pure and our souls don’t have to burn in his caldera. You know, like Enuli’s will.” He shot her a poison glance.

“My name is – ” she started.

“I don’t think that’s it at all,” I said. “I say the four of us sacrifice ourselves to save Bekka.”

“You *would* say that, as her betrothed,” said Enuli.

“Well yes,” I said. “Yes, I would. Forgive me for not wanting the love of my life to die for a stupid reason. Maybe I should just throw myself in the caldera right now. And she’s carrying an unborn child? Did you miss that part?”

“People, people,” said Calkas. “Peace! We’re all on the same side here.”

“No we’re not,” I said. “So let’s vote. Everyone in favor of saving Bekka, say aye.”

“And everyone in favor of not sacrificing anyone to the waves, and letting the Volcano God’s will be done, say nay.” Calkas added.

“Aye,” I said.

“Aye,” said Bekka.

“Nay,” said Calkas.

“Nay,” said Enuli.

“Nay,” said Daho.

“What?!” I protested.

“Nay,” Daho repeated.

“But you said – ” I told him.

“You promised me one extra day,” Daho said. “Think about it. Calkas is promising me two.”

“No!” I protested. “You can’t do this! Seriously, I’ll kill you guys if I have to!”

“Then your soul will burn in the caldera forever,” said Calkas. “And it still won’t help your betrothed or your child.”

“You can’t do this,” I repeated, softly, more of a mutter.

“We can, Ahuja,” said Calkas.

I slumped back into my room, defeated.

Day Four

I gave them the traditional morning greeting. “So, I guess we’re all still here.”

We were. It was our last day. We now had enough information to prove, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that all of us had blue eyes. At midnight, we would all have to commit suicide.

“You know what?” said Enuli. “I’ve always wanted to say this. ALL OF YOU GUYS HAVE BLUE EYES! DEAL WITH IT!”

We nodded. “You have blue eyes too, Enuli,” said Daho. It didn’t matter at this point.

“Wait,” said Bekka. “No! I’ve got it! Heterochromia!”

“Hetero-what?” I asked.

“Heterochromia iridum. It’s a very rare condition where someone has two eyes of two different colors. If one of us has heterochromia iridum, then we can’t prove anything at all! The sailor just said that he saw someone with blue eyes. He didn’t say how *many* blue eyes.”

“That’s stupid, Bekka,” Enuli protested. “He said blue eyes, plural. If somebody just had one blue eye, obviously he would have re-

marked on that first. Something like 'this is the only island I've been to where people's eyes have different colors.'

"No," said Bekka. "Because maybe all of us have blue eyes, except one person who has heterochromia iridum, and he noticed the other four people, but he didn't look closely enough to notice the heterochromia iridum in the fifth."

"Enuli just said," said Calkas, "that we all have blue eyes."

"But she didn't say how many!"

"But," said Calkas, "if one of us actually had heterochromia iridum, don't you think somebody would have thought to mention it before the fifth day?"

"Doesn't matter!" Bekka insisted. "It's just probabilistic certainty."

"It doesn't work that way," said Calkas. He put an arm on her shoulder. She angrily swatted it off. "Who even decides these things!" she asked. "Why is it wrong to know your own eye color?"

"The eye is the organ that sees," said Calkas. "It's how we know what things look like. If the eye knew what it itself looked like, it would be an infinite cycle, the eye seeing the eye seeing the eye seeing the eye and so on. Like dividing by zero. It's an abomination. That's why the Volcano God, in his infinite wisdom, said that it must not be."

“Well, I know my eyes are blue,” said Bekka. “And I don’t feel like I’m stuck in an infinite loop, or like I’m an abomination.”

“That’s because,” Calkas said patiently, “the Volcano God, in his infinite mercy, has given us one day to settle our worldly affairs. But at midnight tonight, we all have to kill ourselves. That’s the rule.”

Bekka cried in my arms. I glared at Calkas. He shrugged. Daho and Enuli went off together – I guess they figured if it was their last day in the world, they might as well have some fun – and I took Bekka back to our room.

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“Listen,” I said. “I’m not going to do it.”

“What?” she asked. She stopped crying immediately.

“I’m not going to do it. And you don’t have to do it either. You should have your baby, and he should have a mother and father. We can wait here. The others will kill themselves. Then we’ll go back to the village on our own and say that the rest of them died in the storm.”

“But – aren’t you worried about the Volcano God burning our souls in his caldera forever?”

“To be honest, I never really paid much attention in Volcano Church. I – I guess we’ll see what happens later on, when we die. The important thing is that we can have our child, and he can grow up with us.”

“I love you,” said Bekka.

“I know,” I said.

“I know you know,” she said. “But I didn’t know that you knew I knew you knew. And now I do.”

“I love you too,” I said.

“I know,” she said.

“I know you know,” I said. I kissed her. “I love you and your beautiful blue eyes.”

The storm darkened from gray to black as the hidden sun passed below the horizon.

Day Five

“So,” I said when the other four had woken up, “I guess all of us are atheists.”

“Yeah,” said Daho.

“The world is empty and void of light and meaning,” said Enuli. “It’s the most Goth thing of all.”

Calkas sighed. “I was hoping all of you would kill yourselves,” he said, “and then I could go home, and my father the high priest would never have to know what happened. I’m sorry for pushing the rest of you. It’s just that – if I looked lax, even for a second, he would have suspected, and then I would have been in so much trouble that an eternity in the Volcano God’s caldera would look pretty good compared to what would happen when I got back home.”

“I think,” said Bekka, “that I realized it the first time I ate the sparkroot. Before I’d even finished swallowing it, I was like, wait a second, volcanoes are probably just geologic phenomenon caused by an upwelling of the magma in the Earth’s mantle. And human life probably evolved from primitive replicators. It makes a lot more sense than some spirit creating all life and then retreating to a dormant volcano on some random island in the middle of the nowhere.”

“This is great,” said Bekka. “Now even if it’s a Mersenne prime day I can eat as many green vegetables as I want!”

“You know Mersenne prime days only come like once every couple of centuries, right?” I asked her.

“I know. It’s just the principle of the thing.”

“We can’t tell any of the others,” Daho insisted. “They’d throw us into the volcano.”

“You think?” I said. “Calkas was saying before that 99% of us had blue eyes, so probably we all had blue eyes. Well, think about it. The five of us are a pretty random sample of the island population, and all five of us are atheist. That means there’s probably a lot more. Maybe everybody’s atheist.”

“Everybody?”

“Well, I thought Calkas was like the most religious of anybody I knew. And here we are.”

“I told you, I was just trying to behave so that I didn’t get in trouble with my father.”

“What if everyone’s doing that? Nobody wants to get in trouble by admitting they don’t believe, because if anybody else found out, they’d get thrown into the volcano. So we all just put on a mask for everybody else.”

“I figured Ahuja was atheist,” said Bekka.

“You did?!” I asked her.

“Yeah. It was the little things. When we were hanging out. Sometimes you’d forget some rituals. And then you’d always shoot these

guilty glances at me, like you were trying to see if I'd noticed. I thought it was cute."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"You'd have freaked out. You'd have had to angrily deny it. Unless you knew I was atheist. But I couldn't have told you that, because if I did then you might feel like you had to throw *me* in the volcano to keep up appearances."

"Bekka!" I said. "You know I would never – "

"I kind of suspected Calkas was atheist," said Daho. "He got so worked up about some of those little points of law. It had to be overcompensating."

"Hold on hold on hold on!" said Calkas. "So basically, we were all atheists. We all knew we were all atheists. We just didn't know that we knew that we were all atheists. This is hurting my brain. I think I'm going to need more sparkroot."

A sunbeam peeked through the wall of the lodge.

"Storm's over!" Bekka shouted gleefully. "Time to go back home!" We gathered our things and went outside. The sudden sunlight felt crisp and warm upon my skin.

"So," said Daho, "we don't mention anything about the sailor to anyone else back at the village?"

“Are you kidding?” said Calkas. “I say we stand in the middle of town square, announce everybody’s eye colors, and then suggest that maybe they don’t believe in the Volcano God as much as they thought. See what happens.”

“YOU ALL HAVE BLUE EYES!” Enuli shouted at the jungle around us. “DEAL WITH IT!” We laughed.

“By the way,” I told Enuli. “While we’re airing out things that everybody knows in order to make them common knowledge, that bone in your hair looks ridiculous.”

“He’s right,” Daho told her.

“It really does,” Calkas agreed.

“You watch out,” said Enuli. “Now that we don’t have to reserve the sparkroot for interpreting taboos, I’m going to invent a death ray. Then you’ll be sorry.”

“Hey,” said Daho, “that sounds pretty cool. And I can invent a giant aerial dreadnaught to mount it on, and together we can take over Europe and maybe the next sailor who gets shipwrecked on our island will be a little less condescending.”

“Ha!” said Enuli. “That would be so Goth.”

Sun on our backs, we took the winding road into the village.

