

LAKE OF THE DEAD

small knife, a sodden pouch of tobacco and my equally sodden journal and pen.

My chances of survival were meagre, I realised. Even if I could construct a raft of sorts and negotiate it back over that deadly lake, evading the evil creature's watchful eye, I would still be lost in a wilderness many months' journey from salvation. Our carefully drawn map now lay with my poor friend George Tuller at the bottom of the lake.

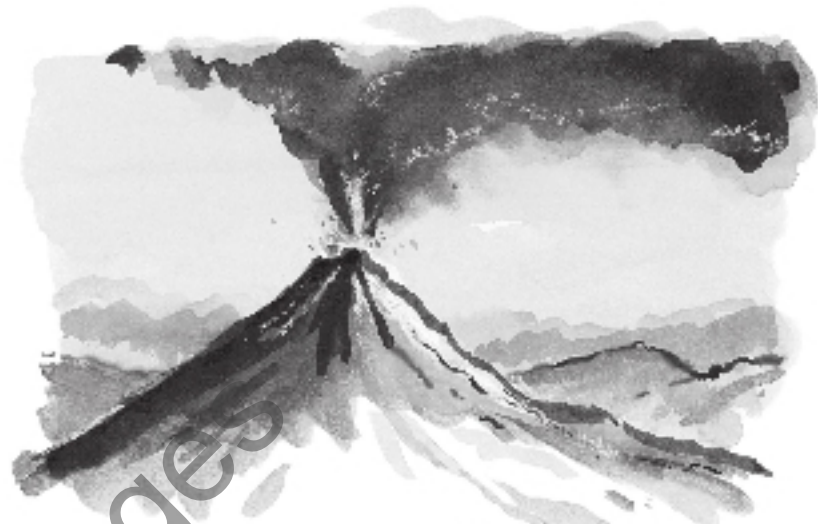
I spent a tormented day in agony, both from the impossibility of my position and from my many wounds. By week's end, I was weak with exhaustion, lack of food and loss of blood.

Now, gripped with a gangrenous fever, weak and at times delirious, I pen these words. Despite my pain, I know with startling clarity that I am dying and will never leave this island alive.

I therefore write these last words as testimony to my brave companions and also as a warning to whomever finds this journal.

PRAY BEWARE OF THE BLACK WATERS AND OF THE EVIL THAT RESIDES IN THIS LAKE OF THE DEAD!

Captain Ezra Bellevue, 1795



CHAPTER ONE

The only reason Josh Brookfield was still alive was that he'd never learned to tie a bowline.

His companions had laughed at his clumsiness. They could tie a bowline with their eyes shut. He'd watched as they all looped the rope about their waists and descended the cliff with ease, their laughter ringing in his ears. When the earthquake hit, their laughter stopped. He knew they were dead now, their bodies crushed beneath a mountain of rock below.

Earlier, when the first tremor had struck, they had all been badly shaken. Josh could see the panic in their eyes . . . smell the fear.

At first they had thought it must be thunder that