

## CHAPTER 12

### The Broadwater

“Up anchor, Bill,” said Father Hannan.

“Aye, Aye, Sir,” said Bill and went forward. The outboard burst into life again, Father Hannan opened the throttle wide and soon the three boats were heading at speed out of the Little Brasswater and up the river for Tamboy. The river now swept in a curve to the left before settling into a strait which led due north. Bill sat talking with Father Hannan in the stern while Tom, Mark, Liz and Cate conferred near the centreboard case over the maps.

“How about we sail both boats across to Bulahdelah Point,” said Tom indicating the position on the western shore of the Broadwater. “Then you and the girls can sail back across the lake to Mungo.” Liz held down a corner of the map which was being blown about by the breeze stirred up by their passage under power.

“It’s about four miles across,” Mark replied. “A bit less than four miles. What do you think, Cate? We shouldn’t have too much trouble.”

“What time would we get to Mungo?”

“We should get there about mid afternoon.”

“How long do you think you will be up the river, Tom?” Tom was busy measuring the distance using the scale at the bottom of the map and his hand.

“It’s a bit over three miles from Bulahdelah Point. Six miles there and back in the canoe. Then three and three quarter miles across the lake.”

“Excluding stops you’d probably average four miles an hour. That’s a good walking pace.”

“Four *knots*,” said Cate.

“Not that you’ll be doing much walking,” said Liz.

“Excluding stops, say three to three and a half hours.”

“And if you get into strife we can call in the Marines.”

“The Marines?”

“Daddy and Mr Parfitt in the One Lunger.”

The boats had made good progress while they were speaking. The river turned to the west and they saw signs of habitation. A cruiser came into view moored to the eastern shore and, shortly afterwards, a moored house boat. There were shacks on both sides and a small outboard boat came motoring down river with a fisherman on board. Ahead the river took another turn, a fairly sharp one, back to the north.

“Tamboy,” said Father Hannan reducing the speed of the outboard motor. A family on one of the houseboats, looking curiously at the strange cavalcade of boats passing by, waved to them. They waved back.

“They are all so friendly,” said Liz.

“Always something to see on the water,” said Father Hannan. “We are providing plenty of interest for the locals.” As they rounded the next bend they could see ahead of them the opening into the Broadwater which sparkled in the sun. Beyond the water, in the far distance, a jagged skyline showed a range of hills.

“There’s our little beach. On the eastern shore,” said Father Hannan a few minutes later pointing to starboard. He eased the throttle of the engine back even further and they cruised slowly into the shore. Tom and Mark untied the two smaller boats and drew them alongside the larger vessel as they approached so they wouldn’t run into the bigger boat as it grounded. Father cut the engine. Bill was in the bow and he dropped into the water and took the weight of the boat as they reached the shallows. The other two boys stepped over too and manhandled their boats into the beach. The girls joined them and they hauled the bows of the smaller boats onto the shore so that the boats would not float away. Father Hannan, with Bill’s assistance, moored *Great Saint Joseph* just off the shore.

“How long till Dad and Mr Parfitt arrive, Father?” Cate asked.

“Well it’s close on twelve now. They should be here in about half an hour. Which reminds me. Time to say the *Angelus*. Come on you lot,” he called.

The *Angelus*, commemorating the essential steps in the redemption of the human race by the man who was God, Jesus Christ, has been said by Christians since the thirteenth century. Traditionally it is said at midday. It is a Catholic prayer but Mark and Liz were familiar with it. When they had all gathered, Father Hannan intoned the verse—*The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary. And they responded—And she conceived of the Holy Spirit.* There followed the *Hail Mary* and a series of subsequent verses, responses and further *Hail Marys* together with a final prayer which seeks that by Christ's passion and cross we might all be brought to the glory of His resurrection in heaven.

"Now, provisions from the boats and we had best get a fire going for a cup of tea," said Father Hannan when they had finished the prayer. "Tom, Mark, I have a couple of folding chairs you can put out on the shore for the aged and weary."

"Come on Cate," said Liz. "Let's pool the remainder of our provisions and see what we've got left. They may not bring enough sandwiches from Mungo Brush." Bill started collecting rocks for a fireplace. The others fetched the cups and utensils from their respective boats.

Half an hour later the billy was singing over Bill's fire and the five were sitting discussing with Father Hannan the prospects of discovering more of the stations in the Defence Forces' competition. They had been conscious for some little time of the sound of an engine chugging off in the distance.

"It's them," cried Bill who had been sitting in the stern of *Great Saint Joseph* keeping a lookout. They looked up the channel to the north to see a clinker work boat making its way towards them sedately from the Broadwater, a large wave issuing from its bow. Mr Ryan was at the helm and Mr Parfitt attending the engine in the middle of the boat. Along one side was strapped Mr Parfitt's canvas canoe. The chugging eased as the boat slowed in its approach. This was the *One Lunger*, so called because its engine had only one large cylinder.

"Look at Mary Rose in the bow," said Liz at the little figure waving to them.

"Hello Daddy," called Cate and Liz almost together.

“Hello you grubs,” said Mr Ryan. “I hope you have been behaving yourselves.”

“Here we are then,” said Mr Parfitt pushing the clutch lever which disengaged the engine from the drive shaft to the propellor. The boat carried its momentum into the shore. “We are loaded to the gills with sandwiches and cold drinks. Here Bill, catch!” He threw him a mooring line to the base of a nearby tree. Bill secured the mooring line and Mr Parfitt cut the idling engine.

“How’s my girl?” said Tom as he stepped into the shallows and lifted his little sister from the bow of the boat as it nuzzled the shore.

“Tom,” she replied throwing her arms around his neck.

“Have you been sailing on the sea?”

“On a sea. In a boat. Wiv Daddy.” He carried her to the shore and handed her to Cate.

“Hello Pumpkin,” said Cate. “Have you missed us all? We’ve been gone for days, haven’t we?”

“An’ you’re all brown,” said the little girl with her eyes wide. Mr Parfitt and Mr Ryan stepped ashore. Mr Parfitt hugged Liz and put an arm around Cate.

“It’s lovely to see you all. We never for a moment worried about you.”

“Was it you who put Father Hannan up to be guardian angel?” Liz replied. “We thought we would be out of range of parental authority for the first time in our lives.”

“And we’ve been overseen all the time,” added Cate. “We are not impressed!”

“Well. Not *all* the time,” said Father Hannan. “In fact I had the greatest trouble keeping you in view *most* of the time.”

“A price has to be paid for every liberty, Liz,” said her father.

“Very sound philosophy, James. And they don’t look to me like they have suffered too much from the burden,” said Mr Ryan. “Healthy tans, smiling faces. Though a little black round the eyes. Have you been keeping late nights?”

“There’s a reason for it,” laughed Tom. “Mark keeps interfering with our sleep. But we’d better tell you all about it.”

“First, the food,” said Mr Parfitt. “Get the hamper out of the boat, boys, and the girls can play mothers and distribute it all for us. We’ve

brought a collapsible table too. You'd better fetch that. And some folding chairs."

"Oh. Good. That means there'll probably be enough for us to sit on seats rather than on the ground."

"James, let's unstrap your canoe and bring it ashore," said Mr Ryan. "Doubtless we'll find out shortly what it is wanted for."

"Bill. Come on. You and I will make the tea," said Father Hannan.

Over a delicious lunch of sandwiches (chicken and coleslaw or ham and pickles) washed down with more strong sweet tea, the five told the tale of their discoveries to their fathers using the maps to illustrate where they had made their finds. Liz showed the sheet of paper which was the key to the competition. Cate produced the remainder of the fruit cake they had brought with them all the way from Karuah. For some reason, as Bill said, they had overlooked it after leaving Snapper Island.

"We won't overlook it now," said Mark.

"So the reason we need the canoe," Cate concluded, "is so Tom and Bill can get the marker at the shack on the Myall River."

"And we all want to go over to Bulahdelah Point to get the marker there," added Mark. "Then the girls and I can sail the two boats to Mungo Brush."

"The reasoning is impeccable," said Mr Ryan. "And the sooner we get you underway, the sooner will we get you home to your mothers and the easier our lives will be. So I vote we get going."

"Hear, hear," added Mr Parfitt rising to his feet. "Action stations!" They moved quickly to clean up and pack up, then, in company with Mr Ryan, Mr Parfitt and Mary Rose in the *One Lunger*, Father Hannan in *Great Saint Joseph* towed the two boats, with jibs flying, up the channel and out onto the Broadwater. There the two crews hoisted their mainsails and with *Sapphire* towing Mr Parfitt's canvas canoe they parted from the others. Father Hannan was to accompany them over to Bulahdelah Point to offer any assistance they might need in their trip across to Mungo Brush.

"Goodbye, Mary Rose," called Cate.

"Byee. Byee," she waved.

"Goodbye Daddy."

“See you in about two hours, girls.”

“Be careful in that river, Tom,” called Mr Ryan. “We’ll keep an eye out for you at about five o’clock.” The two boats sailed off briskly, running before the sou’easterly. Father Hannan brought the bow of his boat up into the wind with the outboard motor and hauled up the mainsail. He then came aft, switched off the engine and pulled it up out of the water on its bracket.

“You’ve got that down to a fine art, Father,” said Mr Ryan.

“I’m looking forward to a long rest when this is all over,” he replied with a grin as the mainsail filled on starboard tack. “I’m having difficulty keeping up with these youngsters. It’s the hours they keep. They don’t seem to need any sleep.” He put the helm up and the great mainsail filled. He waved as *Great Saint Joseph* began to pull away after the two smaller boats which were now almost a quarter of a mile away.

“Goodbye. We’ll see you at about four, Father.”

“Goodbye. Goodbye, Mary Rose.”

“Bye Jack. Thanks for keeping an eye on those kids.”

“Till about four then.”

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The trip across to Bulahdelah Point took the three boats the best part of half an hour. At first they sailed in the channel and the depth was such as to make the sailing straight forward. But after fifteen minutes or so they had to pass inside the markers. This meant that the water would be shallower towards the point.

“Better keep an eye open,” Mark called across to the crew on *Emerald*. “Watch the centreboards in case they touch bottom.” *Great Saint Joseph* was still some distance behind them.

“I can see the bottom,” Bill called after a while. The wind was causing the occasional white horse to appear.

“It’s the shallow bottom,” Mark called across from *Sapphire*. “It makes the waves steeper than otherwise they would be and the wind knocks the tops off them.” After this they kept a close eye on their progress. All the time the point was coming closer. Both boats sailed

with half raised centreboards so that they would clear the shallow bottom.

"I hope the shallows don't cause a problem for you girls on the way back," said Tom.

"We've sailed in shallow water before," said Cate. And we'll have Father Hannan to help." That the priest was not particularly happy with the depth of the water appeared from his failure to close the gap between them. He was treating the shallows with great respect and sailing *Great Saint Joseph* conservatively.

As they approached the point, which was covered with low wooded scrub, Mark and Tom eased their sheets and headed across the wind, allowing the mainsails to flap somewhat, and reducing their speed.

"It'll be miserable near the shore," Tom called across to *Sapphire* as he observed the short waves breaking in small yellow foam against the low shore. The waves were not all that high but managing the boats in such broken water against the shore would mean that the boats would be bucking up and down and one or other of them would take a wave over the side.

"Let's head west around the point," Mark called back, "and come back in the lee."

"Good idea," said Tom to Cate and Bill. "We'll be sheltered then." Tom bore *Emerald* away downwind to follow *Sapphire* which had passed them, the canoe skating along behind it.

"Father's following us," said Bill looking back. Having observed their progress and checked that *Great Saint Joseph* would be able to negotiate the shallows, Father Hannan had closed the gap.

"He's only about a hundred yards behind us now," said Cate to Tom who daren't take his eyes off the broken water between *Emerald* and *Sapphire*. The two boats dropped below the point and rounded up to the north. As they passed into the lee of the point the water became flatter and they coasted slowly into the shallows and ran onto the shore.

"Board up!" said Cate.

"Board up," replied Bill suiting his action to the word.

“Now. Who is going to look for the marker?” called Mark.  
“You and I had better stay with the boats,” said Tom.  
“Come on Cate. You and I will search,” said Liz.  
“What about me?” asked Bill. “Mayn’t I come?”  
“No, Bill,” said Tom. “We’ll want you to help get the canoe organised. And to hold the boats.”

“Away you go, girls,” said Mark and they stepped ashore carrying sandshoes which they put on when they reached the shore. They disappeared with a wave into the scrub shortly after.

“Here’s Father,” said Bill. They turned to see *Great Saint Joseph* sweeping round in a wide turn, its sails flapping in the fresh breeze. As it came up into the wind Father Hannan lowered the mainsail swiftly and it was caught neatly in lines attached to each side of the boom. They saw a splash as an anchor went over the side and after it ceased its forward movement the boat fell back till the line went taut leaving it about thirty yards from the shore. Only the jib was flapping now. A figure slipped over the side and came wading towards them.

“I’d like it a bit deeper, boys, I have to say,” grinned Father Hannan as he came up to them.

“It’s a W,” called Liz as she and Cate emerged from the scrub a few minutes later. Tom looked up from the canoe which he and Mark were loading with water and supplies.

“How do you know it’s not an M?” he asked.

“It was underlined.” The two girls came down to the narrow beach where the smaller boats were drawn up alongside the canoe. Father Hannan was smoking his pipe and watching the boys.

“Time to go then?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Tom checking the contents of the canoe. “We’ve got water, torch, compass. Come on Bill. Have you got the paddles?”

“You get going, Tom,” said Mark. “Father and I will organise the boats.” Tom walked the canoe out from the shore.

“Climb aboard, Bill, while I hold her.” Bill stepped over the canoe and lowered himself into the front seat then pulled his legs into the canoe carefully one at a time.

“Here’s the paddle,” said Cate handing it to him. Tom lowered himself into the rear seat and took the other paddle from Mark.



“Take it easy now,” said Father Hannan.

“We should be heading back across the lake in an hour and a half,” said Tom.

“Good luck, Tom. Good luck, Bill.”

“Don’t forget to feather the main in the gusts, Cate,” said Tom with a grin.

“We’ll be right. Don’t you worry. Just make sure you don’t sink that canoe.”

“Away you go, then,” said Mark and gave them a push. Tom waved above his head then drove his paddle into the water and the canoe shot away.

“Let’s get organised,” said Mark, and went to the halliard on *Emerald* to haul up the mainsail. Cate fed the sail into the groove in the mast the sail rose steadily to the top. Liz unfurled the jib and, from the port side, took the starboard jibsheet in hand.

“Are you right, then? Climb aboard and I’ll walk you out.” The two girls settled themselves in the boat and Mark walked the boat into deeper water. Cate saw to the lowering of the rudder blade and Liz manned the centreboard line to lower it half way as soon as they got going. Cate looked at both Mark and Father Hannan.

“Give us a push then. Race you to Mungo!” she said with a grin. The two of them gave *Emerald* a push and she shot away from the shore.

“Board down and jib on, Liz,” she called as she hauled in the mainsheet.

“The little devil!” said Father Hannan putting his now extinguished pipe in his pocket with a twinkle in his eye. “Come on Mark. I’ll feed while you haul up the main. We’ll get after them like a shot.” The two looked along the shore to the north west. Tom and Bill were almost half way to the river’s entrance and paddling strongly.

When Mark got clear of the point about ten minutes later he found that the wind had freshened and it had veered. It was now almost due easterly and there were many more white horses. *Emerald* was almost half a mile away, still on port tack and moving quickly. He had to flatten the mainsail, a task which he performed by easing the mainsheet so that the wind pressure was off it, pulling the outhaul on

the boom so that the clew of the sail moved as far out along the boom as it would go, then pulling down on the boom vang, a wire strop with a pulley attached which prevented the boom from rising. While he was doing this *Sapphire* lost her way, stopped sailing and headed up into the wind. Before he could get the boat going again, *Great Saint Joseph* came past to leeward, showing a great turn of speed.

“See you in Mungo, Mark,” he heard Father Hannan call as it drove past.

“Hell! I’m coming last,” he said to himself. “But not for long.” He wrenched the rudder around and hauled in the mainsheet. The boat sped off on a reach to pick up speed before he headed her back to windward to chase the others. *Sapphire* was speedy, he knew, and he had had years of practice at driving hard to windward, playing the wind shifts. It would have been nice to have had a forward hand to assist with balance and the tacking of the jib but he could cope. He set to work to chase the other boats down.

The girls had now tacked onto starboard and were heading to the north east across the channel. But they didn’t remain long on that tack because Cate wanted to stay within the channel. Mark saw *Great Saint Joseph* tack too when it had reached the southern most of the channel markers, still well behind the girls.

“I’ll risk the shallows,” Mark said to himself some minutes later as, with a helpful wind shift, he also tacked onto starboard. If he could cross the shallows he reckoned he would pick up a great deal of ground on the others as they worked the narrow southern channel. He passed the starboard marker post showing the edge of the channel (green for boats going upstream to Bulahdelah township at the head of the Myall River) and set off to cross the shallows. At first all went well. He could still keep the centreboard most of the way down and was not losing too much in leeway. The waves were steeper, however, and occasionally one would break at the bow sending a stream of spray over the boat. When a particularly steep wave lay in his path he would alter course so that the boat would not be knocked sideways by it. After ten minutes or so, however, he began to wonder whether he had done the right thing. Not only was the going tougher,

he noticed the centreboard was kicking occasionally as it touched bottom. Regretfully, he decided to tack and to head back to the channel. He had lost rather than gained ground. Now it would be even harder to overhaul the other two.

On board *Emerald*, both girls hung over the gunwale keeping the boat on its feet in the rising wind. Cate was working the mainsheet in the gusts and steering the boat as close to the wind as she dared. Liz, looking back over her shoulder, kept her informed as to the progress of the other two boats.

“Mark has headed across the shallows on starboard. He’ll be right if he can get through. Father is behind us and catching, I think.”

“Liz. How are Tom and Bill going to paddle back through this stuff? They’ll be swamped.”

With a shock, Liz realised that what Cate was saying was true. She had been so caught up with the prospect of racing the other two boats that she had forgotten what Tom and Bill would face when they came to cross the lake. The canoe had very little freeboard.

“Look’s like we might have to send in the Marines, after all.”

Cate was all concentration. She checked constantly the little wool streamers, called ‘telltales’, near the luff of the jib to see they were streaming properly, then looked for the next wave and finally observed the set of the mainsail to make sure it was drawing properly. Having completed this round she repeated it, and repeated it. It is no easy task sailing a small boat to windward in a fresh breeze.

“Pull another inch on the jib sheet, Liz. The leech is fluttering ever so faintly.” Liz did as she was asked. “We’ll tack shortly, just as soon as we get to the line between these two starboard marker posts,” she added a few minutes later. “Ready about. Make it a good one. Lee-oh!” she said and put the helm down. Liz broke the jib sheet out of its cleat but kept the tension on it. As the boat crossed through the wind to take the tack on the starboard hand, Liz ducked her head under the boom, waited till the jib had backed fully and she had the other sheet in her hand with tension on it before she let the starboard sheet fly. The jib flapped for half a second before she had it drawn tight through the port hand fairlead and cleated home. “A beauty,”

said Cate contentedly as the boat accelerated away on starboard tack. The boat had hardly paused at all.

“We’re tacking better than Father is,” said Liz looking back.

“I’m not surprised. He doesn’t have anyone to handle his jib. The channel is wider now too,” said Cate “and we can almost fetch along the line of those next two markers.”

“Hullo. Mark is in strife,” said Liz looking under the boom and back to the west. Cate turned her head away for a moment from the constant round of attention to look behind them. *Sapphire* was labouring and had clearly not gained on them.

“What’s he doing? He is going nowhere.”

“It’s the shallows. He can’t use the board properly,” said Cate.

“He’s tacking now.” Both girls watched *Sapphire* thrown about by the waves as it made its tack back on to port.

“He’s done it.” *Sapphire* bore away towards the south again heading for the safety of the channel.

“Here comes the next port hand marker. We’ll tack again shortly. Ready?”

“Ready.”

“Lee-oh!” *Emerald* tacked back on to port again. “Now. Where is *Great Saint Joseph*?”

“There,” said Liz, pointing. Cate looked to her right. Father Hannan had suffered from a knock, a wind change unfavourable to his boat, and had not tacked to reduce the loss.

“There’s Mungo. Look.” The hill that marked Mungo Brush on the eastern shore of the Broadwater, was getting closer.

“How far away now, do you reckon?”

“Less than a mile.”

“Liz. I think we’re going to win this race,” said Cate looking sideways at her with a grin. The next moment it was as if the sky had been torn apart. There was a sound like the noise of the tearing up of a hundred sheets and a black shape flashed past the mainsail.

“What the devil?” yelled Liz.

“It’s the Air Force,” Cate cried back. “It’s one of their jets.” The black plane screamed across the water only five hundred feet up. The pilot was clearly visible in the cockpit of the plane.

“I nearly fell out of the boat.”

“I’ll bet he did it on purpose to frighten us. Williamtown Air Base is not far away. They use the lakes as a practice ground.”

“I wonder if they are putting on a show for the Air Force team in this competition.”

“I shouldn’t be surprised. If so, they’ve reckoned without us!”

Father Hannan had finally got *Great Saint Joseph* back into the groove. The short tacking in the channel had presented him with problems for, as Cate had remarked to Liz, he had no forward hand to tend the jib every time he tacked. But now the channel had widened and the sailing surf boat was in its stride, the narrow shape and its momentum carrying it through the waves with facility. It was marching to windward faster than the girls in *Emerald*. But they were still the best part of six hundred yards ahead.

And Mark was now sailing as if his life depended upon it. He hung over the gunwale of *Sapphire*, feathering the mainsail through the gusts, keeping the boat flat to make the centreboard efficient and steering the best possible course through the waves, he was making up ground steadily, using the boat’s compass to pick the wind shifts. A grin spread over his face as he blinked away yet another dollop of spray. You were always in the box seat in a sailing race like this, attacking from behind. Especially when you knew you had the boat speed to run down your opponents.

Another twenty minutes and he was only a hundred yards behind *Great Saint Joseph*. As he watched, Father Hannan tacked the bigger boat onto port to head straight for Mungo hill, but it faltered as the priest had difficulty getting the jib to draw. Mark sailed beyond the point where the bigger boat had gone about and tacked quickly himself, banging the jib across and into the cleat and *Sapphire* surged past the bigger boat to windward. Mark was under no illusions. He knew that once GSJ was set and moving it would give him a run for his money. He saw Father Hannan flash him a grin and the two settled down to slog it out. The girls were now only a quarter mile in front but they were sailing well and something would have to go wrong for either of the other two boats to catch them.

“Come on, Cate. They’re catching us.”

“But we’ll get there before them. Lord, my hands are sore from this mainsheet.”

“I can see the rotunda. See! The shelter shed, or whatever it’s called.”

“And there’s the One Linger close to the shore.”

“And there they are standing near the launching ramp.”

“Uh-oh, I can see the bottom, Cate.”

“Keep your eye on the centreboard. Don’t raise it until it touches. We will need it to work as long as possible to get to this windward shore.”

“There it goes,” said Liz as the board gave a jerk.

“Up six inches,” said Cate. “*And* the wind is beginning to die on us. It always happens when you approach a wooded shore.”

“Two hundred yards now? You’re right. They won’t catch us now. There’s Mary Rose, running along the shore. And there’s Daddy and Mummy.”

“We’ll put in another short tack to take us to the left of the ramp. Ready about?”

They tacked onto starboard in the dying breeze and Cate lent the boat over to enable them to keep most of the centreboard operating.

“Look the others have slowed too,” said Liz. The two boats had made up much ground as Emerald had sailed into the shadow of the shore but now they too were languishing.

“Fifty yards to go. Hooray, we’ve done it.”