



Molly's "Beaufort Town"

*A ten-chapter story in celebration of the
300th Anniversary of Beaufort, NC*

Chapter Five - "Stranded!"

Mother had a straw broom in her hands and was just beginning her daily chores. The first job was to sweep off the front porch. The children had brought home several pocketfuls of seashells and pebbles and had left them right there at the front door. When Father left this morning, he had stepped on the seashells and broken many of them into tiny bits. Sand and shell fragments were scattered all over the porch, so Mother was attempting to clean up the mess the children had left behind when they ran off to the creek.

Jacob, Molly and Lydia were with William Thomson and William's cousin Samuel, who was about Jacob's age. They were taking the Thomsons' nieces, Elizabeth and Ann, to show them the periwinkles and fiddler crabs that could be found around the marshes.

Elizabeth and Ann were from Virginia and were visiting Beaufort with their parents. Their father, Mr. Thomson's brother, was a wheelwright and was thinking of moving here. If his skills were needed in Beaufort, he and his family would be moving right next door.

Mother leaned on her broom for a moment as she thought about all the people who had moved to Beaufort in the last few months. More homes were being built as the edge of the town was gradually moving to the north and east. Soon, if the growth continued, they would have to clear out more trees to make room for additional streets and houses.

Realizing she had much to do, Mother went back to sweeping off the front porch. She had almost finished the job when she spotted Molly's apron, thrown across one of the rocking chairs. "Molly would lose her head if it was not attached to her shoulders," Mother thought to herself. She picked up the apron and shook off the sand before taking it into the house.

As she shook, something fell out of Molly's apron pocket and onto the floorboards of the porch. She reached out to grab it but it fell through the cracks, onto the ground below. Mother didn't know what the object was, but she reminded herself to ask Molly to crawl under the porch to get it when she returned home.

At the creek, the group of children splashed at the water's edge. They were looking for fiddler crabs to show Elizabeth and Ann. The tide was low but there were not many out today. "It's even too hot for fiddler crabs," Molly thought to herself.

Looking around to find something else to do, Molly spotted a small boat, belonging to the Thomsons, pulled into the marsh grass. She tugged on William's sleeve. "How about if we go over to the island?" she asked. "Elizabeth and Ann will love it over there!"

William was willing, but Jacob wasn't so sure. The dinghy didn't look too safe to him, but William assured him that it was "seaworthy enough" to get them across the harbor. Working together, the children pushed the boat out of the grasses and into the edge of the water.

Elizabeth and Ann stepped into the boat first, followed by Molly, Lydia and William. As the oldest, Jacob

and Samuel gave the boat a shove, then jumped in at the back of the boat. There were only two paddles, so Jacob, Samuel, William and Molly took turns rowing.

With seven children aboard, the boat was crowded. Lydia closed her eyes and whispered a prayer that the boat would not sink with their combined weight as the boat rocked from side to side. Elizabeth and Ann, not accustomed to boating, shifted around nervously on the narrow seats.

"Sit still or you'll tip us over," William warned. The two girls froze in their seats and did not move again until the boat was safely on the eastern tip of the island.

Here, there was much more to see and do. In the shallow inlets, egrets waded, looking for small fish to eat as horses grazed in the grasses nearby. The children knew not to bother the horses, which were skittish around people, but they pointed them out to Elizabeth and Ann, who clapped their hands with delight. This was the first time they had seen horses that were not fenced in or pulling a wagon.

Molly suggested going further down the beach where there would be more of a breeze. Here, waves lapped against the shore, covering and uncovering hundreds of coquina clams. The children watched as the tiny clams stood on their ends and burrowed their way back into the sand, disappearing like they had never been there at all.

Since it was a hot day, the children played in the water for a long while. The boys rolled up their pant legs and the girls hiked up their dresses to wade out as far as they could. Under their bare feet, they could feel the bristly hairs of sand dollars tickling their toes. They counted to see how many they could find. They dug their toes into the sand and flicked them up, one by one. So far, they had counted almost one hundred of the round, flat creatures.

The tide, which had been low until now, gradually reversed itself as the children continued to laugh and play. Then the waves started to come farther up the beach as the sun began to drop in the western sky.

Suddenly, Jacob remembered the boat that had brought them over earlier in the day.

"Oh, no!" he cried. "The boat! The tide may take it out to where we can't reach it!"

One behind the other, the children raced back to where they had left the boat, leaving their shoes behind them and a trail of footprints in the sand. Out of breath, they rounded the corner by a clump of low-lying bushes and looked toward the shoreline.

The boat was nowhere to be found! Molly groaned. Boy, were they in trouble now!

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Shackleford Island

Shackleford Island is the southern-most of the three barrier islands that make up today's Cape Lookout National Seashore. It is approximately nine miles long and a half-mile wide. In 1702, the island was settled by the English. Most of the residents lived on the east end of the island and were whalers and fishermen. Wild horses, believed to be survivors of Spanish shipwrecks in the 1500s, also made their homes there. When the island settlers needed horses for farm work, they would catch the animals and use them to pull plows and wagons. When the horses were no longer needed for their services, they would be released back into the wild. Although no one lives on the island today, there are about 100 horses that continue to roam the island freely. The herds are protected by Federal law.



Wild horses of Shackleford Island. (Photo courtesy of the *Carteret County News-Times*.)