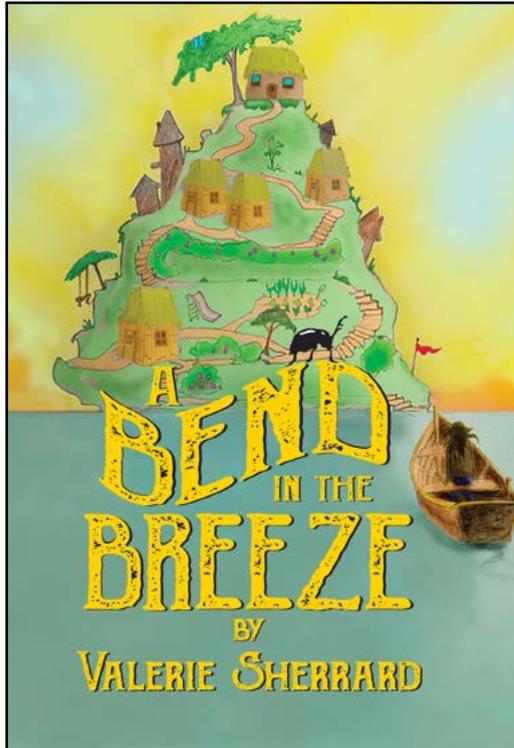


**Excerpt from *A Bend in the Breeze*
by Valerie Sherrard**



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Prologue

Latitude and longitude are invisible lines that circle the earth. The lines of latitude run east and west, while the lines of longitude travel north and south. Each line has a number and if you have both the latitudinal and longitudinal numbers, which are also known as coordinates, you can find any place on the earth.

It is therefore fair to say, if you had the exact coordinates, you could find the tiny island of TeJÉ where this story takes place. You could travel there by boat or plane and after you arrived you could walk around on its warm, sandy beaches. You could sit in the shade of a tropical tree and fan yourself with long, wide leaves, or swim in the crystal blue water that laps at its shores.

When you live on an island, everything comes and goes with the tide and the wind. This was a fact that was well known to the islanders.

The people of TeJÉ spent their entire lives on a patch of land so small that it would seem little more than a speck from a distance. And yet, its shores held the whole history of the people who lived there. Every happening in their lives took place within its boundaries and when each inhabitant's eyes closed for the last time it became their final resting place.

If you went there today, you would see wonderful and interesting things. That is true of most places on this planet, for our world abounds with fascinating sights and sounds.

You might even glimpse remnants of what took place in the story you are about to read, although you would have to look very, very carefully.

Chapter One

The Unexpected Guest

Up until the day upon which our story begins, the people of TeJÉ had never had a visitor. Not once. Not ever.

This fact was not known to the girl who had just reached the island's shores. Alone and frightened, she stood there for several moments, trying desperately to compose herself. When she felt steady enough to venture inland, she did so with hesitating steps, never suspecting that the trail of footprints she left behind marked an event of great significance.

The girl whose small feet had made these imprints was called Pascale Chardon.

Before she had gone very far, a house came into view. When she saw it, Pascale's heart beat in equal measures of hope and dread.

There was nothing frightening about the appearance of the dwelling. On the contrary, the simple home had a welcoming appearance. Lush green bushes snuggled against the doorframe and the faces of tall yellow flowers greeted guests cheerily.

Pascale's feeling of alarm came partly from her natural shyness and partly from the terrible situation she found herself in. If any other option had been open to her, she would have turned away. But she had no choice, and she knew it.

Her legs trembled as she crossed the patch of grass that separated her from the door. There she stood with her hand poised to knock. And then her courage very nearly failed her.

"It may be," she told herself firmly, "that there is a woman inside this house who is very much like my own dear mother."

This strengthened her resolve, even as it brought a wave of de-

spair, for Pascale knew her mother — her entire family for that matter — must be nearly mad with grief and despair, not knowing where she was or even if she was alive.

But no. She must not allow herself to dwell on such thoughts. Every bit of her energy must be dedicated toward her own survival.

And so, she took a deep breath to steady her nerves, gathered up her courage, and knocked.

The doorstep she stood on and the house she sought to enter belonged to a family called Riverstone. If they had been expecting her, refreshments would have been laid out and someone would have been waiting to receive this timid guest. But since there had never before been a stranger at the Riverstone door, no such preparations had been made.

The child's knock was soon answered by Mrs. Riverstone, whose eyes widened in astonishment.

"I beg your pardon ma'am," Pascale said. "May I trouble you for a drink of water?"

Mrs. Riverstone was not a dull woman, nor was she out of water. All the same, her only reaction to the polite request was to gawk silently at the child.

"I am *terribly* thirsty," Pascale added. It was all she could do to keep from begging.

Mrs. Riverstone regained control of herself. She sprang into action, taking hold of Pascale's thin arm and pulling her into the small, tidy home, perhaps just a bit more vigorously than was necessary.

"Dear me, dear me," she said, pointing her unexpected guest to a smooth wooden chair. "Of course, you can have a drink."

Mrs. Riverstone grasped the handle of a water pump and gave it several quick downward thrusts. Water shot from its spout into a red clay cup.

Pascale's fingers shook as the cup was passed to her. She struggled to steady them as she raised it to her lips. How wonderful and cold the water felt flowing into her mouth and down her parched throat. She drained the cup and twice asked for more before closing her eyes and letting out a satisfied sigh.

That was when Mrs. Riverstone settled herself into a chair and cast appraising eyes over her guest.

Pascale was slender and well-tanned. Her brown hair had a golden glow from many hours in the sun. Gray, wide-set eyes looked out from an oval face and her lips, although pale, dry, and chapped, formed a small smile. It was this smile that prompted Mrs. Riverstone to speak.

"Well then, child — who are you and how did you get here?"

"I am called Pascale Chardon."

The sound of her name seemed to give her courage. Pascale lifted her chin and continued in a soft voice.

"I was traveling on a passenger ship, along with my aunt and uncle and two cousins. Our voyage was to be a grand holiday; Mother said I was lucky to have been invited. And it truly *was* wonderful, until a mighty storm came up out of nowhere. You would never think a ship so large could be tossed around as it was — like a child's toy on the waves. Water rushed against it in great swells, crashing madly on the deck.

"The next thing I recall, I was drifting in a small boat, alone in the great, wide ocean. How I came to be *in* the boat is gone from my memory. I only know that after days of bobbing on the rise and fall of rolling waves, the tides brought me here."

"And where —" Mrs. Riverstone's next question was interrupted by the sight of a black beetle crawling out of Pascale's hair and across her forehead. The girl barely seemed to notice it until her host jumped up, leaned across the table and attempted to swat it.

“What are you doing?” Pascale cried, falling back to avoid the woman’s hand.

“A bug!” Mrs. Riverstone said. “It was in your hair.”

“Oh!” Pascale said with a small wave. “That is Inch.”

“Inch?” repeated Mrs. Riverstone. “You’ve named a *bug*?”

“Yes.” Pascale nodded. “Inch must have escaped the ship at the same time as I did, although it was a day or more before I noticed him in the boat. It was *such* a comfort to know I wasn’t entirely alone.”

“Well, you aren’t alone now,” Mrs. Riverstone pointed out. She scrunched her nose to show her disapproval of Inch’s presence in her kitchen.

Pascale cupped her hand and lifted it to shield the beetle, worried there may be a second attempt to dislodge him.

“Please understand,” she said. “Inch was my only friend through the long, dreadful days while we were at the ocean’s mercy. I cannot allow harm to come to him.”

Inch’s fate may have been discussed further except for the arrival just then of Mrs. Riverstone’s children, Vimal and Sofia, who had been drawn from their play by the sound of voices.

The pair had first gone to a window and peeked into the house from outside. Mornings were their mother’s chore time and everyone knew she did not welcome interruptions. This made them curious to see whom she could possibly be talking to.

Their eyes had grown large with wonder at the sight of Pascale seated in their kitchen. Strangers on TeJÉ were unheard of and yet here in their very own home was a girl they had never seen before. With growing astonishment, they watched and listened to the odd discussion over a beetle.

“Eck! I *hate* bugs!” Sofia whispered to her brother, who had heard enough shrieks from her over the years to know this was

true.

“Never mind that, let’s go find out who she is,” Vimal said.

This they did, hurrying inside and marching straight up to Pascale.

“Who are you?” Vimal asked.

“I am Pascale.”

“Well, *I* am Vimal. I’m nine, but I will be ten very soon.”

“I am *eleven*,” Pascale said. Her eyes moved to the girl who stood silently at Vimal’s side. “And is this your sister?”

“This is my sister Sofia, who is seven,” Vimal said. “This is our house.”

“And *our* mother,” Sofia added, speaking for the first time. She lifted her chin and crossed her arms over her chest as she spoke.

“Your mother has kindly given me water,” Pascale told the pair.

“Where did you come from?” Vimal said.

“No time for that now,” Mrs. Riverstone said. “I must take Pascale to the Elders.”

“Because of the rule, Mother?” asked Vimal.

“The rule?” Pascale said.

“Of course,” Vimal said. “From the Authority of Trust.” He cleared his voice and quoted, “Any stranger to the island must be taken *at once* to the Village Elders no matter how unlikely it seems that he or she is the Long Awaited.”

“But ... what does this mean?” Pascale asked. She looked to Mrs. Riverstone, but instead of answering, Mrs. Riverstone gestured for her to rise.

“Come, come,” Mrs. Riverstone said. “We must go without delay.”

Pascale felt dizzy from trying to grasp the meaning of what she had just heard. Her head swam with questions, but she rose obediently and followed Mrs. Riverstone.