

## HEART OF THE SAMURAI

Margi Preus

A Novel inspired by a true adventure on the high seas

Narrator

Manjiro

Goemon, Jolly

Captain

### *Reading time about 10 minutes*

Narrator: Manjiro squinted across the expanse of glittering sea at the line of dark clouds forming on the horizon.

Manjiro: Goemon, what lies there, across the sea?

Goemon: Nothing you want to know about. Barbarians live there. Demons with hairy faces, big noses, and blue eyes.

Narrator: None of the boys noticed that dark clouds had swallowed the sky.

Manjiro: We didn't notice the waves lapping at the boat.

Goemon: We didn't notice the wind until the sail ruffled, then

All: Snapped

Manjiro Is the sail supposed to snap like that?

Goemon Stick to your work.

Manjiro Does the wind often howl so?

Goemon Quiet! Can't you see there are still fish to catch?

Narrator: But no sooner had Goemon said this than the wind began to roar like a dragon.

Goemon The sail filled with air and yanked the boat on its side.

Manjiro The wind pushed the sea into great mountains of water.

All Then the cold rain turned to ice.

Goemon        We huddled in the bottom of the boat, the rain freezing in sheets to our clothes, our hair....

Narrator:     Days passed.

Manjiro        How long until we came to the edge of the ocean and fall off its edge?

***Pause***

Narrator:     Then one day, help came, but not in the form they wished for.

Manjiro        Look at all those sails! They are like huge wings!

Goemon        It's as long as seven of our boats.

Manjiro        It's an enormous bird with ropes like spider webs.

Narrator:     They found themselves standing before the man who must be the ruler of the ship. He was everything they had heard the foreign devils to be: tall, hairy-faced, with a nose like an albatross's beak.

:                But no matter how odd-looking or dangerous these men were, Manjiro knew he had to choke down his fear. Had to find out more.

Goemon:        We boys were given food, clothing and bunks to sleep in. But all Manjiro could think of were all the questions he wanted to ask.

Manjiro        Don't you wonder how they find their way out here in the open ocean, with no landmarks to guide them?

Goemon        Maybe they are just sailing around aimlessly. It seems that way to me.

Manjiro        Don't you wonder what they're doing, though?

Goemon        All I wonder is when are we going to go home...

***Pause***

Manjiro:        There's always someone standing up there on those little boards. All day, and even at night – if the moon is bright – those fellows stare out at the sea.

Goemon        They're looking for something.

Manjiro Yes, but what?

Goemon Japanese boys like us.

Manjiro All these small boats. What are they for?

Goemon To go fetch Japanese boys when they find them.

Manjiro And those big cooking pots on deck. What is their purpose?

Goemon To cook Japanese boys.

Manjiro If they were going to eat us, why didn't they just do it and get it over with? Why waste their food and water on us?

Goemon They're fattening us up. We're too skinny.

Manjiro Honored friend. I am going to tell you something. You are not too skinny. Not anymore.

Listen Goeman-chan. I am going to find out what they're doing. I'm going to ask the first person I see.

Goemon You are going to get yourself into trouble, Manjiro, with all those questions.

## ***Pause***

Narrator: Captain Whitfield loomed above Manjiro, his one squinting eye trained on the young boy.

Manjiro *(Gulp)* Umm ah Umm....

Captain: What is it? Out with it – smartly now!

Manjiro: Sorry for bother you...

Captain: Boy! Stop apologizing for asking questions! How are you going to learn if you don't ask things? Ask all the questions you like whenever you like to whomever you like.

Narrator: Manjiro felt he needed a moment to wonder at this, so he ran to his favorite hiding spot - one of the small boats suspended from the side

of the ship. He scrambled up and over the side and sat on the bottom of the boat, hugging himself, as if he'd just been given a gift.

Manjiro: But a gift from a barbarian?

***Pause***

Manjiro: Suddenly the deck was alive with the scuffling of many feet. Orders were given in husky whispers but before I had time to clamber out of the little boat, it was lowered into the water, and sailors scrambled down the ropes and into it.

Jolly: Eh? What ye be doin' here boy? I should throw you overboard!

Captain: Jolly! Set him down gently, in the *boat* if you please.

So, Manjiro it's you. Well we're one man short, so we'll see what stuff you are made of. You can follow orders can't you?

Manjiro: Yes sir.

Captain Take up that oar, then.

Now listen to me, all of ye. Your main job is to row, and to row like vengeance. Don't ye be losing your nerve and no loud noises. Not a hair on your heads may tremble, yet your backs must heave to. Now, pull!

Narrator: Three other boats had also set off from the ship, each with a six-man crew.

Manjiro: They all rowed so hard, I wondered if they were in a race. But a race to where?

Jolly Yer a heap of trouble, ye filthy, spying Chinaman... Eating our lobscouse, drinkin' our water. Yer nothin' but an ignorant pagan.....

Captain: Jolly! I don't know what you're grumblin' about up there — but let's have some hearty rowing, eh? Crack your backbones! Burst your hearts and liver and lungs, me lads!

Harpooner, stand by your iron.

Narrator: The water around the boats seemed to boil, then heave, and then... up from the sea rose a great black shape. Like a mountain rising out of the sea.

Manjiro: A massive head appeared, looming over the boat, its enormous eye staring straight at me.

Kujira!

Jolly/Captain: Whale!

Narrator: Now Manjiro understood. He understood everything. The long, sharp spear-like things in the boat, the tubs filled with coiled rope, the lookout on the mast...

Manjiro: ... everything made sense.

## ***Pause***

Narrator: Jolly stood, poised with the long harpoon, on the bow of the boat.

Manjiro: Despite his meanness, I had to admire him, ready to hurl what looked like a pine needle at that great, hulking creature.

Narrator: There was something magnificent in the courage of all these men, who rowed their tiny boats up to and not away from such a monster — more dangerous than a dragon.

Captain: Give it to him!

Narrator: The harpoon was thrown, the line hissed as it played out.

All: Hisssssssss.....

Manjiro: Then there was a moment when I wished I could reach out and pluck it back. The whale was magnificent, too. A beautiful, glistening creature! Such a big amount of life to take... I felt I should say a prayer, asking forgiveness for what they had done and express gratitude to the whale for the gift of its life.

Narrator: The whale lashed out in pain, its tail striking the sea with a sound like thunder.

- Jolly: One blow would reduce our boat to splinters and send us all to the bottom of the sea.
- Narrator: Suddenly the little boat lurched forward. The whale plunged ahead and then struck off swimming, towing them behind so fast it felt as if a gale were blowing.
- All: Nantucket sleighride!
- Narrator: The boat flew along the surface, leaping from crest to crest of the waves with a bang! Bang! BANG!
- Jolly: Some whooped...
- Manjiro: Some prayed...
- Captain: Some clung to the boat with all their might.
- Manjiro: A bucket floated in the briny water and I snagged it and started bailing.
- Captain: That's thinking.
- Narrator: The line attached to the harpoon whistled out of the tubs. The other end of the line, which had been wrapped around a post on the stern, was smoking from the friction.
- Captain: Water on the loggerhead!
- Manjiro: I tossed the water from my bucket onto the smoking line.
- Captain: Lad, you were born for this work.
- Narrator: Suddenly the whale burst out of the water in an explosion of foam. It thrashed with its great tail coming near to knocking the boat over two or three times. Then it swam around and around in smaller and smaller circles, beat the water with its tail, gave a tremendous shudder, rolled on its side and lay still at last.