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# Deluge

Anne McCaffrey and Elizabeth Ann Scarborough

## About the Book

In *Powers That Be*, *Power Lines* and *Power Play* Anne McCaffrey and Elizabeth Ann Scarborough told the story of a sentient planet, Petaybee. Now they have returned to Petaybee and introduced the reader to Ronan and Murel, twins who can transform into seals and converse telepathically with the creatures of Petaybee.

Ronan and Murel have left Petaybee on a mission to help rescue their friend Marmie, who has been falsely arrested on the orders of a corrupt Colonel. However, they end up being imprisoned themselves and taken to the Gwinnet Incarceration Colony. There they have to try to evade the clutches of their old adversary Dr Mabu, an unscrupulous scientist who wants to study their unusual shape-changing ability, and doesn't care how much pain her experiments cause them.

Meanwhile, the powerful and avaricious Company is making another attempt to take over the world of Petaybee for its resources, and the twins' parents, Yana and Sean, along with the entire planet, must fight to survive ...

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About the Authors

# Deluge

Book Three of

The Twins of Petaybee

Anne McCaffrey  
Elizabeth Ann Scarborough

We would like to dedicate this book to the late Zuzu and her mistress, the real Adrienne Robineau, who loaned us both her name and Zuzu's as well as many details of Zuzu's purrsonality for the *Piaf* ship's cat.

This book is also dedicated to Adrienne's mom, Annette Brigham, and to her sister and brother-in-law, Felicia Dale and William Pint, a brilliant musical duo and longtime friends who introduced us to the rest of Felicia's family.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Besides Adrienne and Zuzu, we would like to thank our friends and research assistants, Lea Day and Richard Reaser, as well as the Poole family for sharing their insight into Hawaiian culture.

And, of course, Anne McCaffrey owes the Irish aspects of Petaybee to her adopted homeland of Eire and her friends there, as Elizabeth Ann Scarborough owes the Arctic aspects of the planet to her former hometown of Fairbanks, Alaska, and her many wonderful friends there.

# 1

THE SENTIENT WORLD Petaybee, its northern continent blanketed in snow, appeared deceptively serene. Cold enough to freeze a sneeze in midair, but peaceful beneath its dark sky, it seemed an easy target for the troops whose arrival disturbed that peace.

Although they knew that the people in the village of Kilcoole were hostile and armed, the Company Corps soldiers did not worry unduly about resistance. Their landing was unannounced and they believed unexpected, so their superiors were confident that the soldiers could simply storm into house after house, waking the villagers and hauling them from their beds while they were still befuddled by sleep.

Instead, the soldiers were the ones who were befuddled as they slammed open unlocked door after unlocked door to find vacant unheated rooms with ice frosting the inside walls. Wild animals darted down the street or across it but no domestic beasts or human beings remained in the village.

The sergeant in charge of the ground mission regarded the village suspiciously. 'Fan out and search but be damned careful,' he ordered. 'These people are hunters. They won't be far and they'll be watching us.' He returned to his flitter, kept running and warm by the driver, and called the captain on the com. They'd hoped the blade of the Petaybean winter would still be a few weeks away but it seemed they were out of luck. Much of their equipment would be useless now with the extreme cold. 'They're gone, sir.'



‘I doubt that, Sergeant,’ the officer replied. ‘They must have been warned. Now we’ll have to pursue them outside the village on their own turf. I’ll consult High Command. Meanwhile, search the houses and see what intelligence you can gather. The governor’s mansion is a log cabin at the end of the street nearest the river. Seize records of any kind, books, computers, storage chips – anything. If they make grocery lists in this godforsaken hole, I want those too. Governor Shongili has a laboratory west of the village, according to our sources. Search that in the same manner.’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Then you can make a bonfire out of the place.’

‘With respect, sir, if we do that we lose the chance to catch them when they try to return home.’

‘It’s minus ninety degrees Fahrenheit, Sergeant. If they can’t return home, they’ll have to show themselves to seek other shelter. Once the village is leveled, we’ll search the surrounding villages and see if they’re hiding there.’

‘Yes, sir,’ the sergeant said.

But as they fanned out to search the houses, snow began falling. It wasn’t supposed to be possible for snow to fall at such extreme temperatures, but this weird world was a law unto itself, or so the residents seemed to believe.

As if it wasn’t cold enough already, a killing wind began to drive the falling snow into the soldiers’ thermal-masked faces, into the open doorways, scraping huge drifts from the piles on the ground and flinging them against the houses. The sky grew white too, and within moments the sergeant couldn’t see his own mitten when he put it in front of his face.

‘Take cover,’ he yelled, and maybe his troops did, but his voice was blown away on the wind.

Less than three miles away but nearly a half mile underground, the occupants of Kilcoole were awakening.

Clodagh, the community's shanachie – storyteller, wise woman, and native healer – was wide-awake, sitting with her back and hands flat against the cave's sides, her buttocks and feet flat against the floor. Self-appointed disciples of the planet and would-be students of Clodagh's – Brothers Shale and Granite, and Sister Igneous Rock – watched her, trying to feel what she was feeling.

Yanaba Maddock-Shongili, co-governor of Petaybee and former colonel in the Company Corps, opened one eye and looked up at Clodagh. She'd been up half the previous night plotting with Marmion de Revers Algemeine's employees: Captain Johnny Green, the skipper of Marmie's ship the *Piaf*; Petula Chan, Marmie's security chief; and Raj Norman, a well-armed associate of uncertain status. Also included in their group was helicopter pilot Rick O'Shay, a former officer in the Corps, like Yana, but a native Petaybean as well.

When she finally turned in, the twins and Sean were all sleeping near her. Now none of them were there.

'Where?' she asked Clodagh and the rock flock, as Petaybee's worshipful admirers had been dubbed by the other inhabitants.

Sean's sister Sinead and her partner Aisling had just entered the communion cave from the outer chamber.

'They're here,' Sinead announced tensely, but Yana knew she was not referring to her family. The Company Corps, once more under hostile leadership, had landed with the intention of arresting her and her family and most of the villagers as well. Although it was now widely known that a Petaybean adapted by the planet to its extreme climate could not long survive offworld, the authorities responsible for Marmion's arrest – abduction really – intended to take the rest of the Petaybeans to Gwinnet Incarceration Colony to join their friend.

'When?' Yana asked.

'A few minutes ago.'

'Is that where Sean went?'

‘No, he’s gone to round up your kids. Aisling said they decided to go for an early morning swim to the coast.’

Yana swore an unmotherly oath beneath her breath. Her children’s selkie seal side was a great trial to her and, with increasing frequency, a source of not just worry, but of anxiety that bordered on terror for their safety. She had thought the planet was giving her a gift when it healed the cause of her infertility and allowed her to have the twins when she was well into her forties. Obviously she had offended it in some way for it to have afflicted her with such an unruly lot of semiwild animals for progeny. Their father, much as she loved him, was often no better. And now they had all broken cover and were out there in harm’s way in places where she could not hope to follow.

Clodagh said, ‘Sean will be fine, Yana. Coaxtl and Nanook went with him to guard him if he comes to shore.’

‘And the kids?’ Yana hated to ask.

‘Gone,’ Clodagh said. ‘Sean didn’t reach them in time.’

‘Gone? You mean . . . ?’

‘I mean gone. The children have left the planet.’

The deep sea otters’ city-ship ascended into the sky from the depths of the Petaybean sea. Though the vessel’s departure for space seemed more controlled than the previous ones, which had displaced the waters to catastrophic effect, its upward spin still created a vortex in the seabed from which it rose. Salt drops fell from the invisible force field that formed its hull, showering down on the furry round faces of the sea otters and the sleek brown heads of the river otters watching it rise.

In seal form, Murel and Ronan watched first the otters, then the sea, and finally Petaybee grow smaller as the city-vessel left Petaybee’s space.

The twins watched from the dome in the sursurvū, through which Kushtaka had once monitored the sea life around her city. Kushtaka was the leader of the occupants of

the city-ship, a colony of an ancient race of nonhuman shape shifters best known to their fellow sea creatures as deep sea otters. The view from the sursurvū – a network of surveillance devices deployed by the aliens in the vicinity of their ship – was more impressive than that from the viewscreen of the regular spaceships in which the twins had previously traveled. From the chamber's dome they could watch the faint lightening of the sky as they climbed higher into it. Somewhere below them in the black sea, icebergs still churned round and round in the whirlpool created by the wake of the city-vessel's spin.

They saw Petaybee as they had never seen it before in those few brief moments before they left the atmosphere and entered space. The volcano's red-hot lava was visible even from very high up, and more surprising, they saw several other bulging domes thrusting out of the water to the south and east to form a ridge beyond the original volcanic cone. Their entire northern continent was pure white, but the southern one had not yet had its first snow.

Once they were in space, it was much like being inside the city underwater, except that the vastness was far greater, deeper, and seemingly uninhabited. Being aboard the city-vessel was also a lot like being in another sort of spaceship, except for the all-encompassing view afforded by the transparency of the shield.

*A bit unsettling, that,* Ronan remarked in his thoughts to his sister, his eyes widening as he tried to twist his thick furry neck to take in the scenery.

Sky, the twins' otter friend, ran from one side of the domed sursurvū chamber to the other until he finally flopped down between his friends' flippers and said in a rather sad voice, *Otters who are not me and not deep sea are gone now.*

Murel nuzzled him with her nose. *You could have stayed behind, Sky.*

*Sky otters go where river seals go,* he told her.

As Petaybee seemed to shrink with distance, Murel and Ronan continued to watch, while Sky curled up for a nap. The twins' thoughts spun as the vessel had when rising. They were not yet eleven years old and this was their third journey into space on behalf of their family and their world. This one promised to make the other two trips seem like – well, child's play. Explanations about why they had to be the ones to go were unnecessary this time. Even the river and sea otters, who normally cared only about swimming, sliding, and catching fish, had sensed the urgency of their need and sent messengers to the chilly waters of Perfect Fjord to summon the creatures they considered to be large otterly cousins.

Kushtaka's species had lived on Petaybee when it flourished the first time, before the Company Corps' terraforming that had made the planet barely habitable for the twins' paternal ancestors. Like the humans, the deep sea otters were originally immigrants from another world, and like Ronan and Murel, they could assume another shape – one vaguely squidlike, which the twins couldn't help thinking of as 'alien.' Their city was also designed as a sea- and spacefaring vessel. Once the twins had explained their urgent need for transport, since no other spaceworthy vessels were left on Petaybee, the aliens agreed to take them to *Versailles Station*, Marmion's home base. Once there, they hoped to alert Marmie's powerful friends to her illegal arrest, so the important people could make the company release her. After all, Marmie was on the company's board and had a large financial interest in it. She was also an influential member of the Federation Council.

The twins knew that her arrest had been bogus, the result of her crossing a Corps colonel while rescuing Ke-ola's people and their aumakuas – or totem animals – the sea turtles and sharks. The colonel had done nothing to help the Kanakas while their colony was bombarded by meteors, and then accused Marmie in particular and Petaybee in general

of kidnapping company employees and livestock and had his friends arrest her. If everyone else hadn't been busy with emergencies at sea, they might have been able to prevent it. But as it was, an open com link had alerted Mum - who was co-governor of Petaybee - and the village that after confiscating the *Piaf*, the company intended to send more troops to take Ke-ola and his people back and arrest Mum and Da and the villagers of Kilcoole as Marmie's accomplices.

The twins couldn't believe it when they first heard, but listening to the adults talk, they realized that there was more to internal Company Corps and Federation politics than they had ever wished to know. Mum said it was always a struggle to keep the most grasping, greedy, and inhumane interests from taking control. She had obeyed plenty of orders she didn't like while in the Corps, but now that she no longer worked for the company, she wasn't about to tamely accept outrageously high-handed tactics that flew in the face of previous Federation edicts regarding Petaybee and her people.

The thing was, once adults - including Mum - had been fully adapted by Petaybee to the planet's extremes, there was no leaving. Da had explained that complete adaptation to Petaybee's extreme cold involved actual physiological changes that made it impossible for assimilated Petaybeans to survive a space journey. To arrest a Petaybean adult - even one not born on the planet - and take him away from the planet was to sentence him to death. None of them, particularly Mum, intended to go tamely.

*I hope we're doing the right thing, Murel thought to Ronan. I was so wishing that this time maybe we could let the grown-ups take care of things, like they said, and stay hidden with the family and the rest of the village.*

*Mum didn't leave us much choice, Ronan told her. I am no more ready for another trip than you are. But if she and Johnny and Pet start a guerrilla war against the entire*

*Company Corps and try to hijack their ship so Johnny, Pet, and Raj can get someone sensible to stick up for Marmie and for us, they could all be killed. Johnny and Pet are good, and that Raj guy is well armed, but hijacking a company ship? And then what happens to Mum if they succeed? Does she think the soldiers aren't going to notice their ship is gone and look around a little? She's bound to get caught and sent away. They might even be able to use drugs or something to make her tell where the others are hiding.*

*Mum? Not likely! Murel replied, but she wiggled her whiskers back and forth, perplexed. But they can't hide in the caves forever. Too many folk know about them now, and those who've failed Petaybee's entrance exam are not the sort who'd mind telling. Sooner or later they'll find our people and take what they think is their chance to be rid of us. But even if they weren't trying to arrest us too, we can't let the PTBs lock Marmie up in some horrible place. Da says she made a lot of the PTBs mad at her for championing us and Petaybee's cause, but she still has lots more friends who wouldn't let anybody touch her if they knew she was in trouble.*

*Yeah, Ronan agreed, understanding PTBs as shorthand for powers that be. And you can bet once she's free, her friends who are the good PTBs will make the rest of the company back off from trying to arrest everybody else on Petaybee too.*

*Too right, Murel said. I remember the lessons we had about the Federation Justice System, and the accusation and arrest both stink worse than week-old dead fish.*

When at last they could no longer see Petaybee, even as a bright spot in the sky, they began to explore the city a bit, keeping an eye out for Kushtaka, her daughter Tikka, and Ronan's new friends, Mraka and Puk. They swam in and out of the various rooms either through the door holes or by dissolving the walls. The colored lights in the city's towers spiraled and spun up and down.

## 2

TIKKA FOUND THEM. Though she was not as friendly with Murel and Ronan as she had been before the sharks killed her brother Jeel, Sky was still very much in her favor, and the two otters departed for the sliding areas that were built into the city.

Kushtaka's people were much like regular otters and seals in that they ate when they were hungry, not at fixed mealtimes. The fishing beam the twins had seen Mraka and Puk operate gathered many fish before the journey. Murel didn't know where the fish were stored, but they were almost as tasty as fresh caught. There were chutes in many places throughout the city where the otters could summon a snack, as Ronan and Murel had seen several of them do.

But although anyone was free to eat at any time, the twins' hosts seemed to prefer to dine with convivial company.

First Mraka and Puk, then Kushtaka and a few friends, and finally Tikka and Sky, gathered together while Mraka operated the chute.

During a previous encounter with the two fishers, Ronan had taught them to balance fish on their noses and to juggle them. Now Mraka flung a fish to Puk, who caught it and quickly tossed it so Ronan caught it on his nose. The three of them juggled more and more fish, gathering a crowd that seemed to have nothing better to do than watch a couple of big otters and a frivolous seal play with their food. Sky ran from one to the other, wanting to catch a fish for himself, but he couldn't leap as high as the jugglers could throw.



Finally, Murel had had enough and joined in the juggling circle to show them how it was really supposed to be done.

Every third catch, she threw a fish to one of the other onlookers so that the meal was being served rather than wasted.

There was no night or day in the flying city either, but the twins in seal form weren't especially disoriented by that. *Piaf* and *Versailles Station* both had waking and sleeping watches during which individual quarters or sections could be darkened or brightened to simulate dirtside conditions. However, deep undersea it was all much the same. The twins had learned that in seal form their eyesight, including night vision, was exceptionally good, besides which they had sonar. The city's lights were bright enough to see everything they needed to, and if they wanted to sleep, they had only to go into any of the rooms. The city had far more rooms than it had citizens, so although some of the deep sea otters preferred certain rooms, or dens, as Sky said, many just ducked into the hole nearest wherever they happened to stop when they were tired.

Most of the twins' hosts had specific duties. Some were particularly skilled at a particular function of the city, but all at least took turns doing most tasks.

The twins observed their hosts in several of the jobs but were never invited to help. They had tried asking tons of questions, but finally Kushtaka had asked them not to, because they were interfering with the work. Murel told her that they only wanted to know about the jobs in case they could help, but Kushtaka pointed out that as seals, they would find working many of the controls difficult, if not impossible.

When Murel and Ronan first arrived in the city, they were surprised to find that they did not change into human form. Kushtaka had explained that it was due to the extreme density of the air in the city-ship. Both the alien 'otters' and the twins could breathe it as well as swim in it: although it

contained enough oxygen to sustain them, it was 'wet' enough that the twins retained their seal form while within the city's bubble and did not change as they normally did when out of the water. They didn't fully understand her explanation, but as long as the unusual atmosphere kept them alive, that was all that counted. However, not being able to help out was rather dull, so after the novelty of living as seals in a bubble in space wore off, the twins slept a lot, unless their particular friends among the alien crew were available.

The deep sea otters' city-ship must have been much faster than the *Piaf*, because it seemed to take them far less time to reach *Versailles Station* than when they'd traveled with Marmie on her ship.

The station looked just as it had when they'd first arrived. Like the deep sea otters' vessel, it had lights, but instead of swirling in spirals, they were gridded and symmetrical. They knew the top level was Marmie's main home, with its comfortable mansion, adjustable climate, and the artificial river and pool she had installed just for them. It was hard to imagine going back there and seeing the place without Marmie, Pet, or Johnny.

*How are we going to dock?* Murel asked.

*We can't dock in a dry place, Mraka told her. But our hunting device is actually a modified transport beam. We have reconfigured it to perform its original function, so it can insert you into the station once the hatch is open.*

*If we can get them to open the docking bay,* Ronan said. One thing that made this whole mission so awkward was that the city-vessel was truly *alien* in a galaxy whose people and technology all reflected post-Terran human colonization. The deep sea aliens couldn't communicate with regular humans, and had no devices that would allow the twins to do so either.

*They are your species, are they not?* Kushtaka said. *Can you not speak to their minds and tell them you need*

access?

*We don't do mind control, Murel said indignantly. We only use telepathy to talk to other creatures when we're in seal form.*

*You are now in seal form and they are certainly other creatures, Kushtaka pointed out. I see no problem.*

*We haven't tried to use telepathy with other humans except Da and sometimes Mum, Ronan told her. Usually we just talk to them. I suppose it's worth a try, isn't it, sis? If you and me and Sky and maybe even Kushtaka's people focus on the idea of the hatch opening, maybe someone will decide it's time for routine maintenance.*

Kushtaka's people weren't interested, however, and weren't sure what was being asked of them. Ronan and Murel tried to concentrate, but it gave them a bit of a headache to try so hard to send to some unknown person over what was still a considerable distance, through the city's force field and the space station's hull.

Sky sat on his hind legs, shifting his upper body from side to side as he peered at the closed hatch, watching it closely to make sure it didn't open without him seeing it do so.

*I hope nobody sees us and decides we're hostile and fires on us, Murel said.*

*I don't think they have any long-range weapons on the station, Ronan told her. If they do, nobody mentioned it. And if they send a shuttle out to investigate, we may be able to use telepathy on whoever is aboard.*

*Or wave at the robot cameras in a friendly fashion at least, Murel said, flapping her flipper up and down. Yoo-hoo, we're sentient seals lost in space and could use a lift, thanks ever so much. I don't see how we're to manage this one.*

*You need not concern yourselves over that, Kushtaka told them. We have been cloaked since we first approached. Unfortunately, this does make it difficult to convey to the space station that we require them to open their shell so we*

*can deliver you. Perhaps if we could take you somewhere that had a sea like our own? We cannot linger here long.*

*Alert! The otter in the sursurvuv announced to the city at large, All personnel return to your duty stations. Another vessel approaches.*

It proved to be a large luxury liner, and it sailed right past the hovering home of the deep sea otters.

They could not intercept the communications between the new ship and the space station, but as soon as the ship was in position to dock, the hatch opened to admit it. The city-vessel followed right on the liner's tail, ready to insert the twins and Sky into the hatch with the whirlpool hunting/transport beam.

*Couldn't you just zip past the other ship and enter ahead of it?* Murel asked nervously. The idea of riding the beam seemingly unprotected through open space alarmed her.

*There are several reasons why we cannot,* Kushtaka told her. *We would have to accelerate in order to pass the ship but would have insufficient time and space to decelerate for a safe landing. Even if that were not a problem, there is the difficulty that the ship might ram us or land on top of us, though we would have to decloak when we land. But last and most important, if we go inside the station with the large ship behind us, we will be trapped there. The beam is the only way we can effect your entry.*

*But how can it work?* Murel wondered. *With no gravity or suits or anything? Won't the water freeze in space?*

*The beam was originally designed for space, as we told you, sister seal,* Puk assured her. *Our people use it all the time - or that's what the stories say, at least.*

*You do understand we'll die if it doesn't work?* Ronan asked. *I wouldn't like to be the main late lamented character in the story you tell later about how it didn't work after all.*

*It is a slide, Sky told him, his sleek body quivering with anticipation. Slides always work.*

*We have to try, Murel decided. We can't come this far and then give up because we are too scared. Marmie may not be scared, but I bet the little kids from Halau are.*

*Too bad Kushtaka doesn't have a normal com system here that people could understand, Ronan said. We could just hail the station, tell them what's happened, and go home.*

As they spoke, they were positioning themselves close to the pool of what looked like ordinary water. That was where the beam would start once Mraka and Puk activated it.

*The new ship is entering now, Kushtaka told them. This is the proper time. Mraka, Puk, now!*

The pool emptied into a swirling light-filled column that snaked past the hull of the other ship and into the station's docking bay. It looked extremely insubstantial.

*Count to three, Murel said.*

*You going first or shall I? Ronan asked.*

A sleek brown form shot past them both. *Hah!* Sky cried. *Good sliiiiide!*

*Ready, set, go!* the twins said together, and jumped into the beam after him.

It had its own gravity and its own temperature control, and was overall a much more complex instrument than the tame whirlpool it seemed back on Petaybee. It supported them until they slid onto the deck, wet from the beam, bumping up against Sky, who had slid to a stop next to an already docked shuttle.

In the center of the bay, only one technician saw them as they flopped across the floor on flippers and belly to cover, where they could change into their dry suits.

He blinked once, then was called to task by a coworker and returned his attention to helping the big ship dock.

Peering around the docked shuttle, Murel saw Sky watching the big ship get berthed. Once more the little otter stood on his hind legs and did his cute back and forth

examination of the people who had finally come to look at the adorable otter. He kept saying 'Hah! Hah!'

That was when the twins decided to run out into the bay yelling, 'Sky! There he is! Bad otter, Sky, running away from us like that.'

'You kids need to get yourselves and your animal out of here,' the bay chief told them, striding up. 'This is no playground.'

'We know that, sir. Sorry, sir.'

'They got the otter, sir, but what about the seals?' the technician who had seen them asked.

'What seals?' his boss demanded. 'This is *Versailles Station*, Conrad. Not Sea World. Get a grip.'

The chief walked away shaking his head over the way some people let their kids run wild, but Conrad watched Ronan and Murel suspiciously as Sky hopped onto Murel's shoulder and they headed for the nearest com room to carry out their mission, rushing too fast to note the designation of the new ship or to see the first of the company brass disembark.

### 3

BY THE TIME the *Piaf* docked at Gwinnet Incarceration Colony, the ship's cat, Zuzu, and her mistress, Adrienne, had abandoned their attempts to have the cat act as morale officer for the Kanaka children trapped aboard the liner when the Company Corps impounded it.

Zuzu liked the children and did not like to hear them cry, but she wanted to cry too, seeing the soldiers' heavy boots stomp past and hearing them bark orders at her friends. She spent much of her time huddled beneath whatever bunk or chair Adrienne chose.

When the ship docked and the soldiers clamped restraints on Adrienne's hands and shackles on her feet before leading her and the other crew members away, Zuzu stayed huddled. A long time had passed without anyone returning before she crept out and slunk from one cabin to the next trying to find someone she knew.

Only the lounge seemed to be occupied. The children were there, but they were strangely quiet, where only a few minutes ago Zuzu had heard them screaming and crying for their mothers. None of the mothers were there, though three female soldiers stood among the small quiet bodies that lay on the bedding in the middle of the lounge, all breathing, Zuzu noticed, all apparently sleeping.

Zuzu slunk around the wall and the corner of the huge tank that had been used to hold first the sea turtles and then the sharks from Halau, where her crew had also rescued the children and their families. It was a good hiding place. She could watch without being seen, and felt safe

enough to grab a quick nap before she heard the tramp of boots once more in the *Piaf's* corridors.

Where was the crew? Adrienne, Steve, Madame, no one was returning? Only the soldiers? Zuzu wanted to cry. She had been with Adrienne since she was a tiny kitten. Adrienne loved, fed, and protected her. All of the crew were her friends, but Adrienne was her special friend, the closest to a mother she remembered. Like the children in the lounge, Zuzu was suddenly orphaned.

The *Piaf* had been her home most of her life too, but she could not stay here while the soldiers ran it. Many of them smelled bad, spoke loudly and angrily, and stomped around so much she was glad she didn't have a long flowing tail, like some cats.

Her tail was a tidy curl atop her rump, the legacy of ancestors who were Japanese bobtail cats, a very superior and elevated sort of feline. She had never met one, but Adrienne told her about them and assured her that hers was a distinguished lineage.

A little dark woman came aboard with the soldiers and marched from child to child, inspecting each one. Then, with something in her voice that sounded like Zuzu felt when the food in her dish was not her favorite flavor, the woman said, 'The transport is ready for these children. They may all go to the island.'

'Mama!' a kit barely old enough to say the word screamed, and hauled at the little dark woman's trousers with his grubby fist.

'Be still, child,' the woman said. 'Your mama is not coming back to the ship. If you want to see her again, you must follow the nice corporal and do exactly as she says. She will take you on a nice ride to somewhere that you can play while you wait.'

The female soldiers lined the children up and herded them out of the lounge. This time Zuzu followed, slinking, crouching, hiding behind things and under things until the