

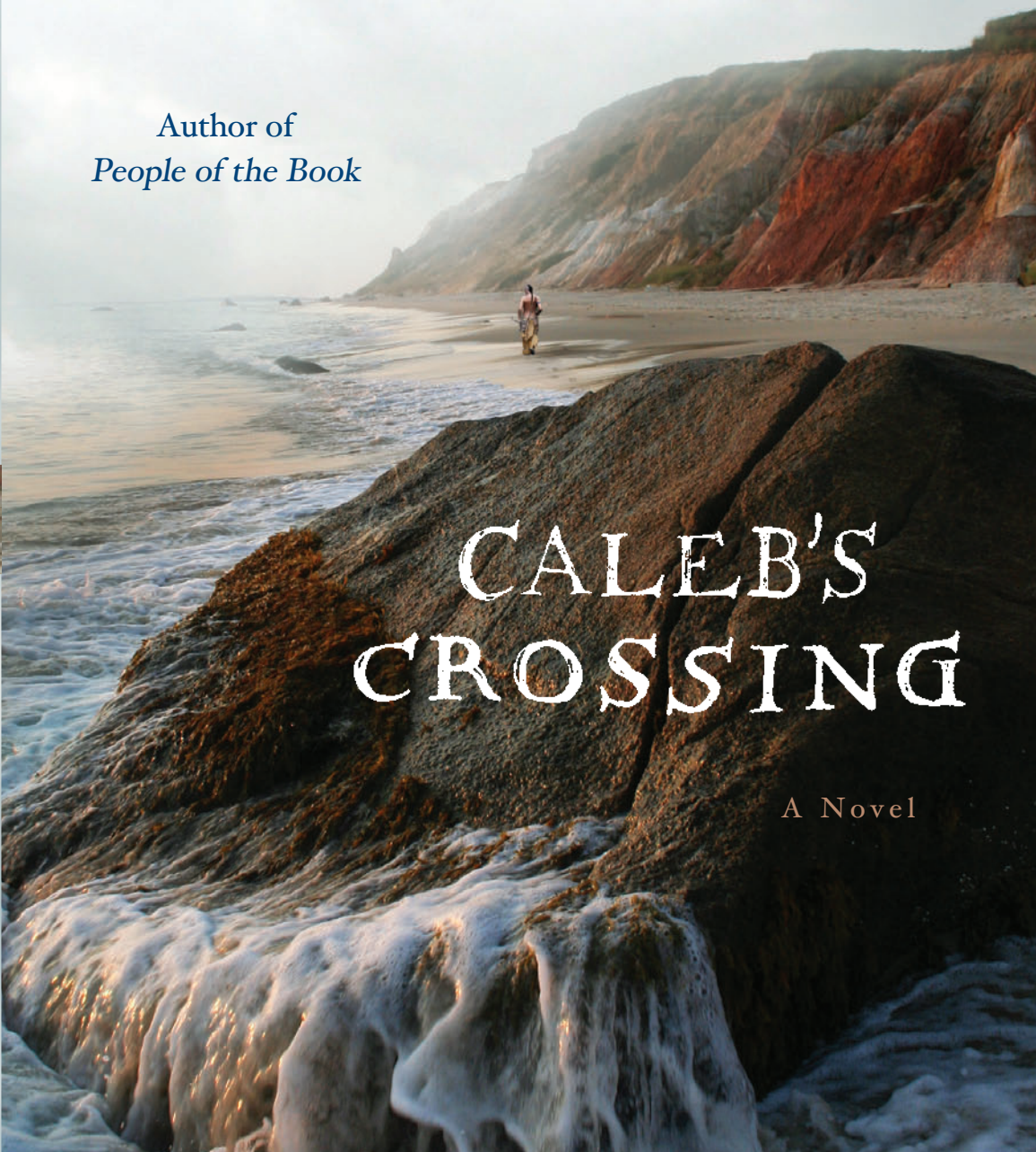
Winner of the Pulitzer Prize

Geraldine Brooks

Author of
People of the Book

CALEB'S CROSSING

A Novel



CALEB'S
CROSSING

Also by Geraldine Brooks

FICTION

People of the Book

March

Year of Wonders: A Novel of the Plague

NONFICTION

Foreign Correspondence:

A Pen Pal's Journey from Down Under to All Over

Nine Parts of Desire:

The Hidden World of Islamic Women

PHOTOGRAPHER: RANDI BAIRD



Geraldine Brooks was born and raised in Sydney. As a foreign correspondent she covered crises in the Middle East, Africa and the Balkans before turning to fiction. Her novels *Year of Wonders* and *People of the Book* were international bestsellers, and her second novel, *March*, won the Pulitzer Prize. She currently lives on the island of Martha's Vineyard with her husband and two sons.

Geraldine Brooks

CALEB'S CROSSING

A Novel

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*For Bizuayehu,
who also made a crossing.*

Refertur Historici, de Orpheo musico, et infini Poeta
 quod ab Aegypcio Lyram auferret, eage tantum statuerit
 ut illius Centum syllabas, saxumq; moueret, et arboris ingentis
 apud se traxerit, feratq; ferocissimus mitor, redderet. Vimo
 quod accepta Lyra ad inferos descendit, et ydolothronum et
 yrotopinam suo Carminis domularet, et Eurhidren uxorem
 ab inferis, ad superos euerit: Hoc symbolum esse statuerit
 philosophi Antiquissimi, ut ostendat quod tanta et vis et virtus
 Doctrinae et polioris literaturae ad mutandum Barbarum humanum
 qui sunt tanquam arboris, fera, et bruta animalia: et eorum
 quasi metaphorsim effundam, igitur tanquam yprotopinam et
 et apud se traheret.

Deus vos delegit esse Patronos nostros, et cum omni suscipit: in-
 timam Commiserationem vos ornavit, ut nobis paginis salutifera
 opem feratis, qui totum progenitum a maioribus nostris duobus.
 tam animo, quam Corporeque nati sumus, et ab omni humanitate
 alieni sumus, in desertis et illis variis erroribus ducti sumus.

Et itaq; quatuorq; ornatissimi, amantissimiq; viros, quas quantiq;
 quam maxime, immensaq; gratias vobis Tribuamus: eo quod
 omnium rerum Copiam nobis Suppeditaveritis propter educationem nos-
 tram, et ad sustentationem Corporum nostrorum: immensas, maximeq;
 expensas studistis.

Et praecipue quas quantaq; Gratias Deo opt. Max. debemus, qui
 sanctas scripturas nobis revelavit, Dominumq; ysum Christum
 nobis demonstravit, qui et via veritatis et vitae, propter
 haec omnia, per vstra miseratione divina, aliqua spem solida
 est, ut instrumenta fiamus, ad docendum, et propagandum
 vangelium Cognatis nobis Contrariisq; ut illi etiam Deum
 Cognoscant: et Christum.

Quamvis non possumus pari pari reddere vobis, reliquisq; Benefactoribus vestris
 benedictamen speramus. nos non desituros apud Deum suppli-
 ratio nibus impotenti exorare pro illis pijs miseratione divinis viris, qui
 superavit in doctor Anglia, qui pro nobis tantam vim auri, ac
 youtiq; effuderunt ad salutem animarum nostrarum procurandam.
 et pro vobis etiam, qui instrumenta, et quasi aquae ductus fuistis.
 omnia ista Beneficentia nobis conferendi.

In ista Dignitati Devotissimus: Calth: Chodshakhaumauk

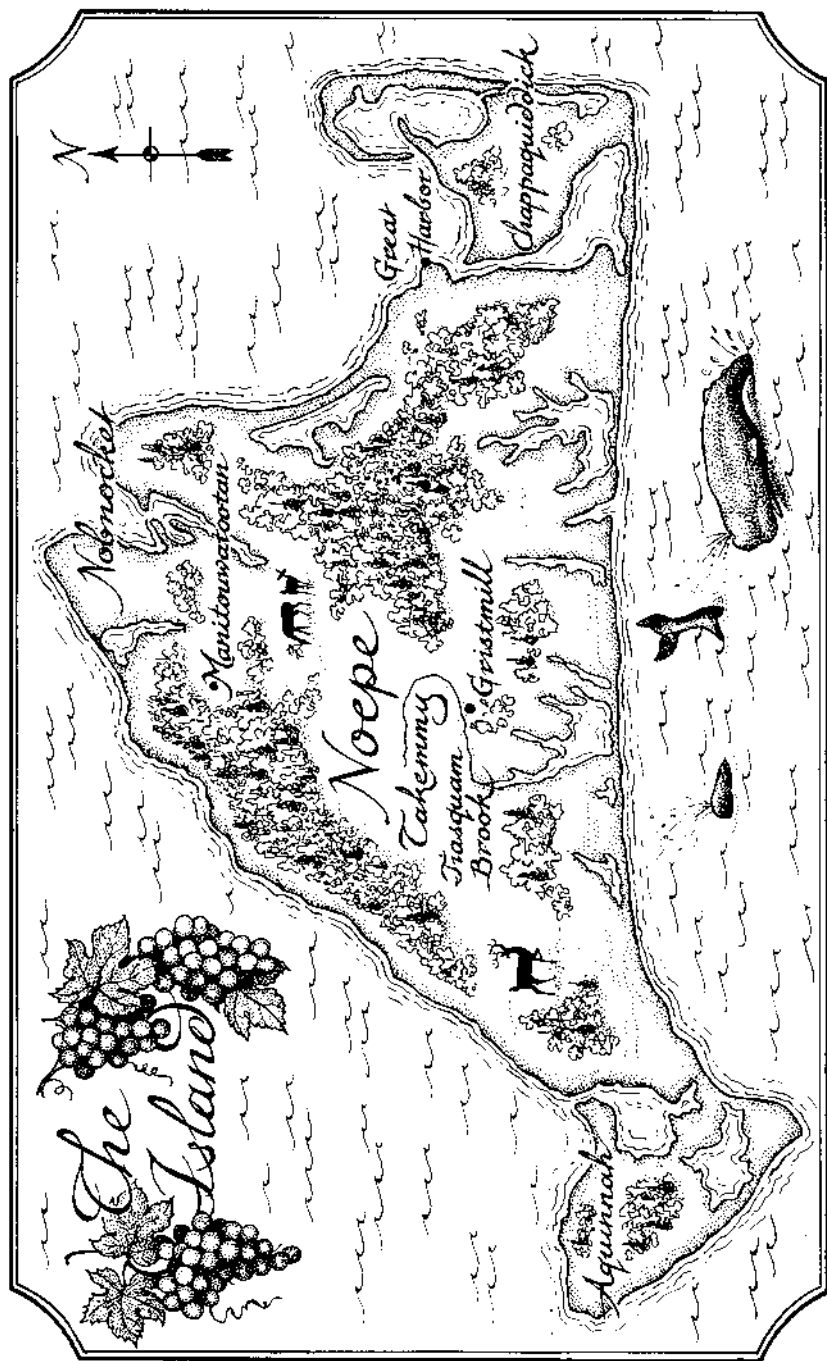
Author's Note

This is a work of imagination, inspired by the life of Caleb Cheeshahteumauk, a member of the Wôpanâak tribe of Noepe (Martha's Vineyard), born circa 1646, and the first Native American to graduate from Harvard College.

The character of Caleb as portrayed in this novel is, in every way, a work of fiction. For the facts of Caleb's life, insofar as they are documented, please see the afterword.

I have presumed to give Caleb's name to my imagined character in the hope of honoring the struggle, sacrifice and achievement of this remarkable young scholar.

Shown opposite and on the endpapers/inside cover is the only document known to have survived from his hand: a letter, in Latin, to the England-based benefactors who funded his education. In it, Caleb discusses the myth of Orpheus as it relates to his own experience of crossing between two very different cultures.



Anno 1660
Aetatis Suae 15
Great Harbor

I

He is coming on the Lord's Day. Though my father has not seen fit to give me the news, I have the whole of it.

They supposed I slept, which I might have done, as I do each night, while my father and Makepeace whisper together on the far side of the blanket that divides our chamber. Most nights I take comfort in the low murmur of their voices. But last evening Makepeace's voice rose urgent and anguished before my father hushed him. I expect that was what pulled me back from sleep. My brother frowns on excessive displays of temperament. I turned on my shakedown then and wondered, in a drowsy way, what it was that exercised him so. I could not hear what my father said, but then my brother's voice rose again.

"How can you expose Bethia in this way?"

Of course, once I caught my own name that was an end to it; I was fully awake. I raised my head and strained to hear more. It was not difficult, for Makepeace could not govern his tongue, and though I could not make out my father's words at all, fragments of my brother's replies were clear.

"Of what matter that he prays? He is only— what is it?— Not yet a year?— removed from paganism, and that man who long had charge of him is Satan's thrall— the most stiffecked and dangerous of all of them, as you have said yourself often enough. . . ."

My father cut in then, but Makepeace would not be hushed.

"Of course not, father. Nor do I question his ability. But because he has a facility for Latin does not mean he knows the decencies required of him in a Christian home. The risk is . . ."

At that moment, Solace cried out, so I reached for her. They perceived I was awake then, and said no more. But it was enough. I wrapped up Solace and drew her to me on the shakedown. She shaped herself against me like a nestling bird and settled easily back to sleep. I lay awake, staring into the dark, running my hand along the rough edge of the roof beam that slanted an arm's length above my head. Five days from now, the same roof will cover us both.

Caleb is coming to live in this house.

In the morning, I did not speak of what I had overheard. Listening, not speaking, has been my way. I have become most proficient in it. My mother taught me the use of silence. While she lived, I think that not above a dozen people in this settlement ever heard the sound of her voice. It was a fine voice, low and mellow, carrying the lilt of the Wiltshire village in England where she had passed her girlhood. She would laugh, and make rhymes full of the strange words of that place and tell us tales of things we had never seen: cathedrals and carriages, great rivers wide as our harbor, and streets of shops where one who had the coin might buy all manner of goods. But this was within the house, when we were a family. When she went about in the world, it was with downcast eyes and sealed lips. She was like a butterfly, full of color and vibrancy when she chose to open her wings, yet hardly visible when she closed them. Her modesty was like a cloak that she put on, and so adorned, in meekness and discretion, it seemed she passed almost hidden from people, so that betimes they would speak

in front of her as if she were not there. Later, at board, if the matter was fit for childish ears, she would relate this or that important or diverting news she had gleaned about our neighbors and how they did. Oft times, what she learned was of great use to father, in his ministry, or to grandfather in his magistracy.

I copied her in this, and that was how I learned I was to loose her. Our neighbor, Goody Branch, who is midwife here, had sent me off to her cottage to fetch more groaning beer, in the hope that it would cool my mother's childbed fever. Anxious as I was to fetch it back for her, I stood by the latch for some minutes when I heard my mother speaking. What she spake concerned her death. I waited to hear Goody Branch contradict her, to tell her all would be well. But no such words came. Instead, Goody Branch answered that she would see to certain matters that troubled my mother and that she should make her mind easy on those several accounts.

Three days later, we buried her. Although it was spring according to the calendar, the ground was not yet thawed. So we set a fi re on the place my father had chosen, between the graves of my twin brother Zuriel, who had died when he was nine years old, and my other infant brother who had not tarried here long enough for us to name him. We tended the fi re all through the night. Even so, at dawn, when my father and Makepeace commenced to dig, the shovel rang on that iron- hard earth. The sound of it is with me, still. The labor was such that father trembled all over afterward, his limbs palsied with the work of putting her to rest. So it is, out here on this island, where we dwell with our faces to the sea and our backs to the wilderness. Like Adam's family after the fall, we have all things to do. We must

be fettler, baker, apothecary, grave digger. Whatever the task, we must do it, or else do without.

It is near to a year now since my mother's death, and since then I have had charge of Solace, and of the keeping of this house. I miss my mother, as I know father does, and Makepeace too in his way, although his affections are less warmly worn than ours. His faith also seems stronger in the way he is able to accept what befalls us as the working of divine will. We have all spent many sore days and nights examining our souls and our conduct to read what lesson the Lord intended for us in taking her so soon; what failings and sins he did mean to punish in us. And though I sit in prayerful reflection with my father on this matter of our spiritual estate, I have not given to him the ground of what I know to be true.

I killed my mother. I know that some would say I was a child who Satan, trickster, toyed with. But as to soul, there is neither youth nor age. Sin stains us at our birth and shadows our every hour. As the scripture tells us: *Their foot shall slide in due time*. Loose one's footing, as I did, and age matters not. One cedes all claims to childish innocence. And my sins were not mere nursery mischief but matters etched in stone upon the tablets of mortal error. I broke the Commandments, day following day. And I did it knowingly. Minister's daughter: how could I say otherwise? Like Eve, I thirsted after forbidden knowledge and I ate forbidden fruit. For her, the apple, for me, the white hellebore— different plants, proffered from the same hand. And just as that serpent must have been lovely— I see him, his lustrous, shimmering scales, pouring liquid over Eve's shoulders, his jewel eyes luminous as they gazed into her own— so too did Satan come to me in a form of irresistible beauty.

Break God's laws and suffer ye his wrath. Well, and so I do. The Lord lays his hand sore upon me, as I bend under the toil I now have—mother's and mine, both. The tasks stretch out from the gray slough before dawn to the guttered taper of night. At fifteen, I have taken up the burdens of a woman, and have come to feel I am one. Furthermore, I am glad of it. For I now no longer have the time to fall into such sins as I committed as a girl, when hours that were my own to spend spread before me like a gift. Those hot, salt-scoured afternoons when the shore curved away in its long glistening arc toward the distant bluffs. The leaf-dappled, loamy mornings in the cool bottoms, where I picked the sky-colored berries and felt each one burst, sweet and juicy, in my mouth. I made this island mine, mile by mile, from the soft, oozing clay of the rainbow cliffs to the rough chill of the granite boulders that rise abruptly in the fields, thwarting the plough, shading the sheep. I love the fogs that wreath us all in milky veils, and the winds that moan and keen in the chimney piece at night. Even when the wrack line is crusted with salty ice and the ways through the woods crunch under my clogs, I drink the cold air in the low blue gleam that sparkles on the snow. Every inlet and outcrop of this place, I love. We are taught early here to see Nature as a foe to be subdued. But I came, by stages, to worship it. You could say that for me, this island and her bounties became the first of my false gods, the original sin that begot so much idolatry.

Now, here, in the scant days I have left before Caleb comes to us, I have decided to set down my spiritual diary, and give an accounting for those months when my heart sat so loose from God. I have gathered what scraps of paper I could scavenge from my brother's

store, and I intend to use whatever moments I can eke out before each day's weariness claims me. My hand is unlovely, since father did not school me in writing, but as this relation is for my own eyes, it makes no mind. Since I cannot say, yet, whether I will find the courage to stand in meeting some day and deliver an accounting of myself, this will have to do. In my affliction I have besought the Lord but I have had no sign that I am saved. When I look at my hands and wrists, marred by the marks of small burns from cook pots and flying embers, every red weal or white pucker brings to my mind's eye that eternal fire, and the writhing masses of the damned, among whom I must expect to spend eternity.

God alone ordains the damned and the saved and naught that I set down on these pages can change that. But since Caleb is to come here, trailing about him the smoke of those heathen fires and the scent of those wild, vision-filled hours, I need to be clear in my own mind and honest in my heart where I stand with regard to such matters, so that I can truly put them from me. I must do this for his sake, as well as for my own. I know that father sets great store in Caleb. He sees him, more than any other here, as a great hope to lead his people. Certainly Caleb seems to want this also; no one toils at his book more diligently; no one has gathered such a rich harvest of knowledge in the scant seasons he has had to study these things. But I also know this to be true: Caleb's soul is stretched like the rope in a tug o' war, between my father and his own uncle, the pawaaw. Just as my father has his hopes, so too does that sorcerer. Caleb will lead his people, I am sure of it. But in which direction? Of that, I am not in the least bit certain.