

Some

Sixteenth

Century

Romances

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THE DUTCH

Chapter 1

Vim van der Grooten—one of many secret Lutherans in Amstelledamme, Holland—had thus far survived, undetected by Inquisitioners...

THE DUTCH PEOPLE in Holland have always been resilient survivors. In the 11th century when a fourth of their land was suddenly flooded with seawater from the North Sea destroying towns, killing people, animals and crops, the Frisians of northern Holland immediately went into action, built earthen dikes and dunes; successfully fought back the North Sea. The rest of Holland soon followed their example.

By 1555, Holland had already achieved the status of being one of the largest shipping centers in the world and was the envy of Europe. Ships came carrying industrious passengers, mostly traders and bankers, from almost every port in the 16th century world, to trade, buy and sell merchandise; and most importantly to conduct financial transactions. Everyone in Holland knew trade and finance was Holland's lifeblood.

Right in the face of the powerful North Sea, the courageous Dutch people built the city of Amstelledamme, the name of which was derived from the Amstel Dam on the Amstel River.

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Amstelledamme, later to be renamed Amsterdam, was the main port for Holland's world trade and soon made Holland the most prosperous country in 16th century Europe.

Since most of the country was grassy marshland, one could see milk cows contentedly grazing on lush grass.

Winds drove giant, churning windmills that ground grain and pumped seawater from the marshes, day by day claiming more land from the sea, allowing the people to survive.

Unlike a century earlier in Holland, it was a time of plenty. There were surpluses of butter, milk, herring, cloth, wine, exotic fruit; tons of salt for export; strong, medium and mild cheeses to tease the palate.

One could select from a great variety of colorful flowers in the fragrant flower markets.

Farmers raised thousands of healthy pigs. Delicious Holland ham soon became a favorite throughout the Western world.

Chickens, ducks, geese were plentiful, as was a variety of tasty fish, both fresh and dried. The Dutch loved to eat fish and were especially fond of raw eel on toast.

Dutch fishermen challenged the cold, rough, sometimes snowy seas seething with violent waves to bring home their silvery catches. Many lost their lives in the struggle.

On farms not far from the city, Gardeners grew a great variety of fresh vegetables and on any given day one might see their livestock boats slowly transporting a horse, cow or load of hay or grain to market.

Sweet-smelling fruit trees provided an abundance of fresh fruit, such as apples, peaches, apricots and pears, much of which was dried in the sun for export to other countries.

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Delicious, wild strawberries and mulberries could be had for the picking.

Many things were imported, including nutmeg and cloves for tea, pepper, vanilla, thread, hemp for rope, wood, pitch, tar, rye, wheat, talcum, figs and delicious, aromatic coffees from a newly discovered country called Brazil.

For the Dutch home, there were locally made blue and white glazed bowls, dishes and vases, which would eventually become known as the famous *Delft Blue*.

In the shops along Warmoesstraat Street and in every home in Holland one could find Dutch-made copper pots, copper pans and copper cooking utensils.

Most Dutch people could afford to buy the inexpensive, magnificent, imported Oriental and Persian carpets to decorate their homes.

For the connoisseur of spirits, which included almost everybody, there were kegs of wine from many countries: locally made great Dutch beer, gin, apricot brandy. At any of the many drinking establishments one could also sip fine beer imported from German breweries.

Many Dutch wore clothes made of calico, a printed cotton fabric imported from India. Wool clothes were imported to Amstelledamme from surrounding local towns and also from England.

If one was extremely wealthy, one could purchase splendid oil paintings like those created by the Dutch painter Jan van Eyck, who used vivid oil colors to create illusions in three-dimensions with meticulous detail, such as *Madonna with Canon van der Paele*.

From metal smiths one could buy custom jewelry or just watch the smiths create horseshoes, copper pots, pans and kitchen utensils.

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One could bake one's bread dough at the bakery where bakers kept large, hot ovens standing by or one could watch a shoemaker use lime and saltwater to strip the hair from a cowhide then see how he tanned it to make leather shoes for the city folk or see how he made wooden shoes for farmers and millers.

One could purchase one's candles from one of the many candle makers who provided thousands of candles every year to light up *Oude Kerk*—Dutch, meaning, '*Old Church*'. The candle makers also supplied candles to banks and trade buildings.

One could smell the ever-present peat moss, manure, and wood smoke; hear Catholic Church bells ring for Catholic weddings, Catholic deaths and Catholic Holy days.

One could mingle with traders, bankers and Catholic pilgrims who came from afar to visit *Oude Kerk* and the many Catholic chapels in the city.

All of these essential goods, services and niceties made life quite pleasant for *Catholics*, which by far represented the majority of Dutch people—but there were *horrible* underlining religious and political currents that *tortured* and destroyed life after life of *Protestants*, because they refused to conform to prescribed Catholic doctrine.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands was a constitutional monarchy. Executive power rested in the ruling royalty and the cabinet of ministers. Since 1532, the Council of State had advised the sovereign. In the early part of the 16th century, Holland was under the control of the Dukes of Burgundy. Between 1519 and 1555, the benevolent Holy Roman emperor Charles V of the Spanish house of Habsburg ruled Holland. He was also the King of Spain. In 1555, Charles, soon to resign his positions, turned Spain and Holland over to his son, Philip II, who'd been born and educated as a Roman Catholic in

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Spain and had no liking for Holland whatsoever, much less its Protestants. His rule would be so oppressive that it would eventually lead to Holland's war of independence from Spain.

The Spanish Inquisition—the *destroyer of Protestants*—had been brought to Holland in 1522.

In 1555, Antoine Perrenot De Granville, a French diplomat and advisor to Charles V and Philip II, was in charge of overseeing the Spanish Inquisition in Holland. Philip II supported the vicious Granville. As a result, many Holland Protestants had been *tortured* then *killed* or if lucky, *exiled*.

William I, Prince of Orange, who'd started life as a Lutheran and who'd later been required by Charles V to become Roman Catholic in order to inherit, would in years to come lead Holland to religious freedom, but in 1555, he'd just been appointed stadtholder of Holland by Philip II. It would be many years before William, also known as William of Orange, would set the stage for religious tolerance for Lutherans and other Protestants in Holland.

Martin Luther was a *reformer* who detested indulgences—the release from penalties of sin through payment of money. In 1517, he'd published his *Ninety-Five Theses*, in Latin—which dwelled on indulgences and the excesses of the Roman Catholic Church—thus starting the Protestant *Reformation*. Luther felt Christianity was not about the elaborate organization headed by the pope, but rather about the individual's own communication directly with God.

Luther gained a great many fearless followers who left the Catholic Church to join him—costing thousands their lives; killed by order of the Spanish Inquisitioners, who, first, had them *tortured*—forcing them to dis-

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close the names of *other* so-called *heretics*, as all Lutherans and other Protestants were called by Catholics. Following this, the tortured Lutherans would be either burned at the stake or exiled. To avoid this fate, many had become *secret* Lutherans and attended secret meetings.

In 1546, old and sick after many years of fighting for his cause, the Lutheran leader, Martin Luther, died.

Vim van der Grooten—one of many *secret* Lutherans in Amstelledamme—had thus far survived, *undetected* by the Inquisitioners.

With his extensive education in linguistics, by rights he should have been teaching at a university, but Holland didn't have one, so, in order to remain in the Holland he loved dearly, he'd become an *oberwijzer*—schoolteacher—and taught in a private school for the wealthy sons of Dutch bankers and traders.

Since banking and trading with foreigners was the mainstay of Holland's economy, all students in Amstelledamme were required to learn several foreign languages fluently as part of their curriculum. Students usually began foreign language studies at the age of eleven.

Being very intelligent and studious when he'd been a student himself, Vim had become fluent in both Dutch and English by that age. Since he'd shown a remarkable gift for learning languages, his wealthy, merchant parents had sent him to study in Paris where he'd also mastered French, Latin, Spanish, German, Russian, Portuguese, Italian and several India dialects.

Vim stood in front of his French class, vigorously writing with chalk. His loose, arm-length, puffy white shirtsleeve billowed and flowed as his thin

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fingers pushed the squeaky white stick, quickly forming words across the large slate board that hung on the mason wall in front of the classroom.

His black cotton jacket, which matched the black, loose-fitting pants he was wearing, hung from a rack in the corner of the room and atop it his flat, beret-like, black cap. His white, collarless shirt secured by a thin, ribbon-like string fit snugly about his neck. His silky, honey-brown hair came down the sides of his head to just above his earlobes; down his forehead to about an inch above his eyebrows. His, typically Dutch, nose protruded somewhat, but didn't spoil his handsome thirty-two-year-old, thin face.

His dark-blue eyes carefully scanned the French words he was writing on the slate. He pronounced them as he wrote. "*Quatre-vingt-dix-huit—quatre-vingt-dix-neuf—cent!*"

"*Quatre-vingt-dix-huit—quatre-vingt-dix-neuf—cent,*" the class repeated.

The clock on the wall struck the hour. He glanced at it then dismissed the class in Dutch, "That completes the lesson for today—remember—study the next three chapters in your book. I'll make fine linguists out of every one of you by semester's end!" he promised. Even as he said it, he suspected it was a promise he wouldn't be able to keep.

The students' chair legs grated against the floor as they got up from their writing tables, began the usual light, school-talk chatter among themselves, put on their brightly-colored sweaters and coats, slowly filed out of the classroom.

Vim brushed his hands together to remove chalk, walked to the corner of the cold, damp classroom, put on his heavy jacket, cap, felt some warmth coming back into his body, put papers and books into the black

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leather case he always carried to class, picked it up by its handle, left the classroom.

He felt a sense of apprehension as he walked down the stone stairs of the chilly, gray stone building, out into the damp air.

He reached in his pocket, took out his Jew's harp, put it against his teeth and played a tune of sorts. He thought that might dispel his feeling of uneasiness.

As he stepped off the last step onto the cobblestones, then as he began to cross the cobblestone plaza, he heard a dog bark off in the distance.

His playing didn't lighten his mood, so he put his harp away, glanced up at the Catholic Chapel of the Holy Grave, which had been completed in 1540. *How could such a beautiful building shelter such monstrous men as the Inquisition has created?* he wondered.

He studied the ornate façade that set off the chapel's portal from the main building, stood for a moment and admired its three sectioned-off dark, stained-glass windows. He followed the windows upward with his eyes as each climbed to a pinnacle, formed three arches that pointed to heaven. He saw the windows were encased in a larger recess that culminated at the top in a huge semicircle. Above all this he saw the massive ornate designs, which would later be attributed to the Early Renaissance Period.

He was the only person on the street, which he thought unusual. He again took out his harp, began to play a simple tune, noticed the late-afternoon overcast sky had spread an eerie gray over the towers of the city. *Maybe that's why I feel so ill at ease,* he thought. *But why is everyone staying indoors?*

As he began walking across the cobblestones the answer suddenly came to him. He recoiled at the *odor* in the air, quickly put away his harp, lost all passion for music or levity.

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Although he'd experienced it many times before, he'd never gotten used to *that* smell: the horrifying odor of someone being *burned alive*, the sickening scent of their burning flesh, even at the substantial distance he was from the *Dam*.

He knew that on the Dam at that very moment one or more *heretics*—like *himself*—were passing their final, horrible moments in agonies worse than Dante's Hell.

He trembled as he heard the far-off *screams* of a helpless woman shatter the quietness of the street. He'd seen and smelled it all before. He knew she was tied to a wooden pole, a flickering fire leaping up at her bare feet—in that *nightmarish* place on the distant Dam.

He shuddered, felt an urge to *destroy* her sadistic killers, then felt a second of regret. He was a Lutheran after all. A good Christian. To kill someone would be against everything he believed in.

He recalled the year before when he'd been required by the Inquisition to witness the burning at the stake of a Mennonite, as it was compulsory, sooner or later, for everyone in Amstelledamme to witness the burning at the stake of a heretic of one kind or other.

Following a mock trial by the Inquisition tribunal—he'd seen a woman taken by procession to the Dam; tied to a wooden pole that had been erected on the Dam just for the purpose.

As he continued walking, he recalled the detailed images of that horrible day. As he'd stood in the crowd and watched, flames from the burning stacks of wood under her dangling feet had grown hotter and higher. She'd screamed, as the flames licked her legs and body. The heat had blackened and finally scorched off pieces of stinking, smoking flesh; searing the blood that had oozed from her wounds. Finally, the wonderful relief of *death* had ended her suffering and Vim remembered he'd quickly wiped

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away tears before they could be noticed by the surrounding mob thus divulging his sympathy for the victim.

Again today—the Inquisition is slowly and painfully separating the soul from the life of another—perhaps she's a Lutheran like me, like Hubert, like Anki. And despite the Inquisition's efforts to send her soul to hell—I pray, directly to God—that her soul finds its way to His open arms, Amen.

He relaxed a little as he finally reached the ornate wooden door of his parents' tall, slender house near the Amstel River, that he, his brother Hubert, and Anki had shared since he and Hubert's parents had died.

He turned his key in the heavy latch, opened the weighty door, went in, locked the door behind him, stood for a second in the entrance cove, saw Hubert sitting at a table in the adjoining living room.

Hubert was busy and didn't notice Vim come in.

Vim was so chilled, not only by the cold, damp weather, but by his recent experience in the street that he went directly to the brick fireplace in the alcove, put his hands out, felt the soothing warmth from the single piece of coal burning on the grate, still felt cold.

It was spring, April evenings were chilly.

He set his black case down. His hand shook as he removed the coal spoon from where it hung from a metal peg on the wall of fireplace brick, quickly added a piece of coal to the small fire, saw sparks fly up the flue, soon felt a little warmer.

The smell of coal smoke in the air made him begin to feel a little more comfortable, a little more mentally detached from the horrors taking place elsewhere in the city. He found a glass and bottle of Dutch gin, poured himself a shot, downed it and felt the liquor warm his gut.

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Vim and Hubert's father had been a diamond merchant, but instead of learning the diamond business, Vim had decided on a career in teaching.

They'd both inherited a large amount of money and jewels when their father had died of consumption in 1549.

Hubert, being very business oriented and artistic, had inherited the business.

While giving birth, their mother and unborn baby had died in 1547.

Vim went into the living room.

Hubert was sitting at a table examining cut diamonds by the light of a large candle. The candlelight illuminated his honey-brown hair. Hubert was much like Vim in his thin-faced appearance, but had a completely different, more tranquil personality.

He glanced up at Vim. "*Goed avond*," he said in Dutch, meaning '*Good evening*'. "I didn't see you come in!"

"*Goed avond*," Vim replied, warmly, "I feel a horrible *dread*—like I've been chased by a *witch*."

"Perhaps you almost *have*! Please sit down while I finish counting! The word is *bad*—*very* bad!" Hubert said very politely, as was his nature.

Vim sensed an unusual seriousness in Hubert's voice. "In that case, I'll remain standing," Vim replied, took a position behind a heavy chair at the table, gripped the back of it. "Well, what *is* it? Tell me quickly," he said in his tactless manner.

Hubert spoke softly as he continued counting the diamonds before him, "It's *time*!" He scooped the diamonds up. They sparkled in his hand in the candlelight as he poured them into a leather pouch. "We must leave *tonight*—right *now*!"

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Vim realized Hubert, who was usually very composed, was highly agitated. Vim knew that was *very* unusual for Hubert. "What's *happened*?"

"The *Inquisitioners* found out about our Lutheran *meeting* place! They raided the secret meeting last night! Lucky we were not there! Word is they've captured *Franz* and all the others that *were* there! You know what *that* means! The *Inquisitioners* have surely tortured them *all* by now—red-hot pincers—or on the rack—or in some other fiendish way. Under *Inquisition* torture—no one can keep from informing on the others. The *Inquisitioners* must already know by now that *we're* secret *Lutherans*, too."

Vim's face became livid. "Why are you just *sitting* there counting *diamonds*? Why didn't you get me out of *class*?"

"It would have looked *suspicious*. You'd have had to give some excuse to the schoolmaster for why I was there to get you—why you were leaving *early*. He may have become wary."

"*Anki*—!" Vim yelled down the hallway, suddenly remembering her.

"She's getting a few private things together," Hubert hurriedly explained, tightening the leather throng, closing the pouch of diamonds. "She'll be out in a minute."

"Maybe we don't *have* a minute—*Anki*—*hurry*!"

Anki quickly entered the room, a leather bag dangling from her shoulder by a strap, her little black female dog Teefi in her arms. In the candlelight, Anki's dark-blue beret set off reddish-brown hair that tumbled down to her shoulders, touched her black seal-skin jacket then curled up all the way around the base of her neck in typical Dutch-girl fashion.

Hubert had long admired her soft, rounded nose, cute, dimpled chin, rosy cheeks, fifteen-year-old healthy, innocent-looking face, medium built, well-proportioned body.

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She, on the other hand, had been in love with *Vim* for as long as she could remember. She liked Hubert because he bought her nice things, but the true love in her heart had always been only for *Vim*.

She had a fiery personality. "What in the name of *Christ* are you *yelling* about?" she cried, at *Vim*.

She usually came on strong when talking to him, tried to match his verbal force before he sounded off back at her.

"Didn't Hubert tell you the *Inquisitioners* are *looking* for us? They'll be coming *here* for *sure*—to *capture* us—*torture* us—*kill* us! Why are you still *here*? Why haven't you gone somewhere and *hidden*?" *Vim* demanded.

Hubert stood up, lightly touched Anki's cheek with the back of his hand. "She has no place to *go*. Unfortunately, the *Inquisitioners* have no doubt found out *she's* a secret Lutheran, too. I told her she could escape with us. I'd never be able to forgive myself if they should *capture* her—scar her tender face—"

His argument was very persuasive.

"Enough!" *Vim* cried. "Okay—*okay*—she goes *with* us!"

"Let's be *gone*!" Hubert said as he affectionately put his hand on Anki's shoulder.

She carefully peeled his fingers off her shoulder. Her light-blue eyes sparkled as she caressed the large diamond rings on his fingers.

Suddenly, something heavy *slammed* against the front door of the house—then a *second* time.

They stared at the door, half-paralyzed with shock. They saw and heard an axe blade split the thick wooden door—come crashing through it!

"*Inquisitioners*! There's no time to run! Grab a *weapon*—anything—we'll have to *fight*!" *Vim* cried, grabbing the decorative short sword from above the living room fireplace.

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Anki ran to the alcove, grabbed the heavy coal spoon and hid.

Hubert located the crossbow they kept leaning in one corner of the room for just such an occasion, quickly tightened the bowstring; readied an arrow.

The door crashed open. A huge man wearing a black tunic with a cross on the front rushed in—wielding a sword in his hand. "*There they are—get them—kill them if you have to!*" he yelled.

"Let's take them *alive*—roast them like *sausages* on the *Dam* stakes!" the intruder behind him yelled.

The two intruders laughed sadistically.

A third man rushed into the room, sword in hand.

The first man, with the cross on his chest, saw *Vim's* sword. "Well, look at *this* one—he thinks he can out-duel the head of the Inquisition *Guard!* Stand back—I'll take him prisoner *myself!*" he said, lunging his blade toward Vim.

Vim awkwardly met the intended blow with his sword then swung his blade with both hands, accidentally sliced open the intruder's stomach; then realizing it was do or die, drove the sword deep into the guard's chest. The huge man, the head of the Inquisition guard, dropped to the floor, dead.

Vim, *shocked* by what he'd done—*killed a man*—let the sword slip from his hand. It *clattered* as it struck the floor.

The second man, screaming an oath, flailing his steel, rushed toward Hubert.

Hubert carefully aimed the crossbow, fired—its short, sharp arrow found its mark—the middle of the intruder's forehead. The intruder crashed to the floor with a thud.

The third intruder, sword in hand, came at unarmed Vim. "Now you'll *pay* for killing our *leader!*"

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Anki slipped up behind him—knocked him senseless with the heavy coal spoon.

"Follow *me*—out the back way," Hubert cried, tossed the crossbow onto the floor, grabbed his jacket, beret and the pouch of diamonds.

Vim still stood staring, paralyzed by what had happened.

"Come *on*—snap *out* of it," Hubert cried, pulling Vim's arm. "We've got to get *out* of here—*fast!*"

The three dashed out the back door.

When they reached the alley they didn't see anyone in either direction.

Anki clutched Teefi, whispered words into her ear as they silently made their escape down the alleyway.

It was getting dark, but there was still enough light to find their way through the dim, narrow streets.

They stopped occasionally, then, in case they were being pursued, hid in the shadows against a high, cold stone wall; watched for anyone who might be following. All they saw moving was a large bird as it screeched above them and flew on into the darkness.

They knew they could never return to their house, the Inquisition would confiscate it and all of their property—and put out a warrant for their arrest.

Vim and Hubert had known all along, that eventually the day would come when they'd have to escape from Holland to get away from the Inquisition, as hundreds of others had already done. They knew it'd only be just a matter of time, but loving Holland as they did, they'd postponed leaving as long as possible. However, they'd made elaborate plans and preparations for when that inevitable day would actually arrive.

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Months earlier, Vim and Hubert had quietly purchased a single-mast fishing cutter, fifty-feet long, three strong triangular sails, sturdy vessel. Its previous owners, professional North Sea fishermen, had fished with it for many months. Vim and Hubert also had taken it out into deep water many times; had learned to sail it as well as the professionals.

Both its bow and stern were rounded and it had a broad beam, which allowed it to carry a large cargo without effort.

Over the months they'd supplied it with everything they could think of from warm clothes to food. They'd put aboard spices, two-hundred pounds of sugar, a hundred pounds of salt, four hundred pounds of flour, three hundred gallons of drinking water, four kegs of gin, eight large kegs of beer, ten kegs of wine.

They'd also stowed away cooking oil, coal for the small coal-burning stove and oven, fishing equipment, knives, kitchen utensils, bags of seeds, bulbs, plant starts, medicinal herbs, dried fruit, dry beans, dried peas, barley, oats, rye, dried fish, dried meats including beef sausage and dried beef strips.

They'd also loaded two barrels each of potatoes, apples, onions and carrots—all packed in sawdust. They'd included bottled lime juice, raisins, cornmeal, dark bread, cracked wheat, old dough starter for leavening bread, a hundred pounds of various cheese wheels, crackers, compasses, maps, charts, carpenter and other tools for repairing the cutter should it require it, long-stemmed clay pipes, tobacco; flint and steel for starting fires.

And they'd packed six longbows with quivers and arrows, three Bibles and a few other books, candles, candlesticks, crosses, an altar cloth, clerical clothes, a chest of gold coins, Hubert's tools for diamond cutting, jewelry making and engraving hobbies; and many other useful items.

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It was good to be so well prepared. However, their *immediate* problem was they had to *reach* their fishing cutter, *sail* it far out to sea—before the *Inquisitioners* caught them.

They walked as quickly and quietly as possible, but not so fast as to arouse attention. They finally reached the major street called Warmoestraat; began walking north on it.

Suddenly Anki turned and started down a side street.

Vim grabbed her arm. "Where are you *going*?" he whispered.

"I can't leave without telling my *mother* and *sister* *goodbye*!" she whispered. "I'll only be a minute!"

"You *can't*—" Vim whispered.

"I *have* to."

"Where will you say you're *going*—and *why*?" Vim asked.

"Oh—I'll make *up* something—tell them I'm *eloping*—leaving Holland with a dashing young man! They won't care—I've always been too independent for them. I'm the black sheep of the family. They won't suspect anything."

"Are they Lutheran?" Hubert asked.

"No—Catholic. They don't know I'm Lutheran. I won't tell them."

"You don't know where our little boat *is*," Vim argued.

"Yes I *do*, I helped you take plants in the little boat, out to the cutter one night."

"We've moved it since then," Hubert whispered then added, "we'll wait in the shadows by that building over there—for a quarter hour, no *longer*," he whispered, nodding his head in the direction of a building next to the street they were on.

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Anki clutched Teefi, dashed off down the side street into the evening dusk.

Vim didn't mind taking a chance when it was necessary, didn't feel this was, reluctantly moved into the shadows of the building alongside Hubert, watched and waited.

The usual evening mist, a foot deep, had formed and was creeping up the street.

After some time, Vim cupped his hands together, breathed into them to warm them. "How long has it *been*?" he asked.

"I'd say about half the time I told her we'd *wait* for her," Hubert whispered.

"Maybe we should leave her behind—no, hell she'd be *caught*. When the Inquisitioners learn we *killed*..." Vim began, his brain filled with bewilderment. "They'd take *special* pleasure in torturing *her*."

"*Never* think of that—promise me you'll never say it *again*," Hubert whispered.

"I can't *help* it...I've *sinned*," Vim whispered.

"No, brother. The Lord said, 'smite thy enemies'. That's what we did—smote *them*—before they smote *us*!"

Suddenly—out of the mist—they saw a woman on foot coming their way up Warmoesstraat Street wearing an all-black dress, black shawl. Her black head covering fit tightly about her hair, came to a point on her head.

She glanced their way, said nothing, walked on past.

Perhaps a prostitute—out this late, Vim whispered. "Where's *Anki*?"

"Don't worry, Anki's very disciplined, she'll be here."

Anki popped out of the darkness suddenly. "Let's go," she whispered.

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They smelled the ghastly odor of burnt human flesh in the air as they continued their way north along Warmoesstraat, the three-quarter mile long street that ran almost north and south within the horseshoe-shaped inner city.

They slipped past empty shops where metal smiths, bakers, shoemakers and fishmongers sold their goods during the day, passed *Oude Kerk*, left Warmoesstraat and were soon nearing the end of the street that would take them to the IJsselmeer where all the city's ships were resting at anchor.

Vim new they were *far* from being *safe*. He glanced back over his shoulder, saw a procession of *torches* coming their way from half a mile back up Warmoesstraat! Fear gripped him.

He could just make out the silhouette of the woman who'd passed them. She was talking to someone in the procession, pointing in Vim's direction.

Then came *terrifying* sounds—filling their hearts with *horror*!

Vim cried, "*Hondegeblaf!*" His throat caught. He could hardly get the word to come out, it was a Dutch word meaning '*the baying of hounds*'. "Run for your *lives*—they've set *mastiffs* on us!" he cried.

They heard their own breathing turn into labored gasps as they made the mad dash on down the street, every aching muscle in their body forced to its limit. They could tell from the distant howls that the huge mastiffs—*forerunners of torture and death*—were quickly *gaining* on them!

After what seemed forever, the three finally reached the place where Vim and Hubert had hidden the small boat. Their hearts beat a little slower when they saw it bobbing in the water.

"Get in! Get *in!*" Vim cried, his voice still shallow with fear.

Hubert quickly got into the unsteady boat—pulled Anki in.

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Vim hurriedly unwrapped the line that held the boat to a post, quickly hopped in, pushed off from the bank with his foot, sat down on the wooden seat at the rear of the boat.

Hubert grabbed an oar, began frantically rowing.

The boat was only a few yards from shore when they saw a huge, snarling, grayish-brown *mastiff* on the bank where their boat had been only moments before—its body muscles tense, mouth dripping saliva, ugly nose wrinkled, long, sharp fangs gleaming—lashing out at the air in the glowing mist—snapping, *wanting to get at them!*

Suddenly—it leaped from the bank, hit the water; began swimming toward their little boat.

Teefi courageously yapped at it.

"Get *away*—you *bastard!*" Anki yelled at the mastiff.

In his excitement to get the boat away from the bank, Hubert was rowing as fast as he could, but in his excitement to get away from shore didn't realize he was only rowing on *one* side of the boat. That caused the boat to turn back toward the mastiff. Realizing what he was doing wrong, Hubert quickly switched sides, began rowing on the opposite side—*too late!* The snarling mastiff sunk its teeth into the boat's wooden stern; tried to pull itself into the boat with its front paws.

Vim grabbed an oar; brought it crashing down on the mastiff's head. The mastiff yelped, disappeared under the water. "Take *that* you devil!" he yelled.

"*Yes—!*" Anki echoed, delightedly. "Take *that* you *bastard!*"

Hubert, visibly shaken, managed to redirect the boat with his oar, quickly putting distance between them and the shore.

Soon he and Vim were rowing in unison, making good headway toward the cutter.

SOME SIXTEENTH CENTURY ROMANCES

When they reached about halfway between the shore and their cutter, which lay at anchor ahead of them in the Ijsselmeer, they saw that the rest of the Inquisition procession had reached the dirt bank from where the mastiff had jumped. The dotted line of procession torches made an eerie, sinister glow in the thin, evening fog.

By the torchlight of the Inquisition torches, Vim could make out a man in a dark cloak carrying a long pole standard with a large cross atop.

Then, the three heard the solid *thud* of a flaming *arrow* as it struck the back of their boat. More fiery arrows came flying at them—*hissed* as they fell short into the water.

Vim filled his beret with water—quickly put out the little fire on the back of the boat then he and Hubert put their backs into their rowing, soon reached their fishing cutter.

Vim heaved the small boat's anchor line onto the cutter's deck.

The three scrambled up the rope ladder that hung down the cutter's side, pulled the boat up after them; quickly secured it against the gunwale.

"We *made* it!" Vim cried.

"Yes—!" Anki cried, trying to give Vim a hug, wanting to share his elation.

He responded by roughly removing her arms from his neck.

She felt hurt. "You have no *feelings*!" she cried.

He ignored her.

From the deck, they saw the torches of the procession hurriedly making their way back up Warmoesstraat.

"What do you think they'll do *now*?" Anki cried.

"I think they'll try to send a *boat* after us—but they'll have to pass it through the *locks*, then ready a *ship* to chase us with. By then—we'll be long *gone*!" Vim cried, exaltedly.

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"Sure this tub will *float*?" Anki asked, letting Teefi down onto the deck to run around.

"It'll float! We've had her out on the sea many times! She's a strong cutter—and fast!" Hubert said.

"Let's get to work!" Vim cried.

He and Hubert unfurled the mainsail.

A seabird screeched above as they pulled up anchor, worked sail lines; ran out the mainsail to near the end of its spar.

Finally, their concerns about the Inquisition catching them diminished as they heard the snap of the mainsail's canvas as it filled with the gentle breeze blowing from the south.

"The Inquisitioners will be hard pressed to catch us *now*," Vim cried, taking hold of the tiller.

"I hope you're *right*," Hubert replied, adjusting sail lines.

Overhead, the clouds began to disperse, gradually revealing a large piece of deep-black sky, crystal-clear stars; a bright, full moon.

As they sailed away from Amstelledamme, they felt heartsick, frequently looking back at the city they'd all grown up in, saw Amstelledamme's lights appear smaller and smaller as the wind driving the three sails pushed the cutter faster and faster on its way out toward open ocean. Wondered if they'd ever return.

Teefi whined. Anki, tears in her eyes, picked her up, glanced at Vim, hoping for a little recognition, sensed he still didn't like the idea of her coming along. Sure enough, she saw his face was like an unfeeling rock staring out at the vast expanse of water.

SOME SIXTEENTH CENTURY ROMANCES

There was no sign of an Inquisition ship following as they sailed through the string of Frisian Islands then on out into the North Sea.

Vim and Hubert knew the triangular lateen sails of their cutter were not designed for long voyages across wide oceans. Square-rigged sails were designed for that, like an Inquisition ship would have if the Inquisitioners should send one after them. Such a ship would be faster than their cutter and could eventually catch up with it.

Even so, they devised a plan for the voyage ahead: to cross part of the North Sea, sail on through the English Channel staying clear of Spain where they knew the Spanish Inquisition was thriving and where they might get boarded by an Inquisition ship, sail across the Atlantic Ocean in a smooth south-westerly arch, which would allow them to catch the trade winds, then bypass the Canary Islands, sail on to the *New World* along a route similar to that taken by Christopher Columbus in 1502.

The perils of the sea lay ahead of them, but they eventually realized that if they ever returned to their beloved Holland, all their fates would clearly be sealed—*torture*—then *death*, as they'd slowly be burned at the stake. They had only one place to go—forward onto the expanse of the treacherous ocean.

We'll take our chances on the high seas. If perilous waters claim our lives, God, not obsessed Inquisitioners will be what will kill us, Vim thought.

"Well Anki, do you want to sleep below—or up here on deck?" Hubert asked.

"Up here, of course. Teefi and I don't want to miss a damned *thing!*" she said spontaneously.

"Hungry?" Hubert asked.

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In her spunky way, Anki replied, "No, but I'd really like a good tobacco *pipe* and cup of *gin*!"

Hubert smiled, went below, brought up sleeping mats, blankets, pillows, clay pipes, pewter cups, and a bottle of gin then went back to working sail lines.

Anki laid out her sleeping mat, blanket and feather-filled pillow on deck, filled three clay pipes with tobacco, lit them, filled three cups with gin, distributed the lot.

"Thanks!" Hubert said. "You're good to have on board—even if you *do* swear like a ship's carpenter!"

"The *hell* you say," Anki retorted, picking up Teefi.

"The hell I *do* say," Hubert replied, uncharacteristically.

Anki plopped down straddle-legged on the mat, shuddered from the cold, pulled the heavy blanket around her and Teefi, began to feel much better as she sipped her gin, smoked her pipe, watched the beautiful ocean waves rise and fall in the moonlight, keeping an eye out for an Inquisition ship.

As Vim worked the tiller, he, too, wondered if the Inquisitioners would go to the trouble to take a ship and follow them. *They probably will. They'll feel obligated to revenge the henchmen we killed.*

Then, as he looked out over the ocean, he realized he had a more *immediate* problem—ominous black *clouds* with flashes of *lightening* spitting through them lay dead ahead of the cutter!

SOME SIXTEENTH CENTURY ROMANCES

THE RUSSIAN

Chapter 2

Aleksandr Bradachev was technically related to the boyars—the clans of the warrior caste—the Czar's worst enemies...

IN THE SUMMER of 1555, Ivan IV Vasilyevich, the Grand Prince of Muscovy, also known as Ivan the Terrible, was twenty-five years old. He'd been officially crowned when he was seventeen. He was the first Czar of Russia, which was the equivalent of the Roman imperial title of Caesar, and had already earned the reputation of being one of Russia's most brutal and notorious rulers.

Before Ivan was born, a prophet had told his father, Grand Prince Vasily III of Muscovy, that Ivan would be an evil ruler and that he'd make rivers of blood flow in Russia.

When he was young, Ivan had exhibited his sadism. He'd torn the feathers from birds he'd caught, put out their eyes and sliced open their stomachs with a knife so he could watch the stages by which they died. From the ramparts of the Kremlin fortress he'd whirled young dogs down to the courtyard to break their bones, enjoy their yelps of pain.

As he grew older, he became convinced that God was on the side of the poisoner, the strangler, and the swordsman. And, he believed that, as

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Czar, when he killed or exiled someone or got drunk or pushed peasant girls down into the straw, that it was *God* doing those things, through *him*.

After he'd had two men decapitated in public, because his paranoia had convinced him they were out to kill him, he became convinced he could dispense justice as he saw fit and that God sanctified his power. When he rode through a crowd if anyone looked up at him he ordered their *head* be immediately cut off in front of all those present.

Anyone he suspected was against him—and there were thousands—he had beheaded, tortured or exiled.

One of his favorite tortures was to have the victim's clothes removed, have them tied hand and foot on the floor, their feet slowly roasting over a fire. While they screamed in terror, he would slice off select pieces of their extremities and then either slowly cut the victim into pieces or order it done while he watched.

In 1555, in the city of Moscow, which was his capital, the increasing population had exceeded forty thousand.

The fortress of the Kremlin stood like a sentinel protecting the city. Italian architects had designed much of it, including the onion-shaped, gilded cupolas of the cathedrals that spiraled toward the sky.

The *Cathedral of the Intersession of the Virgin*—later known as *Saint Basil's Cathedral*—was under construction. Scaffolds encircled it like spider webs. It was being built to celebrate *Ivan the Terrible's* military conquests.

Moscow was a lively city of wooden buildings surrounding the revered Kremlin. Lush gardens grew along its broad, dirt streets. There were mansions next to hovels. There were bathhouses next to chapels. Every person in the city went to a bathhouse once a week to steam and get clean.

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Within the great square of the Kremlin, there was always at least one colorful fair in progress. Minstrels and tumblers attracted those of idle curiosity and they in turn attracted pickpockets. There were songs, laughter and fistfights. There were beggars, drunkards and horse manure lying side-by-side in the streets.

For the aristocracy, there were magnificent garments made of gold cloth studded with precious stones. Black fox furs set off fine silk garments and gowns, also for the ladies there were leather boots sewn with pearls.

Both men and women tended to be on the husky side.

They seasoned their food with garlic, onion and hempseed oil. The nobility ate roasts, chickens cooked in lemon, cabbage soup, meat pies with rice and fish or eggs, cream, gruel, candy made from ginger and honey, sturgeon, pike, salmon, fish fritters, caviar, and drank cranberry juice, copious amounts of vodka, mead and Hungarian wine.

Aleksandr Bradachev was technically related to the boyars—the clans of the warrior caste—the Czar's worst enemies.

Like mostly everyone else, Aleksandr had taken a steam bath every week, and in the winter had then run outside and rolled naked in the snow in front of passersby. That was the established custom. No one paid attention to public nudity.

He'd been born into an aristocratic family. His parents were rich. He lived with them in a mansion alongside a chapel. He'd eaten only the finest food and drunk only the best of wines all his life. His mother dressed in black-fox-fur-trimmed silk gowns with pearl-studded leather shoes.

Until recently, they'd been invited to balls and parties the rich boyars put on. The Czar had suddenly taken a more than usual dislike to the boyars and had of late subjected many of them to various tortures and de-

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capitations, which slowed down their partying. In spite of the danger, the Bradachevs continued to socialize with the boyars.

Aleksandr had been playing kickball with some friends and had just returned home. As his friends lived on the west side of the city, he'd entered his parents' mansion by the back way, the west entrance off an alley where garbage was readied to be picked up.

He planned to change clothes and get ready for his twenty-ninth birthday party—which he was not supposed to know about.

He slipped into the kitchen quarters and closed the door.

Katrina, the resilient Russian lady in charge of the kitchen and his friend from birth, met him.

She put her finger to her lips to warn him to be quiet then whispered a word in his ear in Russian that meant '*Wait.*' She grabbed a towel and forcefully pressed it to his mouth. "You're not going to like what I'm going to tell you. You'll want to *scream*. Do you *understand* me?"

He nodded that he did.

"The Czar has had your parents' heads cut off!"

She felt the powerful convulsions of his muscles as he screamed silently into the towel. Tears flowed.

She put her lips to his ear. "Your parents are lying in the street out front. The Czar's men are out there waiting for you to come home. I have travel bags packed for us. We're leaving now. We have to *hurry!* Do you understand? Can I take the towel away?"

He nodded. She tossed the towel on the floor. They each grabbed a bag—quietly left by way of the alley.

After they were well away from the mansion, they felt safe to talk.

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He tried to recover from the numbness the traumatic experience had caused. "Where are we going?" he managed to ask.

"Vladimir has a team and cart waiting for us outside of the gates!" She handed him some garments from his bag. "Put these old clothes on over your nice clothes. We'll dress as *beggars*. No one will even want to *touch* us—much less *talk* to us."

Her prediction turned out to be accurate. They walked right through the massive gates without being questioned.

After they'd walked for half an hour, Katrina led them into woods.

Vladimir was waiting with a team of two black horses hitched to a cart.

Katrina knew Aleksandr was not used to riding in a cart. "A carriage might have caused suspicion," she explained.

They tossed the bags onto the back, climbed up, sat on the driver's board beside Vladimir.

Aleksandr gained some composure. "What happened?"

Katrina began to explain. "You know how the Czar is. In his madness, he thought some boyars were plotting to kill him. His men found the boyars at a party. Your parents were there, too. His men decapitated all the boyars right there at the party. They brought your parents—" her voice faded, then returned. "The only good thing is that the Czar was out somewhere expanding his empire. If he'd been in the city—he'd have hunted you down—personally."

"When they decide I'm not coming home, they'll send men out *searching* for me!" Aleksandr said, felt another serge of anguish, put his hands over his face.

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Vladimir clicked his tongue. The horses jerked the cart forward. The cartwheels rumbled down the dirt road between the lines of tall Poplar trees.

When they'd been traveling more than an hour, Katrina saw that Aleksandr had recovered somewhat. "Vladimir is going to leave me in Tver' with my sister. We'll all stay there tonight, tomorrow he'll take you to the great trading seaport on the Baltic Sea."

The great trading seaport would later be known as St. Petersburg, Russia.

She looked directly into Aleksandr's eyes. "I took the liberty of gathering up all the jewels and gold coins I could find. They're in your bag. You'll need them for your travels."

"You've both saved my life!" Aleksandr said, climbed into the back of the rumbling cart and opened his bag. "You did *well*, Katrina—there's enough money and jewels here to keep us all rich the rest of our lives!" He transferred half of the coins and jewels to her bag, got back on the board beside her, glanced back at the road behind them from time to time to see if anyone was following them.

As the horses jogged along, the afternoon turned to evening. Then, as they topped a hill, they saw the town of Tver' ahead, strung along the edge of the Volga River.

They eventually reached her sister's house.

Katrina and her sister prepared a hearty dinner to celebrate their successful escape: chicken, cabbage soup, salt pork, black bread and butter. They topped the tasty supper off with two bottles of vodka, found places to sleep; slept very well.

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The next morning they had buckwheat cakes with maple syrup, coffee, fried eggs and small slices of home-cured ham.

As Vladimir was feeding and watering the horses, suddenly he heard the sound of galloping horses behind him. He turned.

A contingent of Russian soldiers on horseback brought their horses to a clamorous halt in front of him.

"Do you own this farm?" one of them asked.

Vladimir was shaken by the presence of the soldiers, tried not to show it, hoped Aleksandr would not come out of the house. "Yes," Vladimir lied, thinking they might ask what he was doing there if he said he was from Moscow.

"We're from the Russian frontlines. We've been riding all night on our way to Moscow. Our horses need water. Do you mind if we water them?"

"Of course I don't mind. It would do me honor if you would water your horses from my trough."

The soldiers dismounted, began watering their horses.

Katrina had been watching Vladimir through the kitchen window, saw the soldiers arrive. She warned Aleksandr. She quickly packed up what food was left over from breakfast and hurried out to the soldiers with it, so they hopefully wouldn't have an excuse to come into the house.

"You all must be hungry," Katrina cried, handing the soldiers the food.

"That's very kind of you," the soldier who'd spoken to Vladimir said.

"Did you come from Moscow?" she asked.

"From the frontlines. We're on our way to Moscow for supplies—and we must be on our way. Thanks again," the soldier said.

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The soldiers mounted, waved and rode away.

Katrina sighed a sigh of relief. "I thought they had come for Aleksandr!"

"I did, too!" Vladimir said.

Vladimir fed and watered his horses, hooked up the team.

They all said their goodbyes and he and Aleksandr climbed aboard the cart, started the long journey toward the ocean.

The rough road jostled the cart about.

"Where shall I go?" Aleksandr asked.

Vladimir's voice was deep. "Well—it's for sure—you can't stay in Russia. Have you heard about the New World?"

"No!"

Vladimir filled his cheek with tobacco. "About fifty years ago, an explorer born in Italy, by the name of Columbus, sailed southwest from Spain and found a New World. I understand that people from many lands are going there to start a fresh life, just a thought."

As the horses pulled the cart along, Vladimir occasionally spit tobacco alongside the road.

Aleksandr glanced at him. "What will *you* do?" he asked, as a flock of crows flew across the road ahead of the horses, disappeared into some trees.

"We'll live in Tver', spend money a little at a time so as not to arouse suspicion. Eventually, things will change in Russia. Ivan the Terrible will not live forever."

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After twelve more days of bumping along dirt roads, they finally reached the great trader seaport on the Baltic Sea—and not any too soon. It had begun to pour down rain. They found shelter in a shed, waited it out until morning.

When the rain stopped, they took off their beggar's clothing.

Aleksandr removed a crimson cape from his bag, wrapped it about his wide, golden-colored collar that rose up his neck from his shoulders, tied the cape in front.

His dark blue tunic-like shirt matched his loose-fitting trousers that disappeared down into his tall boots.

Except for his stylish beard, his skin was smooth. His hands were slender as a result of having been raised among aristocracy.

Vladimir's on the other hand were covered with wrinkles. His black clothes were of coarse material, his boots were made of a sturdier leather.

They walked together a ways down a little hill then stood on a cliff overlooking the water.

Aleksandr thought what he saw must be the most beautiful sight in the world. The morning sun was radiating pink and green light, coloring soft, puffy clouds that lay along the horizon.

Large and small ships resting at anchor cast dark shadows upon the calm bay.

Breakfast candles still twinkled, lit up house windows. The air was cool and a little damp, but refreshing.

They walked on down to the piers, looked the ships over that were taking on cargo.

Aleksandr became interested in a large two-master, pointed at the ship. "How about *that* one?"

"No—it's not large enough—and—it's Portuguese."

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Aleksandr looked at him. "What's wrong with Portuguese?"

"Nothing—but, do you speak Portuguese?"

"No."

"Do you remember your French?"

"Yes. Yes—I see what you mean."

"Now—take that three-master taking on cargo at the end—that's a *French* ship. She has rectangular and fore-and-aft sails. That means she's going on a long voyage. The name on her side is *Cloche de France*. What does that mean in French?"

"It means, 'Bell of France'. Let's find out where she's going."

They walked down to the ship. Aleksandr found an officer on board. The officer explained that the ship was bound for Le Havre, France. From Le Havre, the officer said he didn't know where the ship would be going.

Aleksandr paid for passage, turned to Vladimir, shook his hand. "Take good care of our Katrina. She's a wonderful lady."

Vladimir sadly watched as Aleksandr went aboard the ship, hoped he would be alright, then slowly turned away and began his own long, lonely journey back to Tver'.

The ship he'd chosen, the *Cloche de France*, sailed the next day.

Aleksandr leaned against its gunwale and watched seabirds effortlessly gliding from side to side as they followed the ship. His thoughts momentarily returned to his parents' horror, then back to his present situation. *Whatever lies ahead—at least—I'm out of Russia—away from Ivan the Terrible.*

After stopping at many trading ports, *Cloche de France* eventually arrived in Le Havre, moored at a pier.

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Aleksandr made inquiries of several deckhands and learned that the *Cloche de France* was going on to the *New World*.

He paid for his passage in gold and remained on board.

THE DUTCH ON THE HIGH SEAS

Chapter 3

In spite of all their efforts, it was apparent the Inquisition ship was gaining on them...

VIM, HUBERT AND Anki had sailed through rough weather for two weeks without having seen any sign of an Inquisition ship.

One morning Anki cried, "Look—a *sail!*"

Vim and Hubert looked in the direction she was pointing.

"Yes, a sail all right!" Vim cried, ran below, returned with one of the earliest spyglasses ever made. It'd been given to him by an old, Dutch spectacle-maker, in exchange for a diamond. Vim put it to his eye, pointed it toward the sail. The view through it was not very clear, but he could make out the insignias on the flags flapping in the wind on the tallest mast. "*Dutch*—yes—and another flag with a *cross* on it like the *Inquisition* cross..." He hesitated, remembering he'd killed the intruder with a cross like that on his chest. "They're *coming* for us! We need all our *sails* to the *wind!* We'll try to *outrun* them!"

Anki quickly put Teefi below deck then did all the minor sailor chores she knew how, un-kinking ropes and the like.

SOME SIXTEENTH CENTURY ROMANCES

Vim and Hubert put their backs into their work, ran up sails to their best advantage for gathering wind.

In spite of all their efforts, it was apparent the *Inquisition* ship was *gaining* on them.

That's when Vim noticed the *vortex*. He studied it carefully.

It was a good way off, closing fast.

Anki saw his concern, looked out over the ocean until she saw it, too. "What *is* it?" she asked.

Hubert had seen it, also. "A *cyclone*!" he said.

"Will it hurt us?" Anki asked.

"If it hits us *directly* on—it'll *sink* us," Vim said, his eyes squinting with concern.

"Well then, the damned thing better stay *away*!" Anki cried.

But it didn't. Soon the high winds from the outer regions of the cyclone began whipping the cutter's sails. Huge waves began to wash over the stern.

Through the turmoil they could see nothing of the *Inquisition* ship, only a gigantic column of furiously spinning water, then not even that as sheets of *rain* began pouring down.

By then they'd sailed far south into mild weather. The rain was not cold, not warm; just tolerable to their naked skin.

Anki had taken off all her soaked clothing and was running naked from puddle to puddle, jumping up and down in them.

Teefi had somehow climbed the ladder, gotten out of the hold and was dashing about, yapping, soaked to the skin. Anki ran to her, snatched her up in her arms.

"You crazy *girl*," Vim yelled. "You'll be washed *overboard*! Stop running *around*—grab hold of the *mast* and hang *on*!"

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"I don't know *how!*" she cried.

The wind was howling as Vim made his way to her through the lashing rain, took her by the arm. "What's to *know?*" he cried, bringing her to the mast.

He couldn't help noticing her delightful nakedness as he tied her to the mast with a line. She saw him glance at her body.

She loved his wet, honey-brown hair as it clung in disarray against his head, enjoyed seeing the water cascading down his white chest, wished he'd take her in his arms right there and then! *I'll get him to fall in love with me one way or the other*, she thought.

"Now, stay *put!*" he yelled against the crying wind, then fought his way through the storm back to the tiller, helped Hubert try to steady the cutter.

The sturdy cutter heaved and creaked with the violent force of the savage winds, but held together.

As luck would have it the cyclone didn't hit them directly. It veered north instead.

The fierce winds eventually died down. The rain finally stopped. The sky cleared, except for a few gray clouds here and there. The sea became almost calm and they were able to see across miles of ocean in every direction.

"Notice anything *different?*" Hubert asked.

"What?" Vim replied.

"The *Inquisition* ship! It's *gone!*" Anki cheered, still tied to the mast. "The cyclone sunk that goddamned *Inquisition* ship! *Yes—!*"

"God works in mysterious ways," Hubert declared.

"*You'd* better untie Anki," Vim said.

"Why?" Hubert asked.

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"Don't tell her, but I think I'm starting to *like* her," Vim whispered.

Hubert was not happy with that news as he'd loved Anki for a very long time and hoped to marry her someday. "*You* untie her—you tied her to the mast," Hubert insisted.

"Go on—it's *your* turn," Vim argued.

"She's *naked!*"

"I'm well *aware* of that. She isn't going to get any *less* naked until she gets some *clothes* on," Vim said.

"I'm going to catch my death if you two *heroes* don't get your *acts* together—*soon*," Anki cried loudly, still clutching Teefi and the mast.

Hubert sheepishly went to her.

"Don't *worry*, I'll hold Teefi in *front* of me so you won't see anything *important!*" Anki cried.

He tried not to look, but *he had to see what his hands were doing as he untied the knots, didn't he? He had to touch her bare skin to untie her, yes?*

She recoiled each time he touched her, wishing it were Vim touching her.

Hubert blushed deep red, but enjoyed touching her. "Now kindly get something *on!*" he said, actually wishing she wouldn't.

She did, but not much, just a cotton sun suit with little yellow sunflowers on it.

The following day, according to their compass, charts and crude maps, they were about 500 miles directly north of the Azores.

Great, rolling, always dangerous swells on the deep-blue ocean loomed before them.

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Vim and Hubert knew that if the cutter should get sideways to the waves, it would surely capsize.

They occasionally saw a seabird intensely searching the water for its next fish dinner, saw the morning sun breaking into a glorious golden sunrise.

They felt the warm, gentle trade winds from the northeast that kept the cutter's white sails billowing against the light-blue sky. A few white, puffy clouds lay along the northern horizon.

They'd developed a routine: Vim took the tiller for four hours while Hubert slept then they worked, cooked, ate and talked for a couple of hours. Then, Hubert took the tiller while Vim slept four hours and so forth.

They knew that if one of them were to fall asleep while at the tiller, the cutter would turn sideways to the waves—and capsize.

On the 4th of May 1555, it was warm enough to enjoy sleeping on deck, so they all had their sleeping mats laid out on the foredeck.

It was five-thirty in the morning. Dawn was cracking.

Hubert was at the tiller.

Vim was standing with his hands on the rail, looking out over a great expanse of the Atlantic Ocean. The curvature of the earth permitted him to see eighteen miles in any direction.

Then, he saw it. "*Look!*" he yelled, pointing toward the sea.

Hubert and Anki looked, didn't immediately see what he was pointing at.

Then Anki saw it, too. "*Yes! Look—!*" she cried, pointing.

They saw a huge, rough, dark-gray, rock-like protrusion break up out of the water, not a hundred yards from the cutter. As it continued to

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serge upward, they saw spray fly from its two giant, rugged-shaped flippers and from a hole in its top.

"If it bumps us—it'll *sink* us!" Anki cried.

Its enormous body, which was much larger than the cutter, rose majestically above the waves. Then, rolling to its left, it raised its gigantic tail above its head and dove straight down toward the deep. Its tailfins gradually disappeared. It was a humpback whale.

During their lives, the brothers had seen many large fish, even sharks, but never a whale.

Anki had never been on the ocean before.

Hubert caught his breath. "What *was* that? It was magnificent!"

"I think it's called a *walvis*," Vim explained, which in Dutch meant, '*whale*'. "I've heard fishermen tell stories about them."

Hubert's dark blue eyes narrowed against the slight breeze as he looked out to sea. "It's even longer than the *cutter*!"

"Look over *there*!" Anki cried, pointing.

To the west, they saw four of the behemoth whales breach, blow geysers of water into the air, then gradually submerge, then, one at a time, disappear beneath the sea.

"They're *splendid*!" Anki cried.

"*Ja*," Hubert agreed, meaning '*Yes*'.

"Let's have a *smoke* on it!" Anki cried.

She went to a wooden box near her sleeping mat where she kept odds and ends, got out their three long-stemmed clay pipes, cleaned the bowls with a pocketknife, got tobacco from the tobacco box, tamped it into each bowl with her forefinger. She knew correct tamping of the tobacco was important. Tamped too firmly and the smoke would not draw freely.

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Tamped too lightly and too much smoke would be sucked through, making it tongue-burning hot.

Then she went below, lit a taper from the coal that was slowly burning in the little stove, lit the three pipes with it. "Ah, that smells good!" she cried as pipe smoke filled the galley.

She found three copper cups, poured each half full of Dutch gin. Holding the pipe stems in her teeth, a finger through the cup handles, she grabbed some scraps for Teefi with her free hand, climbed the stairs back up to the rolling deck, handed Vim and Hubert each a pipe and cup of gin.

"*Danken je wel*, Anki," Hubert said, meaning '*Thank you*'.

"*Ja!*" Anki replied, sitting down on her mat.

They smoked their pipes, sipped the berry-flavored gin and enjoyed the smell of fresh ocean air mixed with the aroma of swirling tobacco smoke.

"Well, if nobody is going to talk to *me*, I'll talk to *myself*," Anki declared. "Self says I, what the hell are you *doing* out here on this *ocean* with these two guys when you could be *roasting* over an open Inquisition fire in Amstelledamme?" she quipped, tossing Teefi some scraps.

Hubert leaned against the tiller. "This sea air gives me an appetite," he said, finally. "Vim, while you're free, suppose you can find some bread and dried cod for us to snack on?"

"How would you like to have baked *fresh cod*?" Vim suggested.

"*Yes—!*" Anki cried, "*Fresh cod*, but *how*?"

"That would be more than a man could ask," Hubert agreed.

"These are cod waters, but we need to reef some sail to slow the cutter down so the fish line will drop way down—maybe six-hundred feet or more," Vim said, taking a sip of gin.

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"Then you best be *about* it. Careful, don't fall overboard," Hubert said amiably.

Vim reefed about a third of the mainsail, got fishing equipment and some dried herring from below.

Anki and Teefi followed as he went to the stern, rigged a deep-sea fishing pole and reel that'd been specially made by a Dutch metal smith in Amstelledamme. The reel carried about two thousand feet of line.

Anki watched closely as he tied a large hook to the end of the line, baited it with a good-sized hunk of herring, put some heavy sinkers on to weight the line down, tossed the baited hook over the stern.

It quickly disappeared under water. Only a stretch of tense line could be seen as the movement of the cutter pulled the bait along under the water.

Vim let more and more line run out from the reel. When he thought he'd let out a thousand feet, he pressed his thumb against the remaining line on the reel, rested the pole against the rail and waited.

"Well," Hubert joked. "I can taste baked cod. Have you had a *bite*?"

Just as Vim was about to say no, he felt something take the bait, jerked the pole hard to set the hook. The battle began. He could feel a very heavy fish on the line. He quickly took the pipe out of his mouth, handed it to Anki. "Lock the tiller and get the *gaff*!" he cried to Hubert, a thrill in his voice. "And my *fish* knife!"

"I can get them!" Anki volunteered, excitedly.

"You don't know where they *are*," Vim retorted.

"Come steady the tiller, Anki," Hubert said. "I'll get them!"

Hubert turned the tiller over to her, hurried below, quickly returned with the gaff and a leather scabbard containing Vim's sharp fish knife.

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The fish ran with powerful surges, then as Vim reeled in line, the fish ran out with it again and again.

After half an hour, it was tiring and as they watched the water's surface, it surfaced about a hundred feet from the cutter. The fish leaped almost completely out of water.

When Vim saw its head and three dorsal fins, he knew it was a *cod*. "Did I say there were *cod* in these waters?" he chimed.

Anki jumped up and down excitedly by the tiller, not able to see what was happening over the rail. "I want to see, too!"

"Indeed you did say so," Hubert said, answering Vim's question.

"I want to *see*!" Anki cried again.

Vim coaxed the cod to near the stern. Hubert gaffed it behind the gills. It took both of them to hoist the heavy fish on deck.

"Oh, my *God*!" Anki cried, when she saw its huge bulk come over the rail.

Teefi ran around the fish, barking.

Vim spread his hands wide. "Look at the *size* of that fish!"

The cod was over four-feet long.

Hubert examined it. "It'll make a few fine meals."

"Too bad it's so *big*," Vim said.

Hubert gave him a sidelong glance. "Why's that bad?"

"Because, it won't fit into the oven, whole. I can't bake it in the usual way. I'll have to fillet it and cook the fillets. It's so big we'll be able to smoke and dry some for later." Vim took off his shirt so he wouldn't get anything on it, then began filleting the fish with his fish knife.

At the sight of Vim's bare muscular skin, Anki felt something for him she'd never experienced before, an exciting, intoxicating, sensual feeling deep within her.

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Vim had no way of knowing he'd never have a reason to wear a shirt again the rest of his life.

Hubert un-reefed the mainsail, took over the tiller from Anki, sipped some of his gin, sucked on his pipe, which had not had time to go out.

Anki helped Vim skin and fillet the huge cod.

"Where did you learn to fillet fish?" Vim asked.

Anki was very happy he'd spoken to her, but didn't answer him right away, eventually said, "I worked in the fish market one summer."

He looked up from his work. "How does Cod *Dutch-Florentine* sound?"

"Yes—," she said enthusiastically, looking into his eyes.

He tossed the remains of the fish overboard then crouched down, washed the fillets, his hands and the knife in a wooden bucket of clean water.

Hubert looked down at him, then made a slight adjustment to the position of the cutter's tiller. "Sometimes I wonder if it was *languages* you studied when you went to Paris. Not that I'm complaining about your excellent *cooking*, understand."

Vim stood up. "I'll have to admit—after tasting the wonderful cuisines of Paris—I did take a couple of courses in culinary arts. I never said anything about that to mother and father. In Holland, cooking was always woman's work." He took a draw on his pipe, which had gone out. *I'll light it again when I go below deck*, he decided.

Hubert held up his copper cup. "Here's to *freedom*—wherever it may be!"

Vim located his cup, raised it. "I'll drink to that—to *freedom*!"

Anki found hers. "Teefi and I will drink to that, too—to *freedom*!" she cried, downing what was left in her cup.

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Vim knelt down on the deck.

Hubert locked the tiller, took off his shirt.

He and Anki joined Vim in prayer.

When they finally got to their feet, Vim spoke first. "I'll take these fillets below and see what I can make out of them."

"I'll *help* you!" Anki cried, excitedly.

"I suppose you know how to *cook* fillets, too, along with your other talents," Vim said coolly.

"I didn't get any *complaints* when I cooked for you and Hubert before," Anki responded.

"Well, come along," Vim said.

Hubert handed her his cup. "Take my cup with you and bring me another bit of gin—if you will—no hurry—when you come back up," he said, winking at her.

Vim and Anki took the fillets below then Anki took Hubert a cup of gin, went back below deck.

Vim went on deck a couple of times, retrieving fishing equipment then stayed below.

Vim stoked the stove, added some coal. He located a copper pot, put some fresh water in it.

"Here, make yourself *useful*. Peel and slice two potatoes, and add them to this pot."

She did. She loved helping him.

He set the pot on the stove to boil.

He'd just found a skillet and had barely cut up one of the fresh cod fillets when a large yellow *cat* jumped up on the table and began hungrily *eating* a piece of fillet.

The cat startled them both.

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"Now—where in the name of God did *you* come from?" Vim yelled.

Hearing Vim say something below, Hubert yelled back, "Is everything *okay* down there?"

"*Ja*—just a stowaway *cat*!" Vim yelled up the hatchway.

"A *what*?"

"A damn splendid *cat*!" Anki yelled up to Hubert.

Vim took a stick, and despite the dramatic protests of the cat, scooped the piece of fish it was eating onto the floor of the galley. The cat jumped down from the table, continued to hungrily devour it.

"There," Vim said to the cat, as he finished cutting up the fillets and putting them in the pan. "You stay on the *floor*!"

Anki reached down, tried to pet the cat. It would have none of it. It growled as if protecting its food, went on eating.

Vim added enough fresh drinking water to cover the fillets, added salt, dried parsley and a bay leaf, smelled the delightful steam rising from the pan as he poached the fillets for several minutes, carefully removed them from the skillet, slid them onto three copper trays, which he'd left to warm on the back of the stove.

He kept some of the cod aside for the cat.

Anki tossed the cat a piece.

Vim looked at the cat. "He looks healthy...actually a fine looking cat," he said. "It must be terrible to be hungry. I can't say I ever have been," he said as he boiled the juices that remained in the skillet until they were reduced by half.

Anki liked the new smells that filled the galley. "Smells great!"

She watched carefully as he put a little fresh water in each of two copper pots, heated them until the water was boiling.

"Be careful of the boiling water. It could scald you," he cautioned.

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"Quit treating me like a little girl. I'm a grown woman. I know how to boil *water!*"

"You are definitely a *grown* woman."

"Well, I'm glad you *noticed!*"

Into the first copper pot, he dropped several handfuls of dried spinach, put four peeled carrots into the second. When the spinach was cooked to his satisfaction he drained off the water, sprinkled the spinach with nutmeg, put half of the spinach on each tray with the cod fillets to keep everything warm.

"You're still *hungry*," Anki said, giving the cat another piece of cod.

Then, in another copper pot, after he'd tasted a sample, he added slices of a Dutch cheese that had a flavor similar to Swiss *Gruyère*, sliced some milder Dutch cheese into the pot, added salt, ground pepper, flour, the juices from cooking the cod, stirred the mixture until the cheeses were melted. The result was a delightful sauce for the fish.

He drained and sliced the carrots, added some brown sugar, made carrots *julienne*.

They heard the waves slapping lightly against the bow as he drained the potato slices, added some sliced onion, a little bacon fat, flour, salt, pepper, many slices of sharp cheese, some bread crumbs and a little paprika, mixed all the ingredients together, poured the mixture into the empty skillet, popped it into the hot oven to bake for a few minutes.

He looked at the cat. "You really are *something*," he said.

On an impulse, he tossed a large piece of raw cod up through the hatchway, onto the deck. Then he tossed the cat up after it. "There—you need some fresh *air!*"

They heard Teefi begin barking crazily.

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"Why the hell did you *do* that? I was going to try to *pet* that cat!" Anki cried.

"That cat's half *wild*. It'll take time for it to be tamed."

"It'll take *longer* if nobody *starts*," Anki protested.

She watched him pour the sauce over the cod, remove the potatoes from the oven, add half of them to each tray.

"Get that copper pitcher over there," he said with a wave of his hand. "Fill it almost to the top with white wine from that keg," he said, pointing to a small keg.

She went about the task. "Done!" she said.

"Take the wine on deck and come back," he instructed.

When she returned they drank the rest of the gin in their cups then he handed her a very warm tray, some forks and spoons. He took the other two trays. "Dinner's *ready*!" he declared.

"*Yes—*," she cried enthusiastically. "I'm *hungry*!"

They took the steaming trays of food and the utensils up on deck.

Earlier in the voyage Hubert had secured a small table and two benches to the deck. During her earlier trip to the deck Anki had set the pitcher of wine in the middle of it.

Hubert locked the tiller, joined them.

Vim set a tray on the table in front of Hubert then sat down with his own tray.

Anki did likewise on the opposite side. "Nobody wants to sit with *me*, I see," she said, trying to catch Vim's eye.

Neither of the men answered.

Everyone felt the invigorating experience of eating dinner out on the open sea on the gently rolling deck.

"I see you have a *friend*," Hubert said, looking at the cat.

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Vim glanced at it. "He must have been eating mice and scraps down there all this time."

Then, as was their custom, the three said a silent prayer.

Anki poured wine into the cups.

Hubert took a bite of the cod then looked across the table at Vim.

"What do you *call* this cod dish?"

"I call it Cod *Dutch-Florentine*. I didn't have any *Italian* or *Swiss* cheeses to make it with like we had in Paris—so I substituted Dutch cheese. How does it taste?"

"Wonderful," Anki piped.

"It's superb!" Hubert agreed, sipping his wine, taking a bite of potatoes. "The cod is just superb! And the potatoes—what do you call them?"

Vim smiled. "Near-*Au Gratin*. I had to substitute sharp Dutch cheese for the sharp Cheddar—bacon grease for the butter."

"The potatoes are excellent," Hubert said then tasted the carrots.

"And the carrots? What do you call them?"

"Carrots *Julianne*."

Hubert took another bite. "They're splendid."

Vim took a sip of wine. "I think this sailor's life *agrees* with us."

"I *love* it!" Anki cried, sipping her wine.

"And you, Vim! I haven't seen you smile like you have been lately, for a very, very long time."

"I was thinking how funny Anki looked tied to the mast," Vim quipped.

"*Funny?*" Anki cried. "Wind and water slapping me in the face—all over my *body*, actually. *Not* very funny—and poor Teefi!"

Vim took another sip of his wine. "I love this life. We have good food, fine wine, beer, gin—and maybe a little apricot brandy down there

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somewhere—great, fresh ocean air—now—as the saying goes—all we need are *women* and *song*!"

They were all feeling the wine.

"What about *me*? Do I look like chopped *liver*?" Anki cried. "What don't *I* have that you *like* so much?"

"That's just the point. You have *everything*, but there's only *one* of you—*two* of us! We could *fight* to see who wins you, but it will be a long voyage—no fighting allowed. There must be *women* where we're *going*," Vim said.

She's felt a thrill slip up her spine when Vim had said she had *everything*!

Hubert picked up his cup. "Well then—to *freedom*!"

"I'll drink to that!" Anki said, sipping her wine.

"*Ja*. Freedom. Without freedom the good life is not possible," Vim agreed, raising his cup. "Here's to freedom—wine—*more* women—and *song*!"

Hubert clicked his cup against Vim's. "To freedom—wine—more women—and song!"

"Here's to freedom—wine—more *men*—and *music*!" Anki cried. "There will probably be *men* where we're going, *too*. Ever think of *that*?"

Vim and Hubert glanced at each other.

The three sat, chatted for a while; finished drinking the wine.

Hubert looked out over the ocean. "It's my turn to sleep and your turn to take the tiller," he said to Vim.

"Vim, let *me* take a turn at the tiller," Anki pleaded.

"You're not strong enough. If the sea suddenly gets rough, you won't be able to handle it," Vim argued.

"Oh, *shit*!" Anki cried.

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"Speaking of sleeping—look at our *cat*," Vim said.

"*Our* cat? You and Anki found him. But he's a very nice cat. Think it's a *tomcat*?"

"Yes—I think it's a tomcat—and look—he's curled up, asleep," Vim said.

Anki got off the bench, eased her way to the cat, reached down, felt him. "He's a *tomcat*, alright!"

"He must have finally gotten enough to *eat*," Hubert said, lying down on his sleeping mat.

"*Ja*," Vim agreed, taking the tiller.

"What do you think we should *call* the cat?" Hubert asked.

Anki thought a moment. "*Geel*."

"*Ja—Geel* is a good name for a yellow tomcat," Vim agreed.

Hubert drifted off to sleep, leaving Vim, Anki, Teefi and Geel alone.

As the golden half-moon rose, Anki began to have romantic thoughts. "It's a *beautiful* evening," she said.

"Yes."

"Do you think we'll really get to the New World?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, the cyclone made me think. If I never get to the new world and never find someone to *love*... If we should *wreck*, I mean, I'd die without becoming a *real* woman, wouldn't I?"

Vim took a draw on his empty pipe then took it out of his mouth, put it in his pocket, took her hand. "You are a *real* woman. Believe me, you really *are*."

"Do you like me, Vim...really *like* me, I mean?"

"I *really* like you...a lot," he said.

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"*Oh,*" she sighed. "I *love* you. *Kiss* me."

He did, for a long time.

BAJAMAR, ISLANDS IN THE SUN

Chapter 4

The slavers, using dogs, routed them out, until satisfied they'd enslaved every last Lucayan in the Bahamas...

THE BAHAMAS RAN for almost a thousand miles, roughly oriented along a northwest-southeast line parallel to and about two hundred miles east of Cuba. There were approximately 700 islands, rich in natural beauty, shoals and cliffs.

There were vast deepwater channels that ran through the coral beneath the turquoise-colored waves. Magnificent coral reefs. Tropical fish of every spot, stripe and color shimmering and darting along the bottom of the shallows, above shifting, white sand.

The Spanish had named the islands *Bajamar*, meaning '*Shallow Sea*'. They were indeed islands in a shallow sea, most only a few feet above sea level.

The deceptive coral, as beautiful as it was, could easily sink a ship with its rock-hard, sharp pinnacles that sometimes protruded to near the surface and at many locations, slightly above.

Every year, between July and October, hurricanes ripped through the area, sometimes made direct, devastating landfalls on the islands.

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In 1492, Christopher Columbus had sailed from Spain, first to the Canary Islands, then to the Bahamas. He was welcomed in the Bahamas by friendly natives who he called Lucayans—Island People.

The Lucayans had not developed the art of writing. Their customs were passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth.

The Lucayans believed that the Arawaks, who lived in Haiti, were their ancestors since they had the same language, customs and beliefs. They used the same kind of spears for weapons and the same kind of tools and constructed their canoes from a single log of mahogany as had the Arawaks.

The Lucayans made their huts of strong, slender timber, bound together by plant fibers, and palm fronds. The huts had conical roofs—no door at the entrance—and a hole in the center of the roof for ventilation. To withstand the sometimes hurricane-strength winds, the Lucayans secured the walls down into the ground with poles, and planted a massive tree trunk at the hut's center to strengthen the entire structure.

Their beautiful, strong little villages were constructed in a circle, with the hut of the *cacique*, which in Lucayan meant, 'headman'—built in the middle.

The Lucayans made and used highly-decorated wood bowls, hammocks, baskets and chairs.

They started their fires by rubbing two sticks together. In this way, they ignited hardwood and made hot hardwood coals, which they used for many things, from felling large trees to making intricate designs.

After they'd burned-in their designs, they used stone axes and adzes to remove most of the charred outer layer, then sharp-edged conch shells to scrape and finish the wood's surface.

On their farms, they tilled the soil, raised crops of cassava, gourds and tobacco.

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The men speared fish and dived for conches, the white meat of which was made into delicious dishes. They hunted the agouti and iguana, challenged the sea and visited distant islands in their canoes.

The Lucayans were a peaceful, gentle, cheerful people.

The Lucayan men wore nothing except body paint.

The Lucayan women were so beautiful and well proportioned that men came from other lands to find a Lucayan wife, and the women wore only a small loin patch made of cotton and leaves that hung from a string tied around their waists, or nothing at all. Like the men, they painted their healthy, golden-brown skins in designs of various colors. The paint not only supposedly warded off evil spirits, it also protected them from the sun.

Their foreheads were artificially broadened from birth from their mother's lightly pressing them with a board while they were infants, which gave them a fuller-faced appearance than would naturally have been the case. This procedure was due to the belief the slanted forehead would protect them from blows from an enemy's bludgeon.

They were a very relaxed people. They told stories, danced, sang and had feasts. They thought their supposed protectors, which they called *zemis* were good spirits that surrounded and protected them at all times. They also believed there was a Supreme Being up in the sky by day, up in the starry heavens by night, who provided them with all the good things in their lives.

Regardless of how protected the Lucayans thought they were, frequently a raiding party of disgustingly-ugly cannibals known as Caribs came up from the south, very quietly surrounded a Lucayan hut, and using bows and arrows, their bludgeons, and pieces of rope, took all of the terrified, screaming family back to Haiti where they mutilated and tortured the

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males—cooked and ate them—and the children. They used the females for breeding, then cooked and ate all the male children they produced.

Those very Lucayans—those kind, fun loving natives—were the first people Christopher Columbus encountered when he reached the Bahamas on the 12th of October 1492 with his three ships *Santa Maria*, *Nina* and *Pinta*. He thought he'd reached Japan or China.

The Lucayans, seeing the magnificent ships and splendid attire of Columbus and his soldiers, thought they were from heaven. The Lucayans brought the soldiers friendship, gifts and food, but Columbus and his men were not interested in those things, only in gold. Columbus did, however, think the mild, humble natives might make good servants, so he successfully shipped five of them alive back to Spain for examination. Someone in Spain decided they would make better *slaves* than servants.

From then on, by using force, terror, cutlasses and savage dogs, the Lucayans were herded into groups, transported to rocky islands where slave ships picked them up.

Many Lucayans, learning of the approach of the slavers, fled into thick forests, hid. The slavers, using dogs, routed them out, until they were satisfied they'd enslaved every last Lucayan in the Bahamas.

In 1517, after the slavers had run out of Lucayans to enslave and had gone elsewhere, a Catholic Dominican friar, bishop, missionary and historian by the name of Bartolomé de Las Casas came up with the humanitarian idea of searching all the islands in the Bahamas to search for any remaining Lucayans who may be hiding in forests or caves and take them all to the island of Hispaniola where they could live out the rest of their lives in peace with

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other island natives who had a similar way of life. To this end, he commissioned a ship and searched the islands for three years.

Out of the tens of thousands of Lucayans who'd been in the Bahamas when Columbus arrived, Las Casas found only eleven, which he took to Hispaniola. As far as any Spaniard knew, the Bahamas had been completely stripped clean of all humanity and left uninhabited, its tilled fields and pastures to be reclaimed by nature.

The outside world would find no real use again for these beautiful islands for another eighty-five years—until 1640, when the Bahamas would be discovered by some Bermudans.

Even after Las Casas' thorough search of some seven hundred islands—one island had *eluded* him. By a quirk of nature that island happened to be situated inside a group of islands and hidden from view from the sea. The group was located along the eastern-most edge of the Bahamas. That is why Las Casas had not happened upon that island and carefully searched it for Lucayans.

Access to it could only be obtained by way of a narrow, deep-water channel through a maze of dense mangrove trees that were intertwined and deeply rooted in the shallow, turquoise-colored sea's white sands.

The hidden island was quite large and a comfortable distance from any other island. It was filled with dense pine forests—some of its trees were two-feet or more in diameter. There were also mahogany, logwood, cork, black olive and cedar trees. Flowering, fragrant shrubs and flowers filled the entire island with beauty and sweet aromas.

Wild pigs, wild horses and wild donkeys were plentiful in the forests. Hawks, painted bunting and owls nested in the forest trees. Agouti

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and raccoons roamed freely. Three and four-foot long iguanas enjoyed the island's rich nuts and grasses.

Lizards skittered across its beautiful, white sand beaches. Frogs found comfort on colorfully-flowered lily pads in the small coves where sea grass waved to the rhythm of ripples in the island's shallow, blue-green, translucent water. Occasionally, turtles ambled along the beaches. Pink Flamingos, spoonbills, multi-colored parrots, songbirds and lively hummingbirds enjoyed life in its waters, trees and flowers. Occasionally, a pelican graced its beaches. Terns elegantly glided through the sea air. Zebra Longwing butterflies flittered from flower to flower.

In the waist-high, shallow, turquoise water millions of sunlit wave facets twinkled above swimming tropical fish of every color, contrasting brilliantly with the sparkling white sands that slowly drifted just beneath their bellies.

Fronds of giant coconut palms waved in the warm, gentle breezes along the shoreline all around the island.

Not only had the island not been discovered by Las Casas, it was so isolated that it had never been found by *any* outsider—including the cannibal *Caribs*—or the *slavers*. In other words—it was a splendid—hidden—unspoiled *paradise* for those very few who *did* survive there.

In 1515, a large family of Lucayans lived on that hidden island, which they didn't think of as being hidden.

The family spoke Arawak.

When Huro, the father of the family, had been a young man, he had helped clear away large areas of pine and hardwood forests on the island for cultivation and had helped divert water and raise crops of cassava, corn and

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cotton. He'd hunted wild pigs and agouti and prepared them for roasting over the open fire. He and the rest of the family gathered clams.

He, his father and brothers found giant conch, opened them, cut out their white meat for his mother's cooking pot. He'd helped build the seven, palm-frond thatched huts, which were used for sleeping and storage. He'd also learned to fish expertly.

One day, while gathering clams, Huro stepped on a poisonous rockfish. It didn't inject much poison into his foot or he'd have died right away, but it did make him deathly ill. He lay on a sleeping mat in his parents' hut for several days. His mother and Aunt Sharu administered herbs to his swollen foot and he was eventually able to get around, but not yet able to go fishing with his father and brothers on a day foretold by floating leaves to be the best day for catching fish.

He had to remain behind on the island with his mother, his Aunt Sharu and a girl, two years younger than himself, who was visiting from another Lucayan island.

At the break of day, his father and brothers, their bodies painted in bright colors, each took a patty of cassava bread and a gourd of fresh water, got into their mahogany canoes and, as Huro sadly watched, rowed off through the deep channel among the mangrove trees and out of sight. Their plan was to meet with fishermen from other islands, out on the open sea.

Huro's mother, Aunt Sharu, and the girl who was called Kiki, had gone about their usual tasks that day of drying and grinding cassava and making cassava bread. They made a fire, but didn't prepare a cooking pot that evening, as they felt that would have been an insult to their fishermen, who they hoped would proudly bring back at least a large yellowtail for them to cook.

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Huro and the three females sat on mats on the beach in the light of the half-moon that hung over the ocean, waited for their fishermen to return.

They waited and waited. Finally, the dying embers in the fire circle and the rising sun made them aware that a new day had begun.

There was still no sign of their fishermen—they'd all been *caught* and taken *away*—during the last *slaver* raid to take place in the Bahamas.

None would ever return.

After a few years, Huro, his mother, Aunt Sharu, and Kiki, who had not returned to her island, because her relatives hadn't come for her, eventually became resolved to the fact that the great Supreme Being above—who they believed was responsible for all things—had taken their fishermen away forever.

A few years later, having received not a single visit from another island, it was decided that Huro and Kiki, who liked each other a great deal anyway, should marry. So, one day, after elaborate preparations were made, she and Huro's Aunt Sharu performed a religious ceremony, married Huro to Kiki.

In celebration of the occasion, Huro's Aunt Sharu carved two vivid green *Celts*—polished serpentine marble good luck charms made into the shape of flower petals—gave one to Huro, the other to Kiki.

In 1528, the mother and Aunt Sharu helped deliver Kiki's newborn baby girl, which Kiki named Tana. Huro wanted a boy to help him with the crops and fishing, but the following year, they had another girl, that Huro named Lanoi. The year after that another girl, Zoni, and a year later, Maru came along—four girls, Tana, Lanoi, Zoni and Maru. No boys.

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Two years after Maru was born, Hero's mother and Aunt Sharu both died within a short time of each other.

As was the Lucayan custom, after each died, Huro and Kiki had placed the corpse on a pyre raft they'd made of palm fronds, floated the raft out to sea behind Huro's canoe, lit the pyre on fire, gave it a push toward the open ocean.

They performed this ritual at night so the Supreme Being—who they believed lived in the darkness above—could easily locate the corpses and take their souls up to Heaven.

Since Huro had no sons to help him, he decided his daughters must learn to do *everything*—fish, hunt, cook, build—everything. The daughters eventually learned all he and Kiki could teach them.

With the additional help from the younger ones, Hero and Kiki were able to grow fine crops, catch fish, repair the huts and do the many things there had not been time to do before, such as have clam feasts, dance, play the *bato*, drink fermented cassava juice, sing on the beach by the light of a large fire—happy days for the entire family.

No one asked why no other people ever came to the island or why there were no people on nearby islands. They believed the Supreme Being had taken them all away. They thought perhaps He would bring them back again some day.

In the fall of 1553, during hurricane season, Hugo and Kiki took a canoe out island hopping—never to return.

After Hugo and Kiki had been gone three days, their four daughters—the only remaining free Lucayans in the Bahamas—performed the

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customary religious ritual for their departed father and mother and committed their bodies to the sea.

Following the ceremony, it was decided that Tana, being the eldest, should take charge of the other three, so she moved into the center hut, encircled by other huts.

Each of her sisters took a hut to themselves.

They all worked together improving the huts and eventually built additional huts for storage.

They kept up the traditions of their parents and ancestors: built large fires on the beach, had clam and lobster feasts, danced, sang, played the *bato*, painted their naked bodies—frequently got tipsy on fermented cassava juice.

LAND HO!

Chapter 5

"Someone's built a big fire! See the light flickering against the trees..."

IT WAS TEN o'clock in the morning, June 17th, 1555, a warm, splendid day.

The trade winds were pressing steadily against the sails of the cutter, propelling it through ocean swells.

Hubert was at the tiller.

Anki, in a sun suit, was standing at the tip of the bow looking out over the water.

All their skins were well tanned from long exposure to the warm sun.

Vim and Hubert had shortened the legs of their trousers to just below the knees, had stowed all their other clothes below deck.

Vim tasted the flavor of rich tobacco smoke in his mouth as he drew on his pipe, walked back to where Hubert was. "I've been meaning to ask you what those *plants* are that you've been watering every day in the pots on the aft deck," he said.

Hubert locked the tiller. "*Come—I'll show you!*"

They walked toward the stern where potted plants in various colors and sizes sat along the gunwales.

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The sun cast shadows across the deck, longer, then shorter, as the deck rolled from side to side.

Hubert took out his pipe, pointed it toward three potted plants. "These are *tomato* plants. Those over there are strawberries, raspberries and grapevines of both green and purple grapes."

Vim pointed his pipe stem at two sturdy, bushy plants with green berries hanging on them. "And these?"

"Those—believe it or not—are *coffee* plants. I got them this spring from an Arab trader. He said they're from the Yemen region of Arabia, which is hot and humid. He also said to keep them warm and give them lots of sunlight. I thought since we were going south we might as well take them along. We'll run out of coffee eventually. Maybe we can get them to grow after we get to where we're going."

Vim looked out at the broad ocean. "Where do you think we *are* going?"

"Yes, where?" Anki added as she came to meet them.

Hubert took a long draw on his pipe. "According to the compass and charts, we must be getting very near the *New World*."

Vim laughed. "I hope you're right. Do I have time to catch another *fish* before we arrive at this *New World*?"

Hubert managed a chuckle, sucked more smoke from his pipe. "*Ja*—my guess is you have *plenty* of time. Do we need to slow down the cutter for your fishing?"

Vim thought a moment. "No—this time I'm going to try to catch something that stays nearer to the surface."

Hubert returned to the tiller.

Anki became occupied with Teefi.

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Vim went below, prepared his fishing equipment, returned to the aft deck and began fishing.

He fished until late afternoon, had caught nothing. Then, abruptly, something hit his bait. He jerked the make-shift fishing pole, set the hook. "I *hooked* one! It's *big*!"

Anki put Teefi down, ran to see what was going on.

As had become routine, Hubert locked the tiller, picked up the gaff, which Vim had already brought up from below.

After a serious battle, Vim finally brought the fish close to the stern.

"That's a *beauty*!" Anki cried.

Hubert gaffed it.

The three hoisted it up on deck.

Teefi began barking.

It was a large fish—about forty pounds Vim estimated. It had a dark-gray back, silver-yellow sides.

Hubert examined it a moment then returned to the tiller. "I wonder what it *is*?"

Vim ran his finger along the fish. "It looks like a *perch*—but I've never seen one this *big*."

As the sun and clouds painted a sunset masterpiece of red, pale-green, yellow and orange hues, Vim located his fish knife, cleaned the bulky fish, washed it and the knife in fresh water, then went to the bow, sat on a chair they'd previously secured to the deck, puffed his pipe, rested.

Anki joined him. "I think that fish is a *tuna*," she said between puffs on her pipe.

"Why do you think so?"

"Like I said, I worked at a fish market one summer."

He smiled at her.

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Their eyes met.

He looked out over the water, noticed two dolphins racing directly in front of the cutter.

Then, she saw them, too. "Look—*dolphins!*" she cried.

They watched the dolphins and the serene ocean scene for some time—silhouetted flocks of seabirds flying against the dying sunset, cries of seagulls searching the waves for food.

As sunset faded, the faint light of the full moon began to reflect off the water. They could still see the white sides of the dolphins, hear their squeaky sounds as they played, diving every few minutes then reappearing as if performing for an audience.

"Isn't this *romantic?*" Anki sighed.

Vim smiled, took her hand, yelled back to Hubert, "We must be close to *land!*"

"*Ja—I see birds!*"

"And—do you see our *other* friends!" Vim called.

"What *kind* of friends?" Hubert asked.

"*Dolphins!* There are two playing just in front of the cutter!" Anki cried, excitedly.

Hubert raised his hand to test the wind. "That's a good omen!"

Vim studied the horizon for other signs of land—*then* he saw it—a break in the moonlight revealed a dark streak on the glistening sea. He at once recognized what that meant, jumped to his feet, pointed at the dark streak. "Land *ho!* Land *ho!*"

Anki ran and clutched the rail.

Hubert looked where Vim was pointing. "*Ja! Ja!* I see it!"

"I don't see a damned *thing* that looks like *land,*" Anki protested.

But soon islands loomed massively before them.

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Then Anki noticed light reflecting from some palm trees behind the closest island. "*Wow!*" she cried, pointing. "Look at *that!*"

Vim studied the light a moment. "Someone's built a big *fire!* See the light flickering against the trees?"

"I *see* it!" she cried.

"Are the dolphins still out in front of the cutter?" Hubert asked.

Vim went to the bow and looked over it. "*Ja!*"

"Maybe they're used to swimming ahead of *fishing* boats! I've heard that dolphins will do that sometimes," Hubert suggested.

Anki leaned against the bow rail. "Let's see where they *take* us!"

The dolphins, and perhaps their ancestors as well, had indeed played ahead of fishing canoes—guiding them through the deep-water channel right to the beach of the *hidden* island. After the fishermen had safely reached the beach they'd always rewarded each dolphin with a piece of fish.

The dolphins' squeaking guidance through the deep-water channel had saved many a fisherman's canoe from striking coral, which, without guidance would have resulted in disaster.

Anki stood on the bow of the cutter, called to Hubert any change in direction the dolphins took.

Hubert adjusted the tiller accordingly.

As they approached a group of massive mangrove trees, they reefed all three sails to slow the cutter's approach, then coasted the rest of the way through the narrow, deep-water channel between shadowy lines of trees.

As the cutter passed the last of the mangrove trees—the three aboard could not believe their *eyes!*

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By the light of the moon and that of a huge fire on the beach, they saw four attractive young women, *naked* except for loin patches tied with string about their waists, standing on the beach by the fire—transfixed—*staring* straight at the cutter. One held what looked like a musical instrument in her hand.

"Now, we're *getting* somewhere!" Anki cried, slipping out of her sun suit. "When in *Rome* do as the *Romans* do!"

Tana was the first to realize what they were looking at. "*Lukku! Lukku!*" she cried, which in Lucayan meant, '*Man! Man!*'

Tana was standing near the fire where she and her sisters had been singing and dancing while she'd been playing the *bato*. She dropped the *bato* onto the sand—began running toward the cutter. Her sisters quickly followed.

"*Women*," Hubert uttered, his gaze not distracted. "I believe they're *naked*," he said, in a weak voice.

"It would seem you are right," Vim agreed.

"What shall we *do*?" Hubert asked.

"Our cutter's bow is wedged into the *sand*—I think all we *can* do is toss the rope ladder over the side and hope for the *best!*" Vim said.

"*Right!*" Anki said sarcastically. "Not that the four *naked women* have anything to do with it!"

The young ladies—who'd never seen a man before, except their father—reached the cutter just as Vim and Hubert dropped the ladder over the side.

Tana reached the ladder first, hesitated a second, then grabbed the ropes, began climbing.

Lanoi, Zoni and Maru quickly followed.

Tana reached the top of the ladder, climbed on deck.

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Hubert and Vim stood slack-jawed at her beautiful nakedness.

Anki stood, grinning impishly, completely naked herself, holding Teefi.

Vim thought Tana was one of the most beautiful women he'd ever seen, with the exception of Anki. As Tana came closer, Vim could see, even in the dim light, that her skin was painted various colors in an assortment of animal designs.

Lanoi climbed on deck. Her painted beauty immediately impressed Hubert.

The additional weight of the newcomers made the cutter's bow slip off the sand, back into the water.

Vim ran to the bow, tossed the bow line out onto the beach.

Zoni, who was already hanging on the ladder, continued to climb up.

Maru ran, got the bow line, tied it around a palm tree, returned and climbed the rope ladder.

Tana looked at Vim, gestured her hand toward the island. She spoke to him in Lucayan. Her words were melodious to his ears. They meant, *'Welcome to cairi!' 'Welcome to our island!'*

It was the first time Vim had heard Lucayan. He guessed at what she meant. "She's welcoming us to their *island*. *Cairi*, must mean *island*."

"*Cairi*, must mean *island*," Anki mimicked. "Just wait until their *men* show up with *spears* and *roast* us all—over hot *coals*!"

Tana pointed to herself. "*Tana!*"

Vim smiled, pointed to himself. "*Vim!*"

The remaining ladies climbed aboard, introduced themselves the same way Tana had.

"Me, *Anki*," Anki cried mockingly, pointing to her naked left breast.

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Vim noticed how gentle and well-mannered Tana and the others were. What Anki had said earlier, about where their men were, flashed through his mind.

Tana spotted the huge fish lying on deck. Her eyes grew bright with anticipation. "*Yellowtail*," she said in Lucayan. She'd never seen such a large yellowtail before. She knew that if she and her sisters had caught one that large while in their canoe, they couldn't have brought it back. She pointed to the fish then put two fingers and her thumb to her lips, pointed at the fire on the beach.

Vim understood immediately. With her hands, he knew she'd said, '*Let's cook the fish on the fire on the beach and eat it.*' He gestured his approval of the idea.

"What did she say?" Anki asked.

"I think she said something about cooking the fish over the fire on the beach."

"Sure that's *all* she said?"

"That was all. Are you *jealous* of Tana?"

"A little, I guess."

Tana announced to her sisters in Lucayan that they were going to have a feast and not to forget to give the dolphins a fish reward for safely guiding the boat through the coral to the island.

Maru took the fish knife, cut two nice pieces from the fish, tossed them to the dolphins.

Geel, the cat, appeared from somewhere and was suddenly standing at Maru's feet.

Tana looked down at the cat. What she said in Lucayan meant, '*You want some fish?*' She knew the animal was a cat. She'd seen *feral* cats in the forests of the island.

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Geel rubbed himself against Maru's leg as she cut him off a piece of fish.

"I thought you said that cat was *wild*," Anki teased Vim.

Tana obviously liked the cat.

Vim pointed at it. "*Geel!*"

Tana's lips formed the strange word. "*Geel!*" she repeated. She wondered if *Geel* was the *word* for cat in Vim's language or if it was the *name* of the cat.

Tana remained on the cutter near Vim.

Anki wasn't about to let Vim slip away from her that easily. She remained next to him on his other side.

Lanoi remained with Hubert.

He smiled at her.

They all took turns petting Geel and Teefi, becoming better acquainted.

Maru and Zoni took the fish down the rope ladder, wet it with water from the bay, laid it on palm fronds near the fire, seasoned it with salt, stuffed it with herbs, heated rocks in the fire, then moved the hot rocks with sticks to a place on the sand near the fire. They lifted the fish, palm fronds and all, placed it on the hot rocks, wrapped fronds over the fish, put hot rocks on the fronds, left it to cook.

Geel jumped off the cutter onto the beach, dashed to the fireside, obviously very interested in what was happening to the fish.

Vim, Tana, Anki, Hubert and Lanoi climbed down the ladder, joined Maru and Zoni by the fire.

By the light of the fire, Vim and Hubert could appreciate the full beauty of all the Lucayan ladies. They all had long, black hair that came down past their copper-colored waists, all had brown eyes, slender necks,

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and all had beautiful facial features with high cheekbones. The form of their bodies was exquisite. The painted animals on their skin gave them an appearance of wildness that contrasted with their otherwise gentle personalities.

Vim glanced at Anki, decided her charms were more than a match for the island ladies', felt strangely excited at the excellent turn of events.

Zoni brought everybody half a coconut she'd filled with fermented coconut milk.

Vim tried his, thought it strong, but liked it.

Tana watched his facial reactions carefully, noticed the slight twinge in his eye as he took a swallow.

Anki saw how much Tana was admiring Vim, took a sip of the coconut milk, "*Alligator pee!*" she cried.

"*Easy,*" Vim cautioned, "We don't want to alienate the natives."

"Oh, *really?* Well, they don't understand what the hell I'm saying, anyhow," Anki countered, with a mock-pout.

Vim and Hubert got the picture, looked at each other, then, to the surprise of the Lucayan ladies, dashed off—made a mad run for the cutter.

Tana wondered if she and her sisters had done something to displease them. The mystery was immediately solved when moments later Vim and Hubert returned carrying a small wooden keg of red *wine*.

"Now, *this* should be *interesting,*" Anki cried.

Teefi squirmed. Anki lowered her to the beach, turned her loose.

The Lucayan ladies laughed, jumped up and down with elation.

Zoni found a, three-legged, Lucayan chair.

They set the keg on it.

Anki grimaced, but forced herself to drink what remained in her coconut shell.

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Everyone filled their coconut shell with wine from the keg.

Vim and Anki watched Tana's face as she took the first sip of wine, could tell she liked it.

"*Damn!*" Anki thought. "*She likes it!*"

Vim could see that the fish and wine were highly prized by the ladies.

The fish was cooking and the clams in the pot were beginning to steam.

Everyone was beginning to feel happy from the fermented coconut milk and wine.

Bird cries came from down by the water's edge.

Tana found the *baco*, began to play.

She and her sisters began to sing Lucayan songs.

"*Wine, women, and song*," Anki cried, cryptically.

Vim, Hubert and Anki sang along in Lucayan the best they could.

Everybody was having a great time.

Vim, Hubert and Anki sang a few songs together in Dutch and the ladies did their best to sing along.

Then the Lucayan sisters broke free, began dancing around the fire.

Vim, Hubert and Anki began dancing around it, too.

"Now is this going to be a great *party*—or *what!*" Anki cried.

They all danced right into the beautiful, moonlit bay, began swimming.

The ladies removed Vim and Hubert's short pants, which left the men naked, began scrubbing them all over with a soap the ladies had made from ashes and wild pig fat, scented with the extracts of flowers. They especially delighted in washing the men's silky, honey-brown beards.

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Anki was very interested in the development, as she'd never seen Hubert naked.

Vim glanced at Hubert. "Should we be *insulted* by all this scrubbing?"

"You *did* smell like *goats*," Anki cried.

"Come here," Vim said to Anki.

She moved closer to him.

"You don't smell exactly like a *flower* yourself," Vim said.

He motioned for the girls to give Anki a bath, watched as they scrubbed and perfumed her then glanced around. "I just realized that the island smells *fragrant*."

Hubert laughed. "We were probably smelling *ourselves* and didn't notice it before."

"We've got to do something about the *language* barrier. Any ideas?" Vim asked.

"You seem to be doing all right," Anki said cryptically.

Hubert splashed some water on Lanoi. "*Ja*, we should probably all speak the same language," he said.

Vim shook his head to get some of the water out of his hair. "Not very many people in the world speak Dutch. How about *French*?"

"French is fine with me. As you know, I learned it in school," Hubert said.

"Me, too," Anki added. "*Oui*, and all *that* crap!"

"French it *is* then. *Liberté*—is French for '*Freedom*'. They don't seem to have a *name* for this island—let's call it *Liberté*."

"*Liberté!* *Ja*—has a good ring to it." Hubert was becoming a little unsteady from so many drinks, tried to keep his coconut shell from tipping over as the ladies continued to scrub him.

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"*Liberté!*" the ladies shouted.

"*Liberté!*" Anki echoed.

After the girls were satisfied the men and Anki were clean, they swam with them awhile, then took them to the beach, poured gourds of fresh water over them and over themselves, to wash off the sea salt, then took them to some mats, let them dry off—then—painted their entire bodies in red, blue and yellow animal designs.

"This is *fun!*" Anki cried.

Hubert tried out his French. "Do you feel like you're trading in your *way of life* for a *new one?*"

Vim laughed. "It *does* feel that way. But—I think we can get *used* to it," he replied in French, smiling.

When the fish was tender and flaky, the ladies divided it and the other food into pottery bowls, and the feast began.

Vim tasted the cassava bread, decided it tasted good, but a little bitter.

Vim could tell from the Lucayan ladies' expressions that the huge yellowtail and wine had sealed all their friendships.

After the feast, the ladies brought sleeping mats, laid them out on the beach sand.

The fire gradually died down.

Each lay down on a mat in the magical evening, listened to the waves lap against the shore—a sound guaranteed to sooth the mind, remove all concerns.

Vim and Tana lay side by side on their backs, looking up at the millions of stars.

Anki lay on her back on Vim's other side.

"God is watching us," Vim said in French, looking at the sky.

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Tana didn't understand what he'd said, but understood from the way he'd said it he meant the Supreme Being was up there. She believed that the Supreme Being had sent Vim and Hubert to them. She wasn't sure about Anki.

She reached for Vim's hand. Their hands joined. They each felt warm, affectionate feelings.

Not to be outdone, Anki reached for Vim's other hand. He squeezed hers tenderly then looked at her and smiled.

Lanoi, who was lying next to Hubert on her mat, studied him in the moonlight, saw his straight nose, the way his lips curved, his silky honey-brown hair, the softness of his tan skin and hands, decided he was very strong and handsome, squeezed his hand.

They all knew their customs would not permit the consummation of any relationships—until a way could be found to perform *marriages*.

"I think there will be no *hanky-panky* on Liberté Island unless some *holy* man drifts ashore," Anki said.

"True," Vim agreed.

Anki was, in a way, delighted with that turn of events.

THE FRENCHMAN

Chapter 6

He finally arrived at the waterfront where various ships and boats, some only partially visible through the fog, were either at anchor or at the piers on-loading and off-loading cargo...

IN 1555, THE population of France was increasing at a very rapid rate.

Grain production had reached its maximum level about twenty years earlier. All land suitable for growing grain had been claimed for that purpose; therefore, as the population continued to increase, the price of grain did also. This increased the price of bread and with the faster-growing population came cheaper labor, which meant less money the poor had to buy bread with. They borrowed money to buy it then couldn't pay off their loans, neither for bread nor for their land. This produced highwaymen, beggars and vagabonds.

Vagabonds were considered to be against the authority of the nobility and, as such, anyone could kill them on sight, without repercussions.

Heavy taxes produced an increase in popular violence. Peasants, laborers and artisans joined revolt forces, took over towns and, by 1555, had murdered many of the nobility. In retribution, the king of France, Henry II,

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sent an army to smash the rebels. The army executed hundreds of those who'd revolted—usually, after horribly torturing them.

In the opinion of the royal officers holding high positions in municipal governments, the cause of much of the people's agitation was the *heretics*. The so-called heretics were those attracted to the religious Reformation, to Calvinism in particular.

John Calvin was a French theologian, a Catholic Church reformer who established a new religion, called Calvinism, which had strict codes of belief and behavior.

He taught that people could practice their religion *without* the daily assistance of priests, also, that God elected a group of people who were destined for salvation or damnation. He believed if a person led a good Christian life, that is, in accordance with his understanding of the Bible, they would have a fair chance of being selected by God to be saved from damnation.

John Calvin studied for the priesthood at branches of the University of Paris. His father insisted on his studying law, so he also attended universities at Orléans and Bourges. Following the publication of his commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia*, requesting the French nobility to have leniency on heretics, he was forced to leave Paris.

He first went to Italy, but didn't stay long, then on to Geneva, Switzerland where he built his influence into a powerful reform movement, trained Calvinist pastors and sent them to France.

In France, the French government outlawed Calvin's books, including his popular *Institutes*. Anyone caught selling them was subject to be burned at the stake. All Calvinists were labeled *heretics* and almost three *thousand* were rounded up and either killed by government troops or executed outright.

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King Henry II, a staunch Catholic, established the Second Tournelle in the Parliament of Paris to hear heresy cases. Many heretics were identified in this way and burned at the stake.

Jacques Colet de Noyon fit the description of a *heretic* to perfection. He was one of the Calvinist pastors who'd trained in Geneva and been sent to Paris.

In addition to his seditious religious practices as a Calvinist pastor and his selling of Calvinist books, he compounded his felony by also being an admirer of Michel de Nostredame, a French physician and astrologer who called himself Nostradamus, which was Latinish for Nostredame.

Nostradamus was accomplished in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Spanish, Provençal and French.

A hundred years before Galileo, Nostradamus believed the *dangerous*—because of its radical, therefore *heretical* nature—Copernican theory that dared to assert that the *earth* revolved around the *sun*. Due to his interest in astrology, astronomy and his apparent ability to see future events, Nostradamus was always precariously on the borderline of being accused of heresy.

In addition to Calvinist books, Jacques Colet de Noyon sold copies of Nostradamus' 1555 publication of his prophesies, a single volume called *Centuries*. In its first printing, *Centuries* contained the first three parts and some of the fourth and would eventually be enlarged to contain a hundred parts containing almost a thousand visions and prophesies written in poetic form to hopefully deceive the Inquisitioners, but yet pass on jewels of insight to future generations.

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Centuries described in Provençal, Italian, Greek, Latin, Spanish, Hebrew, but mostly in the French of 1555, future events that Nostradamus apparently saw during his meditations in his secret study.

As Jacques read *Centuries*, he would try to visualize what Nostradamus must be like, locked in his secret study, gazing at the surface of a bowl of water sitting on a brass tripod before him. Then Jacques would imagine Nostradamus beginning to see, in his mind's eye, events he was sure would come to pass sometime in the future. Jacques could imagine Nostradamus taking up his quill pen, dipping it into an inkwell, and writing down what he'd just visualized.

Jacques was mystified, as was everyone else who read Nostradamus' quatrains. Many were written as if describing what had happened in a dream, usually with no connection to what part of history the dream related to. Such a quatrain was written in Nostradamus' poetic *Centuries* as Century 1, Quatrain 29:

*Quand la poisson terrestre & aquatique,
Por forte vague au gravier sera mis:
Sa forme estrange sauve & horrifique,
Par mer aux mure bien tost les ennemis.*

That quatrain would, some four hundred years later, be interpreted as meaning: *a foreign, smooth and frightful-looking, amphibious landing craft, that travels over both land and heavy sea, will be cast upon the shore by a great wave. From it, enemy soldiers will soon reach the walls.*

That poetic quatrain describes quite accurately the landing of the Allies on the beaches of Normandy, which was a critical turning point in World War II.

If Frau Goebbels, the wife of Hitler's propaganda minister, Dr. Joseph Goebbels, had suggested he carefully read Nostradamus' *Centuries*, in

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its *entirety*, instead of just the one passage from it, as he did, it may have turned the war in Germany's favor, as Goebbels and therefore Hitler may have decided the Allied invasion would take place at the seawalls of *Normandy*, where it did, instead of at *Calais*, where the Germans *thought* it was going to.

In addition to Nostradamus' being renowned for his ability to see the future, he was also famous for his ability as a healer of plague victims.

After his studies of medicine at Montpellier medical school, he went from one plague-epidemic town in France to another, tending to plague victims. He successfully used his own ideas for treating patients, which included radically-new hygiene procedures such as boiling water before using it, keeping the body clean, disinfecting houses and streets and burning corpses and their clothing. He believed that the age-old practice of *bleeding* patients didn't do any good.

His prophecies, occult beliefs, such as believing the earth revolved around the sun, his unorthodox medical practices, and the fact that he had Jewish ancestors in his family tree all made him a prime candidate for becoming noticed by the Inquisitioners.

In 1552, Nostradamus had published a book on his medical treatments, which Calvinist Pastor Jacques, as Jacques Colet de Noyon was called, also just happened to have copies of for sale.

He glanced across the river at the Notre Dame Cathedral where the stench of the infamous Parisian sewers continually filled the air with death. He then continued to walk on down the cobblestone street toward his favorite bakery.

Before he arrived at the bakery, he stopped in at a small cheese shop, bought a small wheel of zesty cheese then went on to the bakery.

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His friend of long standing, Pierre Torr  owned the bakery and was also a Calvinist, but tried not to let that fact become publicly known for obvious reasons.

As Pastor Jacques entered his shop, Pierre motioned him to follow him into a back room. "*Venez avec moi,*" Pierre said in French, meaning '*Come with me*'.

Suspecting what was the matter, Pastor Jacques didn't speak, just picked up a long stick of fresh bread from a basket and quickly followed Pierre to the back room.

Once safely behind closed doors, Pierre put his hand on Pastor Jacques' shoulder. "The *Inquisitioners* are *looking* for you! As you know, if they *catch* you—being a Calvinist *pastor*—you'll be burned alive!"

"Then—I must be quickly on my way. I don't wish to incriminate you by my presence here."

"Just as a precaution—slip into this Catholic priest's habit. No one will dare bother you while you're disguised as a Catholic priest—unless you're recognized, of course. I suggest you keep the hood about your face as much as possible."

Pierre hung a long string of rosary beads—a large, silver *Christ-on-the-cross* dangling from the bottom of it—around Pastor Jacques' neck. Pastor Jacques stuffed his maroon beret into his pants pocket, swiftly put on the black priest habit. Pierre hastily put a bottle of fine wine into an inside pocket of the habit and Pastor Jacques' cheese wheel into another.

Pastor Jacques laid several gold coins on the table. "Thank you my dear friend," he whispered, then quickly left by the shop's rear door keeping his stick of bread in plain sight, pretending he was a priest who'd been in the shop to purchase bread, in case anyone was watching him leave.

DON LEWIS WIREMAN, SR.

Before Pastor Jacques had gone to Geneva to study theology, he'd been a very successful, young merchant in Paris.

He was only thirty, had considerable monetary resources and knew his way around France and other countries as well.

He'd known since he reentered France from Geneva that it'd be only a matter of time before the Inquisitioners learned of his whereabouts and attempted to arrest him. However, in case they tried, but were unsuccessful in actually capturing him, he always carried a large number of gold coins and a few silver ones in a money belt under his bulky clothes—in case he should suddenly have to pay traveling expenses out of the country.

Now, knowing the Inquisitioners were searching for him to give him a mock trial then burn him at the stake, he knew he could never return to his plush apartment along the Seine. He must escape!

The weather in Paris had been wet and cool all day. The sky was overcast with gray and black clouds and it'd started to sprinkle.

From what he'd learned of Nostradamus' medical methods, he was convinced rain was a *bad* thing for Paris. *It puts out fires in the streets burning plague corpses, carries contaminated water from them into the city's water supply and dampens flames intended to burn heretics at the stake, prolonging their terrible agony*, he thought. But, at the moment, where he was walking the rain was temporarily cleansing the awful odors and making it possible for him to occasionally take a breath of sanitary air.

He pulled the black hood of the damp habit a little closer about his face, walked on down the wet cobblestones toward the docks.

He finally arrived at the waterfront where various ships and boats, some only partially visible through the fog, were either at anchor or at the piers on-loading and off-loading cargo.

SOME SIXTEENTH CENTURY ROMANCES

He'd not seen anyone since he'd left Pierre so he felt fairly safe.

He wanted to get passage on a vessel going to the port of Le Havre, then buy passage on a ship that would round Spain to Marseilles, as that is where he thought Nostradamus was presently healing the sick. The thought had occurred to him that Nostradamus might take him on as a pupil.

He walked down one pier after another until he came to a large single-mast boat designed to carry grain down the river.

There were two men working on deck.

"Are you going to Le Havre?" Pastor Jacques called from the pier.

The men looked up, saw his priest's habit.

"Yes, Father, we're leaving in about an hour for Le Havre!" one of the men called back. "You can come aboard if you like!"

Pastor Jacques walked across the gangplank from the pier to the barge, sat down on a small barrel near where the men were working. "Where's the crew?"

"You're looking at it. A boat this size only needs a helmsman and a deckhand, Father," the Frenchman with a thin face and slight mustache answered.

"I'm Father Folet," Pastor Jacques lied. "I wish to buy passage with you to Le Havre. With the plague like it is—I'd rather take my chances on the river than go by coach."

"We understand, Father," the Frenchman with the thin face and slight mustache said. "I'm Claude, the helmsman—this is Charles, the deckhand. We wouldn't even think of charging you to ride with us."

"I'm always glad to meet new children. I thank you and appreciate the favor, but I cannot accept it. I insist on paying you each a gold coin."

Claude looked at him in disbelief. "Well, if you insist, Father."

Pastor Jacques laid a gold coin in each of their hands.

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"Now. If you don't mind, I'm very hungry and wish to eat my bread and cheese, and wash it down with some wine. When you've finished your work—please join me—and if you want some of my wine, as well as my bread and cheese—bring your own mugs. I think drinking from someone else's mug may help spread the plague."

Claude and Charles looked at each other a second, perplexed at such an odd idea coming from a priest, then went back to work securing cargo covers.

Pastor Jacques sat back down on a barrel.

The rain had stopped, but the sky was still overcast.

He tore off a piece of golden, crusty bread from the end of the long French loaf he'd bought at the bakery then cut into his cheese wheel, spread some of the strong-smelling, creamy cheese on the bread, took a bite. It was the first time he'd eaten since the previous day. It tasted wonderful. He uncorked the bottle of red wine, held the opening above his mouth so as not to touch it with his lips, slowly drizzled wine into his open mouth.

Soon, Claude and Charles joined him with bread, cheese and wine of their own.

Claude pulled up an empty barrel, sat on it. "We'll eat with you, then up anchor. It's not easy to eat and work at the same time, Father."

Waiting at anchor made Pastor Jacques ill at ease. He would have preferred they be out on the river. *Do they suspect something?* he wondered. *Did I say too much about my sanitary ideas?*

Pastor Jacques glanced at Claude, then at Charles. "With so many vagabonds about—who would obviously like to take some of this grain you're carrying—how do you *protect* it?"

The two opened their coats, showed him the bulb-shaped butts of their wheel-lock pistols.

SOME SIXTEENTH CENTURY ROMANCES

Claude took a sip of his wine. "We've had to shoot seven of them, Father. We ask your forgiveness."

"You are forgiven, my children," Pastor Jacques lied, between bites of bread and cheese. He held out his hand, blessed them with the sign of the cross, instantly felt a pang of guilt about his lies and deception.

"Thank you, Father," Claude said.

"Did the vagabonds you shot have *disease*?"

Charles took a bite of his cheese. "No—they were just hungry."

Pastor Jacques' eyes narrowed as he looked out over the river. "Traveling the river—I suppose you see many people with the *plague*."

"*Oui*," Claude said. "There are plague stories among the boatmen of Marseilles. One is that the plague killed so many people one woman sewed herself inside her shroud because she was afraid there would be no one left to do it after she died. And, a month ago, in Marseilles, a butcher and a baker, and the baker's entire family, died of *El Carbon*."

By *El Carbon*, Claude had referred to, '*the carbon*', which was a most contagious form of the plague. It was so named because it caused black pustules to form on the body of the sufferer.

Claude and Charles finished their meal of bread, cheese and wine then both went to work bringing in the heavy lines, and the gangplank that held the boat to the pier. Claude went to the tiller. Charles began raising sails.

Soon the boat was in the middle of the river and the current was carrying it downstream.

Charles used the sails mostly to navigate the boat and keep it near the center of the river.

Pastor Jacques was surprised to find he'd eaten the entire loaf of his bread, all of his cheese and had drunk the last drop of his wine.

DON LEWIS WIREMAN, SR.

He set the empty wine bottle on the wooden deck, stood up, stretched, went to where Claude was at the tiller, stood near him.

As they passed a plague corpse floating down the river, Pastor Jacques tried to think of a way of bringing up the subject of Nostradamus without giving himself away. He finally thought of one. "I understand there's a physician in Marseilles who's been successful in healing many plague victims—Nostes—I think his name is Nostes."

Claude looked quizzical for a moment. "Oh—*Nostradamus!* Yes, Father, he's cured many people—entire French towns—of the plague. But he uses methods that are not usual and I understand the authorities are after him."

Pastor Jacques looked out over the river. "Is he a *real* physician—or an impostor—do you think?"

Claude adjusted the damp black beret on his head. "I understand he's well-schooled in medicine and has practiced it a long time, Father."

"So, why do the authorities have a problem with him?"

"I understand he practices *magic*," Claude said.

"Magic! Is that why they're after him?"

"I think so—but I hear he also studies *occult* works," Claude added, adjusting the boat's tiller with his hand.

"In Marseilles?"

"No—I understand he escaped from Marseilles."

"Where did he go?"

"I don't know, Father," Claude said.

Since Nostradamus was not in Marseilles, there was really no purpose for Pastor Jacques to go there. He decided he would go to Le Havre and see what ships were in port.

SOME SIXTEENTH CENTURY ROMANCES

"You look tired, Father. Perhaps you would like to take a nap below. It'll be about four hours before we reach Le Havre," Claude said.

"*Oui*—I'll do that."

He went below, found a cot and went to sleep.

He was awakened by the ringing of church bells. He stretched himself, went up on deck.

Claude was still at the tiller and Charles was tending sails. Pastor Jacques walked to the rail, tried to see through the fog. He could hear church bells steadily ringing. "Where *are* we?"

"*Rouen*, Father," Claude said. "It's off there—through the fog—in front of you. They ring the church bells for a quarter of an hour every time someone dies!"

"Do they ever stop ringing?"

"Never! They never stop ringing, Father. Every time we pass Rouen, the bells are always ringing."

There was a break in the fog and Pastor Jacques thought he saw a corpse through it lying along the bank. *Perhaps it's a log*, he thought, hopefully. He was tired of seeing corpses; people in pain—religious brutality. The thought suddenly occurred to him, *I'm ready to leave France—forever*. "How do you know where you're going in this fog?" he asked.

Claude made a slight adjustment in the boat's course. "I've been doing this for over a year now—practice—it comes with *practice*, Father."

"You're a brave man, my son."

"Maybe brave—maybe stupid—sometimes it's hard to tell."

The boat took a sharp change in direction as it followed the snake-like curves of the Seine.

DON LEWIS WIREMAN, SR.

After about an hour, the fog had gradually lifted. The river widened and they saw the port of Le Havre off to their right.

As they came into port, Pastor Jacques took mental note of the ships moored at the piers. "Where do you think these ships are going?" he asked Claude.

"That big single-master is flying an *Italian* flag. My guess is—it's a trader ship headed for *Spain*."

Pastor Jacques definitely didn't want to go to Spain. That'd be like going from the frying pan into the fire. He knew the Inquisition was powerful there.

"See the giant three-master with rectangular sails? It's flying the French flag. It's rigged for crossing large oceans. Perhaps it's going to Columbus' *New World*," Claude ventured.

Pastor Jacques looked the ship over carefully. "The West *Indies*?"

"Perhaps—or even farther south," Claude speculated.

As Charles reefed the sails, Claude brought the boat alongside the pier.

They tossed out mooring lines and a dockworker tied them down.

They shoved the gangplank out to meet the dock.

Pastor Jacques smiled. "Thank you both for your hospitality."

"You're very welcome, Father. Glad to be of help," Claude said.

Pastor Jacques walked across the gangplank onto the dock, then on up it to near some storage buildings along the shore. He went into one to conceal himself.

He slipped the rosary over his head, held it in his hand. When he saw Christ on the cross, he said a silent prayer and instead of leaving it *behind* with the priest habit, he put the rosary into a pocket of his loose-fitting pants, took off the habit, hid it behind some cargo boxes, removed his ma-

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room beret from his pocket, straightened it out, put it on his head, left the building and walked—out of sight of Claude and Charles—until he reached the pier where the three-mast ship was moored.

He noticed the name on its side—*Cloche de France*.

He found an officer on deck, found out it was indeed going to the West Indies, bought passage.

It sailed the next morning.

THE GARDENS

Chapter 7

As Vim looked over the site, he realized the new garden plot was only a small fraction of the forest that'd obviously been cleared by someone else sometime in the recent past...

VIM VAN DER Grooten stood near the center of the new, large garden plot he, Hubert and Anki had helped the Lucayan sisters prepare.

It was the first time Vim, Hubert or Anki had tried to raise a garden.

Vim knew the survival of the Dutch way of life, as far as food was concerned at least, depended on the garden being *successful*. There was no sign that vegetables such as lettuce, radishes, and cucumbers had ever been raised on the island before and it was possible that the island's climate and soil would not support the growth of them.

They'd laid out the new garden plot separate from the one the Lucayan sisters had worked for many years growing cassava, corn, gourds and tobacco.

Vim, Hubert, and Anki had used metal axes they'd brought from Holland. Working alongside them, the sisters had used stone axes they'd made years earlier and machetes that'd been handed down to them, brought to the island years earlier by traders from Haiti.

SOME SIXTEENTH CENTURY ROMANCES

Vim, Hubert, Anki and the sisters had removed all trees, bushes, grass and as many roots as they could from a large area of choice land, for the new garden spot.

The soil was moist, easy to work. Vim, Hubert and Anki had used shovels they'd brought with in the cutter, had tilled about a fourth of an acre of land.

The sisters had learned to use the Dutch hoes and small hand tools to break up clods, prepare the rich, red, iron-filled loam for planting.

As Vim looked over the site, he realized the new garden plot was only a small fraction of the forest that'd obviously been cleared by someone else sometime in the not-to-distant past. *Who cleared so many acres of land and why? What were the people like who did it? What had they grown on the land? Why had they grown it? Could it be possible there was once a large population of people living on these islands? What happened to them?* he wondered. In the month he'd been on Liberté Island, he'd not seen another living soul except Hubert, Anki and the Lucayan sisters, which was a relief in a way as they'd not encountered any *hostile* natives as yet.

Vim, Hubert and Anki had been teaching the Lucayan sisters to speak French. The sisters were learning rapidly.

Perhaps, when they have larger vocabularies, I'll learn from them how it was they're the only Lucayans left on Liberté Island, Vim thought.

As far as he could tell, the sisters were the only people left on *any* of the islands.

Those answers would have to wait, the *immediate* need was to find a way to get fresh water to irrigate the garden so planting could begin, so fruit and vegetables could be grown.

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Tana came up to Vim from across the garden, a hoe in her hand. "Tout faits," she said in French, meaning 'All done'.

Making a pouring gesture toward the garden with his hand in French, he said, "Eau," which meant 'Water'. Water for the garden—he was trying to tell her.

Tana immediately dropped the hoe, ran down the slope toward the palm-covered huts, quickly returned with a pot of water from the nearby freshwater spring, smiled broadly, poured the water out of the pot onto the garden.

Vim gently took the empty pot from her hands, set it on the ground, gave her a hug and kissed her on her cheek. She'd understood what he'd tried to tell her in French about watering. *That must be how the sisters have always watered their cassava*, he thought.

Anki noticed with concern as Vim took Tana by the hand and the two began walking toward the center of the island.

"Damn," Anki thought, "have I lost him?"

She decided not to follow them.

As Vim and Tana walked through aromatic, flowered shrubs, they saw beautifully colored birds sitting in nearby trees.

They came to a magnificent shrub with sweet smelling red flowers. Vim picked a pretty blossom from it, carefully arranged it over her left ear.

She looked into his dark-blue eyes, smiled, gave him a hug.

They walked up onto a rise.

Vim made a mental note of how far above sea level they were. *About a hundred feet*, he estimated.

They walked on, came upon a little rushing waterfall with green moss and healthy plants growing all around it.

SOME SIXTEENTH CENTURY ROMANCES

Vim saw the spring was fed from a large creek that ran out of the forest beyond.

They went to the crystal-clear pool the waterfall had created. Vim knelt, cupped his hands and tasted the water. It felt cool, tasted like spring water. *There's enough water here to water at least a hundred acres of land,* he thought. *But, how can we get it down to where we need it?*

He cupped some more water in his hands, playfully tossed it onto Tana's head. She smiled, shook her naked, painted body as the cool streamlets ran down her warm skin.

She quickly tossed some water back on him then playfully started running back down the path the way they'd come. Vim was quite sure that was her way of telling him she was going swimming in the bay.

Vim ran after her, down the slope, past the huts, chased her down the white beach until she splashed into the gentle waves of the bay, where he finally caught up with her.

As they swam, many multicolored tropical fish darted about them.

When they'd tired of swimming, they went back to the huts where her sisters and Anki were giggling and dousing each other with fresh water from the nearby spring.

Vim saw Hubert, motioned him over.

Anki brought the two each a half-coconut shell of gin, lit their pipes, without comment, then ran to the bay, went swimming with the Lucayan sisters.

Vim and Hubert sat down on the cool, damp, white sand of the beach.

Vim stretched his legs out in front of him. "Tana and I found a large stream of fresh *water!*"

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Hubert took a puff on his pipe. "I thought you and *Anki* were... If you don't want *Anki*..."

"Of *course* I want *Anki*. You mean because I walked with *Tana* to the center of the island? Somebody has to socialize with *Tana*. There aren't enough of us guys to go around."

"Be careful... *Tana* and *Anki* may get the wrong idea," Hubert cautioned. "So where did you find the *stream*?"

"It's probably only a hundred yards from the garden, toward the center of the island."

"How much *water* do you think?"

Vim took a sip of juice from his shell. "More than enough to cultivate this whole island. The question is—how to get it down to where we *need* it?"

"Maybe we can do like the *Romans* did."

Vim took a draw on his pipe. "Build an *aqueduct*?"

"Why *not*?"

"How would we go about that?"

Hubert became distracted for a moment by a parrot that was trying to walk through the sand toward them, then he took a sip of gin and said, "You've seen how the ample *forests* are. We could make a solid *stand* of wood for an aqueduct—make it run all the way from the stream to the *garden*—then run a section of it to the *cassava* plants—another section on down to the huts. We can even make a freshwater *shower* hut."

Vim was watching the ladies swim. "A *shower* hut—that's a *great* idea! The ladies will *love* it!"

"I think *we* may even enjoy it a bit *ourselves*!" Hubert quipped.

"Yes, I think perhaps!" Vim agreed.

They laughed.

SOME SIXTEENTH CENTURY ROMANCES

"What can we make the aqueduct out of, so it'll not be destroyed by the water running over it?" Vim asked.

Hubert took another draw on his pipe. "I'm thinking *pottery* of some kind."

Hubert noticed the parrot was finally making some headway across the sand toward them.

Vim took another sip from his shell. "I don't think the pottery the sisters have made from the red loam here is quite strong enough to stand up to the weight of the water that will be coming down the aqueduct."

"Perhaps we can mix *loam* with *sand*, mold it and *fire* it somehow."

Gray smoke curled about Vim's slender nose as he sucked on his pipe. "We'd have to build a *kiln* that's *hot* enough to melt the surface sand, give it strength."

Hubert noticed the struggling parrot had almost reached them. "We could make a brick kiln with a long *chimney* so it will create a strong draft to make the flames very hot. If we burn wood and pitch in it, that should make a very hot fire, too," he continued, taking a sip of gin.

"Will a wood fire get *hot* enough to melt *sand*?"

"*Oui*. I've seen a glass bottle *melt* in a hot fireplace—*glass* is made from sand, so if a hot wood fire will melt *glass*, it will melt *sand*," Hubert reasoned.

"Where can we build a *kiln*?"

The parrot took flight, flew the last little ways to where the two were sitting.

Hubert finished off his gin. "I think—up by the *garden*. We can clear a place, build a palm hut for our tools, lay down a brick floor about three yards square and build our *kiln* in the *middle* of it. That way there'll be less danger of catching the forest on fire from the sparks."

DON LEWIS WIREMAN, SR.

Vim drank the last of his gin. "I'll *race* you to the *girls*!"

They dropped their pipes and coconut shells on the sand, jumped to their feet, made a dash for the inviting water.

Hubert got there first.

Then they saw that Tana was laughing, pointing to where Vim and Hubert had been sitting.

"What?" Hubert asked.

They turned to see what she was looking at, saw what she was laughing about. The parrot had a *pipe* stem in its *mouth*. It looked like it was trying to *smoke* the pipe Vim had dropped on the sand.

Everybody laughed.

The next day, Vim and Hubert instructed the girls on how to lay out the garden using hoes. How to slope the rows so water from a ditch could be dammed at the top of each row then released down each as needed.

Vim and Hubert decided to go ahead with the planting and water the garden for the time being by carrying water from the pond, until the aqueduct could be completed.

They got all the precious seeds and plants they'd brought from Holland in the cutter. They knew they only had *one* chance to get the seeds to grow, if they *failed*, they'd never taste a cucumber or other of their favorite vegetables, ever again.

They'd completed the garden rows, carefully planted the scarce seeds—radishes, Dutch corn, onions, beans, peas, parsnips, lettuce, chard, cabbage, carrots, and seeds of many other kinds of vegetables—in long lines in the fertile soil.

SOME SIXTEENTH CENTURY ROMANCES

Vim opened his hand, five kernels of corn glistened bright yellow in the sunlight. "Did you know corn's been around for over seven thousand years?"

"Where did it come from originally?"

"That's still a mystery," Vim said.

They planted one row into various kinds of squash, another into cucumbers.

They planted the strawberry and raspberry starts together in one corner of the garden, which they named, *Terre de la Baie*—French for, 'Berry Land'.

In another corner they planted watermelon, cantaloupe and honeydew melons.

They started a vineyard by planting the green and purple grapevines Hubert had brought from Holland, along an outside row by themselves, so in the future, assuming some disaster didn't strike, they could expand the vineyard by planting grape cuttings farther and farther away from the garden's center. They carefully planted their coffee plants on the opposite side of the garden from the grapes, for the same reason.

Tana and Anki brought gourds of cool spring water.

Everyone drank eagerly then continued their work.

Vim held up a potato. "The potato is quite new to Europe," he said.

"Where the hell did Europe get *potatoes* from, *anyway*?" Anki asked.

"From some place—recently discovered—called *Peru*."

Hubert cut the eye out of a potato. "The eyes of the potato are what allow them to reproduce."

"*Reproduce!* That's what *I* want to do," Anki lamented.

Vim smiled at her.

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She returned his smile.

Vim and Hubert cut the eyes out of many potatoes they'd stored in barrels of sawdust aboard the cutter, then planted four long rows of them.

They all helped clear a special place for a fruit tree orchard, planted seeds and starts of apple, pear, peach, plumb, cherry and apricot.

Suddenly, Maru and Zoni came running from the direction of the forest, holding plants in their hands by their soil-covered roots.

Vim examined the plants.

"These are probably *tea* plants!" Vim said. "Let's plant them near the coffee!"

"*Dutch* coffee comes from a place called *Brazil*," Hubert commented.

"*Oui*—it's very *good* coffee, too" Vim added. "I hope ours will taste as good. I understand coffee originally came from Ethiopia."

"And *tea*—where did *that* come from?" Anki asked.

"I'm pretty sure it originally came from Asia," Vim said.

Vim had no idea what the other plants were that Maru and Zoni had brought. Whatever they were, they had long stems and leaves he thought looked like cornstalks.

Maru broke off a piece of stem, put it in her mouth.

Vim, Hubert, and Anki did the same.

It tasted sweet to Vim, definitely not cornstalks.

It was *sugarcane*. The Dutch had never seen sugarcane before.

The Lucayan sisters like it, it must be good, Vim reasoned.

They planted some to see if it would grow in the garden.

Zoni disappeared, soon returned with starts of lime, lemon, grapefruit and orange trees.

Hubert planted them in the orchard.

SOME SIXTEENTH CENTURY ROMANCES

"We best build some shelter against violent weather for the herbs," Hubert suggested. "Besides, they'll get too much sunlight out here—a stiff breeze would break their stems."

"A heavy *rain* could flood and wash the whole garden away!" Anki suggested.

Vim, Hubert, and Anki built a separate palm hut, but instead of making it *round*, they made it *square* and constructed shelves inside along the walls, put pots of herbs on the shelves.

When they'd finished planting everything they could think of, they all carried pots of water, poured them into the ditch at the head of the rows and inside small dikes Vim, Hubert, and Anki had carefully built around planted fruit seeds and starts.

After they'd filled the ditch with water, Vim opened one of the earthen dams and they all watched the life giving water flow down the first row, watched it soak the soil, begin nature's amazing seed-germination process.

Vim knelt on the ground. Herbert and Anki joined him. Vim said a prayer aloud for the plants.

In accordance with Lucayan tradition, a feast was required to celebrate planting, also to pacify the *zemis*—good *spirits* the Lucayans had always erroneously believed surrounded them and kept them from harm.

When she saw Vim had finished praying, Tana reached down, picked up some damp dirt, playfully tossed it on his deeply tanned chest.

"I think she *likes* you," Anki said sarcastically to Vim in Dutch.

Vim didn't comment.

Tana began running toward the bay.

Vim jumped to his feet, quickly followed her.

Anki dashed ahead of them both.

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The others joined in the race to the bay.

The next day, Vim and Hubert brought a dry pine log from the forest; sawed it up with a saw from the cutter and with help from Anki and the Lucayan sisters, who used stone adzes, made mud boxes and wooden forms for mixing and shaping bricks.

Vim and Hubert mixed the loam with water, made a thick mud. The sisters and Anki carried it in their hands and clay pots to the wooden forms, shaped bricks, let them dry in the sun.

When they were dry, Vim tapped one with a stone. "The bricks are *strong*," he concluded.

Vim and Hubert constructed a brick kiln. They offset bricks above the firebox for airflow, built a chimney so intense heat would be applied directly to fire the thick half-cylinders of loam-sand mixture they'd soon create.

They fashioned thick half-cylinders by mixing loam and sand with water, pressed the mixture into wood and pottery forms, let them dry in the sun. They made each half-cylinder large enough so as to be able to carry six inches of water down the aqueduct.

When the kiln was complete and some of the half-cylinders dry enough to be fired, Vim used the flint and steel he and Hubert had brought from Holland, started a fire in the firebox. As Vim added small pieces of hardwood to the tiny flame, the fire danced, burst brightly into larger flames.

When Vim thought the fire was hot enough, he put the first half-cylinder into the kiln with its curve to the top so it could be more easily removed after firing, tossed large pieces of hardwood, pine and pitch into the fire.

SOME SIXTEENTH CENTURY ROMANCES

Soon, the fire was very intense, the suspense heartrending, as everyone gathered around to see if the fire would get hot enough to melt the loam-sand's surface.

Vim wiped perspiration from his brow, took a drink of water from his gourd.

As they all watched, the surface of the loam-sand gradually became a bright red-hot *liquid* before their eyes.

"You *did* it!" Anki cried, dancing about.

Teefi barked as she chased Anki's heels.

Everyone was relieved, happy, laughing, dancing around the kiln.

In the days that followed, they all helped construct a strong, wooden stand to hold up the aqueduct.

The Lucayans had long-since learned how to make cassava *glue*. Anki helped Vim and Hubert place the half-cylinders along the top of the stand then they glued and sealed each section to the next with glue the sisters had made from cassava plants.

"We'll soon see if the *glue* will hold *water*," Vim said.

"I'll bet you a *kiss* the aqueduct *leaks*!" Anki teased Vim.

"Okay. It's a *bet*!" Vim said.

When the aqueduct was ready they all stood in the garden while Hubert went up to where the aqueduct met the stream, opened the dam.

Water began rushing down the aqueduct.

As Hubert was running back down to the garden, the first gush of water shot out into the garden ditch.

All the girls flailed their arms, jumped up and down.

"Maybe we'd better try out the new *shower*!" Vim suggested.

That idea was met with great enthusiasm.

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"Yes—," Anki cried eagerly, beginning a mad dash down the hill.

They all ran down the slope to where a section of aqueduct disappeared into the top of the new, large palm-covered *shower* hut they'd constructed.

They all ran inside. Jets of fresh water from the aqueduct were shooting down through the cross-weaved, fiber showerhead Hubert had ingeniously devised.

"See! The aqueduct *leaks!*" Anki cried. "You owe me a *kiss*, Vim!"

Tana's eyes dimmed as she watched Vim give Anki a meaningful kiss.

They all drenched their naked bodies by playfully pushing each other under the cool spray of fresh water. They hugged, laughed and happily played under the spray for a long time.

Tana reminded her sisters that a feast and celebration to both celebrate the planting and to appease the *zemis* was required, so everyone got together, constructed light bamboo frames along the beach, covered them with flowers.

Food was needed for the feast, so out came the canoes that the Lucayan sisters had long ago hewn from logs. They all hopped in, paddled out to sea.

Using metal fishhooks Vim and Hubert had brought from Holland plus some the sisters had made from fishbone, they caught a nice bunch of snappers, trapped lobsters in bamboo traps, gathered clams and conch meat.

When they returned, they began fixing the meal for the feast.

"This is going to be a *great* party! I *forgot!* What is it we're *celebrating?*" Anki asked, puffing on her pipe.

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"It's a Lucayan custom to have a feast in celebration of the planting and to appease the *zemis*," Vim explained.

"Great idea! What the hell are *zemis*?" Anki asked.

"As I understand it, they're like *angels* that the Lucayans believe watch over them and protect them from harm," Vim said.

"If they're so well *protected*—what the hell happened to all their *men* folk?"

"Good question," Hubert said.

The sisters built up the fire, which had never completely died out, wrapped potatoes and carrots from the cutter in palm leaves and baked them in the hot ashes, baked the herb-filled fish wrapped in palm fronds in a pit of hot stones, steamed clams and conch meat on a bamboo rack in a special clay pot Hubert had invented.

The ladies brought loaves of fresh Dutch bread to the feast that Vim had baked in the cutter's oven.

The sisters brought cassava bread they'd made.

They all prayed, then devoured the delicious food with their fingers.

After the feast, Anki ran around, filling their coconut shell halves from a keg of Dutch beer that'd been cooling in the spring, lighting pipes.

"We can clear more land and plant the *hops*, *wheat* and *barley* seeds we have on the cutter. Someday—maybe we'll be able to make our *own* beer!" Vim ventured.

Tana located the *baco*, began playing it.

The others got up, joined her, dancing and singing around the booming fire.

It reminded Vim of the night they'd first seen light from the sister's fire from aboard the cutter. *Lots of things have changed since then*, he thought, then ran and fetched his Jew's harp and trumpet from the cutter.

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The party-loving group enjoyed each other's music and close companionship until the break of dawn.

SOME SIXTEENTH CENTURY ROMANCES

PUT ADRIFT

Chapter 8

"To the New World," Aleksandr said, slamming his tin against Pastor Jacques' in typical Russian fashion...

THE *CLOCHE DE FRANCE* was actually a warship—a galleon that had been built in Spain and purchased by a group of rich French merchants. They'd partially converted it to a merchantman for their West Indies trade routes. A high, square forecastle rose behind its bow. Its three masts carried both square and fore-and-aft sails. It had a tier of guns on each side of the hull. Thus, it was sufficiently armed to protect itself against pirates, although, in its history, it had never been required to fire a shot.

Calvinist Pastor Jacques Colet de Noyon looked up from the deck at the French flag flying atop the mast. *I won't be really out of France, until I'm free of this ship*, he thought, as he leaned against the rail, looked out over the vast expanse of ocean waves.

"Where do you think we *are*?" a man to his left asked in Russian.

Pastor Jacques recognized Russian when he heard it, but didn't understand a word of it. He turned to the man, saw he was young, about the same age as himself.

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"*Est-ce que vous parlez français?*" Pastor Jacques ventured in French, meaning '*Do you speak French?*'

"*Oui,*" the man answered.

"I'm Jacques Colet de Noyon—please—just call me Jacques," Pastor Jacques said in French.

"I'm Aleksandr Bradachev," Aleksandr said in French, with a heavy Russian accent, extending his hand.

Pastor Jacques shook it. "Where do you suppose we *are?*"

"I asked you *first,*" Aleksandr said.

They laughed.

"Rumor has it we should sight some of the islands of the West Indies any day now," Aleksandr continued.

"You're from Russia?"

"Moscow—born there. This is the first time I've been out of Russia."

"How is it you speak such excellent French?"

"Moscow is the center of Russia's western trade routes. My grandfather on my father's side was a trader. Knowing French is important to a trader because it's the language of exchange in most countries. My father taught my mother French. They both taught it to me. They hoped I'd become a merchant."

"You seem to be very miserable," Pastor Jacques said. "Are you ill?"

"Only at heart. My parents were killed recently."

"Killed?"

"Have you heard of Czar Ivan the Terrible?"

"Everybody has heard of Ivan the Terrible."

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Aleksandr glanced around the ship. He'd not seen a Russian since he'd been on board, so thought it safe to talk about Ivan. "He killed my parents—had their heads cut off right in front of our house."

"The czar could *do* that?"

"He's very paranoid. He tortures and kills anyone he suspects might be against him."

"And he suspected that your mother and father were against him?"

"*Oui*—unfortunately, since even before Ivan was born—our family has been associated with his enemies—the *boyars*," Aleksandr said.

"That's why you're here?"

Aleksandr glanced around the deck again. "*Oui*—I barely escaped his wrath with my life."

For the same reason, Pastor Jacques thought he best make certain his new acquaintance was not *Catholic*. "As I understand it, in Moscow the religion is Russian Orthodox."

"*Oui*—our family is—was all Russian Orthodox."

"And—the Russian Orthodox Church has no connection with the Catholic Church in Rome—am I correct in saying that?" Pastor Jacques asked.

"True—there's no connection that I know of. I've never even heard of the Catholic Church—what do they believe? Before you answer—to answer *your* question—our Russian churches are at odds with each *other*. They have no time to squabble with an outside church."

Pastor Jacques began to feel comfortable talking to Aleksandr. "You asked what *Catholics* believe. For one thing they believe that Protestants—like myself—." Pastor Jacques hesitated, looked into Aleksandr's eyes for any sign of rejection at his mentioning the word, 'Protestant'. Seeing none, he continued, "—should be burned at the stake."

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"What does that mean—"burned at the stake"?"

"It means the Catholics tie a Protestant to a stake—a wooden pole. They build a fire under them—burn him or her," Pastor Jacques said.

"Burn them *alive*?"

"Frequently," Pastor Jacques said.

"Wait until Ivan the Terrible hears about *that* way of torturing people—he'll *love* it...and I thought Ivan knew every torture there was," Aleksandr mused.

"I suppose you could say it's the major punishment used by the Inquisition," Pastor Jacques said.

"*Inquisition*? What's that?"

"It's a long story—basically—it's a Catholic council of three—that puts people suspected of heresy on trial—if you can *call* it a trial. If the terrified suspects don't confess to being a heretic—they're tortured until they do—then they're tortured because they *are* one," Pastor Jacques said.

"In Moscow—all justice is dispensed by Ivan the Terrible. Which—if the victim is lucky—results in their head being quickly separated from their body."

Pastor Jacques glanced up at the billowing sails. "I understand exactly what you mean," he remarked.

"You're *Protestant*—that's the reason you're on this ship—going to the *New World*—hoping to get away from the torturers. Hoping for a change—*oui*?" Aleksandr asked.

Now it was Pastor Jacques who glanced around to see if anyone was observing them, then said, "*Oui*—I'm a Calvinist Pastor."

"And a Calvinist has nothing to do with the Catholic Church?"

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"Well—the religious ceremonies are not much different—but we believe very differently. We believe a person can pray directly to God without benefit of a priest or any kind of cleric," Pastor Jacques said.

"Is it all right if I call you—Pastor Jacques?"

"I'd be happy if you would."

"Are you from *Paris*?"

"*Oui*—mostly from Paris."

"I've never been to Paris. Is there much art there?" Aleksandr asked.

"*Oui*. There is—but, strangely enough, the best art in Paris is that created by artists brought in from Italy, like Giovanni Battista di Jacopo Rosso, Vignola, Primaticcio, Serlio, and Benvenuto Cellini. What is art like in Moscow?"

"It's much the same story as in Paris. My family was rich. My father commissioned *Italian* artists to decorate our mansion. Italian artists also designed the Cathedral of the Intersession of the Virgin in Moscow—to commemorate the military feats of Ivan the Terrible. He presently has his army fighting the khanate of Kazan. If he can annex their territory—Russia will have access—for the first time in its history—to the Volga River."

The weather was changing. The warm breeze had become a little stronger, began to rustle through their beards. The dying sun had tacked silver linings on the dark clouds that lay over the ocean to the west. It began to sprinkle.

"Looks like a *squall* coming up. I think it's time I went below," Pastor Jacques concluded.

"Me, too!"

They left the rail, went down the hatchway to the small cabins below.

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"I bought a bottle of wine from one of the deckhands," Pastor Jacques said. "Will you join me in a drink?"

"*Oui*, I'd like that."

They went into Pastor Jacques' cabin, left the door open.

Pastor Jacques opened the bottle of wine, found two tins and poured them each a drink. "To the *New World*," he said, raising his tin.

"To the *New World*," Aleksandr said, slamming his tin against Pastor Jacques' in typical Russian fashion.

They each took a sip.

"Oh," Pastor Jacques said, moving to the head of his sleeping mat. "I have something to show you. It's a rosary—actually—it's a Catholic *priest's* rosary." A bad feeling suddenly came over him. "I laid it on this shelf under this *book*." He couldn't find the rosary anywhere.

"Is *this* what you're *looking* for?" a voice from the open cabin door asked.

They turned to see who'd spoken. A tall man filled the doorway. Pastor Jacques recognized his robe and hat as being that of a *Catholic cleric*. Pastor Jacques feared the worst.

The cleric mockingly dangled the rosary before them. "You're both under *arrest* for possession of the property of a *priest*," he said, then yelled to a sentry, "Take them both on *deck*!"

They were ignominiously dragged up the hatchway to the ship's deck.

The sentry relieved them of all of their valuables.

The captain of the ship was summoned.

In pouring rain, the cleric, captain and first officer conducted a mock trial, as Pastor Jacques and Aleksandr stood before them.

"Are either of you *Catholic*?" the cleric asked.

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Neither answered.

"Very well then, if we were in *France*," the cleric continued, cynically, striking his ornate metal rod on the wet wooden table before him, "you would be sent to Paris for trial by the *Inquisition*—then—burned at the *stake*. Since we're *not*—you'll both be set out to *sea* in a small *boat*—with two *oars* and a day's ration of *water* apiece!"

The sentence was carried out. Pastor Jacques and Aleksandr were cast adrift, having been relieved of all their money and jewels—set adrift out on the broad Atlantic Ocean in a small green wooden boat.

They managed to paddle enough with the two oars they found in the boat to keep the boat from capsizing in the swells brought on by the squall.

"If you have influence with the Almighty—now's the time to *test* it!" Aleksandr suggested.

"If you'll join me in prayer—I'll give it a *try*," Pastor Jacques said, tilting his head forward in the rain in prayer. "Dear God—there are evil men on your earth. We pray you deliver your meek humankind from them and—if you can spare the time—please deliver *us* from this squall. Amen."

"*Amen!*" Aleksandr echoed.

They raised their heads, and as if by magic the worst of the squall veered away from them toward the north. The waters around them soon calmed, the clouds opened up and they saw the moon for the first time.

They watched the tips of the crow's-nests, which were at the tops of the *Cloche de France's* masts, slowly dip below the horizon as the ship continued its southern journey.

They were safe from the squall, but still stranded out on the ocean.

After they'd been rowing quite some time, Aleksandr suddenly noticed something unusual. "Look out *there!*" he said, pointing.

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There was a *break* in the moon's refection on the water.

"It looks like *islands!*" Pastor Jacques said excitedly, adjusting his beret.

"*Islands?*" Aleksandr cried in disbelief.

"*Oui*—if we can paddle that far—we can have the dubious honor of being *marooned* on an *island*," Pastor Jacques said, continuing to row. "If *cannibals* don't get us."

"Are there *cannibals* in this part of the world?"

"I don't know. I'm not sure where we *are* exactly. Rumors have it there used to be some cannibals on islands in this general area," Pastor Jacques said.

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THE BLUE SAILFISH

Chapter 9

"A sailfish!" Vim cried. "Look! It just took the bait..."

IT WAS A perfect August day.

Vim had baited a large fishhook with a mullet Hubert had caught earlier in the morning. Vim had tossed the baited hook over the stern of the cutter they'd named, *La Mouette*, meaning '*The Seagull*'. The mullet skipped lightly over the surface of the blue-green water for a few minutes.

Suddenly, Vim saw a purple shadow shoot up behind the dancing mullet. "Something's about to hit the *bait!*" he shouted in French.

Hubert turned the tiller over to Lanoi, who he was teaching to sail the *La Mouette*—ran to the stern!

Anki and the Lucayan sisters had already gotten there ahead of him.

They all watched as a magnificent blue, spotted sail broke the surface. Then, amid the churning water—a wiry bill slashed at the bait.

"Look at *that!* It's going for the *bait!*" Anki yelled.

"What *is* it?" Tana cried in French.

"A *sailfish!*" Vim cried. "Look! It just took the *bait!*"

The sailfish ran with the line, then its sudden surge let Vim know it'd turned with the bait. He applied the reel's makeshift brake—jerked the

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stiff pole, set the hook. The giant sailfish broke the surface of the water, leaped—again and again—showering spray as it walked on its tail over the water, its brilliant blue back, silver sides and belly sparkling in the morning sun.

Vim fought it for half an hour, perspiration running down his face and body.

When he finally got it near the stern of the cutter, all the ladies gasped at the size of it.

Its long, sharp bill thrashed as Hubert slipped the gaff hook under its gill.

Vim thought the hickory gaff pole might break, as all, except Lanoi who was working the tiller, helped pull the sailfish up.

Vim threw a piece of sailcloth over the slashing bill to prevent injuries then they pulled the struggling sailfish the rest of the way on board.

It must weigh two hundred *pounds!*" Hubert declared.

"Look at the *snout* on that damned thing!" Anki cried.

The Lucayan ladies danced around it for good luck.

"Can we *eat* it?" Tana asked in French.

"You have never *seen* one before?" Vim asked.

"Never," Tana said.

"*Oui*, we'll *eat* it," Vim said. "I've heard about these sailfish from Dutch sailors. They say sailfish are good to eat."

When the sailfish finally stopped moving, they cleaned it, washed it with seawater then scrubbed the deck.

Everyone was happy.

Anki handed cups of gin all around.

Pushed by a slight breeze, the *La Mouette* sailed on through the inviting, blue ocean waves.

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They were all laughing and enjoying each other's company.

Hubert went to the tiller and stood near Lanoi.

Vim, Tana, Zoni and Anki sat down out on the bow.

After while Zoni noticed something. "What's *that*?" she asked in French, pointing out to sea.

Everyone looked to where she was pointing, saw something *green* floating on the blue water quite some distance away.

Since Hubert had more experience tacking the cutter than Lanoi did, he took the tiller.

Vim and the others began working sails, redirecting the *La Mouette*, brought it around, headed it in the direction of the green object.

As they got closer, they could see it was a small, green boat with two men in it—frantically waving their *arms*!

Hubert eased the *La Mouette* alongside the boat.

The men looked scruffy, but were obviously not armed.

"*Bonjour!*" Vim called in French, meaning '*Hello!*'

To his surprise, one of the men replied in French, "*Bonjour!*"

"What are you two doing way out here floating around in this little *boat*?" Vim shouted.

"It's a *long* story! Let us come *aboard* and we'll *tell* you all about it!"

Vim lowered the rope ladder. The two climbed aboard.

Anki, in her mischievous way, watched with intense interest, waiting to see the expression on their faces when they realized everybody on board was *naked*.

Zoni liked Pastor Jacques instantly. She insisted on helping him up on deck. His face turned crimson when he saw so much nakedness. "I'm

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Pastor Jacques Colet de Noyon! Nice fishing cutter you have here!" he said, not knowing what else to say.

"I'm Aleksandr Bradachev!" Aleksandr said as Maru affectionately helped him up on deck. He didn't blush at her nakedness, as he was used to public nudity. In fact, he realized that he very much enjoyed her nakedness.

"You look like you're in excellent physical condition! One would expect people floating on the open ocean to be almost ready to *die*," Anki quipped.

"We just got put adrift last night. We were trying to paddle to those *islands* over there," Pastor Jacques said, pointing. "It's lucky for *us* you came along. What brings you way out here, anyway?"

"Fishing," Vim said.

Then Pastor Jacques saw the sailfish. "Wow! That's a *beauty*! Did you just catch it?"

"Vim just caught it a few minutes ago," Zoni said.

They took the green boat in tow behind the *La Mouette*, set sail for Liberté Island.

"We could use some water," Aleksandr said.

"Of course, we have plenty of water and how about a cup of *gin*?" Vim asked.

Pastor Jacques and Aleksandr nodded that that would be a good idea.

"Water—and—gin for our guests *s'il vous plait*," Vim said.

Zoni brought Pastor Jacques a tin of water and one of gin.

Maru did the same for Aleksandr.

"I'm Vim van der Grooten. This is Tana—Lanoi—Zoni—Maru—Anki—and my brother Hubert!"

"*Enchanté!*" Pastor Jacques said, which literally meant, '*Enchanted!*'

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"*Enchanté, mademoiselles*," Aleksandr said, admiring Maru.

There was no question that Pastor Jacques was immediately taken by Zoni's beauty as well. "Who's *married*?" he asked.

"None of us are," Vim said. "And—believe it or not—we're all still *virgins*!"

"I'm a virgin as well," Pastor Jacques volunteered.

"I am also," Aleksandr confessed.

What kind of pastor *are* you?" Vim asked Pastor Jacques.

"Are any of you *Catholic*?" Pastor Jacques inquired, immediately.

"None of us are *Catholic*," Hubert said. "Vim, Anki, and I are Lutheran, and the ladies are Lucayans."

"In *that* case—I'm a *Calvinist* Pastor," Pastor Jacques said. "A person has to be careful these days," he apologized.

Everyone laughed, relieving the tension.

"That you're not Catholic is great news. Now, we don't have to *kill* you!" Anki piped.

Everyone laughed again.

"Then—you're authorized to perform marriages in the name of God?" Vim asked, in a more serious tone.

"By all means!" Pastor Jacques confirmed.

Vim didn't hesitate a second. He fell to his knees before Anki. "Will you *marry* me?" he asked in French.

Shocked, she cried, "I wasn't even sure you *loved* me! Do you *love* me, *really*, Vim?"

"Yes. I *love* you!" Vim cried.

"I thought maybe—you and *Tana*—," Anki said, kneeled down in front of him, put his fingers to her lips, kissed them.

He embraced her.

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"*Oui—oh—oui—oui—I'll marry you!*" she cried, pulled his face to her, kissed him a long time.

Then Hubert knelt before Lanoi, took her hands in his. "*Est-ce que vous vous me marierez?*" he asked, meaning '*Will you marry me?*'

"*Oui, Hubee!*" she cried. "*Oui—oui!*"

"We'll have a *double-wedding* and a special feast—for three *days!*" Zoni declared.

"With *radishes*, if you like!" Vim added.

"*Radishes?* Where will we get *radishes?*" Pastor Jacques asked, amazed.

"From our *garden*," Maru said.

"This calls for another drink," Anki cried.

"From your accent, I think you must be from *Russia*, no? You're probably used to *vodka*. Unfortunately, we don't have *vodka*," Vim apologized, to Aleksandr. "How about another gin?"

"That would be *splendid*," Aleksandr agreed. "Yes, I'm *from Russia*."

Zoni refreshed everyone's cup with gin.

"To the engagements of *Vim* and *Anki*—and *Hubert* and *Lanoi!*" Pastor Jacques said, lifting his cup.

Everyone lifted their cups, except Tana. She thought she'd be the one Vim would choose to marry. Tears welled up in her eyes.

Pastor Jacques tried to comfort her. "What *is* it?" he asked.

"Nothing," Tana replied.

As the two dolphins appeared and guided the *La Mouette* safely through the deepwater channel to the beach of Liberté Island, the ladies filleted the sailfish, tossed its bones over the stern, washed down the deck.

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As soon as the cutter touched the beach, the ladies rewarded the dolphins with pieces of sailfish, separated the small boat from the cutter, tied the small boat's rope to a palm tree and tied the cutter's rope to another one.

Tana and Lanoi laid a blanket of palm fronds on the sand near the cooking area to put the fillets on.

The men carried the fillets down the rope ladder and the Lucayan ladies carefully laid them out on the palm fronds.

The Lucayan ladies began preparing for the weddings of Vim and Anki, and Hubert and Lanoi. They quickly set about redecorating the existing bamboo frames with fresh, fragrant flowers, constructed and decorated additional frames. They built and adorned an arched frame for the brides and grooms to stand under during the ceremony.

Tana restored the fire to a fine blaze with dry wood.

"Where are you *from*," Vim asked Pastor Jacques, giving Anki's hand an affable squeeze as he spoke.

"Paris—I suppose you could say—I grew up there, but I spent a lot of time in Geneva, Switzerland. That's where I learned to be a Calvinist pastor."

"I studied languages in Paris," Vim said. "I was a language teacher in Amstelledamme, Holland."

"Oh! The great *shipping* port!" Pastor Jacques exclaimed.

"Have you *been* there?" Vim asked.

"No—but I think everyone in Europe has heard of it," Pastor Jacques said.

"Then—I propose that the *first* day of the *wedding* feast be devoted to *French* cuisine," Vim said.

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"Vim studied culinary arts in Paris. He doesn't *sound* convincing, but he really *can* cook," Hubert added, lightheartedly.

"*Au contraire*," Pastor Jacques disagreed. "The first day must be devoted to *Dutch* and *Lucayan* cuisine—in honor of the four of you getting *married!*"

"Well—that *settles* it then—today we'll have cuisine that is half *Lucayan* and half *Dutch*. Tomorrow we'll devote the celebration to *you* and have *French* cuisine, and also *Lucayan*. And—on the third day—*Russian* cuisine in honor of Aleksandr—and *Lucayan* cuisine as well!" Vim said to Pastor Jacques.

"Fair enough!" Hubert said, sipping his gin. "Zoni—Maru—please escort these two survivors to the *beach*—they smell like *goats!*"

Everyone laughed.

Zoni and Maru brought Pastor Jacques and Aleksandr each half a coconut shell of fermented coconut juice, found a block of ash soap, gleefully peeled the two men's clothes off, tossed their garments into the fire, took them by the hand, led them into the beautiful, turquoise water among darting tropical fish.

They excitedly scrubbed the men thoroughly then led them to the shower hut where the four laughed and played together a long time in the cool, delightful spray of fresh water.

In the meantime, Vim, Hubert, Anki and Lanoi had begun preparing part of the sailfish fillets in the *Lucayan* style and part as enjoyed best by the *Dutch*. The rest of the fillets were divided up, some for drying, some placed in the waterproof, wooden box they'd made and buried in the damp sand by the cold spring near the huts where the fillets would remain cool and fresh then be cooked as needed over the following few days.

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They also stored goat's milk in the spring, from a small herd of goats they'd found wandering about on another island a few weeks earlier.

While Pastor Jacques and Aleksandr dried out on beach mats, Zoni and Maru painted special colored designs on the men's bodies, to bring them good luck, then they let the men take a well-deserved nap after their hazardous journey in the green boat.

Vim and Anki set about creating culinary masterpieces.

First, Vim built a fire in the metal stove he'd removed from the cutter earlier.

"The *stove* is better for cooking things in a *pot* than the open fire is," he said to Anki.

"*Oui*," she agreed. "The fire burns the *hell* out of things sometimes."

They laughed.

He went and got a large copper pot with lid and some olive oil from the cutter.

He put the pot on the stove, poured olive oil in it, added fresh parsley from the garden, fresh basil from the herb hut, cut up two onions, dropped them in, ground some dried peppers, added them, heated and stirred the mixture until the onions were crystallized then added chopped, fresh garlic from the garden, heated everything a while longer.

He chopped tomatoes they'd picked from the garden, added white wine he'd brought from the cutter and salt they'd found on the island.

He let all that simmer while he cut the sailfish fillets into chunks.

Smelling the fish, Geel made an appearance.

"Where have you *been Geel*? *Geel* is back!" Vim said to Anki, as he dropped a piece of fish for the cat.

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"About damned *time!*" Anki cried. "Geel might be *half* wild, but this island is *completely* wild. It's survival of the *fittest* living here!"

Vim had found a wild olive tree in the forest, had pickled some olives in brine, dropped a few into the copper pot, stirred everything together, pushed the pot to the back of the stove, let it all simmer together. "*Oui*, it is survival of the fittest. So far, *we've* survived and we've been able to make some of our *European* ways of life survive as well, and, at the same time respect the *Lucayan* way of doing things."

"What are you going to call this mess we're cooking?"

"*Dutch fish stew!*"

They laughed.

Meanwhile, Tana had prepared some sailfish fillets *Lucayan* style—stuffed with spicy herbs, wrapped in palm fronds, baked under hot stones.

"This *rhubarb* is nice and crisp," Vim said.

He decided to make two Dutch rhubarb *pies*.

He prepared and pressed dough in pie tins he'd gotten from the cutter, put them in the oven to bake until they became golden brown pie shells, washed and cut up about two pounds of rhubarb they'd gathered from the garden, put the pieces in a bowl, added sugar, flour, salt, cloves, cinnamon, goat's milk, a little olive oil and stirred everything together, poured the contents of the bowl into the baked pie shells, baked the pies for about an hour.

"There, all *done*," he said with satisfaction, tossing Geel another piece of fish.

Vim still had two loaves of French bread he'd made the day before. He put them on the back of the stove to warm.

Vim and Hubert had made a very large and beautiful, white and red, wooden table and chairs out of cedar wood.

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When everything was ready, Tana and Lanoi set the table with bowls for the fish stew, served the Lucayan fillets on single palm fronds, put cassava bread and French bread on the table.

Vim smelled the steam rising from the pot, was happy with the aroma, put the pot of Dutch fish stew on the table.

He realized he hadn't seen Hubert anywhere recently, wondered where he'd gone.

Then Hubert suddenly appeared with an, '*I've-been-up-to-something*', look on his face.

Vim found his trumpet. Tana found the *baco*. Between them and Anki's singing, they proceeded to make enough loud music to wake up the two who'd been sleeping on the beach.

The two sat up, rubbed their eyes.

"The feast is prepared," Vim announced.

"You mean you're going to have the *feast* before the *wedding*?" Pastor Jacques asked, astounded.

"*Oui*," Vim said. "We plan to be *busy* afterwards! Hubert and I've been on Liberté Island for almost three *months* with all these beauties—and we're still *virgins*!"

"*Now*, I understand," Pastor Jacques said.

"Let's eat while the food's still *hot*!" Vim said.

They all sat down at the table.

Pastor Jacques bowed his head, the rest bowed theirs. "Thank you God for the food we are about to receive..." Pastor Jacques began, prayed for some time then they said amen's, began to eat.

The Lucayan ladies began eating only Lucayan food.

The men started in on the Dutch cuisine.

"May I try some of your *fillet*?" Aleksandr asked Zoni.

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"*Mais oui!*" Zoni said, happy he'd asked to taste the Lucayan cooking she'd helped prepare.

She put a small portion of Lucayan style sailfish fillet and a bit of cassava bread on a piece of palm frond, passed it to him.

He picked up some of the fish, put it in his mouth. "*Délicieux! Très délicieux,*" he said in French, meaning '*Very delicious*'.

Zoni smiled, happy he liked Lucayan food.

"What did he *say*?" Maru asked Zoni.

"He said it was delicious!" Zoni said in Lucayan.

"*Aleksandr?*" Maru asked in French. "Do you want to try some?"

"Please let me try some!" Aleksandr said.

Maru passed some fish and bread to him.

He tasted it. "*Très délicieux!*" he echoed.

All the ladies smiled.

"Oh—I forgot the *wine*," Vim said, dashed off to the cooler by the spring, quickly returned, poured everyone a cup of sparkling white French wine.

They all raised their cups, except Tana, who was still feeling sad about not getting to marry Vim.

"To the soon-to-be-married brides and grooms!" Aleksandr toasted.

Everyone except Tana drank to the toast.

"Where did you get this splendid French wine?" Pastor Jacques asked.

"When I was studying in Paris—my family would come visit me and buy many cases of French wine before returning home. When Hubert and I realized we'd eventually have to *escape* from Holland—we built wine racks up inside the hull from keel to deck and filled every one with bottles of good wine," Vim said.

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"You have excellent taste," Pastor Jacques said.

"Thank you," Vim said. "How's the Dutch *stew*?"

"It's wonderful!" Pastor Jacques said. "Zoni—would you like to try some?"

Zoni passed her bowl. Pastor Jacques spooned some into it.

Zoni picked up one of the spoons on the table, tried to work it. She'd seen Vim and Hubert eat with a spoon, but she'd never tried it.

Pastor Jacques saw that she was just learning, got up from his chair, went and stood behind her, put his hand on hers, helped her guide the spoon of Dutch sailfish stew to her beautiful lips. *She must not be more than five years younger than me*, he thought.

"*Très délicieux!*" she said.

Everyone laughed, breaking the slight tension.

Soon, everyone was eating *every* kind of food and drinking wine.

"You, Hubert and Anki—being *Lutheran*—I hope you won't mind if I conduct the wedding ceremony in the *Calvinist* tradition," Pastor Jacques said.

"Not at all—that is if you don't mind wearing a *Lutheran* minister's robe while you're *doing* it," Vim said lightheartedly.

Pastor Jacques laughed. "I don't mind at all."

Hubert took the hint. He and Lanoi ran to the *La Mouette*, found the Lutheran ceremonial robe, stole, altar cloth, Bible and cross, returned.

They moved a small table from one of the huts, set it under the arch of flowers, arranged the altar cloth on it, set the large cross and Bible on the altar cloth.

"Pastor Jacques," Hubert said. "Please come to the altar."

Pastor Jacques broke away from Zoni, went to the altar.

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Hubert placed the ornate white silk robe on Pastor Jacques, fastened it about the middle, carefully placed the silk stole around his neck so its ends hung straight down as was the Protestant way of wearing the stole.

"Under the circumstances—I don't expect you have *rings* for the bride and groom, but I thought I'd ask," Pastor Jacques said.

"Wait!" Hubert cried. He ran to one of the huts, returned with his hands enclosing something.

Then, Vim realized what Hubert had been doing so *secretly*.

Hubert laid four shining objects out on the table.

Everyone gathered around.

As the Lucayan sisters looked on, it was to them as if the Supreme Being was shining a beam of His light on the magnificent, serpentine marble sacred objects Hubert had set before them.

In the brilliant sunlight, the beautifully polished, vivid green of four flower-petal-shaped *Celts*, delicately contrasted with the red and white cedar wood beneath them. Radiant bursts of light reflecting from the facets of four large *diamonds*—one diamond set into each *Celt*—gave them a flashing, bluish, *magical* glow.

The ladies were stunned.

"They're *beautiful*!" Anki said.

"They're magnificent!" Pastor Jacques added.

"I make *jewelry*. It's a *hobby* of mine," Hubert explained. "Lanoi tells me these are called *Celts*. As far as we know—they and the dance around the fire to the music of the *baco* are the only religious rudiments that remain of the Lucayan way of life."

"Then—in my opinion at least—they're the *perfect* symbols for the *weddings*," Pastor Jacques declared. "Shall we begin the *ceremony*?"

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The Lucayan ladies put fragrant flowers in Anki and Lanoi's hair and wished that they, too, were about to become brides.

The men removed the chairs from around the table, placed them in a semicircle in front of the altar.

Everyone not directly involved in the ceremony sat down on chairs.

Pastor Jacques took his place in front of the altar, his back to those seated.

He didn't have everything he normally would have had to conduct such a service, so he improvised.

The Pastor Jacques' words were soft and reverent as he said the first part of the service in Latin. He made the sign of the cross with his hand several times as he spoke, then turned with the Bible in hand, faced everyone, opened it and in French, read the first part of the Song of Solomon.

"Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—
for your love is more delightful than wine.
Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes;
your name is like perfume poured out.
No wonder the maidens love you!
Take me away with you—let us hurry!
Let the king bring me into his chambers."

Having had only two months of French lessons, the Lucayan sisters didn't understand all of what Pastor Jacques was saying, but they understood the idea.

"Will the *brides* and *grooms* please come forward?" Pastor Jacques asked.

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Vim and Anki, and Hubert and Lanoi stepped forward, stood before him.

Pastor Jacques continued to conduct the ceremony in French.

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God to join together Vim and Anki—and Hubert and Lanoi in Holy Matrimony—which is an honorable estate—instituted of God in Paradise—and into which Holy estate these persons, Vim and Anki—and Hubert and Lanoi—being present—come now to be joined. Therefore if any man can show any just cause why Vim and Anki—and Hubert and Lanoi may not lawfully be joined together—by God's Law—or the Laws of the Liberté Island—let him now speak—or else hereafter forever hold his peace."

Tana held back tears, but didn't challenge the marriage.

Pastor Jacques continued. "I require and charge each of you, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if any of you know any impediment, why ye may not be lawfully joined together in matrimony, that ye confess it. For ye be well assured, that so many as be coupled together otherwise than God's word doth allow are not joined together by God—neither is their matrimony lawful."

Neither of the couples spoke of any impediments.

"Vim, wilt thou have Anki to be thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honor, and keep her, in sickness and in health—and forsaking all others, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?"

"I will," Vim said.

"Hubert, wilt thou have Lanoi to be thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou

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love her, comfort her, honor, and keep her, in sickness and in health—and forsaking all others, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?"

"I will," Hubert said.

"Anki, wilt thou have Vim to be thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honor, and keep him in sickness and in health—and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?"

"I will," Anki said.

"Lanoi, Wilt thou have Hubert to be thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honor, and keep him in sickness and in health—and, forsaking all others, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?"

"I will," Lanoi said.

"Vim and Anki—please come forward," Pastor Jacques said.

"Vim—take Anki by the right hand and repeat after me."

Vim took her hand.

"I, Vim, take thee Anki to my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, for fairer or fouler, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance—and thereunto I plight thee my troth."

Vim repeated the vow.

"Anki, repeat after me."

"I, Anki, take thee Vim to my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to be bonny and buxom at bed and at board, to love and to

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cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance—and thereunto I plight thee my troth."

Hubert took Lanoi's hand and they repeated their vows.

"Place the *Celts* on the Bible," Pastor Jacques said.

They each placed a *Celt* on the Bible.

Pastor Jacques continued, "Bless these *Celts*, o merciful Lord, that those who hold them, that give and receive them, may be ever faithful to one another, remain in your peace, and live and grow old together in your love, under their own vine and fig tree, and seeing their children's children. Amen. Place the *Celt* in your partner's hand and all repeat together—with this *Celt* I thee wed and with my body I thee honor and with all my worldly goods I thee endow. In the name of the Father—and of the Son—and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

They all repeated the vow.

Pastor Jacques motioned for the four of them to kneel.

"Let us pray... o eternal God, creator and preserver of all mankind, giver of all spiritual grace, the author of everlasting life—send thy blessing upon these thy servants, these men and these women, whom we bless in thy name—that—as Isaac and Rebecca lived faithfully together, so these persons may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant betwixt them made, whereof this *Celt* given and received is a token and pledge, and may ever hereafter remain in perfect love and peace together, and live according to thy laws—through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

Pastor Jacques continued the ceremony with the Lord's Prayer. "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name, your kingdom come, yours will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For thine is the kingdom

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and the power and the glory, forever. Amen. Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder."

Then, he raised his head and spoke to those seated. "For as much as Vim and Anki, and Hubert and Lanoi have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and thereto have given and pledged their troth each to the other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving of a *Celt*, and by joining of hands—I pronounce therefore that each couple be man and wife together, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

Then, Pastor Jacques added a blessing. "God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, bless, preserve, and keep you—the Lord mercifully with his favor look upon you—and so fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace, that ye may so live together in this life, that in the world to come ye may have life everlasting. Amen."

"Vim and Hubert, you may kiss your brides."

They kissed their brides for a long time.

Pastor Jacques removed his ecclesiastical garments, joined the well-wishers.

Showing she had no hard feelings, Tana brought cold, red French wine and poured it into their cups. They drank a toast to the newlyweds then Tana found her *baco* and played it as she began to dance around the fire.

As the sun sank below the horizon, firelight cast Tana's long, dancing shadows onto the moonlit beach and water. She was quickly joined by the other Lucayan sisters, then by the men. They all danced, sang and drank wine to the music of her *baco*.

Then—without warning—the Lucayan ladies quickly spoke to each other in Lucayan then whispered something to Anki in French—and before

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Vim knew what was happening, Anki cried, "*Oui—!*" tossed her wine cup on the sand and began running as fast as she could *down* the beach toward the far-distant south end of the island.

Lanoi tossed hers and began dashing *up* the beach toward the north end.

Vim quickly ran after Anki.

Hubert raced after Lanoi.

No one would see the four again for *many* days.

After the four were out of sight Zoni said in French, "Look! Vim made Dutch rhubarb *pies!*"

"For some reason, Vim must have *forgotten* all *about* them," Pastor Jacques said, chuckling. "Let's have some *pie!*"

They all laughed and enjoyed Vim's Dutch rhubarb pies.

Then the ladies laid sleeping mats on the beach and the four laid out in the moonlight, chatted and were still finishing up the open bottles of wine as the sun rose the next morning.

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A WARRIOR FROM INDIA

Chapter 10

In his right hand he wielded his long, razor-sharp, slender, curved sword...

ON THE OUTSKIRTS of Delhi, India, in May 1555, Mongol Emperor Humayun briskly galloped his ornately saddled, white warhorse directly toward his enemy's *on-coming cavalry*. In his right hand he wielded his long, razor-sharp, slender, curved sword. Thrusting it forward, he urged his cavalry to follow him to *victory*—like *Jenghiz Khan*, one of his ancestors on his father's-*mother's* side, had done—and—as *Tamerlane*, one of his ancestors on his father's-*father's* side had likewise done.

The howling winds were beating against his face, fluttering his gold and white turban and white silk uniform.

Rushing air was whipping the flags and pendants about his army's standards, making them flap in frenzies of colored silk.

Emperor *Humayun's* brave men, swords in hand, spurred their mounts on as they surged *forward* toward the *oncoming*, sword-swinging enemy.

It was not yet monsoon season, and dust—kicked up by the hundreds of his army's thundering horses' hooves—floated behind his marching,

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matchlock-wielding riflemen and horse-drawn cannons that rumbled along at the rear of his cavalry manned by Turkish gunners.

In all, his army numbered some three thousand soldiers.

Humayun was an orthodox Muslim and prayed five times a day. As he rode, he recited to himself some verses from the Quran—a book of over six thousand sacred verses he'd memorized as a child. He believed that *Muhammad* would understand that he, *Humayun*, was engaged in an important battle to take *Delhi*—which, if successful, would forever seal Humayun's undisputed sovereignty over the Mughal Empire—an empire that covered the entire northern half of India. Humayun thought Muhammad would surely forgive him for not stopping his cavalry advance to dismount, kneel on the ground, bow to Mecca and say his afternoon prayers. Humayun knew that if his army *won*, in *Muhammad's* eyes, they'd be *avengers* in the name of *Allah* and if it *lost*, they'd be *martyrs*. There was, therefore, no way to *lose*, but he felt it'd be best to swiftly defeat his enemy by taking *Delhi*—so he could quickly return to his *harem, jewels, silk and velvet*.

In 1530, Humayun had inherited the Mughal Empire from his father, Emperor Babur, who'd bravely fought and finally conquered the powerful leader Afghan Sher Shah.

Afghan Sher Shah's *son's* were among the officers leading Humayun's *enemy's* cavalry charge, now galloping toward Humayun, about to meet him *head on* in gory battle.

Among those officers briskly galloping their war horses at the point of *Afghan Sher Shah's sons'* cavalry, racing toward Humayun's cavalry, was a twenty-eight year old *soldier of fortune* by the name of *Adan Sābād Cotouré*.

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Over the last two years he'd been paid very well to fight in *Afghan Sher Shah's sons'* cavalry. He'd even been given the honorary rank of cavalry officer.

"*Balā se!*" Adan screamed against the fierce wind in Hindustani as, with a forward gesture of his razor-sharp, curved sword, he directed the charge of the right half of the cavalry.

What he'd screamed was a *curse*. It was apparent to him that *Humayun's* army outnumbered *Afghan Sher Shah's sons'* army, which Adan was in, perhaps *ten-to-one*. *Afghan Sher Shah's sons'* army, unlike *Humayun's*, had no cannon and few riflemen.

Adan quickly realized the battle was tantamount to *suicide* for him and his cavalry. It was now no mystery to him why the strength of *Afghan Sher Shah's* empire and army had crumbled under the rule of *Afghan Sher Shah's sons*. When it came to war—his sons were *idiots*.

What will money do me—if I'm dead? Adan thought. *Win or lose, this will be my last battle...*

Adan screamed commands as, with his boot heels, he urged his sleek, black horse onward into the fight!

His red turban set off his well-trimmed, black mustache and beard which followed the contours of his mouth, curved around the sides of his lips, came to a crisp black peak at the end of his chin and pointed directly at his rapidly-charging *enemies*.

His ebony black eyes became mere slits in his deadly-serious, rugged, copper-colored face as he mentally weighed the strength of the first horseman he was about to do battle with.

Like two giant ocean waves—the two screaming armies of sword-swinging cavalry clashed in deadly combat. The glint of hundreds of flashing, slicing, bloody-red-stained swords glinted in the sunlit, rising dust.

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In the midst of this struggle of titans, Adan was swinging his sword valiantly and accurately, but finally the dust became so thick he could hardly see where he was directing his sword.

Then, as Adan's horse reared up above the dust cloud, Adan caught a glimpse of his so-called *leaders*—the *sons of Afghan Sher Shah*—riding away from the fight at full *gallop!*

Obviously, the battle had already been actually *won*—and Adan's side had *lost*, but the one-sided battle continued.

He forced his horse's reins heavily against its lathered neck. As his horse wheeled about, Adan screamed to his men in Hindustani, "*Retreat—Retreat!*"

When his horse had forced itself free of the conflict, Adan spurred it to a full gallop, away from the fighting, out onto open desert land.

He heard bullets whiz past as he urged his overworked, wet stallion onward and southward in the general direction of his home, which was on the east coast of southern India near a town that would later be known as Pondichéry.

When he felt he was out of danger from his Muslim enemies, he slowed his horse to a comfortable walk, rode on to a small trader's village about fifteen miles south of Delhi, a village which would eventually become the location of the city of Forīdābād.

He purchased new clothes, including a white turban, and a waterproof, cloak-like garment so he would be prepared for the monsoons he knew would soon be coming, as they did every year at that time, got rid of his bloody uniform and blood-stained sword and purchased a green cotton travel bag with a long strap to carry supplies he'd need.

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With lament, he sold his faithful horse, as he'd still have to travel by *boat* more than twelve hundred arduous miles before he'd arrive at his home in southern India.

From vendors, he bought some unleavened bread, dried meat and a bottle of fermented palm juice for his boat journey then had a meal of lentils, curried rice and vegetables to prepare him for the long voyage ahead.

He arranged for passage with the owner of a large, single-mast trader boat that had a large rectangular sail, a bright blue, square tent on its deck, and was about to depart down the Chambal River.

He knew the trader boat would take him on down the river to where the Chambal emptied into the Ganges, then on to the mouth of the Ganges in the Bay of Bengal.

Adan tossed his bag inside the tent, laid his head on it, curled up, went to sleep.

Adan was jogged awake each time the trader boat made its frequent stops at small towns along the Ganges. At every stop the three traders operating the boat sold shoes, fruit and crates of chickens.

After several weeks, they arrived in a fishing village at the mouth of the Ganges. The traders moored the boat to a pier.

A larger vessel was in port. Adan paid its owner for passage down the east coast of India, eventually arrived at his home port, which much later, in 1674, would become known as Pondichéry, India, founded by Francois Martin of the French East India Company.

But, Adan's father, a French adventurer and trader, had settled there much earlier and had married Adan's mother, a Hindu, in 1527.

Adan had grown up there and in his twenties had become a soldier of fortune. He was fluent in Hindustani and several other Indian dialects, as

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well as French. As a soldier of fortune, he'd indeed made a fortune, which he'd gradually added to over the past two years from money and jewels that had been paid to him by the sons of Afghan Sher Shah for winning many skirmishes for them.

During his long absences, his mother had kept his fortune safe for him and, in return, Adan had been very generous in sharing it with his parents.

He'd made up his mind to leave war-torn India—perhaps for *always*—and didn't look forward to telling his parents goodbye.

His mother had been born into the *Vaisyas* caste, which included merchants, farmers and traders. Adan was the only surviving offspring his parents had left. Two of his younger brothers and a younger sister had died of malaria.

Adan, being half French, had been *tolerated*, but never really *accepted* by the people of the community. That was why he'd become a soldier of fortune instead of a merchant, farmer—or trader like his father.

As he walked up the dirt path to his parents' small farm, he saw seven white Brahma cattle grazing in the hot, humid pasture.

The yellow-red brick house and farm buildings look like they're still in good condition, he thought.

As he came near the house, a brown dog began barking, came running to greet him, jumped up, playfully put its paws on his stomach. He petted it. It'd been the family dog since Adan was in his teens. He was happy to be home again.

The door of the house was open. Adan went in, looked around the living-dining room, saw the red-plaster walls with a few familiar pictures hanging on them, saw the carpet, which was used for yoga and meditation

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and for sitting to eat, saw the family altar with burning incense and beautiful flowers on it, smelled the ritual perfume, went on into the kitchen.

His mother was standing in front of the cooking stove, her back to him, cooking something in a pot that smelled sweet and aromatic.

He couldn't remember the last time he'd had a good meal.

He didn't want to startle his mother, so he carefully rang the tiny bell she'd always used to let the family know when dinner was ready.

She turned, saw him—dropped her spoon. "*Adan!* It's *you!*" she cried in Hindi, grabbed him by the shoulders, gave him a powerful hug then hugged him a second time. "It's really *you!* You worried us to near death. When we heard by way of the coast that Emperor Humayun was going to try to take Delhi—we thought—well we thought..."

"It's okay, mother. Humayun took Delhi—and I *escaped* alive! That's all that matters!"

She squeezed his strong arms with her copper-colored, wrinkled hands. "Yes—you're not hurt—*that's* what matters. Put your bag down! Put your bag down—let me *look* at you!"

He leaned his bag against the wall. "What are you cooking?"

"*Phal,*" she said, meaning '*Fruit*' in Hindi. "You must be *starved!* *Fruit*—you can have *later*—*now* you must have what's in the *other* pot—your favorite—*goat* meat in *curry* sauce!"

She got a bowl from the shelf, filled it with choice pieces of hot goat meat, spooned more curry sauce over it and handed it and some unleavened bread to him.

She followed him into the living-dining room.

They sat, cross-legged, opposite each other on the carpet.

He began to eat. "Where's *papa?*"

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"Where he usually is—up the coast in his boat—trading—trading—trading!"

"When will he be back?"

"You never know with him—but I would say tomorrow morning."

"Is he in good health?"

"Healthy as a humped-back bull."

"And you?"

"I'm fine. Just the usual aches and pains of getting old."

He finished eating the goat meat and bread.

She took his bowl into the kitchen, returned and sat down.

He got his travel bag, sat back down on the carpet, turned the bag upside down. Gold *coins* and *jewels* fell out onto the carpet.

She drew a quick breath at the beauty of the sparkling jewels, cut diamonds, some as large as her thumb, and emeralds, and sapphires, picked up one of the larger diamonds, held it up to the window light. "This must be worth a *fortune!*"

"Yes—it'll pay my passage to the *New World*," he said as simply as he knew how.

She studied the diamond a moment longer, then realized what he'd *said*—the diamond dropped from her hand. She looked intently into his eyes. "What do you *mean?*"

"I feel sorry already, mother—about leaving you and father here alone—but I have to leave India. The entire *army* of the sons of Afghan Sher Shah was routed in the fight for Delhi—wiped out. If I stay, it will be only a matter of time before some local spy sells my head to Emperor Humayun. I have no more future as a soldier of fortune. And—to tell you the truth—I'm tired of fighting—tired of the turmoil that has become India. I'm

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going to try to find a *peaceful* place to live, if such a place even *exists* on this earth."

"That's very sad news. Your father and I hoped you'd get all the fighting out of your system and settle down here with *us*—maybe find a good *woman*...since you weren't given one to marry at birth as is the usual custom."

"I know—I know—I'm half *French*—India isn't where I belong. I don't mean that I don't belong with *you* and *papa*. I don't know *where* I belong—but I must try to find that place—*wherever* it is. I just wish I had a *bhāṭī*, a brother, to stay with you and keep you company. I feel very downhearted about that."

"I have a *surprise* for you," she said. "*Jamul—Jasmine—Raja—*come here—!"

Immediately, a slender boy, about fifteen Adan guessed, with copper-colored skin and short, black hair came into the room, followed by two young girls.

"This is your new *brother—Jamul*—and your new *sisters—Jasmine* and *Raja*," she said to Adan. "We adopted them into our family while you were in the north."

Adan rose to his feet. "I'm happy to meet you. Welcome to the family." He took Jamul's hand and gave Jasmine and Raja each a hug.

"Now he can leave India without feeling guilty," he said, relieved.

His mother smiled, made a sign and the children quietly left the room.

"Jasmine *weaves* very well," she said.

"They are all strong and healthy. They'll make you good company," he said, looking at her.

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"Yes—yes they *will*," she said, lowering her a little in contemplation. "But, we'll miss you *terribly*."

"And I'll miss you all very much, too, but you *do* understand that I must leave India."

"Yes," she said as she went into the kitchen.

She returned with a bowl for him filled with sweet, spiced fruit she'd been cooking when he arrived. She also brought some goat cheese, which she knew he was very fond of.

He sat, said a prayer then ate the fruit and cheese.

The mother called the children in and the five of them sat in the lotus position on the carpet and meditated for quite some time.

Early the next morning, they heard Adan's father enter the house, singing.

They all jumped out of their sleeping mats, hurried to greet him.

"*Papa!*" the children cried in French.

He hugged everyone and sat on the carpet to rest. Everyone gathered around him.

"Were you in the battle of *Delhi*?" he asked Adan in French.

"Yes, papa," Adan replied in French. "Humayun had us outnumbered *ten-to-one*. He took Delhi—almost without a *fight*."

"Where will you go now?" Adan's father asked.

His mother, unable to go through the emotional rigor again, lowered her eyes, got up and went into the kitchen.

"I'm leaving for the *New World*—a new adventure," Adan said.

"I was young and full of adventurous spirit once," his father said. "Yes. If I were young today and without a family—I'd try to get to the New World."

The mother brought them each a cup of fermented palm juice.

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"All this money and jewels—where did they come from?" his father asked.

"From the sons of Afghan Sher Shah," Adan said, taking a sip of palm juice. "They don't have the slightest idea how to run an *empire*—but—they *pay* their *soldiers* well."

"*That's* a good thing," his father said, taking a swallow of juice.

"As you know, mother has the rest of my treasure stored safely away," Adan said. "I will only take these gold coins and a large diamond. The diamond should pay my passage on a ship to the New World. The rest is for you and mother to decide what to spend it on."

His father picked up the diamond Adan's mother had dropped earlier, examined it. "Yes—this diamond is worth a *fortune*. What ship are you planning to take to the New World?"

"I'm thinking of maybe taking a French ship out of Marseilles," Adan said, sipping his palm juice.

His father drank the last of his juice. "If I may make a suggestion—a *Spanish* ship might be better. Their captains have been to the New World many more times than the *French* captains have."

"But—the French captains speak *French*—I don't speak Spanish," Adan said, finishing his drink.

"The *Spanish* captains also speak *French*," his father said. "*French* is the international language of commerce. It's even spoken as a second language in countries like Russia and Italy. I'd try to go on a *Spanish* ship if I were you."

"I trust your vast experience. I'll take a *Spanish* ship then," Adan said. "How do you suggest I get *passage* on one?"

"Tomorrow—a local trader ship by the name of *Mitra* will stop here to trade some goods. I'll make arrangements for it to take you to Ahmadā-

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bād, on the coast of the Arabian Sea. From there, you'll need to get passage to Suez which is on the Red Sea—then—take a boat to Alexandria which is on the Mediterranean Sea—*that's* one of the largest ports in the world. You should be able to get a Spanish ship there. And—just to be on the safe side—take *four* diamonds and lots of gold coins with you—you'll be traveling a long way."

"You always understand," Adan said.

Adan spent the night at home.

The next morning, he said his sad farewells and took the trader boat to Ahmadābād. From there, he continued to follow his father's instructions, took passage to Suez on the Red Sea then a boat to Alexandria on the Mediterranean Sea.

He found a Spanish ship in port there by the name of *Espada Española*.

SOME SIXTEENTH CENTURY ROMANCES

THE ITALIAN

Chapter 11

Julius had studied music from a student of the great composer, Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina...

IN THE SUMMER of 1555, in Florence, Italy, Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni, who called himself Michelangelo, had recently finished the sculpture, *Deposition*. The sculpture was focused on Nicodemus and Christ. Nicodemus' ancient face was relaxed with the compassion of the sculpted Christ he was holding in his lap. Nicodemus' face was somehow reminiscent of Michelangelo's own. Michelangelo had created the piece—rough, glowing softly with light and shadow—for his own sarcophagus.

After creating it, Michelangelo had picked up a mallet and *smashed* the sculpture to pieces. It was some time before he had allowed his assistant to put it back together again.

Michelangelo, the Italian Renaissance sculptor, painter, architect, and poet—who had, throughout his life, created masterpiece after masterpiece, such as the frescoes on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, the *Pietà*, *David* and *St. Peter and St. Paul*—was reaching the end of his days. He would die in Rome just nine years later.

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At the time, Italian art and culture was spreading up through Italy and dominating the rest of Europe. Knowledge of Latin and Greek became characteristic of the rich, from the British Isles to Sicily. Italian dress and cooking set the standard at courts. Naples was considered the ultimate in taste and sophistication. Even in England, one of Michelangelo's students was commissioned to do Henry VII's tomb. Italian writers were being imitated. Italian universities led the way in anatomy and mathematics.

The rise of Lutheranism and the sacking of Rome in 1527 had created a *militant* aspect to Catholic reform. Visual *images* were used to put down the austerity of Protestantism. Rome, itself, had changed from a poor, decomposing town to an exhilarating city with large, open squares and immense churches, built and decorated by the best painters and architects. All these worldly marvels were supported by the papacy in an effort to direct Europe's nobility and aristocracy toward Catholicism. It was thought that the common man would have no choice but to follow.

Italy's economy was in good shape as indicated by both industry and agricultural production. The planting of new grapevines—for producing fine Italian wines—was evident on the mountainsides. Fields lined with elms, mulberries and fruit trees had become the rule. Wool production, and therefore textiles, had increased. Silk production was very successful. Banking was flourishing, which increased the number of palaces and buildings being constructed throughout Italy, but *all* was not well in Italy.

In 1540, Pope Paul III—a patron of the arts—had issued a papal bull approving the creation of the Roman branch of the *Inquisition*. And, in 1542 had legalized the Counter-Reformation when he had convoked the Council of Trent. His able assistant in these matters had been Cardinal Giovanni Caraffa, who was soon elected pope, as Paul IV.

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Pope Paul IV was an extremist determined to stamp out abuses concerning the Catholic religion and anything he defined as *heresy*. He increased the activities of the Inquisition—a church tribunal entrusted with searching out and punishing heretics in Roman Catholic countries to protect the *influence* of the Catholic Church. Pope Paul IV believed the papacy should be an *Italian* affair. That did not set well with the Spanish court.

Pope Paul IV was seventy-nine, hot-tempered and had no understanding of the *humanistic* qualities of people. No one was safe from his *suspicion*.

He became agitated about the presence of married men in the Sistine choir, which he thought was a contamination of the *purity* of the papal singers.

He began the first legally established *ghetto* in Rome.

The Jews of Rome were herded into the ghetto, forced to sell their property to Christians and made to wear yellow headgear for identification. Copies of the Talmud—a codification of Jewish law—were located and *burned*.

Prostitutes were imprisoned.

Beggars were expelled from Rome.

Such was the situation in Italy, Rome and Florence in 1555.

Julius Santoni Binini was a young student of architecture and sculpture studying under the direction of an apprentice to the well-known Florence architect and sculptor, Bartolommeo Ammannati, who had lived and studied in Venice and Rome before settling in Florence.

Before taking up the studies of architecture and sculpture, Julius had studied music from a student of the great composer, Giovanni Pierluigi da

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Palestrina, but Julius had decided he preferred his life's work to be in *architecture* and *sculpture* instead of *music*.

As part of his overall curriculum, Julius had become fluent in Latin, French and German, had done well in his studies of architecture and sculpture and was being considered for an apprenticeship to the architect of a church being built in Rome. He had a conflict with that possibility. He secretly wanted to build *Lutheran* churches—not *Catholic* ones.

He also had another heretical tendency; he believed the *earth* revolved around the *sun*.

After he'd completed his prescribed studies in Florence, he decided he needed time to think things over. He decided to go to Rome and visit his family.

As his carriage passed over the Ponte Vecchio bridge, he looked out over the Arno River and wondered if he'd ever see Florence again. His time there had without doubt been the best of his twenty-seven years. He'd lived a rich life steeped in arts, culinary delights and wonderful parties. He knew he'd miss Florence a great deal.

Money being no object, he took carriages and stopped at inns along the cobblestone, hundred-and-fifty-mile-long road to Rome, arrived the late afternoon of the next day, tired and looking forward to a good meal at his parents' mansion. As he approached the mansion, his younger sister Brigita saw his carriage pull up in front—ran out to greet him.

"*Julius—!*" she cried in Italian as she ran down the marble steps to welcome him. "You're looking *splendid!* Florence hasn't taken away the tight *curls* from your head! And—*look* at you—all long-sleeved in *silk*—

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and *jeweled*! Mother won't *recognize* you! Is that the latest attire in Florence these days?"

"You have so *many* questions, beautiful sister," Julius replied, giving her a hug. "*You're* wearing a *splendid* dress. Emerald green—*isn't it?*"

"Yes—all *silk*—except the crocheted collar, of course," she said, leading him up the walkway. "Come in—come in! You must be tired after such a long trip—I'll have the servant girls draw you a *bath!*"

A coachman walked passed them carrying Julius' luggage.

"It's great to be home. How's everyone?"

"*Mamma* and *papà* are fine. They've been *worried* about you."

"Worried about *me?* Whatever *for?*"

"You know how things are *changing* in the world—this *Lutheranism* stuff—they were afraid you might have become *tainted* by it! You know how Florence has become these days—new ideas running rampant. Oh—it doesn't matter—you obviously *haven't* changed."

He didn't look directly into her eyes.

Having lived with him from a child, she knew that meant something was wrong. "What *is* it?"

"I *have* changed. I believe the *earth* revolves around the *sun*. I think the Polish astronomer, Nicolaus *Copernicus* is *right* about that."

"Sh-h! That's *preposterous*—that's *heresy*—you could be *imprisoned*," she said quietly. "Everyone knows that *Ptolemy* found that the *sun* revolves around the *earth*."

"There's a school of thought in Florence—that Ptolemy was *wrong*," Julius said.

"I fear for your safety. Don't tell anyone about these ridiculous thoughts," she cautioned. "It'll *ruin* your *career*."

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Julius stopped in front of the house a moment. "You're the only one I've told—the only one I can *trust*," he said softly. "But—there's *more*. I don't believe that *indulgences*—!"

She gently put her hand over his lips. "Now you're *really* talking like a heretic," she said tenderly. "Go take your *bath*—you'll feel better—and no matter what—don't say a word about any of this to *mamma* or *papà*."

He went with the servant girls, took a long, soothing bath with them in the huge Roman tub, like he'd enjoyed doing ever since he was a child.

The bath made him feel much better, but his heretical thoughts remained with him.

The servant girls dried his healthy skin, oiled him all over with perfumed oil and dressed him.

He heard the call for dinner, went into the luxuriously appointed dining room, sat in the chair next to his mother's chair at the long, elegant table, complete with crystal wine glasses, silver, and flowers.

He had but a moment to take a sip of the delightfully dry, red Italian wine before his mother, father and Brigita entered the room. He rose, went to his mother.

"Oh—Julius—*Julius!* You look *fabulous!* This new career of yours obviously *agrees* with you!" his mother cried.

"Yes. I love architecture, *mamma*," he said, giving her a polite hug, then went to his father.

"Have you heard about the pope's disagreement with Spain's *Charles?*" his father asked.

"Yes, it's the talk of *Florence*," Julius replied, shaking his father's hand, embracing him.

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They sat down at the table. The father sat at the head, the mother to his right, Brigita to his left. Julius sat back down.

The father led a short prayer and they all prayed silently for a few moments.

Then Julius took a sip of wine.

A servant girl arrived at the table, set down two more pitchers of wine. Others came from the kitchen, encircled the table with a variety of typical Italian appetizers—cold, sliced veal with lemon and olive oil dressing—cold pasta salad, cooked, cooled artichokes, white bean salad, garbanzo salad, a variety of olives, thinly-sliced salami, prosciutto, headcheese, smelt antipasti, peperonata and mortadella.

"Julius has been catching up on the latest *fashions*," Brigita said, taking a bite of antipasti.

"I like the new *style*," the mother commented, cutting an artichoke in half with her fork.

"So—Julius—have you completely *finished* your studies in architecture?" the father asked, gesturing with his hand.

"Yes, *papà*," Julius said, accepting some garbanzo salad from a servant girl. "I graduated with full honors."

"Does that mean you'll be settling in *Rome*?" the father asked, sipping his wine.

"I'm glad you brought that up," Julius said. "I plan to spend a few weeks here—a short sabbatical—then I want to go to Naples."

"*Naples*? Whatever for?" the mother asked, accepting some peperonata from a servant girl. "Rome's in a bit of a *war* with Naples, you know."

"Yes—I know—but I need to study under one of the greatest teachers of architecture—before I feel ready to accept an architectural apprenticeship in Rome," Julius lied, selecting some baby snails in tomato sauce.

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"Who *is* this great teacher," Brigita asked, as she motioned a servant girl to put some baby octopus on a fresh plate for her.

"Antonio Bantinelli."

"I've never heard of him," the father said, accepting some fricassee of chicken.

"You will," Julius said, then added, "I need your help."

"How can *I* help?" the father asked, taking a sip of wine.

"I'll need *papers* to cross into Naples," Julius said. "Perhaps you could arrange for me to get them."

"Well—I can *try*. I'm sure that an *ecclesiastical* approach isn't the answer," he said, taking a piece of duck and some turnips from a silver platter a servant girl was holding for him.

Sensing what Julius was trying to do, Brigita decided to help him. "*Papà*—you know the *head* of the architecture department at the University of Rome," she said, as she removed a small roasted quail from a platter, put it on her plate. "Perhaps *he* could help. After all, the war isn't really about *education*."

"Perhaps," the father said, placing a rosemary game hen on his plate. "I'll make some *inquiries*."

"Not to change the subject, Julius—but, after dinner, would you *entertain* us with some of your wonderful *music*?" his mother asked, biting into a mushroom.

"I'd be delighted," Julius said. "That is—if *Brigita* will consent to join me."

At the end of dinner, a servant girl served rich, black coffee, another served sweet Marsala wine, and another served almond cookies.

The family retired to an adjoining room that had many couches.

Julius sat down at the harpsichord, began playing.

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The mother and Brigita sat attentively sipping sweet wine.

The father cut and lit a thin, dark cigar, and then requested sweet wine from a servant girl.

After Julius had played for about an hour, he took up the zither, accompanied Brigita while she sang.

Then they all retired for the night.

In the following three days, the father was able to get the papers Julius needed to pass into Naples.

Julius knew he wasn't really going to Naples to *study*. He was going there to *escape* from *Italy*.

He decided he wanted to see the Colosseum once more before he left. He took a carriage to within half a mile of it, walked the rest of the way, through the massive archways of the Colosseum, stood inside its immense interior, looked up at the tens of arched windows—where huge galleries, black with shadow, gaped from the past—where emperors and aristocrats had sat drinking wine, enjoying the bloody spectacles in the arena below them.

Julius knew that spectacles that required the tearing away of flesh by wild animals or by the swords of gladiators had been the most *preferred* and he wondered if Europe had *really changed* that much in *spirit* since those early days. How little difference it seemed to him between the days of the blood and guts of the Colosseum and the present day *burnings* of Protestants at the stake by the *Inquisition*.

He returned to his parents' home, said his sad goodbyes and had arranged for a carriage to take him to Naples.

He got in the carriage. "*Ciao!*" he said in Italian, meaning '*Good-bye!*'

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"*Ciao!*" Brigita said, waving her fan, tears running down her cheeks. She thought this would probably be the last time she'd see him.

"*Ciao!*" his father and mother said in unison, not suspecting his *real* reason for going to Naples.

When he got to Naples, the authorities accepted his papers, then Julius had the coachman take him directly to the waterfront so the coachman would report back to Julius' family what he'd actually done, so they wouldn't worry he'd been murdered or something.

As he stood on the waterfront, he saw a large Spanish ship was in port, noticed the name on its side, *Espada Española*, inquired as to where it was going, was told—to the *New World*.

The sudden crunching sound of carriage wheels close behind him made him turn around.

It came to a complete stop.

To Julius' surprise, *Brigita* stepped down out of the carriage, in *traveling* clothes. The coachman handed her a handbag.

Julius ran to her. "What are you *doing* here?" he cried. "You can't make me change my *mind!*"

"I'm coming *with* you! I decided I couldn't bear living in Rome *without* you," she sighed. "I had a servant follow you. I know all about your leaving Italy."

"It might be *dangerous* for you!"

"I don't *care!* I need to get away from the *war* and all the religious *prejudice!* I want a new life! I'll learn to believe what *you* believe! *Please* say it's okay for me to come with you!"

"How did you get *papers* to come to Naples?"

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"I explained everything to mother. She knows people in high places. She got me the papers."

"She knows I'm *leaving*?"

"She knows *we're* leaving—if it's okay with *you*, that is. She promised not to tell *papà* until tomorrow. Please let me come with you. I brought money and jewels."

He looked out over the harbor, took her travel bag. "I think it'll be *quite an adventure!*" he said, smiling.

"You mean you'll take me *with* you?"

He nodded.

She gave him a hug. "You're the *best* brother a girl could ever *have!*"

They booked passage on the *Espada Española*—unaware that the *Inquisition* had already spread its deadly business to the *New World*.

THE HURRICANE

Chapter 12

"Looks like we're headed into a storm..."

IT WAS OCTOBER 1555.

Hurricane season in the region of the Bahamas and the New World ran from May through November.

Julius Santoni Binini and his sister Brigita had been sailing on the *Espada Española* for a little more than a month.

One evening as Julius and Brigita rested their backs against the taffrail running along the edge of the stern, Julius noticed an isolated *cloud* to the southwest, pointed it out to Brigita.

They watched it for a long time, until the sun began to set, then, within a very short time, curiously, it began spreading its broad sides down over the ocean, both to eastward and to westward. Julius thought that was a very unusual thing for a cloud to do.

In its new form, it resembled a long stretch of low land.

They noticed that the moon had turned a grayish-red and that the sea had begun undergoing a rapid transformation, then they saw three *water-spouts* suddenly rise up near the cloud.

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"Looks like we're headed into a *storm*," he said.

A medium-height, dark-copper skinned man in a white turban and white clothes walked up to the rail, stood next to Julius, leaned his back against the rail.

The word *caution* flashed through Julius' mind.

"*Bon soir*," the man said in French, meaning '*Good evening*'.

Julius had no way of knowing at the time, but he need not have worried as the man was *Adan Sābād Cotouré*.

"*Bon soir*," Julius replied.

"I'm Adan Sābād Cotouré—from India."

"I'm Julius Santoni Binini and this is my sister Brigita—we're from Italy."

The men shook hands then Brigita extended hers. Adan took it, politely bowed and kissed it.

Brigita was instantly taken by Adan's courageous dark eyes, exquisite manner and strong physique.

"I see you're watching that cloud. What do you *make* of it?" Adan asked in heavily Hindi-accented French.

"There's something about it that makes me uncomfortable," Julius replied.

"Are you sure your discomfort is not from the *food*?" Adan asked.

Julius and Brigita laughed.

"I know what you mean," Julius said.

Julius looked up at the ship's sails, beginning to be beaten by the wind.

They heard the captain shouting orders to reduce sail, saw the crew scurrying about the deck.

"It looks like the captain's expecting a *squall*," Adan suggested.

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"*Oui*," Brigita agreed.

"I've been wondering ever since I've been on this ship—what *cargo* it carries," Adan said.

"Have you been about the decks?" Brigita asked.

"*Oui*," Adan said.

"That's why you spoke to me in *French*. You learned that French is the common language of the ship," Julius suggested.

"*Oui, monsieur*," Adan said. "That's the reason I spoke to you in French."

"On the middle deck there's a large *grate*. You can stand on it and look through it down into the hold. Have you done that?" Julius asked.

"*Oui*—but I don't understand what the *grate* is for!"

"I asked some of the sailors about it. The grate is to keep *slaves* from coming on *deck*—just in case some should get *loose*," Brigita said.

"What do you mean 'get *loose*'?" Adan asked.

"Didn't you see the rows of *shackles* down in the hold? Those are for *handcuffing* slaves to the *ship*."

"But there aren't any *people* down *in* the hold," Adan said.

"There *will* be! This is a *slave* ship," Julius said. "Now it's carrying cargo like wheat, cattle and colonists to the New World—but then it'll go to Africa and get a load of slaves and take *them* to the New World."

"*Slaves*," Adan said half to himself, paused a moment then asked, "These big *boxes* tied down to the deck—what do you think is *in* them?"

"Maybe feed for the cattle. Or something else they don't want to get moldy below deck. Maybe cotton," Julius suggested.

They noticed the wind had become much stronger.

"¡*Prepara la nave para el tiempo malo!*" the captain shouted in Spanish, meaning '*Prepare the ship for bad weather!*'

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A *whistle* sounded! Sailors scurried up ratlines braving the torturous wind, worked the sails until all except the headsail were furled and reefed, reducing the amount of sail drag against the wind to the lowest possible.

Suddenly, Julius, Brigita and Adan felt the ship *quiver*, like a giant hand had shaken it from beneath. A second later, they saw a flood of *foam* rush over both the *bow* and *stern*—sweep over the *decks*—toward *them*! They grabbed hold of the taffrail, hung on! Rushing water came up to their knees, then as it subsided they heard the boatswain calling for all hands to lighten the ship by throwing cargo *overboard*.

Soon, sailors were pushing cargo boxes, jars, bales and barrels—anything loose—off the deck, into the sea.

Some deckhands cut the lines holding some cargo boxes down to the deck near Julius, Brigita and Adan, but because the cargo boxes were so heavy, the sailors were not able to push any of them across the deck and into the ocean.

Julius, Brigita and Adan put their hands to their ears against the shrieking wind, by the light from frequent lightening strikes they saw angry ocean swells becoming *deeper* and *stronger*, felt the ship pitching, rolling, even with hands to their ears they still could hear men yelling, deck planks creaking from running feet, cattle bellowing, saw slanted rain pouring down onto the ship in sheets. They saw, except for lightning, the sky had turned black and that the sea had turned into a raging *tumult*!

As they desperately clung to the rail, they saw the wind rip up several heavy timbers from the deck—spin them off through the air like tooth-picks.

Then they saw cascading swells of *twenty-foot-high* waves crash across the decks of the quivering ship, saw the wind—which had reached

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over a *hundred* miles an hour—break off the middle mast a few feet above the deck, saw the mast and its lines and sheets spinning crazily about like a giant tree gone mad—ripping loose everything the lines were attached to—then the whole giant-spider-looking lot broke lose—fell into the churning ocean!

They heard the ship breaking up, saw storm-lashed cannon and men being swept *overboard* like toys!

Wind driven saltwater lashing his face, Julius worked his way toward a giant *cargo* box that had been cut free of the deck by deckhands when they were trying to toss it overboard.

Adan grabbed Brigita around her waist, struggled to keep closely behind Julius.

Pitting themselves against the powerful, stinging wind, the three climbed to the top of the *cargo* box, somehow *tied* themselves to it with the loose ends of ropes that were holding it together.

They saw the storm rip the shuddering *foremast* from its holdings, crash it down, breaking away part of the foredeck as it hit, heard the wind roar and crackle with electricity all around them, as lightning flashes continued to light up the hellish, misty scene.

Then, as they lay, soaking wet, on their backs looking up at the storm, they saw the ferocity of it break off the *mizzenmast* like a twig, sling it—and the *helmsman*—out to sea!

Suddenly—they felt a heavy wave hit the box they were strapped down to. As they helplessly watched, onrushing water violently carried the box, with them on it—*off* the ship's deck—right into the wild, swirling *ocean*! Within seconds, they could see *nothing* of the ship, its cargo or crew, only the rapidly-changing shadows of the brutal, foggy night. They

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were *alone*, being tossed about like a cork on the mountainous, foaming ocean.

Julius knew he'd been lying on his back on the box a long time. After he'd counted three periods of darkness, which he interpreted as three nights, the storm had subsided and on the morning of the fourth day he could see Brigita and Adan nearby, still strapped to the floating cargo box.

Adan's turban had been sacrificed to the storm. His black hair, beard and eyes contrasted with the white froth on the surrounding water.

"*Brigita! Are you alive?*" Julius cried.

"*Oui!*" Brigita answered. "*Oui, Julius—I'm okay!*"

Julius untied himself from the huge, bobbing cargo box, stood up on it, legs shaky, lips dry, felt glad to be alive, stumbled over to where Brigita lay, untied her.

She crawled to where Adan lay still tied to the box, gently shook him. His eyes opened. She felt the urge to *kiss* him, restrained herself. "You *okay?*" she asked in French as she untied the ropes.

"*Oui! Merci!*" Adan said, got to his feet.

"We've all *survived*," Julius said happily.

"Where do you think we *are?*" Adan asked.

"We *must* be near the *New World*," Julius said.

"I can see only *water*," Brigita cried.

SAILING LESSONS

Chapter 13

"Take the tiller..."

FISHERMEN AND SEEKERS of pleasure alike have been sailing since prehistoric times.

Vim knew that pleasure crafts had been owned by the privileged classes of ancient Rome, Greece, Egypt and China—as well as by wealthy Dutch. He was happy to be at the helm of the *La Mouette*. He knew it'd been designed for catching fish in the North Sea and that it wasn't exactly a *pleasure* craft, but looking at the joyful faces of the crew stretched out on its foredeck, he couldn't help thinking so.

He was in high spirits because of his wife, Anki. As strange as it seemed, that two people with such opposite personalities would end up getting married, they were crazy about each other. They went everywhere together.

He'd taught her and the other ladies all he knew about sailing the *La Mouette* and they'd learned quickly and well. He wondered how well Pastor *Jacques* and *Aleksandr* would do at sailing.

Pastor Jacques was lying near Zoni on the foredeck.

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"Pastor Jacques," Vim called, "would you like to learn to *sail* her?"

"Learn to sail the *La Mouette*?" Pastor Jacques asked, rolling over on his back.

"*Oui!*" Vim said.

Pastor Jacques got to his feet, went to the tiller where Vim was. Zoni followed.

"Take over the *tiller*," Vim said to Pastor Jacques.

Pastor Jacques took hold of the highly polished wood tiller.

"The trick *is*," Vim said, "to get the *feel* of the *forces* that control the cutter."

"For *example*?" Pastor Jacques asked.

"For example, if you pull the tiller a little to the *right*, you can feel the pressure of the cutter against the water *increase*. *Try it*," Vim said.

Pastor Jacques adjusted the tiller. "I see what you *mean!*" he said enthusiastically.

"Now to the *left* a little—notice that the pressure *decreases*," Vim said. "That's because we're sailing with the *wind* directly to our *back*. Notice the mainsail is at a *right* angle to the length of the cutter."

"*Oui—I see!*"

"Return the tiller to its *original* position," Vim said.

Pastor Jacques did.

"The keel runs under the cutter—from the bow to the stern. It's like a board being pushed lengthwise through the water. When you move the tiller—you change the direction of the *rudder*—that changes the direction the *cutter* goes—which changes the direction the *board* under the cutter *pushes* against the water," Vim said. "The wind has to be pushing against the sails, of course!"

"*Oui—*" Pastor Jacques said.

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"Now—we're going to—*slowly*—and I repeat—*slowly*—turn the cutter to the *left*," Vim said. "Hubert will adjust the angle of the mainsail as we turn!"

"*Oui*—I understand. If we turn too *fast*—we'll *capsize*," Pastor Jacques said.

"Exactly! Now—*slowly*—start moving the tiller to the *left*," Vim said.

As Pastor Jacques moved the tiller, Hubert swung the mainsail toward them somewhat.

"You see," Vim said, his long honey-brown hair fluttering in the wind, "now the wind is coming *toward* us from our *left*. It's now *pulling* on the sails, instead of *pushing*, and you'll notice the cutter isn't spinning out of control, because the keel underneath it is keeping it from doing that. It's really a combination of *forces* you're changing!"

"I see," Pastor Jacques said.

"Now—we're going to bring the cutter even *farther* around to the left so the wind is coming to us from just left of the bow. Pull the tiller some more," Vim said.

The cutter turned and Hubert moved the sail far back toward the stern.

"Why's Hubert moving the sail so far *back*?" Pastor Jacques asked.

"Because with the sail in that position—the wind is still *pulling* on the sail, no longer *pushing* on it," Vim said.

"I understand. This is really a pleasure. Can *Zoni* give it a try?" Pastor Jacques asked.

"She already knows how to sail," Vim said. Then, realizing he may have embarrassed Pasteur Jacques, said, "You're doing very well—after a little practice—you'll be a *great* sailor!"

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Zoni smiled at Pastor Jacques.

He smiled back.

Vim instructed Pastor Jacques to slowly bring the cutter back around to the right. Hubert adjusted the mainsail until they were back on their original course.

Hubert went below, got his fishing gear, and, after quite some time caught two bonitos off the stern. He estimated they weighed about five pounds apiece.

All hands except Vim and Hubert—who were sailing the cutter—cleaned the striped, tuna-like fish.

It was an overcast day with the sun breaking through here and there.

The ocean was calm except for a few whitecap waves.

Suddenly, Anki *jumped* to her *feet*—pointed out to *sea*! "What's *that*?" she cried.

They all looked out over the water to where she was pointing.

"It looks like a big *box* floating on the water!" Aleksandr observed.

Vim took over the helm. Hubert handled the sails and they maneuvered the cutter closer to the box, then they saw the two *men* and a *woman* standing on it. Hubert reefed the mainsail.

"*Ahoy!*" Vim called out in French.

"*Ahoy!*" Adan answered.

Julius and Brigita waved from the box.

As he tossed a line to Adan, Vim yelled in his most eloquent French, "Whatever possessed you to try to navigate the *ocean* on a *box*?"

"It's a *long* story," Adan said, still able to smile after three and a half days on the floating box.

Hubert and Lanoi lowered the rope ladder.

Adan helped Brigita climb up then Vim helped her aboard.

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Adan and Julius followed up the ladder.

Adan's flushed face revealed his considerable embarrassment at the nakedness of everyone on board.

The nudity didn't cause Julius or Brigita any discomfort, as they were used to bathing with their servants.

All three were unnerved by the strange, painted figures of animals and crosses on all of their rescuers' bodies.

"Tana—could you get them some *water*?" Vim suggested.

Tana went below, returned with cups of fresh water, handed one to each.

"Drink *slowly*," Vim cautioned.

The three were very thirsty, but tried to drink the water slowly.

"What's in the *box*?" Aleksandr asked.

"We don't *know*—but we'd like to find *out*," Julius said between swallows.

"I'll see what I can do—do you have an *axe*?" Aleksandr asked.

Hubert produced one from the hold.

Aleksandr took it, climbed back down the rope ladder.

Vim could see that Maru was worried about Aleksandr. "He'll be all right," Vim assured her.

After a few tries, Aleksandr finally got himself onto the surging box, located the narrowest board he could, began prying on one end of it with the axe, got the end loose, pulled it up, reached his hand into the crevice he'd created, felt something soft, grabbed hold, pulled it *out*.

"*Chapeaux!*" he yelled in French, meaning '*Hats!*'

He held up a bright red one with ostrich feathers sticking out of it, threw it high into the air. Maru *caught* it, put it on her *head*, danced around the deck laughing.

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"Throw *me* one!" Anki cried.

Aleksandr tossed her a large, blue felt one.

She put it on and began dancing crazily about the deck.

Aleksandr tossed Brigita a peacock-feathered one.

She put it on, began dancing.

Aleksandr produced many more hats from the box, tossed them aboard.

When he'd tossed up more than enough hats to go around, he dropped the axe, grabbed for the rope ladder—missed! Grabbed for it again—caught it! Just in *time*! Struggled up the ladder. Hands reached for him—pulled him aboard!

A large white-capped *wave* flooded over the box! Water rushed into the hole Aleksandr had made with the axe. The box quickly filled with *water*—*sank*!

Maru ran to Aleksandr, hugged and kissed him.

They all watched bubbles rise to the surface as the box slowly disappeared into the ocean depths.

Everyone laughed and paraded about the deck in their luxurious, funny hats.

Hubert un-reefed the mainsail and Vim and Hubert brought the cutter about, headed for *Liberté Island*.

Zoni and Lanoi found some copper cups in the hold, gave everyone a drink of gin then helped Adan, Julius and Brigita out of their wet clothes, removed everything from the pockets, as well as their money belts. Their pleasure was obvious as they *tossed the clothes overboard*.

"I'm Vim van der Grooten from Holland and this is my wife, Anki—my brother, Hubert, also from Holland and his wife Lanoi, from Liberté Island," Vim said, shaking hands with Adan and Julius.

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Vim, amazed by Brigita's coy, naked beauty, bowed, kissed her hand.

"I'm *Pastor Jacques Colet de Noyon* from *France*," Pastor Jacques said, shaking hands with all three. "This is my intended, *Zoni*, from *Liberté Island*."

"I'm *Aleksandr Bradachev* from *Russia* and this is my intended, *Maru* from *Liberté Island*," Aleksandr said, shaking hands.

"I'm *Adan Sābād Cotouré*, from *India*."

"I'm *Julius Santoni Binini*, from *Italy*. This is my *sister*, *Brigita*."

"You all must be *tired*," Hubert observed. "Please, feel free to stretch out on the foredeck."

Adan stretched out on deck and was very pleased when Brigita laid down, completely naked, beside him. He didn't let on just how pleased he really was.

A little farther away, Julius stretched himself out on deck and was surprised but delighted, to see Tana lay down beside him.

Pastor Jacques sat down in the bow chair.

Aleksandr and the other ladies gathered around those stretched out on the deck.

"How did you happen to be floating on a *box* in the middle of the *ocean*?" Pastor Jacques asked, took a sip of gin.

"We were on a ship bound for the *New World*," Julius said then sipped his gin.

"How long were you *on* that cargo box?" Pasteur Jacques asked.

"I counted three dark periods during the storm—must have been three *days*. I think today is the fourth day," Julius said.

"How did you get *on* the box in the first place?" Aleksandr asked.

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"The Spanish slave ship we were on was hit by a *hurricane*," Adan said.

"*Wow!*" Lanoi said in French then added, "And you were the only *survivors?*"

"*Oui!*" Julius said. "And if it hadn't been for *you* all—"

Tana squeezed Julius' hand, smiled at him.

"You must be *hungry*," Lanoi said, dashed below, returned with cassava bread, handed Brigita, Adan and Julius each a piece.

They ate it vigorously, washed it down with gin then dozed off to sleep.

"Julius is *beautiful*—and his *hair* is *curly*," Tana said, laughing, touching Julius' hair with her fingers.

"All of our men are strong and *beautiful*," Lanoi said in Lucayan.

"I understood that," Vim said in French. "And—all of our *women* are strong and *gorgeous!*"

Anki went to Vim, gave him a kiss. "We have all had *bad* times—now we all have damned *good* times," she said in French.

"Very good times," Vim agreed. "*Oui*—very *good* times!"

After about two hours of sailing, they saw Liberté Island on the horizon.

The two dolphins appeared as usual, led the *La Mouette* safely through the deep-water channel to the island's beach.

Tana cut one of the fish in two pieces Hubert had caught, tossed half to each dolphin.

Maru, Zoni and Lanoi climbed down the rope ladder and secured the *La Mouette* to its usual palm tree anchor.

Tana and Anki woke up the three sleeping beauties.

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The girls escorted the newcomers to the shower hut, scrubbed them with ash soap—let them dry out on sleeping mats that the girls had laid out on the beach for them—then rubbed scented olive oil into their hair.

The ladies happily drew figures of agouti, raccoons, horses—and crosses—not understanding why Pastor Jacques liked crosses so much—all over Brigita's, Adan's and Julius' bodies. Now the *zemis*—the good *spirits*—would surround and protect the newcomers from harm.

Brigita, Adan and Julius went to sleep on the mats.

The ladies got the bonito from the cutter, salted and stuffed it with herbs, helped Vim prepare it for turning on a metal rod Hubert had found on the *La Mouette*, suspended the rod over hot coals between two Y-shaped pieces of wood.

Earlier that morning, Hubert had shot a wild boar with an arrow using one of the longbows they'd brought from Holland. Pastor Jacques and Aleksandr had helped skin and clean it, had carried it to the village, as they called the area where the circle of huts and small spring of fresh water were located. Vim had stuffed it, had put it in a Dutch oven that had a round hardwood lid with handle on top, had placed the Dutch oven in a pit of hot coals, had covered it with sand.

Vim knelt on one knee, tested the heat from the hot coals around the Dutch oven with his hand. "Perfect!"

The wild boar had been cooking slowly for about ten hours. Vim decided to let it continue to cook until the bonito had turned on the spit to perfection. In the meantime, he'd prepare special sauces for both the boar and the bonito.

The wind was gently caressing palm fronds high above.

The, "*cu-cu-cu-cu-cu-cu!*" of a spoonbill wading in shallow water along the beach broke the silence of the beautiful evening. Near the spoon-

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bill, some flamingos were strutting, others were pruning each other's feathers and all the flamingos were honking like geese.

Anki smelled the fragrance of the island flowers as she began to prepare some vegetables. "*Cheri*," she called, to Vim. "What the hell does a man from *India* like to *eat*?"

"I see what you mean. I know Adan will like *curry*. I'll make a curry sauce," Vim said.

"Do I need to do anything *special* to these *vegetables* to make them kind of *India-ish*?" Anki asked.

Vim laughed. "No—not today. We didn't know we were having *company*."

"What about the man from *Italy*?" Anki asked.

"He'd like pasta, but we don't have any of that right now either! I'll make a *tomato* sauce. He can put it on his wild boar meat. That's all we can do for him on such short notice."

Anki laughed. "After three days of floating on that *cargo* box," she said, peeling some carrots, "they'd probably even eat *agouti* stew!"

Anki knew that even Vim, who ate almost anything, didn't like Luccayan agouti stew.

Vim laughed as he turned the fish on the spit, with the hardwood handle, watched the juice begin to glisten on the skin of the bonito as he rotated it over the hot coals. Drops of juice fell onto the coals, made hissing sounds, filled the air with an appetizing odor.

"The fish smells *delicious*!" Anki cried.

"You seem to be in an exhilarating mood today—anything *special* going on?" he casually asked as he prepared sauces.

Anki didn't answer right away, just boiled some vegetables with herbs and salt, kept them warm until everything was ready to be served.

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"Sure there's nothing special going on!" he said.

"Actually, I do have one hell of a *surprise* for you," she said, excitedly.

It was the first time she'd *ever* had a surprise for him.

"What *is* it?" he asked.

"*Nous allons avoir un bébé!*" she said in French.

He looked at her. There was a moment of silence. He could see she was *serious*, which was unusual for her, and yet she was smiling at the same time. He let go of the spit handle, jumped to his feet—*ran* to her—dropped to his knees in the sand in front of her, hugged her legs. "Did you say—*nous allons avoir un bébé?*"

"*Oui, cheri!*" she said, running her fingers through his long honey-brown hair. "*Oui—Oui!*"

"Come here—*everybody*—come over *here!*" Vim shouted.

Vim's loud exclamations woke Brigita, Adan and Julius.

Everybody ran to Vim and Anki.

"What *is* it?" Pastor Jacques asked, alarmed. "*Sharks?*"

"Anki's going to have a *baby!*" Vim cried, happily.

"What a *blessing!*" Pastor Jacques said. "New *life* in these islands! *Congratulations!*" he said, shaking Vim's hand then gave Anki a hug.

The Lucayan sisters gathered around, admired Anki like she was a fragile pearl.

"A *baby!* A *baby!*" Lanoi cried.

"When is the baby *due?*" Zoni asked.

"In the month of May—according to Vim's calendar," Anki said.

Vim hugged Anki.

"*Congratulations!*" Hubert said, giving Lanoi a hug. "Lanoi and I have some news, *too!* *We're* going to have a baby—*also!*"

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Vim congratulated them.

Anki gave Lanoi a hug.

"*Congratulations! Congratulations to the four of you!*" Pastor Jacques chimed, shook Hubert's hand and gave Lanoi a hug.

"So—that means your baby is due in May, also," Aleksandr said.

"*Oui*," Lanoi said cheerfully.

"That's wonderful," Adan said. "In India we would celebrate such news for three *days!*"

"And, so we *shall!* Three days of *celebrations!*" Pastor Jacques declared. "Do you all *agree?*"

There was a solid round of, "*Oui—!*"

"What's *burning?*" Aleksandr asked.

Everyone looked. The fish was getting a bit too done on one side. In his excitement Vim had stopped turning the spit. Aleksandr started turning it for him.

The ladies set the table with good china, silver utensils and copper cups they'd previously discovered in the *La Mouette*.

Vim went to the Dutch oven. Everyone except Aleksandr, who was turning the fish, gathered around Vim. Vim removed sand, lifted the wooden lid from the Dutch oven that contained the roasting wild boar. As he peeled away the hot, moist palm leaves from the top of the boar, wonderful-smelling steam rose, a delightful aroma of succulent meat, herbs and a hint of garlic.

"*Everyone—bring your plates,*" Vim said.

Anki and Lanoi filled the plates with hot meat, fish, vegetables and bread.

They all took their plates to the table.

Anki poured wine.

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They all bowed their heads as Pastor Jacques led them in prayer. "Dear Lord, in honor of the news of the two soon-to-be mothers—and the fathers—we thank you for this food and for the three days of celebration that we are about to commence. Amen."

"Vim made some damned good *sauces* for the boar and fish," Anki cried.

"Yes, I made *ethnic* sauces—if you will," Vim explained, pointing to each one in turn. "This is for *fish*. This one's a French *pork* sauce. This one's a quick *Italian* sauce—and this is an Indian *curry* sauce."

Brigita, Adan and Julius, not having eaten for four days, quickly put sauces on their food, began eating with voracious appetites.

"This is the most *delicious* food I have ever *had*," Julius said.

"After bobbing around on that cargo box for almost four days—I can understand how you must *feel*," Vim said.

"In *spite* of that," Julius said, sipping his wine, "you and Anki are *great* chefs. Everything is *delicious*! In Italy—we had very excellent food—but I think not as fine as this. "Do you *agree*, Brigita?"

"I agree. This is most delicious!" Brigita cried. "Where did you learn to *cook* like this?"

"He learned in *Paris*—and he has taught me to cook," Anki said cheerfully.

"Anki's modest. She was *already* a good cook before she knew me," Vim said.

Everyone agreed that the food was splendid.

"Here's to the expectant *mothers*," Pastor Jacques said, lifting his cup.

Everyone lifted their cup, clicked them together and took a sip of wine.

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"The expectant mothers will be under *my* care from now on," Pastor Jacques declared.

"Why do you say *that*?" Vim asked.

"With the permission of the *four* of you, of *course*," Pastor Jacques continued. "I've studied the medical methods of one of the finest physicians in all of France—*Michel de Nostredame*. Have you ever heard of him?"

No one said they had.

"Have you delivered a *baby* before?" Vim asked.

"*Oui*," Pastor Jacques said. "In Geneva, I delivered *two* while I was studying to become a pastor."

"Of what church are you a pastor?" Julius asked.

"Calvinist," Pastor Jacques said. "Are you Catholic?"

"Brigita and I are Lutheran," Julius said.

He had spoken privately to Brigita many times about religion and astronomy since they'd left Italy. She had come around to his way of thinking.

"That's wonderful news!" Pastor Jacques said. "Vim and Hubert are Lutherans."

"And the ladies?" Julius asked.

"Lucayan," Aleksandr said.

"And you?" Julius asked Aleksandr.

"Russian Orthodox," Aleksandr replied.

Everyone looked at Adan.

Adan stopped eating a moment. "*Hindu*," he said quickly, before being asked, then poured more curry sauce over his meat.

"You were saying about *Michel de Nostredame*," Hubert said, taking a sip of wine.

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"Everyone here except the Lucayan ladies have probably heard of the *plague*," Pastor Jacques said.

Most agreed that they'd heard of it.

"Michel de Nostredame developed methods to stop the plague. He saved hundreds of lives—complete towns. Towns all over France begged him to come save them. He did what he could—until..."

"Until what?" Lanoi asked.

"Until the *Inquisitioners* accused him of *heresy*—but fortunately he had power at the king's court and escaped them," Pastor Jacques said.

"Have you *met* him?" Zoni asked.

"I went *looking* for him once. Then, I learned he wasn't where I thought he was—so I never had the pleasure—but I've studied his book on medical treatments and am very qualified to take care of the expectant mothers of this village," Pastor Jacques said, taking a bite of a carrot.

"You are obviously the best qualified to take care of them," Vim agreed. "Brother—Anki—Lanoi—what do you say?"

"I agree," Hubert said.

"I trust my husband's judgment," Anki said.

"Me, too," Lanoi added. "I trust my husband's decision."

"That settles it—you're the village pastor—and—physician," Vim said.

They all raised their glasses in toast to that.

"In that case, I have some *instructions*," Pastor Jacques said. "After our three day celebration—the expectant mothers can only have *two* cups a day of wine—or two half coconut shells of fermented coconut milk or fermented cassava juice—in addition to their regular food, of course."

"Why?" Hubert asked.

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"Alcohol's bad for unborn babies," Pastor Jacques said. "By the way—do any of you have experience with *distillation*?"

"I saw it done once. I saw some young men in Moscow distill fermented *potato* juice. That's where *vodka* comes from, you know," Aleksandr said hopefully.

"Fine," Pastor Jacques said. "We'll need to learn to distill pure *alcohol*. It's good for medical purposes—and some *vodka* for Aleksandr would be a side benefit."

"Yes—some *vodka*," Aleksandr cheered, eating a piece of potato.

"And—there's a method of combining *alcohol* and extract of *seaweed*. I'm told it'll prevent *infections*," Pastor Jacques said. "We must make extract of seaweed, too—before the babies are born."

"Did I understand you to say you were on your way to the *New World*?" Julius asked Pastor Jacques.

"Yes—Aleksandr and I caught the same ship for the New World. I had used a priest's rosary to help make my escape from France. I didn't hide it well enough and it was discovered by a Catholic clergyman aboard ship. To make a long story short—I unintentionally, implicated *Aleksandr*. We were both put out to sea in that small green boat you see moored by the *La Mouette*," Pastor Jacques explained.

"Without *rations*?" Adan asked.

"With a ration of *water* apiece," Pastor Jacques said. "We were trying to paddle to an island, when good Vim and the crew of the *La Mouette* rescued us."

"If you *had* gotten to an island—you would have been *marooned*," Julius said.

"*Oui—marooned*," Pastor Jacques said reflectively.

"They gave you a *trial*?" Adan asked.

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"*Oui*—we had a trial aboard ship, if you can call it that. I don't think it lasted half an hour. The decision was that—had we been in *France*—we would have been burned at the *stake*—at least *I* would have been—instead—they decided to put us out in a boat on the open ocean to die," Pastor Jacques said, sipping his wine.

"*Vim*—how did *you* get to Liberté Island?" Julius asked.

"Hubert, I and Anki escaped the Inquisitioners in Holland and sailed here," Vim said.

"Sailed all the way here in the *La Mouette*?" Adan asked.

"*Oui*," Vim said, taking a draw on the pipe Anki had brought him.

"That's *fantastic*," Adan said, "you sailed right to *this* island?"

"No—we saw the islands late one evening. We actually followed the two *dolphins* you saw today. Luckily they brought us safely through the deep-water channel to Liberté Island. If we'd tried to sail to here *without* them—the cutter would have been torn *apart* by *coral*," Vim said, sipping his wine.

Adan excused himself. He thanked Vim and Anki again for the wonderful meal, got up, went to the sleeping mat he'd been lying on on the beach, sat in the lotus position on it, meditated a long time. When he finished, Brigita came to him.

"You *pray* on the mat?" she asked.

"*Oui*—well, actually *I meditate*—in India I had a special mat I liked to meditate on," Adan said.

"I will *make* you one," Brigita said.

"You know how to *weave*?" Adan asked.

"*Oui*—a weaver in Rome taught me."

"You'll need a *loom*," Adan said. "The Lucayan ladies obviously weave. Maybe *they* have one in one of their huts."

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"Come—let's take a *look*," Brigita said.

A Royal Tern cried, "*kaak—kaak—kak!*" as she winged her way toward her nest on a nearby island.

THE HUNT

Chapter 14

"I thought I heard a donkey brae last night..."

VIM CAREFULLY PUSHED aside a fragrant, red-flower-laden shrub branch with his hand, motioned for Anki and the others—Pastor Jacques, Zoni, Adan, Brigita, Julius and Tana—to follow him as he stepped out of the edge of the forest into a grassy clearing.

As dawn stretched its golden fingers over the meadow, Vim saw movement in the tall green grass in front of them.

He readied his longbow and an arrow with a sharp metal tip.

Anki moved up beside him, readied hers.

As they squatted in high grass, listened—from in front of them came the unmistakable sound of gobbling turkeys.

Cautiously, the others—longbows and arrows at the ready—quietly moved out of the forest, joined Vim and Anki, formed a line, prepared to let their arrows fly.

Suddenly, a flock of squawking wild *turkeys* flew up! Just as suddenly, eight archers jumped to their feet, let eight *arrows* fly! Each found its *mark*! Eight *turkeys* plummeted to the *ground*.

They each picked up their bird.

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"Good *shooting*," Vim cried, hefting his turkey. "About four pounds, I'd say!"

The others hefted theirs, came to similar conclusions about their weight, removed the arrows and dressed out the birds, put them into colorful cotton bags dangling from their waists.

As they walked on, they came upon a large log, sat on it to rest, ate fruit and salted fish they'd brought along with them.

"We must be about a mile from the village," Vim commented.

"Look over *there*," Zoni said, pointing.

Out front of them, along the edge of a meadow where it met a forest, they saw a herd of *donkeys* grazing.

"I *thought* I heard a donkey brae last night," Adan said.

"And apparently you *did*," Vim said. "We've never heard them before. They must have been living over on the opposite side of the island."

"My father has donkeys on his farm in India," Adan said. "They're very *stubborn* animals."

"I brought some rope," Vim said, pulled one from his bag, made a *loop* in it. "Let's see if we can *catch* one!"

Vim led the hunting party back into the forest for concealment.

They quietly worked their way through the woods so as not to frighten the donkeys, get close to them.

As they came closer, the donkeys they raised their tails—ran off loudly *braying* into the meadow—except *one*! It didn't *move*!

"This one's not *wild* like the others," Pastor Jacques observed. "It has obviously been around *people* before!"

"*Oui*," Vim agreed, "But *who*? There are other signs that *many* people have lived on this island before—but *who*—and when—and will they *return*?"

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Vim took the rope loop, tied a slipknot in it, moved closer to the donkey and touched it with his hand. It paid no attention, continued munching grass.

"Maybe it'd prefer an *apple*," Adan suggested, pulling one from his bag.

Adan showed the apple to the donkey. It was interested. As the donkey raised its head to bite the apple, Vim slipped the rope loop over its head, then gave it the apple.

"There," Pastor Jacques said, "You've *got* him!"

"Maybe," Adan warned.

"What do you *mean*?" Pastor Jacques asked.

"Now just try to *move* him," Adan said.

Vim tugged on the rope. The donkey continued grazing.

Pastor Jacques joined Vim, helped pull on the rope, then Adan helped, too. The donkey paid no attention, continued grazing.

The girls *tittered*.

Zoni and Anki were in on Tana's little *joke*.

The ladies joined the three men, but the ladies just *pretended* to pull on the rope. The donkey continued grazing.

"Give *me* the rope," Tana cried.

The men, seeing their efforts were in vain, gave up, handed the rope to her. She took it, *jumped* on the *donkey*—effortlessly *rode* it in a circle around all of them!

Everyone was amazed, applauded.

"How did you *know* you could *ride* the *donkey*?" Vim asked.

"Before you came to the island—I used to ride this donkey very *much*," Tana said, smiling.

Everyone laughed.

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Then, with Vim in the lead, followed by Tana on the donkey, everyone carried their turkeys toward the village.

Along the way, they stopped to show Adan, Julius and Brigita the *garden* and tell them how they'd built the *aqueduct* to bring water down to it and to the *shower* hut.

"We let ten percent of everything go to seed. That way we always have plenty of *seed* for the *next* crop," Vim explained.

"I think we can teach the donkey to pull a *plow*," Adan suggested. "That would really *help*."

"At the moment, we don't *have* a plow," Vim said. "Do you know how to *make* a plow?"

"I think I can," Adan said. "I know what one *looks* like. My father has heavy wooden plows in India. Oxen pull them—but we can make a *smaller* version—not as *heavy*—so the *donkey* can pull it."

"That will make the work much easier," Pastor Jacques agreed.

"I think that should be our *motto*—keep things *easy*," Vim said. "Now that we're *free*—let's not *work* ourselves to death!"

They all agreed that would be a good idea.

"And in that *spirit*," Vim added, "there's a cold keg of Dutch *beer* in the village *spring*. The first one *there* gets to *open* it!"

Tana kicked the donkey in the ribs, but it didn't go very fast. "That's not *fair*!" she yelled, jokingly, as the others made a dash toward the village spring.

Julius dropped back, walked beside her.

"*Cheri*—you are *sweet* like *honey*," she said, smiling down at him.

"Which *reminds* me—did you see that *honeycomb* we passed? It's in that old *tree* back there," he said.

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"*Je l'ai vu*. That's good *French*? *Je l'ai vu*?" she asked.

Je l'ai vu meant, 'I saw it'.

"*Oui*! You learn French very *quickly*," he commended.

"Do you know how to get *honey* out of a *tree*—without getting *stung* by *bees*?" she asked.

"How do you *do* it?" he asked as they were nearing the village spring.

"With *smoke*," she said.

"How clever! While we're waiting for Hubert and the others to return from fishing—let's take some smoldering hardwood and get some *honey* from that *tree*!"

"A tin of cold *beer* first?" she hinted.

"Maybe even *two*," he said, laughing.

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THE FEAST, DAY TWO

Chapter 15

...he brushed orange-honey glaze onto the roasting turkeys...

PASTOR JACQUES HAD proposed marriage to Zoni, and Aleksandr had proposed to Maru, and the ladies had accepted.

So, on the second day of the three-day celebration of the announcement of Anki and Lanoi being expectant mothers, additional bamboo frames were constructed on the beach for the weddings of Pastor Jacques and Zoni, and Aleksandr and Maru. The ladies replaced old flowers and decorated the new frames with fragrant flowers arranged in imaginative designs.

After everyone had returned from their hunting and fishing trips, they all made a dash for the shower hut, laughed, played in the water, gave each other a good scrubbing with fragrant ash soap.

After they'd dried off on mats on the beach, they began preparing food for the feast.

While Adan and Tana took turns rotating the spit over hot coals with the eight succulent, wild turkeys on it, Vim, Anki, Pastor Jacques and Zoni went into the forest, located the orange trees where Zoni had found the starts she'd given Vim to plant in the orchard—found full-grown orange

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trees with splendid oranges ready for the picking, filled their bags, returned to the village.

Vim cut open four of the oranges, squeezed their juice into a bowl.

"These are very *juicy* oranges," he commented.

He mixed in some honey Julius and Tana had gotten from the old tree, added some white wine and, for thickening, added some juice from a boiled cassava plant.

With a brush he'd made from cassava fibers and a stick, he brushed orange-honey glaze onto the roasting turkeys. All that was left to do was let them cook.

The crew that'd been out fishing in the *La Mouette* had returned late in the morning with six two-pound *kingfish* that Julius had caught off the stern of the cutter, plus many large *shrimp*, *crabs* and *lobsters* Hubert and Aleksandr had netted and trapped.

Upon seeing the arrival of these treasures from the sea, Vim got a large copper pot, set about preparing to make a great bouillabaisse. He combined olive oil, chopped onions, chopped tomatoes, garlic, parsley, saffron, fennel, thyme, bay leaf, and orange peel, sautéed them in the copper pot until the onions turned glassy.

He knew the timing for cooking the fish and shellfish in the bouillabaisse was critical. The bouillabaisse would be perfect only if cooked until the shrimp turned pink.

He prepared a *rouille*—a paste of garlic, red pepper, breadcrumbs and some of the stock from the bouillabaisse—to be served at the table, to intensify the flavor of the bouillabaisse.

When the onions were glassy, he added enough fresh spring water to the pot to fill it about a fourth full. He let it come to a boil and added some sea salt he and Anki had made by drying sea water—then, let it all

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simmer while Anki washed and steamed young asparagus shoots fresh from the garden. She steamed them over water on a bamboo steam rack Pastor Jacques had made and had fitted inside a copper pot.

"Should I put *lettuce* in the salad?" Anki asked.

"*Oui*," Vim answered.

In another bowl, she broke up and added freshly washed crisp leaves of new lettuce, thinly sliced tomatoes, a little onion and a small amount of garlic. On these she poured a mixture of olive oil, red wine and ground curry, mixed them all together.

"Are you going to *pâté* the *livers*?" Anki asked.

"*Oui*," Vim said.

In another pot, she boiled the turkey hearts and livers with salt and herbs. Later she'd slice and serve the hearts separately. Vim would make a *pâté* of the livers.

When the table was set and everyone was ready, Vim sliced the kingfish fillet's, put them and the shrimp tails, crabs and lobster tails, all still in their shells, into the delightful liquor in the bouillabaisse pot, stirred them, let them cook until he saw the shrimp turn pink. "Are you *ready*?" he asked.

"*Oui*," Anki said.

While the others were enjoying a cup of wine, Vim and Anki set everything on the table, the eight honey-orange glazed turkeys, the steaming bouillabaisse with *rouille*, asparagus tips, salad, sliced turkey hearts, liver *pâté*, French bread, Dutch bread, cassava bread, Dutch cheese, island-goat cheese and more wine.

Pastor Jacques led a prayer thanking God for the food and for allowing them all to remain free and happy on Liberté Island. He doubted they could remain unmolested on the island much longer. *Things have been going just too good to be true*, he thought.

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"What do you call this seafood and fish," Adan asked.

In France it's called—*bouillabaisse*," Vim said. "*This* one is called *Liberté Island Bouillabaisse!*"

Everyone laughed.

"I'll drink to *that*," Maru said, lifting her cup.

The others lifted theirs.

"Now—tell me the truth, Adan—when we were floating around on that *cargo* box—did you think we'd ever be sitting down at a table with fine people like *these*—eating honey-orange glazed *turkey*—*Liberté Island Bouillabaisse*—and drinking French *wine*?" Julius asked.

"No," Adan confessed, breaking apart a lobster tail.

"Nor I," Julius said, soaking some bread with *bouillabaisse* broth. "This is really *exquisite!*"

"To the soon-to-be-married *Pastor Jacques* and *Zoni*—and *Aleksandr* and *Maru!*" Julius said, lifting his cup.

Everyone drank to that.

"Now that *Anki* and *Lanoi* are with child," Vim said. "Anki and I are going to move into one of the huts in the circle around the headman's hut and Lanoi and Hubert are going to move into another one in the circle."

"*Headman's* hut?" Julius asked.

"*Oui*," Tana said. "Our mother told us that once, long ago, we were *many* people on this island. The palm huts were built in a circle with the hut of the *cacique* in the *middle*."

"*Cacique* is the Lucayan word for *headman*. The hut in the middle was the hut of the *cacique*," Vim explained. "I suggest we use the hut of the *cacique* for *storage*."

Everyone saw the wisdom in that idea.

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"That's a good thought," Adan said. "That way we don't have to *fight* to see which of us the *headman* will be."

The men nodded their heads in agreement.

"What did you do in *India*?" Vim asked Adan.

"I was a soldier of *fortune*," Adan said. "I fought against the Mughal emperor *Humayun* in northern India."

"What *happened*? Why did you take ship for the *New World*?" Hubert asked.

"We *lost*!" Adan said, taking a sip of wine.

Everyone laughed.

"After that it was too dangerous for me to *remain* in India. It would have been only a matter of time before my enemies caught up with me," Adan explained.

"And—*Julius*—what did *you* do in *Italy*?" Vim asked.

"I had just finished my studies in architecture and sculpture. I believe the *earth* revolves around the *sun*, and that I really want to build Lutheran churches," Julius said. "Those are considered heretical *ideas* by the authorities in Rome—so I left for the *New World*. And a wonderful New World it has turned out to be!"

"Would you consider designing a *church* for *Liberté Island*?" Pastor Jacques asked.

"I'd consider it an *honor*," Julius said, smiling.

"That's a *splendid* idea!" Adan said. "We can build it on the highest point of the island!"

Anki and Lanoi fixed pipes for Vim and Hubert. Brigita brought Adan a lit cigar she'd made of island tobacco, then the four ladies went to prepare the flower arch and the altar, arrange chairs, get the ceremonial robe, stole, altar cloth, Bible and cross ready for the ceremony.

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"Does anyone play the *fiddle*?" Hubert asked.

"*Oui*," Julius said. "I do."

"I just thought I'd *ask*," Hubert said. "We brought one from Holland. It's in a case on the *cutter*. I'll *get* it!"

Hubert left, returned quickly with the case.

Dust rose as Julius lifted the creaky lid, but inside they saw a clean, highly polished fiddle and bow. Julius carefully lifted the fiddle out of its case, put the butt of it to his shoulder and began to tune the strings.

The ladies stopped what they were doing, gathered around.

When Julius was satisfied the fiddle was tuned, he began to play.

Adan and the Lucayan ladies had never heard anything like fiddle music. They were fascinated.

The pleasant sound of the notes traveled out over the water of the bay.

Adan experimented with various tunes then began playing something that sounded like it was appropriate for a wedding.

Pastor Jacques got the message, put on the ceremonial robe and stole, took Zoni by the hand and marched with her to the music until they were under the arch of flowers.

He motioned for Aleksandr and Maru to do the same. They slowly marched to the music until they were standing near Pastor Jacques and Zoni then Julius stopped playing.

Hubert produced four beautiful, diamond-studded *Celts*, gave one to each bride and one to each groom.

Pastor Jacques turned to the couples, Bible in hand, opened it and in French, read the first part of the Song of Solomon.

"Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—

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for your love is more delightful than wine.
Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes;
your name is like perfume poured out.
No wonder the maidens love you!
Take me away with you—let us hurry!
Let the king bring me into his chambers."

Pastor Jacques continued the service until he had married himself to Zoni and Aleksandr to Maru.

"*Congratulations!*" Adan said.

The ladies tossed flowers into the air.

Tana played the *baco* and everyone danced around the fire.

On a secret, *prearranged* Lucayan *signal*, as Anki and Lanoi had used at their wedding two months earlier—Zoni started *running* down the *beach*. Pastor Jacques dashed after her, was soon *gaining* on her.

Maru suddenly ran in the *opposite* direction, *up* the beach, *Aleksandr* in full stride close behind her.

Tana gave Julius' hand a squeeze as they watched the newlyweds disappear around the curvature of the island.

Those who remained gathered around the table, continued to snack and drink wine.

"Here's to the *newlyweds!*" Vim cried, raising his cup of wine.

They all clicked their cups together. "To the *newlyweds!*"

"If they ever *return* from their *honeymoons!*" Hubert said. "They were all *virgins* you know."

Everyone laughed.

"*I'm* a virgin as well," Adan said.

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"A *virgin* soldier of *fortune*? That's incredible," Vim said. "How did you *manage* that?"

"I was always *fighting*—too *busy* to make *love*," Adan said.

Everyone laughed.

"*I'm* a virgin," Julius said.

"That's *amazing*," Hubert said.

"*Brigita* and *I* are virgins, too," Tana said.

They continued to feast until mid-afternoon.

Tana suggested they should all dance.

While Julius played the fiddle, Vim taught everybody a new dance, where men-and-lady couples danced together then exchanged dance partners.

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FROM THE GRAPE CAME THE WINE

Chapter 16

"What the hell is that stuff..."

HISTORICALLY, TALES OF fine wines have come to us from the Egyptian and Syrian Bronze Ages and on back beyond them to at least 8000 B.C. Wine was a gift of nature—crushed grapes allowed to ferment.

Julius knelt in front of the vines of the purple and the green grapes Vim and Hubert had brought from Holland and had planted on the edge of the garden. He examined each plant carefully, took a stick, dug around the roots and looked at them.

"What do you *think*?" Vim asked. "Are they *okay*?"

"My uncle has vineyards in Italy. I know a few things about grapevines. These are showing signs of a *root* disease," Julius said.

"Can anything be done to *save* them?" Vim asked.

"My guess is—if we can find some grapes growing wild here on the island—we can graft *these* vines onto *them*," Julius said.

"How would *that* help?" Hubert asked.

"My uncle had a problem like this with grape vines he got from Asia. When he planted them in *Italy*—they began to die of a root disease

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much like these are doing—so he grafted them to some *Italian* grapes. The Italian grapes were *immune* to the disease and protected the *grafted* plants," Julius said.

"Let's see if we can find some wild grapes—we'll get the others to help," Vim said.

They went back to the village—loudly rang the bell Hubert had improvised, an old, upside down metal pot with a metal cup hanging from a rope inside it.

Soon everyone was sitting at the table and Vim explained the plan.

They each packed food, a gourd of *water* and a *knife* in their bag, took pots to put any new plants they might find in, and bamboo baskets with handles to easily carry the *pots* in, headed for the garden.

Vim showed everyone the grape plants and told them they'd be looking for plants with the same shaped *leaf*—growing wild in the forest.

They set out for the forest near the center of the island, climbed the rise to the upper end of the aqueduct.

Julius was surprised so much water was coming down the stream. It gave him an idea. "We have mastered the art of making *brick*," he said. "And of making *lime*. If we mix lime, sand and water together—we get *ce-ment*. If we dig a large *hole* down by the *village*—we can cement *bricks* together in the bottom and up the sides of the hole and have a place to *swim* in *fresh* water. It's done a lot in Italy."

The ladies thought that a great idea. They danced around happily crying, "*Oui!*"

"That sounds like a good idea to me," Pastor Jacques said. "Vim? Hubert? Aleksandr? Adan?"

Everyone agreed they'd build a *swimming pool* near the village.

They continued walking through the clearing and into the forest.

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"Look," Maru said in Lucayan, as she pointed to a very tall tree with yellow flowers on it. The other Lucayan ladies looked where she was pointing, saw what it was. All the ladies ran to the tree—except Anki and Brigita, who didn't understand what was going on—pulled off some fruit, peeled out the nuts, started *chewing* them.

"What the hell *is* that stuff?" Anki cried.

The men finally caught up with them.

"They're good to *chew*! Try one," Maru cried.

Pastor Jacques took one, smelled it. "Smells a little bit like *nutmeg*," he said, pointing at the leathery leaves of the tree. He tasted the nut, found it to be bitter at first, then a *sweet*, pleasant flavor filled his mouth. "Not *bad*," he declared.

The other men tasted the nuts.

"We have these in India. The Muslims say they're sacred," Adan said. "They call them *cola* nuts."

"We dry them and boil them in honey water. It's a *wonderful* drink," Tana cried. "Good for the *stomach*."

"Let's take some *with* us," Vim said.

They separated several pounds of nuts from their follicles, stashed them in their bags.

"Here's a little cola nut tree, just starting to grow," Hubert said.

"Let's take it along," Vim said.

They used their knives and some sticks, dug the little tree up, roots, soil and all, put it in one of the pots they'd brought along for grapevines, then put the pot back in its basket.

They found a trail through the woods, followed it a ways.

"Over *here*!" Julius said.

They all went to where he was.

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"These are *grape* leaves," Julius said. "But—be *careful!* Those plants over *there* are poison *ivy!*"

"That's *all* I need—to get stung by poison *ivy,*" Anki cried. "Being naked as a *bird*—it could easily *happen!*"

"Better than being bitten by a *snake,*" Vim said.

"*Snakes?* Where? I *hate* snakes," Anki cried.

"Just kidding!" Vim said.

They all examined the grapevines and leaves.

Some of the grapes were *ripe*. Other vines still had hard little green berries on them.

Julius tasted one of the ripe grapes. "These will make a very dry wine by themselves," he said. "We'll take these plants back to the vineyard. I'll graft *Holland* starts to them—then we'll pray for *success.*"

They filled all the empty pots with grapevines, roots and soil, started back toward the vineyard.

When they reached the vineyard, Julius examined the soil and lay of the land. "This sandy *loam* soil should be *good* for grapes—and the garden *slopes* just enough to give good water runoff," he said. "We'll need to make *trellises* for the grapevines to grow on. The land's at a good angle, the sun will shine on the vines evenly."

He quickly set about grafting sprigs of the *Holland* vines to the wild vine stocks.

They planted the *grafted* ones in a row and also planted some of the *wild* grapevines by themselves, so later on they would be able to compare the quality of the wines they each produced.

"How long will it take for them to have mature grapes?" Hubert asked Julius.

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"We should have edible grapes next *year*—but it usually takes *five* years for a vineyard to reach *full* production," Julius said.

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LANOI AND THE HAWK

Chapter 17

Keer took flight and, as she flew, shrieked her familiar spine-thrilling cry, "kree-e-e-e..."

IN CHINA, AT least as far back as 2000 B.C., people used hawks to catch and kill small animals. This use of hawks was known as hawking. Later, hawking spread to Persia, India, Japan, Egypt, Italy, England and other countries.

Lanoi's Lucayan ancestors in the Bahamas had used hawks to kill animals for food, for hundreds of years.

Lanoi loved and respected the female Red-tailed hawk, kept her in a hut on the other side of the spring, separate from the village.

It was a one-sided love affair however. The hawk, which Lanoi called Keer, was reserved, aloof and very independent. She obviously felt *superior* to Lanoi.

Lanoi liked Keer's red tail with her white and black stripes and the dark, reddish brown feathers on her back.

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On Keer's underside, her stomach feathers were almost orange all the way to her tail. Her razor-sharp talons and hooked beak were designed by nature to aggressively catch and violently *kill*.

The hawk had been just a baby when Lanoi and Tana had found her in the forest.

All the sisters had helped build a palm hut for her. They'd made three perches in the hut, one near the floor, one halfway up, one near the ceiling.

They'd made a leash for Keer, kept the leash tied to a leather strap attached to each of her legs while she was perching.

They'd also built a large weathering area of cross-linked bamboo for her to fly about in and had attached the enclosed weathering area to the hut with netting.

They'd run a small stream of water from the spring—through the weathering area into a large clay pot placed in the ground—for the hawk to bathe in.

Lanoi and her sisters' father and mother had both been hawkers and Lanoi and her sisters had learned the art of hawking from them while growing up.

Lanoi had tanned a wild boar's skin with mangrove bark and water, made her own heavy, leather hawking glove. The glove fit her left hand perfectly and its leather was thick enough so the hawk's talons couldn't penetrate it and pierce Lanoi's skin.

She'd attached a metal ring to the glove to fasten the hawk's leash to, had split some of the leather and made a tassel which hung from the glove.

She'd made a heavy weave cotton hawking bag, that hung from a strap, to carry equipment, meat to feed the hawk and any quarry the hawk might *kill*.

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She'd trained Keer for many weeks with an artificial bird she'd made of leather, sand and feathers. She'd tied the artificial bird to a string, which was wound around a well-designed cylinder of wood. With Keer on her glove, she'd swung the artificial bird around herself in a counterclockwise motion, until Keer had learned to efficiently catch it.

She'd made a pair of metal hawking bells, fastened them to Keer's legs in case Keer should become *too* independent.

Lanoi knew Keer would not lose her feathers until after the coolest part of the year had passed and the warmer weather had begun again. That would give them both many more months of hunting together before the hawk temporarily lost her feathers and wouldn't be able to fly for some time.

Early every morning since Keer had been trained, Lanoi took her out to an open meadow in the forest to let her catch her major meal of the day, sometimes a few mice, sometimes a large rodent and sometimes a quail-dove.

The morning was cool. A few clouds in the east made for a splendid amber-gold sunrise.

Lanoi walked ahead of *Hubert* with *Keer* on her glove. They'd walked for over an hour to get to where Lanoi usually hunted ducks with the hawk.

They came out of the palm trees onto a beach.

Lanoi stopped, released Keer.

Keer gracefully rose high above the ocean water, spread its wings and gracefully glided on the thermals.

Lanoi and Hubert could see Keer was carefully surveying the beach and water far below with her keen eyes.

SOME SIXTEENTH CENTURY ROMANCES

Then, as they watched, Keer suddenly swooped down, wings back, plummeted with tremendous speed—over a *hundred* miles an hour—struck a *duck* swimming in the water!

Nearby ducks rapidly beat the tips of their wings against the calm sea as they made their hasty escape.

Lanoi and Hubert ran to the water's edge, near the duck Keer had hit.

Lanoi waded out into the shallow bay, took the duck away from Keer, saw the duck had been killed by Keer breaking the duck's neck.

Keer took flight and, as she flew, shrieked her familiar spine-thrilling cry, "*kree-e-e-e!*"

Lanoi whistled. Keer obediently returned to the glove.

"Very *impressive*," Hubert said.

Marrying Lanoi had been good for Hubert. In a short time she'd completely transformed him. He'd become very relaxed. He was indeed no longer the diamond-counting *stoic* of his former days.

"Using Keer is a good way to get a *bird!* I can't get close enough to *shoot* one like this with a bow and arrow," Lanoi said, holding up the duck.

"This kind of bird is called a *canard sauvage* in French," Hubert explained.

"*Canard sauvage!*" she repeated.

He took the duck from her so she could handle Keer more easily. "We'll ask *Vim* how it should be *cooked*, perhaps it'd be best roasted in the Dutch oven with ground up *juniper* berries."

"Or maybe with a wild *mushrooms* and green olive wine sauce—*oui?*" she said, a sparkle in her eye.

Hubert pointed. "Look—*oies!*" he said in French, meaning '*geese*'.

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She looked farther down the beach, saw a flock of large birds coming in for a landing—*Oies!*" she said, then glanced at her husband. He looked at her, then at Keer.

"No," she laughed, "I know what you're about to *ask*—the answer is—*no*—Keer *cannot* kill *oies!*"

SOME SIXTEENTH CENTURY ROMANCES

THE PIG

Chapter 18

"Let's only kill one pig..."

SMOKING FOOD TO preserve it was done at least as early as the dawn of civilization, as well as drying, pickling and salting. Vim had learned about all four methods of preserving food while in Paris as a young man.

He found that smoking was convenient and reliable. The way to smoke meat, he knew, was with smoldering hardwood. The forests on Liberté Island were ideal for that because of their many hardwood trees.

During an earlier exploration of surrounding islands by Lucayan canoe, Vim and the others had found a herd of *pigs*, somewhat wild, but apparently had been domesticated in the not to distant past. *Pigs*, whose *predecessors* the slavers had missed killing during their sweeps of the islands.

The pigs were large, and, Vim reasoned, if he were to *kill* one, much of its meat would spoil before they could eat it.

Aleksandr had eaten excellent smoked *ham*, *bacon* and *sausage* in Russia. When he learned that Vim knew how to smoke *meat*, he volunteered to help him build a *smokehouse*.

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Through experimentation, Julius had learned how to make strong cement out of lime, sand and water.

Working together, they'd all constructed a brick-lined swimming pool and a patio in the village. That gave them enough experience to try using bricks and cement to construct a smokehouse.

Julius helped Vim and Aleksandr with the assembly plan and they began construction of the smokehouse not far from the kiln they used for making bricks.

About ten feet from the smokehouse location, they built a brick and cement *firebox*. The firebox was constructed so the *top* of it was slightly lower than the *bottom* of the smokehouse would be, when completed.

From the firebox to the smokehouse, they constructed a closed flue to carry cool smoke from the firebox to the smokehouse. Vim compared that to the long stem of his Dutch tobacco *pipe*, which served the same purpose.

Finally, around where the flue came into the center of the smokehouse, they constructed the smokehouse of cemented bricks with a wood roof and a wood door. It's floor was ten feet each direction and the walls were eight feet high.

They built some bamboo shelves for smoking fillets of fish and sliced meat.

They ran a hefty rod of bamboo across near the ceiling from which to hang hams, bacon and sausage.

They constructed a brick and cement patio around the smokehouse and built tables and chairs where they'd be able to sit while preparing meat and fish for smoking.

And they made a paddle and a large waterproof box for making and holding *brine*.

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Now they were ready for the *pig*!

The next morning, Vim got everybody together for the *hunt*. Those who'd not been in the hunting party when they'd gotten the turkeys were given the bows and arrows this time.

Everyone got into canoes, partly paddled, partly sailed to the island where the large pigs had been seen.

They beached the canoes, spread out, moved toward the center of the island.

"Let's only kill *one* pig," Vim said. "Eventually—we can smoke more if we want, but now let's just kill *one*!"

They found a trail through the forest, then the trees ended and they saw a lush meadow. Five large pigs were rooting around in the soil, eating grass and roots out in the meadow.

"Everybody with a *bow*—form a *line*," Vim said. "Everyone *else*—stay *behind* them!"

When the archers drew near, the pigs began squealing and running away. Everyone ran after them.

"Take the one on the *right*!" Vim yelled.

The archers fired their arrows. They all hit the pig on the right, brought it down.

"Good shooting—*ladies*!" Tana said.

"*Ladies*?" Hubert cried.

"Maru's and Lanoi's arrows got there *first*," Tana cried.

"Well—if you ladies are all going to stick *together*," Hubert said, then laughed.

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They dressed out the pig, carved it into sections per Vim's instructions and carried it back to the canoes, paddled for a while then sailed to *Liberté Island*.

They all showered together in the shower hut.

After they'd dried off, they prepared a brine of rock salt, from a salt deposit on the island, and fresh water then Vim added *honey* to it.

"Shall we flavor the ham with *garlic*?" Vim asked the group around him.

"*Oui!*" was the answer.

They cut garlic cloves in half, tossed them into the brine. By the same consensus process, they added cinnamon, clove, ginger, nutmeg, oregano, pepper and sage.

Vim dropped a small potato into the brine. It sank to the bottom. He stirred the brine with a paddle while Aleksandr added salt. When the potato began to *float*, Vim removed it and signaled Aleksandr to stop adding salt. The brine was ready for the *meat* to be added.

Vim put the hams and slabs of bacon in a bamboo cage that had a rack on it for holding a pot of water, lowered everything into the brine, filled the clay pot with water, which kept the meat and cage it was in from rising to the surface.

He left the meat in the brine until it was cured, removed it, dried the outside, hung it in the smokehouse, set damp hickory chips to smoking in the firebox then left the meat to become *smoked*.

Tana quickly put the pigskin in a pot of water to boil so the hair could be removed easily. The skin would then be boiled in water containing salt and hot peppers until it was thoroughly cooked, would be dried, cut up and cooked in hot pig fat until brown, crispy and *delicious*.

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"Have you ever eaten salted, smoked *oysters* in *olive* oil?" Vim asked Aleksandr, out of curiosity.

"Never!" Aleksandr said.

"You must *try* it! I'll *make* some—they're very *tasty*!" Vim said.

GLASS

Chapter 19

"Did your father make these beads...

ONE DAY IN November 1555, Lanoi brought Hubert a few red glass *beads*, dropped them into his hand.

"Where did you *get* these?" he asked.

"We found them in my father's and mother's hut after they disappeared."

"How did they *disappear*?" he asked, looking into her eyes.

"One day they said they were going in the sail canoe to see many different islands. There was a bad storm here on our island that afternoon while they were gone. We think they got caught in the storm."

"Did your father *make* these beads?" he asked.

"No—he didn't know how to make beads. Maybe he got them by trading a fish or a pig for them."

"Whom did he trade with?" he asked.

"With other island people."

In 1492, red glass beads and red caps had been traded to the Lucayan Bahama Islanders by Columbus' men for food and favors then they'd been

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traded throughout the islands by Lucayans, until the slavers had put an end to the trading by capturing the islanders.

Hubert knelt in front of Lanoi, put his ear to her stomach.

"I don't *hear* anything," he said.

She took his hand, gently put it on her stomach.

"I feel our baby *moving!*" he said excitedly.

She smiled.

He stood up, kissed her lips. She put her arms around him. "You will have to keep learning to hunt with Keer from *Zoni* and *Maru*," she said. "Anki and I will be too *tired* and hot to go hunting, with our *babies* coming."

"What does Pastor *Jacques* say about your babies?" he asked.

"He said we are doing very well. We are starting the fourth new moon. I'm tired now. I need to lie down for a while. Pastor Jacques said that's usual in the fourth moon."

Hubert walked her to their newly decorated hut. She lay down on a large sleeping mat that was on a bed he and Vim had made.

"Do you want something to eat? Or drink?" he asked.

"Only sleep," she said, smiled her wide smile and dozed off.

Hubert was still interested in the glass beads. He got Julius and Vim together around the swimming pool. They sat in the new lounge chairs they'd made from wood and strips of heavy, very colorful, cotton cloth the ladies had woven. Hubert showed Julius and Vim the glass beads. "Do you think we can make *glass*?" Hubert asked.

"We know we can melt *sand* in the *kiln*," Vim said.

"Maybe if we make a larger *kiln*—" Hubert suggested.

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Anki handed Vim and Hubert lit pipes.

Julius thought about the kiln idea. "Are you thinking the same thing *I'm* thinking?" he asked.

"Let me see—being an architect, you're probably thinking of something very *big*," Vim said, taking a draw on his pipe. As he exhaled, the smoke drifted up over his golden-tan, hairy face. "Windows for the *church*?"

"Exactly!" Julius said. "If we can learn to make glass *beads*—maybe we can learn to make colored *glass* for *windows*. We don't have to be able to *see* through it—as long as some of God's light gets through—that's all we need."

Tana brought each of them half a coconut shell of fermented coconut juice that she'd been cooling in the spring. They each thanked her.

"So—we're talking about a very *large* kiln?" Hubert asked.

"Not really," Julius said. "If we can make sheets of square colored glass—say—one foot on each side—we could break it into pieces and put the different colored pieces *together* to make a window."

"How can we hold the pieces together?" Hubert asked.

"How did you cement the *aqueduct* pieces together?" Julius asked.

"With *cassava* glue," Vim and Hubert answered at the same time.

"Since we don't have *lead*, which is the usual thing to use to make leaded glass windows—we'll try a mixture of *cassava* glue with *clay*. That may be strong enough to hold the pieces of glass together for a small window," Julius said, taking a sip of his drink.

"What do we do with the kiln?" Hubert asked, sipping his drink.

"Well—we'll need to heat about ten pounds of sand mixture at a time," Julius said.

"What will be in the mixture?" Vim asked.

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"Perhaps *I* can be of help with that question," Adan called from the pool.

He excused himself from swimming with Brigita, picked up his drink, climbed out of the pool and sat down in a lounge chair.

"We've been making glass in *India* for centuries," he said. "The sand must be mixed with a little *lime*—be careful not to get the lime in your eyes or on your skin. Then you experiment with mixing minerals into the sand to get different colors. You put all that in a clay pot—heat it until it all *melts*. Then—for *windows*—you must dump the red-hot glass onto a flat surface—smooth *clay* would work. Then comes the tricky part—you have to roll out the glass so it's *flat*—while it's still *hot*."

"You learned all that while you were a soldier of *fortune*?" Julius asked.

Adan laughed. "You learn *many* things when you're a soldier of fortune," Adan said, took a sip of his drink then continued. "Vim learned *culinary* arts in Paris while he was studying *languages*. Hubert was a *merchant*, but he learned to make *jewelry* and do *engraving*. And you—you studied *architecture* and sculpting—but you also learned *music*. See what I mean?"

"*Oui*—I see what you mean," Julius said.

"Now that we know what we're going to melt—we can figure out what kind of a kiln we'll need to melt it in," Hubert said, sucking on his pipe.

In the weeks to come, they designed a new kiln and built it near the first one, made a special clay pot for melting the sand mixture and a hardwood tool for moving the pot, prepared a smooth, flat, fired clay surface on the ground.

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They all decided it'd be best to fire the kiln up at night, as it would be too hot during the day.

One night they all gathered around the new kiln that Vim had built a very hot hardwood fire in.

There were little piles of ground up minerals carefully arranged on the brick patio surrounding the kiln. The minerals had been gathered from different places on the island—from wherever sediment was found that had a different *color*.

Julius put a handful of clean, dry sand into the pot and added a small amount of brown mineral. He mixed them together, carefully added a little lime and continued to mix it. When he was satisfied everything was mixed well, he gave the pot to Hubert.

Hubert used a long-handled hardwood tool, placed the pot into the kiln.

"The moment of *truth* is near," Vim said.

"Spoken like a true *heretic*," Pastor Jacques joked.

All the men laughed.

The Lucayan ladies still didn't understand what a heretic was exactly.

As they all watched as the inside of the clay crucible began changing color, first to red then to white hot.

"I think it's *melted*," Aleksandr said.

Vim stuck a metal rod into the crucible, felt the mixture, decided it had indeed melted, got some of the melt on the end of the rod, quickly brought it to the smooth clay slab, shook a drop onto the clay surface. Hubert quickly made a hole in the center of the drop with a thin metal punch he'd designed for the purpose.

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"By damned—you made a *bead!* It's *flat* on one side, but you *made* one—and it has a *hole* in the middle just like it's supposed to have," Anki cried.

They watched the bead as it cooled. When it was completely cool, everyone watched as Julius picked it up, held it with his fingers to the firelight, saw it had areas of *brown* and *green* running through it. "Yes, we've made a *bead!*" he cried.

Anki passed cups of wine around.

"Here's to *glass!*" Adan said, lifting his cup.

"To *glass!*" everybody chorused, as they raised their cups.

Then they put about a pound of mixture in the crucible and fired it.

Hubert poured the white-hot glass onto the smooth clay and, while it was still hot, Vim and Aleksandr rolled it out flat with a large hardwood roller they'd made just for the task. Tiny sparks flickered from the surface as they rolled the glass thin.

When it was cool, Julius examined it against the firelight, saw the cool glass was mostly *red* with a few black streaks, tapped it with his knuckles. It didn't crack or break.

"We've *done* it!" he said. "This will make excellent stained-glass *windows* for the *church!*"

They all stood around the kiln talking until the fire died down, played in the shower for quite some time, then put on the elaborate *hats* Hubert had risked his life for on the floating box and danced around the fire on the beach while Tana played the *baco*.

Later they laid out on their sleeping mats in the cool of the evening and watched seabirds fly over the water in the moonlight.

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SAVE THE *LA MOUETTE!*

Chapter 20

"Vim—come quick—a storm is coming..."

"I'm going to have a *baby*," Zoni said in Lucayan, as she picked a ripe tomato from its stem. "And—*Maru* told Aleksandr *she* is with child, also."

"That's *wonderful*—!" Tana said, carefully picking a fat tomato from the bushy plant.

"And *Adan* has asked Brigita to *marry* him," Zoni said.

"Did you know Julius asked *me* to marry him?" Tana asked.

"He *did*?" Zoni asked.

"*Yes*—Julius wants to celebrate for four *days*," Tana said.

"We have the *harvest* festival to celebrate, too," Zoni said.

"We could celebrate *four* days—then another *five* days for the *harvest* festival," Tana said.

"Nine *days*?" Zoni cried.

"It'll be *fun*!" Tana said.

"Anki and Lanoi are heavy with child—we'll have to dance *for* them," Zoni said.

They laughed.

"I'll play the *baco*," Tana said.

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"Maybe Julius can teach Lanoi how to play the *fiddle*," Zoni suggested jokingly.

"Can you imagine Lanoi playing the *fiddle*?" Tana asked.

They laughed.

"Look at the *sky*!" Zoni said. "A bad *storm* is coming!"

To the south, the December sky had turned black. They felt a sudden gust of *wind*.

"Lets warn the *others*!" Tana cried.

They set their baskets of tomatoes down—ran to the village!

"*Tempête! Tempête!*" they cried in French.

Pastor Jacques came out of his and Zoni's hut, saw the menacing black clouds rapidly moving toward them across the ocean. "Vim—come *quick*—a *storm* is coming!" Pastor Jacques shouted.

Vim was with Anki in their hut. Anki was lying on the bed heavy with child. "There's a storm coming—but you'll be safe *here*," Vim assured her, giving her a quick kiss.

"Be *careful*," she said.

Vim ran outside, yelled, "*Hubert!* Where's *Hubert*?"

Hubert had heard the warnings and had comforted his pregnant wife Lanoi in the same way Vim had Anki. "Stay *here!* You'll be *safe* here!" he yelled against the screech of the increasing wind as he dashed out through the hut opening.

"We have to get the *La Mouette* up the *rollers* before the storm *sinks* her!" Vim yelled. "If we lose the *La Mouette*, we lose all the French *wine*—and our Dutch *food*—and we won't be able to catch big *fish* anymore!"

They'd built a dry dock for the *La Mouette* high on the beach with wooden rollers for the keel and more rollers to support the sides of the hull.

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Everyone except Anki and Lanoi gathered around Vim.

"The *men* will guide the *La Mouette* up the rollers! *Ladies*—pull the *canoes* and the small *boat* up on the *beach*! Let's go—!"

The wind began to howl in earnest, making white-capped waves on the bay. High above, it ripped through the palm fronds, making them rustle and flutter wildly.

Rain began to pour down.

The *men* ran to save the *La Mouette*—and the *ladies* ran to save a canoe from being swept out to sea.

"Hubert and I will get on the *cutter*—the rest of you help guide it up the *rollers*!" Vim yelled to the men.

As lightning flashed, Vim and Hubert climbed the rope ladder, made their way to the heavy wench at the bow. Hubert released the latch, began unwinding the thick hemp rope that had been used to bring in fishnets, heavy with fish, in the rough North Sea. Vim climbed down the ladder, tied the rope to a large tree then quickly returned to help Hubert with the wench.

Pastor Jacques and Aleksandr were on one side of the *La Mouette*, Adan and Julius on the other. They all began maneuvering the cutter into position between dry dock rollers.

"More *your* way!" Pastor Jacques yelled across the cutter to Adan and Julius.

The wind shook the *La Mouette* and threatened to push it away from the dry dock.

After several tries, the men on the ground finally got the bow end of the keel started onto the rollers.

"Okay! Turn the *wench*!" Pastor Jacques yelled to Vim and Hubert.

Vim flipped the wench latch.

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He and Hubert turned the huge wench handle, wound the slack rope onto the wench spool until it was taut then, as the others forced the cutter between the rollers, Vim and Hubert turned the handle and the men on the ground gradually maneuvered the *La Mouette* up the rollers to what they hoped was safety.

"Good *work!*" Vim yelled against the wind. "Now let's go help the *ladies!*"

Vim and Hubert quickly got down off the cutter and all the men ran to help the ladies pull canoes and the small green boat up the beach to safety.

Through the shrieking of the wind, they heard Tana's donkey brae as it pulled against the rope that secured it to a tree.

Then the rain began coming down in *sheets* amid almost continuous flashes of *lightning*.

They all made a mad dash to the village.

Soaking wet, Hubert went directly to his and Lanoi's hut. Lanoi was *gone*, and he noticed—so was her *hawking* glove!

"Lanoi's *gone!*" he yelled against the shriek of the wind. "And she took her *hawking* glove! She must be trying to help *Keer!*"

"*Anki's* gone, *too!*" Vim yelled. "They might be *together!*"

"Pastor *Jacques!* Save the *fire!* We've got to go find *Lanoi* and *Anki,*" Hubert yelled.

"*What?!*" Pastor Jacques yelled back.

"The storm will *drown* the fire on the *beach!* Get someone to help you move some of the fire to the fire circle in my hut so we won't *lose* it!" Hubert yelled.

"*Okay!*" Pastor Jacques yelled.

Fronds were being ripped off palm trees and were flying about.

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Seabirds were crying and flying hither and thither as they looked for cover from the storm.

Hubert and Vim ran to the hawk's hut, saw *Lanoi* standing in the bamboo weathering area with *Keer* perched on her hawking glove. *Keer* was obviously nervous and frightened. Every feather was soaking wet.

Hubert understood that *Lanoi* had come out into the storm to sooth her edgy bird, but he was concerned for *Lanoi* and her unborn baby's safety. "You crazy girl! You could have been *hit* by something! I thought you were going to stay in the hut!"

"I was just lying there—saw my *hawking* glove—thought of poor *Keer*—couldn't *stop* myself!" *Lanoi* cried.

They followed *Lanoi* as she took *Keer* into the bird's hut, fastened its leash to its leg straps and placed it on a perch.

Lanoi removed a roll of cotton cloth from her bag, grabbed one end and let the rest fall to the ground, unrolling as it went. A live mouse fell out, landed on the sandy floor. *Keer* instantly swooped down on it, killed it with her sharp talons, began ripping it apart with her beak, eating it.

"She'll be okay *now*," *Lanoi* said in French.

Hubert took her hand.

Vim and Hubert hastily walked *Anki* and *Lanoi* back to their huts.

The storm had made the air cool. *Lanoi* thought the fire in the brick fire circle in she and Hubert's hut felt good.

"Can I borrow some *fire*?" Vim yelled to Hubert from he and *Anki*'s hut. "You two are the only ones who have any *fire*!"

"Bring a piece of *pitch*, if you have one!" Hubert called back.

Within a few seconds *five* men were *standing* in front of Hubert's *doorway* holding sticks of pine, sticky with pitch, in their hands. In turn, they each

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put the end of their stick into Hubert and Lanoi's fire. The pitch burst into *flame—popping, hissing* and casting flickering shadows onto the hut walls.

Each man returned to his own hut and built a fire in the brick fire circle.

Soon, encouraging smoke rose up out of the holes in the tops of six huts and they could all dry off.

"Will the *plants* be okay?" Zoni asked Pastor Jacques.

"I think they will—unless it turns into a *hurricane* the extra water will be *good* for them."

In he and Anki's hut, Vim found his pipe, cleaned it, put new tobacco in it, stuck a sliver of wood into the fire, lit his pipe then sat in a chair by the fire next to Anki.

She handed him a piece of dry, salty fish.

He took a bite. "*Yellowtail?*" he asked.

"*Bonito,*" she replied.

THINGS OF GLASS

Chapter 21

"It's a splendid vase..."

THE STORM TURNED out to be a heavy *squall* instead of a late-in-the-year *hurricane*.

The next day was cool, so Julius fired up the kiln they'd built for making glass.

All the men and Tana and Brigita gathered around.

Julius prepared a mixture using the ground-up, green mineral in a pile on the patio. He put it into a clay crucible, fired it until it was melted.

Adan dipped the end of a hollow piece of bamboo into the molten glass. The bamboo flamed up and charred, but the melted glass still clung to the end of the bamboo stick.

Adan quickly took it to the flat clay sheet they'd made on the ground, rolled the glass around on it then blew into the other end of the bamboo, formed a glass bubble filled with air.

Adan again shaped the glass against the flat clay, set the glass bubble he's created straight up, pressed it down a little against the clay to make

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a flat bottom, let it cool a little, snapped off the top where the glass was attached to the bamboo.

With tools he'd made of hardwood, he turned over the glass globe he'd just made, placed it back in the kiln and melted the jagged edges so the glass flowed nicely together, took it out of the kiln, set it on the clay, let it cool.

He held it up to the light. It was a superb translucent gray with green streaks running through it. "Well?" he asked.

"It's a splendid *vase*," Julius said.

It was the first glass vase Tana had ever seen. "It's very *pretty*. What is it *good* for?" she asked.

Julius took it, filled it half with water, picked a beautiful flower from a nearby bush, put its stem down into the water. "So we can have *flowers* on the *table*," he said.

"You eat *flowers*?" Tana asked.

Everybody laughed.

"We can *smell* the flowers while we're *eating*," Adan explained.

"I *like* it," Brigita said, holding it in her hand, gave Adan a kiss. "It looks a little like a vase we had in Italy."

"Now *you* try," Tana said to Julius.

Julius made a small pile of damp sand on one side of the flat clay, formed the sand with his hands until it took the shape he was trying to achieve.

He fired a mixture in the kiln, poured it out onto the damp sand. Aleksandr helped smooth the melted glass down the sides and around the base.

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Julius let the glass cool, put it back in the kiln upside down, let the small amount of sand melt that had stuck to the glass, removed it, set it on the flat clay, pressed it flat.

"A *bowl* for *stew*!" Tana announced, excitedly.

"*You* try it," Pastor Jacques said to Tana.

Tana melted some glass, dipped a hardwood stick in it, pressed it down on the flat clay then held it in the air to cool.

It looked like a giant *fishhook*. "I'll catch a big *fish* with this," Tana cried.

They all laughed.

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ALEKSANDR'S BATHHOUSE

Chapter 22

"In the winter, we steamed in the bathhouse, then ran outside and rolled around naked..."

EVER SINCE VIM had seen the first fired brick come out of the kiln, he'd wanted to build a brick oven for making bread and pastries, so he and Julius had designed and built a great brick oven such that the temperature could be easily controlled and large amounts of bread could be baked at the same time.

Vim had baked one loaf of Dutch bread, one of French, one of Italian, one of Russian black, some Hindu unleavened bread and some cassava bread in it.

It was the seventh day of the nine-day celebration of the new mothers-to-be, *Zoni* and *Maru*—and the marriages of *Adan* and *Brigita*, and *Julius* and *Tana*—and the harvest festival. The newlyweds had returned from their honeymoons. Vim had created a splendid meal of Dutch, French, Italian, Russian, Hindu, and Lucayan dishes. Everyone was enjoying the food, wine and conversation.

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"In Russia, everybody took a *steam* bath once a week," Aleksandr said. "In the winter, we steamed in the *bathhouse*, then ran outside and rolled around naked in the *snow*."

"In public?" Pastor Jacques asked.

"*Oui!*" Aleksandr replied.

"So—every week you saw everybody in your village without there clothes on," Tana said.

"*Oui,*" Aleksandr said. "It was fun! Nobody paid any attention to naked people."

"What's *snow*?" Lanoi asked.

"It's white stuff that comes down from the sky," Aleksandr said.

"Is it white *rain*?" Maru asked, taking a bite of melon.

"It's *like* white rain—but very *cold*," Vim said.

"You have this snow in *Holland*?" Zoni asked.

"*Oui,*" Vim said, taking a bite of shrimp.

"Is it in *France*?" Tana asked Pastor Jacques.

"*Oui,* we have it in France," Pastor Jacques said.

"Is it in *India*," Brigita asked Adan.

"*Oui,*" Adan said, as he spooned curry sauce onto a piece of boiled goat meat. "There's much snow in the mountains of northern India."

As if to agree, a nearby yellow-necked toucan with a huge blue-black bill let out its call, "*rib-ribit-rop-rip-rib-ribit-rop-rip!*"

"Is the snow colder than the water in our *spring*?" Tana asked.

"Much *colder*," Hubert said.

"They have it in *Italy*?" Tana asked her new husband, Julius.

"*Oui!* This time of year we have snow in Italy," Julius said, picking up a piece of pasta with his fork.

SOME SIXTEENTH CENTURY ROMANCES

"So—let's design a *steam* bathhouse and build it out of *brick*," Julius suggested.

"It'll be great to have steam baths. You'll see," Aleksandr said.

"But—remember—there's no *snow* here to *roll* in," Lanoi said, breaking a patty of cassava bread. "We only have *sand*!"

Everyone laughed.

"We can lay on our mats instead of rolling in snow," Maru said, sipping wine.

So, in the following days, they built Aleksandr's bathhouse, and early one morning, while it was still cool, everyone sat in it and enjoyed a good hot steam bath.

THE BULL

Chapter 23

The bull singled out Aleksandr, chased him around a large tree...

AFTER THE SLAVERS had stripped the islands of their people, the stray livestock left behind and other domestic animals that'd been lucky enough to hide from the slavers in the forests began to increase in number.

The animals had few enemies, lots of food and fresh water, so after many years they became numerous.

One of the favorite adventures of Vim and the others on Liberté Island was to sail canoes from island to island to see what they could see.

A week before Christmas, the men, Brigita and Tana undertook such an exploration.

They canoed to and landed on the beach of an island not far from Liberté Island then hiked to a meadow that had some sparse trees with a stream running through.

They walked on, eventually found themselves in an old village.

The palm fronds had long-since been mostly depleted from the huts, but the center trunks were generally still standing, providing ample evidence of the existence of long-ago dwellings.

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Aleksandr picked up the head of a stone *axe*. "Look at *this*," he said, holding it up.

"And *this*," Pastor Jacques said, holding up a stone *knife*. "People used to *live* here! What do you think *happened* to them?"

"Do you remember your father or mother telling stories about the people of the islands?" Adan asked Tana.

"*Oui*," our father told us a story about one day when he was very sick, because he'd stepped on a rockfish, he couldn't go out to sea fishing with the other men of the village. They went fishing without him. They never came back."

"That explains why there are no *men* on Liberté Island—but where did everyone from *this* island go?" Julius asked.

"If they died because of disease, where are their *bones*?" Pastor Jacques asked.

"It was the custom of our people to put the dead body on a raft—set it on fire—push it out onto the sea," Tana said.

"I understand," Pastor Jacques said.

"Look at *this*!" Hubert said, holding out something in his hand.

"It's a silver *medallion*," Pastor Jacques said. "It has Christ on the cross stamped into it and there's an inscription in *Spanish*."

Hubert turned it over. "Look at *this*—the instruments of *torture* of the *Inquisition* are stamped into the other side," he said.

Pastor Jacques put it in the palm of his hand, looked at it closely. "In the name of God—you don't think Columbus' *Spaniards* took all these people *away*!" he cried.

"The *Spaniards* were obviously here," Vim said.

Pastor Jacques knelt down on the ground, began to pray.

The others did likewise.

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"Whatever happened to the people of these islands—bless and keep them in your heart for they are the kindest people in all the world. Amen," Pastor Jacques prayed aloud.

They got to their feet, left the abandoned village, hiked on.

As they hiked, not knowing what to expect, they kept their bows and arrows at the *ready*.

As they neared a group of trees, a small, red *bull* suddenly came *charging* out of the *trees*!

"Look *out*!" Aleksandr yelled.

Everyone raised their head—saw the bull charging at *them*—ran in every direction.

The bull singled out *Aleksandr*, chased him around a large tree. He finally caught a branch, pulled himself up, sat on the limb—watched the bull paw the ground.

"You think you're a tough *bull*?" he taunted. "We have bulls in *Russia* that could eat you for *breakfast*! In *Russia*—they wouldn't even let you watch a *bullfight*!"

He heard his wife, Maru yell, "Be *careful*, Aleksandr!" as she watched from behind a tree.

Aleksandr hung his bow on a small branch of the tree he was in to allow his hands to be free.

As the bull came snorting around the tree again, Aleksandr swung from a large branch—dropped onto the bull's *back*.

Maru was alarmed. "What's he *doing*?"

"In *France*, we call it *bull riding*," Pastor Jacques said.

"He could be *killed*!" Maru insisted.

The bull bucked and grunted.

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Aleksandr was able to hold on for a couple of minutes then the bull tossed him onto the ground, then instead of turning and *goring* him, it ran off into the trees.

"See—the bull is *afraid* of me!" Aleksandr cried with exultation, then collapsed.

Maru ran to him, knelt down, kissed him and held him in her arms. "*Really* though—are you *hurt*?" she asked.

The wind had been knocked out of Aleksandr. He lay in her arms as if near death.

The others gathered around. Hubert suspected Aleksandr was faking.

"The *bull*—it's coming *back*!" Hubert yelled.

Aleksandr sprang to his feet. "*Where?*"

Everybody laughed.

"Hubert was only *joking* about the bull coming *back*!" Maru explained.

Aleksandr got his bow down out of the tree and they continued to explore the island.

As they walked along, they heard *mooring* coming from some trees, went to investigate. They came upon a herd of twelve *cows* and seven calves grazing among the foliage.

"I see visions of cow's *milk*, cow *cheese* and *butter*," Vim said.

"And I see veal *steak* and *sausages*," Julius added.

"In France, there's a marvelous new dessert called *ice cream* made from cow's milk. I understand that the chefs of *Catherine de Médicis* first made it," Pastor Jacques said.

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"The chefs of the queen of *France* discovered it, you say?" Julius asked.

"*Oui*," Pastor Jacques said. "That's what I understand."

"Have you tasted it?" Julius asked.

"*Oui*," Pastor Jacques said, "It's *splendid!* Have you?"

"*Oui*," Julius said. "But, I'm inclined to think it was originated in *Italy*."

"That's very possible," Pastor Jacques agreed. "Many good things in France came from Italy."

"It's a grand dessert," Vim said. "I tasted it in Paris. We could make some if we had *snow*."

They would eventually build a corral and shelter for the cows and would have all the things cows were noted for providing—except *ice cream*.

They left the island of cows, canoed to another island, trekked inland.

"I hear the cackling of *chickens*," Adan said.

"You know about *chickens*?" Hubert asked.

"We have chickens in India," Adan said. "Curried chicken is very tasty!"

They came upon a nest. A hen was laying eggs. They waited until she'd finished, then as the half-wild hen squawked and flew away, Vim picked up one of its warm eggs. "Ham and eggs?" he asked.

"With fried *potatoes!*" Aleksandr added.

"With fried potatoes it *is!*" Vim said.

"And *squid* and hot *cassava* bread!" Brigita added.

"That too," Vim agreed.

"Roast *chicken!*" Julius said.

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"With sautéed *mushrooms*," Vim said.

They'd return and catch some chickens later.

On another island, they found a herd of *donkeys*, a spring, and much land that'd been cleared for farming some time in the not-to-distant past.

They'd eventually train some of the donkeys to pull a *plow* and they'd plant the area into wheat, barley, oats, hay, sugarcane, tobacco and white *mulberry* trees for raising *silkworms*.

On another island, they found a herd of *horses*. Being a cavalryman, Adan was very interested in them and would eventually break *two* of them to be used for pleasure riding about the island.

PAPER MONSTER

Chapter 24

"There's a monster over there..."

HUBERT WAS AWAKENED by a *noise*, opened his eyes. What he saw surprised him so much he decided to lay quietly on the mat and watch.

The dying embers in the hut's fire circle cast a tall, slowly-moving *shadow* onto the hut wall. The shadow was of the most *hideous* shape he'd ever seen, knotted, blunt nose, open mouth, flickering tongue. It reminded him of stories he'd heard about *dragons*.

He nudged his wife, Lanoi, who was sleeping beside him.

She opened her eyes, raised her head, looked at the shadow then laid her head back down against her pillow.

"There's a *monster* over there," he whispered.

She didn't say anything.

By the light of the glowing embers, he got a glimpse of the mysterious creature casting the shadows. It was about four feet long. "*Really*—there's a big *animal* over there," he whispered excitedly.

Lanoi still remained silent.

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As he watched, the monster twitched its tail. He could see it was eating something out of a bowl. Suddenly, it let out a loud *croak*, gasped for air—ran out of the hut.

He heard Lanoi giggling. "What *was* that?" he asked.

She burst out laughing.

"Why are you laughing? What was it *eating*?" he asked.

"That was just a big *iguana*! It won't *hurt* you! The bowl it was eating from is full of ground up hot *chili* peppers!"

They both broke into uproarious laughter.

Then, he remembered something—searched the house, finally found his *calendar*.

"Merry *Christmas*!" he said.

"What's *Christmas*?" she asked.

"It's a long story—but it's a holiday that we have in Holland," he said. "We give each other *gifts*."

"Do you celebrate for many days?"

"Twelve!" he said.

"Twelve *days*?"

"Twelve days," he repeated then said, "I *have* something for you."

He got out of bed, went to the other side of the hut, lifted up a cloth.

"It's a *loom*!" she said excitedly.

"It's a *loom* like we have in *Holland*. Vim and I made it for you and Anki."

She got up, went to the handloom, looked at it. "It's very nice. How does it *work*?"

He showed her how to rotate the thread cylinders behind the frame. She figured the rest out by herself.

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The commotion about the iguana had woken up everyone else in the village.

Anki, Lanoi, Vim and Hubert met outside their huts, walked to the shower house together.

The others followed and soon all twelve were under the cool spray tossing water on each other.

"Merry *Christmas!*" Pastor Jacques exclaimed.

"Merry Christmas!" everyone else repeated.

Adan knew about Christmas as he's celebrated it a few times with his father before his father had converted to Hinduism.

They finished showering, dried off on mats.

"We men have a Christmas *surprise* for you ladies," Pastor Jacques announced.

"Look!" Aleksandr said, pointing. "We men got together and built *swings* for you ladies!"

Everyone looked. There were six wooden swings hanging by ropes from nearby tree branches.

Each of the wives gave their husbands a hug and kiss.

"We *like* this new *holiday*," Tana said.

Pastor Jacques held a special Christmas service under the arch. Everyone prayed.

After the short service, Julius revealed *another* surprise. "All the men made *toys* for the *babies*—after they *arrive*, of course," Julius said.

Everyone laughed.

He set a little wooden *horse* on the table, pushed it along on its tiny wooden wheels.

Hubert hooked a little wooden *cart* behind the petite horse.

SOME SIXTEENTH CENTURY ROMANCES

Aleksandr gently pulled the toy past him, along the edge of the table.

As it made its way around the table, everyone took turns moving it on past them.

When it came his turn, Vim sat a miniature, carved, wood figurine of a *man*, on the driver's seat of the cart.

On his turn, Adan put a carved figure of a *woman* beside the man.

As they pulled it around the table again, Pastor Jacques dropped little pieces of cut *grass* in the back of the cart to represent *hay*.

"Are you men *sure* you made this toy for the *babies*?" Maru asked.

Everyone laughed.

Vim had *another* surprise. He went to the spring, brought back a large bottle, set it on the table.

Brigita brought cups.

Vim poured some cool, brownish-white liquid into each cup.

"What is that?" Zoni asked.

"In Holland they call it *cocoa*," Vim said. "It's cow's milk, cocoa, sugar and cinnamon."

"Where did you get the *cocoa*?" Pastor Jacques asked, sipping his drink. "It's *delicious*!"

"As it turns out, we have *cocoa* trees growing wild—right here on Liberté Island," Vim said.

"Is it good for *babies*?" Tana asked.

"It's *very* good for babies," Pastor Jacques said.

THE CHURCH

Chapter 25

"What else will the Hindu temple need..."

CHRISTMAS HAD REMINDED Julius that he'd been designing a church to be built on the highest point of Liberté Island.

He got everyone together to talk about it.

"At first, I thought of designing our new church as an eight-sided *cupola* like Filippo Brunelleschi in Florence designed the Duomo Cathedral that was completed in 1436," Julius said, holding up a sketch he'd made on some of Vim and Hubert's chart paper, to show to everyone seated at the table. "But I changed my mind. Here's an example of the onion-shaped *cupola* that has been made popular by Italian architects in Italy and Russia," he said, holding up another sketch. "However—since we're *Hindu—Calvinist—Lutheran—Russian Orthodox—and Lucayan*—perhaps we need a church that includes *all* of our religions."

"*Oui*," Pastor Jacques agreed, taking a sip of wine. "That's a *splendid* idea."

"How would a church like that *look*?" Adan asked.

Julius held up another sketch.

"It would be divided into *thirds*, like this," Julius suggested. "One section would be devoted to the *Hindu* religion. It would look like a Hindu

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temple. It would have carpets on the floor for praying and singing and *tapestries* and *paintings* on the walls."

"What God do you *pray* to—if I might ask," Pastor Jacques asked Adan.

"I pray to whatever God I need *most*. If the *weather* is bad I pray to *one*—for something else—another. But—I always say some prayers to *Krishna*."

"I believe the Hindu temple usually has a part that towers toward the sky—*oui*?" Julius asked, taking a sip of wine.

"*Oui*," Adan said. "For Hindus—that represents the spiritual center of the *universe*."

"Then, we shall build a tower *here*," Julius said, drawing a circle on the chart paper with a quill pen.

"What else will the *Hindu* temple need?" Julius asked, popping a fresh strawberry into his mouth.

"It'll need a statue of the *deity* sitting in a ceramic tank of water. The ladies come to bathe themselves and to wash it every day. At night it's covered with a sacred cloth," Adan said. "And there's one *other* matter."

"What's that?" Julius asked.

"The statue of the deity must not be too *heavy*—so I can lift it and put it in the *cart*," Adan said.

"Put it in a cart?" Julius asked.

"*Oui*," Adan continued. "On certain days, I must parade the statue of the deity through the village. Using a cart and Tana's donkey would be easiest—if that's okay with Tana! I'll put a carpet in the cart for the statue to sit on."

"That is okay with me," Tana said, sipping coconut juice.

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"So—let's put a *doorway* in the temple, about here, so the statue of the deity can be easily taken out and in," Julius said, making a mark on the paper.

"Anything else you can think of?" Julius asked.

"Something showing the Incarnations of *Vishnu*—behind the statue of the deity would be appropriate," Adan said.

"I can help with that," Hubert said, taking a draw on his pipe. "Make me a sketch of what it looks like and I'll make a nice large one in gold inlay."

"Gold *inlay*?" Aleksandr asked, surprised.

"Vim and I brought a trunk of gold coins from Holland. We have no use for coins on Liberté Island. I'll melt them down in the kiln to make inlays."

"I agree," Vim said.

"I'll need help making the statue of the deity," Adan said.

"I can help with that," Julius said. "Is there anything else you can think of that's needed for the Hindu temple?"

"No," Adan said.

"Then—let's talk about the *Lucayan* section," Julius said.

"We would like a fire to *dance* around," Maru suggested.

"Okay—we can put a fire circle *here*," Julius said, pointing to the paper in his hand, "with a *hole* in the roof to let out the smoke. What else?"

"Could we have a large *Celt* on the wall?" Lanoi asked.

"A large *Celt* it is—Hubert?" Julius said.

"With diamonds and gold inlays," Hubert said. "And a few pearls?"

The Lucayan ladies were very happy about that idea.

"Anything else for the *Lucayan* section?" Julius asked, sipping his wine.

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"A place to put the *baco*," Tana added.

Julius marked a place on the paper and wrote *baco* beside it.

"And—we want to have images of *animals* and *crosses* on the walls," Zoni suggested, "like *agoutis* and *iguanas*!"

"And *goats* and *horses*," Tana added.

Julius asked, "Is there anything else you want to add to the Lucayan section?" No one spoke, so he began describing the Christian section.

"For the *Christian* section—I'm thinking of a *dome* with colored glass windows on the east side to catch the morning *sun*. I think the colored glass should show Christ with a staff, standing with lambs," Julius suggested.

"That's a great idea," Pastor Jacques agreed.

"What kind of a cross do the Russian Orthodox use on the altar?" Julius asked Aleksandr.

"It's a bit more complicated than that. In the Russian Orthodox Church—the altar is shielded from the congregation by an *iconostasis*—that is—a wall covered with icons like oil paintings of Christ and Mary and engravings to symbolize saints. We believe that God sends messages and healing through the icons to the congregation," Aleksandr said. "The rest of the *iconostasis* is covered with ornamental gold and always has several tall candelabras standing in front of it."

"We'll stretch the gold as far as we can," Hubert said.

"Does this mean we need *two* altars?" Julius asked.

"Not at all," Pastor Jacques said, "you all know what *I* look like—I'll stand behind the *iconostasis* and give the service."

"*Pews*—we'll need *pews*," Julius said.

"We can build them out of mahogany," Vim said.

"What about *music*?" Aleksandr asked.

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"We can form a *choir*," Adan said.

Thus, having decided on how the church should look, Julius set about completing the drawings for its design and they all began to help in its construction.

They put their best efforts into building the church.

The ladies showed their artistic talents by burning elaborate designs into the walls of the Lucayan section with hot charcoal.

Hubert melted then pounded out large, paper-thin sheets of gold. With it, he and Julius created intricate, gold-inlay designs for every section.

Vim exhibited his artistic talent by painting large pictures of Christ and of Mary in pigmented oil on white cotton cloth strung over wooden frames, which they hung on the walls in the Christian section. The ladies burned designs of crosses and horses into the heavy picture frames.

Julius supervised the construction of the external ribs and arches for the Christian dome, the Hindu tower and the roof over the Lucayan section.

Hubert and Adan designed a gold-inlaid image of the Incarnations of Vishnu and attached it to the wall behind the statue of the deity in the Hindu temple.

By the following May, when *Anki* and *Lanoi's* babies arrived healthy and happy with the help of Pastor Jacques, the church was ready for them to be named in it.

One beautiful morning, as light streamed through the stained-glass windows magnificently illuminating a bigger-than-life-size image of Christ shepherding lambs, Pastor Jacques christened the babes in the Christian section.

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"You shall be called *Jon van der Grooten*. I christen you as a Lutheran in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen," Pastor Jacques said as he sprinkled blessed water on the tiny head of *Vim* and *Anki's* newborn baby boy.

Then Pastor Jacques christened the newborn daughter of the proud and happy parents, *Hubert* and *Lanoi*, naming their new baby, *Lana van der Grooten*.

In July, *Pastor Jacques* and *Zoni* became the happy parents of a baby girl. Pastor Jacques named her *Mary Colet de Noyon*, in a Calvinist christening.

The same day, he named and baptized the new son of *Aleksandr* and *Maru*—*Peter Bradachev*—by complete submersion in water, as was the tradition of the Russian Orthodox religion.

In September, as *Adan* sang fifteenth century India songs—passed down to his people from the Rājasthāni poet *Mira Bai*—his and *Brigita's* son, who they named *Omar Sābād Cotouré*, was bathed in fresh spring water. Had they been in India the baby would have been bathed in the River Ganges.

Also in September, the new son of *Julius* and *Tana*, who was named *Antonio Santoni Binini*, was christened as a Lutheran next to a marvelous limestone and polished clay statue of *Tana* holding their baby in her arms, which *Julius* had just completed sculpting.

After each of these christenings, elaborate celebrations and feasts were held on the beach and all of the babies' feet were dipped into the *ocean*, as was the Lucayan tradition, to introduce them to the Supreme Being. Designs of crosses, agoutis and iguanas were painted on the babies' skins to ward off evil spirits.

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The men persuaded their wives to refrain from using the *board* to elongate the babies' foreheads as had been Lucayan tradition. The wives agreed since they were convinced there were no enemies around Liberté Island to bludgeon them.

As months went by, the *animals* could frequently hear the *choir* singing in the Christian section of the church.

Occasionally in the Lucayan section they could hear everyone singing to the music of the *baco* as the Lucayan ladies danced around the fire circle.

In the Hindu section, all the ladies liked to bathe in the colorful, sacred bath and wash the statue of the Hindu deity with their hands.

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HORSE ISLAND

Chapter 26

"I'll beat you to the peninsula..."

ADAN KNEW HORSES well.

He'd frequented the island where they'd discovered horses, and named it *Horse Island*.

After several months of hard work, he'd broken-in two, high-spirited, feral horses for riding and built a corral for them.

Both horses were fast, strong and healthy.

He brought Brigita to Horse Island by canoe so he could show her the horses.

"This one has a nice *tan* color to it," Brigita said, admiring one of the horses he'd broken-in. "I *like* it!"

"Then it's *yours*," he said.

"You really *mean* it?"

"Consider it a late *Christmas* present."

She gave him a meaningful kiss.

"So, do we *ride* them or just stand here and *look* at them?" she cried.

"Do you know *how* to ride a horse?"

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"Quite well, actually, I'm told!"

"How so?"

"My father owned a stable in Italy. I was riding horses by age three, not all by *myself*, of course."

"Of course. Want to give it a go?"

"Definitely!"

"Then *up you go*," he said, reaching for Brigita's foot.

"No—no! I can mount a horse all by *myself*!"

"It doesn't have a *saddle*—I thought—"

Before he'd finished his sentence, she'd grabbed the horse's reins and mane, sprung onto its back.

"Where did you get the fancy bridles?" she asked.

"*Lanoi* made them from the way I told her they should look," he said as he mounted the other horse. "She knows leather very well."

"I know. She made her own hawking glove. *You* must know *horses* very well. I didn't even know you'd broken these two in. You must have told me you were going fishing."

"I did it gradually," he said, urging his horse forward.

"It seems funny riding *naked*," she quipped.

"Indeed it does."

She kicked her horse in the ribs. It bolted in the direction of the beach.

Adan did likewise and they were soon flying along side-by-side at a good speed. "I'll beat you to the *peninsula*!" he challenged.

"Just *try*!" she shouted back.

The race was on.

They were neck and neck for some time, then her horse pulled out in front and she sailed to victory, sat on her horse at the end of the peninsula.

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He soon drew his horse up alongside hers.

"You really *do* know how to ride!" he cried.

"I think you told me you were a soldier of fortune."

"Yes I fought in an army against the Mughal emperor Humayun in northern India."

"On a horse?"

"Yes, I was one of the leaders of the cavalry."

"So, you fought with a *sword* and all that?"

"Yes."

"*Teach* me!"

"Teach you what?"

"Teach me to fight with a *sword*."

"What are you going to *fight*—*iguanas*?"

They laughed.

"No, I just want to learn *how*."

"Well, we seem to be fresh out of *swords*."

"Look, there along that little pond—*cattails*! We can use cattails for our swords!" she cried.

He dismounted, quickly returned with two long cattails, got back on his horse, rode it around so he faced her, handed her a cattail.

"What did the sword you fought with *look* like?"

"It was long and slender. It had a nice *curve* to it, too—and a tassel hung from the hilt."

"What do we do now?"

He held up his cattail. "The sword can be used either for *thrusting* or *cutting*. When you're riding at full gallop towards your opponent you have to study him carefully—try to figure out what he's going to do, then

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decide whether to *stab* him or come down on him with a swift blow—like *this*," he said, quickly bringing his cattail down gently against her neck.

"Or, like *this*," she cried, swiftly bringing hers down against his neck.

"Very good! You *sure* you haven't handled a *sword* before?"

"I didn't say I hadn't handled a sword before. I even took a few trophies during my *fencing* days!"

"Then you already know about *thrusting*. Let us begin!"

"How do we *proceed*?"

"You ride your horse down the beach to that rock down there. I'll ride up the beach, then we'll race *toward* each other and see what happens."

They took off at a gallop and were soon in position, facing each other.

He dropped his hand. They kicked their horses in the flanks and began the dash toward each other, cattails raised.

She tried to stab him with her cattail. He easily warded off the blow with his, quickly brought it around and tapped her on the back of her neck as they passed each other.

They repeated the maneuver with the horses many, many times, until the sun was beginning to set.

He brought his horse up alongside hers. "I think that's enough sword play for today," he said, jumped off his horse, ran around to the other side of her horse, gently pulled her off onto the sandy beach.

She laid there on her back a second, then jumped up and started running up the beach along the edge of the lapping waves.

He ran after her, caught her, brought her down and laid on her on the damp sand. "*Now* what?" he asked.

"I think you need more practice *thrusting*," she cooed.

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He smiled, kissed her mouth then her delightful nose then her yielding neck, lightly caressed his way over her supple, beautiful breasts highlighted in the golden sunset, and on down her tender stomach.

INQUISITION SHIP

Chapter 27

"There's an Inquisition ship sitting out at sea just off Horse Island..."

AFTER ALL THE efforts the new islanders had put forth in escaping their own turbulent, violent countries, then adjusting to each other's varied ways of life, bending their own rules at times to accommodate the others, fighting for survival during brutal storms and the ruthless hurricane, learning new ideas and new cuisines and even consolidating their very different religious beliefs—not far away, an *evil* lurked upon the ocean that could *destroy* it *all*—an *Inquisition* ship, bristling with cannons, lay just over the horizon.

A light wind was blowing from the south. Except for that, it was a beautiful Bahama day.

Adan and Brigita were riding their horses on Horse Island.

"See those two *palms* near the beach down there?" Brigita cried.

"I see them," Adan cried.

"Whoever gets there *last* has to catch the fish for *lunch!*"

"*Agree!*" Adan screamed.

They both kneeed their horses at the same time. The race was on.

Brigita's horse shot ahead—dashed past the palms with ease.

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"Okay, I gave you the best horse," Adan cried.

"Ah, you just can't admit that I ride at *least* as well as you!"

"Okay, you ride at least as well as me!" Adan conceded.

They sat on their horses quietly looking out to sea.

"Oh, my *God!*" Brigita suddenly screamed, *terrified!*

"*What?*" Adan asked, trying to see why she was alarmed.

She pointed out to sea.

"*Sails!*" Adan cried.

"Look at the *flag* atop the mast—it's an *Inquisition* ship!" she cried.

"We have to *warn* the *others!*"

"How do you propose we do *that?*" Adan asked.

"Follow me!" she cried, kicking her horse in the flanks.

She brought her horse abruptly about, headed it in the opposite direction. He raced his horse up alongside and they rode neck and neck.

The Inquisition ship came to a near stop, *lowered* a small *boat*.

"The *ship*—now they've put a *boat* in the water!" she cried.

"Look—the boat is headed for *Liberté Island!* They must have seen the top of our *church!*"

"The boat has a lot of *men* in it! Looks like they have *swords!*"

"We could *use* some swords about now!" Brigita cried.

"Good thinking—but *how?*"

"I hope these horses can *swim!* Follow *me!*" she cried, plunging her horse into the shallow ocean water that lay between Horse Island and Liberté Island.

"We have to warn Vim and the others!" Adan cried.

There were choppy waves on the water and the horses had trouble making the crossing between the islands.

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Adan and Brigita made it to Liberté Island's beach, urged their wet horses to full gallop and raced them side by side across the sand.

Brigita saw Vim walking along farther up the beach. "There's *Vim!*" she cried.

Adan pulled his horse up alongside Vim. "There's an *Inquisition* ship out there! They've dispatched a boatful of *men* with *swords*—coming this way!"

"We have to *warn* everybody!" Vim cried.

"Hop *on!*" Adan cried, holding out his hand to Vim.

Vim grabbed the hand, quickly mounted behind him.

By the time they reached the village they could see that the *Inquisition* boat had somehow gotten past the deadly coral reefs and was entering the narrow passageway to Liberté Island's beach.

Vim vigorously rang the makeshift bell used to call everyone together.

Lanoi remained in a hut with all the children as everyone else quickly gathered around Vim.

"There's an *Inquisition* ship sitting out at sea just off *Horse Island!* They've sent a boatful of men with *swords!* They're entering the channel now!" Vim cried.

"How did they get past the *coral?*" Brigita asked.

Suddenly, the answer became apparent as two dolphins surfaced in the bay expecting to be rewarded with fish snacks.

"Hide the horses! Get bows and arrows! We'll remain concealed until they land on the *beach*—then we'll give them *hell!*" Vim yelled.

"*Give them hell!*" everyone echoed.

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As soon as the Inquisition boat hit the beach, six men with large crosses on their chests, metal helmets gleaming in the sun, jumped out of the boat into ankle-deep water, long *swords* in hand, waded ashore. They had no idea what a formidable force they were going up against.

The island archers were hidden behind huts.

"*Now!*" Vim screamed, letting an arrow fly. It found its mark. One of the Inquisition invaders dropped to the sand.

The other five attackers got the message and held their shields up as they advanced across the sand toward the village.

Arrows flew, but could not penetrate the shields.

Vim turned to Adan. "*You're* a warrior—what do we *do?*"

"Split your archers! Have half of them shoot high so their arrows will come straight *down* on the bastards! When they raise their shields to protect themselves—have the rest of the archers shoot straight on!"

Vim did as Adan had suggested. The fight was soon over. The six Inquisition men lay dead on the beach.

"Now we have both swords *and* horses!" Brigita cried exuberantly, picking up one of the swords.

Adan picked up one, balanced it in his hand. "Not bad!"

Aboard the Inquisition ship, the captain had watched his boatful of soldiers enter the narrow passage leading to Liberté Island and none had reappeared to report back to him. He'd noticed the top of the church earlier when his ship had been out to sea. He again studied the church through his spyglass.

"I fear something has happened to the crew you sent to the island," the first mate said.

"Yes, they would not have dared disobey my orders to report on the condition of the island if any were still alive. Put more sail to the wind," he

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bellowed, still peering through his spyglass. "That's the strangest looking *church* I've ever seen. It can't *possibly* be *Catholic*. It's some kind of *heretic* hideout. We'll bring the ship as close as possible to it—then blow it off the face of the earth with our *cannons*!"

"Aye, sir!"

"And!" the captain added.

"Sir?"

"Send three more heavily-armed boats of soldiers—and this time send *muskets* and swords *with* them, you *idiot*!"

"But it was you, sir...", the mate began then froze as he saw the fierce gleam of disgust in the captain's black eyes. "Aye, sir!" the mate said, then ran to give the orders.

Adan and Brigita, on horseback, rode up alongside Vim.

"We're going to ride out to the *point* and see what they're up to now!" Adan said.

From the vantage point they saw that three boatfuls of soldiers had been lowered and were making their way toward Liberté Island.

Adan and Brigita quickly rode back to the village.

"They're sending three more boatfuls of *soldiers*! It looks like some have *muskets*!" Adan cried.

"Tana, Maru—do we have any fresh *fish*?" Brigita asked.

"Yes," Tana said.

"Cut it up and keep feeding it to the *dolphins* so they can't go out and guide the boats safely in!"

The ladies quickly ran to feed the dolphins.

SOME SIXTEENTH CENTURY ROMANCES

Meanwhile onboard the Inquisition ship, the captain decided the ship was near enough to the church.

"Fire on that damned *church!*" he bellowed.

"But sir...", the first mate cried. "God will *punish* us!"

"That's not a *Catholic* church, you idiot! Some *heretics* must have built it! Fire the *cannons!* *Destroy* the abomination!"

Less than a moment later, four ship cannons spouted smoke, flames and exploded with thunderous noise.

All four cannonballs *overshot* the church, exploded harmlessly in the forest.

"The damned thing is still *there!* Put more *sail* to the *wind*—bring the ship closer *in!* Prepare the cannons to fire again!" the captain shouted, becoming very agitated.

Suddenly, a strong gust of wind lashed the ship's sails, making the ship go much faster than the captain had anticipated.

Without any guiding help from the dolphins, the soldier at the ship's tiller had no way of avoiding the sharp edges of coral that lay just under the water's surface. There was a terrible *ripping* sound as a large section of the hull was torn away. The ship sank like a heavy rock. All hands were sucked underwater and *drowned!*

One of the boatfuls of soldiers was also torn apart by coral and its occupants, being heavily armored, all sank quickly and drowned.

The remaining two boats landed successfully on Liberté Island's *beach.*

One boat held seven soldiers, the other eight.

Four soldiers had *muskets.*

When all fifteen soldiers were marching up the beach toward the village, Vim gave the order for the village archers to let their arrows fly.

DON LEWIS WIREMAN, SR.

Two of the intruders fell to the sand, the deadly arrows bristling from their purple tunics.

The four intruders with muskets fired. The musket balls fell short of their targets.

As the four began reloading their muskets, Adan and Brigita came screaming out of nearby woods on horseback, swords flashing in the sunlight.

"*Balā se!*" Adan screamed in *Hindustani*.

"*Uccida!*" Brigita cried in *Italian*.

They swiftly cut down the four intruders carrying muskets, before the intruders had time to reload.

The village *archers* quickly finished off the rest of the Inquisition soldiers.

The beach was strewn with dead bodies.

"Is everyone *okay*?" Vim asked.

The archers came out from where they'd hidden.

"*Anki?*"

"Hell *yes!*" Anki cried in French.

"Hubert?"

"Hubert went to see that *Lanoi* and the *children* are okay," Anki explained.

"Pastor Jacques?"

"I'm okay!"

"Zoni?"

"I'm fine."

"Aleksandr?"

Aleksandr chuckled. "When we get these *trespassers* buried—I'll be ready for a good *steam* bath!"

SOME SIXTEENTH CENTURY ROMANCES

"Maru?"

"I'm okay."

"Julius?"

"I still don't believe Brigita yelled '*Kill!*' in Italian," Julius exclaimed.

"Tana?"

"Now maybe we can live in *peace*," Tana said hopefully.

"Adan?"

"All in a day's work!"

"Brigita?"

"I was just getting *started* on them!" Brigita cried.

"Do you think they'll send another *ship* out looking for the one that went down?" Pastor Jacques asked Vim.

"I don't think so. The ocean's huge. A ship can sink for many reasons. There's no reason the Inquisition in Europe would suspect anyone of living on these islands. I think the ship that went down just happened onto us accidentally, probably got close enough to see the top of the *church*."

They buried the dead in the forest.

Pastor Jacques gave a sermon over the graves.

"I wonder how these *Catholic* Inquisition soldiers would feel about being buried by a *Lutheran* Pastor?" Vim ventured.

"Somehow I don't think they'd *like* it much," Julius quipped.

The twelve *escapees* from various *hells* and their descendants lived happily on Liberté Island for another *eighty-five* years, until the Bahama Islands were accidentally discovered by some *Bermudans* in 1640.

